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TODAY

NATIONAL

Many residents of Lapchi, a mountain village near the Nepal-China border in Dolakha, have left their homes after the prolonged Tibet border closure deprived them of income and trading opportunities. Pg 2

While a group of youths has been demonstrating in the Capital for a week now protesting the crackdown on street vending, experts say the authorities should give priority to management over displacement. Pg 3

OPINION

The school education bill, which is in the midst of a dispute, seems to devolve authority to local governments, but without adequately manning and enabling them to exercise this power rationally and responsibly, writes Achyut Wagle. Pg 4

MONEY

As oil-less Nepal makes a sharp turn towards electric vehicles, neighbouring auto giants India and China have lunged forward to establish e-vehicle assembly plants in the Himalayan republic. Pg 5

WORLD

The Taliban are creating a large-scale camera surveillance network for Afghan cities that could involve imposing a plan crafted by the Americans before their 2021 pullout. Pg 6

SPORTS

Nepali boxer Rabin Thapa defeated Dio Koebanu of Indonesia 4-1 in the men's 46-51kg preliminary round of 32 to advance into the second round at the Asian Games 2022 in Hangzhou, China. Pg 7



Prashant Laksam (8) celebrates after scoring Nepal's first goal against the Maldives during the SAFF U-19 Championship 2023 at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu on Monday. Nepal won 4-1 to set up semi-final clash against India on Wednesday.

Nepal, China sign 12 agreements, but none under BRI

Nepali embassy says Dahal and his Chinese counterpart 'comprehensively' reviewed the state of bilateral relations.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, SEPT 25

As Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal wrapped up his political and official engagements in China during his week-long visit, the two countries on Monday signed a dozen agreements and memorandums of understanding. But none of the agreements involved Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects. The prime minister was expected to iron out key differences over expediting BRI projects, cross border energy trade and implementation of past agreements and accords, among others, as he had publicly committed to before leaving for China. But these issues were noticeably absent in the agreements signed on Monday.

The agreements and memorandums of understanding were signed following delegation-level talks between Dahal and his Chinese counterpart, Li Qiang.

Some expectations raised by the prime minister himself and some commitments he made in Parliament and during his public speeches will be reflected in a joint communiqué, a Nepali official told the Post from Beijing.

"We have made some good understandings and the visit has set the tone for carrying forward some good projects," the official said.

During the talks, the two prime ministers 'comprehensively' reviewed the state of

friendly bilateral relations and expressed satisfaction at the close and cordial relations between the two countries, said a statement issued by the Nepali Embassy in Beijing.

The two sides exchanged views strengthening and consolidating bilateral ties, with an emphasis on enhancing cooperation on economy, trade, and people-to-people contacts.

But there is no statement from the Chinese side regarding the meetings and understandings signed on Monday.

Former diplomats and experts say the deals fall short of Nepal's expectations.

"Some more understandings have been reached including finalisation of Nepal-China Electric Power Cooperation Plan, joint inspection of Nepal-China boundary, early finalisation of the implementation plan of the Belt and Road, one of a most hyped agenda item of the visit, joint development of an agriculture industrial demonstration park, among other things. These will be included in the joint communiqué," said the official.

Dahal is currently visiting China at the invitation of Chinese Premier Li Qiang.

>> Continued on page 2

Vegetables with excessive amounts of pesticide residue destroyed

Officials had suspended pesticide testing in vegetables for around two months due to lack of funding.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, SEPT 25

Over the past week, authorities have destroyed vegetables that were found to have contained an excessive amount of hazardous pesticides. The destroyed vegetables include around 100 kg of tomato, 50 kg of cauliflower and a huge quantity of *pakauchey saag*, a type of Chinese cabbage from the mustard family. Several other green vegetables that exceeded the upper limit of pesticide residue were seized and sent to quarantine, according to the Central Agriculture Laboratory under the Department of Agriculture. Pakuchey saag was destroyed in Kathmandu, cauliflower in Nepalgunj of Banke and tomato in Kailali, said Srijana Shrestha, plant protection officer at the Central Agriculture Laboratory. "Vegetables that were seized for quarantine were released after the pesticide residue in them declined," Shrestha said.

Farmers use pesticides to protect crops from insects, weeds, fungi and other pests. According to the WHO, pesticides can be potentially toxic to humans and can have both acute and chronic health effects depending on the quantity and ways in which a person is exposed to them.

Officials say the use of hazardous pesticides, herbicides, and fertilisers has been on the rise in Nepal in recent years, officials say.

The Department of Agriculture carries out tests for organophosphate and carbamate pesticides in fruits and

vegetables on a regular basis from various labs across the country.

There are seven labs that run rapid bioassays of pesticide residue in Nepal—one each in five provinces, Koshi, Madhesh, Bagmati, Gandaki and Sudurpashchim, and two in Lumbini Province.

According to Shrestha, testing of pesticides was halted from July 29 to September 15 due to a lack of budget and testing kits.

Other green vegetables that exceeded pesticide limits were seized and sent to quarantine.

Pesticides are commonly used to kill insects, fungi, weeds and diseases that damage plants and crops. Data shows the import of various pesticides—including insecticides, fungicides, bactericides, herbicides, rodenticides, and bio-pesticides—has been growing every year in Nepal. In the fiscal year 2021-22, the country imported over 1135 tonnes of pesticides. There are 17,298 pesticide retailers and 330 pesticide importers in the country.

