



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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The Kathmandu Post wishes its readers, advertisers and well-wishers

Happy New Year 2023



## A peek into coalitions formed after 1990

**KATHMANDU:** The political developments of 1990 led to the resumption of multi-party democracy in Nepal. The mid-term election of 1994, which gave no party a clear majority in parliament, heralded the coalition culture in Nepali politics. A governing coalition is formed when no single political party gains an absolute majority, and competing forces collaborate to install a government. (Pg 3)



A cyclist is pictured against the setting sun on the New Year's Eve in Kapilvastu on Saturday.

POST PHOTO: MANOJ PAUDEL

## Is the new Pokhara airport under China's BRI radar?

Yes, claims Chinese Embassy. Nepali officials say no official document mentions the international airport as such.

**ANIL GIRI**  
KATHMANDU, DEC 31

At a time when Kathmandu says no project under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative has been signed and Nepal and China are working to finalise the text of project implementation under the BRI, the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu made a surprise announcement on Saturday.

Just a day ahead of the inauguration of Pokhara International Airport by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the Chinese Embassy wrote in its Twitter account that "This [Pokhara airport] is the flagship project of the China-Nepal BRI cooperation."

The airport inauguration ceremony is scheduled to start at 11 am on Sunday. The Chinese Embassy also congratulated the Nepali government and people on the connectivity milestone.

After Nepal and China signed the framework agreement on BRI in 2017, Nepal had initially selected 35 projects to be undertaken under Chinese President Xi Jinping's flagship connectivity project. Later, upon Beijing's request, the total number of projects was whittled down to nine with Pokhara airport off the list.

The government signed a \$215.96 million soft loan agreement with China in March 2016 for the construction of the new

airport in the lake city. The loan agreement between the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal and China EXIM Bank does not mention the BRI.

In May 2014, two years before the loan was agreed, China CAMC Engineering was given the construction contract, at a time when China's BRI was in a nascent phase. Chinese President Xi first announced the idea of BRI in 2013 as 'One Belt, One Road'. China's Exim Bank had agreed to provide 25 percent of the loan free of interest and set the interest rate at two percent per annum for the rest of the amount, with a payback period of 20 years.

At least three officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Tourism told the Post that loan negotiation for the project had begun before the BRI was conceptualised in China.

>> Continued on page 2

## Booster jabs, masking advised as new Covid wave looms

Health Ministry expects a surge in coronavirus cases somewhere between January-end and second week of February.

**ARJUN POUDEL**  
KATHMANDU, DEC 31

On Thursday, a 24-year-old migrant worker from Sainamaina Municipality of Rupandehi district who was returning from the United Arab Emirates, tested positive for the coronavirus.

Staffers at the airport health desk had carried out an antigen test upon his arrival, as the man had Covid-19-like symptoms.

"We called an ambulance to the runway and sent the patient directly to Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital," said Gopal Pandey, a health worker serving at the desk.

"For the past couple of days, we have stepped up surveillance on those suspected of infection."

Amid the risk of a new surge of coronavirus cases in the country, the Ministry of Health and Population has directed agencies concerned to step up surveillance measures.

Carrying out antigen testing in suspected cases is among the measures being carried out to prevent the outbreak of a new variant of Covid-19, which has wreaked havoc in China and other Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea, where Nepalis have high mobility.

But what concerns public health experts more is China's recent move to open its borders to Nepal after two and a half years, just when the spread of coronavirus there started

getting out of control.

India too has recorded a marginal rise in the total number of new cases in recent days. The country may see a surge in cases in the next 40 days, according to media reports.

Experts in Nepal said that the rise in new cases in India is a matter of concern given the uninterrupted cross-border movement between the countries.

>> Continued on page 3

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NATIONAL

BRIEFING

Boy injured in grenade explosion

**PANCHTHAR:** An eight-year-old boy was injured when a stray grenade went off at Chilingdin of Phalgunanda Rural Municipality-4 in Panchthar on Saturday. Police identified the victim as Niraj Khadka of Phalgunanda-4. The minor, who went to the nearby forest to collect firewood, recovered the explosive that exploded while he was playing with it. Police suspect that the grenade might have been left in the forest during Maoist insurgency. The boy sustained injuries in chest, abdomen and face. The victim was taken to Jhapa for treatment, said police.

Minors in prison taken to Pokhara for education

**BAGLUNG:** Two boys who were languishing in Baglung District Prison have got an opportunity for school education. In an initiation of National Child Rights Council and Human Rights Organisation Baglung, the boys were taken to a child home in Pokhara. Anamol Pariyar, aged six, and Alin Budha, aged four, were staying in the prison with their mothers. "We sent the children to Pokhara for their studies as per the consent of their guardians," said Dil Bahadur KC, chief of Baglung District Prison. "Both the women are happy as their sons got the opportunity to study."

Rawal elected UML leader in Sudurpaschim Assembly



**DHANGADHI:** Rajendra Singh Rawal has been elected the CPN-UML's Assembly leader in Sudurpaschim Province. The assembly party meeting held on Saturday in presence of UML provincial in-charge Lekhraj Bhatta elected Rawal as the party assembly leader. Rawal, a resident of Kanchanpur district, is the politburo member of the UML. Similarly, Santosh Sharma has been picked as the party's deputy assembly leader. The UML has 10 members in the 53-member provincial assembly in Sudurpaschim.

Sub-engineer dies in motorcycle accident

**SARLAHI:** Roshan Yadav, a sub-engineer working at Lalbandi Municipality, died in a motorcycle accident in Sarlahi section of the East-West Highway on Friday night. Yadav, 30, met with the accident while he was returning to his home at Dhanushadham Municipality-3 in Dhanusha district from Lalbandi on his motorcycle. Critically injured, Yadav was rushed to Malangawa-based hospital where he died in the course of treatment, police said.

Janata Samajbadi entrusts political committee to pick ministerial candidates

**KATHMANDU:** The Janata Samajbadi Party has instructed its political committee to finalise the names of the party's leaders to be appointed as ministers in the Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led government. The party's executive committee meeting on Saturday assigned the political committee with the responsibility, said Manish Suman, spokesperson of the party. The party has called a meeting of the political committee for Monday and Tuesday. The executive committee meeting held at the party central office in Lalitpur briefly reviewed the party's performance in the November 20 polls and also discussed holding a general convention. A three-member committee led by Shival Thapa has been formed to review the party's performance in the polls.

# Unified Socialist leaders divided over whether to join Dahal-led government

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is said to be discussing with Madhav Kumar Nepal to take the party on board.



Madhav Kumar Nepal, chairman of CPN (Unified Socialist), addresses the party's standing committee meeting on Saturday.

**PURUSHOTTAM POUDEL**  
KATHMANDU, DEC 31

The CPN (Unified Socialist) is still undecided on whether to join the Puspha Kamal Dahal-led government. Speaking to the Post, party leaders refuted rumours that the party is joining the new administration soon.

The party had called a standing committee meeting on Saturday to take a decision on joining the Dahal-led government.

"The ruling coalition has not formally asked our party to join the government yet," Bijay Poudel, the deputy general secretary of the Unified Socialist, told the Post. "The party is still on a wait-and-watch mode to support the government."

Dahal on Sunday ditched the Congress-led coalition and joined hands with the CPN-UML to become the prime minister with support from Rastriya Swatantra Party, Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Janata Samajbadi Party, Janamat Party and Nagarik Unmukti Party.

Maoist Centre and Unified Socialist were earlier in the same Congress-led alliance and contested the November elections under it. But when Dahal suddenly joined hands with KP Sharma Oli, Unified Socialist chair

## Many leaders of Unified Socialist are reportedly lobbying to reunite with the UML.

Madhav Kumar Nepal was left behind.

According to leaders privy to the development, Dahal has been in frequent contact with Nepal since he became prime minister with the support of 169 parliamentarians. Some leaders of the Unified Socialist, which split from the UML nearly two years ago, are reportedly hesitant to join the UML-led camp.

"On what ground should the party join the government formed with the support of the alliance led by UML?" Poudel told the Post. "We have not reached a conclusion on this matter yet."

Insiders, however, said there is still a high probability that the party would join the government. "There are many leaders in the party who believe the party should join the new administration," a leader told the Post

on the condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, many Unified Socialist leaders are also lobbying to reunite with the UML. However, many say that is not possible in the immediate future. "It may take some time to decide on party unification but at the moment, our party chair is under pressure from within the party to join the government," the leader said. "The leadership is waiting for an appropriate moment to decide on it."

On Wednesday, party chair Nepal met with Prime Minister Dahal in a private setting at Hattiban, Lalitpur. Citing the meeting, the party insider said, "It won't be surprising if the party joins the government."

Meanwhile, the party organised a virtual meeting with leaders of its sister organisations on Wednesday and Thursday, during which party chair Nepal discussed with them the prospect of joining the government, said leaders privy to the meeting.

"Some say the party should join the government, while others are opposed to the proposal," party spokesperson Jagannath Khatiwada said. "Leaders in favour of the proposal say the party can connect with the people when it heads some ministries."

Khatiwada denied rumours that party chair Nepal would become the

President. "Such claims that our party chair will become the head of state have no basis," Khatiwada told the Post.

Pradeep Gyawali, a deputy general secretary of the UML, has also rubbished reports that major parties were considering Nepal as a presidential candidate. Gyawali on Friday took to social media to refute the rumours. "There, however, is no denying that the party is considering merger with the mother party UML or the Maoist Centre, given its lacklustre performance in the general elections.

On August 22, Maoist Centre chair Dahal and Unified Socialist chief Nepal had decided that their parties would contest the November 20 election with a common manifesto. But the decision proved to be short-sighted as other leaders of Nepal's party quickly warned against any such move.

The parties had also decided to unify after the election and formed a joint task force for the purpose. But the fate of the decision remains unknown.

"But later the Maoist Centre deviated from the decision," Poudel, the deputy general secretary said. "We have not thought about unification again."

-BY THE NUMBERS-

92.98

Percentage of people who felt their economic situations improved by utilising the concessional loans banks and financial institutions as per the Nepal Rastra Bank survey in 12 districts.

7,972,791

Total booster doses of Covid-19 vaccines used till December 31, 2022.

Rs244.72 million

Nepal's total exports to China as of mid-December as China reopened the Rasuwagadhi border for Nepali goods.

Rs20.31 billion

Total import of cereal products as of December 15 in the current fiscal year as imports dropped 40.2 percent amid India's restrictions on rice exports.

Rs849 million

Foreign Direct Investment pledged during the month of Mangsir (Nov 17-Dec 15) to Nepal.

43.65MW

Extra power that Nepal can sell in the Indian market as the total electricity permitted to be exported to India reaches 452.6MW.

53

Total incidents of press freedom violation in Nepal in 2022, a slight drop from 62 incidents recorded in 2021.

# Is new Pokhara airport part of China's Belt and Road Initiative?

>> Continued from page 1

The Chinese Embassy's claim, therefore, is their own interpretation, which the Nepali side does not own up, they said.

Even when the project completion ceremony of the Pokhara airport was held in Kathmandu during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit in March last year, there was no mention from either side of BRI in connection with the airport.

If the Chinese Embassy says that this airport is built under BRI, this is their definition, a foreign ministry official said. "What we have agreed as of now is that China will fund two other projects under the BRI."

According to the official, the feasibility study of Nepal-China cross-border railway and Nepal-China cross border transmission line will be funded under the BRI modality, as agreed by the two sides. A six-member Chinese team arrived in Kathmandu last week and is preparing to carry out the feasibility study of the cross-border railway, probably starting next week, with the Chinese grant.

It will take more than 42 months to complete the feasibility study of the proposed 72-kilometre railway line that will connect Kathmandu with China's border port of Kerung.

