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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Dhangadi Jumla

TODAY

NATIONAL

Six vultures died and a dozen more have taken ill near a community forest in Kawasoti Municipality in Nawalparasi East on Monday apparently after feeding on poisoned jackal carcasses. Pg 2

Markedly weakened after last year's general elections, CPN (Maoist Centre), its splinter outfits and other forces with similar backgrounds have intensified talks to form a so-called socialist front. Pg 3

OPINION

While the Finance Ministry awaits a new head, Achyut Wagle says the idea of an honest finance minister has already become antithetical as the post has become a sharp instrument to extract funds required for the party in power. Pg 4



MONEY

The government has increased the prices of chemical fertilisers for the first time in 10 years, effective from Monday, citing a severe stress caused by subsidies on the state treasury. Pg 5

WORLD

South Korean and US militaries launched their biggest joint drills in years on Monday while North Korea said it tested submarine-fired cruise missiles in an apparent protest of the exercises. Pg 6

SPORTS

Nepal are a step away from completing their extraordinary march to an automatic berth in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifiers after crushing Papua New Guinea by nine wickets on Monday. Pg 7



Outgoing President Bidya Devi Bhandari waves as newly sworn-in President Ram Chandra Paudel (third right) looks on at the President's Office, Sheetal Niwas on Monday. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is seen on the right.

Onus on Paudel to save the sanctity of presidency

Observers say the veteran Congress leader has to work hard to detach himself from partisan, personal entanglements.

NISHAN KHATIWADA
KATHMANDU, MARCH 13

The new President Ram Chandra Paudel on Monday took the oath of office and secrecy at a special ceremony at the Sheetal Niwas, the President's Office.

Acting Chief Justice Hari Krishna Karki administered the oath to Paudel in the presence of Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and National Assembly Chairman Ganesh Prasad Timilsina, key politicians and other high-ranking officials.

A veteran Nepali Congress leader, Paudel was elected as the third President of the country on March 9, beating rival candidate Subas Chandra Nembang of the CPN-UML.

The tenure of the outgoing President Bidya Devi Bhandari ended Monday. Paudel had spent more than a decade in jail. In his political career, Paudel became a lawmaker six times, minister five times, and Speaker one time. His political journey, nonetheless, is a tale of losses as well.

In March 2016, Sher Bahadur Deuba defeated the then acting president Paudel in the election for the party's top post, with a wide margin.

Paudel also lost the infamous race for prime ministership in 2010. The race began in July 2010 with three candidates: Paudel from the Congress, Pushpa

Kamal Dahal from the UCPN-Maoist and Jhala Nath Khanal from the UML. He could not get a majority even after 16 rounds of voting. In the 17th round, UML's Jhala Nath Khanal was elected the prime minister.

A politician who was unlucky in the election of prime minister and party president has now reached the state's top post. People have pinned high hopes on him.

Bhandari's term was full of controversies as she was often accused of supporting KP Oli.

Political analyst Lok Raj Baral said Paudel's plus point is that he is an experienced leader who had committed his political career to democracy and has never been mired in corruption. "The main question is whether he will be (mis) used by his former party Congress like Bhandari was by the UML," said Baral.

He added: "As Paudel has closely followed Bhandari's controversies, he can learn from them." Bhandari's tenure was full of controversies as she was accused of rubber-stamping KP Oli's decisions, and acting as a party leader rather than as the head of state.

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PM Dahal to virtually take part in Summit for Democracy on March 30

The upcoming summit, which will be the second edition, will be hosted by US President Joe Biden on March 29-30.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, MARCH 13

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has decided to virtually participate in the second Summit for Democracy to be hosted by the US President Joe Biden on March 29 and 30. The United States will co-host the second Summit for Democracy with the governments of Costa Rica, the Netherlands, Republic of Korea, and Republic of Zambia.

Two government officials, one each from the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, confirmed to the Post that Dahal has told them to make necessary preparations and the US side has accordingly been informed.

"With the consent of the prime minister, we have confirmed our participation and are now in the process of getting a time slot for the prime minister to make his statement," said the foreign ministry official.

Prime Minister Dahal also responded to the invitation letter sent by US President Biden, whereby Dahal thanked him for the invitation to the summit, the official added.

The prime minister will address the summit in a virtual mode on March 30, said the other official from the PMO.

The second Summit for Democracy will assemble world leaders in a virtual, plenary format, followed by gatherings in each of the co-host countries with representatives from government, civil society, and the private sector, according to a statement from the US State Department.

"Co-hosting the second Summit for

Democracy with a regionally diverse group of co-hosts reinforces the truth that a safer and fairer world grounded in democratic values is both a shared aspiration and a shared responsibility," the statement said.

In December 2021, former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had participated in the summit.

According to the Americans, as democracy is increasingly under threat globally, the US president took the initiative of bringing the democratic regimes together in order to defend and restore democratic values and human rights around the world.

The summit is also seen as an American attempt to cultivate democratic allies around the world.

In his address at the time, then Prime Minister Deuba had reiterated Nepal's commitment to further strengthening democracy by ensuring equality, inclusion and justice, while protecting civil rights and liberties.

"The prime minister highlighted universal suffrage, separation of powers, checks and balances, independent judiciary, protection of rights and freedoms as well as freedom of speech as the key features of Nepal's multi-party democracy," said a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in December 2021.

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'Naatu Naatu' and 'The Elephant Whisperers' write history at 95th Oscars

Malaysian Yeoh and Vietnam-born Quan win for roles in Everything Everywhere All at Once.



Kartiki Gonsalves, left, and Guneet Monga pose with the award for best documentary short film for 'The Elephant Whisperer' in the press room at the Oscars on Sunday in Los Angeles.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
HYDERABAD, MARCH 13

India celebrated its two historic Academy Awards with enthusiasm

befitting the high-energy best original song "Naatu Naatu."

The dance anthem from the blockbuster Telugu-language action epic "RRR" is the first from an Indian film

to earn a nomination and win and has dazzled audiences everywhere with its energetic tempo and choreography.

"The Elephant Whisperers" was named best short documentary at Sunday's night's ceremony in a first for an Indian production. The documentary, which is streaming on Netflix, follows the story of a couple in southern India who devote themselves to caring for an orphaned elephant and explores the bond between humans and animals.

"Congratulations India" trended on Twitter after "Naatu Naatu" by MM Keeravani and Chandrabose trumped the likes of Rihanna and Lady Gaga to win best original song.

In Hyderabad, where the predominant language is Telugu, fans were elated over the Telugu song's global triumph. "It's an incredible feeling. Finally, a Telugu film did it and we have won an Oscar," rejoiced Venkata Ramanna, a software engineer, who described the win as "exhilarating."

From Indian celebrities and politicians to cricketers and regular citizens, social media in India was awash with congratulations.

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NATIONAL

BRIEFING

India President Murmu congratulates President Paudel



KATHMANDU: President of India Droupadi Murmu has congratulated Ram Chandra Paudel on his election as Nepal's President. In a congratulatory note, Murmu said that she looks forward to working closely with Paudel in further strengthening the bilateral partnership. "I am confident that under your able guidance, our wide ranging cooperation will be strengthened further," reads the note. "I look forward to working closely with you in nurturing and further strengthening our bilateral partnership." The Indian President also wished for Paudel's good health and well-being and continued progress and prosperity of the people of Nepal. Nepali Congress senior leader Paudel was elected the third President of the country on Thursday, defeating Subas Chandra Nembang of the CPN-UML. Out of 52,628 weightage-based votes, Paudel secured 33,802 against Nembang's 15,518.

Two killed, six injured in road accident

GORKHA: Two people died and six others were injured in a road accident involving a minitruck in Gorkha on Sunday. The vehicle, en route to Abukhaireni, fell some 20 metres from the road at Bisuanimode of Gorkha-6 after the driver lost control, said Deputy Superintendent of Police Lilaraj Lamichhane. The seriously injured passengers died while undergoing treatment at the Gorkha Hospital and Bharatpur Medical College in Chitwan, said police. "Two people riding on a motorcycle and other pedestrians were injured after being hit by the out-of-control vehicle," Lamichhane added. Two of the critically injured were referred to the Chitwan-based New Medical College, while the rest were sent to the Gorkha Hospital, police said.

Nepali woman languishing in Indian jail released

KAKADVITTA: A Nepali Muslim woman, who was languishing in Cachar jail in Silchar in Assam, India for almost four years after Indian authorities mistook her for a Bangladeshi, has been released Monday. Jannat Khatun Laheri, a 62-year-old woman of Hariपुर Municipality-6, was released from prison on the initiative of Nepal's Consul General in Kolkata and a social organisation called Bal Suraksha Abhiyan. Laheri has been handed over to her son Firoz Laheri, according to Bikas Pradhan, the head of the Kalimpong-based social organisation in India. Laheri was arrested by the Indian Border Security Force from the Cachar district of Assam in 2018. The Silchar court sentenced her to two years in jail and a fine of INR1,000. Laheri was supposed to be released in 2020, but was kept in jail after she could not provide proof of being a Nepali.

Man arrested on charge of raping minor

DANG: The district court on Sunday sent a 34-year-old man of Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan-8, to judicial custody for further investigation on the charge of raping a four-year-old girl on Friday. According to Superintendent of Police Bir Bahadur Wali, chief of the District Police, who went to work at the same place as the victim's parents, allegedly lured the child and raped her. "The victim was found lying unconscious bleeding from her private parts in a barren field by her mother," he said.

Fourteen houses burnt to a cinder by forest fire

Over 35 houses and sheds were burnt to ashes in Tehrathum in the past month, police say.



A woman searches through the charred remains of her house, expecting to salvage valuable belongings.

CHANDRA KARKI
TEHRATHUM, MARCH 13

Forty-six-year-old Ranamaya Tamang on Monday was seen trying to salvage her belongings from her gutted house in Sunnam settlement of Laligurans Municipality-6. Two of her sons sat under the flimsy hut set up in a field nearby watching the smouldering debris of their house.

The Tamang family's house had caught fire that broke out from Bhalukhop Community Forest just below the settlement on Saturday. The forest fire entered the village and gutted 13 houses including Ranamaya's.

The bushfire continued to smoulder on Sunday as the villagers' efforts to contain the inferno came to no avail. Ranamaya's husband Pancha Bahadur was not at home when the incident occurred. He was in Dharan for medical treatment when the house was engulfed by flames.

"We lost Rs60,000 in cash, valuables, food grain and all other belongings to the inferno. We have turned into paupers now," said Ranamaya. The Tamang family was planning to reroof their thatched house with galvanised zinc sheets. The municipality had provided Rs30,000 last week under its programme to replace all thatched roofs with galvanised sheets.

"The money provided by the municipality and our money from selling goats and cattle were kept in a chest inside the house. The fire burnt all the cash we had kept to repair the house and meet our daily needs," lamented Ranamaya. Preliminary police investigation shows that Tamang's property worth around Rs800,000 was destroyed in the incident.

On Saturday afternoon, the villagers noticed a fire in the community forest. They left no stone unturned to fight the fire but were unsuccessful. "The forest fire fueled by strong winds entered the settlement and destroyed 13 houses with thatched roofs and one with a roof of corrugated zinc sheets," said Chet Bahadur Ghimire, a local who is also the chief of the community forest users' group.

The cause of the bushfire is still unknown.

The fire also burnt the houses belonging to Pushpa Raj Khadka, Prem Bahadur Tamang and Chandra Bahadur Budhathoki to a cinder, destroying properties worth nearly Rs1 million each, according to police. Ten other houses in the village were empty since the house owners had migrated away.

In hope of finding their valuables, mainly gold and silver, the fire victims were found digging into the heap of ashes and coals.

As per the preliminary police report, properties worth around Rs8 million of 14 families were destroyed in the conflagration.

The victims are currently living under the open sky processing the terrible incident. Laligurans Municipality and the district branch of the Nepal Red Cross Society have distributed food, blankets, clothes, tarpaulin, and other materials to the victims as relief.

The area does not have natural water sources and since all the pipelines were destroyed by the fire, the villagers are facing a shortage of drinking water. The whole village has plunged into darkness after the elec-

trical poles were burnt down by the fire. The locals say smoke pollution caused by the fire has made breathing difficult.

According to Chairman Ghimire, a few years ago, there were 150 houses in the area but now the number has decreased to around a hundred after the families migrated in search of better amenities. The farmlands left barren by them have now turned into a forest.