Doctors say long-term consumption of pesticides-laden vegetables and fruits can cause renal failure, heart and lung diseases, mental health problems and cancer. It may also affect pregnant women and harm foetuses.

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Elderly beneficiaries of social security allowance rose by 300,000 last fiscal

Mounting cost raises concern about scheme's sustainability.



Elderly men and women wait outside a bank in Bajura to collect social security allowance.

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU, SEPT 25

Elderly beneficiaries of social security schemes increased by nearly 300,000 in the last fiscal year 2022-23 putting more pressure on the national treasury as the government lowered the eligibility age to receive allowance by

two years. The previous Sher Bahadur Deubal government had lowered the eligibility age for elderly to 68 years from 70 years.

As a result, the number of beneficiaries in this category increased by 295,281 in the last fiscal year 2022-23, according to the Department of

National ID and Civil Registration.

The department said that the number of beneficiaries in this category increased to 1,607,296 by the end of last fiscal 2022-23 from 1,312,015 in the previous fiscal 2021-22. The number of overall beneficiaries increased to 3.8 million in the last fiscal year from 3.57 million in the previous fiscal.

As a result, the budget allocated for social security allowance in the last fiscal year proved inadequate. The department said the finance ministry injected extra Rs4.68 billion on the top initially allocated Rs105.70 billion, the department said.

"The main reason behind the rise in beneficiaries in the last fiscal year is the lowering of eligibility age to receive elderly allowance," said Nawaraj Jaishi, information officer at the department. "Along with the rise in beneficiaries, the government's spending on social security also grew."

In recent years, the government's spending on social security allowance has been rising rapidly, raising concerns about the sustainability of the scheme.

"There is a race to increase the allowance and lower eligibility criteria," said Jaishi.

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DISTRICT DIGEST

Man held with 32 kg hashish
PARSA: Police arrested a 34-year-old man in possession of 32 kg hashish from Gamhariya of Jirabhawani Rural Municipality-1, Parsa, on Monday. A joint team of the Narcotics Control Bureau in Birgunj and the District Police Office in Parsa detained Kshetra Bahadur Shrestha of Thori Rural Municipality-4 with the drugs during a security check. The suspect was heading for Birgunj from Subarnapur on a motorcycle. Detailed investigation is underway into the case, said police.

Two killed in Salyan jeep crash
SALYAN: Two people died on the spot and one was seriously injured when a jeep carrying vegetables met with an accident in Salyan district on Monday morning. According to the police, the jeep heading for Dang from Rolpa veered off the road and fell some 300 metres below at Setapaira near Kapurkot Rural Municipality-3 along the Rapti Highway at around 6:30am. Police identified the deceased as jeep driver Bhakta Bahadur Gharti, 25, and owner Ganesh Budha, 50, from Tulsipur Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang.

Two killed in separate landslides
GULMI/MYAGDI: A 17-year-old worker died and two others were injured in a landslide that occurred in an under-construction house in Bhdgaun in ward 3 of Resunga Municipality in Gulmi, on Monday. According to Superintendent of Police Nabin Kishore Pradhan of the District Police Office, Gulmi, the injured have survived with minor injuries. Similarly, a 50-year-old man, a resident of Phulwang in ward 2 of Malika Rural Municipality was buried under landslide debris along the bank of the local Jemkhola stream on Monday morning. According to Beg Prasad Garbuja, chairman of Malika Rural Municipality, the body of the deceased was recovered an hour later.

Dolakha village adjoining Tibet is emptying due to prolonged border closure

Residents say the government has not taken diplomatic initiative to reopen the border so that they could ply traditional trade.

KEDAR SHIWAKOTI
 DOLAKHA, SEPT 25

Residents of Dolakha's Lapchi village in Ward 1 of Bigu Rural Municipality near the Nepal-China border have started leaving the village for a lack of income and trade due to the border closure.

The Nepal-China border was closed during the Covid pandemic and since then despite several requests from the locals, the authorities have not taken necessary initiatives to reopen it. The locals blame the lack of diplomatic initiative from the Nepal government to reopen the border for trade and commerce for the locals.

Most households in Lapchi are engaged in the pastoral home-grown industry producing dairy products. They would take dairy products like ghee, curd and hard cheese produced from yak milk to the market across the border in Tibet. Since the border closure, Lapchi locals have not been able to sell their products, and this has resulted in a drastic reduction in their income.

The Chinese government had closed the border after the 2015 earthquake, but it was opened for residents of bordering villages. The border was closed again in 2019.

According to Temba Sherpa, a local of Lapchi, some borders connecting Nepal and China have been open to talks, but there has been no initiative to open the Lapchi border.

The local residents have been forced to walk for two days to reach Lamabagar in Bigu-1 to buy daily consumables which they would otherwise buy in the Tibetan market across the border. "Now we have to pay Rs140 per kg of goods we transport to the vil-



The Lapchi village near the Nepal-Tibet border pictured a few weeks ago. Many residents have left the village after they were unable to ply their traditional trade following the closure of the border three years ago. The Nepal-China border, which was closed at the start of the Covid pandemic four years ago, has yet to reopen.

lage," said Sherpa. "The nearest Nepali market area is two days walk from our village whereas the Tibetan market is only a stone's throw away.

Before the border was sealed, we could go to the Tibetan market to buy essentials and return the same day." The locals have been bearing addi-

tional transportation costs just to bring essential goods back to the village.

