



THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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26.8°C -2.3°C
Nepalgunj Jumla



Nepali evacuees are seen outside tents at a coronavirus quarantine site in Kharipati, Bhaktapur, on Monday. A total of 175 people have been kept there to wait out a 14-day quarantine after being evacuated from the Chinese province of Hubei where a deadly new coronavirus originated.

Mahara's acquittal and Tumbahangphe's elevation to minister will have lasting effects, analysts say

While Krishna Bahadur Mahara was acquitted of attempted rape charges, Shiva Maya Tumbahangphe was appointed minister for law, both on the same day.

TIKA R PRADHAN
KATHMANDU, FEB 17

Monday saw two dramatic political developments. Hours before former Speaker Krishna Bahadur Mahara was acquitted of attempted rape charges, Shiva Maya Tumbahangphe, who served as Deputy Speaker during Mahara's tenure, was appointed minister for law and justice.

Both Mahara and Tumbahangphe have recently made headlines for reasons that were interlinked—not just because they were Speaker and Deputy Speaker but also because Mahara had resigned after allegations of attempted rape while Tumbahangphe had been denied the Speaker's position due to what she had alleged to be patriarchy in the ruling party.

Monday's decisions by the executive and judiciary may have brought down the curtain on two political controversies, but they are certain to have a lasting effect and remain talking points for long, say analysts and politicians.

Mahara might have gotten an acquittal from the court but moral

questions remain, especially given his stature in politics, said Rachana Khadka, a central committee member of the Nepal Communist Party.

"On legal grounds, he got a clean chit but the moral questions will continue to haunt him," Khadka told the Post.

Mahara resigned on October 1, five days before his arrest and two days after a police complaint by a woman who works at the Parliament Secretariat, accusing him of attempted rape.

Once Mahara's case went to court, Tumbahangphe had demanded that she be elevated to the Speaker post, as she was qualified and the Deputy. But with the House out of session, the party was in no hurry to elect a new Speaker and it refused Tumbahangphe.

By the time the House session recommenced on December 20, new developments had emerged in the ruling party, with the two chairs KP Sharma Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal both making a pitch for persons of their choice for Speaker—neither wanted Tumbahangphe.

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INTERVIEW | 16

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Oli sees a conspiracy to unseat him, but it is unclear what he is referring to

Although those close to Oli insist that a conspiracy is brewing, political analysts are unsure how anyone could assail the strongest government in recent history.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, FEB 17

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli leads the strongest government Nepal has seen in the last three decades since the restoration of democracy. He has more than a comfortable majority, just 10 seats short of a two-thirds majority in Parliament. But Oli still seems to see conspiracies against his government.

On Sunday, while speaking in his home district of Jhapa, Oli said that attempts were being made to topple his government.

"Several conspiracies are being hatched to make this government fall," said Oli without going into specifics. "You may think that this government is strong and has a majority, but some elements are trying to make it fail or topple it or defame it."

With the strongest government, Nepal also has the weakest opposition. With just 63 seats in Parliament, the primary opposition Nepali Congress lacks the numbers even to block a bill.

Rajan Bhattarai, foreign relations advisor to Oli, said that the prime minister made the statement after "receiving some information" about ongoing conspiracies against the current government. He refused to divulge details.

But a section of leaders in the ruling party itself says there's no threat as such to the current dispensation in Kathmandu. They dismissed Oli's remarks as an outcome of "paranoia" or "anxiety".

Oli, who is also the chairman, along with Pushpa Kamal Dahal, of the Nepal Communist Party, however, is clearly not happy. He is constantly upset with the media for pointing out his administration's flawed policies. Even those within his close circles admit that Oli is not good at taking criticism.

Oli completed his two years in office just two days ago, on Saturday. While addressing the House of Representatives, he listed his government's achievements.

>> Continued on page 4

No takers for mall spaces, but financiers keep pouring money into shopping complexes

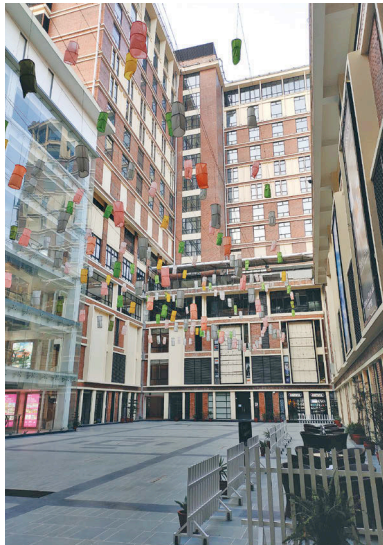
A desire to replicate success, lack of market research, and changing shopping habits are behind the failure of malls, economists say.

ANUP OJHA
KATHMANDU, FEB 17

The Chhaya Centre, one of the biggest malls in the country, is located in the tourist heart of Kathmandu—Thamel. But more than a year after opening, it remains largely empty.

The ground floor of the Chhaya Centre, which opened on December 25, 2018, has 82 retail spaces but 53—more than half—are empty. Out of 75 spaces on the first floor, 25 were empty, including two large halls while on the second floor, out of 76 spaces, 38 were bare. The third floor was almost empty with construction work taking place. The mall, spread over 860,00 sq ft, was reportedly built at a cost of Rs5 billion.

In the past decade, giant shopping malls have mushroomed across Kathmandu Valley. There are nearly a dozen malls in Kathmandu alone while massive new buildings are being constructed across the Valley. In the past fiscal year alone, construction permits for 15 commercial buildings above an area of 10,000 square feet were issued, with 16 permits in the preceding year, according to the Building Construction Permit Division office at Kathmandu



More than half of 82 retail spaces remain empty at Chhaya Centre in Thamel.

Metropolitan City. While the division did not maintain separate data on malls, since 2016, the city has given construction permits to 832 commercial buildings, which include shopping malls.

Despite being built at a cost of millions of rupees, many of the new malls are finding it difficult to attract new retail outlets while older ones are emptying out. According to economists, this reflects changing shopping habits and a tendency among financiers to simply follow trends without conducting proper market research.

Kavita Risal, marketing manager at Chhaya Centre, said that out of 258 spaces, only 100 are occupied.

"People have bought spaces here but they are not opening up shops," said Risal.

According to the few retailers who have maintained storefronts at Chhaya, footfalls are dwindling and do not support the cost of renting a physical space.

"It's been a year since we opened our adventure information centre and we have not had a single customer yet," said Pravat Adhikari, who operates HST Adventures, a travel and tourism company, on the first floor of the centre.

The only space that regularly attracts customers to the mall is the film theatre on the top floor, according to both retailers and the few customers.

>> Continued on page 4

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MEDLEY

Inside the Post

National

A desire to replicate success, a failure to conduct market research, and changing shopping habits are behind the failure of malls, economists say.

Opinion

The statistics related to performance for the past two years—especially regarding governance, economy and diplomacy—barely substantiate the recent flimsy political rhapsodies by Oli.

Culture & Arts

On the very first episode of the 18th season of American Idol, a reality-based singing show, Nepali singer Dibesh Pokharel, who goes by his stage name Arthur Gunn, gave a standout performance, winning the hearts of the judges as well as the audience.

Money

The Department of Commerce, Supplies and Consumer Protection Management has penalised the importer and distributors of fake Garima brand paddy seeds under the Consumer Protection Act 2018. The bogus seeds resulted in crop losses worth Rs230 million during the 2019 growing season.

Sports

Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho believes Manchester City’s two-season ban from the Champions League has opened the door for a host of teams to qualify for next season’s competition. Mourinho’s men moved up to fifth in the Premier League thanks to Son Heung-min’s stoppage time winner to beat Aston Villa 3-2.

News Quiz

1. Who is the new Law and Justice Minister of Nepal?

a. Shiva Maya Tumbahangpe
b. Bhanu Bhakta Dhakal
c. Ishwor Pokharel
d. Padma Kumari Aryal
2. Which organisation has been maintaining a digital database to address the blood supply and demand gap?

a. Blood Donors Association
b. Youth For Blood
c. Nepal Blood Bank
d. Hamro LifeBank
3. How many Nepalis were brought home from Wuhan, China, on Sunday morning?

a. 160
b. 170
c. 175
d. 200
4. Who is the first Asian player to score 50 goals in English Premier League?

a. Park Ji-sung
b. Son Heung-min
c. Shinji Kagawa
d. Takumi Minamino
5. When is the Bir Ganesh Man Singh Memorial National Boxing Championship set to begin?

a. February 25
b. March 5
c. March 15
d. March 31
6. When had the police filed a charge sheet against Krishna Bahadur Mahara in an attempted rape case?

a. September 29, 2019
b. October 31, 2019
c. October 21, 2019
d. October 11, 2019
- 
POST FILE PHOTO



A worker carries construction materials up the upper tiers of Kumbheshwor Mahadev temple in Bagalamukhi, Lalitpur. The temple was damage in the 2015 earthquakes.

POST PHOTO : KESHAV THAPA

On this day in history

Sri Lanka tones down privatisation

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka has toned down an ambitious privatisation programme in favour of state-controlled joint ventures following protests from within the new socialist government, analysts said Thursday.

Deputy Finance Minister G L Peiris told parliament the government was seeking “strategic alliance” with foreign and local firms, but hoped to retain a “gold-en share” in the proposed joint ventures.

A committee would be appointed soon to work out reform in public sector enterprises such as telecommunications, power generation, highways, ports, railways, shipping, insurance and aviation, he said.

“The state will retain ownership in most public enterprises, whilst inviting private sector participation in part ownership. The overall responsibility of the government will always remain to ensure equality and economic justice.

The Kathmandu Post
February 18, 1995

Answers to News Quiz: 1(a), 2(d), 3(c), 4(b), 5(d), 6(b)

HOROSCOPE




ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Can you hear your inner engine revving up? You're raring to go, and today is the perfect time for you to take off! The runway is clear and the skies are cloudless. Head off into the wild, blue yonder! Aim for your most ambitious goals, because you're in a phase of life where they're more possible than ever.



TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Taking care of your health isn't something you can do only once in a while. It's something you have to integrate into your life every single day. Your self-discipline is stronger than ever, so you're in the best frame of mind to start a new fitness routine, join a gym, or invest in some new exercise equipment.



GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

What are your thoughts on the latest revelation from a friend? What? Don't you know?! Today, you need to figure it out. Sure, the drama of it has caught you a little bit off guard, but your quick thinking needs to kick in right now. Don't let your reactions be guided too much by your fears.



CANCER (June 22-July 22)
**
If your attention is being divided between your home life and your public life, the best choice is to focus on issues at your home. Why? Because your home is your refuge, a safe foundation, and you need to keep it that way. Make sure that you can leave your home every day knowing that you'll return to peace and calm.



LEO (July 23-August 22)

It's a good day to invest in the resources that help you get things done in your life. If you need to buy computer equipment, tools, office supplies, or even just a more comfortable pair of shoes, today is the day to do it. If you shop around a bit, you'll find some great bargains. Don't worry that you're wasting your money.



VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

If you're in the early stages of a romance, don't worry if the conversations you have with your partner aren't exactly meaningful. As you get to know each other better, the realities of the world will start to take over. Rather focus instead on the fact that they're integrating you into their everyday life.



LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
**
Balance is important today. Before making any type of decision, you have to weigh the pros and cons of each possible course of action. Don't put things off for another day because you'll have too much to deal with later. You can't understand the right way to move forward until you examine these situations more thoroughly.




SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

If waiting for the other person to make the first move makes you feel too passive today, then grab the power back! If you want things to move forward, take the first step and see if they follow you. If they do, then you both can get started on the new phase of your relationship right away.



SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

If you're feeling unsure in a new situation today, you can always turn to the people you love for advice and insight. They're much more aware of the big picture than you are. Right now, you're a bit too far into your own head to be able to step back and get the perspective you need.




CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

You can reach an important compromise with an authority figure. It's all about sharing the same goal. If you have a different way of reaching it than they do, just explain yourself. Let them in on your plans, and there's a good chance they'll be much more comfortable giving you free rein.



AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

You'll be strongly drawn to good things today, and you'll be willing to do just about whatever it takes to experience them. And that might require travelling farther to go to that bakery with those killer brownies, waiting in a long line to get the tickets you want, or paying a ridiculous amount for that special perfume.



PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Someone in your life is claiming to be working hard at improving things between the two of you, but have you seen any real evidence of it? Your patience might be running awfully thin right now, so feel free to tell them that you need to see a little bit more progress in order to feel as though you've been adequately heard.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Use shears
5 Wildlife photographer's concealment
10 Baby buggy, in London
14 Make intentionally hard to find
15 Solitary type
16 Drifter
17 Scraped by
18 In crowd
19 Bun
20 Tied race (2 wds.)
22 Died down
24 Prune
25 City in Iowa
26 Errand runners
29 Movie theaters
33 Faulty
34 Troubadour prop
36 Have debts
37 Obstacle
38 Provide food for
39 Like sushi
40 Physicist Georg —
41 Mimicked mockingly
42 Brightness
44 Mischief-makers
47 Slaved away

48 Existence
49 Hard wood
50 Twinkles
53 Exercise apparel
58 Tale
59 Blue Light Special store
61 Canoe or kayak
62 Pealed
63 Minute amounts
64 Bowling alley
65 Lyric poems
66 Thoroughly unpleasant
67 Cheese from the Netherlands

DOWN

1 Tool storage
2 Winged Victory
3 Light bulb, in comics
4 Sells
5 Censors
6 Albright or Montez
7 Put one's foot —
8 After deductions
9 More wonderful
10 Put into words
11 Establish
12 Up to the job
13 Mildew
21 — d'oeuvres
23 Hogan or Affleck

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

USED VARY TONE
COTE MELEE IGOR
LIAR UTICA NEMO
ALTARS TAR TESS
IFSO PLAY
BOLDEST YUPPIE
GELS LABS GEENA
IND SKOAL ELS
SCENE ANDY PREY
THRASH EARNEST
BAIL TIED
SLAB JET COARSE
PALI AMEBA LENO
IVAN CORAL EBON
TANG KNIT DABS

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25 Did something
26 Eva or Zsa Zsa
27 Nebraska hub
28 Companies
30 Ethical
31 Not in the dark
32 Fixed a seam
34 Slip-up
35 Navajo foe
38 Soft leather
42 Kind of cheese
43 Friendly
45 Jangles
46 Objective

47 Foot, slangily
50 Pita sandwich
51 Praise
52 White-tailed sea eagle
53 Back muscles
54 Latin I verb
55 Freeway
56 Andrews or Wynter
57 Mushroom part
60 Kiwi's extinct cousin

SUDOKU

1	8	4	5	3	9	2	6	7
7	2	5	6	4	1	8	3	9
3	9	6	2	7	8	5	1	4
2	6	8	3	9	5	4	7	1
9	7	3	8	1	4	6	2	5
4	5	1	7	2	6	3	9	8
8	3	9	1	5	2	7	4	6
6	4	7	9	8	3	1	5	2
5	1	2	4	6	7	9	8	3

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

			6					8
4					6	1		2
					2	6	4	
9		3		5			2	
1		5				4		7
	4			9		1		5
	6	4	3					
7			8	1				4
8						7		

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★



A woman prepares bara, a traditional Newari dish, in Bhaktapur.

POST PHOTO: BEEJU MAHARIAN

Engineer faces corruption case for amassing illegal properties

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU, FEB 17

Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority on Monday filed a corruption case at the Special Court against Jitendra Kumar Chaudhary, the chief engineer at the Biratnagar Divisional Road Office, on the charge of amassing property amounting to Rs 39.94 million illegally.

Chaudhary's high living standard made him a suspect, said CIAA.

The anti-graft body said that Chaudhary was charged after an investigation found that the living standard of his family was suspiciously high. The family had large cash deposits in several banks and added properties beyond their financial capacity.

"While filing the charge-sheet, the commission had also presented Chaudhary at the court," said CIAA Spokesperson Pradeep Koirala. "Now, the court will decide his fate."

The commission had started an investigation on Chaudhary after receiving a complaint that he had accumulated properties through illegal means in collusion with contractors.

The anti-graft body has sought two years jail term, confiscation of illegally-acquired properties and a fine equivalent to the illegally-acquired properties for Chaudhary as per section 20 of the Corruption Prevention Act 2002.

According to the CIAA, Chaudhary had purchased land and houses and registered them to himself, his wife Kiran, and their two children Abhisek and Smriti. Chaudhary's wife and their two children have also been named defendants in the case.

Chaudhary was transferred to Dang from Biratnagar Divisional Road Office last year before he was recently transferred to the Gaighat-Diktal Road Project under the Sagarmatha Highway.

Army fails to spend budget allocated for expressway

Calling bids for complex bridges and tunnels before the new fiscal year was not possible, says Nepal Army Spokesperson Brig-Gen Pandey.

BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, FEB 17

The Nepal Army is once again returning around half of the budget released for the Kathmandu-Tarai expressway project. The government had approved Rs 15 billion for the national pride project in the current fiscal year. But the national defence force, which took over the project in 2017, was unable to spend the money.

Briefing the Development Committee of Parliament on Monday, the Army said it wouldn't be able to spend Rs 7 billion of the budget meant for the country's first expressway project. Last year, too, the Army had returned Rs 9 billion of the Rs 15 billion released for the project, saying there was no scope for calling international bids for contractors before the fiscal year ended.

The Army has furnished the same reason this year.

"It doesn't seem possible to call the biddings for complex bridges and tunnels before the new fiscal year begins. Therefore, we have to return the

budget," Brig-Gen Biygyan Dev Pandey, spokesperson for the Army, told the Post on Monday.

He said they would first need to select international consultants to provide overall support in the construction of the expressway.

The consultants will prepare the bidding documents based on the detail project report before inviting bids.

Pandey said the selection of consultants would be completed by April and the bidding process for contractors will start by June. The new fiscal year begins in mid-July.

Though the Army had earlier selected six international firms—five Chinese and one Turkish—to provide consultative service, the process was scrapped after a probe found that the selection criteria were leaked as a result of technical error.

"It was a technical error and the investigation showed there was no malafide intention behind the leak," Pandey had said in a press meet on December 9 last year.

Following the probe findings, the Army had issued a warning to project

head Brig-Gen Sharad Lal Shrestha.

Kalyani Khadka, the chairperson of the parliamentary committee, said the Army had cited delay in the approval of detail project report and the cancellation of the bidding project for the delay in calling the bidding.

The project that was supposed to conclude by August 2021 has been pushed back by around three years to May 2024. The Army has said the expressway would reduce the travel time between Kathmandu and Nijgadh in Bara district to an hour.

Pandey said they had shortlisted five international firms as consultants. "The delay in bidding will not push back the completion deadline," he said. The detailed project report was endorsed by the Cabinet on August 18, two years after the construction began.

The detailed project report has estimated the project cost at Rs213 billion—Rs 80 billion more than what was projected by an Indian consortium of Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services Transportation Networks, IL&FS Engineering and

Construction, and Suryavir Infrastructure Construction in 2015.

The expressway has three tunnels with a total length of 6.415 km that will be constructed in three different sections of the 72.5 km long roadway. Similarly, out of 86 bridges along the expressway, 16 have been categorised

as the special ones requiring international contractors for construction.

"The compulsion for the Army to return the money isn't a good sign. We hope the deadline is not extended again," said Rajendra Lingden, a member of the parliamentary committee, told the Post.



Excavators at work at the Farsidole section of the Kathmandu-Nijgadh expressway project, in Lalitpur.

POST PHOTO: ANISH REGMI

Two held for defrauding woman

SHUVAM DHUNGANA
KATHMANDU, FEB 17

Metropolitan Crime Division, Teku on Sunday night arrested two members of a gang that defrauded people by asking them to deposit millions in their account to "help them secure US visas."

According to police, the duo was arrested after Sanumaya Lama, 37, of Tarakeshwor, Kathmandu, filed a complaint at the crime division, saying that a person "applying for a US visa" defrauded her of Rs 6 million. The person asked her to transfer Rs 6 million to his account so that he could present his bank details with his US visa application, said Lama.

Acting on the complaint, police arrested Ram Chandra Kunwar (34), a resident of Baglung currently living in Lalitpur and Ganesh Lama (34), a resident of Kavre also living in Lalitpur. They were arrested in

Bhaktapur.

After police interrogated the duo, it was revealed that Kunwar, Lama and three other members of the gang scoured for people with millions of rupees in the bank. After getting in touch with such people and winning their trust, the gang would convince them to deposit money in their account "for a few days". They would say that they needed the money in their account to apply for a US visa, said Inspector Kumar Pandit, an officer at Metropolitan Crime Division, Teku.

"After the money was deposited, they would withdraw the money and disappear," Pandit told the Post. "Even in Lama's case, Kunwar convinced her to deposit Rs 6 million for a day so that he could apply for a US visa. But when Lama deposited the amount, five people withdrew the money from different branches of the bank," he said.

"We are looking for the other three

members of their gang," said Pandit.

Investigation showed that this was not the only fraud case the gang was involved in. Members of the gang were found to have duped another person into depositing Rs 7 million in their account, said Metropolitan Crime Division Superintendent Mukesh Kumar Singh.

The number of fraud cases in Nepal has risen steadily over the past few years. According to Nepal Police, 368 cases related to fraud were recorded in the country 2016/17. The number rose to 542 in 2017/18 and to 627 in 2018/19.

"Many cases related to fraud are settled by the victim and the fraudsters after police arrest the culprit," said Deputy Superintendent Hobindra Bogati, spokesperson for the Kathmandu Metropolitan Police Range. "They are released after a settlement is reached. This could also be the reason behind the rise in the number of fraud cases," said Bogati.

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Chartered helicopter services banned inside Annapurna Base Camp region

The fourth council meeting of the Annapurna Rural Municipality decided to prohibit choppers in the region last fiscal year, citing adverse impact on the region’s ecology.



Five helicopter companies are currently operating chartered flights from Pokhara Airport to the Annapurna region.

DEEPAK PARIYAR
POKHARA, FEB 17

Annapurna Rural Municipality has imposed a ban on the operation of chartered helicopter flights in the Annapurna Base Camp region. The municipality recently announced its plan to restrict helicopters from flying in the area. It will, however, allow rescue helicopters to fly to the area.

The fourth council meeting of the rural municipality had decided to prohibit helicopters in the region in the last fiscal year. The ward office of Annapurna-11 had registered an application with the District Administration Office requesting to stop commercial flights citing its adverse effects on the region’s ecology and tourism.

Him Bahadur Gurung, chairman of Annapurna Rural Municipality Ward No. 11, said the number of chartered

helicopters flying into the Annapurna Base Camp region had increased in recent years, and these unmanaged flights had polluted the environment.

“We used to see Himalayan monal, Ghoral and Kasturi in our villages. But now, we don’t see them anymore; the noise pollution caused by helicopters have chased them away,” said Gurung.

Ramesh Kumar KC, chief district officer, however, said that helicopter flights should be monitored and their frequency kept at check rather than putting a complete ban on their operation in the region.

“We just started the Visit Nepal 2020 campaign. This decision stands to affect tourist movement in the Annapurna Base Camp region,” said KC.

Five helicopter companies are currently operating chartered flights from Pokhara Airport to the

Annapurna region. Devraj Subedi, the spokesperson of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal Pokhara branch, said his office has received a letter from the District Administration Office, informing them to stop the operation of chartered flights based on the demand of ACAP, rural municipality and local entrepreneurs.

“However, the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation has not officially told us to stop chartered helicopter flights to the region,” said Subedi.

Helicopter companies, for now, have stopped their flights, giving in to the request of the ACAP, rural municipality and the Civil Aviation Authority, said Raj Kumar Gurung, chief at ACAP.

Every year, around 15,000 tourists charter helicopters to the Annapurna Base Camp.

POST FILE PHOTO

BRIEFING

Phuyal appointed minister of Bagmati Province

MAKWANPUR: Rameshwor Phuyal, chief whip of the ruling Nepal Communist Party in the Bagmati provincial assembly, has been appointed as the Physical Infrastructure Development Minister. Province Chief Bishnu Prasai administered an oath of office and secrecy to the newly appointed minister amidst a function on Monday.

Authorities start removing snow from Manang roads

LAMJUNG: Authorities have started using dozers to clear snow from the roads and settlements in Manang district. The district witnessed snowfall some two months ago but the deposited snow has yet to melt. Chief District Officer Pushparaj Paudel said his office has started removing snow to ease vehicular movement.

Demand to name province on the basis of identity

TAPLEJUNG: A national council meeting of the Gurung Rastriya Parsiad is dissatisfied with the name of Gandaki Province. Issuing a 12-point declaration, the meeting demanded authorities to revise the name of Gandaki as Tamuwan province on the basis of identity.

Man sentenced to 37 years in prison for raping daughter

HETAUDA: The Makwanpur District Court sentenced a man to 37 years in prison on the charge of raping his daughter. The single bench of Judge Dilliratna Shrestha on Monday gave its verdict against the 49-year-old man, a resident of Hetauda Sub-metropolis-8. The convict had raped his 17-year-old daughter a year ago.