Nepal and China are also thinking of building the Ratmate-Rasuwagadhi-Kerung transmission line. A joint technical group comprising representatives of the Nepal Electricity Authority and the State Grid Corporation of China held two rounds of talks, in China and then in Nepal, for the transmission line before the start of the Covid pandemic. According to the NEA, once built, the cross-border line will open an alternative market for Nepal's surplus power.

Currently, India is Nepal's only foreign market for electricity trade. India allows Nepal to sell a maximum of 452MW electricity from 10 hydropower projects. The 400 kV transmission line from Ratmate to Kerung will allow power trade between Nepal and China, the NEA said in its annual report for 2021-22. The project's Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) is currently underway.

"Pokhara airport was conceived of long ago and as per our rather in-depth conversations with the Chinese side, it does not fall under the BRI framework," the official added. "But the thing is, now, all kinds of Chinese assistance either in the form of loan or grant, or any project undertaken or



Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is scheduled to inaugurate the Pokhara International Airport on Sunday.

completed by the Chinese, are being defined as falling under the BRI. As per our definition, this particular project does not fall under the BRI framework."

Officials from the two countries are now finalising the text of BRI implementation where financial, technical and other inventories of each project would be fixed. The previous Sher Bahadur Deuba government communicated to the Chinese side that Nepal does not want loan and preference would be given to grant considering the size and nature of Nepal's economy.

If unavoidable, a loan should come with the interest on par with a multilateral lender or not exceed one percent per annum. In most cases, the interest rate of projects under the BRI is two to four percent. The Deuba government also made clear that Nepal is not in a position to take commercial loans to fund the project.

The Nepali side is also looking for a similar arrangement for the repayment of loans under the BRI, extending the period to 40 years and beyond. Nepali officials have also called for fair and open competition among the bidders for BRI projects.

Speaking with select journalists on April 22, 2022, outgoing Chinese

ambassador Hou Yanqi had said the BRI consists of both grants and commercial loans.

"It is based on a cooperative modality that includes grants and commercial cooperation," she said.

Hou said that many of the projects that China is currently building in Nepal fall under the BRI framework.

## India allows Nepal to sell a maximum of 452MW electricity from 10 hydropower projects.

"This [BRI] is a long project. The projects that are being constructed in Nepal under BRI have three modalities. First, it is like Gautam Buddha Airport in Lumbini where ADB has invested and Chinese contractors have worked. Second, the modality of Pokhara Airport where China's commercial loans and grants are there and the construction company is also Chinese," Hou said. "And the third modality is like the Tribhuvan

International Airport in Kathmandu. The responsibility of improving this airport has been given to a Chinese company and the cost will be borne by the Nepal government."

In bilateral documentation, none of these projects has gotten grants or loans earmarked BRI, finance ministry officials said.

"Publicity is one thing but in documentation or while signing the loan negotiation or negotiating the projects, the Chinese side never said Pokhara Airport falls under the BRI," the finance ministry official added.

The Chinese Embassy in its press note has further said: "The new airport is designed and built in accordance with the standards of China and the International Civil Aviation Organization, which reflects the quality of Chinese projects, symbolises the national pride of Nepal, and becomes a remarkable sign for China and Nepal to jointly build the Belt and Road Initiative."

to promote the early completion and operation of the airport," the embassy said. "In March this year, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Nepal and attended the completion ceremony of the construction ... of the airport. Several prime ministers of Nepal also visited and promoted the project construction."

A joint-secretary at the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation said that loan negotiations for the project had begun in 2008, ruling out the BRI component in the airport. China's CAMC Engineering first visited Pokhara in 2008 in view of its construction when Dahal was the prime minister. No document says this project falls under the BRI, the joint-secretary said.

Former Nepali ambassador to China Leela Mani Paudyal said it is difficult to determine which project falls under the BRI. "I don't know whether this particular project falls under the framework of BRI or is funded under the BRI scheme. Of late, all Chinese investment—grant or loan—is tagged as BRI cooperation." By this definition, this particular project may fall under the BRI but, again, there is no clear demarcation between a BRI and a non-BRI project, said Paudyal.

**मोटरसाइकल हरायो**  
मिति २०७२/०९/१५ गते राति ९:३० बजेपछि नयाँ टिमी आकाश पुलको छेउमा रहेको आफ्नो कोठा अगाडि पार्किङ गरिरहेको ठाउँबाट बाग्मती प्रदेश ०२-४१ प २३५९ नं. को १५०CC को रातो कालो रंगको Bajaj को पल्सर मोटरसाइकल हराएको हुँदा पाउनु हुने महानुभावले नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालय वा फोन नं. ९६६००६७००४ मा खबर गरिदिनु हुन अनुरोध गर्दछु।  
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SUNDAY EXPLAINER

# A peek into coalitions after 1990

Governments have come and gone, but sustaining Nepal's political stability remains a constant challenge.

NISHAN KHATIWADA  
KATHMANDU, DEC 31

The political developments of 1990 led to the resumption of a multi-party democratic system in Nepal. The mid-term election of 1994, which gave no party a clear majority in Parliament, heralded the coalition culture in Nepal's politics.

So when is a coalition government formed?

In simple words, a governing coalition is formed when no single political party gains an absolute majority, and competing forces collaborate to install a government.

The current arrangements of the 2015 constitution, the election process, and the political system often make a coalition government inevitable. "In our parliamentary democracy, parties need to forge a coalition because there is little or no chance of a single party forming a majority government," says political analyst Jhalak Subedi.

Former National Assembly member Radheshyam Adhikari echoes the sentiments when he says the "constitution's spirit favours a coalition culture."

## History of coalitions

A trend of forming pre- and post-poll alliances followed the country's adoption of a multiparty democracy. All the governments since 1999 have been coalitions of two or more parties. Particularly since the first Constitutional Assembly, when the proportional representation system was brought in, coalition has become the norm.

Jagat Nepal, a political observer and writer, said the coalition culture was rooted in the 1990 movement as the new political order provided a fertile ground for multiple political parties to flourish and compete for power.

An interim government led by Nepali Congress veteran Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was formed in April 1990. In the election that followed, the Congress secured a clear majority in 1991, winning 110 of the 205 seats to form a government. A communist party, CPN-UML, stayed in the opposition with 69 seats.

But Congress's internal feud led to the Parliament's dissolution in 1994 and the party's defeat in the elections that followed. In November 1994, a general election was held but no party got a majority, leading to a hung Parliament. The UML formed a minority government and Man Mohan Adhikari became the prime minister. The government lasted nine months.

The UML and the Congress, respectively, elected Lokendra Bahadur Chand in January 1997 and Surya Bahadur Thapa in October 1997 prime ministers of coalition governments. The irony is that both leaders belonged to the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, loyal to the Panchayat system against which the Congress and UML had fought long and hard. The Parliament saw formations and dissolutions of several coalitions.

After the 1999 elections, the Congress formed a majority government, winning 113 of the 205 seats. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was appointed prime minister.

But in 2000, Girija Prasad Koirala ousted Bhattarai to replace him in office. In July 2001, after Koirala resigned following the Army's failure to take action against the abduction of police personnel by the Maoist insurgents, Sher Bahadur Deuba became the prime minister.

The first Constituent Assembly elections were held in 2008. The Maoists, who joined mainstream politics following the peace deal of 2006, emerged as the largest political force. CPN (Maoist) leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who spearheaded the decade-long insurgency until 2006, was appointed the prime minister in the ruling coalition involving the UML. The Congress remained an opposition force.

The Maoists Supremo also could not



(From right) Maoist Centre chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, CPN-UML chief KP Sharma Oli, chair of the National Assembly Ganesh Prasad Timsina and Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba pictured at a function last week.

hold on to power for long. In 2009, Dahal resigned after president Ram Baran Yadav revoked his decision to fire Army chief Rookmangad Katawal. The UML and the Congress then formed a coalition with Madhav Kumar Nepal, who was defeated in the 2008 polls in two constituencies but was nominated to the Assembly later, as its head.

After Nepal resigned in June 2010 under Maoist pressure, Jhala Nath Khanal of his party succeeded him in February 2011. There had been a seven-month stalemate. By then, the debate on a new constitution had heated up.

Khanal resigned after failing to make any headway in constitution writing and the management of former rebel Maoist party's weapons and combatants. Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai replaced him in August 2011. All three communist leaders—Nepal, Khanal and Bhattarai—became prime ministers with the backing of multiple parties. Though Bhattarai successfully settled the issue of army integration, he couldn't lead the constitution making process to its conclusion.

## The lack of a single-party majority in the polls has again given room for fresh political instability.

As the Constituent Assembly failed to draft the constitution by the latest deadline, Bhattarai called for fresh elections to the second Assembly. Khilaraj Regmi, the then chief justice, was appointed head of the interim government which conducted the CA elections a second time in November 2013.

The lack of a single-party majority in the polls again gave room for fresh political instability. In February 2014, Sushil Koirala, president of Nepali Congress that emerged as the largest party from the polls, became the prime minister with the second-largest party, UML, as its major partner. At the time, the Congress and the UML had tried to justify the first and second-largest parties joining hands in view of the country's critical stage—first, due to the crisis caused by the devastating earthquakes and, second, because of the political leadership's failure to produce a constitution after eight years of exercise. Eventually, the post-quake situation brought all three major forces—the Congress, the UML and the Maoists—together and the country got

a constitution on September 20, 2015. Koirala stepped down in October.

Then, the UML's KP Sharma Oli led another coalition, including the Maoist Centre, Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal, and Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Loktantrik. In July 2016, Oli resigned after the Maoists withdrew their support. The Congress and the Maoist Centre blamed Oli for failing to address the disputes over the constitution and the issue of transitional justice in cases related to the Maoist insurgency.

In August 2016, Pushpa Kamal Dahal was elected prime minister with the backing of the Congress and some fringe parties. There was a power-sharing deal between the Congress and the Maoist Centre in which Dahal had to step down after the 2017 local polls. In June 2017, Parliament elected Deuba as yet another coalition prime minister.

In 2017, elections for all three tiers of the government were held. The communist alliance of the UML and Maoist Centre secured a landslide victory, mustering nearly a two-thirds majority in the federal parliament. Oli was re-elected prime minister on February 15, 2018, with the Maoists on his side. Also, the Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum led by Upendra Yadav joined the coalition. The UML and the Maoists jointly led six of the seven provinces.

Both parties merged to form the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) on May 17, 2018, with an agreement to divide the prime ministerial tenure between Oli and Dahal. But Oli refused to hand over the reins to Dahal after the first half, which eventually led to the NCP's split. In a time-buying and defensive tactic, Oli dissolved the House twice, leading his comrades Dahal and Nepal to side with the Congress to mount an attack on him. Oli was removed with the order of the Supreme Court and Sher Bahadur Deuba led the coalition composed mainly of Oli's former allies from July 2021.

The Congress-led ruling coalition contested both the local, provincial and federal elections held in 2022 in an alliance. As no party got a majority, it was anticipated that the Congress-led coalition would form the government. But a dramatic turn of events followed with Deuba refusing to hand over the prime ministership to Dahal. Maoist Centre chair Dahal became the prime minister of the latest coalition involving the UML and new players Rastriya Swatantra Party, and some fringe parties in Parliament.

**Third picks the best fruit**  
The political analyst Jhalak

## Why coalitions fail

No coalition government so far has remained intact for a full tenure. Why have the coalition governments been so vulnerable to splits?

Political analyst Subedi said that after facing challenges in coalitions, the leaders, instead of accepting the results, opt for splits as they make decisions keeping themselves at the centre. "Coalition partners jumping ships for their own vested interests has been sudden," he said.

Political observer Jagat Nepal asserted that the political parties have been joining coalitions merely to quench their thirst for power, leading to splits. "Politicians have not been honest with their ideologies. They fear that without power, they can't survive in politics. They all rush to grab power, seeking advantages, mostly economic," he said.

Nepal said geopolitical influences have also been the reason behind various coalitions' failure as the power centres want Nepal's governments to serve their interests.