"The locals of Lapchi are also

dependent on China for grazing their yaks. Earlier, the locals used to graze their cattle on the Chinese land straddling the border area and used to pay 750 grams of ghee, per yak per year, to the Chinese government for using the grasslands to graze," said Sherpa. "But these days if the Chinese authorities find even one stray yak across the border, they chase it away."

According to Karma Baiser Sherpa, another local, they have not been able to sell yak ghee in the Tibetan market. A kilo of ghee would fetch Rs1,300, but without a buyer, the locals have more than 6,000 kg of ghee stored.

The village earlier had 48 households with more than 500 yaks. But now only 12 to 13 families remain and others have moved to cities or abroad, says Karma.

"There were around 150 of us in the village. Now only some of the houses are occupied. Most people left the village also leaving behind their traditional trade," said Karma.

Chief District Officer of Dolakha, Komal Prasad Dhamala, said that opening and closing borders are governed by international laws; therefore, the local government can do very little to provide respite to the locals despite their repeated requests.

"We have requested the government agencies including the Prime Minister's Office to reopen the Lapchi border. But there has been no response," said Dhamala. "If this issue is not resolved then the village will cease to exist. The Nepal government must talk to the Chinese government to reopen the border so that the locals can continue their trade and earn their livelihoods."

Dahal's China trip limited to formality, experts say



Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal (left) with his Chinese counterpart Li Qiang.

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He held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Saturday in Hangzhou, on the margins of the 19th Asian Games.

After the delegation level talks between Dahal and Li in the Great Hall of the People, 12 agreements including MoUs were signed, according to the Nepali side.

Those agreements signed on Monday include an MoU on cooperation between China's National Development and Reform Commission and Nepal's National Planning Commission, and another on enhancing cooperation on the digital economy. Yet another MoU is on cooperation between China's National Development and Reform Commission and Nepal's Ministry of Forestry and Environment for green and low carbon development. There are also agreements on cooperation for the development of agriculture, livestock and fisheries, and formation of a

joint technical working group to review and amend the China Nepal Trade and Payment Agreement signed in 1981.

Additionally, the two sides also signed a Protocol of Phytosanitary Requirements for Export of Plant-derived Medicinal Materials for Chinese Medicine from Nepal. An agreement has also been reached between the Chinese Department of Press and Publication and the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation to translate and publish classical texts.

Likewise, an MoU on Production and Living Materials for the Northern Hilly Region of Nepal signed between Nepal and China six years ago, was exchanged between the Nepali and Chinese officials.

Similarly, Nepal's Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Science and Technology of China have agreed to cooperate in the fields of science, technology

and innovation. Also, an MoU was signed on disaster materials, human resources, and construction of the Hilsa-Simkot road.

Both sides also reached an agreement on the construction of Nepal-China Power Grid Interconnection Project (Chimile-Kerung) which is a 220 kV cross-border transmission line and will be built through Chinese grant.

Officials said a joint communiqué that is still being discussed between the Nepali and Chinese sides will shed further light on all the agreements reached during the visit.

"I see nothing more than formality," said Mahendra Bahadur Pandey, former Nepali Ambassador to China. "This shows how hollow we are and that we have no idea about how to deal with a great power like China."

"I don't see any plan, vision or strategy on how to present ourselves to the Chinese side. The agreements reached today are no more than formalities enacted during the visit of the executive head of a close neighbour to another. We did not prepare enough for the visit. What are the crucial areas we can cooperate on with China? How do we execute past agreements?" said Pandey.

"Nepal is clearly having a tough time balancing its geopolitical interests," said Ganesh Adhikari, former chief of the National Intelligence Department. "The country is in a geopolitical quagmire as it struggles to maintain a non-aligned foreign policy in line with the constitution."

Nepal must have a strong non-aligned foreign policy, not only in theory, but also in practice in order to survive in the changing world order, Adhikari added.

"If we don't strengthen our diplomatic capability and apparatus, no one is going to trust us. Lack of diplomatic capacity and non-adherence to non-alignment are the major failings of Nepal's international relations. Our leaders should understand that we cannot make everyone happy. This kind of confusion and dilemma are clearly reflected in Nepal's foreign policy conduct, which is evident in this visit," said Adhikari.

Government not in a position to cut social security expense

>> Continued from page 1

"This has contributed to a rise in the number of beneficiaries leading to increased public spending in the sector."

The then KP Sharma Oli government increased all social security allowances by 33 percent, including the elderly allowance to Rs4,000 per month from Rs3,000 per month in fiscal year 2021-22.

The Sher Bahadur Deuba-led coalition government, which came to power in July, 2021, decided to lower the eligibility age to get elderly allowance, despite concerns raised by experts.

As a result, the government's expenses on social security, based on cash transfers, have been rising. In the fiscal year 2020-21, the government spent Rs68.61 billion on social security allowances, according to the Department of National ID and Civil Registration.

The government's spending increased to Rs95.97 billion in fiscal 2021-22. For the current fiscal year 2023-24, the government has allocated Rs109.71 billion to distribute social security allowance, according to the Finance Ministry.

Besides direct cash transfers, the government spends heavily on various other social security schemes, including medical insurances and subsidies, which also burden the state coffers.

According to a World Bank report, the overall public spending on social protection rose rapidly in Nepal for a decade—from fiscal year 2010-11 to fiscal 2019-20. According to the report, the government's spending on overall social protection was Rs26 billion in fiscal year 2010-11, which surged to Rs189 billion in fiscal 2019-20.