Makeshift bridges across Mahakali demolished

DARCHULA: Police have demolished two makeshift wooden bridges that were illegally constructed over the Mahakali river in Darchula district. Security personnel from Dumling removed the wooden structures at Pelsiti and Malpa on Sunday. The bridges were reportedly built by the Indian side without taking permission from Nepali authorities.

Road connectivity causes a slump in Doti village’s crop production

Those families who were self-reliant are now completely dependent on the market for their daily supplies.

MOHAN SHAHI
DOTI, FEB 17

Until recently, the people of Daudagaun had to walk for an entire day to reach Dipayal Silgadhi, the district headquarters of Doti. The journey duration has been shortened to a mere few hours as the village is now connected to the district’s road network. However, road connectivity has had an opposite effect in the village: many families have stopped growing food and vegetables.

When the motor road reached Daudagaun for the first time, it was expected to provide market access to locally-grown crops and vegetables. Instead, the road has decreased the production of crops and vegetables in the village.

“No one wants to grow vegetables and crops these days,” said Lal Bahadur Joshi, a resident of Kanachaur. “Most villagers have become dependent on the market for foods and vegetables.”

This problem is not limited to Daudagaun alone. A majority of local governments in Doti have prioritised road connectivity projects in their

areas, which has raised a host of unforeseen problems.

“The recent development trend has done more harm than good. Those families who were self-reliant are now completely dependent on the market for their foods and vegetables,” said Shiva Shankar Timilsena, an associate professor of Economics at Doti Multiple Campus. “Agricultural production is dwindling because more and more people are leaving their homes in search of jobs.”

Bharat Bahadur Khadka, a resident of Adarsha Rural Municipality who works in India as a daily wage worker, said 90 percent of the male population in his village was working in India.

“We can earn more money in a short period in India than from working in farmlands,” Khadka said.

According to the National Census 2011, Doti has 41,440 households with a total population of 211,746–97,252 male and 114,494 female.

“The local governments are only focusing on physical development. They are doing very little to address the socio-economic needs of the people,” said Chief District Officer Tek Narayan Paudel.



Doti women donate labour for a rural road project in the district.

POST PHOTO: MOHAN SHAHI

Assembly members demand immediate naming of Province 1

DEONARAYAN SAH
MORANG, FEB 17

Province assembly members of Province 1 have mounted pressure on the government to name the province at the earliest date possible.

The assembly members of both the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) and opposition parties demanded that the province should be named by the ongoing winter session.

Speaking at the assembly meeting on Monday, Sanjha Kumari Danuwar of the Nepali Congress drew the attention of the Speaker over the delay in naming the province. Arguing that the delay had tarnished the image of the province, he demanded that the issue be sorted out at the earliest.

“Has it been delayed because the assembly members of the NCP are awaiting the directive of the party headquarters?” questioned Danuwar, reacting to the NCP-led government’s lackadaisical response to resolving the long-standing issue. “It’s been two years since the provincial elections.

People will insult us if the provincial assembly fails to name the province,” she added.

The NCP Secretariat had directed its provincial party committee and the parliamentary committee in Province 3 to adopt Bagmati and Hetauda as names of the province and its capital respectively in December 2019.

The NCP decision came under attack from various quarters, claiming that it was the leadership’s centralised mindset. As per constitutional provisions, provincial assemblies have the right to decide the names of the provinces and their capitals with a two-thirds majority.

The assembly members of the ruling party also demanded that Province 1 also be named soon. NCP member Khinu Langba Limbu on Sunday called for the naming of the province on the basis of identity.

Earlier, all five political parties in the Province 1 assembly had assured to decide the name of the province by the ongoing winter session that began on February 6. The assembly mem-


bers, however, have doubts over the issue being resolved in the winter session.

The ruling NCP holds a comfortable majority to decide the name of the province. But the assembly members of the party are divided about the possible name.

According to assembly member Umita Bishwakarma, the members are divided on the proposed names of the province—Kīrant, Limbuwan, Khumbuwan, Koshi, Sagarmatha, Koshi-Kīrant or Koshi-Sagarmatha.

The NCP has 67 seats in the 93-member provincial assembly, while the main opposition Nepali Congress has just 21 members.

Similarly, Samajbadi Party Nepal has three members while Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Sanghiya Loktantrik Rastriya Manch has a member each and one candidate was elected as an independent member. Province 3, 4, 6 and 7 have been named Bagmati, Gandaki, Karnali and Sudurpaschim respectively. Provinces 1, 2 and 5 are yet to be named.



काठमाडौं उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड

सैबु, भैसेपाटी, ललितपुर

कार्यकारी निर्देशक पदका लागि दरखास्त आह्वान सम्बन्धी सूचना

(प्रथम पटक प्रकाशित मिति: २०७६/११/०६)

काठमाडौं उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड, खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड ऐन, २०६३ बमोजिम स्थापना भएको अविच्छिन्न उत्तराधिकारवाला स्वशासित संगठित संस्थाको रुपमा रहेको छ । बोर्डमा रिक्त रहेको कार्यकारी निर्देशकको पद खुल्ला प्रतिस्पर्धाका आधारमा छनौट गरी पूर्ति गर्नु पर्ने भएकोले काठमाडौं उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड नियमावली, २०६४ को नियम १७ बमोजिम देहाय अनुसारका योग्यता भएका ईच्छुक नेपाली नागरिकहरुबाट यो सूचना प्रथम पटक प्रकाशन भएको मितिले २१ (एक्काइस) दिन भित्र यस बोर्डको कार्यालय, सैबु, भैसेपाटी, ललितपुरमा आई पुग्ने गरी रितपूर्वकको दरखास्त पेश गर्नुहुन सम्बन्धित सबैको जानकारीको लागि यो सूचना प्रकाशन गरिएको छ ।

१. **पद** : कार्यकारी निर्देशक

२. **आवश्यक न्यूनतम योग्यता** : कार्यकारी निर्देशक पदमा नियुक्तिको लागि ऐनको दफा १७ तथा नियमावली, २०६४ को नियम १७ मा व्यवस्था भएको योग्यताका अतिरिक्त देहाय बमोजिमको योग्यता पुगेको हुनुपर्नेछ ।

(क) मान्यता प्राप्त शिक्षण संस्थाबाट इन्जिनियरिङ विषयमा वा व्यवस्थापन, वित्त, वाणिज्य शास्त्र, कानून, जनप्रशासन वा अर्थशास्त्र विषयमा कम्तीमा स्नातकोत्तर वा चाटर्ड एकाउण्टेण्ट उपाधि हासिल गरी खानेपानी तथा सरसफाई क्षेत्रको व्यवस्थापकीय जिम्मेवारी लिई कम्तीमा ५ वर्षको अनुभव हासिल गरेको हुनुपर्नेछ ।

स्पष्टिकरण : खानेपानी तथा सरसफाईको क्षेत्रमा व्यवस्थापकीय जिम्मेवारी भन्नाले नेपाल सरकारको कम्तीमा राजपत्रांकित द्वितिय श्रेणीको पदमा रही खानेपानी तथा सरसफाईको क्षेत्रमा कम्तीमा ५ वर्षको अनुभव हासिल गरेको वा खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड, कुनै प्राधिकरण तथा नेपाल सरकारको स्वामित्व भएको संस्थाको व्यवस्थापकीय पदमा (कम्तीमा नवौं तह वा सो सरह) रही खानेपानी तथा सरसफाई क्षेत्रमा ५ वर्षको अनुभव हासिल गरेको हुनुपर्नेछ ।

(ख) दरखास्त दिने अन्तिम मितिसम्म ४५ वर्ष उमेर पुगेको र ६० वर्ष उमेर ननाघेको ।

(ग) नैतिक प्बन्ध देखिने फौजदारी कसूरमा अदालतबाट दोषी प्रमाणित नभएको ।

(घ) कुनै राजनैतिक दलको सदस्य नभएको ।

(ङ) बोर्डसँग कुनै किसिमको स्वार्थ (Conflict of Interest) नवाभिएको ।

(च) कुनै देशको स्थायी बसोबासको अनुमती (Permanent Resident) प्राप्त नगरेको ।

(छ) आवेदक कुनै निकायमा कार्यरत भएमा कार्यरत संस्थाको स्वीकृतिको प्रतिलिपि पेश गर्नुपर्नेछ ।

(ज) नेपाल सरकारको सार्वजनिक संस्थामा बहालवाला कर्मचारी छनौट भएमा नियुक्ति लिनु अघि त्यस्तो संस्थाबाट बहाल टुटेको प्रमाण पेश गर्नुपर्नेछ ।

३. **पदावधि** : कार्यकारी निर्देशकको पदावधि ५ (पाँच) वर्षको हुनेछ । काठमाडौं उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड नियमावली, २०६४ को नियम १८ को व्यवस्था बमोजिम निजको पदावधि पुरा हुन अगावै पदबाट हटाउन बाधा पर्ने छैन ।

४. **पारिश्रमिक र सुविधा** : कार्यकारी निर्देशकको पारिश्रमिक र सुविधा काठमाडौं उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड नियमावली, २०६४ को नियम १९ बमोजिम हुनेछ ।

५. **प्रमुख काम, कर्तव्य र अधिकार** : कार्यकारी निर्देशकको काम, कर्तव्य र अधिकार खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड ऐन, २०६३ को दफा १८ र काठमाडौं उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड नियमावली, २०६४ को नियम २० मा उल्लेख गरिए बमोजिम हुनेछ ।

६. **छनौटको आधार** : काठमाण्डौ उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्डको कार्यकारी निर्देशक छनौट सम्बन्धी कार्यविधि, २०७६ बमोजिम हुनेछ ।

७. **छनौटका प्रक्या** :

- रितपूर्वक प्राप्त दरखास्तहरु मध्येबाट बोर्डको प्रचलित ऐन, नियमावली तथा यस पदपूर्तिको लागि तयार गरिएको कार्यविधि अनुसार देहाय बमोजिम छनौट प्रक्या अगाडि बढाइने छ ।
- शैक्षिक योग्यता, उल्लेखित विषय क्षेत्रमा कम्तीमा ३० कार्य दिनको तालिमको प्रमाणपत्र, खानेपानी वा प्राकृतिक श्रोत व्यवस्थापन विषयहरुमा लेख, रचना प्रकाशित भएको भए सो को प्रतिलिपि, व्यवस्थापकीय पदको सामान्य कार्य अनुभव (कुनै व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड, प्राधिकरण वा यस्तै प्रकृतिका ठुला सार्वजनिक संस्थाको व्यवस्थापक पदमा कम्तीमा ५ (पाँच) वर्षको कार्य अनुभव) र विशिष्ट कार्य अनुभव (खानेपानी वितरण एवं ढल निकास आयोजनामा आयोजना व्यवस्थापक भई काम गरेको न्यूनतम ५ (पाँच) वर्षको कार्य अनुभव (कम्तीमा २० करोड भन्दा माथिको आयोजनाको व्यवस्थापन गरेको, पुर्वाधार विकास सम्बन्धी आयोजनाको आयोजना प्रमुखको रुपमा ५ (पाँच) वर्षको अनुभव भएको, वित्त व्यवस्थापन वा श्रोत परिचालन सम्बन्धी विकास साभेदार निकाय संलग्न रहेको आयोजनामा वित्त व्यवस्थापन वा श्रोत परिचालनको क्षेत्रमा ३ (तिन) वर्ष वा सो भन्दा माथिको कार्य अनुभव, अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय विकास साभेदार/दातृ निकाय संलग्न भएको संस्था वा आयोजनामा कम्तीमा ३ (तिन) वर्ष वा सो भन्दा बढीको कार्य अनुभव सहित व्यक्तिगत विवरण (CV) को मूल्यांकनका आधारमा बढी अंक प्राप्त गर्ने ७ (सात) जना उम्मेदवारको संक्षिप्त सूची (Short Listing) दरखास्त दिने अन्तिम म्याद समाप्त भएको मितिले बढीमा १५ (पन्ध्र) दिन भित्र प्रकाशन गरिनेछ । उम्मेदवारले आवेदन साथ पेश गरेका कागजातहरु स्वयंले प्रमाणित गर्नुपर्नेछ ।
- संक्षिप्त सूची तयार गर्ने प्रयोजनको लागि गरिएको मूल्यांकनको निश्चित अंकभार, व्यवसायिक कार्य योजना (Business Plan) को मूल्यांकन, व्यवसायिक कार्य योजनाको प्रस्तुतिकरण र अन्तरवार्ताका आधारमा उम्मेदवारले प्राप्त गरेको कुल अंक गणना गरी सबै भन्दा बढी अंक प्राप्त गर्ने उम्मेदवारलाई सफल उम्मेदवार र त्यसपछि दोस्रो बढी अंक प्राप्त गर्ने उम्मेदवारलाई वैकल्पिक उम्मेदवारको रुपमा छनौट गरिनेछ ।