A coalition becomes more fragile if it has parties from differing backgrounds, in some cases pole-opposite ideologies, and parties in their infancy with a mere motive for power. "The current coalition is fragile. The largest party is out of the government," said Subedi.

## A way out

As coalitions become the compulsion, political forces must seek a way out, say observers.

Former National Assembly member Adhikari said to sustain both pre- and post-poll coalitions, the partners should have a common policy and programme before an agreement is made. "The parties can be ideologically apart, but either before or after the polls, basic principles and concepts must be agreed upon—they should agree on a boundary that they will not cross while agreeing to form a coalition," he said.

Subedi stressed that coalition leaders should first be honest. "If the leaders fail to be responsible, they should step down as the leaders do in some nations," he said.

For the sustainability of coalitions, Nepal added: "The political forces must ally only on the planks of the nation's necessities—nothing else."

## BRIEFING

### Expert panel set up to ease distribution of passport, other documents

**KATHMANDU:** The Ministry of Home Affairs has set up and mobilised a panel of experts to study and recommend ways to resolve the hassles in public service delivery. The move is aimed at removing red tape in the distribution of essential documents such as passports, national identity cards and licences, for which people are compelled to stand in queue for hours. The Ministry took the initiative after complaints that the common people have been suffering for years while acquiring the essential documents. Fanindra Mani Pokharel, joint secretary and spokesperson for the Ministry, informed that independent experts have been deployed in various public offices to monitor the situation and identify hassles of service delivery and recommend suggestions accordingly. "Based on the panel's suggestions, the ministry will take necessary steps," Pokharel said. "If the service needs to be expanded, the government will do the needful." With the formation of the government, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal had announced that easy access to public services such as the distribution of passports and driving licences would be prioritised. Following the announcement, the first meeting of the Council of Ministers had decided to take steps to improve service delivery.

### Digital attacks new threat to press freedom, says journalists' federation

**KATHMANDU:** The Federation of Nepali Journalists has said 2022 was a very challenging year in terms of freedom of the press and expression in Nepal. The federation says there are fresh challenges to press freedom with the advancement of new technology. "People or groups disagreeing with the news have started attacking media organisations and journalists through a different method. This has added a challenge to Nepali journalism," said Roshan Puri, general secretary of the federation, in a statement on Saturday. "Unlike the previous year, media and journalists were attacked through digital means this year."

# Experts stress vaccination, face masks

>> Continued from page 1

Nepal and India share about 1,800km of porous and unregulated border from where thousands of people move across the two countries every day.

Workers deployed at health desks set up at international land crossings and international airports say that the measures being currently taken won't stop the virus from entering the country.

According to them, antigen testing is being carried out only on symptomatic people. Passengers have to show a vaccine quick response code or negative report of polymerase chain reaction tests. Infected people can enter the country in the incubation period, when they may not be showing Covid-19 symptoms. They can pass the virus to the people who come in their close contact.

"We kept the infected person in hospital for two hours, counselled him and then sent him home," said Nabaraj Gautam, information officer at Sukraraj Hospital. "The man boarded a taxi on the way out."

Authorities concerned stopped regulating movements of infected persons long ago.

Infectious disease experts say that a new surge in Nepal is inevitable and it's only a matter of time. They say preventive measures could reduce the impact of the new surge.

"I want to emphasise that the only way out is vaccine, vaccine and vaccine again," said Dr Rajiv Shrestha, an infectious disease expert at Dhulikhel Hospital. "Administer booster shots at the earliest and strictly enforce masks and other public health measures."

Of late, the Health Ministry has reported circulation of at least 17 different sub-variants of Omicron including BA.2, BA.2.75, BA.2.75.1, BA.2.75.2, BA.2.75.3, BA.2.75.5, BA.2.75.6, BA.2.76, BA.5.2, BA.5.2.1, BM.1, BM.1.1.3, BN.1.3, BQ.1.1, BQ.1.2, Bx.1 and XBB in the country.

The country has yet to report the presence of the B.F.7 variant that is spreading in China and other countries but, again, experts say its entry into Nepal is inevitable.

Nepal has reported almost all variants and sub-variants of Covid-19 detected in the world. Due to the high mobility of people across the globe, the risk of any virus variant entering the country remains high, doctors say.

"Even if we do not at present have the B.F.7 virus variant, there is always the risk of its spread here, and such a risk has only heightened of late," said Dr Sanjay Kumar Thakur, spokesperson for the Health Ministry. "We have alerted all agencies concerned."

Nepal on Saturday reported five new Covid-19 cases out of 169 polymerase chain reaction tests carried out across the country. The number of active cases, which had declined to 10 on Monday, the lowest in the two-and-a-half years, rose to 30 on Saturday.

"We expect a new surge from January end," said Thakur. "Only with the cooperation of all concerned agencies, as well as the general public, will we be able to check its spread. The Health Ministry cannot do everything on its own."

So far, 12,019 Covid-related deaths have been reported in Nepal, according to the official count. The Health Ministry said that 22,324,933 people, or 76.5 percent of the total population, have been fully vaccinated. The number of people taking booster shots stands at 7,972,791 as of Saturday.

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# Kissinger's leaders and the drifters

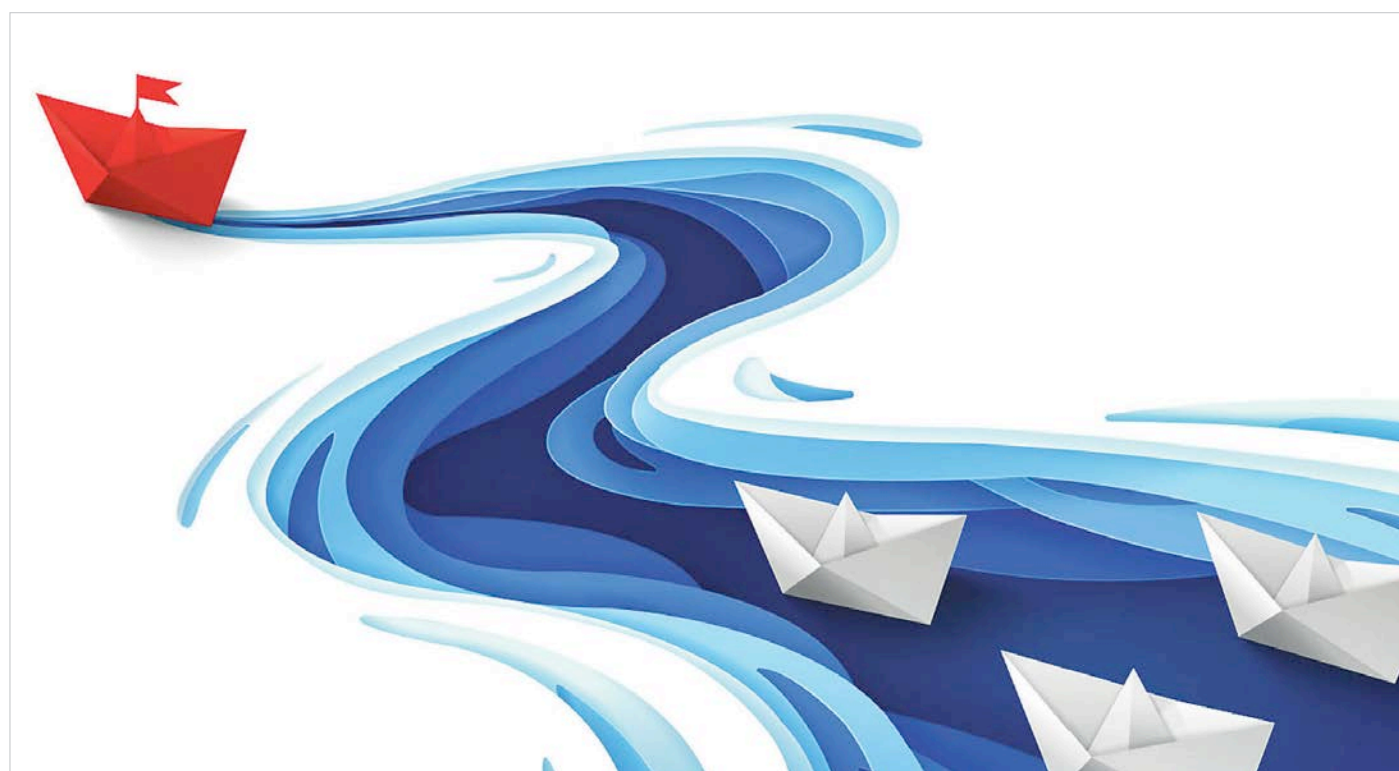
## WORDS & ECHOES

Nepal needs a leader who can combine the qualities of the statesmen and visionaries that Kissinger describes.

ABHI SUBEDI

One afternoon, I visited Mandala Book Point to pick up a book for my interdisciplinary quest. The astute and humanist bookseller and publisher Madhab Lal Maharjan—who can read the minds of the academics and drifters who visit his bookshop—was there. As far as I remember, he has maintained a continuum as a bookseller from the hippie days to the present. I recall several moments when Madhab encountered book readers, including scholars and writers. I remember one moving and eloquent moment of such an encounter: Rishikesh Shah, the great Nepali historian, came to the bookshop as was his habit, and asked for some books published in Delhi. After getting the book, the frail-looking Shah said he did not have cash at that moment to pay for it. Instead, he fished out a gold coin and offered it to Madhab who, refusing to take it, said, “Shahji, please pay another time whenever you have the money.” Shah died a few weeks later. I recall that as a moment when a scholar and bookseller met in a contact zone imbued with the creative power of book reading and selling.

This time, Madhab pulled out a book from a disorganised pile of new arrivals and handed over the sizable volume entitled *Leadership*, written by Henry Kissinger and published by Penguin Press in 2022. At first, I thought it would be a farfetched interdisciplinary exercise for a literary academic to delve into the tome by Kissinger. But it turned out to be the kind of book I was looking for at this moment when we are discussing, in earnest, leaders and drifters. Leaders are indispensable, but a leader who holds his or her work seriously as a noble mission has become a rarity in Nepal. I must confess I have not seriously read any books by such a well-known historian and diplomat before.



But this one struck me as essential reading. I was captured by Kissinger's poetic interpretation of history, and his riveting accounts of the roles that leaders have played. This is a study of leaders who have created conditions for the changes and transformations of societies. Kissinger's conviction is that the role of leaders is very important because “without leadership, institutions drift, and nations court growing irrelevance and, ultimately, disaster”. I was delighted to read this oeuvre by the 99-year-old former national security adviser and secretary of state in the Nixon administration, and later the erstwhile Harvard scholar and writer. After reading the book, I saw common patterns of the perceptions of a literary writer and of a diplomat historian.

Kissinger has selected six leaders for this study, most of whom he worked with and knew personally. They are Konrad Adenauer, the first post-war chancellor of West Germany; Charles de Gaulle, who is consid-

ered to be the saviour of France two times, after the Second World War and the Algerian Crisis; Kissinger's own boss Richard Nixon, who is said to have made breakthroughs in geopolitics; Anwar Sadat, who died in his mission to establish durable peace with Israel; Lee Kuan Yew, who made the small territory of Singapore a greatly prosperous country in the world; and Margaret Thatcher, who made great achievements in the male-dominated British politics. The mantra of the entire oeuvre is put at the beginning in these words, “Any society, whatever its political system, is perpetually in transit between a past that forms its memory and vision of the future that inspires its evolution.” Kissinger sees the indispensable role of a leader. Such conviction and faith of Kissinger in a leader may sound somewhat out of place today when, except for a few cases, the qualities of the leaders he admires are in short supply.