"Due to the long drought this year, the forest bed is also dry which fueled the fire and made it harder for us to extinguish the inferno. Due to the decreasing number of people and increasing forest coverage, it has become very difficult to maintain and protect the forest from fire," said Ghimire.

Several other forest areas in the district are facing similar risks and challenges of forest fire management, says Ghimire. Similarly, property worth Rs5 million was destroyed due to a forest fire in Hoda settlement, Aathrai Rural Municipality-5, on Sunday. Four houses were completely gutted after the forest fire from Chuhandada forest entered the settlement, said Bishnu Prasad Oli, chairman of ward No 5 of the rural municipality.

According to Oli, on February 26, fourteen houses were gutted when a forest fire entered ward No 6 of the municipality. "Property worth more than Rs8 million was damaged," said Oli.

According to the District Police Office, over the past month, more than 35 houses and sheds were burnt to ashes in different places of the district due to forest fires.

Six vultures found dead in East Nawalparasi, 12 more taken ill

The birds are suspected to have fed on poisoned carcass.

NARAYAN SHARMA
EAST NAWALPARASI, MARCH 13

Six vultures died while a dozen more were taken ill in Kawasoti Municipality-3 of East Nawalpur district on Monday.

The adult vultures were found dead near their habitat in community forest areas in Kawasoti Municipality-3, said DB Chaudhary, a conservationist who has been working for years in vulture conservation.

An additional 12 vultures were also found sick around the Kerunge river. Conservationists suspect the vultures might have consumed poisoned carcasses, particularly the carcasses of jackals that died of poisoning recently. "Poultry farmers had used the poisoned feed for jackals that entered the coops to prey on chickens and ducks," Chaudhary said, adding as many as three jackals were found dead in the area recently.

Conservationists have started a search operation to locate other vultures that they fear may have been ill or dead.

Chaudhary said they have deployed vulture conservation enthusiasts, and staff from the Jatayu Restaurant, a community-managed vulture restaurant, to search for other vultures. A team of district forest officials are also involved in the search process, he said.

Since the birds of prey travel across a large area in search of food, conservationists haven't been able to confirm the total number of affected vultures yet.

Meanwhile, a team of veterinarians from the Chitwan National Park and the National Trust for Nature Conservation reached the incident site to provide medical treatment

to the sick vultures.

According to Mohan Kafle, head of Kawasoti Division Forest Office, a team of veterinarians, led by Deputy Forest Officer Shishir Lamsal, arrived at the site to provide necessary medical treatment. Following the treatment, a total of eight ailing vultures flew to the wild while four seriously ill scavenging birds have been kept at the vulture restaurant under the care of veterinarians.

Nepal has so far recorded nine of the 23 vulture species found in the world.

As many as 10 vultures bred and raised in Chitwan National Park's breeding centre were released in the wild on Saturday. A team of conservationists had released the birds in the Pithauli forest area near a vulture restaurant—an artificial feeding site—in Kawasoti of East Nawalparasi district.

Nepal has so far recorded nine of the 23 vulture species found in the world. The IUCN lists four of them—white-rumped vulture, slender-billed vulture, red-headed vulture and Indian vulture—as 'critically endangered'. The Egyptian vulture is listed as 'endangered' and three species—bearded vulture, cinereous vulture and Himalayan griffon—are categorised as 'near threatened'.

The Kawasoti region is home to eight of the nine species of vulture found in Nepal. The country has an estimated 15,000 vultures.



A local man carries the carcass of a vulture in Kawasoti on Monday.

Dahal participating in an event seen as US attempt to build allies

>> Continued from page 1

Underlining the universality of human rights, which are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, he stressed that fulfillment of basic needs of the people should be the priority of all in order to strengthen democracy. "He expressed the view that democracy thrives in an enabling environment where people can live a more dignified life based on economic growth and sustainable development," said the statement.

"The participation in the Summit for Democracy means continuation of our policy as per the spirit of the democracy," the official at the prime minister's office said.

Prime Minister Dahal now seems to be making an effort to reach out to other democracies.

The Summit for Democracy is also seen as the American attempt to build democratic allies. "We are living through an era defined by challenges to accountable and transparent governance," said the State Department

while announcing the second Summit for Democracy on November 29.

"From wars of aggression to changes in climate, societal mistrust and technological transformation, it could not be clearer that all around the world, democracy needs champions at all levels. Together with other invitees to the second summit, we look forward to taking up this call, and demonstrating how transparent, accountable governance remains the best way to deliver lasting prosperity, peace, and justice," the statement added.

Samantha Power, administrator of the USAID, during her Nepal visit on February 8 and 9, had confirmed that

Prime Minister Dahal had been invited to participate in the summit.

"The invitation has been extended to Prime Minister Prachanda. This gives an opportunity to the prime minister to reinforce and continue what the former prime minister had committed to. Prachanda will also talk about his plans to strengthen the democratic process and rule of law," said Power during a press conference in Kathmandu on February 9.

Prime Minister Dahal, despite once leading a violent communist movement, now seems to be making an effort to reach out to other democracies.

"We are a democracy, so naturally,

there is no question about our participation in the summit," said CD Bhatta, who frequently writes on issues of geopolitics and foreign affairs. "Our leftists have some dilemmas. Back at home they need to be communist and to uphold the communist ideology. But for outsiders, they have to be seen as democrats."

Democracies are declining globally, so the US wants to boost the confidence of democratic countries, which is why it is hosting the summit, said Bhatta.

"This is also a message to Russia and China, which the West sees as authoritarian regimes, that democracies don't die easily," Bhatta added.

'Litmus test' for Paudel as he begins term

>> Continued from page 1

UML leader Amrit Bohara said that as Paudel is a seasoned politician who has for long been involved in Nepali politics and also took part in various movements against autocratic regimes, he can be the right custodian of the constitution. "He can do it, I think, if he internalises the institution's sanctity," Bohara said.

Paudel was backed by 10 parties in the presidential election. The earlier UML-Maoist ruling alliance was broken after the Maoist Centre, in a dramatic turn of events, decided to support the Nepali Congress in the presidential election. Other parties joined the team, to form a new 'eight-party' alliance, which turned Nepal's power equations on their head.

According to Bohara, there is a high chance that Paudel will have to deal with undue pressure from Nepali Congress or from the ruling coalition at critical junctures. "But overall, I believe that such an experienced lead-

In the Nepali Congress circles, many see Paudel as 'narrow-minded', said a party leader, requesting anonymity.

er who has already served as the Speaker can protect the sanctity of the office. The President is not a person but an institution."

Purushottam Dahal, a senior journalist who has for long followed the Congress, said Ram Chandra Paudel has contributed more to Nepal's political movements than his predecessors as President. "His long contribution to the democratic process inspires hope. But as no political party has completely owned the present constitution, how he will

play the role of its custodian remains to be seen."

Dahal said age is an important factor. "He is nearly 80. What does he have to gain now by serving vested interests? He has no compulsion to buckle under any kind of undue pressure in the next five years."

In the Congress circles, many see him as 'narrow-minded', said a party leader requesting not to be named. Though he hasn't been linked to any corruption case and has succeeded in maintaining a clean image, some accuse him of failing to rise above petty personal interests. He is at times criticised for lobbying to appoint people from his family in lucrative positions.

"Now, it's the time to prove that he is above his own interests, his party's interests and the ruling coalition's interests," said Laxman Ghimire, former minister and Nepali Congress leader who was in the Cabinet with Paudel. "His litmus test begins today."

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(Date of publish: 14 March 2023)

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Project Director

BRIEFING

Nembang is UML's deputy parliamentary party leader



KATHMANDU: CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli nominated lawmaker Subas Nembang as the UML's deputy parliamentary party leader on Monday. Former Speaker and Constituent Assembly chair Nembang was the party's deputy parliamentary party leader after the parliamentary elections of 2017 as well. A lawmaker from Ilam district and UML vice-chair Nembang was defeated in the presidential election by Ram Chandra Paudel of Nepali Congress on Thursday. On Sunday, Oli nominated lawmakers Padam Giri and Mahesh Bartaola as the party's chief whip and whip, respectively.

Pramila Yadav announces withdrawal of her candidacy

KATHMANDU: Vice-presidential candidate from the Janata Samajbadi Party Pramila Yadav has announced the withdrawal of her candidacy. Issuing a statement on Monday, Yadav said she will be supporting Ram Sahay Prasad Yadav of her party in the election. Pramila's candidacy, however, can't be withdrawn officially as the Election Commission on Sunday published the final list of candidates for the vice-presidential election. Ram Sahay Prasad Yadav is "an eligible candidate for the post," she said in the statement. The final list published by the commission includes Asta Laxmi Shakya from the CPN-UML, Pramila Yadav and Ram Sahay Prasad Yadav from the Janata Samajbadi Party and Mamata Jha from the Janamat Party. The election for the Vice President is scheduled for March 17.

Maoists intensify negotiations to form a 'socialist front'

They say it's likely the front would be announced within a few days, aiming to resolve all the remaining tasks of the peace process.

TIKA R PRADHAN
KATHMANDU, MARCH 13

Prime Minister and CPN (Maoist Centre) chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Saturday said that a 'socialist front' would soon be formed, one that will lay a strong foundation for the unification of the country's communist forces.

The motive of the socialist front, according to Maoist leaders, is to develop a common understanding among the socialist forces and take the delayed peace process to a logical conclusion.

"The communist parties, who followed the Maoist line, are holding discussions. Our common concern is to resolve all the remaining tasks of the peace process and transitional justice through truth and reconciliation," Dahal said at the meeting of the party's Central Madhesh Province Coordination Committee on Saturday. "A socialist front will be formed within a few days."

However, Dahal, who is engaging in extensive discussions with at least nine Maoist splinter groups almost every day, didn't mention when the front would be announced.

Three parties in the ruling coalition—Maoist Centre, Janata Samajbadi Party and CPN (Unified Socialist)—had extensively discussed and worked to form a socialist front even before the November 20 polls but that could not materialise at the time.

But now the issue has come to the forefront again with the Supreme Court's latest move to register the writ petition against the Maoist Centre chair and Prime Minister Dahal which was rejected by the apex court administration.

Leaders said Maoist Centre is holding talks with other like-minded parties in different modalities. The party also aims to unify those parties. Maoist leaders say they want to form a broader front with the parties that may not be ready to merge into the Maoist party.

Nepal Samajbadi Party, led by former prime minister Baburam Bhattarai, is almost certain to merge with the Maoist Centre as it is closely working with the Dahal-led party of late. The Bhattarai-led party even contested the November elections under the Maoist Centre's election symbol.

A leader of the Nepal Samajbadi Party said both the unification pro-



(From left) Maoist Centre vice chair Krishna Bahadur Mahara, and former Maoist leaders Prabhu Sah and Netra Bikram Chand. The latter two who quit the mother party now head two different outfits. They are now in talks for reunification with the mother organisation.

cess and formation of the socialist front have been delayed due to the prime minister's busy schedule.

"We discussed the formation of the socialist front before the polls," said Vijay Kumar Poudel, deputy general secretary of Unified Socialist. "Now we are trying to announce it at the earliest."

He said the front would most probably be announced after the Cabinet expansion.

Before expanding his cabinet, Prime Minister Dahal has been preparing to seek a vote of confidence following the election of the Vice President which is scheduled for March 17.

All three parties working for the socialist front are desperate to show their unified front mainly because of their diminishing strength apparent in the November 20 polls.

The CPN (Maoist Centre) was reduced to 32 seats in the latest polls, down from 54 in the 2017 polls. Meanwhile, the JSP, which had won 17 seats in the previous election, could manage only 12 now. The CPN (Unified Socialist), a splinter party of the CPN-UML which had some 24 lawmakers, has been making do with only 10 now. More humilatingly, the party couldn't even become a national party in the Parliament as it failed to secure three percent of the total valid votes under



the Proportional Representation system.

Given this background, it appears natural that the parties are harping on forming an alliance of 'like-minded' forces.

"It is long ago that our party decided to remain open for forging alliances or fronts and even unite with like-minded forces," said Manish Suman, spokesperson of JSP. "Socialist front can be one of its outcomes."

Prime Minister Dahal at a party meeting on Saturday had informed Maoist leaders about the ongoing unity talks.

The meeting of the political committee of JSP held on January 2 and 3 had decided to form a talks team led by Rajendra Shrestha to hold discussions with like-minded forces for a working alliance, forming fronts or even going for party unity.