८. **दरखास्त फारम र दरखास्त दस्तुर** : दरखास्त फारम काठमाण्डौ उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्डको कार्यालयको वेबसाइट www.kvwsmb.org.np बाट डाउनलोड गरी वा कार्यालय समयमा कार्यालयबाट प्राप्त गर्न सकिनेछ । उक्त दरखास्त फारम रितपूर्वक भरी तोकिएको कागजात संलग्न गरी सो दरखास्त फारम साथ दरखास्त दस्तुर रु. ३०००।०० (तिन हजार) फिर्ता नहुने गरी नगदै यस बोर्डको कार्यालय (ललितपुर महानगरपालिका बडा नं. १८, सैबु, भैसेपाटी) मा तिरी दरखास्त फारम बुझाउन सकिनेछ । दरखास्त फारम बुझाउन ल्याउँदा हालसालै खिचेको पासपोर्ट साईजको २ प्रति फोटो पेश गर्नु पर्नेछ ।

९. **दरखास्त दिने अन्तिम मिति** : यो सूचना प्रथम पटक प्रकाशित मितिले २१ औं दिन भित्र कार्यालय समयमा बोर्डको कार्यालयमा दरखास्त पेश गर्नु पर्नेछ । उम्मेदवारले दरखास्त फारमसाथ शैक्षिक योग्यता, तालिम र अनुभव सम्बन्धी कागजातहरु र व्यवसायिक योजना (सकल १ र प्रतिलिपि २ थान सहित) कार्यपत्र तीन थान छुट्टाछुट्टै खाममा अलग अलग शिलबन्दी गरी पेश गर्नु पर्नेछ । म्याद भित्र पेश हुन नआएको र रितपूर्वक नभएको दरखास्त मान्य हुने छैन । तोकिएको समयभित्र ३ (तिन) वा सो भन्दा कम उम्मेदवारको दरखास्त परेमा पहिलो चरणमा परेका आवेदनहरुलाई यथावत राखी थप ७ दिनको म्याद राखी पुनः दरखास्त माग गर्न सक्नेछ । पुनः दरखास्त आह्वान गर्दा पनि थप उम्मेदवारको आवेदन नपरे पनि छनौट सम्बन्धी प्रक्यालाई अगाडि बढाउन सकिनेछ ।

१०. **व्यवसायिक कार्ययोजनाको विषय एवं ढाँचा** : काठमाण्डौ उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड तथा सो को काम, कर्तव्य र अधिकार (Scope of work) सम्बन्धी जानकारी । बोर्डको आगामी पाँच वर्षको स्पष्ट दृष्टि (Vision) सहितको व्यवसायिक कार्य योजना । व्यवसायिक कार्य योजनामा माथि उल्लेखित विषयका अतिरिक्त काठमाण्डौ उपत्यका भित्रको खानेपानीको सम्पत्ति तथा दायित्वको व्यवस्थापन, बोर्डको समस्या, चुनौती तथा समाधानका उपायहरु सहितको भावी कार्ययोजना पेश गर्नुपर्नेछ । साथै हाल विद्यमान बोर्ड तथा खानेपानी सेवा व्यवस्थापन र निकट भविष्यमा काठमाण्डौ उपत्यकाका संचालन हुने मेलम्ची खानेपानी आयोजनाको सम्पत्ति तथा दायित्वको व्यवस्थापन, संचालन समेतको विस्तृत कार्य योजना संलग्न गर्नुपर्नेछ । यस कार्य योजनामा माथि उल्लेखित परियोजनाका अतिरिक्त काठमाण्डौ उपत्यकामा सर्वसुलभ एवं गुणस्तिय खानेपानी सेवा व्यवस्थापन गर्न सम्भाव्य योजनाको खाका, श्रोतको व्यवस्थापन, कार्यान्वयन संचालन विधि (Modality), रचनात्मक लागत असुली योजना (Cost Recovery Plan) संलग्न गर्नुपर्नेछ । (करिब ६००० शब्द भित्र रही)

(कार्यपत्र सामान्यतया अंग्रेजी वा नेपाली कुनै एक भाषामा A4 साइजको कागजमा एकापट्टी मात्र लेखिएको हुनुपर्नेछ । अंग्रेजी भाषामा कार्यपत्र तयार गर्दा न्यू टाईम्स रोमन फण्ट १२ र नेपाली भाषामा तयार गर्दा युनिकोड १४ फण्ट साईजमा हुनु पर्नेछ । कार्यपत्रको कभर पेजमा कार्यपत्रको शिर्षक एवं कार्य पत्र प्रस्तावकको नाम उल्लेख हुनुपर्नेछ । कार्य पत्रको अन्य पेजहरुमा नाम लेक्ने वा अन्य कुनै संकेत गर्न पाइने छैन । यसो गरेको पाइएमा कार्यपत्र रद्द गरी यसपछिको प्रक्यामा सहभागि गराइने छैन ।)

११. संक्षिप्त सूचीमा परेका उम्मेदवारहरुको नामावली, कार्यपत्र प्रस्तुतिकरण तथा अन्तरवार्ताको मिति, समय र स्थान दरखास्त दिने समयविधि सकिएको मितिले १५ (पन्ध्र) दिन भित्र सार्वजनिक गरिनेछ । थप जानकारी लिनु परेमा बोर्डको वेबसाईट www.kvwsmb.org.np र फोन नं. ०१-५४९१७३७/५४९१९३७ मा कार्यालय समयभित्र यस बोर्डको कार्यालय सैबु, भैसेपाटीमा सम्पर्क राख्न सकिनेछ ।



EDITORIAL

The blame game

Irrationality must not overpower truth. Visit Nepal's failures are due to bad campaigning.

Nepal's tourism year campaign for 2020 seems to be bound for failure. The signs towards this outcome came early, when the campaign organisers made many gaffes. That the seat of Nepal Tourism Board CEO stayed empty for much of January should have been a dead giveaway, but the rot set in much earlier. The website for Visit Nepal 2020 did not have any promotional content until at least mid-September, for instance. But it seems that the coronavirus epidemic in China has put the final nail on the coffin of Visit Nepal.

Visit Nepal was always going to suffer if a disease broke out in the neighbourhood. Other countries in Asia and abroad too are suffering from the lack of Chinese tourists. While Nepal was hoping to attract a record 350,000 Chinese tourists this year—bound not to happen now—Thailand is reeling from a tourism crisis, with 9 million less Chinese tourists expected to visit this year. However, what is a one-time, unavoidable stroke of bad luck—global pandemics do not occur on a regular basis, much less consistently near Nepal—reports of discriminatory attitudes against Chinese tourists will threaten to destroy Nepal's burgeoning tourism sector and set it back by years.

Nepali officials will love to use the Covid-19 outbreak as a reason to mask the failures surrounding Visit Nepal 2020. To be sure, the disease has had a major impact the world over. Tourist arrivals from China for February are already 90 percent lower this year than the same month last year. Since 2012, the Chinese have been the largest contributors to outbound tourism globally. In 2017 alone, Chinese tourists spent \$258 billion, around 20 percent of the world's total spending on tourism that year. Posting such numbers, and with Nepal itself hoping for record arrivals from the northern neighbour, it is logical to assume that with the Chinese staying home, more and more countries will face hardships until the epidemic is contained.

However, the reduction in the numbers of all tourists this year has been painted by some as due to the fear of the Chinese tourists who have shown up to Nepal. This is just a feeble excuse. For sure, some international tourists may have stayed back owing to Nepal's proximity to the epicentre of the Covid-19 outbreak. But this has nothing to do with the few Chinese tourists that are here. In truth, the biggest issue has been Nepal's failure to adopt modern, catchy ways to market itself. The country's tourism promotion bungled from one misdirected attempt to another. The need of the hour was slick advertising campaigns on television and social media. Malaysia, for instance, has gained global recognition and seen tourist numbers greatly increase since the launch of its 'Malaysia: Truly Asia' advert campaign in 1998. Similarly, Japan has had great success—and millions of followers—on Instagram due to its #visit-japan campaign. Meanwhile, Nepal had its tourism minister lambasted for showing up to Australia—in the midst of their biggest bushfire crisis—to hold an illegal street rally.

The simple fact remains: Nepal should have done a better job in promoting tourism for this year. That the Covid-19 epidemic has scared away a chunk of the business this year will have no effects in the future of tourism in Nepal. But the lack of effective promotions, the attempted cronyism and interference at Nepal Tourism Board, and the failure to build-up necessary products and infrastructure to attract a wide range of tourists, combined, will surely have detrimental effects on Nepali tourism for many more years to come. Should discriminatory and irrational fears push the sector to reject Chinese tourists in this crucial juncture, that market may not provide tourists in the years to come. In such times of hardship, cooler heads must prevail.

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Two years on, the government's promises of prosperity seem like a joke

Democratic norms are being trampled on, governance is weak and the economy is in a shambles.

ACHYUT WAGLE



The Nepal Communist Party majority government, headed by Prime Minister KP Oli, completed two years in office last week. Prime Minister Oli took this opportunity to highlight the achievements of his government through an hour-long address to the federal parliament. In his speech, Oli portrayed an unbelievably rosy picture of his administration's time in power—ranging from the enactment of almost five dozen new laws, implementation of fiscal federalism, control of corruption, consolidation of the economic outcomes to the dexterity in diplomacy. His jibe on political stability, 'the survival of a government for two years itself should be considered a great achievement in Nepal', however, hinted to a perceived imminent threat to his government, seemingly from within his party's ranks.

The fact of the matter is, these two years indeed have been a period of great achievement for Oli, at least on a personal level. He has managed to consolidate state-power singly around him and has ventured into the discretionary use of the same (largely through verbal decrees instead of legislation). He brought more than half a dozen key government agencies, which were originally conceived to function independent of direct political interference, under the Prime Minister's Office. They include the country's intelligence agency, the National Investigation Department (NID), the Department of Revenue Investigation (DRI) and the Department of Money Laundering Investigation (DMLI).

Imbalance of power

Such one-upmanship has gravely skewed the balance of power. It has brought down the separation of power—deemed sine qua non to democracy—between the three key branches of the government, namely the executive, legislature and judiciary. The parliament has become a mere rubber stamp for govern-



ment-sponsored bills. All provincial governments are constantly complaining of non-cooperation, and of the federal government's reluctance to devolve the authorities even categorically spelt out by the federal constitution. The statistics related to performance for the past two years—especially regarding governance, economy and diplomacy—barely substantiate the recent flimsy political rhapsodies by Oli.

Incidentally, the seven provincial governments have also completed their two years in office and are trying to make their achievements public as well. But their approach is more subdued and apologetic for being unable to perform at par to their expectation, scope and potential. For this, the chief ministers, directly or squarely, are pointing fingers to the non-cooperation from the federal government in formulating required laws, devolving authority, designating the required number of technical and regular civil servants and supporting the capacity building of the sub-national governments.

While Oli was boasting of implementing the fiscal federalism in his address to the federal parliament, Chief Minister of Gandaki Province Prithvi Subba Gurung not only unequivocally claimed that the federal government was not being sincere in implementing the same but also demanding a review of the formulae fixing the equalisation grants from the federal to sub-national levels. The chief ministers of other six provinces of the country also generally echoed Gurung's concerns. If the national development were an aggregate of the development of the provinces, which is indeed the case, the tall claims of achievement by the prime

minister barely tally with that of the chief ministers.

Governance

The federal polity is now heavily constricted because of legal, institutional and operational shortfalls. The government seems to be keen on introducing regressive laws that are designed to restrict civic and academic liberties and strangle the federal system. The provisions in proposed bills related to information technology, media, higher education etc. are only a few examples to this end. The transparency and accountability of the administration has been severely compromised by the arbitrary nature of the investigation and prosecution of criminal as well as corruption cases. Cases like Nirmala Panta's rape and murder, the Lalita Niwas public land graft, the corruption related to the purchase of Airbus aircraft by Nepal Airlines Corporation and transfer of ownership of a huge amount of valuable public land to Yeti Holdings without adhering to proper public procurement procedures, remind us how open to nepotism, favouritism and misuse of state power the Oli government is. In the absence of public accountability mechanisms extended parallel to the federal structure of the state, particularly with a focus on the local levels, the corruption has now diffused to the grassroots.