### Leaders in Nepal

In Nepal, we are grappling with existential angst caused by the need for a leader who should take us through the period of transition. We need a leader who combines the qualities of the statesmen and visionaries that Kissinger describes. We, too, could cite the example of BP Koirala among a very few others who combined both statesmanship and prophetic quality. There are also many drifters in our times whose actions are limited in scope. Kissinger presents leaders as very responsible persons who are educators and guides, and who feel the pain and aspirations of society as their own. Kissinger summarises his argument by saying that leadership is the “result from the collision of the intangible and the malleable”. Intransigence and vote-denying have been ruining such a great creative collision in our times. In Nepal, like in the neighbouring countries, such malleability is becoming a rarity. Kissinger sees a leader as a manager-

al as well as a visionary person, and I would add, a creative writer whom we can see in his description of Anwar Sadat's style, “His policies flowed organically from the personal reflections and his own interior transformation.” Kissinger emphasises from the beginning the importance of the creative quality of a leader. He calls a good leader an artist who sculpts the future; he cites the philosopher Isaiah Berlin to emphasise that “the leader, like novelist or landscape painter, must absorb life in all its dazzling complexity”.

Henry Kissinger distinguishes between two types of leaders—statesman and prophetic or visionary. He says Vladimir Lenin, Mahatma Gandhi, Charles de Gaulle, Winston Churchill and Muhammad Anwar Sadat have gone down in history as prophetic leaders of history, but they had great managerial qualities too. He calls Jawaharlal Nehru not a prophetic like Gandhi but a statesman. In Nepal, we are bereft of leaders on whom we can rely, regardless of their principles. The choice of leaders and their selection criteria in contemporary Nepal makes us feel that we are not faring well in matters of finding good leaders. And that is at the heart of our problem. Kissinger says the six leaders had “profound differences”, but they all had “parallel qualities”, and “an ability to devise a strategy to manage the present and shape the future”. It has become common in Nepal to wait for a leader to emerge. I would call that our prophetic crisis in politics.

Henry Kissinger's book is a successfully made artistic interpretation of the qualities of the six leaders, but it shows how leaders of any society could interpret history with their vision, sense of mission and dedication. We should be optimistic about it. In the case of de Gaulle, Kissinger says, at first, “Nothing suggested that one day he would emerge as a mythic leader.” But de Gaulle did emerge as one. People also played a role there. Let us all be visionary, optimistic and realistic about the great phenomenon called leadership.



Subedi is a poet and playwright.

## OBITUARY

# Pelé: Beyond the football pitch

Pelé will also be remembered as a great champion of peace and well-being of the world's children.

KUL CHANDRA GAUTAM

Along with billions of people around the world—including millions of Nepalis—I was mesmerised by the magic of Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe while watching the 2022 FIFA World Cup finale in Qatar. But another great player who constantly hovered in my heart and mind was my all-time favourite, the legendary Pelé of Brazil, battling for his life in a faraway hospital in Sao Paulo.

Pelé, the King of football, passed away peacefully last week at 82. The outpouring of grief, adulation and nostalgia for him from people worldwide is a tribute to the unparalleled love and respect he commanded. Although Pelé was not in Qatar for what has been dubbed the greatest FIFA World Cup ever, pictures of him in his famous

### UNICEF, Pelé and breastfeeding

In the 1980s and 1990s, UNICEF was involved in promoting many innovative methods of social mobilisation to influence child-friendly public policies in Brazil. One example was the promotion of breastfeeding to improve child health and reduce the rates of infant mortality and malnutrition. Due to the aggressive marketing of baby milk formulas by private multinational companies, breastfeeding had declined dramatically to the point where only 8 percent of Brazilian mothers exclusively breastfed their babies during the first six months in the 1980s. UNICEF explored how it could best help in reversing this dangerous trend.

Efforts to promote breastfeeding by the Ministry of Health and concerned paediatricians were not yielding the desired results in the face of deceptive advertising by the infant formula companies. In their search for the most respected and credible messenger whose advice mothers would pay attention to, UNICEF came up with an unusual yet obvious choice—Pelé. He happily agreed to lend his name to this worthy mission of saving lives and protecting the health of millions of Brazilian children. The decline in breastfeeding affected all

Pediatric Association had uncontested scientific evidence that breastfeeding was the best nutrient for infants and that exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continued breastfeeding for up to two years with a gradual introduction of healthy weaning foods protected children from infection, malnutrition and common childhood diseases. Breastfeeding has many life-long advantages for infants, mothers, and society as a whole. After securing Pelé's enthusiastic agreement, UNICEF helped prepare an attractive poster depicting Pelé's mother patting her famous son on the shoulder and saying, “Of course, he is the best football player in the world—I breastfed him!”

This poster became the centre-piece of the breastfeeding promotion campaign that dramatically increased exclusive breastfeeding to almost 40 percent within a few years. As a result, the lives of thousands of Brazilian children were saved, and the health of millions was improved as a result of this campaign.

### Pelé's childhood in poverty

Pelé was receptive to UNICEF's message partly because of his experience growing

UN's anti-poverty development goals.

In Brazil, Pelé's name is also associated with anti-corruption activism. In 1995, Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who had once been a UNICEF consultant on social policy, appointed Pelé as an Extraordinary Minister for Sport. During his tenure, Pelé proposed legislation to reduce corruption in Brazilian football, which became known as the “Pelé law”.

### 'Say Yes for Children' campaign

As UNICEF's Chief for Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1980s and later as its global Programme Director, I had many opportunities to visit Brazil. I witnessed the impact of Pelé's contribution and the country's impressive progress in child survival and development.

I also had a special opportunity to meet and interact with Pelé in 2001 when I was leading UNICEF's plans to organise a Global Summit at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children. To build momentum for the Summit's ambitious goals, UNICEF launched a “Say Yes for Children” campaign with the active support of luminaries like Nelson Mandela, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and dozens of world leaders. One of the highlights of the campaign was a special partnership with FIFA. We invited FIFA President Sepp Blatter and several famous football stars and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors to join. The most prominent among them was Pelé, who signed the campaign as part of the “UNICEF-FIFA Global Alliance for Children”.

In another memorable event, Pelé helped UNICEF and FIFA to kick off the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany as part of a campaign to utilise the power of football to instil in children self-esteem, mutual respect and fair play while also spreading the message of peace. Pelé carried the World Cup trophy onto the pitch in Munich alongside supermodel and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Claudia Schiffer.

### Maestro of the “Beautiful Game”

During his illustrious career, Pelé won three FIFA World Cups in 1958, 1962 and 1970 and set many international records as the greatest football player of all time. His extraordinary skills, such as the ability to strike powerful and accurate shots with both feet and the elegance with which he manoeuvred the ball and outmanoeuvred his competitors are legendary. More than anyone else, Pelé is credited for popularising football as “The Beautiful Game”.

There have been other great football stars in recent years, including Messi, Mbappe, Maradona, Ronaldo and Zidane, to name a few. But Pelé will be remembered as the most loved, admired and inspiring legend in history. Besides being the best football player, he will also be remembered as a great champion of worthy causes like peace, the environment and the well-being of the world's children.



Gautam is a former Assistant Secretary-General of the UN and Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF.

## Call for columns

The Kathmandu Post invites well-researched, unapologetic opinion pieces. To make sure your articles get our attention, please keep the following things in mind when inquiring and submitting your pieces.

All your opinion pieces should be pitched to the Opinion desk—not to the editor. Email your piece or pitch (along with a high-resolution headshot and a one-line bio) to tkpope@kmg.com.np.

We will respond only to pitches that have original ideas. Plagiarism will lead to blacklisting. We suggest that you google your pitch before writing to us. If you're submitting an article that the Post or other publications have already covered, tell us why your piece offers something new.

Let us know what your expertise is on the topic you're interested in exploring. The Post receives dozens of pitches every day from aspiring writers, students, analysts, activists, entrepreneurs and diplomats. We are not able to respond to every single email, but if we like your idea, we will get back to you within a week.



The signing of “UNICEF-FIFA Global Alliance for Children” on 20th November 2001.

number 10 shirt adorned the new, shining football stadiums in Doha with “get well soon” messages.

Everybody knows Pelé as the best football player in world history, but few know about his significant contribution to social causes. Pelé helped save lives and improve the health of millions of children in Brazil. He also helped to promote global causes such as ecology and environment, sports and development, and peaceful resolution of conflicts as a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations, UNESCO and UNICEF.

segments of Brazil's population, but the worst consequences were among the poorest. Many poor women were influenced by milk-formula advertisers who presented bottle feeding as a healthy and glamorous alternative to breastfeeding. Rich and beautiful women were shown to prefer bottle-feeding over breastfeeding. Even doctors and nurses in hospitals were enlisted by infant formula companies to influence new mothers to switch to bottle feeding.

As the world's leading child health organisations, UNICEF, the World Health Organisation, and the International

poor child. Born in 1940 in a poor community in the state of São Paulo in southern Brazil, Pelé's real family name was Edson Arantes do Nascimento. He grew up in poverty, earning money as a servant in tea shops. His father taught him to play football, but he could not afford a proper football. He often played with a grapefruit or an improvised ball made of old socks stuffed with newspapers and tied with a string. Given his personal experience, Pelé was very sensitive to the plight of children in poverty. Thus, he became an enthusiastic supporter of UNICEF and the



FOREX

US Dollar	132.66
Euro	141.42
Pound Sterling	159.63
Japanese Yen (10)	10.05
Chinese Yuan	19.13
Qatari Riyal	36.32
Australian Dollar	90.07
Malaysian Ringgit	30.12
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.27

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 101,400
Silver	Rs 1,395

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

India suspends cough syrup maker's production after Uzbekistan deaths

**NEW DELHI/TASHKENT:** India has suspended production at a pharmaceutical company based near New Delhi whose cough syrup was linked to the death of 19 children in Uzbekistan, India's health minister said on Friday. Uzbekistan said this week that at least 18 children had died in the southeastern city of Samarkand after consuming Marion Biotech's Dok-1 Max syrup. On Thursday, Uzbek media reported a 19th victim, a one-year-old child, in the nearby region of Qashqadaryo. Uzbekistan's health ministry had said the syrup contained a toxic substance, ethylene glycol, and was administered in doses higher than the standard dose for children, either by their parents, who mistook it for an anti-cold remedy, or on the advice of pharmacists. Indian Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said all production had been suspended at Marion Biotech's unit in Noida, outside Delhi. "All manufacturing activities of Marion Biotech at Noida unit have been stopped yesterday night, while further investigation is ongoing," Mandaviya wrote on Twitter on Friday. (REUTERS)

Taiwan to plough \$12 billion in excess tax revenue back into economy in 2023

**TAIPEI:** Taiwan will plough an extra T\$380 billion (\$12.43 billion) in tax revenue back into the economy in 2023 to help protect the island from global economic shocks, including subsidies for electricity prices, President Tsai Ing-wen said on Saturday. While the export-dependent economy grew 6.45 percent in 2021, the fastest rate since it expanded 10.25 percent in 2010, it is expected to grow much more slowly in 2022 and 2023, hit by Covid-19 turmoil in China, global inflation woes and the impact of the war in Ukraine. Tsai, in a statement from her office, said the government must make preparations in advance for the "more severe challenges" the global economy faces in 2023. The estimated T\$380 billion in excess tax revenues for the central government in 2022 will be spent on areas including subsidies for electricity prices, labour and health insurance and other spending to cope with the impact of global inflation and international economic challenges, the president said. (REUTERS)

UK problems won't go away in 2023, Sunak warns

**LONDON:** Britain has had a tough 12 months and its problems will not "go away" in 2023—but the coronation of King Charles III will help bring the country together, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said Saturday in his New Year message. Sunak, who in October became the third Conservative British prime minister of the year, said the UK was rocked this year by the "profound economic impact" caused by Russia's war in Ukraine. He said his government has taken "difficult but fair decisions to get borrowing and debt under control" and helped Britons cope with a cost of living crisis driven by sharply rising energy bills. Sunak did not mention the UK's political chaos this year, which saw former Prime Minister Boris Johnson quit in July after a string of scandals and his successor Liz Truss resign after less than two months in office. (AP)

US gets one bid for oil and gas lease in Alaska's Cook Inlet

**WASHINGTON:** The US government on Friday said it received one bid for the right to drill offshore for oil and gas in Alaska's Cook Inlet near habitat for bears, salmon, humpback whales and endangered beluga whales. Hilcorp Alaska LLC submitted the sole bid—\$63,983 for an area covering 2,304 hectares or 5,693 acres. The company is a unit of Hilcorp, which is the largest privately held oil and gas exploration and production company in the United States. It already has leases to drill for oil and gas in onshore areas of Cook Inlet, which stretches from Anchorage to the Gulf of Alaska. (AP)

# Cabbage exports to India soar as organic trend catches on

Nepal exported 11,673 tonnes of white cabbage worth Rs136.17 million to India in the first five months of the fiscal year, according to customs data.