Maoist Centre leaders said they are negotiating both at the personal and task force levels to turn the longstanding concept of a social front



into reality.

"Discussions are going on with the three parties and we will announce the socialist front soon," said Krishna Bahadur Mahara, spokesperson of the Maoist Centre who leads the party's talks team formed to negotiate with like-minded parties.

As the Nepali Congress also claims to follow the socialist ideology, questions arise about whether the party will remain on the socialist front or not.

But Maoist Centre leaders ruled out any such possibility as the Congress comes from a different background than the communist forces.

"Since Congress opts for democratic socialism and we are in favour of scientific socialism, I don't think Congress will join our front. But we can work together on some specific issues," said Giriraj Mani Pokhrel, deputy general secretary of Maoist Centre who is also a member of the party's talks team. "The front will be formed with an objective to give a new direction to the country's politics."

However, the major concern of the front's constituents will be to take forward the delayed peace process by forging an understanding among the major parties regarding transitional justice.

According to Maoist leaders, this time they are working more

seriously to see the plan through its end. While the Mahara-led talks team is continuously engaged in the negotiations, chairman Dahal and vice chair Mahara are holding discussions personally with key leaders from other parties. Barshaman Pun, Shakti Basnet and Giriraj Mani Pokhrel are members of the Mahara-led team.

"You shouldn't be surprised if we announce the socialist front within a few days," a leader quoted Dahal as saying at the party's meeting on Saturday.

After the Supreme Court's decision to continue with the writ petition against Dahal, all the Maoist splinter groups have been holding regular meetings and even issued a warning that all war-era cases must be resolved only through the truth and reconciliation commission.

The Dahal-led government has already registered a bill to amend the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Act on March 9.

"Cases related to the people's war and people's movement have not been addressed yet and the peace process is yet to be concluded," Dahal said. "We have the responsibility to give a political way out to the peace process and transitional justice on the basis of their principles for which it's essential for the socialist forces to cooperate and unite."

Four fringe communist parties have already formed a joint front—Samajbadi Deshbhakta Morcha—on Friday. Its constituents are the Netra Bikram Chand-led Nepal Communist Party, Rishiram Kattel-led Nepal Communist Party, Bishwobhakta Dulal-led Baigyanik Samajbadi Communist Party and Karnajit Budhathoki-led CPN (Maoist Socialist). The front will have a praesidium to be led on a rotational basis. However, none of these splinter groups have any seat in the parliament.

On Saturday, Dahal said the front will develop a new basis for the unification of the communist parties. "Even within the UML, a large number of members want unity among the leftist forces. They want a revival of the erstwhile Nepal Communist Party," Dahal said. "That voice is in favour of the revolution and communist movement. Therefore, we should take the initiative for unity."

Task cut out for new Chinese premier: economic revival

In his first press conference after he assumed office, Chinese premier Li Qiang says he will treat 'all businesses equally and defend business property rights.'



China's newly-elected Premier Li Qiang takes an oath after being elected on Sunday.

PURUSHOTTAM POUDEL
BEIJING, MARCH 13

In Beijing, two shopping malls—the You Tang on the Menwai Street and the Silk Market on the Xiushui East Street—are famous for daily essentials. Before the Covid pandemic struck, the malls would have almost all of its shop spaces occupied. Not anymore.

"This mall had a lot of shops before the pandemic, but there are now a lot of empty places," a 45-year-old businesswoman who has a clothing store at the Silk Market told the Post on the condition of anonymity. "Business is not what it used to be."

The You Tang mall has faced the same fate. A businessman said that he has witnessed some of the small-scale businesspersons packing up their shops after their businesses dried up. They couldn't afford the rent of their shops and even had to sell their properties to cope up with the situation, he said.

Covid pandemic was first recorded at Wuhan, a city that lies about 1,100 km south of Beijing, in late 2019. The pandemic quickly spread around the world, bringing the world to its knees. China remains one of the worst affected countries. The pandemic has had a huge impact on the country's economy; in 2022, the world's second largest economy recorded a Gross Domestic Product growth of just 3 percent, the

second lowest increase in recent decades following a 2.4 percent growth in 2020.

Against this backdrop, the task is cut out for Li Qiang, 63, the country's new premier who assumed office on March 11; he is now in charge of reviving an economy that has been battered by Covid-19 for three years.

Li, of course, knows this full well. Two days after taking office as the nation's prime minister, Li on Monday appeared at a press conference in Beijing's Great Hall of the People and placed emphasis on rebounding the country's ailing economy.

As the prime minister, Li is now in charge of reviving the economy that has been battered by Covid-19.

Prior to this, in his final statement as prime minister, Li Keqiang had also prioritised boosting the country's economy.

But doubts remain on how successful Li Qiang would be on his goal given his lack of experience in central governance. He is the first prime minister who has never held a position in the central government before becoming a

prime minister after the foundation of the People's Republic of China. Li was a career bureaucrat who was hand-picked by President Xi Jinping.

Attempting to boost the morale of the local business community, the newly appointed premier has promised to "encourage fair competition among different commercial organisations and aid in the expansion and growth of private businesses."

"From a fresh starting point, we will establish a market-oriented, legalised, and globalised business environment, treat businesses with various forms of ownership equally, and defend business property rights as well as the rights and interests of entrepreneurs," the premier said at the conference.

While he has promised to improve the internal economic system, there is pressure to adjust the external environment as well. In particular, the friction between China and the United States also must be resolved to achieve the anticipated GDP for the year 2023. The government has claimed it would achieve a growth rate of 5 percent in 2023.

"Surveys by various international organisations have also predicted that our economy will be strong this year," Prime Minister Li said at the press conference. "We are excited by the results of the last two months. The target we have set will be fulfilled."

Reportedly, United States-China ties are at their lowest point in decades, giving rise to tensions in technology and investment. However, Prime Minister Li said that despite the tensions, Foreign Direct Investment in China has not decreased and its trade with the United States remains stable.

"China got FDI worth US\$189 billion last year, and commerce between the US and China totalled US\$760 billion," Prime Minister Li said.

Zhang Jeigen, an associate professor of international studies at the Shanghai-based Fudan University, however, said that the new government is likely to face two challenges, domestic and international, to overcome the country's economic woes.

"Domestically, China needs to find a new economic driving force," Professor Zhang told the Post. "Internationally, anti-globalisation led by the US remains a serious challenge. How the new government handles this challenge is something to watch for."

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OPINION



OUR VIEW

Systemic failure

The way the Nepal Oil Corporation currently sets the prices of petroleum products makes no sense.

Clichés are so popular because they often reflect an underlying reality. One such cliché in Nepal is that, “Oil prices always go up, never come down.” This is not true all the time. The current petrol price of Rs178 a litre, for instance, is a big dip from the per litre price of Rs199 last June. Yet that fact reveals as much as it hides. The price of petroleum products has plummeted in the international market: Brent crude, the international benchmark for oil pricing, which was trading at \$128 a barrel last June, was down to \$80 a barrel in the first week of March. So while international oil prices in the time dropped by around 37.5 percent, the corresponding figure in Nepal was around 10 percent. Interestingly, the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC), the country’s oil monopoly, has an “auto-pricing” mechanism whereby the prices of petrol and diesel are to be automatically adjusted when their prices in international markets change. But that clearly is not the case. The system has rather become a tool for the oil monopoly to fool consumers.

The problem with oil prices, especially in developing countries like Nepal, is that the prices of other commodities tend to move with them. So when the oil prices are jacked up and kept artificially high, the cost is passed on to consumers. Inflation in the country continues to see a troubling rise: The year-on-year consumer price inflation was 7.88 percent in mid-February compared to 6.24 percent at the same time a year ago. A related problem is that when oil prices increase, commodity prices go up as well; but when oil prices drop, the prices of goods seldom come down. It is hard to buy the NOC’s argument that it cannot reduce fuel prices as it is incurring huge losses. Reportedly, it still owes the Indian Oil Corporation, its sole supplier, Rs10 billion while another Rs6.3 billion is due to the Nepal government. Perhaps that is the case. But given the corporation’s tainted history and its notoriously opaque bureaucracy, it is hard to believe anything coming out of there. In the past, the corporation has given its staff bumper bonuses even while the organisation was deep in red.

The easiest way out of the current predicament would be to allow private entities to import and distribute oil, thereby breaking the NOC’s monopoly. The corporation executives as well as their backers in the government argue that since oil is a “sensitive” area, the private sector cannot be trusted with it. Yet this is a fallacious argument. If so, even communication is a sensitive sector and as such no private organisation should be allowed to run any kind of communication services. The argument would also have sounded more credible had the NOC had over the years been able to ensure problem-free and cost-effective access to oil for all Nepalis. Its modus operandi at present increasingly resembles that of an extortion racket. If an arrangement has not served the country, not for years but for decades, it would be wise to explore an alternative.

THEIR VIEW

Elucidating historical wonders

The latest discovery will further advance our understanding of the pyramid’s internal structure.

There are still many mysteries involving archaeological sites and cultural assets of the world. Japan’s latest technology can be used to help elucidate these historical wonders. Egypt’s Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has announced the discovery of a new void inside the Great Pyramid of the Pharaoh Khufu near Cairo.

An international team involving researchers from Nagoya University and the High Energy Accelerator Research Organization had been investigating the pyramid since 2015. The existence of another huge void was surmised in 2017 and the latest discovery is expected to further advance the understanding of the pyramid’s internal structure. The pyramid was built 4,500 years ago, but how it was built and its internal structure are not known in detail. The pyramid of Pharaoh Khufu is approximately 150 metres high, and it had been speculated that there may be unknown voids within.

It is difficult to conduct excavation surveys on pyramids because they are valuable cultural assets. For this reason, Nagoya University researchers have developed a method to explore the internal structure using muons falling from the sky. Although muons pass through materials well, they are partially blocked in areas of high density. This property can be used to surmise the presence of a large void inside the pyramid by detailed analysis of the direction and number of muons that come flying through. Using this method, the international team found a corridor-shaped space two metres wide and nine metres deep above the entrance on the north side of the pyramid, and the team inserted a scope to check the interior. It can be said that the efficiency of the new method has been proven.

The team said that there is nothing in the void and its use or role is unknown. Some believe that it functions to disperse the weight of the stones, but it is also believed that there may be a further passageway leading beyond the void blocked by stones. It is hoped the research proceeds and the reason the corridor was built becomes clear. Using muons to explore is a method suitable for analysing massive structures. Similar methods have been applied to explore the subsurface of volcanoes and to estimate the distribution of melted fuel at the Fukushima No 1 nuclear power plant. With the further development of this technology, the expectations are that it can be applied to inspections of public infrastructure such as tunnels and to geological surveys.

Such academic research helps protect cultural properties and enhances Japan’s reputation in that field. This is a meaningful activity that could be considered part of diplomacy using science and technology. The Japanese government should support the development of exploration methods using advanced technology. The government should also consider providing broad support for the activities of international teams of researchers in collaboration with other organisations such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

— The Japan News/ANN

The prime minister should pick a capable and honest person for this important role.

ACHYUT WAGLE



Immediately after assuming his office two and half months ago, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal said the first priority of his government would be to revive the country’s economy. He also assured the leaders of the umbrella organisations of the private sector—the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and the Confederation of Nepalese Industries—to address the pressing economic issues, including high interest rates, liquidity crisis and low capital expenditure faced by the country.

Deliberating in a separate programme, “The Way Forward to Nepali Economy”, organised by the Society of Economic Journalists of Nepal on February 12, Prime Minister Dahal lamented, “Economists, despite their high-sounding academic degrees from so-called reputed Western universities, also appear unable to understand and address the problems of the Nepali economy. Apart from the knowledge about economic theory, persons with a deeper understanding of our social dynamics are perhaps better placed to tackle our country-specific socioeconomic problems.” He was, in fact, responding to an observation that 12 out of 16 finance ministers changed in as many years after Nepal became a republican democracy were the henchmen of powerful party leaders, who lacked formal training in higher education, let alone in economics.

The connotations of these statements are clear. First, the understanding of the looming crisis in the economy among the political class is very shallow and so the promise of addressing it “head on” is nothing beyond political platitudes. Second, his pick (for that matter by any party leader in his coalition government) as the next

Hello, next finance minister!



SHUTTERSTOCK

finance minister is more likely to be a trusted lieutenant on the pretext of the person’s better “understanding” of Nepali society (politics?) than economics. A counter-argument of convenience, vociferously put forth by under-qualified politicians to this end is: Even the trained economists, when appointed as the finance ministers and office bearers at the National Planning Commission (NPC), could barely make any tangible difference in the economy. This claim certainly has some flesh; however, it needs deep digging into the exact reasons for such underperformances.