Economy

Against the government's claim that the economy is on the right track, key economic indicators are extremely worrisome. The government has been forced to downward revise both revenue and expenditure targets in its half-yearly review of the national

budget. In the first six months, the trade deficit has exceeded Rs642 billion which is equal to more than 20 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Inflation on daily consumer products has crossed the 10 percent mark. The inflow of foreign direct investment is at an unimpressive Rs12 billion. The most worrying factor has been the very poor absorption capacity of readily available financial resources, particularly at the local levels. The unspent amount stuck in various government accounts has now reached Rs241.78 billion, including Rs.5846 billion at the local level as of mid-January 2020. With the expected change in leadership in the finance ministry, the stock market has witnessed a lukewarm positive response; though the overall economic uncertainty continues to loom large.

Diplomacy

Not only the operational level day-to-day diplomacy, the overarching foreign policy plank of Nepal now seems to be in complete disarray. Economic diplomacy is in tatters. Oli and his government rode their anti-India and pro-China wagon to power. Now, the government has massively increased Nepal's engagement with China at various levels; between the governments, between the selected think tanks and academia and between the two ruling communist parties. At the same time, it has undermined the importance of engaging with the other powerful neighbour, India, as well as the rest of the democratic world. Extremely callous handling of the foreign policy, for all practical purposes, defeated the concept of so-called 'balanced' or 'non-aligned' position of Nepal. The entire policy paradigm has now become a playing in the hands of a few top hats of the ruling NCP.

The latest example of foreign policy mayhem has manifested in the endeavour to ratify the \$500 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) grant compact. Prime Minister Oli declared that, regardless of the report to be prepared by his party's review committee headed by former prime minister Jhala Nath Khanal (who happens to be an Oli detractor), he would push to ratify the compact in Parliament and that it will be sanctioned. At the root of such discord and confusion is the absence of well-defined, timely-calibrated and institutionalised foreign policy.

In a nutshell, the last two years have hardly made any headway towards Oli's repeated promises of prosperity; the prosperity slogan has now become something of a joke.

Algorithmocracy: What the future may hold

Artificial intelligence is changing society, for better or for worse, but Nepal is lagging behind.

BIMAL PRATAP SHAH



Democracy has sometimes been hailed as a panacea to all the ills the world is suffering from. But, in the second decade of this millennium, things did not look that favourable for the democratic process, mainly because many people lost faith in democracy. People's participation in the electoral process decreased considerably. The lower voter turnout and people's declining trust towards liberal governments, however, are the least of democracy's problems. The biggest threat to the political order will come from disruptive digital technologies, unless it is used to the system's advantage.

The current political leadership in Nepal is clueless about the coming future. Until now, they have overlooked the importance of effectively managing digital technologies that are poised to disrupt many of the foundational ideas of democracy, specifically artificial intelligence (AI). AI refers to systems that display intelligent behaviour by analysing their environment and taking actions with some degree of autonomy to achieve specific goals. AI can also be defined as a simulation of human intelligence by machines.

The Nepali government seems to be confident about the possibility of devising policies to manage AI in due course of time. The effects of new technologies unfolded relatively slowly in the past, allowing former governments enough time to adjust. This time though, the policymakers are mistaken. The pace of the AI revolution will be much faster and will fur-



ther accelerate over time.

The use of AI in politics brings new opportunities as well as poses various challenges to the democratic process. Politicians usually design the election agenda that they thought would best serve the interests of the constituency. This created a huge design-reality gap that made citizens more dissatisfied with democracy. Modern-day tech-savvy politicians have already started using AI to study the electorate's views to adjust their campaign strategies.

Such politicians are using AI to analyse data about voters' preferences by studying their social media activities. This could be a good thing if politicians increase communication with the voters. This could be a threat as well. For example, in most cases, the illiterate voters do not know what is good for them and are only interested in short term gains, thus democratic elections could end up becoming mass appeals instead of the reasoned deliberation process that has until now benefited society as a whole.

Political advertising provides politicians with tools that enable them to

manipulate citizens by using smartly designed algorithms. The tool can also be used to study individual opinions and nudge undecided voters towards the side that invests more in machine learning strategies. The reasons for this shift are complex, but appear to be AI-related. Politicians and governments are using AI to manipulate people.

Another large threat to democracy could come from the AI industry dominated by a few tech giants. Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Facebook, IBM, Apple, Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent already lead AI development. Furthermore, these tech giants are developing the frameworks, chipsets and networks that underpin the communication infrastructure of the modern world. They are also funding the majority of research and earning the lion's share of patents. Above all, these companies are not transparent.

The Chinese government, meanwhile, is pumping huge sums of money into AI research as part of a strategy developed in 2017. In the US, the private sector traditionally funded AI research, but now the US is fol-

lowing in the footsteps of China. Earlier this month, the White House announced that it is pumping hundreds of millions more dollars into AI research. The administration is planning to boost funding for AI research at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the National Science Foundation, the Department of Energy and the Department of Agriculture.

The Chinese government's development strategies have already proven to be effective. Between 2016 and 2018, Chinese companies filed more AI-related patents than their US counterparts. According to a recent study conducted by Nikkei, in 2018 alone the northern neighbour was responsible for 30,000 new patent filings related to artificial intelligence. This is because private AI companies in China leverage strategic support from the government to form the collaborative networking necessary for AI innovation.

There are many things the government here in Nepal can learn from the Chinese government in promoting AI in the country. Yet, it is unlikely that we will see any efforts from the government's side to create an effective strategy. This is because the political leaders' thought process and ideology are still stuck in the 19th century.

Meanwhile, artificial intelligence continues to rise in importance. It has also become an important tool in the fight against disease outbreak. Insilico Medicine, a startup based in the US, used AI to rapidly identify molecules that could form the basis of an effective treatment against the current Coronavirus outbreak. The AI-based system took only four days to identify thousands of new molecules that could be turned into potential medicines against the virus.

Artificial intelligence can provide society with many benefits, if regulated and used responsibly. Elected representatives cannot afford to ignore this technology any longer. The government's role will always be pivotal to using such technology to benefit democracy.

Shah works as a trade and transport consultant.

China's secrecy has made coronavirus crisis much worse

China's authoritarian system needs to step up its game confronting unexpected crises that require a rapid response.

IVO DAALDER

For eight years, China's President Xi Jinping has trumpeted his country's increasingly authoritarian system as a grand model for other developing countries to follow. No doubt, China has seen an extraordinary period of economic growth, which has benefited hundreds of millions in China and around the world. But authoritarianism has also come at great cost, as the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus underscores.

In two months, the virus has spread throughout China and beyond. More than 60,000 people have been reported infected, and nearly 1,400 have died as a consequence of the disease. These numbers are likely to vastly understate the true extent of its spread and impact. The numbers inside China are bound to be much higher, and the lack of reports from Africa, the Middle East and South America are more likely due to faltering health care systems rather than its absence altogether.

We may never know if the spread of the new virus could have been prevented by earlier, concerted action. But the fact that China chose secrecy and inaction turned the possibility of an epidemic into a reality.

The first instance of a new pneumonia-like disease in Wuhan, an industrial city of 11 million people, emerged in early December. By the end of the month, doctors in Wuhan noticed an increased number of sick people with symptoms similar to the SARS outbreak that had killed nearly 800 people in 2002-03. The patients were quarantined, and the Wuhan health commission issued a public notice stressing no cause for alarm. The infections were traced to a live-animal food market, which was shut down January 1, and the genetic sequence of a new coronavirus was identified two days later.

Official communications stressed that there was no reason to believe the diseases could be spread among humans, and the authorities cracked down hard on any medical warnings that appeared on social media. In one notable case, a WeChat post by Dr Li Wenliang to colleagues that patients at his hospital had been quarantined with SARS-like symptoms, was dismissed as 'illegal'.



SHUTTERSTOCK

acts of fabricating, spreading rumours, and disrupting social order'. (Dr Li later contracted the disease and died).

Chinese authorities waited for a month after the first case to notify the World Health Organisation about the new coronavirus, thus delaying concerted efforts to understand the virus, its transmissibility and lethality among infectious disease specialists around the world. Even so, from January 2 to January 18, China did not report any new cases and continued to downplay its severity. As the number of hospitalisations mounted in Wuhan, officials went ahead with a New Year banquet for 40,000 people.

Only when new cases were reported outside Hubei province on January 20 did the Chinese authorities decide to act. Within

days, Hubei province, home to 50 million people, was quarantined, with no travel allowed.

But it was too late. The disease had spread around the country and the world. Within Wuhan, reports of new cases and deaths grew exponentially—from just 100 infected patients and deaths in single digits in mid-January to tens of thousands of reported cases and hundreds of death a few weeks later. Yet, even though Chinese authorities finally acknowledged the severity of the situation, Beijing did not allow a WHO investigating team to enter China until this week and still declines offers by the United States and other countries to send all the experts needed to help combat the disease.

Authoritarian political systems don't do well when confronting unexpected crises,

especially those like infectious diseases that require a rapid local response. They disempower officials at the lower rungs. The firmer the control at the top, the less likely the initiative from the bottom. Dangers go unreported and those who speak out, like Dr Li, are quickly punished as a clear sign to others to stay in line.

But when it comes to infectious diseases, top-down approaches fail. In fact, they make things worse, by delaying actions that could otherwise prevent the spread of the disease. Only if people are empowered to take the initiative can quick action be taken.

When the first coronavirus patient in the United States presented himself in Snohomish County, Washington, Hollianne Bruce didn't wait for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to confirm the

disease. The epidemiologist assigned to the county immediately traced everyone the patient had been in contact with and urged them to remain in isolation for 14 days to prevent the disease from spreading. So far, it hasn't.

Authoritarians are good at ducking responsibility and shifting blame. And no doubt Xi Jinping will survive this latest crisis and remain fully in charge of the country. But people inside and out of China will have noticed that secrecy and control can be deadly, and will begin to question whether the system is in fact as effective as China's leaders make it out to be.

This article was previously published in The Korea Herald, a part of the Asia News Network.

Twenty-first century skills and the 4th Industrial Revolution

The prospects and problems are spectacularly different for most people in low income countries.

MANZOOR AHMED

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently said, "It is not only Bangladesh, the whole world will need skilled manpower... and for that we have reformed our education system, giving priority to vocational training". She was speaking at the international conference on 'Skills Readiness for Achieving SDG and Adopting Industrial Revolution 4.0' on February 2, 2020. The event was organised by the Institute of Diploma Engineers Bangladesh (IDEB) and the Colombo Plan Staff College in Manila, Philippines.

The Prime Minister has rightly indicated an important priority. The question is: how are buzzwords such as the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' understood and what is happening on the ground in the thousands of secondary level institutions across the country?

Klaus Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum and the organiser of the annual Davos Summit, is credited with popularising this term. As Schwab explains, the First Industrial Revolution started in the 1780s, using water and steam power to mechanise production. The Second, beginning in the 1870s, used electric power to create assembly lines and lead to mass production. The Third, starting from the 1960s, used electronics and information technology, also known as digital technology, to automate production. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) now builds on the digital revolution.

The latest Industrial Revolution blurs the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres in an unprecedented way. The 4IR is radically different, since it is more than only a technological shift in economic production, as the previous three were. It opens unlimited possibilities for addressing critical challenges of poverty, inequality and sustainable development. However, beyond the hype surrounding 4IR, the potentials and challenges have to be seen from the perspective of the real world, especially from the point of view of low-income countries like Bangladesh where the majority of the world's people still live. The prospects and problems are spectacularly different for most people in these countries when compared to those in wealthier countries.

Over 80 percent of our workforce is employed in the informal economy, which is not regulated by worker welfare and rights standards. A third of the workforce has no



SHUTTERSTOCK

education, 16 percent have only primary education and 31 percent have only up to secondary education, according to a 2017 Labour Force Survey. Over 40 percent of workers are engaged in the low-skill and low-wage agricultural sector. The concept note for the Eighth Five Year Plan (FY2021-25) that is under preparation says that the overall quality of the labour force is much below the level that is needed to achieve the planned 15 percent growth in manufacturing, to expand the organised service sector, and to facilitate the transition to an upper-middle-income country.

Life and the livelihoods of the majority of people in Bangladesh are largely characterized by the use of the second or even the first Industrial Revolution technologies. At the same time, ironically, most people are also touched by the third Industrial Revolution through the penetration of mobile phone technology. The features of 4IR can be found in a handful of the better educated and privileged population who benefit from or contribute to its development at home or abroad. What this means is that simultaneously, technologies and people's skills, as well as their attitudes and aspirations, have to be

lifted across the board in all four phases of industrial revolutions, starting from wherever the people are on this spectrum. This is where skills formation, the role of the education system and the relevance of 21st century skills come in.