**KRISHANA PRASAIN**  
KATHMANDU, DEC 31

Nepal's export trade may have lost steam in the past few years, but one export is racing ahead. Shipments of Nepali cabbage to India have been going at double speed this fiscal year.

According to the Department of Customs, Nepal exported 11,673 tonnes of white cabbage worth Rs136.17 million to India in just the first five months of the current fiscal year ended mid-December.

During the whole of the last fiscal year, exports of the common vegetable totalled 11,081 tonnes valued at Rs124.82 million.

Nepal's eastern hill districts have been exporting cabbage in the thousands of tonnes to India with a steep rise in demand there for organic vegetables. The cabbage is mainly produced in Sankhuwasabha, Tehrathum and Dhankuta.

The harvest begins in September. Traders said that the bulk of the cabbage goes to Kolkata, India.

Due to the weather factor and fertile land, farmers in the eastern hill districts do not use much chemical fertiliser and pesticides even when growing vegetables commercially.

Because cabbage is cultivated mostly using organic methods in the eastern hill districts, demand has been growing in the Indian market.

Laxman Bhattarai, manager of the Agricultural Commodity Market Management Committee, Dharan, says cabbage has been listed as a top exportable vegetable to India. "It's easy to export too."

He said that demand for cabbage grows in the Nepal market when floods in the Tarai region damage the vegetable crops. "In India, demand is rising as cabbage produced in Nepal's hills is known for being organic."

According to Bhattarai, around 4,000 tonnes of cabbage is dispatched to the Indian market from Dharan alone during the harvest season.

Besides cabbage from the eastern



The cabbage is mainly produced in Sankhuwasabha, Tehrathum and Dhankuta.

hills, cabbage produced in Palung and Tistung in Makwanpur is also highly sought after in the Indian market, most of which is exported, traders said.

"This season, cabbage produced in the eastern hills fetched an average price of Rs30 per kg in the Indian market," Bhattarai said.

"With the surge in sales, farmers are being attracted towards commercial production. They have been expanding the vegetable acreage too."

Bhattarai expects a massive rise in cabbage exports in the coming years.

Hari Dahal, a former government secretary, says vegetables produced in

the hills are tastier compared to vegetables produced in the Tarai plains.

"The taste factor could be the reason behind the rise in demand. Also, vegetables produced in the hills are less exposed to pesticides compared to the Tarai."

According to Dahal, Nepal needs to focus on import substitution as purchases of foreign products have reached alarming levels.

"Nepal's farmlands in the hills are very suitable for organic vegetable production. The country should benefit from this because demand for organic vegetables has grown by leaps and bounds globally."

Trade economist Posh Raj Pandey says that traders have been exporting other vegetables and passing them off as cabbage.

"Since you need a licence to export other vegetables to the Indian market, opportunist traders have been exploiting the trade preferential loopholes by labelling the shipments as cabbage."

According to him, other vegetables also need to pass sanitary and phytosanitary standards before they can be exported.

According to the Department of Customs, Nepal's vegetable imports plunged 26.89 percent year-on-year to Rs14.31 billion in the first five

## Chinese manufacturing weakens amid outbreak



A file photo shows shoppers walking through a reopened shopping mall in Beijing.

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
BEIJING, DEC 31

Chinese manufacturing contracted for a third consecutive month in December, in the biggest drop since early 2020, as the country battles a nationwide Covid-19 surge after suddenly easing anti-epidemic measures.

A monthly purchasing managers' index declined to 47.0 from 48.0 in November, according to data released from the National Bureau of Statistics on Saturday. Numbers below 50 indicate a contraction in activity.

The contraction was the biggest since February 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic had just started.

The weakening comes as China earlier this month abruptly relaxed Covid-19 restrictions after years of attempts to stamp out the virus. The country of 1.4 billion is now facing a nationwide outbreak and authorities have stopped publishing a daily tally of Covid-19 infections.

Several other sub-indexes, including for large enterprises, production

and demand in the manufacturing market also dropped compared to November.

"Some surveyed companies reported that due to the impact of the epidemic, the logistics and transportation manpower was insufficient, and delivery time had been extended," said Zhao Qinghe, a senior economist at the statistics bureau in a published analysis of the December data.

According to data from the bureau, sectors including construction saw expansion in December together with sub-indexes that measure industries such as air transport, telecommunications, and monetary and financial services.

The purchasing managers' index for China's non-manufacturing sector also fell to 41.6 in December, down from 46.7 in November.

China is likely to miss its goal of 5.5 percent economic growth this year, with forecasters cutting their outlook to as low as 3 percent in annual growth, which would be the second weakest since at least the 1980s.

## Nepal tourism board targets 1 million tourists next year

The country's tourism promotional body plans aggressive marketing activities in Asia.

**POST REPORT**  
KATHMANDU, DEC 31

Nepal Tourism Board, the country's tourism promotional body, on Saturday said it has targeted to host at least 1 million visitors in 2023, largely by attracting visitors from Asia.

"After two years of stagnation because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the industry is in a revival phase," said Dhananjay Regmi, chief executive officer of the board, speaking at a programme to mark the 24th anniversary of the board.

"We will focus on attracting more visitors from Southeast Asia and the Middle East this year by launching more promotional campaigns in these regions."

The tourism industry is the fourth largest employer in the country, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics.

Nepal received 230,085 and 150,962 tourists in 2020 and 2021, respectively. 546,216 tourists came to Nepal as of November 2022, according to the Department of Immigration. The arrival numbers are expected to reach 600,000 in 2022.

"We would have received more visitors if the Gautam Buddha International Airport in Bhairahawa had succeeded in attracting more airlines," Regmi added.

Nepal opened its second international airport in the southern city of Bhairahawa in May 2022. The modern facility is the gateway to the pilgrimage site of Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha.

The country's third international airport is scheduled to be inaugurated in Pokhara on Sunday.



546,216 tourists came to Nepal as of November, according to the Department of Immigration.

"We have now experienced that a lavish inauguration ceremony does not guarantee the regular operation of the airport," said Regmi. "We have to be careful to ensure that the new international airport in Pokhara will not share the same fate as that in Bhairahawa."

Bhairahawa airport needs to be promoted as a gateway not only to Lumbini but to the entire western and far-western part of the country, Regmi added. "The role of the private sector is significant to attract more visitors and make the most of the international airports."

Chandra Prasad Rijal, vice chairman of the Nepal Tourism Board, said the tourism board has not been able to work effectively to attract tourists.

"The political leadership has been ignorant towards the tourism

sector," Rijal argued. Shreejana Rana, president of the Hotel Association of Nepal, said Nepal Tourism Board has contributed a lot to promotion efforts.

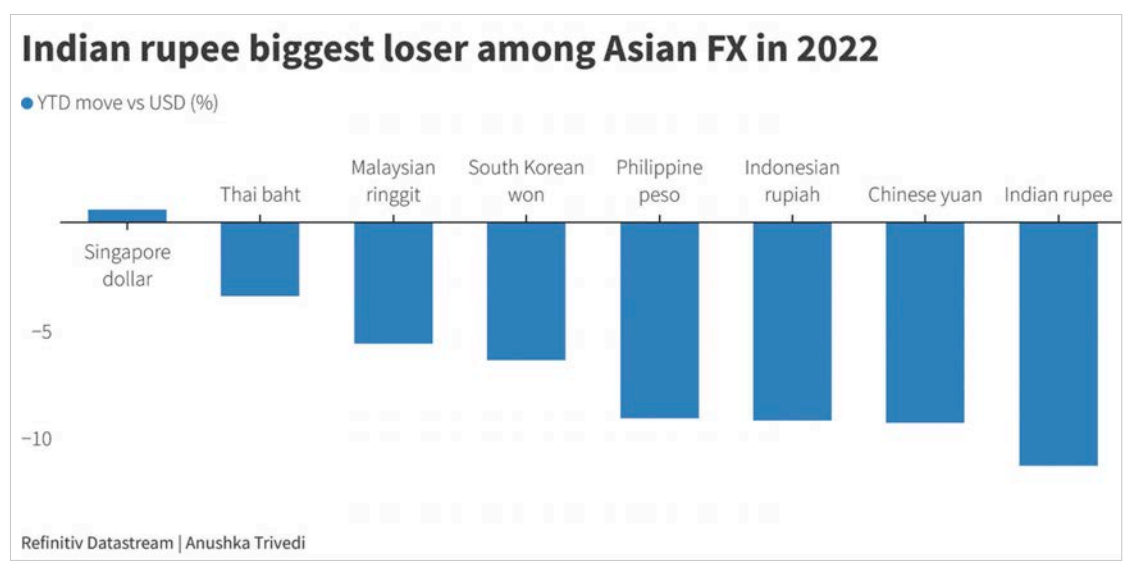
"We should not start taking things for granted," said Rana. "The need of the hour is to make the existing public-private partnership in tourism promotion even more effective."

Tourism Secretary Suresh Adhikari said that there is a need to expand Nepal's tourist destinations.

"We can promote cultural and sports tourism targeting regional visitors," Adhikari said. "However, insufficient budget and poor infrastructure have been barriers to the growth of Nepal's tourism industry."

"Private sector investment is a must for tourism development and we need to work on it."

## Indian rupee ends 2022 as worst-performing Asian currency



**REUTERS**  
MUMBAI, DEC 31

The Indian rupee ended 2022 as the worst-performing Asian currency with a fall of 11.3 percent, its biggest annual decline since 2013, as the dollar rocketed on the US Federal Reserve's aggressive monetary policy stance to tame inflation.

The rupee finished the year at 82.72 to the US currency, down from 74.33 at the end of 2021, while the dollar index was headed for its biggest yearly gain since 2015.

The rupee was also a victim of a rally in oil prices sparked by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which pushed India's current account deficit to a record high in the September quarter in absolute terms.

Heading into 2023, market participants believe the rupee would trade with an appreciation bias, finding relief from easing commodity prices and hopeful of foreign investors continuing to buy Indian equities.

"The Fed could keep rates higher for longer than anticipated and if the slowdown in developed economies turns into a prolonged recession, India's exports could be hit severely, which are two key risks for the rupee," said Raj Deepak Singh, head of derivatives research at ICICI Securities.

Most traders and analysts expect the currency to move between a tight 81.50-83.50 range in the first quarter.

Equity inflows would be a key metric to watch for the rupee for foreign investors as well, analysts said. But considering several uncertainties heading into 2023, such as tight monetary policy conditions, likely recession in some economies and an ongoing geopolitical conflict, gauging the direction of share markets had become tough, they added.

"There's going to be a period of softness in global equities... If we get a selloff in Indian shares, I'll be less optimistic on the rupee," said Christopher Wong, FX strategist at OCBC Bank.



## WORLD

# Benedict XVI, first pope to resign in 600 years, dies at 95

The former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had never wanted to be pope, planning at age 78 to spend his final years writing in the 'peace and quiet' of his native Bavaria.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
VATICAN CITY, DEC 31

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, the shy German theologian who tried to reawaken Christianity in a secularised Europe but will forever be remembered as the first pontiff in 600 years to resign from the job, died on Saturday. He was 95.