The facts

These lackadaisical leadership traits are risky as the economic challenges for Nepal emanating from domestic and international factors are real and just around the corner. Domestically, economic growth is difficult to cross 4 percent while inflation is poised to shoot to double digits in the current fiscal year. The shrink in the manufacturing sector is unabated, which now contributes only less than 5 percent to the gross domestic product (GDP), while the projected trade deficit is feared to cross Rs2 trillion. In the first seven months of this fiscal year, the deficit has already hit the Rs875 billion mark, including about Rs50 billion loss in services imports alone. Exports totalled less than Rs93.5 billion. After

eight months of the financial year, the capital expenditure has been barely 21 percent of Rs380 billion allocated. Even at the provincial and local levels, the scenario of capital expenditure is not fundamentally different.

By now, two-thirds of the revenue target of Rs1.4 trillion should have been met, but only 41 percent of it has been realised so far. The capital market vulnerability has defied all logic of modern economic management. The national debt is now near 45 percent of GDP, about half of which is an international obligation. This, among several other indicators, makes public financial management increasingly challenging for the government.

Internationally, the collapse of two moderate-sized American banks, namely Silicon Valley Bank and Silvergate, a crypto bank, in just 48 hours last weekend is seen as the prelude to a 2008-like financial crisis in the US economy. In addition to food and fuel price spirals primarily due to the protracted Russia-Ukraine war and resultant global supply chain disruptions, the cascading effects of the looming global financial crisis are sooner or later certain to hit the Nepali economy as well. A more telling effect compared to other smaller economies is likely as ours due to its complete dependence on imported fuels and almost 80 percent dependence on imported foods and essential items. The rapid devaluation of the Nepali

currency and rising import bills will worsen the wounds.

Although no systematic data is available, there is a tangible fall in the disposable income of the common man. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are hit hardest. They are the basis of employment and self-employment and the backbone of the Nepali economy. Policy experimentation at unnatural frequencies and poor economic governance are disturbing the market mechanism and the economic cycle.

The person

What kind of personality should the prime minister pick as the new finance minister during these testing times? An obvious answer would be a capable and honest person for this important role. But it is not as straightforward as stated. In the past, the preference was more often than not given to a sycophant of influential leaders over available capable persons. The idea of an honest finance minister has already become antithetic as the post has become a sharp instrument to extract funds required for the party in power and finance for the “regal” lifestyle of a handful of political top-hats.

The contingent question is: How much change can an individual as finance minister bring to the economy even if they are genuinely committed to substantive reform? And why have a couple of trained economists, who had the opportunity to head the ministry, also fared badly? It takes a lot of courage on the part of the political leadership to allow, ideally even an economist finance minister, to function as per their conscience vis-a-vis the national need. Even several well-trained economists appointed in the finance ministry and the NPC have failed the nation. It is primarily because they are given these responsibilities only after effectively converting them into “yes-men” to the heads of the party to which they belonged. Conversely, their self-seeking character finds it easy only to do and say exactly what pleases the ears of their masters to get and retain these lucrative public positions.

If the prime minister and his partners in the coalition yet again fail to give the responsibility of the finance ministry to a person who knows the Nepali economy well and understands the increasingly pervasive malfunction of fiscal federalism, it is certain to cost the economy dearly and dash its future.

Nepal’s cascading hazards

New scientific insights

In 2023, one of the authors, Talchabhadel and others conducted a diagnostic analysis of the 2021 Melamchi flood. The study integrated remote sensing data, hydrologic and hydrodynamic modeling, and machine learning techniques to understand the individual and interacting dynamics of several physical processes and their cascading and compound effects. Given the high risk of landslides in mountain areas, particularly following the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake, it is essential to assess the risk susceptibility of settlements and infrastructure on a timely basis to prepare for potential future landslides.

In the case of the 2021 Melamchi flood, the landslide dam’s outburst, combined with rainfall, resulted in a sudden breach of accumulated water that caused sediment-laden flooding over a broad area and severe damage down to the Melamchi Bazaar. This emphasises the need and importance of evaluating risk by considering a range of non-extreme circumstances in addition to extreme ones. The Melamchi flood should be viewed as a warning

and create temporary reservoirs behind unsorted and unstable deposits.

There is an insufficient number of hydro-meteorological stations to effectively evaluate the situation. Properly utilising earth observations and satellite-based estimates is essential when gauge data is unavailable. However, these products should first be tested against gauge data to ensure accuracy. Gauging stations may fail to provide data during extreme weather conditions. The national weather radar network is not yet complete, with some areas of the country still not being monitored. There may be a dearth of skilled personnel to tackle the concern.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) is making strides to digitise disaster risk management by creating the Building Information Platform Against Disaster (BIPAD) portal. This platform combines data from various authorities, non-government organisations, educational institutions, and research firms. Stakeholders and users can access indicators of various disaster-related activities throughout the country.



POST FILE PHOTO

that other areas may be at risk of similar cascading and compounded hazards.

It is essential to assess the vulnerability of infrastructure to various hazards (such as mapping landslide susceptibility, delineating flood plains, mapping fire risk in forests, and others). The threshold for rainfall that leads to different hazards triggering landslides must be regularly updated using data collected at a high frequency. Interactions between hazards must be studied closely, as a combination of non-catastrophic events can create unforeseen compounding hazards. Also, a small hazard may start in one particular location but can escalate in magnitude and extend to impact a broader area and for a longer period. Additionally, sediment-laden floods behave differently than clear-water floods. Large seismic activities can also cause massive landslides, block rivers

Investing in science and technology

Currently, available scientific resources are inadequate to understand complex weather processes in the Himalayan region. More investment is needed in science and technology to enhance resilience to face extreme events. We must train and educate the new generation in emerging technologies like machine learning, high-performance computing, and new Earth system models. This also demands coordinated and collaborative research and exposure to the wider scientific community for accurately and effectively predicting cascading hazards and formulating strategies to mitigate associated risks. Undergraduates, graduates, and doctoral students should be encouraged to research and participate in projects and capstone initiatives that address real-world problems.

Making government data and

research open to the scientific community can promote transparency and trust in the scientific process. Satellite-derived estimates, remotely-sensed data, earth observations, and re-analysis data can be beneficial to acquire information in areas where data is sparse. Nevertheless, creating a comprehensive network of gauging stations should be paramount to making informed decisions. Measuring is essential to assessing any situation, and understanding the full scope of a situation is difficult without ground-based observations.

A data-driven model and machine learning approaches that integrate hydroclimatic models, remotely-sensed data, and non-traditional data sources such as Citizen Science and expert knowledge needs to be developed. Such a modelling framework would act as an operational decision support tool, enabling stakeholders to conduct “what-if” analyses and design mitigation strategies. To make the tool more accessible, it should be implemented as either a cyberinfrastructure or a mobile application. Decision support tools should not only provide data about past incidents but should also provide information to assist in making informed spatial decision-making about financing in climate-resilient critical infrastructure.

To complement data-driven models, anticipatory actions must be taken based on our results and knowledge. This can be practised through various means, such as early warning systems, improving the adaptive capacity of the communities, and considering risk in spatial planning and infrastructure designs. These can be effectively practised with coordinated approaches with governments, stakeholders, and communities, such as community-based disaster risk reduction, participatory approaches, ecosystem-based approaches, and prepared and response training. Traditional and indigenous wisdom can help better implement and align these measures with the local context.

Local authorities must adopt and timely update a comprehensive plan that includes an early warning system, prevention measures, mitigation strategies, and response protocols. This plan must also entail emergency procedures to coordinate evacuations and to provide prompt relief and assistance to those affected by the hazards. In addition, public awareness, education programmes, science, and effective communication must be implemented to ensure that people know the potential risks to their locality and are equipped with the knowledge to respond effectively.

Talchabhadel is a Research Scientist at Texas A&M University. Sharma is an Assistant Research Professor at Pennsylvania State University.

FOREX

US Dollar	131.70
Euro	140.52
Pound Sterling	158.76
Swiss Franc	143.97
Australian Dollar	87.19
Canadian Dollar	95.52
Singapore Dollar	97.70
Japanese Yen (10)	9.85
Chinese Yuan	19.13
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.08
Qatari Riyal	36.01
Thai Bhat	3.80
UAE Dhiram	35.86
Malaysian Ringgit	29.29
Korean Won (100)	10.08

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES

Nepse (in percent) 1,951.21pts -1.25%

HIGHEST LOSERS					
KLBS	ADLB	HBL	NADEP	WNLB	MERO
-7.62	-5.41	-5.28	-5.25	-4.65	-4.01
MODERATE LOSERS					
GLICL	SMFDB	LEMF	ACLBSL	PRIN	AKBSL
-4	-3.98	-3.92	-3.73	-3.61	-3.59
MODERATE GAINERS					
NIBD84	UMRH	DORDI	NBLD82	SBCF	NICAD8283
1.38	1.57	1.61	1.65	1.78	1.93
HIGHEST GAINERS					
MKLB	PBDB8	SGHC	GVL	UNLB	SPL
2	2.01	2.04	3.86	4.03	9.98

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 104,100
Silver	Rs 1,255

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

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Thulo.com partners with SDC and UNCDF to empower over 1,700 micro, small and medium enterprises in Nepal



KATHMANDU: To bridge the digital gap of MSMEs Thulo.Com initiated a project 'MSMEs Growth Bazar'. Digitisation of MSMEs by providing market access through Thulo.Com, which has been successful in digitising micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) based in Province 1, Bagmati, Gandaki and Lumbini. The project, with the support from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), assisted over 1,700 MSMEs, in their digitisation, reads the press release issued by the company. The partnership helped MSMEs digitise payments, delivery, and post-sales services in rural areas in Nepal, boosting their sales and helped them recover from the effects of the pandemic. (PR)

India tech minister plans to meet startups on SVB fallout

MUMBAI: India's state minister for technology said on Sunday he will meet start-ups this week to assess the impact on them of Silicon Valley Bank's collapse, as concerns rise about the fallout for the Indian start-up sector. California banking regulators shut down Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) on Friday after a run on the lender, which had \$209 billion in assets at the end of 2022, with depositors pulling out as much as \$42 billion on a single day, rendering it insolvent. "Start-ups are an important part of the new India economy. I will meet with Indian Startups this week to understand impact on them and how the government can help during the crisis," Rajeev Chandrasekhar, the state minister for IT said on Twitter. (REUTERS)

Nepal hikes chemical fertiliser prices to curb subsidies

Nepal's chemical fertiliser subsidy bill is likely to shoot up to a record Rs38.50 billion this fiscal year as import prices have swelled tremendously.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, MARCH 13

The government has jacked up the prices of chemical fertiliser after 10 years, effective from Monday, to rein in the subsidies following the stress on the treasury.

Following the price revision, subsidised diammonium phosphate (DAP), the world's most widely used phosphorus fertiliser, will cost Rs50 per kg, up from Rs43.

Urea will now cost Rs25 per kg, up from Rs14. Similarly, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, potash will cost Rs40 per kg, up from Rs31.

The ministry said in a press statement on Monday that prices had been raised to prevent smuggling to India where the soil fortifiers cost more. The move is a bid to save on subsidies as the savings will enable the government to import more fertilisers in line with growing demand.

The practical demand for chemical fertilisers hovers at 520,000 tonnes annually, the ministry said.

Nepal's chemical fertiliser subsidy bill is likely to shoot up to a record Rs38.50 billion this fiscal year as import prices have swelled tremendously, officials said.

The government earmarked Rs31 billion for the import of chemical fertilisers till February-end, Rs15 billion through the annual budget and Rs16 billion as source assurance.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development said that they have received resource assurance from the Finance Ministry for another



The practical demand for chemical fertilisers hovers at 520,000 tonnes annually.

Rs7.50 billion to procure adequate stocks to prevent shortages during the paddy transplantation season in June.

With that money, the government will be able to import over 400,000 tonnes of essential plant nourishers.

In 2019 before the Covid-19 pandemic, the government could buy that quantity of fertilisers for Rs10 billion.

The government provides subsidies to the farm sector in a bid to keep inflation at bay by raising crop output. But subsidies have not prevented food inflation from going out of control.

In recent months, food inflation has soared by more than 30 percent, according to market analysts.