What we call 21st century skills are not necessarily all novel, nor do they mark a clean break from what were important in the 20th century or the 19th century. There are common and timeless elements of quality and relevance for learners and the whole of society in any system of education. Education systems have always struggled to achieve and maintain these essential elements, and they have not become invalid in the 21st century.

This formulation of 21st century skills recognises the value of the foundational skills of multiple literacies, the essential tools for learning. This is the base on which the higher order skills of solving problems and thinking critically are built. Young people also have to be helped with social and emotional maturity and acquiring moral and ethical values—the qualities of character. A lifelong learning approach has to be adopted for this. As in the case of technolo-

gy adoption and adaptation, skills development and education also need to consider the perennial basic and essential elements that can respond to the diverse phases of technology, production, consumption, lifestyle and expectations in which people find themselves.

The education authorities—the two divisions of the Bangladesh Ministry of Education and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board—are engaged in a review of school curricula in the context of 21st century challenges. What is more important than formulating the curriculum is to find effective ways of implementing the curriculum. Teachers—their skills, professionalism and motivations—are the key here. So is the way students' learning is assessed. Look at the negative backlash effects of the current public examinations—too early and too frequent; many questions on what they actually assess; and the distortion of the teaching-learning process in schools.

A good move is to start streaming students to different tracks from 11th grade rather than 9th grade, something which is under consideration now. The aim is to build a common foundation of competencies for

all, and not force young people to foreclose their life options early.

Klaus Schwab had warned that we face the danger of a job market that is increasingly segregated into 'low-skill/low-pay' and 'high-skill/high-pay' segments, giving rise to growing social tensions. Coping with the implications of this danger for education and skill development is a continuing concern. We cannot discuss the numerous structural and operational obstacles to necessary reforms in education and skills formation and how to deal with these within the confines of this article. But we can hardly ignore them either.

The decision-makers of today find it difficult to free themselves from the trap of traditional, linear thinking. They are too absorbed by the multiple, immediate crises knocking at their doors every day. Can they find the time and focus their mind enough to think strategically, looking at the bigger picture and with a longer time horizon, about the forces of change and disruption that are shaping our future?

This article was previously published in The Daily Star, a part of the Asia News Network.

Why do we want the big, fat Nepali wedding?

From a *mehendi* ceremony to a bachelorette party to a filming/photography crew, Nepali weddings these days have become massive, lavish and very expensive.

ANKIT KHADGI
KATHMANDU

Deepika's engagement ceremony was everything she had ever wished for. A designer outfit, professional makeup, a palace-like venue, her family having a ball and top photographers documenting the special day. Deepika, 26, who wants to be known by her first name only, was the first one in her family to have such an extravagant engagement ceremony, and the first to add the ritual of an exchange of rings.

"Traditionally in our Newa culture, we have the *kochi*, the first ceremony of the wedding in which the groom's presence is not necessary. In this ceremony, the groom's family visits the bride and performs *pujas*, to confirm the wedding," says Deepika. She opted for a ring exchanging ceremony instead, replicating an Indian ritual she's seen many a time in Bollywood movies.

Like Deepika, many urban Nepalis these days are opting for weddings that include a series of events that reflect an assimilation of various cultural practises, some straying from traditional practice, like synchronised dance performances, *mehendi* and *haldi* ceremonies, bachelorette parties, cinematic wedding videos. And while doing so, they are not shying away from spending exorbitant amounts of money.

According to Anup Ghimire, director of Wedding Dreams Nepal, a wedding management and planning company, "Most people want big weddings because it's a special time. They want it to be memorable for themselves and for everyone else."

Weddings have always been an important aspect of society, especially in the South Asian region. It is estimated the Indian wedding industry, which is the biggest in South Asia, is worth an approximate \$50 billion dollars alone. From making Bollywood actors serve food to your guests and hiring Beyonce to dance at your *sangeet*—people are willing to do anything to make people remember their wedding.

But why do people want such grand celebrations? Dissecting this psyche, Lalita Bashyal, a sociologist, says wedding celebrations have always been a huge deal in Nepali society, as weddings are generally associated with power and status. "In our context, wedding celebrations have always been a symbol of status. That's why people want weddings to be big in order to reflect their social



PHOTO COURTESY: WEDDING DREAMS NEPAL

Brides and grooms hire photographers and spend hours to capture the 'perfect' shot, which looks like a photo straight out of a magazine.

Weddings have always been an important aspect of South Asian societies.

position," says Bashyal, a teaching faculty at Madan Bhandari Memorial College. "People will feel that their status-quo in society might get affected if they don't throw big celebrations. That's why they opt for grand weddings."

People also want to document all their celebrations. Gone are those days when wedding photos would be limited to the brides and grooms bowing their heads in to shyness, their families beside them. Today, brides and grooms spend hours for the perfect shot, which looks like a photo straight out of a magazine. Some even go a step further and have a pre-wedding photoshoot. Along with photos, couples want videos too, particularly crafted for social media.

"They also come with plans of where they want their video to be shot at and even the kind of music



PHOTO COURTESY: WELCOME EVENT MANAGEMENT

they want in their video," says Bishwas Magar, director of Wedding City Nepal, who has been in the business for almost five years. There's also a high demand

for drone shots, a reflection of how important photos have become for the newly-weds. "Since from a bird eye view everything looks stunning, couples are trying

aerial photography for their weddings," says Ghimire, of Wedding Dreams Nepal.

Social media also has a lot to do with this trend of organising big

Is Oscar-winning film Parasite inspired from a Tamil film?

Thalapathy Vijay's Minsara Kanna, when released in 1999, was one of the biggest hits then in Kollywood that year.

DAWN

South Korean dark comedy thriller film, *Parasite*, created history this year by bagging multiple awards—including Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, Best Foreign Film and the first-ever foreign-language release to win the Best Film award at the Oscars.

But it seems Tamil producer PL Thenappan, who holds the rights of the 1999 Vijay-starrer *Minsara Kanna*, claims that Bong Joon-Ho's directorial is a plagiarised version of his film. The producer recently announced that he will

sue the makers of *Parasite* and pursue a legal course of action against them.

The producer added that he will also claim compensation for stealing credit for his work.

"On Monday or Tuesday, I will be filing a case with the help of an international lawyer. They have taken the plot from my film. When they find out that some of our films have been inspired by their films, they file cases. Similarly, it is only fair for us to do the same," said Thenappan while talking to an Indian publication.

Parasite is a dark comedy thriller

er that follows the members of a poor family who scheme to become employed by a wealthy family by infiltrating their household and posing as unrelated, highly qualified individuals.

Tamil film Minsara Kanna revolves around a wealthy boy who decides to work for a businesswoman and employs every member of his family at the businesswoman's house to succeed in love.

Although social media has refused to take the plagiarism claims seriously, Thenappan insisted he means business. He has, however, failed to file a case so far.

Nepali singer wows judges, winning appreciation both on and offline

Twenty-one-year-old Dibesh Pokharel won the golden ticket at the audition round of the 18th season of American Idol for his standout performance.



SCREENGRAB VIA YOUTUBE

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU

On the very first episode of the 18th season of American Idol, a reality-based singing show, Nepali singer Dibesh Pokharel, who goes by his stage name Arthur Gunn, gave a standout performance, winning the hearts of the judges as well as the audience.

Pokharel, who originally hails from Kathmandu, sang Bob Dylan's 'Girl from the North Country' and 'Have You Ever Seen The Rain' by Creedence Clearwater Revival impressing the three judges—Katy Perry, Lionel Richie and Luke Bryan—who awarded him a golden ticket commending his voice.

Pokharel, an aspiring musician, shifted to Wichita, Kansas, in the US, five years ago.

"You are a rockstar," said Perry, after listening to his performance. All of the judges were blown away by his singing talent and unanimously agreed that he shows great promise in the competition.

Pokharel, 21, an aspiring musician, shifted to Wichita, Kansas, in the US, five years ago. He has been

producing and singing Nepali songs for his YouTube channel creating his own niche audience since, with one of his songs 'Nyano Ghar' receiving more than 600k views on YouTube.

After the season premiere of the singing contest, his audition clip has gone viral on social media, with many complimenting his raw, deep voice. In his introductory video, Pokharel said that music has always been his passion and after shifting to America he has found interest in bluegrass and country music genre.

Pokharel, who gave the audition in Detroit, Michigan, will be moving to Hollywood for the next round, where he will be competing with other contestants.



DAWN

Thenappan claims that Bong Joon-Ho's directorial is a plagiarised version of his 1999 film and he will pursue a legal course of action against the makers of *Parasite*.

BRIEFING

South Korea’s main opposition party changes name again

SEOUL: South Korea’s main opposition party changed its name for the second time in three years on Monday as it seeks to forge a conservative alliance against left-leaning President Moon Jae-in ahead of April polls. The country’s political parties have a tendency to adopt new names to sever ties with a tainted past or appeal to a wider audience. The Liberty Korea Party—a name it only began using in 2017 as it sought to distance itself from a corruption scandal swirling now-ousted president Park Geun-hye—has declared itself the United Future party while absorbing into its ranks two minor conservative allies.

At least five Afghan soldiers killed in Taliban attack

KABUL: At least five Afghan soldiers were killed when Taliban fighters stormed their base in northern Afghanistan, officials said on Monday, as the country waits for an expected “reduction in violence” before a US-Taliban deal. The attack happened in Shora Khak area of volatile Kunduz province on Sunday, days after US Defense Secretary Mark Esper said an agreement with the Taliban was in place for a “conditions-based” seven-day reduction in violence. “Unfortunately, five army soldiers were martyred and three wounded,” the Afghan defence ministry said in a statement, adding that Taliban fighters also suffered casualties.

Indonesia military to blame for 2014 Papua killings: Report

JAKARTA: Indonesia’s military shot dead four students in the country’s restive Papua region during 2014 protests and carried out “gross human rights violations”, a commission investigating the uprising concluded Monday. Komnas HAM issued its findings five years after the high-school students were gunned down in Paniai, a central area of insurgency-wracked Papua province, which shares a border with independent Papua New Guinea. “This incident constitutes crimes against humanity,” the commission’s chief investigator Muhammad Choirul Anam told AFP in a statement Monday. The military did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

(AGENCIES)

Afghanistan to reveal long-delayed election results in ‘days’

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL, FEB 17

Afghanistan will announce the long-delayed results from its presidential election within “three to four days”, a spokesman for the election commission said Monday, nearly five months after polls were held in the war-torn country. In December, the election commission announced that incumbent President Ashraf Ghani had won a slim majority of 50.64 percent in the September 28 poll. His closest rival, Abdullah Abdullah, alleged vote-rigging, forcing a recount.

The final results of the presidential election is expected within three to four days.

The delay has left Afghanistan facing a political crisis just as the US seeks a deal with the Taliban which would allow it to withdraw troops in return for various security guarantees and a promise that the militants would hold peace talks with the Afghan government. If all goes well, then whoever wins the election is likely to be the man sitting across from the Taliban at the negotiating table in a bid to chart Afghanistan’s future. “The final results of the presidential election will be announced within three to four days,” Zabihullah Sadaat, spokesman for Afghanistan’s Independent Election Commission, told AFP. “The recounting and auditing is completed,” Sadaat said. Whether the results will be accepted remains to be seen. Earlier this week, Abdullah’s team said they would not accept fraudulent results. Current vice-president Abdul Rashid Dostum, a powerful Uzbek former warlord and Abdullah’s ally, has also threatened to form a parallel government if fraudulent election results are announced. Nearly one million of the initial 2.7 million votes were purged owing to irregularities, meaning the election saw by far the lowest turnout of any Afghan poll.



AFP/RSS

Visitors walk through an unusually-empty Wat Arun temple in Bangkok on Monday amid a slump in international tourism over the spread of the covid-19 coronavirus.

Infected passengers aboard US evacuation flights as China virus death toll mounts

The covid-19 virus has infected more than 70,500 people in its epicentre of China and sparked panic buying.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO, FEB 17

More than a dozen infected Americans from a coronavirus-riddled cruise ship off Japan flew on evacuation flights to the US with other passengers on Monday, as the epidemic claimed more lives in China to take the death toll above 1,700.

The covid-19 virus has infected more than 70,500 people in its epicentre of China and sparked panic buying, economic jitters and the cancellation of high-profile sporting and cultural events.

With fresh cases emerging daily in Japan, the government has advised citizens to avoid mass gatherings, and on Monday cancelled celebrations for the Emperor’s birthday—an annual jamboree that sees thousands of well-wishers descend on central Tokyo.