Benedict stunned the world on February 11, 2013, when he announced, in his typical, soft-spoken Latin, that he no longer had the strength to run the 1.2 billion-strong Catholic Church that he had steered for eight years through scandal and indifference.

His dramatic decision paved the way for the conclave that elected Pope Francis as his successor. The two popes then lived side-by-side in the Vatican gardens, an unprecedented arrangement that set the stage for future "popes emeritus" to do the same.

A statement from Vatican spokesman Matteo Brunetti on Saturday morning said that: "With pain I inform that Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI died today at 9:34 in the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery in the Vatican. Further information will be released as soon as possible."

The Vatican said Benedict's remains would be on public display in St Peter's Basilica starting Monday for the faithful to pay their final respects.

The former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had never wanted to be pope, planning at age 78 to spend his final years writing in the "peace and quiet" of his native Bavaria.

Instead, he was forced to follow the footsteps of the beloved St John Paul



Pope Benedict XVI

II and run the church through the fallout of the clerical sex abuse scandal and then a second scandal that erupted when his own butler stole his personal papers and gave them to a journalist.

Being elected pope, he once said, felt like a "guillotine" had come down on him. Nevertheless, he set about the job with a single-minded vision to rekindle the faith in a world that, he frequently lamented, seemed to think it could do without God.

"In vast areas of the world today, there is a strange forgetfulness of God," he told 1 million young people gathered on a vast field for his first foreign trip as pope, to World Youth

Day in Cologne, Germany, in 2005. "It seems as if everything would be just the same even without him."

With some decisive, often controversial moves, he tried to remind Europe of its Christian heritage. And he set the Catholic Church on a conservative, tradition-minded path that often alienated progressives. He relaxed the restrictions on celebrating the old Latin Mass and launched a crackdown on American nuns, insisting that the church stay true to its doctrine and traditions in the face of a changing world. It was a path that in many ways was reversed by his successor, Francis, whose mercy-over-morals priorities alienated the traditionalists who had

## Like his predecessor John Paul, Benedict made reaching out to Jews a hallmark of his papacy.

been so indulged by Benedict.

Benedict's style couldn't have been more different from that of John Paul or Francis. No globe-trotting media darling or populist, Benedict was a teacher, theologian and academic to the core: quiet and pensive with a fierce mind. He spoke in paragraphs, not soundbites. He had a weakness for orange Fanta as well as his beloved library; when he was elected pope, he had his entire study moved as if from his apartment just outside the Vatican walls into the Apostolic Palace. The books followed him to his retirement home.

"In them are all my advisers," he said of his books in the 2010 book-length interview "Light of the World." "I know every nook and cranny, and everything has its history."

It was Benedict's devotion to history and tradition that endeared him to members of the traditionalist wing of the Catholic Church. For them, Benedict remained even in retirement a beacon of nostalgia for the orthodoxy and Latin Mass of their youth and the pope they much preferred over Francis.

In time, this group of arch-conservatives, whose complaints were ampli-

fied by sympathetic U.S.-based conservative Catholic media, would become a key source of opposition to Francis who responded to what he said were threats of division by reimposing the restrictions on the old Latin Mass that Benedict had loosened.

Like his predecessor John Paul, Benedict made reaching out to Jews a hallmark of his papacy. His first official act as pope was a letter to Rome's Jewish community and he became the second pope in history, after John Paul, to enter a synagogue.

In his 2011 book, "Jesus of Nazareth," Benedict made a sweeping exoneration of the Jewish people for the death of Christ, explaining biblically and theologically why there was no basis in Scripture for the argument that the Jewish people as a whole were responsible for Jesus' death.

"It's very clear Benedict is a true friend of the Jewish people," said Rabbi David Rosen, who heads the interreligious relations office for the American Jewish Committee, at the time of Benedict's retirement.

The Vatican under Benedict suffered notorious PR gaffes, and sometimes Benedict himself was to blame. He enraged the United Nations and several European governments in 2009 when, en route to Africa, he told reporters that the AIDS problem couldn't be resolved by distributing condoms.

"On the contrary, it increases the problem," Benedict said. A year later, he issued a revision saying that if a male prostitute were to use a condom to avoid passing HIV to his partner, he might be taking a first step toward a

more responsible sexuality.

But Benedict's legacy was irreversibly coloured by the global eruption in 2010 of the sex abuse scandal, even though as a cardinal he was responsible for turning the Vatican around on the issue.

Documents revealed that the Vatican knew very well of the problem yet turned a blind eye for decades at times rebuffing bishops who tried to do the right thing.

Benedict had firsthand knowledge of the scope of the problem, since his old officethe Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which he had headed since 1982was responsible for dealing with abuse cases.

In fact, it was he who, before becoming pope, took the then-revolutionary decision in 2001 to assume responsibility for processing those cases after he realised bishops around the world weren't punishing abusers but were just moving them from parish to parish where they could rape again.

And once he became pope, Benedict essentially reversed his beloved predecessor, John Paul, by taking action against the 20th century's most notorious paedophile priest, the Reverend Marcial Maciel. Benedict took over Maciel's Legionaries of Christ, a conservative religious order held up as a model of orthodoxy by John Paul, after it was revealed that Maciel sexually abused seminarians and fathered at least three children.

In retirement, Benedict was faulted by an independent report for his handling of four priests while he was bishop of Munich; he denied any personal wrongdoing but apologised for any "grievous faults."

## BRIEFING

### 'Moral, historical rightness is on our side', Putin says on NYE

**MOSCOW:** President Vladimir Putin said in his New Year's address Saturday that "moral, historical rightness" is on Russia's side as his country faces international condemnation for its offensive in Ukraine. As Russian regions in the Far East rung in the New Year, the Russian leader delivered his traditional midnight address standing among soldiers who fought in Ukraine, according to Russian news agencies. Putin said in remarks carried by news agencies that this year was marked by "truly pivotal, fateful events" which became "the frontier that lays the foundation for our common future, for our true independence". "Today we are fighting for this, protecting our people in our own historical territories, in the new constituent entities of the Russian Federation," he added, referring to Ukrainian regions that Russia claimed to have annexed.

### Japan to develop 3,000 km long-range missiles, deploy in 2030s, Kyodo reports

**TOKYO:** Japan's Ministry of Defence is arranging to develop multiple long-range missiles with a range of up to about 3,000 kilometres and aims to deploy them in the 2030s, Kyodo news reported on Saturday, citing a source familiar with the matter. The government is looking to deploy a 2,000-km range missile by the early 2030s and a 3,000-km hypersonic missile that can reach anywhere in North Korea and some parts of China by around 2035, Kyodo said.

### Bolsonaro lands in Florida, avoiding Lula handover

**BRASILIA:** Outgoing Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro landed in Florida on Friday, after delivering a tearful message to his supporters less than two days before his fierce leftist rival Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is set to take office. An official Brazilian plane landed in Orlando, Florida late on Friday, flight tracking website FlightAware showed. Although Bolsonaro's destination has not been officially confirmed, his security staff were already in place in Florida. Bolsonaro's exit from Brazil came after he repeatedly said he would not hand over the presidential sash to Lula at Sunday's inauguration, breaking with Brazil's democratic tradition. He may also face legal risks from remaining in Brazil as his presidential immunity expires when Lula takes office.

### North Korea fires 3 missiles amid tensions over drone flights

**SEOUL:** North Korea fired three short-range ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters in its latest weapons display on Saturday, a day after rival South Korea conducted a rocket launch related to its push to build a space-based surveillance to better monitor the North. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement it detected the three launches from an inland area south of Pyongyang, the North's capital, on Saturday morning. It said the three missiles travelled about 350 kilometres before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. (AGENCIES)



New Year's Eve fireworks light up the sky over the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge during the fireworks display in Sydney on Saturday.

## Palestinians hail United Nations vote on Israel's occupation as 'a victory'

REUTERS  
RAMALLAH, DEC 31

The Palestinians on Saturday welcomed a vote by the United Nations General Assembly requesting that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) provide an opinion on the legal consequences of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories.

The Hague-based ICJ, also known as the World Court, is the top UN court dealing with disputes between states. Its rulings are binding, though the ICJ has no power to enforce them.

The vote on Friday nonetheless presents a challenge for Israel's incoming Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who took office on Thursday at the head of a hard-right government that includes parties who advocate for occupied West Bank lands to be annexed.

Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem—areas the Palestinians want for a state—in a 1967 war. Peace talks broke down in 2014. "The time has come for Israel to be a state subject to law, and to be held accountable for its ongoing crimes against our people," Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said.

Israeli officials have not yet issued a comment on the vote. It was condemned by Israel's UN envoy Gilad Erdan before it was held as the Jewish Sabbath began.

Senior Palestinian official Hussein al-Sheikh said on Twitter that the vote

"reflects the victory of Palestinian diplomacy." There were 87 members who voted in favour of adopting the request; Israel, the United States and 24 other members voted against; and 53 abstained.

## Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem in a 1967 war.

The Palestinians have limited rule in the West Bank and East Jerusalem was annexed by Israel in a move not recognised internationally. Its settlements in those territories are deemed illegal by most countries, a view Israel disputes citing Biblical and historical ties to the land, as well as security.

The UN General Assembly asked the ICJ to give an advisory opinion on the legal consequences of Israel's "occupation, settlement and annexation ... including measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and from its adoption of related discriminatory legislation and measures."

The new Israeli government has pledged to strengthen its settlements in the West Bank but Netanyahu has given no indication of any imminent steps toward annexing them.

## WHO urges China to share specific data regularly on Covid situation

WHO previously said that China may be struggling to keep a tally of Covid-19 infections.

REUTERS  
NEW YORK, DEC 31

The World Health Organisation on Friday once again urged China's health officials to regularly share specific and real-time information on the Covid-19 situation in the country, as it continues to assess the latest surge in infections.

The agency has asked Chinese officials to share more genetic sequencing data, as well as data on hospitalisations, deaths and vaccinations.

Official figures from China have become an unreliable guide as less testing is being done across the country following the recent easing of the strict "zero-Covid" policy.

WHO has previously said that China may be struggling to keep a tally of Covid-19 infections.

The agency has invited Chinese scientists to present detailed data on viral sequencing at its meeting of a technical advisory group scheduled for January 3.

Covid infections have risen across China this month after Beijing dismantled its zero-Covid policies including regular PCR testing on its population. The United States, South Korea, India, Italy, Japan and Taiwan have all imposed Covid tests for travellers from China in response.

The United States has also attributed the recent change in its policy to the lack of information on Covid variants and concerns that the increased cases in China could result in the

## Afghan educator who quit over women ban vows to fight

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
KABUL, DEC 31

An Afghan academic who caused a storm by quitting and tearing up his degree certificates on live television to protest the ban on women in universities has vowed to fight the order "even if it costs my life".

Ismail Mashal, a lecturer in journalism for more than a decade at three universities in Kabul, shed his qualifications and resigned from the institutions after the ban was issued this month.

"I'm raising my voice. I'm standing with my sisters... My protest will continue even if it costs my life," Mashal, 35, told AFP at his office in the Afghan capital.

"As a man and as a teacher, I was unable to do anything else for them, and I felt that my certificates had become useless. So, I tore them."

Footage of his outburst on Tuesday on TOLONews, a leading private television channel, went viral on social media, leading to criticism by some supporters of Afghanistan's Taliban authorities.

## Mainland China reports one Covid death for Dec 30

**BEIJING:** China reported one new Covid-19 death in the mainland for December 30, compared with one death a day earlier, the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention said on Saturday. The death toll has risen to 5,248. (REUTERS)



Elderly patients receive IV drip treatment at a clinic in a village of Lezhi county in Ziyang, Sichuan province, China.



# Pokhara stun Lumbini by nine wickets

The surprise defeat puts an end to Dipendra Singh Airee-led team's five-match winning streak in the Nepal T20 League.