Despite the rising cost of social security, the government is not in a position to reduce it. "We have to increase spending in the sector to implement the rights provisioned in

the constitution," said Nara Bahadur Thapa, former executive director of Nepal Rastra Bank. "Even to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, we have to invest in social security."

The social security scheme was launched in 1994-95 by the government led by Manmohan Adhikari, a UML leader. The scope of the scheme, which started by providing Rs100 a month to the elderly, was gradually expanded to include single women and people with disabilities in 1996-97.

Members of communities on the verge of extinction and disabled persons were also added to the list in 2008-09. Dalit children made it to the list in 2010-11, while widows were included in 2011-12.

Dalits from the Karnali region were added in 2016-17 and children from 15 districts with low human development index values were made beneficiaries of cash transfers in 2018-19. The number of such districts has gone up to 26 till fiscal 2021-22.

The government still needs to put a number of groups on the list of beneficiaries as per the Social Security Act—2018.

For instance, indigent people (persons who earn less than what is specified by the government in a notice published in the Nepal Gazette) and helpless women legally separated from their husbands are yet to be enlisted as beneficiaries despite legal provisions. Currently, only divorced women aged 60 years and above are getting social security allowance.

Thapa said growing recurrent expenses including in social security has forced the government to compromise on capital spending as it cannot reduce recurrent budget. "As the government's revenue collection has been disappointing amid sluggish economic activities, all tiers of the governments—central, provincial and local—will be forced to cut capital spending," said Thapa.

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Devotees chant bhajans at Krishna Mandir in Patan, Lalitpur, recently.

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

Relief quota teachers continue Kathmandu-centric protest

They refuse to accept the deal between government and teachers' federation.



POST PHOTO

POST REPORT KATHMANDU, SEPT 25

Dissatisfied with the six-point agreement between the government and the Nepal Teachers' Federation, teachers recruited under relief quota continued the Kathmandu-centric protest on Monday too.

Like in previous days, they marched from Maitighar Mandala to New Baneshwar demanding the government address their demands.

Although representatives from the government and the federation signed the agreement on Friday, the Relief Quota Teachers' Association has refused to accept the deal and continued the agitation. They have termed the agreement a betrayal for them.

Relief quota teachers are those employed on a contractual basis by local units to fulfil the shortage of teachers at community schools. There are around 40,000 such teachers across the country.

As per the agreement, 75 percent of the seats of the temporary and relief quota will be fulfilled through internal competitions for permanent posting. The relief quota teachers, however, demand that all the seats be fulfilled only through internal competitions or they should be allowed to continue teaching until their retirement age of 60.

Calls grow for regulating street vending amid ban and protests

It is not wrong to take action against irregularity, but it should be done with proper planning and study, says urban planner Suman Meher Shrestha.

POST REPORT KATHMANDU, SEPT 25

A group of youths have been staging a demonstration in the Capital for a week now protesting against the ban on street vending. They have been asking Kathmandu Metropolitan City's mayor, Balen Shah, to immediately address the issue.

The activists have been staging stand-in protests in front of the Rastriya Sabhagriha demanding the proper management of the footpath businesses, without disrupting the overall transportation of the city. Youth activist Ishan Shakya known as 'Iih' and other protesters have been demonstrating by standing continuously for hours in front of the Rastriya Sabhagriha.

While writing on social media last Tuesday when launching the stand-in protest, Iih said they want the metropolitan city to provide alternative locations and schedules so that they could continue their business. "We are calling for a compassionate, accountable and proactive governance."

"We are not against anyone. We are just seeking answers from the local government. All we are doing is demanding accountability," Iih said on Tuesday.

The issue has been in the debate since the start of this year.

On July 1 last year, a video on Twitter (now known as X) went viral that showed the Kathmandu municipal police forcibly seizing a corn cart from a vendor couple at Baluwatar. Since then, numerous such cases have unfolded on Kathmandu's streets.

Then, the KMC in January this year published a notice, strictly prohibiting street vending using carts and those who sell vegetables, fruits and other items on bicycles on the roads and footpaths. The KMC notice stated that doing such business on the roadside is illegal and the City will book law violators, based on Local Government Governance Act, 2074 BS (2017) and Solid Waste Management Act, 2068 (2011).

As the ban and continuous crackdown on street vending continues, various sections of society have expressed their solidarity with the street vendors.

Nepali Congress General Secretary Gagan Thapa wrote on social media on



POST PHOTO: SANJOG MANANDHAR

Youth activists pictured during their stand-in protest in front of Rastriya Sabhagriha in Kathmandu. They demand the City authority manage respectable alternatives for street vendors.

Sunday that the Kathmandu Metropolitan City should soon sit for talks with the activists, including Iih.

"I have been trying to meet the Kathmandu mayor, Balen Shah, and discuss about activist Iih among others who have been staging a standing

As ban and crackdown on street vending continues, many have expressed their solidarity with the street vendors.

protest that is already into its sixth day," wrote Thapa. "We should listen to everyone's voice in democracy and if any issues have been raised in a peaceful manner, we must heed them more attentively."

An urban planning expert, Suman Meher Shrestha, said the informal sector including street food, street vendors, and vegetable sales plays a crucial role in Nepal's urban economy. "The

Metropolitan city should give priority to management over displacement. It is not wrong to take action against irregularity but it should be done with proper planning and study."