The price of chemical fertilisers started to increase from the beginning of 2021 due to surging input costs,

supply disruptions caused by sanctions (Belarus and Russia), and export restrictions by China, according to the World Bank.

Concerns around fertiliser affordability and availability were further amplified by the war in Ukraine. Fertiliser prices have surpassed their 2008 peaks. In Nepal, the burden of subsidies has become a test for the new government.

The Finance Ministry decided to cut the budget by 20 percent because the country is short of cash.

"The pressure on recurrent expenditure has grown along with increased liabilities for subsidies on chemical fertilisers," the Finance Ministry said in a recent statement.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal

Dahal has vowed not to let the country suffer from a chemical fertiliser shortage on his watch.

On January 10, Dahal won a vote of confidence in Parliament, and speaking after the victory, the prime minister "guaranteed" that the government henceforth would not disappoint farmers who have been suffering constantly due to one or the other reason.

The agriculture ministry said that the appreciation of the US dollar added an extra burden on fertiliser prices. The subsidies have increased massively but the quantity of fertiliser has not increased.

According to reports, the price of urea in the global market was \$360 per tonne in September 2020, which jumped to \$1,022 in April 2022. In

August 2008, when there was a global food shortage, the price of urea reached \$815 per tonne.

In Nepal, urea is sold to farmers at a subsidised rate of Rs14 per kg. The average price of DAP, the world's most widely used fertiliser, was \$434 per tonne in September 2020, which reached \$1,056 per tonne in May 2022.

The highest price of DAP recorded so far is \$1,218 per tonne in April 2008. DAP is sold to farmers in Nepal at a subsidised rate of Rs43 per kg.

The agriculture ministry said that the subsidy in urea, before the price hike, was 80 percent, 60 percent in DAP and 59 percent in potash. After the revision, the average chemical fertiliser subsidy is 59.04 percent, a drop from 70.82 percent.

"As per the finance ministry directive, the subsidy will be decreased gradually to 50 percent," the agriculture ministry said in a statement.

The last time the government hiked the chemical fertiliser price was in December 2012.

The government reinstated subsidies on chemical fertilisers in 2009 to boost agricultural production and ensure food security. Acting on the conditions laid down by donors, the government started deregulating the fertiliser trade in 1997 with subsidies on DAP and potash being completely removed.

Since 2009, the government has been providing a 40-45 percent subsidy on fertilisers. The government has hiked prices at a time when farmers have been hit by the increased cost of production as farm inputs have become more expensive.

Women entrepreneurs in Mustang in need of digital marketing skills

Digital marketing is much more than just posting photos and videos on social media, an expert says.



POST PHOTO: DEEPAK PARIYAR

Organic products of the district have remained confined within the district because of poor marketing.

DEEPAK PARIYAR
MUSTANG, MARCH 13

Women in Mustang run homestays, produce apple and apricot juice and dried chips, buckwheat and nettle flour, and apple candies among other organic products. But, the most they have ever done to promote their business online is posting the photos and videos on social media platforms such as Facebook and Tik Tok.

Kamala Lalchan is among such entrepreneurs, who runs a factory producing apple and apricot juice.

Lachlan, also the chairperson of Bjongmore Small Farmer Agriculture Co-operative at Marpha in Gharapjhong Rural Municipality, Mustang, posts such photos once in a while and urges members to do the same.

Most of the members in the agriculture co-operative are women, who work in groups of 5 to 10 to produce such products.

But the products have remained

largely unknown outside the district due to poor marketing.

The entrepreneurs believe that digital marketing can become a game changer for the exposure of Mustang's product to national and international markets. Lately, they have been more keen towards learning such skills.

"Though women entrepreneurs from our group sometimes share their products on Facebook and Tik Tok, most of us do not know how to market the products digitally," said Lalchan.

Juma Thakali, proprietor of the Thakali Community Homestay at Thini village in the rural municipality, shared the same story. But a Facebook page has helped her get more visitors.

"Earlier, we only had a visiting card and a brochure of the homestay," said Thakali. "But, lately we have been getting visitors who say they knew about us through the Facebook page."

Thakali often promotes local cuisine, culture, and scenic beauty of her locality on Tik Tok.

There is also a women's entrepreneurs group, consisting of 14 members, in Thini which makes Jhilinga, a traditional Nepali food, from buckwheat flour.

The rural municipality has provided the group with four machines to produce it at a 90 percent subsidy.

Around eight months ago, the rural municipality had provided training to local women to make Jhilinga.

According to Syamu Thakali, secretary of the group, 120 pieces of Jhilinga can be made from around four kg of buckwheat flour.

Jhilinga is sold from outlets in and around Jomsom and Marpha.

"The sales are more during the festivals," said Thakali. "We plan to increase its production and focus on marketing in the coming days."

"Selling the products door to door is often time consuming," said Meena Thakali, a member of the group, at a digital marketing training programme organised in Jomsom last Thursday.

The Tourism Entrepreneurs Women

Association of Nepal (TEWAN) had organised the programme with assistance from the Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment of Gandaki Province and Gharapjhong Rural Municipality.

Jamuna Thapa, the vice chair of the rural municipality, is herself an entrepreneur. Thapa teamed up with Bitti Thakali and Laxmi Thakali to produce candies from apples.

The group, which started production around three months ago, have been excited by the sales.

"We have been able to sell all the candies we made in the first phase," said Bitti. "We plan to produce more in the coming season and sell it in Kathmandu and Pokhara as well."

Though the women entrepreneurs have utilised social media to promote their businesses to some extent, the authorities concerned need to impart them with more effective marketing skills, according to Ujwal Poudel, a software engineer at Pokhara-based Aankhijhyal Technologies, an information and technology consulting firm.

"Digital marketing is much more than just posting photos and videos on social media," said Poudel, who provided the training last week. "Businesses should create innovative content on the basis of market demand and social media trends."

Women entrepreneurs were informed about tourism promotion on various social media platforms, search engine marketing, email marketing and selling the products through an online medium during the training programme.

Kamala Giri, president of TEWAN, said branding of Mustang's products along with digital marketing skills will help entrepreneurs in the district, most of whom are women.

"Visitors to the area have been the main customers of Mustang products," said Giri. "Effective digital marketing will expand the market."

Maya Gurung, the chief of the District Coordination Committee, Mustang, said that organic products of the district have remained confined within the district because of poor marketing.

Nepali recruitment agency loses GLAA licence

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, MARCH 13

Adept and Agile, a Nepali recruitment agency, has lost its Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) licence after investigations revealed that workers were charged exorbitant job-finding fees before arriving in the UK, GLAA said in a statement on Monday.

"GLAA officers have revoked the licence of Adept and Agile with immediate effect," the statement reads. "This means that the business will no longer be able to supply workers into GLAA-regulated sectors of agriculture, horticulture, shellfish gathering, and any associated processing or packaging."

The authority, which licences gangmasters, companies that supply labour, in such sectors, had suspended Adept and Agile's licence earlier in January after a UK court handed a Slavery and Trafficking Risk Order to its two directors on suspicion of exploiting workers by charging exorbitant recruitment fees.

The accused directors Pravin Rimal and Resham Gurung, however, denied the accusations.

Gurung claimed that they have never sent a single Nepali citizen to work in the UK. "We have nothing to say about the decision," Gurung told the Post in January.

According to the GLAA, they failed its fit and proper test after being handed an interim Slavery and Trafficking Risk Order (STRO) in December 2022.

"GLAA investigators spoke to Nepalese workers recruited by Adept and Agile as part of its investigations," the statement reads. "More than 100 confirmed that they had paid between 12,000 pounds (around Rs1.9 million) and 13,000 pounds in order to find work in the UK."

"They told the GLAA that the fee was paid directly to Gurung, a relative of his, or someone at the offices of Adept and Agile."

Work-finding fees are explicitly banned under the GLAA licensing standards.

Several workers also told the GLAA that they were instructed not to tell anyone about the fee they paid, otherwise they would be sent back home to Nepal.

Biden to defend US banking system after SVB, Signature collapse

REUTERS
WASHINGTON, MARCH 13

President Joe Biden will on Monday address a banking crisis that led US regulators to step in with a series of emergency measures after the collapses of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank threatened to trigger a broader systemic crisis.

Biden on Sunday hinted at new regulation of big banks after the biggest US bank failure since the 2008 financial crisis, but faces a divided Congress unlikely to approve tougher new rules.

His economic team worked with regulators over the weekend on the measures, which included guaranteeing deposits in both banks, setting up a new facility to give banks access to emergency funds and making it easier

for banks to borrow from the Federal Reserve in emergencies.

The moves sent waves of relief through Silicon Valley and made stock futures rally, but the crisis is testing confidence in the US financial system and fears remained the fallout would roll global markets in the week to come. "The American people and American businesses can have confidence that their bank deposits will be there when they need them," Biden said in a statement.

"I am firmly committed to holding those responsible for this mess fully accountable and to continuing our efforts to strengthen oversight and regulation of larger banks so that we are not in this position again," Biden said. Rules introduced after US banks sparked a global financial crisis in

The crisis is testing confidence in the US financial system.

2008 by aggressive mortgage lending may come under the spotlight in coming days. They were partially repealed in 2018 under former President Donald Trump.

The changes to the Dodd-Frank Act pushed by Republicans raised the threshold at which banks are considered systemically risky and subject to stricter oversight to \$250 billion from \$50 billion. Silicon Valley bank had \$209 billion in assets at the end of last year. Democrat Biden faces a divided

Congress after Republicans took control of the House of Representatives in January, and new US bank regulations could be difficult.

"The prospect of legislation in this polarised political world is very low," John Coffee, a professor at Columbia Law School, told Reuters.

"The real problem here is that banks that are holding illiquid loans or securities on a hold-to-maturity basis do not have to mark them down even though they have a market value well below their balance-sheet value."

Senator Tim Scott, a Republican from South Carolina who sits on the Senate's banking, housing and urban affairs committee, said it was important to bring markets to a "calm and orderly resolution," but warned against too much intervention.



US President Joe Biden.

REUTERS

WORLD

BRIEFING

Taiwan says defence spending to focus on readying for 'total blockade' by China

TAIPEI: Taiwan's defence spending this year will focus on preparing weapons and equipment for a "total blockade" by China, including parts for F-16 fighters and replenishing weapons, the military said in a report. China, which views Taiwan as its own territory, staged war games around the island in August, firing missiles over Taipei and declaring no-fly and no-sail zones in a simulation of how it would seek to cut Taiwan off in a war. In a report seeking parliamentary budget approval, a copy of which was reviewed by Reuters on Monday, Taiwan's defence ministry said it began reviewing its strategic fuel reserves and repair abilities last year, but did not give details. In "anticipation of a total blockade of the Taiwan Strait", spending this year would include replenishment of artillery and rocket stocks, and parts for F-16 fighters "to strengthen combat continuity", the ministry said. In an update on its threat assessment from China, the ministry said China's military has been conducting joint force operations with an eye to controlling strategic choke points and denying access to foreign forces.

Nobel laureate Kenzaburo Oe, who wrote of war and his son, dies at 88

TOKYO: Kenzaburo Oe, who won Japan's second Nobel Prize for literature with books about the horrors of war and about his disabled son, has died at the age of 88. Oe also later became known as a prominent campaigner against nuclear weapons and nuclear power. His death, on March 3, was due to old age, his publisher Kodansha said. Ten years old when Japan was defeated in World War Two, Oe was scarred by his memories, which included being asked in school every day if he was willing to die for the Emperor and feeling shame when realising in bed at night that he wasn't. He wrote about gruesome tales of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and noted how his shock at what he had heard may have been his inspiration for becoming a writer. Oe was never afraid to hold his country to account and was scathing about former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's efforts to revise Japan's pacifist constitution. Japan bore "some" responsibility for the war, he said in a 2014 interview.

Malaysian ex-PM Muhyiddin hit with seventh graft charge

KUALA LUMPUR: Former Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin pleaded innocent on Monday to a seventh corruption charge, this one alleging he received illegal proceeds of 5 million ringgit (\$1.1 million) that was banked into his political party. Muhyiddin is Malaysia's second leader to be indicted after leaving office and has denied wrongdoing. He slammed the case as "organised political persecution" to embarrass him and crush his Islamic-dominated opposition ahead of state elections. He denied abusing his power to award contracts to selected ethnic Malay contractors in return for bribes, and to approve an appeal by a business tycoon on the cancellation of his tax exemption. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim rejected accusations that the charges were politically motivated. The anti-graft agency and the attorney-general's chambers, whose chiefs were previously appointed by Muhyiddin, have denied there was political interference in the investigation and prosecution process. (AGENCIES)

China's Xi wants bigger global role after diplomatic coup in Saudi-Iran deal

Calls for country to 'unswervingly achieve' the goal of 'national reunification' of Taiwan.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIJING, MARCH 13

President Xi Jinping called on Monday for China to play a bigger role in managing global affairs after Beijing scored a diplomatic coup as the host of talks that produced an agreement by Saudi Arabia and Iran to reopen diplomatic relations.