Pokhara Avengers' Aasif Sheikh bats during the Nepal T20 League cricket match against Lumbini All Stars at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Saturday.

POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

## SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, DEC 31

Lumbini All Stars' winning streak in the Nepal T20 League came to a crashing end after Pokhara Avengers surprised them by nine wickets at the Tribhuvan University Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Saturday.

Pokhara lost five consecutive matches in the first round of the double-round robin league but have found rhythm winning two in a row now, thanks to spinner Bipin Khatri who shook the top order to keep Lumbini on the back foot.

The 25-year-old off-spinner came out of the shadow to start the demolition in the fifth over, removing opener Sunil Dhamala for 15 and Kushal Bhurtel for a golden duck in the very next delivery.

He took 3-23 for his tournament best performance which came after failing to take a wicket in three successive innings.

Khatri had taken two wickets in Pokhara's three-wicket loss against Lumbini in their first leg meeting on Thursday and continued that coup dismissing Ireland star batter Harry Tector for 10. Tector has failed to leave his mark in the Nepal T20, managing only 17 runs in two innings with Lumbini.

Indian Harmeet Singh top scored for Lumbini scoring 38 runs facing 21 deliveries but Zahir Khan caused the further damage with his tournament best 3-18. The Afghanistan spinner removed Singh and Yogendra Singh

Karki, both trapped leg before, and bowled Gulsan Jha (2) for a tournament leading tally of 13 wickets.

Captain Dipendra Singh Airee (10), South African Shadley van Schalkwyk (16), Kishori Mahato (4) and Englishman Pat Brown (7) all departed without a fight back as Lumbini folded for a low 127 total.

Aarif Sheikh, Tul Thapa and Siddhant Lohani also pocketed one wicket apiece for Pokhara.

In reply, opener Aasif Sheikh scored an unbeaten 77 and put on an unbroken stand of 95 runs with Aarif, who made 26, to post 128-1 to complete a sweet revenge.

Aasif blasted nine fours in his 62-ball knock to move to the top of the scoring chart with 204 runs.

The win gives Pokhara four points from seven matches and keeps alive their slim hopes for progressing to the playoffs.

### Janakpur win

Lumbini have 10 points and lead the six-team standings but have played a game more than Janakpur Royals who occupy the second spot on eight points.

Janakpur kept up the chase for top finish after an all round show from Afghan Samiullah Shinwari propelled them to a 49-run win over Biratnagar Super Kings later in the afternoon.

Janakpur top order foundered against Biratnagar attack but Shinwari scored an unbeaten half-century to help Janakpur reach 189-5.

Pakistani Hussain Talat and Surya Tamang took two wickets each to cause the most damage.

Opener Pawan Sarraf fell for two, caught by Gauranshu Sharma off Talat.

Sarraf's opening partner and West Indies batter Trevon Griffith returned back to pavilion making 19 runs.

Chadwick Walton (29) and Sundeeep Jora (20) tried to steady the ship but Tamang trapped both lbw to halt their progress as Janakpur were struggling at 83-4 in the 11th over.

But Shinwari hit 78 facing 40 deliveries that featured six boundaries and six sixes to guide Janakpur to a big total.

Shinwari then returned 3-21 to help Janakpur skittle Biratnagar for 140-7, with Rohit Paudel (1), Prithu Baskota (2) and Bibek Yadav (3) all succumbing to his lethal leg spin.

Captain and West Indies opener Andre McCarthy departed making 14.

Talat scored a speedy 42 off 20 balls that provided the highest score for Biratnagar after joining Sharma, who made 33, but Lalit Rajbanshi struck back removing both the batters for a figure of 2-26.

Biratnagar replaced Arjun Saud—who has managed just 53 runs in four innings—with Pradeep Airee in the starting XI and it paid off as the wicketkeeper batter played an unbeaten 36 but with no support offered from the other end of the wicket, Biratnagar fell to a helpless 140-7.

Biratnagar are third with four points from five matches.

## SCORECARD

### NEPAL T20 LEAGUE

15TH MATCH, TU CRICKET GROUND

TOSS: Lumbini All Stars, elected to bat first

Lumbini All Stars 127

H Singh 38 (21)

Z Khan 3-18, B Khatri 3-23

Pokhara Avengers 128-1 (18.2/20 ov)

Aasif 77\* (62), Aarif 26\* (37)

K Mahato 1-16

Pokhara win by nine wickets.

Player of the match: Aasif Sheikh

### 16TH MATCH, TU CRICKET GROUND

TOSS: Biratnagar Super Kings, elected to field first

Janakpur Royals 189-5

S Shinwari 78 (40)

S Tamang 2-16, H Talat 2-33

Biratnagar Super Kings 140-7 (20 ov)

H Talat 42 (20), P Airee 36\* (26)

S Shinwari 3-21, L Rajbanshi 2-26

Janakpur win by 49 runs.

Player of the match: Samiullah Shinwari

## TODAY'S MATCHES

Janakpur Royals vs Kathmandu Knights

Lumbini All Stars vs Biratnagar Super Kings

## HOROSCOPE

### ARIES (March 21-April 19) \*\*\*\*

You'll feel like strategising for your personal transformation in 2023. The vibes are perfect for investing in the idea of change, so don't feel guilty about throwing some of your hard-earned cash toward your dreams for tomorrow.

### TAURUS (April 20-May 20) \*\*\*

The new year kicks off with a surge of auspicious energy. Leave the past where it belongs, as the stars bring a refreshing vibe that's perfect for walking into the future. Consider breaking out of your comfort zone.

### GEMINI (May 21-June 21) \*\*\*\*

You'll feel both introverted and in the mood for companionship today. Inspire yourself to engage only with your most beloved companions. Keep a tight circle as you celebrate the dawn of 2023 with those you love the most.

### CANCER (June 22-July 22) \*\*\*

Take a moment to reflect upon your creative goals for the new year. You may also want to consider how you wish to grow within your relationship. An old friend may reach out unexpectedly.

### LEO (July 23-August 22) \*\*\*

Epiphanies around the future and what you're meant to do in this life could manifest today. Get serious about your goals and all of the brainstorming, planning, and organisation that comes with them.

### VIRGO (August 23-September 22) \*\*\*\*

The new year kicks off with playful and optimistic energy. These vibes are all about believing in yourself and seizing the day. Understand that every hour leads you closer to the life you most desire.

### LIBRA (September 23-October 22) \*\*\*

Take some time to appreciate and honour the people who raise you up today. Remind yourself that it's okay to lean on others for support, though you'll need to be willing to return the favour. Creative ideas will flood your psyche.

### SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) \*\*\*

The winds of change will blow through your hair today. It will be perfect for approaching your New Year's resolutions with vigour. You'll feel strategic as you brainstorm how to make your dreams a reality.

### SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) \*\*\*

Take a moment to outline your financial goals for 2023 today. It is all about understanding the value of planning and hard work, asking you to temporarily deviate from your wild and free-spirited nature.

### CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) \*\*\*\*

You should feel confident about the future. Get creative with your new year's resolutions, especially where creative goals are concerned. Unfortunately, there's a danger that you could get caught up in focusing on the negative.

### AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) \*\*\*

Give yourself permission to go slow and enjoy yourself, as it is perfect for putting up walls in order to reflect on your plans for the new year. It will be important that you embrace solitude in order to unwind.

### PISCES (February 19-March 20) \*\*\*

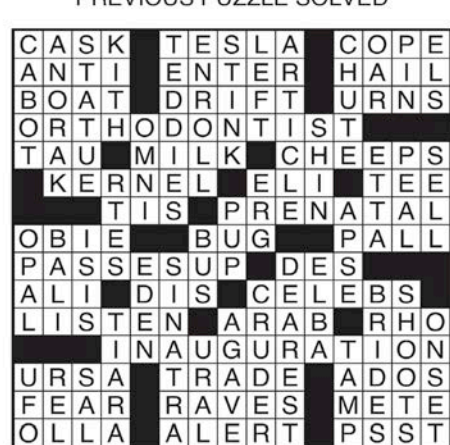
The stars will ask you to use your voice and mind today. Allow yourself to think critically about the future. Spend time making strategies for the new year. Shocking news may land on your ears later in the afternoon.

ASTROLOGY.COM

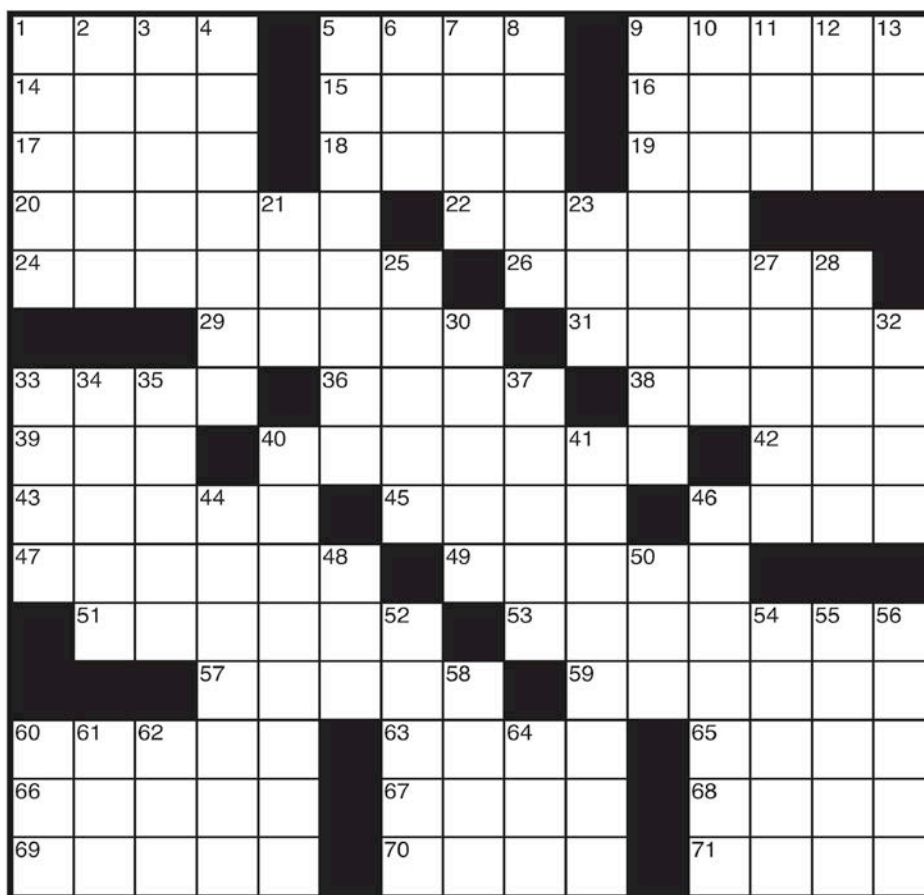
## CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- Did the crawl
  - Fall guys
  - Small farm
  - Movie theater
  - Nope (hyph.)
  - Put on the payroll
  - Garbage bin output
  - Point the finger at
  - Asserts
  - Jammed
  - Coke rival
  - Mocked
  - Tribal emblems
  - "Late Show" feature
  - Robber at sea
  - Minor argument
  - Barely gets by
  - Imposed a levy
  - Sly — fox
  - Dexterously
  - Fleming of spydom
  - Green —
  - Bombay attire
  - Madame Bovary
  - Break away
  - Like many models
  - Really enjoy
  - Coax
  - Happen
  - Monotony
- DOWN**
- Flat boats
  - Enlarge
  - Battery post
  - Business deals
  - Divided
  - Gleeful cry
  - Shoe style
  - Mattress covering
  - Virtue
  - Jet set
  - destination
  - Pizarro's quest
  - Hardly any
  - Six-pointers
  - Before, in verse
  - Kind of quiz
  - Fists, slangily
  - Saying
  - Kind of engine
  - Himalayan country
  - Novelist — Ferber
  - Imported cheese
  - Muslim mystic
  - Asian royalty
  - Concede
  - Brick oven
  - Grad-school exam
  - Dove's quest
  - Cozy
  - Ceremonial fire
  - Dietary needs
  - Wedding party member
  - Pesto or marinara
  - Tox here and there
  - Give up the crown
  - Igniting
  - Lyrical
  - Vision medication
  - PC bailout key
  - Horse command
  - Corn covers
  - Personal journal
  - Some eclipses
  - Zola of literature
  - Tumbledown building
  - Breach
  - Poem by Keats
  - Actress — Thurman
  - Kind of vaccine