According to Shrestha, the city must listen to the demands and protests and come up with the best solution.

Street-vending is also a shared concern for the city's middle and lower middle class families, as streets are where they find affordable vegetables, fruits, groceries, clothes, second hand books, and various other goods for their daily needs.

Shrestha stresses the need for maintaining official records and gathering formal statistics on street vendors and the informal sector, so that informed decisions could be taken to manage these sectors. "All big cities in the world have embraced the informal sector. Actually, Nepal's failure to formalise the informal sector has resulted in a significant loss of potential revenue as well."

Koshi Chief Minister Karki expands Cabinet

Hikmat Karki has inducted two ministers and as many ministers of state into his Cabinet.

DEO NARAYAN SAH MORANG, SEPT 25

Koshi Province Chief Minister Hikmat Karki on Monday expanded his Cabinet. Karki, who was appointed the province chief per the Supreme Court's September 7 verdict, has inducted two ministers and as many state ministers into his Cabinet.

Lila Ballav Adhikari has been appointed the Minister for Internal Affairs and Law, while Budhhi Kumar Rajbhandari has been assigned the portfolio of the Drinking Water, Irrigation, and Energy Ministry.

Likewise, Ram Prasad Mehta has been appointed the state minister for Industry, Agriculture, and Cooperatives, and Niran Rao the state minister for Finance and Planning.

Adhikari and Rajbhandari were administered the oath of office and secrecy by Province Head Parshuram Khapung while state ministers

Mehta and Rai were sworn-in by Karki. With the new appointments, the Koshi Province Cabinet now has nine members.

Previously, Til Kumar Menyangbo, Ekraj Karki and Panch Karna Rai of the UML were appointed ministers on September 8.

On September 7, the Supreme Court ordered Koshi's Provincial Head to appoint CPN-UML's provincial assembly leader Karki the chief minister of the province, declaring the July 27 vote of confidence secured by Nepali Congress's Uddhav Thapa as unconstitutional.

The top court had issued the mandamus order to appoint Karki as chief minister within 48 hours as per Article 168(3) that paves the way for forming a government led by the leader of the largest party in the assembly. With 40 seats in the 93-member assembly, the UML is the largest party in the province.

After the November 20 elections last year, Karki assumed office as the province chief on January 8 but lost the position after failing the floor test on June 30.



Criminal groups from China spreading out to South-east Asia, including Singapore, experts say

Chinese law enforcement agencies have recently stepped up cooperation with their South-east Asian counterparts to tackle transnational crime.

CHRISTINE TAN SINGAPORE, SEPT 25

Criminal syndicates from China have been spreading their tentacles across the Asia-Pacific region, setting up bases in countries like the Philippines, Australia and Singapore to launder their ill-gotten gains.

In February 2023, police in Australia arrested nine Chinese nationals in a series of raids across Sydney. The gang in Australia is said to have operated a shadow banking system for criminal groups.

Among those arrested was Steven Xin, the Australia-based business partner of Macau gambling kingpin Alvin Chau, who was jailed in China for 18 years in January for illegal gaming and other crimes.

Mr Jason Tower, the country director for the Myanmar programme at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), said these criminal networks are believed to have billions in capital.

USIP is an American federal institution that was established by the US Congress in 1984.

Mr Tower told The Straits Times: "It's reached the point where they control territory in Myanmar through partnerships they have with border guard forces under the Myanmar Army, and with other militias there."

He added that these criminal organisations also operate out of Cambodia and Laos, and are targeting financial hubs across the world, including London, Dubai and Singapore.

"You're seeing the reach of these Chinese criminal networks that have been operating in South-east Asia now extend across the world. They've been involved in trafficking people from more than 50 different countries into the region," said Mr Tower.

In August, the United Nations said in a report that hundreds of thousands of people are being trafficked by criminal gangs and forced to work in scam centres and other illegal online operations that have sprung up across South-east Asia. Up till 2019, these criminal groups mainly offered off-shore gambling services.

But with crackdowns and restrictions after the Covid-19 pandemic, their focus shifted to large-scale scam

operations, said Mr Tower, who co-authored a report tracing the history of these criminal groups.

He said the syndicates first moved to the Philippines in the early 2010s, and there, they set up online gambling sites and casinos aimed at attracting fellow Chinese countrymen. Online gambling is illegal in China.

After Chinese and Philippine law enforcement began a crackdown on illegal online casinos in 2016, the operators fled and set up shop in the coastal city of Sihanoukville in Cambodia.

From late 2017 until the middle of 2019, Cambodia essentially did nothing to regulate gambling in Sihanoukville, and even licensed it.

But chaos soon descended upon the city, when Chinese gangs committed violent crimes while providing securi-

tional airports, the reality is that these "spinach cities" - the word "spinach" in Mandarin sounds similar to gambling - host unregulated gambling operations.

Saixigang Industrial Zone was built by investments from "Broken Tooth" Wan Kuok-Koi, a triad leader who was sentenced to 13 years' jail in Macau in 1999 for money laundering, criminal association and attempted murder.

After his release in 2012, Wan founded the World Hongmen History and Culture Association, and in 2013 established the now-dissolved Dongmei Group, which was a key investor in Saixigang Industrial Zone.

In 2020, the US Treasury slapped sanctions on Wan, alleging he was expanding his criminal activities throughout South-east Asia and using Hongmen as a front for criminal activities. The Huanya International City project is apparently owned by Chinese-Thai Yu Jianjun. The Karen state government demanded that construction on the project be halted in 2020 as government approval had not been obtained, but the project is reportedly still ongoing.