Beijing’s municipal authorities have ordered everyone arriving in the capital to self-quarantine for 14 days, the presumed incubation period of the virus. State media said China may postpone its annual parliament session, which has been held in March for the last 35 years.

Outside China, the biggest cluster of infections is from the Diamond Princess cruise ship off Japan’s Yokohama, where an additional 99 cases were revealed on Monday.

That brought the total to 454 diagnosed despite passengers being confined to their cabins during a 14-day quarantine.

As criticism grows of Japan’s han-

dling of the ship crisis, governments are scrambling to repatriate their citizens, with Canada, Australia, Italy, and Hong Kong poised to follow Washington in removing nationals from the vessel.

Early Monday more than 300 passengers were transferred onto coaches via a makeshift passport control and loaded onto two planes heading for air bases in California and Texas.

The first flight touched down at Travis Air Force Base in California shortly before midnight Sunday.

Before they boarded the flights, US officials were informed 14 of them tested days earlier had received posi-

tive results. Authorities allowed them to board but isolated them from other passengers in a “special containment area”.

Those on board were expected to undergo a further 14-day quarantine period on US soil. “I am happy and ready to go,” Sarah Arana told AFP before leaving the ship. “We need a proper quarantine. This was not it.”

Australia became the latest country to order its citizens evacuated from the ship, with Prime Minister Scott Morrison saying more than 200 Australians still on board would be rescued on Wednesday.

Some Americans on the ship, how-

ever, declined the government’s offer.

“My health is fine. And my two-week quarantine is almost over. Why would I want to be put on a bus and a plane with other people they think may be infected when I have spent nearly two weeks isolated from those people?” tweeted Matt Smith.

Forty other US passengers tested positive for the virus and were taken to hospitals in Japan, said Anthony Fauci, a senior official at the National Institutes for Health.

It was not immediately clear if they were already counted among the 355 confirmed cases on the ship.

In China, authorities have placed about 56 million people in Hubei under quarantine, virtually sealing off the province from the rest of the country in an unprecedented effort to contain the virus.

New cases outside the epicentre have been declining for the last 13 days. There were 115 fresh cases outside the central province announced Monday—sharply down from nearly 450 a week ago.

Chinese authorities have pointed to the slowing rise in cases as proof their measures are working, even as the death toll climbed to 1,770 with more than 11,000 recovering.

But World Health Organization head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has warned it is “impossible to predict which direction this epidemic will take”.

Concerns remain about global transmission, especially on cruise ships, which appear to have become especially virulent breeding grounds.



AFP/RSS

Chinese paramilitary police officers wear face masks as they secure an area at Daxing international airport in Beijing.

UAE issues licence for first Arab nuclear power plant

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ABU DHABI, FEB 17

The United Arab Emirates said Monday it has issued a licence for a reactor at its Barakah nuclear power plant, the first in the Arab world, hailing it as a “new chapter”.

The UAE has substantial energy reserves, but with a power-hungry population of 10 million it has made huge investments in developing alternative power sources including solar.

“Today marks a new chapter in our journey for the development of peaceful nuclear energy with the issuing of the operating license for the first Barakah plant,” Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan said in a tweet.

“As we prepare for the next 50 years to safeguard our needs, our biggest strength is national talent.”

The Barakah plant, located on the Gulf coast west of the capital Abu Dhabi, had been due to come online in late 2017 but faced a number of delays that officials attributed to safety and regulatory requirements.

The national nuclear regulator has now given the green light to the first of four reactors at the plant, Hamad al-Kaabi, the UAE representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), told a press conference.

Abu Dhabi authorities said in January that the plant would start operating within a few months. No new date was given on Monday but Kaabi indicated it would happen soon.

“The full operation of Barakah plant in the near future will contrib-

ute to the UAE’s efforts for development and sustainability,” he said, adding that the operator would “undertake a period of commissioning to prepare for commercial operation”.

The plant is a regional first—Saudi Arabia, the world’s top oil exporter, has said it plans to build up to 16 nuclear reactors, but the project has yet to materialise.

It is being built by a consortium led by the Korea Electric Power Corporation at a cost of some \$24.4 billion.

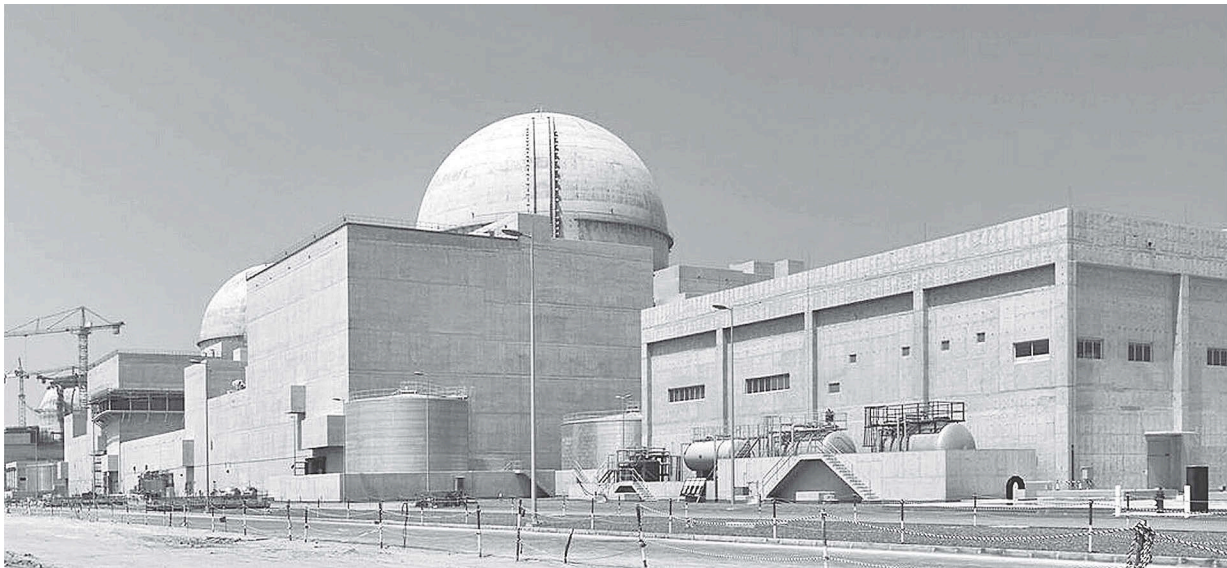
When fully operational, the four reactors have the capacity to generate 5,600 megawatts of electricity, around 25 percent of the nation’s needs. The remaining three reactors are almost ready for operation.

As well as generating competitively priced electricity, the UAE also hopes the nuclear plant will elevate its status as a key regional player, building on its success in establishing itself as a centre for tourism, banking and services.

“This is part of the UAE’s drive to diversify its energy economy, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and project its image as a regional leader in science and technology,” one Gulf analyst told AFP.

Other headline initiatives include a homegrown space programme, which saw the first Emirati astronaut sent into space last year, and plans to launch a probe to Mars.

The Barakah plant is situated on the Emirates coast, separated from Iran by the troubled Gulf waters. It is just 50 kilometres (30 miles) from the border of Saudi Arabia, and is closer



AP

The under-construction Barakah nuclear power plant in Abu Dhabi’s Western desert.

to the Qatari capital Doha than it is to Abu Dhabi.

Amid a tense confrontation between Iran and the United States over Tehran’s nuclear programme, the UAE has said it will not be developing an uranium enrichment programme or nuclear reprocessing technologies.

But relations between Iran and the UAE, a staunch US ally, have deteriorated as Washington pursues a “maximum pressure” policy against Tehran and accuses it of attacking oil tankers in Gulf waters.

Energy giant Saudi Aramco was the target of a missile and drone attack in

September that knocked out half of its production. The strike was claimed by Yemen’s Iran-backed Huthi rebels but Washington accused Tehran of carrying it out.

“The 2019 attack on Aramco highlighted the vulnerability of the Gulf’s energy infrastructure to external attacks,” said the Gulf analyst, who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the issue.

“The heightened pitch of regional tensions between Iran on the one hand, and the US and its allies on the other, increases the vulnerability of new energy infrastructure to the pos-

India women facing sedition charges over school play get bail



AFP/RSS

India has been gripped by widespread street demonstrations against the law that grants citizenship to religious groups from three neighbouring countries, but excludes Muslims.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW DELHI, FEB 17

Two women held for two weeks by Indian police on sedition charges over a school play which allegedly criticised a contentious citizenship law have been granted bail, officials said Sunday.

Teacher Fareeda Begum, 50, and parent Nazbunnisa, 36, were arrested on January 30 for helping the children stage the play at Shaheen Public School in Karnataka state.

The play depicted a worried family talking about how they feared the government would ask millions of Muslims to prove their nationality or be expelled from India.

They were detained under a British colonial-era law after a member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s party claimed the children insulted the Hindu-nationalist leader in the play.

India has been gripped by widespread street demonstrations against the law that grants citizenship to religious groups from three neighbouring countries, but excludes Muslims.

Nearly 30 people died in the months long protests, including two in Karnataka, which is ruled by Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party.

The women were denied bail multiple times before a court set them free late Saturday on a personal bond of \$1,400 each. “The accused have been released on bail but we will continue with our investigations,” an officer told AFP.


Officers visited the school at least five times to quiz children about the play and gather evidence against the accused.

Critics accuse the police of misusing the law amid a public outcry and several protests after videos showing officers interrogating the children—aged between nine and 11 years—went viral on social media.

The citizenship law, combined with a mooted national register of citizens, has stoked fears that India’s 200 million Muslims will be marginalised.

The British-era sedition law enacted in 1860 carries a maximum penalty of life in prison.

Prosecutions are rare but it has frequently been used against critics of the government of the day.

FOREX	
US Dollar	114.36
Euro	123.99
Pound Sterling	148.87
Japanese Yen	10.41
Chinese Yuan	16.38
Qatari Riyal	31.41
Australian Dollar	76.87
Malaysian Ringit	2760
Saudi Arab Riyal	30.49
Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank	
BULLION	
PRICE PER TOLA	
 Fine Gold	Rs 76,500
 Silver	Rs 890
SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA	

GASOLINE WATCH



100% PERFORMANCE. EVERYTIME.



Petrol (Per Litre)
Rs 108.00/-
Diesel (Per Litre)
Rs 97.00/-
Kerosene (Per Litre)
Rs 97.00/-
LPG (Per cylinder)
Rs 1375/-
Source: Nepal Oil Corporation



People buy blankets at the shops in Basantapur, Kathmandu.

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

Consumer Protection Department fines importer and sellers of fake paddy seeds

The bogus Garima seeds resulted in crop losses worth Rs 230 million during the 2019 growing season.

KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, FEB 17

The Department of Commerce, Supplies and Consumer Protection Management has penalised the importer and distributors of fake Garima brand paddy seeds under the Consumer Protection Act 2018. The bogus seeds resulted in crop losses worth Rs230 million during the 2019 growing season.

Farmers had planted the seeds on 1,700 hectares in 13 districts in the western Tarai, according to a report submitted by the Seed Quality Control Centre to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.

The department took action against 17 firms and slapped fines totalling Rs3.12 million. The importer of the seeds, Sunrise Agriculture Research of Dang, was fined Rs300,000 while 14 sellers were fined Rs200,000 each—Tanahu Bij Bhandar; Tanahu; Jamil Bij Bhandar; Kapilvastu; Ghimire Agrovet; Kapilvastu; Laligurass Agrovet, Kapilvastu; Swargadwari Agri Nepal, Dang; Janata Agrovet, Dang; Munal Agrovet Concern, Nepalgunj; Srijana Vet Centre, Bardia; Sikha Agro Centre, Bardia; Khushiram Veterinary Centre, Bardia; Lohiti Agrovet Centre, Bardia; RH Agrovet, Kailali; Kishan Agrovet Centre, Kailali and Prasant Agrovet Centre, Chitwan.

Netra Prasad Subedi, director general of the department, said that lack of regulation and work procedure in the law prevented him from taking stricter action against the offending traders.



POST FILE PHOTO

“It took a year for the regulation to be approved; and until it is published in the Nepal Gazette, we can do nothing,” he added.

Subedi said that according to the law, the sufferers have to go to court to claim the compensation amount. Consumer rights activists can help the farmers initiate proceeding in the district courts as there is no consumer court in the country.

He added that the Agriculture Ministry would determine the amount of compensation to be provided by the federal and local governments respectively.