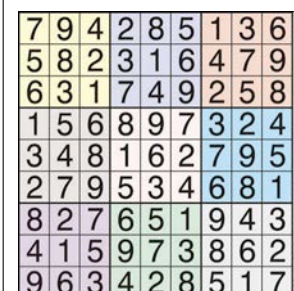
### PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



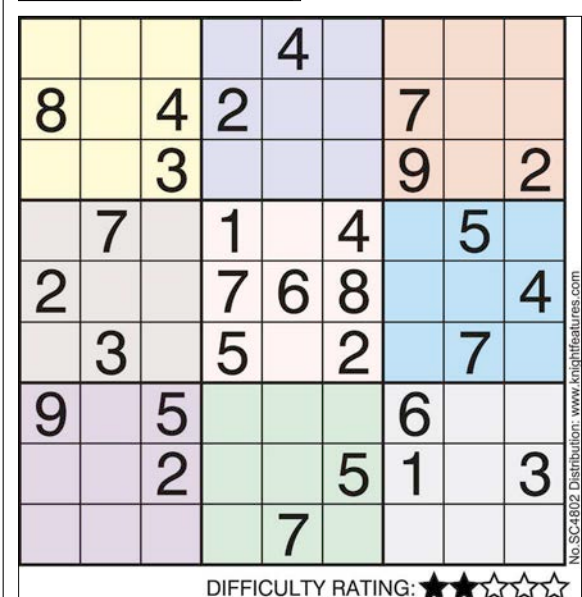
12-29-22 © 2022 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS



## SUDOKU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★



FICTION PARK

# My happy family

Nothing could be salvaged from this mess Rama tried so hard to call love.

PARI ADHIKARI

Sitting on a pile of broken china dinnerware, Rama was a mess. The mayhem from earlier in the day replayed in her head like a broken record. There was an eerie calmness in the hallway; the only audible sound was her heavy breath. Her face felt numb, and the tears that kept trickling made her nauseous.

After a few deep breaths, Rama finally gathered the courage to get back up; the tingling in her feet from the prolonged sitting revolted against her. She examined the scene around her: the living room was in complete chaos.

After a thorough investigation of the mess before her, she started cleaning the room. Just as she angled her feet a little to bend over, a tiny piece of ceramic found its way into her bare sole. With shaky hands, she gently removed the shard from her skin. A lean stream of red blood came gushing out. The bright red mark it traced on its way down somehow reminded her of her wedding day.

What a jolly day it had been. Apart from the obvious excitement of marrying the love of her life, it was a special day because, for the first time in decades, her entire family had set aside their differences and gathered together. In those ecstatic moments, she had wondered if she would ever be as happy as she had been then.

Looking back, every happy memory of then now felt like a dream. It almost seemed as if she had manifested her fears into reality.

As Rama began gathering the shattered pieces, she tried laying down a few next to one another. Once a few of them fit together, an impression of engraved letters formed on their back. It read: RaMan—Rama and Aman melded together. A flashback of those exact letters written on her palm in brown henna now filled her thoughts and how its dark cast was almost naturally attributed to her sweetheart's profound love and how easily she had taken it all to be true. More so, how it had been true for the first few years before things started going downhill.

Now, almost a decade later, it felt as though she didn't recognise Aman at all. The man who mercilessly shoved her and threw plates at her this morning wasn't the man she had married. He had the same face, the same dark brown almond eyes, and the same slight crooked smile that gave her butterflies—and still did. His



SHUTTERSTOCK

Her house was now haunted by echoes of crashing cutleries and terrified screams.

appearance was, however, the only semblance of his past self now.

It almost felt like she woke up to a different man every day. Once filled with joyous laughter, their household was now haunted by echoes of slamming doors, crashing cutleries and terrified screams. Aman was unpredictable—one day, he would see nothing but red and go on a rampage, and the next day, he would sing to her, gently stroking her hands filled with scars of his doing, as if trying to make up for the mess he'd made of her.

Aman was unpredictable, but one thing he would do for sure was to run his magic on Rama with a few sweet words, making her forget everything that had happened. The days formed a cycle—each new episode of abuse brought with it an apology and promise to change, and at the centre of the cycle sat Rama, questioning her own sanity.

Rama would blame herself at times, trying to make sense of his abusive behaviour.

He is just in a bad mood.

Maybe it is all my fault.

He does love me; it's just his temper.

She would console herself with words she knew were only half true. And in such moments, she would wait—for things to change and get better.

Today, however, was different. Neither did she feel at fault, nor could she attribute Aman's wrongdoings to anything but his own shortcomings. Instead, she felt rage boiling within her, rising with every

passing second. This morning, he wasn't throwing objects around like usual. Rama knew he had meant to harm her. The intent in his eyes was clear as day. Had the plates landed where they were supposed to, Rama would have been lying on a hospital bed right now.

This realisation hit her like a truck. After her epiphany, nothing felt worth fighting for anymore. She had loved him for ten long and arduous years. Ten years when he promised he could change. Ten years of ups and down spent together. Nothing was worth fighting for anymore. Nothing could be salvaged from this mess she tried so hard to call love.

The only thing that made sense to her now was this: She deserved a better life, even if that meant leaving him.

Just then, she heard someone knock at the front door.

Rama immediately looked at the wall clock in front of her.

13:37

Only then did Rama realise that she had left her little daughter of five stranded in the freezing cold. Taking a quick leap, Rama soon found herself out of the mess. But before she got hold of the door-knob, her eyes caught the sight of the woman in the mirror. Her eyes well up with tears as she saw herself in the dishevelled figure staring right back at her.

She heard Tara pounding on the door rather impatiently now.

Rama quickly fixed her hair and clothes and rehearsed a smile.

She didn't need to; the sight of her little one was enough to kindle joy on her otherwise gloomy face.

With a long sigh, Tara burst through the open door and headed straight to the couch.

No hugs. No kisses.

After digging through her notebooks with great content, Tara pulled out a folded piece of paper and rushed to her mother, who was still at the door.

With a shy smile, she handed out the object to Rama. Puzzled, Rama slowly unfurled the piece of paper. Staring back at her was three human-like figures holding hands with smiles as wide as the curvature of their round faces could go. Scribbled below them were the words- 'My happy family'.

Afraid to miss a reaction if she blinked, little Tara looked attentively at her mother, eagerly waiting for a reaction. But no words escaped Rama's still mouth. Instead, with her head bent down, she kept staring

at the drawing. Suddenly, her lips began to quiver, and quiet sniffles filled the hallway. It was only when little wet spots started forming on her artwork that Tara realised that her mother was crying.

Scared to have offended her mother, Tara asked in a shaking voice, "Do you not like it?"

"Nooo, honey. It's beautiful. In fact, it's the most beautiful piece of drawing I have ever seen. Mommy is just a little stressed. But mommy loves it. Okay? And I love you. I love you so much."

Rama took Tara tightly into her arms.

"I love you too, mommy", whispered Tara, enveloped in her mother's warm embrace, still trying to comprehend what was going on.

As Rama's hold started to loosen, Tara, not knowing how to deal with the situation at hand, ran to her room.

She had never seen her mother like this. As she headed to her room, she noticed the mess in the living room.

"Oh... So you are crying because you dropped the plates. That's it, right? Don't worry, mommy. I'll tell daddy I broke them. And I will ask him to bring new ones. Pink ones. With flowers and glitters. Okay?"

Rama looked at her with a weary smile.

As Tara left the scene, Rama was left alone with her thoughts. A steady stream of tears flowed down her cheeks. Chewing at her lower lip, she dropped to the floor.

My happy family

The words kept flashing before her eyes.

Eventually, Rama managed to slowly get up and reach for the drawer in the TV table. She pulled out a tube of super glue and found her way back to where she had assembled the broken ceramic earlier. With great care, she glued them back into place.

As the pieces slowly formed a whole, they started to look more and more like their past self. Yet, if you paid close attention, you could see they'd been forced back together.

Rama couldn't help but notice the parallels she shared with these plates.

Putting away the glued plates, now unfit for eating, she thought to herself—These can still make place for the new ones; those are the ones I ought to take care of.

There was nothing she wouldn't do for her daughter.

Adhikari is an undergraduate student of public health at IOM. She is also a peer educator for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

## A doctor using social media to spread health awareness

Dr Om Murti Anil's videos, many of which have gone viral, have turned him into a social media celebrity. He is popular especially among migrant workers.



PHOTO COURTESY: DR OM MURTI ANIL

Dr Anil is an interventional cardiologist.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU

A few weeks ago, Dr Om Murti Anil, an interventional cardiologist, posted a video on his Facebook page. His video came at a time when news of dowry-related violence involving a medical doctor had gone viral.

"I thought it was necessary to make a video on the dowry system, which is prevalent in Nepalese society, especially in the Terai region," said Dr Anil. "Even though the dowry system is legally banned, thousands of people continue to be affected by this ill practice."

His video on the dowry system got over 836,000 views, 3,800 shares, 9,500 comments, and 50,000 likes.

For Dr Anil, who originally hails from the Madhesh Province, the dowry system is something he has seen up close. While studying medicine, his classmates teased him that he should set up his own

hospital with the money he would get from his dowry.

His family members and relatives also suggested that he get married to a girl from a well-to-do family to get a handsome dowry.

"But I ended up marrying a woman from a hill community, and not only did I not take dowry, but I also financed my own marriage," said Dr Anil in his dowry video. "Had I taken a dowry, I would have been financially better today, but I would not have been happy. It is better to ride a bicycle from your own income than riding a motorbike or driving a car from the dowry's money."

Besides making videos on social issues, he regularly uploads content on health-related topics. Dr Anil has over 1.2 million followers on Facebook, and his other videos on health issues have amassed millions of views and thousands of likes, comments, and shares.

Another video Dr Anil made that went viral is titled 'True Happiness', which has over 4.7 million views, 165,000 likes, 13,000 shares and more than 5,200 com-

ments. His other popular videos are 'How Rage Impacts Hearts', 'Ways to Control Blood Pressure', 'Is Drinking a Little bit of Alcohol Good for the Heart?', 'Preventing the spread of infection during Pandemic', and 'How Corona can Deceive us'.

It was during the Covid-19 pandemic that Dr Anil started making informative videos. Unlike in the past when mainstream media such as radio, television, and newspaper were the only means to spread messages to the general masses, this is not the case anymore. Today, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have become equally effective in disseminating information.

Though experts say that disseminating information about diseases, their prevention and control, and medicines can be helpful for people, they also stress that extra care should be given to ensure that wrong information is not disseminated to the public.

"People should know the intent of the message and also make sure that if the person giving the message is qualified or not," said Dr Anil. "If the motive [of posting messages] is to do business by attracting patients to their clinics, or if there is a conflict of interest, then it is wrong and against the ethics of one's profession."

Dr Anil's clients also request him to keep posting informative videos. The majority of Dr Anil's audience is Nepali migrant workers in the Middle East. They regularly leave messages and comments asking various health-related questions on Dr Anil's Facebook page, which has a response rate of 70 percent.

To make videos and respond to queries, Dr Anil has a separate team that includes a camera person, a video editor, and an IT expert.

"There are days when I begin my morning thinking about topics for video content," said Dr Anil. "I have invested a huge amount of money and time into creating videos and making people aware of various health and social topics, and it makes me happy to see the impact my work has been able to create."

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