Xi gave no details of the ruling Communist Party's plans in a speech to China's ceremonial legislature. But Beijing has been increasingly assertive since he took power in 2012 and called for changes in the International Monetary Fund and other entities it says fail to reflect the desires of developing countries.

China should "actively participate in the reform and construction of the global governance system" and promote "global security initiatives," said Xi, the country's most powerful leader in decades.

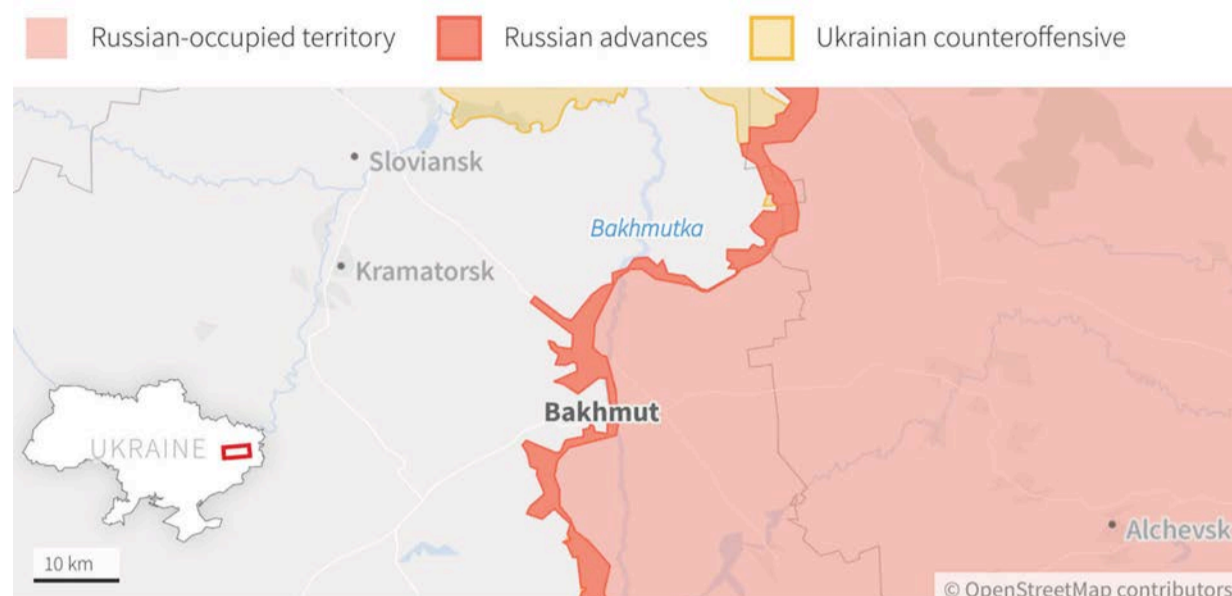
That will add "positive energy to world peace and development," Xi said. On Friday, Xi was named to another term in the ceremonial presidency after breaking with tradition in October and awarding himself a third-

Ukraine, Russia locked in brutal battle in Bakhmut, casualties mount

Ukrainian forces control the west of Bakhmut, while Russia's Wagner mercenary group controls most of the eastern part.

The battle for Bakhmut

Areas of control around the city in eastern Ukraine as of March 12, 2023, 3:00 PM ET.



Source: Institute for the Study of War with American Enterprise Institute's Critical Threats Project; OpenStreetMap.

REUTERS
KYIV, MARCH 13

Ukrainian forces faced relentless Russian attacks on Bakhmut in its eastern Donetsk region on Monday, with both sides reporting mounting enemy casualties as they battled across a small river that bisects the ruined town and now marks the front line.

The situation in the nearly deserted town was difficult, the commander of Ukrainian ground forces said, though adding that his forces were repelling all Russian attempts to capture it.

"All enemy attempts to capture the town are repelled by artillery, tanks, and other firepower," Colonel general Oleksandr Syrskyi was quoted as saying on the Ukraine's Media Military Centre Telegram messaging platform.

Ukrainian forces control the west of Bakhmut, while Russia's Wagner mercenary group controls most of the eastern part, with the Bakhmutka

River that flows through the town marking the front line, British intelligence said in a weekend update.

Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin said on Sunday the situation was "tough, very tough".

"The closer we are to the centre of the city, the harder the fighting ... The Ukrainians throw in endless reserves. But we are advancing and we will be advancing," Prigozhin said in comments released by his press service.

He also said Russian army members helped his troops with ammunition.

"Yesterday, we got 15 truckloads, today we got 12. And I think we will continue to receive them," he said, adding there was no conflict between his fighters and Russian troops.

Prigozhin had previously complained that Russia's top brass was deliberately starving his men of ammunition, an allegation the defence ministry rejected.

Reuters was not able to inde-

pendently verify the report.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late on Sunday his forces had killed more than 1,100 Russian soldiers in the past few days as they fought for control of Bakhmut.

"In less than a week, starting from the 6th March, we managed to kill more than 1,100 enemy soldiers in the Bakhmut sector alone, Russia's irreversible loss," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address.

Russian forces sustained 1,500 "sanitary losses", soldiers wounded badly enough to keep them out of action, he added. Russia's defence ministry said earlier in the day that its forces had killed more than 220 Ukrainian service members over the past 24 hours in the Donetsk region.

Prigozhin said Wagner "will begin to reboot" and start hiring once Bakhmut is captured. Wagner has opened recruitment centres across 42 cities to replenish its ranks.

Neither side gave details of their

UN chief: 'Cold, hard facts' should guide climate policy

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BERLIN, MARCH 13

The head of the United Nations called on Monday for scientists to serve up "cold, hard facts" to push governments into making policies that curb climate change before a key global warming threshold is passed.

His comments came as experts and officials from around the world gathered for a week-long meeting in the Swiss Alpine town of Interlaken to finalise the last of seven reports issued by the global body's panel of top scientists since the Paris climate accord was forged in 2015.

In a video address to delegates, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change "could not come at a more pivotal time."

"Our world is at a crossroads—and

our planet is in the crosshairs," he said. "We are nearing the point of no return; of overshooting the internationally agreed limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius of global warming."

That threshold, agreed in Paris almost eight years ago and measured against average temperatures during pre-industrial times, has become the yardstick for climate scientists who warn of the dangers of an ever hotter planet.

Guterres cited recent IPCC reports showing that while some impacts of global warming are already unavoidable, "it is possible to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees with rapid and deep emissions reductions across all sectors of the global economy."

Some scientists disagree, noting that the rate at which greenhouse gas is being pumped into the atmosphere makes this limit almost impossible to keep to.

US, South Korea hold drills as North launches missiles from submarine

North Korea's increasing nuclear threats, along with concerns about China's ambitions, is pushing the United States to beef up its Asian alliances.



US Army's armoured vehicles prepare to cross the Hantan river at a training field in Yeoncheon, near the border with North Korea on Monday.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SEOUL, MARCH 13

The South Korean and US militaries launched their biggest joint exercises in years on Monday while North Korea said it tested submarine-fired cruise missiles in an apparent protest of the drills it views as an invasion rehearsal.

North Korea's launches on Sunday signal the country likely will conduct provocative weapons testing during the US-South Korean drills that are expected to run for 11 days. Last week, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered his troops to be ready to repel rivals' "frantic war preparation moves."

North Korea's increasing nuclear threats, along with concerns about China's ambitions, is pushing the United States to beef up its Asian alliances. In the past year, North Korea has been steadily expanding its nuclear arsenal, as China and Russia repeatedly blocked US-led efforts to toughen sanctions on the North despite its barrage of banned missile tests.

The South Korean-US drills include a computer simulation and several combined field training exercises.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said that the launches of two cruise missiles from a subma-

rine off its east coast showed a resolve to respond with "overwhelming powerful" force to the intensifying military manoeuvres by the US imperialists and the South Korean puppet forces." KCNA called the missiles "strategic" weapons and said their firings verified the posture of the country's "nuclear war deterrence." This implies that North Korea intends to arm the cruise missiles with nuclear warheads, though it's still unknown if it has overcome the last remaining technological barriers to acquire functioning nuclear-tipped missiles.

It said the missiles flew more than two hours, drawing figure-eight-shaped patterns and demonstrating an ability to hit targets 1,500 kilometres away. The missiles were fired from the 8.24 Yongung ship, KCNA said, referencing a submarine that North Korea used to conduct its first submarine-launched ballistic missile test in 2016.

The reported launch details show Japan, including US military bases in Okinawa, is within striking distance of the cruise missiles if they are fired from the North's eastern waters, said Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul. He added the weapons could reach even the US Pacific territory of Guam if a North Korean submarine can operate farther from its shore.

Sunday's actions were the North's first underwater missile launches since it test-fired a weapon from a silo under an inland reservoir last October. Last May, the country test-launched a short-range ballistic missile from the 8.24 Yongung submarine.

North Korea's command of submarine-launched missile systems would make it harder for adversaries to detect launches in advance and would provide the North with retaliatory attack capability. Experts say it would take years, extensive resources and major technological improvements for the heavily sanctioned nation to build a fleet of several submarines that could travel quietly in seas and reliably execute strikes.

The tests also were the North's first known launches of cruise missiles from a submarine. Its previous underwater launches all involved ballistic missiles. It's also the first time for North Korea to fire multiple missiles from a submarine on a single launch event, observers say.

"At a time when its efforts to build [bigger submarines] have reported little progress due to the sanctions, North Korea wants to show it's still almost developed the types of missiles that can be fired from a submarine," said Moon Keun-sik, a submarine expert who teaches at Kyonggi University in South Korea.

While Bakhmut's strategic value is debatable, Russia sees capturing it as a step towards a major aim of the war—now in its second year—of seizing all of Ukraine's Donbas industrial region. Donetsk and Luhansk regions make up the Donbas.

Ukraine has decided to stay and fight on in the mining town, after initial signs it was planning to withdraw, to grind down Russia's best units ahead of an expected spring offensive by Ukrainian forces.

Analysts expect a Ukrainian counter-offensive to begin in earnest over April-May as the weather improves and more military aid arrives, including heavy Leopard and Challenger tanks.

Western tanks will significantly change war tactics, Leonid Khoda, a decorated Ukrainian tank brigade commander, told Reuters.

"Everyone is waiting, 1st Tank Brigade is waiting too. Not long ago we sent personnel to learn to operate (Leopard) 2A6," said Khoda, who commands the 1st Siversk Tank Brigade which is fighting in the south of Donetsk.

Elsewhere, Russia's air defence shot down four missiles over its Belgorod region bordering Ukraine on Monday, its governor said, adding that one person was injured.

Vyacheslav Gladkov did not say who was behind the attacks but in the past he has accused Ukrainian forces on the other side of the border of similar attacks.

The Russia-controlled Ukrainian city of Donetsk was shelled four times on Sunday, with residential areas and power lines hit and Russian-installed officials blaming Ukraine.

Ukraine almost never claims responsibility for attacks inside Russia and on Russia-controlled territory in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba has urged Germany to speed up supplies of ammunition and to start training Ukrainian pilots on Western fighter jets.

Kuleba made clear he did not expect Western allies to give Ukraine the aircraft it has been asking for any time soon, but said pilots should be ready for when the decision was taken.

Mozambique and Malawi reel from Tropical Storm Freddy, 17 dead

REUTERS
BLANTYRE, MARCH 13

Mozambique and Malawi were on Monday counting the cost of Tropical Storm Freddy, which ripped through southern Africa for the second time in a month over the weekend, leaving a trail of destruction and killing at least 17 people.

Freddy is one of the strongest storms ever recorded in the southern hemisphere and could be the longest-lasting tropical cyclone, according to the World Meteorological Organisation.

It pummelled central Mozambique on Saturday, ripping roofs off buildings and bringing widespread flooding around the port of Quelimane, before moving inland towards Malawi with torrential rains that caused landslides.