Chinese law enforcement agencies have recently stepped up cooperation with their South-east Asian counterparts to tackle transnational crime, including money laundering, human trafficking and cyberscams.

Professor Zachary Abuza, of the National War College in Washington, noted in a recent commentary on Radio Free Asia that Beijing has been taking action following reports of Chinese nationals falling prey to scams and other crimes.

"China's proactive approach also reflects the fact that there are now enough Chinese citizens among the 120,000 trafficked people in Myanmar's SEZs and the 100,000 in Cambodian scam centres that the authorities are being forced to act," said Prof Abuza, who specialises in South-east Asian security issues.

In August 2022, the authorities in Thailand arrested China-born She Zhijiang, the owner of Yatai International City. The 41-year-old Cambodian is currently fighting deportation to China.

- THE STRAITS TIMES



From ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ty to the casinos and enforcing payment from indebted players.

In a chilling video in May 2019 that showed the extent of their influence, a Chinese gang leader with cigarette in hand, surrounded by shirtless and tattooed men, issued a warning to other groups. "In the next three years, we Chongqing people will have the final say about whether Sihanoukville is stable or not," declared the gang leader in Mandarin.

On Aug 18, 2019, Cambodia's then Prime Minister Hun Sen issued a directive banning online gambling. By October that year, many of the gangs had left for Myanmar.

The report by Mr Tower highlighted three cities of concern in Myanmar that operate in special economic zones (SEZs): Saixigang Industrial Zone, Huanya International City and Yatai International City in Myawaddy township in Karen state.

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OPINION



OUR VIEW

Food for festival

It is a minimum necessity to celebrate a long-awaited festival and the state must ensure it.

With major festivals round the corner, reports of food shortage, unusual price hikes in essential goods and black marketing have already started to pour in from various parts of the country. A report from Darchula, one of the country's remotest districts, states that people in Api Himal Rural Municipality there are already short of food as the local Khandeshwari food depot is now empty. Subsidised food grains including rice have not been supplied to Khandeshwari depot for several months. Acute shortage of essential foodstuff ahead of the festive season has made local residents restless.

More such reports from other districts are certain to follow in coming weeks, as has been the trend over the years. As many far-flung villages are not connected to the national road network, people there are heavily dependent on depots for food and other essential goods. Even if such items are available in local shops, they are exorbitantly charged. According to locals, Mota rice is sold for Rs55 a kg at the food depot at Khandeshwari while the same costs up to Rs75 in the local market.

The nature of the problem may differ from place to place but market anomalies are rampant across the country, be it remote villages or urban settlements. People in major towns including the capital city of Kathmandu routinely have to deal with artificial shortages of certain items, unfair price hikes and widespread sales of substandard goods.

Food is a minimum necessity to celebrate a festival and it is the government's basic duty to ensure it. Besides, maintaining a regular supply of essential food items and regulating their prices is vital also in view of poverty-control. Studies show price hike in staple food hits the poor the hardest as they have to spend a large chunk of their income on essential foods. A study on the impact of food inflation on poverty in Nepal concludes that "food price hike of 10 percent pushes 1 million new consumers into overall poverty while 6.7 million existing poor populations would experience even harder lives."

Nepali Congress leaders on Monday rightly raised the issue that directly affects people's daily lives at the party's ongoing central committee meeting. Some members quizzed the Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supply Ramesh Rizal on the shortage and unusual price hike of daily consumer items ahead of major festivals. While admitting that there were anomalies, the minister argued that his ministry had made maximum effort to properly manage the market. He however admitted that the authorities' endeavours hadn't yielded expected results.

Food prices become more volatile during festivals. Traders, middlemen and shopkeepers try to manipulate the prices of foods and other essential commodities on such occasions, more than in other times. This is where the government is expected to play an important role. The authorities responsible for supplying essential goods and monitoring the market need to put extra effort to ensure necessary consumer items are available in the markets—be it cities or far-flung villages—and sold at reasonable prices. If the government fails to assure the people, they may hoard certain items out of fear of shortages, further complicating market dynamics. The government should waste no time in creating a situation whereby nobody has to struggle to properly feed their family this festive season.

THEIR VIEW

On the brink

The economic quandary that a country of 240 million people finds itself facing today is of its own making.

It is Pakistan's moment of reckoning. Words of warning are pouring in to remind the leadership and the people that the country continues to face existential challenges. The other day, the IMF chief urged the caretaker prime minister and Pakistanis to collect taxes from the wealthy and subsidise the poor, who are being crushed under the soaring cost of living.

Last week (on Friday), Najy Benhassine, World Bank country manager for Pakistan, underscored that the state was at a crucial juncture where it must decide whether it wants to continue with 40pc of its population living below the poverty line, with policy decisions being driven by a military, political and business elite that has vested interests, or to change direction towards a better future. "This may be Pakistan's moment in making policy shifts," he argued, while releasing a set of policy notes—Reforms For a Brighter Future: Time to Decide—to be discussed and finalised before a new government takes over after elections, due to be held in the last week of January next year.

He pointed out that states with steady and higher economic growth, such as India, Indonesia and Vietnam, were able to fend off similar difficulties as they tackled their respective crises through making the right decisions.