The Commerce Department has also written to the Department of Industry to investigate online shopping company Daraz as it has been

Farmers had planted the seeds on 1,700 hectares in 13 districts in the western Tarai.

engaged in business activities while being registered as a cargo service provider.

Daraz was slapped a Rs300,000 fine for delivery of incorrect product, and the firm has asked for a review of the case.

Consumers have criticised the

department for not taking stringent action against fraudulent traders while consumer rights activists claim government influence and pressure has weakened it.

The Commerce Department filed a case against Alfa Beta Complex for distributing poor quality food and Shubhakamana Mineral Water Company for not meeting quality standards. Alfa Beta’s case has been submitted to the director general while the mineral water company has been slapped a Rs300,000 fine.

“We will take legal action if a connection is found between the recent destruction of chicks and eggs and rising prices of chicken meat and eggs,” officials said.

The department collected Rs10 million in fines from 1,164 firms found engaged in illegal business practices during market inspection in the first seven months of the current fiscal year. Its inspectors also destroyed Rs10.5 million worth of illegal goods.

Subedi said that the department had spent Rs2 million out of its Rs10 million budget during the first seven months. “We have adequate staff to conduct market inspection,” he said, refuting previous claims that the department needed additional personnel.

The preparation of the work procedure for strategic market inspection has reached the final phase, and it will be made public soon, he said. The work procedure mainly deals with taking action according to the law on the basis of information and surveillance, and establishing strong coordination with the related government bodies.

Malaysia to choose 5G partners based on own security standards

REUTERS
KUALA LUMPUR, FEB 17

Malaysia’s own security standards will dictate which companies take part in its planned 5G rollout this year, its communications minister told Reuters on Monday, as the United States pushes countries to exclude China’s Huawei.

Huawei, the world’s largest telecommunications equipment maker, has been at the centre of a U.S.-led campaign to clamp down on the use of Chinese technology in the development of the next-generation telecommunications platform because of concerns the equipment could be used by Beijing for spying.

The United States placed Huawei on a trade blacklist in May, and in February U.S. prosecutors accused it of stealing trade secrets and helping Iran to track protesters. The company denies the charges.

Malaysia is aware of the “concerns that have been expressed around the world” about Huawei, but it will be governed by its own security standards in choosing partners for the nationwide 5G rollout planned for the third quarter, minister Gobind Singh Deo said.

“My position is very clear, we have our own safety standards, we have our own safety requirements,” he said in an interview.

“So whoever deals with us, whoever comes up with proposals, we have to be certain and we have to be sure they meet the security standards that we have.”

Asked if Huawei had made a promise similar to the one made to India on preventing “back doors” in its equipment, which the US had said could be used by Beijing to carry out covert surveillance on other countries, Singh Deo said: “I don’t think we look at one particular company and say this is how it should be,” he said.

“When you talk about security, be it Huawei or anyone else, you want to be assured that whatever system they propose... is suitable for you. We do not say we will not deal with one particular company because generally there are security concerns.”

Malaysia plans to issue spectrum tenders in April and estimates that fibre optics infrastructure and cellular coverage expansion, which includes 5G development, would cost some 21.6 billion ringgit (\$5.22 billion) over five years.

Huawei has already signed a 5G deal with Malaysian mobile network operator Maxis and preliminary agreements with other telcos such as Axiata Group’s Celcom and Telekom Malaysia.

Besides Huawei, other suitors seeking a piece of Malaysia’s 5G business include Finnish company Nokia, which is positioning to provide services for the trade-reliant nation’s ports industry, and Sweden’s Ericsson.

Singh Deo said the government was keen to involve as many companies as possible to encourage healthy competition in the name of better services.

Indian experts conduct survey for second oil pipeline in Jhapa

The proposed 50-kilometre pipeline will extend from the Charali depot to Siliguri in West Bengal.

PARBAT PORTEL
KAKARBHITTA, FEB 17

The government has begun the process to establish another pipeline in Jhapa, buoyed by South Asia’s first cross-border pipeline in Amlekhgunj through which oil started flowing from India last September.

A team from Indian Oil Corporation, which built the Amlekhgunj pipeline as a gift, has conducted a survey for the proposed pipeline connecting Nepal Oil Corporation’s depot at Charali, Jhapa with Siliguri, which lies across the eastern border in West Bengal, India.

According to Bipin Kumar Shrestha, chief of Nepal Oil Corporation’s Jhapa depot, the Indian team made the field study on February 12.

Experts carried out the survey in Batasi in northern West Bengal, about 3 kilometres from the India-Bangladesh border and Jyamirgadi in Jhapa. “The survey team also studied three rivers—Mechi, Ninda and

Hadiya—on the east-west highway,” he said.

The team will submit its survey report to Indian Oil Corporation, and after that a financial assessment of the project will be prepared. The distance between the Indian Oil Corporation depot in Siliguri and the Nepal Oil Corporation depot in Charali is 50 kilometres. “This distance can be reduced,” Shrestha said, quoting the survey team.

Nepal Oil Corporation had last month requested the Indian government to study the possibility of building another cross-border pipeline during a meeting of the Nepal-India Petroleum and Gas Joint Working Group in New Delhi, India.

According to Birendra Goit, spokesperson for Nepal Oil Corporation, the agenda has been discussed at a commerce secretary-level meeting between Nepal and India too. “The pipeline will provide a number of benefits that will reduce the supply cost.”

According to Nepal Oil Corporation officials, the transportation of gaso-

line through the pipeline is expected to slash Nepal’s fuel import cost immensely. It can also significantly reduce leakage and wastage. With reduced use of tankers to carry fuel, there will also be a significant benefit to the environment.

The 69-kilometre Amlekhgunj pipeline brings fuel from India’s Barauni refinery in Bihar to Nepal. Of the pipeline’s 69-kilometre length, a 36-kilometre section lies on the Nepali side of the border and the rest on the Indian side.

The 10-inch diameter pipeline has a capacity to transport 2 million tonnes of oil per annum. Petroleum supplies from Indian Oil Corporation to Nepal Oil Corporation started in 1974.

According to Nepal Oil Corporation, it has been able to save Rs2 billion annually in freight charges and avoid the vagaries of transportation via tanker truck at the Birgunj border point after it started getting fuel through the pipeline. It currently takes at least 14 hours to ferry gasoline from Patna to Amlekhgunj.



Oil tankers are seen lined up at Indian Oil Corporation depot in Siliguri, India.

POST FILE PHOTO

INTERVIEW

‘Our film industry lacks producers who can invest more than money’

Award-winning Min Bahadur Bham on his love for cinema and the Nepali film industry.



PHOTO: TNM

In the year 2015, everything changed for filmmaker **Min Bahadur Bham** after the release of his first feature film, *Kalo Pothi*. From becoming the first Nepali filmmaker to bagging the best film award at the Critics Week of Venice International Film Festival to even receiving love from Nepali audience for his film, Bham achieved what every filmmaker aspires to with his first film.

Currently, he is working on his upcoming project *A Year of Cold* for which he received funds as the winner of the Norwegian Sorfond Award at last year's Cannes Film Festival. The Post's **Ankit Khadgi** sat with the award-winning filmmaker to talk about his filmmaking journey, his passion for story-telling and his views regarding the current situation of the Nepali film industry. Excerpts:

How did you end up becoming a filmmaker?

My love for films started young. When I was a child, my father had a small cinema theatre in Mugu where he'd screen Hindi films. I liked watching films rather than spending my time playing with toys. My friends aspired to become the hero, but I always wanted to become the one who used to direct the heroes.

I understood the power of words when I was young too. The village I grew up in was a close-knit, remote community, and people who left the village for work outside often wrote telegraphs to people back home. I was one of the few who could read, and I would read all the telegraphs that came. These telegraphs were expensive back then, and keeping that in mind, people sent short, strong notes back home. I used to be stunned by how you don't need too many words to convey what you feel. This made me realise the power of such form of communication. My passion for films increased. I realised how through just a few hours one could connect people with something deep. I was also into writing poems and loved reading books that enhanced my love for story-telling.

Eventually I ran away from home after my SLC and came to Kathmandu, where I joined theatre. But my end goal was always the big screen and with many struggles and hard work, I achieved what I wanted in my life—to make films.

How do you decide on your storyline?

Kalo Pothi's story was somehow a reflection of my personal experiences. Back in my village, when I was young, I had a friend with whom I shared a close bond with. He was from a 'so called' lower caste, and our friendship had some terms and conditions forced by our social structure. He was not allowed to enter my house. These things had a deep impact on me and I weaved the film's storyline with this issue along with the then political situation. I like to tell stories of people I know on an intimate level, real life experiences, and the political situation of our country.

What's your method of working?

I need to have a clear narrative for my story, the structure can change. Scriptwriting is a lengthy and lonely process, and I usually go to secluded places to write. I

also try to visit the place where the story is based on. The research process is a long process too, because whenever I come across some new information or detail, I rewrite and make changes in the story and in the script itself.

What are the challenges you face as an independent filmmaker?

Independent filmmakers from all over the world have to overcome many challenges. If we speak in terms of our country, we lack government support in terms of subsidies. The private investors also lack a comprehensive understanding of cinema due to which it's difficult to find creative producers who are fully involved in the process, besides backing the film financially. There's also a hurdle in getting an audience as well as releasing your film in theatres. Sometimes, it's also difficult to convince the actors and the rest of the crew to have faith in your idea.

How did you feel when you became the first Nepali filmmaker whose feature film was screened at the Venice Film Festival?

To be honest, I was neither excited nor nervous. Back in 2012, my short film *The Fruit (Bansulli)* had also been screened at the same festival. For me, the process of making films is more important. Other things are secondary.

Kalo Pothi was loved by both critics and the masses. How did you strike that balance?

I didn't make the film with the intention of telling a story that has the 'balance'. I used the available tools

and made a film about everyday people, a story everyone could connect to. I think that's the reason why many people loved the film, as they felt the story was real. I was suggested by many to change the language of the film into Nepali. But I followed my vision of telling the story of the ground reality and showed the real culture. I think if you tell stories that reflect reality, many can connect to it. If they can do that, they will enjoy your film.

How has film festivals helped you and your craft?

Film festivals are very important, as they give you a platform for your work to receive exposure amongst the masses who appreciate art. I don't think my film *Kalo Pothi* would have been this big if it wasn't screened at the Venice festival. The screening helped promote the film directly affecting its business. When your film gets the stamp of a film festival, it also becomes easy to get distributors in the global market.

How did your experience in theatre help you in film-making?

If I wasn't involved in theatre, I couldn't have seen myself becoming a filmmaker. Theatre made me disciplined and understand the value of art. Generally, in filmmaking, you have more choices. It's like living a lavish life, where you have multiple options to choose from. However, when you are in theatre, you have to make do with what you have or always look for alternatives.

Because of my theatre experience, I always look for an artistic approach to tell what I want in my frames and utilise the available resources rather than spend an exorbitant amount of money just for a scene.

“I like to tell stories of people I know on an intimate level, real life experiences, and the political situation.”

Theatre also helped me to polish my team-working skills.

How difficult is it for you to balance both roles of a director and producer?

The main reason why my next project is getting delayed is because I am both the producer and director of the film. It's difficult for me to take time out and do both things simultaneously. I have to work on the script, audition the actors, manage the finances, do marketing work, and oversee distribution. It becomes so hectic that sometimes there's a possibility of not being able to start the film at the estimated time.

Many say that Nepali films are not exploring themes beyond migration, civil war and comedy. Why do you think filmmakers aren't taking enough risks?

Nepali films have always stuck to a particular theme when it comes to storytelling. Earlier, films mostly dealt with the suppression of the working class by the ruling class. The lead would be a rebellious proletariat who would fight against 30 goons, who worked for the ruling class, the antagonist of the story.

These days, directors use issues of migration, the effects of civil war and comedy to tell stories because that's what the audience wants to see. People want to see a fantasy world, and pay money to watch people driving expensive cars, clothes or living a good life abroad. Producers and directors are just cashing in on these aspirations and making films about it.

How can our film industry change?

First of all, we have to stop trying to imitate Bollywood's model. We don't have a proper film studio or stars who can guarantee a film's success, thus it is unwise to imitate them.

Also, for Nepali films to do better, the producers should think beyond finance. It's crucial the producers deeply understand the films, just like the directors, so they can find the right approach and resources to tell the story. Our film industry lacks producers who can invest more than money. A country's film industry can only excel if there are good producers who value the art of cinema.

The artists and the makers should also acknowledge the power they have in shaping the mindset of people too. They should be socially responsible and shouldn't think only of money. It doesn't mean that they have to make films preaching social messages only, but they should be conscious of what discourse their film will spark among the audiences.