Freddy is one of the strongest storms ever recorded in the southern hemisphere.

The full extent of the damage and loss of life in Mozambique in particular is not yet clear, as the power supply and phone signals were cut off in some parts of the affected area.

In Malawi's second-largest city Blantyre, at least 11 people were killed and 16 are missing, police spokesman Peter Kalaya told Reuters, adding that those numbers were likely to rise as so far casualties were only in for Blantyre and the storm had affected 10 districts.

He said rescue teams were looking for people in Chilobwe and Ndirande, two of the worst-affected townships in Blantyre, where it was still raining on Monday and many residents were without power.

At least six people died in Mozambique port Quelimane, which was right in the eye of the storm, authorities announced on the public broadcaster on Monday.

The total number killed by storm Freddy in Mozambique, Malawi and Madagascar since it first made land fall last month is now at least 44.

Nepal one win away from World Cup Qualifier after crushing Papua New Guinea

The Rhinos now need to defeat the United Arab Emirates on Thursday to finish in the all-important third position.



POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Players of Nepal celebrate a wicket of Papua New Guinea during the final Tri-Series of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 at the TU cricket ground in Kirtipur on Monday.

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, MARCH 13

Nepal are one step away from completing their extraordinary march to an automatic berth in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifiers after they crushed Papua New Guinea by nine wickets in the final Tri-Series of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 at the TU cricket ground in Kirtipur on Monday.

The Rhinos now need to defeat the United Arab Emirates in the last match of the Tri-Series on Thursday to leapfrog Namibia and finish in the all-important third position, and progress into the Qualifiers set to take place in Zimbabwe in June and July this year.

A 10th victory in the last 11 matches gives Nepal 38 points from 35 matches, one point adrift of Namibia who currently occupy the third spot.

Sandeep Lamichhane returned match figures of 5-25 to bundle out PNG for a paltry total of 95 in 32 overs after Nepal opted to field first. It was the 22-year-old leg spinner's third One-Day International five-wicket haul.

Lamichhane had taken 6-11 in a 151-run win over PNG at Al Amerat in Oman during an ODI Series on September 10, 2021. His career's first ODI five-wicket haul came during an eight-wicket win over the US in the home League 2 series on February 12,

2020. He also became the second Nepali bowler, after Karan KC, to take five ODI wickets in a single innings.

Lalit Rajbanshi, whose five-for helped Nepal savage the UAE by 177 runs and retain the ODI status on Sunday, added two more wickets (2-13) to his tally, and also impressed on the field with two catches off Lamichhane to rattle the PNG batting order that saw seven batters fail to touch a double-digit score.

Asif Sheikh cracked the fastest ODI half-century by a Nepali cricketer.

Kushal Malla also grabbed two wickets giving away six runs in his three-over spell.

Captain Assad Vala top-scored for PNG with 20 runs.

In the ensuing run-chase, opener Asif Sheikh cracked the fastest ODI half-century by a Nepali cricketer as Nepal reached 100-1 in just 7.4 overs. He marked his milestone fifty with a stylish six off Soper in the last ball.

Sheikh's unbeaten 53 came from his explosive 21-ball knock that included eight boundaries and three sixes.

Sompal Kami previously held the record for fastest ODI half-century for Nepal. Kami had set the mark when he smashed a 50 off 38 balls in the second ODI against the Netherlands at Amstelveen, the Netherlands in August, 2018.

It was also Sheikh's eighth ODI half-century.

Sheikh's opening partner Kushal Bhurtel made 33 runs facing 14 deliveries. He hit four fours and two sixes. Bhurtel was trapped lbw by Chad Soper. Victory against UAE will give Nepal 40 points and a privilege to join South Africa, Sri Lanka, Ireland, hosts Zimbabwe and the Netherlands in the World Cup qualification in Zimbabwe.

Lose and the Rhinos, along with the US, the UAE and PNG, will have to take the extra road through the qualifier playoff—a repechage event to the Global Qualifier—set to take place in March and April this year. The bottom four teams of the League 2 will join Cricket World Cup Challenge League winners Canada and Jersey in the playoff, with the top two teams progressing into the Zimbabwe qualifiers.

US have confirmed their spot in the fifth position, meaning they have retained their ODI status.

UAE are currently placed sixth in the standings while PNG are seventh. They will need to finish above Canada and Jersey in the playoff to keep their ODI status.

SCORECARD

ICC MEN'S CRICKET WORLD CUP LEAGUE 2

NEPAL TRI-SERIES, TU CRICKET GROUND

TOSS: Nepal, elected to field first.

PNG 95 (32/50 overs)

A Vala 20 (31)

S Lamichhane 5-25

Nepal 100-1 (7.4/50 overs)

A Sheikh 53* (21), K Bhurtel 33 (14)

C Soper 1-30

Nepal win by nine wickets.

Player of the match: Sandeep Lamichhane

Playing Wednesday: PNG vs UAE

LEAGUE 2 TABLE

Teams	P	W	L	T	N/R	Pt	NRR
Scotland	36	24	10	0	2	50	0.647
Oman	36	21	13	1	1	44	0.039
Namibia	36	19	16	0	1	39	0.298
Nepal	35	18	15	1	1	38	0.095
US	36	16	17	2	1	35	-0.040
UAE	34	14	17	1	2	31	-0.261
PNG	35	5	29	1	0	11	-0.781

Three Star Club end Satdobato's winning run

Shakya scores late to earn four-time champions a 1-0 win.

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, MARCH 13

Satdobato Youth Club's three-match winning streak in the Martyrs Memorial A-Division League came to a halt after they succumbed to a 1-0 defeat against Three Star Club at the Dasharath Stadium in Tripureswar on Monday.

Aditya Shakya scored late in the second half to give Three Star their second win of the season. The win helped Three Star climb to fourth position with seven points.

Satdobato, who are toe-to-toe with early pacesetters Church Boys United Club, stay in the second position with nine points. League debutants Church Boys can go three points clear if they continue their winning momentum against Sankata on Tuesday.

Four-time league champions Three Star were aggressive from the start and threatened the Satdobato box in the 13th minute when Ashok Khawas's long pass into the box found Laken Limbu—who also had a goal disallowed for offside after the break—but the midfielder's header sailed over the bar.

Three Star's best chance of the first half came through a set piece in the 45th minute. Bikram Lama headed a corner from Anil Maharjan towards the goal but Satdobato goalkeeper Abhishek Baral reacted quickly to ward off the danger.

Three Star continued to attack after the restart as well but Satdobato kept them frustrated until the 89th minute when Shakya broke the deadlock.

Shakya danced his way into the box to meet a corner from Maharjan and struck a venomous half-volley past seven defenders and into the back of the net to lift Three Star's mood.

A-DIVISION LEAGUE RESULTS

Satdobato	0	-	1	Three Star
		Aditya Shakya 89'		
Sherpa	1	-	2	Khumaltar
		Biswash Shrestha 80' Manish Thapa 22' Stephane Binong 65'		

PLAYING TUESDAY

Sankata	14:30	Church Boys	ANFA Complex
Friends	14:30	Jawalakhel	Dasharath Stadium
Police	17:30	Machhindra	Dasharath Stadium

Khumaltar register second win

Earlier, newboys Khumaltar Youth Club defeated Himalayan Sherpa 2-1 to pull off their second win.

Khumaltar went in front in the 21st minute when Manish Thapa ran into a deflection by his teammate Stephane Samir Binong and drilled a low shot past Sherpa goalkeeper Biwash Chaudhary.

Sherpa's Abayomi Oluwaseun Fakunle had a golden opportunity to equalise in the injury time of the first half when he forced his way into the penalty box but Khumaltar goalkeeper denied him with a brilliant save.

Binong doubled Khumaltar's lead in the 65th minute. Binong battled with Sherpa defender Amrit Shrestha to meet a through pass from Amrit Gurung and poked past goalie Chaudhary.

Sherpa's Biswash Shrestha scored from a free kick in the 80th minute to reduce the deficit but Khumaltar held on to hand Sherpa their second loss.

Khumaltar have six points from four matches.

Sherpa have four points.



POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Players of Satdobato Youth Club and Three Star Club (blue) compete during the Martyrs Memorial A-Division League at the Dasharath Stadium on Monday.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Prepare yourself for plenty of movement today, dear Aries. Work closely with your higher power asking for support whenever you feel a bit lost. Positive mantras can also help you rise, so be sure to say reassuring things to yourself!

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

You could become frustrated by the games other people play today, dear taurus. Though it'll be important that you maintain a certain level of optimism. Keep tabs on your screen time as the hours continue to pass, and avoid shopping online.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Try not to let personal issues prevent you from embracing love this morning, dear Gemini. Check in with your sense of clarity taking care to set boundaries and initiate self-care if you're feeling worn out. Avoid approaching conflict from authoritative disposition.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Take a moment to set goals for yourself this morning, dear Cancer. However, it'll be important that you nurture your spirit in the process. Plan on devoting time to solitude making good on any promises you made to eat well or exercise.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

You won't find yourself in a shy mood today, dearest Leo. Don't be afraid to use your roar right now. Avoid gossip or behaviors that don't serve you, even if your friends are caught up in the mix.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Your heart will pull you in many directions today, dear Virgo. Watch out for miscommunications and try not to take the office home with you, recognizing the importance of boundaries between your personal and professional life.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

It would be easy to get carried away by your thoughts and in conversation today, dear Libra. Though you should certainly engage with your social and analytical side, take a moment to organize your mind and agenda.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Dear Scorpio, take a moment to check in with your heart and your significant other, using kindness to diffuse any emotional funk that finds you. Precisely think before you speak your words. Mark the perfect excuse to lay low.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Dear Sagittarius, Watch out for passive-aggressive behaviors within your domestic and romantic relationships, taking care that you're communicating clearly and kindly if you feel there are unspoken issues at play. You'll need to honor the emotions of your companions.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Don't feel guilty about playing the role of wallflower today, dear Capricorn. Be extra mindful of your words. Also, be sure to guard your secrets closely, especially when it comes to people you don't yet fully trust. Rest, and hydrate.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

You may feel a bit distracted by your emotions or home life this morning, dear Aquarius. Do your best to stay grounded as you continue the day. Try to fit in a few quiet moments. Consider taking a break from your screens later tonight.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Check in with yourself throughout the day. You may find it difficult to use your voice but try not to let others push you around. Conflict could arise at home. Try not to get swept up in themes around respect or stubbornness.

ASTROLOGY.COM

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- Wandered freely
 - Social climbers
 - Sum total
 - Get up
 - Gallon fraction
 - Campground initials
 - Beam
 - Kind of conservative
 - Thieve
 - Whitish gems
 - Bullwinkle, for one
 - Made a bad shot in pool
 - Part of an ear
 - Racks up, as debt
 - Overtun
 - Actor — Baldwin
 - "— vincit amor"
 - Qom's country
 - Bill of fare
 - Mont Blanc or Jungfrau
 - Rocket part
 - List detail
 - Was a scout
 - Parisian pal
 - Beauty's companion
 - Go over again
 - Smooths feathers
- DOWN**
- British rule in India
 - Gold, in Peru
 - IV plus III
 - Double curve
 - Road sign
 - Kind of car
 - Zero
 - Breakfast food
 - Wintry cry
 - Pollen-bearer
 - Tire center
 - Uncaged
 - Classify
 - Tampico cash
 - So-so
 - Biscayne Bay city
 - Small harbor
 - Landscape
 - Vine crop
 - Large parrot

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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C	H	A	P	E	L	R	E	W	A	S	H	E	D	
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R	E	S	T	S	L	H	A	P	E	G	L	O	B	

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Substance abuse: Illusion of a warm hug

Any kind of addiction is based on immediate reward or pleasure.

□ MIMAMSHA DHUNGEL
KATHMANDU

Esan Chakraborty, 22, a film studies student based in Kolkata, took his first bottle of beer one day in 2014 during Durga Puja to beat the heat. He drank his first whisky in 2015, and later on, he also smoked a joint. As things progressed, Chakraborty began experimenting with a variety of drugs for the sheer joy of it. But eight years later, he regrets it all.

"Whenever I consumed a substance, I was in the moment. There was nothing that dragged me down—no ego, no worries. I had a way of connecting with people. In order for me to be in sync with the things, alcohol, marijuana, or other narcotics served as catalysts," claims Chakraborty.