The economic quandary that a country of 240 million people finds itself facing today is of its own making. Stuck in the midst of grave human resource and financial troubles, Pakistan is contending with complex challenges that need to be addressed and tackled simultaneously if it is to extricate itself from the current crisis and move forward. One cannot expect to collect more taxes and to grow economically without improving sound public services such as education, healthcare and drinking water.

Likewise, balance-of-payments issues cannot be resolved without boosting productivity, and investing in an educated and healthy labour force as well as in climate-resilient infrastructure. Everyone and every sector has to rise together, in sync, if this country is to put itself on a progressive trajectory.

This is not the first time that global lenders such as the IMF and World Bank, which we always lean on for help during what seem to be perpetually hard times, have advised us on what we should do. And it is not as if our ruling classes and policymakers are unaware of the problems or their solutions. Yet these constant reminders underline how the vested interests that the World Bank country chief alluded to are impeding much-needed reforms to restructure the economy.

If we are to revive the economy, every stakeholder that Mr Benhassine has mentioned should ask themselves whether they want short-term gains at the expense of the country and its people, or longer-term stability that can allow us to function and have a future to look forward to.

— Dawn (Pakistan)/ANN

Anti-federal moves in education

The outdated Education Act 1971 is still in force, albeit with dozens of amendments.

ACHYUT WAGLE



Nepal's public education faces systemic failure as evidenced by the low success rate of students in the Secondary Education Examination (SEE), Grade XII tests and their continued exodus for higher education abroad. In both the SEE and Grade XII levels, nearly 50 percent of the students score "non-grading" or fail. Nearly 85 percent of the non-achievers are from community (public) schools which drain the public coffers for staff and teacher salaries, infrastructure and operational expenses. This calls for comprehensive reform which is long overdue in the school education system of the country.

The reform process, if any, of the school education sector has been extremely tardy. An outdated Education Act 1971 is still in force with dozens of amendments of a darning and patchwork nature. With the promulgation of a federal constitution in 2015, the government envisaged a bold structural transformation. Schedule 8, provisioned under Article 57 (4) of the constitution, states that secondary-level education is the exclusive "right" and responsibility of the local level or municipal government.

In line with this constitutional arrangement, in April 2018, the government dissolved the District Education Offices and handed over a majority of its functions to the local levels. But the District Education Offices continued to exist in their new avatar as District Education Development and Co-ordination Units headed by an officer deputed from the federal Ministry of Education. This devolution was in the spirit of the federalism polity that seeks to reduce the demand and supply mismatch of public service delivery. Practically though, some sort of turf war between the federal and local governments about their functions and duties persisted. Delays in formulating laws and regulations reflecting the changed politico-administrative context are largely to blame for this state of affairs.

On the one hand, managing second-



POST FILE PHOTO

ary education has proven to be too large a responsibility for the local governments even after the completion of two elections. They failed to take this important devolution of power in due cognisance. More importantly, they lacked the expertise and workforce to make this transition functionally.

On the other hand, before dissolving the District Education Offices and handing over responsibility to the local governments, the government failed to properly educate the newly elected executives about their unequivocal constitutional responsibilities on school education. The need to capacitate them to enable them to carry out these duties and make their own customised plans and budgetary allocation was barely considered. The federal government continued to pay the salaries and benefits of the teachers and decide the number and nature of teacher quotas to schools. As a result, duplication of authority and confusion persisted, attracting multifaceted controversies.

The new bill

Amidst all this, a new major law governing school education had become inevitable. The current government has registered a Bill Designed to Amend and Integrate the Education-related Laws in the federal Parliament. It contains many controversial, debatable and contentious issues, many of which are already in public debate.

For example, Section 4 of the proposed bill seeks to convert privately-owned schools into non-profit education trusts. This provision has been fiercely challenged by organisations representing private schools. The bill also seeks to abolish the SEE. The

national-level board examination will be held only for Grade XII.

The bill envisages authorising the local levels to establish and operate schools based on national standards, limiting school education to basic and secondary levels, and conducting teaching-learning and examinations in accordance with the national curriculum format. The local levels will also oversee appointments and transfers while the Teacher Service Commission from the federal level will announce vacancies and issue recommendations for appointment.

Part 9 of the bill entitled Departmental Action and Punishment to Public School Teachers, from Sections 84 to 91, has immensely empowered the local levels. Section 84 authorises the chief administrative officer of the local level to admonish teachers. Salary increment or promotion may be withheld for up to five years under Section 87 "if a teacher fails to fulfil the teaching responsibility, acts recklessly, and does not follow the instructions given by the principal or the school management or the local level (government)." Sections 88, 89 and 91 authorise local governments to sack, take departmental action and suspend from duty, respectively.

These "harsh" provisions infuriated schoolteachers who poured into Kathmandu from all over the country last week and forced the government to sign an agreement on Friday to soften these provisions and address their concerns like automatic rather than competition-based tenured positions and promotions. Despite the agreement, some teachers like those from the "relief quota" still do not seem to be satisfied and were back

on the streets on Saturday.

Anti-federal slant

Apart from several lacunae at the structural level, the most serious is the policy confusion the bill has created that weakens the federal polity. First, it has proposed reviving the dissolved District Education Offices with added authority to carry out activities including teacher enumeration, mapping of schools, collection of education data, capacity development of teachers and coordination with higher authorities. This clearly has intentions of centralisation and limiting decision-making at the local level.