Substance abuse is common among young people all over the world. At parties, and get-togethers, young people use alcohol, cigarettes, and sometimes even marijuana and other hard drugs might even make it to the table. Be it curiosity or peer pressure, young people are enticed into trying addicting substances, and often they have no idea of the dangers the addiction can cause.

Samrat Bastola, 22, is currently pursuing a Computer Science degree in the United States. "When I was 13, I was just curious and tried vodka. As I grew older, I began drinking heavily. It was all to get away from what was going on at the time: academics, family problems, and stress," Bastola adds that he was a serial procrastinator and substances helped him avoid real-life responsibilities.

The cause

According to Dr Suman Adhikari, consulting neuropsychiatrist at Manashastra Counselling and Research Centre, substance abuse is closely linked with mental health problems, especially among today's youth.

Adhikari adds that technological advancement has significantly impacted human relationships today. Although social media has reached all corners of Nepal and though there has been an

increase in mental health literacy, it isn't enough.

"Human emotions and real-life relationships are being replaced by virtual interactions," says Adhikari. Many families have transitioned to nuclear families, and people no longer have time for one another. When both parents work, a child may not receive enough love, care, and attention. This is where internet exposure comes to play.

"Imitation and modelling are serious issues. When you see an influencer living a lavish lifestyle and realise you can't have it which may lead to depressive episodes. To overcome this sadness, one may surrender to substances because they provide instant relief and act as an escape into the life you always wanted," Adhikari explains.

People begin by using substances such as alcohol, marijuana, or cigarettes. These are all gateway drugs. "There is an incorrect belief that marijuana acts as a poppy to the soul. One may believe it improves concentration and helps you focus on your studies. It's easy to mistake it for a recreational drug," Adhikari says.

Cannabis is legal in some countries where it is used to treat eating disorder, AIDS, and chronic cancer, among others. However, people abuse drugs because they are unaware of the underlying dangers. The immediate high leads them to believe that these substances are euphoric paradise.

Twenty-year-old Sapana Khatri is a media student based in Kathmandu. She has similar experiences with substance abuse. "I tried cannabis infused brownies for the first time just for the hype. I felt a little anxious, but overall, I liked the feeling. I could really concentrate. I could escape my usual overthinking and distractions," says Khatri, adding that as she started using cannabis substances more and more, it started taking a toll on her body. She started getting more anxious and realised that this form of escape was not worth it.

According to Adhikari, drugs and alcohol can cause dopamine levels in your brain to rise. You experience immediate happiness. However, the changes in your

brain caused by the use of these substances gradually develop into a physical and psychological dependence. "A regular cannabis may progress to cocaine, morphine, heroin, brown sugar, and other injectables," says Adhikari.

The escapism

Substance abuse can occur for a variety of reasons. Aashma Pokharel, a 20-year-old student from Itahari, recalls a specific incident with her distant relative. The relative lived with his grandparents because both of his parents had gone abroad. He wasn't attached to his family and wouldn't even answer the phone when his parents tried desperately. "He found solace in weed (another name for cannabis) and other drugs. He often described to me the feeling as if he was on cloud nine. The substance provided him with an escape from his misery. I think he used weed to fill the void left by his parents' absence," says Pokharel.

"I think the fact that marijuana is illegal in Nepal is what attracts more people to it. People who have tried it say it is the best feeling ever," says Shristi Niroula, an undergraduate Chemistry student based in Kathmandu. "After drinking alcohol, the introverted people I know open up. A

cigarette break is an effective socialisation technique that has helped my shy friends tremendously. I haven't been peer-pressured yet, but I might try it once to escape the daily conundrum."

Priya Aslami, 21, from Butwal, mirrors Niroula's sentiments. She says that she started smoking because her friends asked her to. Aslami describes the first time she smoked a joint as feeling out of this world. Aslami believes that young people like her might have a lot of stress that people do not anticipate. "Many of us are uncertain about their future. There are bad relationships and family problems. But the most common stress is career and life goals," Aslami adds.

The way out

"For me, substances were my coping mechanism. They helped me get out of my head because my heart and mind were always in conflict. When I did not get the love I craved, I went for the three seconds of nothingness—the illusion of a warm hug," says Chakraborty.

Adhikari says that someone's mental health issues have bio-psycho-social causes. It is influenced by genetics and heredity. One is influenced by their social strata, caste, financial status, and academ-

ic background. The way you cope is the psychological facet.

Tara Upreti, 21, also has bad days like many of her peers. She is an aspiring make-up artist and studies mass communication. Instead of succumbing to the illusions and arbitrariness caused by substances, she thinks it's important to find other positive ways to cope. "I also have an existential crisis on random days. I don't understand the purpose of doing anything, but I have stopped myself from trying substances," Upreti says.

"The pattern of any addiction is one of immediate reward or pleasure. You want that instant gratification and dopamine rush," says Prakriti Koirala, who has a Master's degree in clinical psychology. According to her, the trend of escapism through substances is widespread because other coping mechanisms require time and effort. "Reading, exercising and meditating, for example, increase dopamine levels. But youths are gravitating towards using weed or alcohol to escape their sadness than engage in these activities. It is necessary to comprehend why these patterns persist," she says.

Some of the names have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals.

How to tell parents that you need help

Opening up may be difficult at first, but it can lead to a happier and healthier life in the long run.



SHUTTERSTOCK

□ DRISTY MOKTAN

I don't know how my parents will react. My parents will be disappointed. My parents already have enough to worry about.

There are some common phrases we hear from someone who is contemplating sharing their struggles with their parents. Even if a child has a strong bond with their parents, it's common for them to hesitate opening up about their challenges.

Our society still views discussions about mental health as taboo, and the fact that many families don't make it a routine to have such discussions makes children even more reluctant to talk about their issues. They might find it hard to choose the correct words to share how they feel. Teenagers, in particular, struggle with communicating about their anxiety or depression, not because they don't believe they need support but rather because they don't know how to do it.

Dealing with mental health issues is already difficult enough, but it takes a whole lot of courage to even consider discussing it with someone. Challenges with our mental health can often prevent us from making a choice to talk about it. If we struggle with anxiety, intrusive thoughts may make us feel hopeless. In the case of depression, it may be tough to describe how terrible each day is for us. Most of us probably find the idea of having a mental health conversation to be somewhat terrifying, but keep in mind that you are not alone.

Parents are always concerned about providing the best for their children. In times of difficulty, they always want to guide and support us. Our parents may not inquire about our emotions or sentiments, but they are always concerned about our mental well-being. There is a pretty good probability that our parents may have already noticed it if we have not been feeling well. But our parents expect us to approach them first, so sharing it may help them understand what is going on. While we worry that our parents won't handle it well, they frequently do it better than

we anticipate.

Talking to our parents about our mental health struggles might be an overwhelming process, but we have to understand that doing so is a necessary first step in obtaining the support and assistance we require. It may be difficult at first, but it can lead to a happier, healthier life in the long run. It is also absolutely essential to remember that our parents care about us and want to support us.



— MENTAL HEALTH —

Even if children have a strong bond with their parents, they could hesitate to open up about their challenges.

It is very important for us to choose the right time and place to talk so that our parents can give us their full attention without any distractions. Maintaining direct eye contact while having conversations about our struggles might be difficult, so we can do it over some light activities such as taking a walk or playing board games. Activities like these can break the tension and allow both parties to take time and respond. In this way, tackling such difficult topics feels more manageable.

We have to always choose to be honest about how we are feeling. Explaining what we are struggling with is important. Sometimes, we might not know what we are going through ourselves. In such cases, we should still take our time with it and explain. For

instance, if you are feeling low, then say something like, "I don't know how to describe it properly, but I don't feel my best these days. I don't like to hang out with my friends and have no energy to do anything. I think I might need help." Also, when talking about our mental health struggles, we always have to use "I" statements to explain how we feel. For example, say, "I am feeling depressed" instead of "You are making me depressed."

We have to let our parents know what kind of support we need from them. When our parents learn about our challenges, they may want to help us right away. But we have to be clear about what kind of support we are looking for. This could either be listening to us or helping us find a therapist.

When speaking to our parents, we must always be ready for a variety of responses, and it's also crucial to keep in mind that even they may want some time to process the information. We have to be ready to answer a lot of questions. We have to make sure to provide them with relevant details, such as our difficulties with eating, sleeping, socialising, and experiencing headaches or stomach aches. Also, the conversation may not go as expected the first time, in such cases, we should attempt speaking to them again when they are ready.

There is a possibility that we could feel that our parents don't really understand us even after communicating with them. But don't lose hope. It's possible that our parents won't always see the severity of the situation right away. We can try speaking to another trusted adult, or we can always think about getting professional assistance from a therapist or counsellor. They can help us work through our emotions and develop strategies to talk to our parents.

Remember, asking for help is a sign of strength and not weakness. There are people who will always love us and want to support us, all we have to do is ask.

Moktan is a psychosocial counsellor. She works at Happy Minds, a mental health and well-being platform.

India enthuses over Oscars

>> Continued from page 1

"#NaatuNaatu on top of the world!!!" cheered Chiranjeevi, a prominent Telugu film actor and former politician, on Twitter.

"Exceptional! The popularity of 'Naatu Naatu' is global," tweeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He also congratulated the female duo behind "The Elephant Whisperers," director Kartiki Gonsalves and producer Guneet Monga, for highlighting the "importance of sustainable development and living in harmony with nature."

Licypriya Kangujam, a young climate activist in India, called the documentary win a proud moment for every environmentalist.

But the hashtags Naatu Naatu and RRR dominated social media feeds on Monday.

"Naatu Naatu is an emotion across the globe," Charan posted on Twitter as he congratulated the "RRR" team. "This award belongs to every Indian actor, technician and filmgoer," he wrote.

The song was shot in August 2021 in front of Ukraine's Mariinskyi Palace, the official residence of the president in Kyiv, months before Russia invaded the country. The crew took 15 days to shoot the music video, which featured around 50 dancers and up to 400 extras.

Backstage at the awards ceremony, Keeravani was emotional about the win. "For the world, particularly the Western world, folks are more on India and Asian music. It's just long due. I feel very happy to open doors and the world to embrace my culture," he said.

Jubilant as 'Pride of Malaysia' Yeoh wins best actress



AP/RSS

KUALA LUMPUR: Family and friends of Malaysia's Michelle Yeoh responded with screams, jubilation and pride on Monday at her winning the Academy Award for best lead actress, Asia's first ever winner in the category.

There were ecstatic roars and fist-pumps as her triumph was announced at an Oscars viewing party in Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur, with all eyes on her surprised and delighted mother, Janet Yeoh.

"She's a very hardworking girl, you know. Everybody knows it," she told a news conference afterwards, in front of a poster of her daughter that said "Pride of Malaysia".

Yeoh, 60, won the award for her portrayal of a Chinese American laundromat owner Evelyn Wang, dealing with family turmoil in the science-fiction kung fu comedy "Everything Everywhere All at Once".

It was Yeoh's first Oscar nomination and she had been widely regarded as the front-runner.

Yeoh made her Hollywood breakthrough when she was cast as the first ethnic Chinese Bond girl in 1997's "Tomorrow Never Dies" opposite Pierce Brosnan. She has also starred in martial arts movie "Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon," the 2005 period drama "Memoirs of a Geisha" and the 2018 romantic comedy "Crazy Rich Asians". (REUTERS)

Ke Huy Quan makes an inspiring Hollywood comeback

LOS ANGELES: Ke Huy Quan had mostly disappeared from Hollywood for over two decades, dispirited by the lack of on-camera work for Asian Americans. He returned in a big way, winning the supporting actor Oscar to cap an inspiring comeback story.

Quan accepted the trophy on Sunday night for his role in "Everything Everywhere All at Once," becoming just the second Asian winner ever in the supporting actor category, joining Haing S. Ngor for "The Killing Fields" in 1984.

As his name was announced, Quan rose and hugged co-stars Michelle Yeoh and Jamie Lee Curtis, who won supporting actress honours after him. He clasped his hands to his mouth.

"My mom is 84 years old and she's at home watching," Quan said. "Mom, I just won an Oscar!"

An emotional Quan kissed his statue repeatedly and sniffled into the microphone on stage after receiving a standing ovation. Presenter Ariana DeBose was in tears.

"My journey started on a boat. I spent a year in a refugee camp and somehow I ended up here on Hollywood's biggest stage," he said. "They say stories like this only happen in the movies. I can't believe this is happening to me. This is the American dream." (AP)



AP/RSS