Second, the bill seems to devolve authority to the local levels, but without adequately manning and enabling them to exercise this power rationally and responsibly. Consequently, the resistance from the teacher community, which on the surface looked like a protest against certain provisions of the bill, provided political fuel to those forces working to subvert the federal polity.

Third, the bill is against the principle of "market-enhancing federalism" as it jeopardises the interests of private school owners and investors. It looks as if the state is on a definitive course of gradually nationalising private schools. This certainly will have immediate and costly economic as well as political ramifications.

Finally, one of the biggest lapses in the bill is the legal framework to uplift the quality of the public education system, attract adequate qualified teachers, mainly in difficult geographical areas, and ensure that public investment in education yields some convincing results.

Taking care of Nepal's elderly

Despite improving financial well-being, health complexities among the elderly remain.

PUSHPA RAJ JOSHI



Nepal has a relatively young population, with 20.8 percent of people aged 16-25 years and 40.68 percent aged between 16-40 years. Meanwhile, the population of the elderly is increasing, according to the Nepal Population and Housing Census 2021. The census demonstrates that in the past 10 years, the population of those over 60 increased from 8.13 to 10.21 percent. The life expectancy of Nepalis has also increased from 55 years in 1990 to 70

seriously addressed in Nepal.

One major reason is the recent demographic shift, with many Nepalis opting for temporary or permanent migration abroad for employment, education or enhanced quality of life. This has resulted in the accumulation of older people, women and children within the country. The early 2000s witnessed a surge in the demand for blue-collar workers seeking temporary employment in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. This has intensified the frequency and volume of Nepali workers heading to these regions. The United Nations data reveals that nearly 2.7 million people live in the GCC countries; Nepali workers account for about 432,000—a whopping 16 percent of the total population. Most of them are employed at construction sites. Besides this, many Nepalis live and work in Europe, America, Australia and other Western countries.

Migration blues

Foreign employment has radically altered family dynamics in Nepal, presenting more challenges than opportu-

employment results in the prolonged separation of people with immediate family members like spouses, elderly parents and children, forcing them to maintain long-distance relationships. This has led to a significant strain on emotional bonds and disrupted effective communication.

Additionally, families in Nepal increasingly rely on the remittances sent by their migrant members, which partially eases their economic hardships but instigates a degree of dependency for financial support on those members. This has concurrently underscored an escalating demand for geriatric care in Nepal.

Geriatric care

There is a pressing need to improve healthcare services dedicated to the elderly population in Nepal. Specialised geriatric clinics, trained geriatricians and a focus on preventive care are needed to address the unique healthcare needs of elderlies. As loneliness and social isolation are shared among the elderly people left behind, community-based programmes, senior cen-

difference in the overall well-being of the elderly.

So far, a specialised and internationally endorsed caregiving service does not exist in Nepal. The elderly are bound to seek assistance from untrained, informal caregivers, many of whom are often exclusively their incompetent family members. Since the caregiver training initiative dedicated to senior citizens is a contemporary requirement in Nepal, a training course syllabus endorsed by certified geriatric institutes should be developed. Aspiring professional caregivers and caregiver family members should be supported by providing tailor-made training and respite services to better care for their ageing loved ones. The Ministry of Health and Population and other concerned authorities should collaborate with national and international geriatric institutes to make this possible.

As the overall health system in Nepal is still fragile, the government should identify the healthcare challenges posed to the elderly population due to brain and muscle drain, and implement steps to address the needs of the ageing population. The Ministry of Health and Population has recently developed a Geriatric Health Service Strategy after recognising the vulnerability and rights of senior citizens to build a state capacity to support healthy ageing and provide quality health care to senior citizens. However, the ten-year plan (2021-2030) is still in its initial phase, and there haven't been any remarkable results. If implemented optimally, this strategy will be a game-changer in addressing senior citizens' health and social concerns.

To reiterate, the trend of Nepali citizens seeking opportunities abroad has created a growing need for geriatric care within the country. Adapting to this demographic shift by providing comprehensive healthcare services, social support networks and caregiver assistance, ensuring that the elderly can age with dignity and receive the care they deserve is imperative. By addressing the unique needs of older adults, Nepal can better navigate the challenges posed by the abroad-going trend and ensure the well-being of its ageing population. This will be a fitting tribute to the senior citizens who serve as the guiding force behind our existence.

Joshi is a senior scientist and neurobiologist at Martin-Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany.



SHUTTERSTOCK

years in 2020. This is primarily due to improved healthcare and a declining birth rate. However, older people often face healthcare challenges, including chronic diseases, mobility issues, mental health concerns, cognitive impairment and social isolation, requiring healthcare services dedicated to the elderly, also called geriatric care. Unfortunately, such care has not been

nities. Although the remittance has superficially improved the financial well-being of families, severe emotional, social and health-related complexities within the families and societies have emerged. The youths embark on foreign employment, leaving the older members of the families, women and children alone to cope with the country's diverse adversities. Foreign

tres, and other initiatives to promote social interaction are a must to alleviate these issues.

Several studies report that older adults are frequently at risk of developing mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety, especially when they feel isolated or abandoned. Therefore, accessible, uncomplicated mental health services impart a significant

FOREX

US Dollar	133.34
Euro	141.89
Pound Sterling	163.22
Swiss Franc	146.64
Australian Dollar	85.82
Canadian Dollar	99.09
Singapore Dollar	97.66
Japanese Yen (10)	8.97
Chinese Yuan	18.24
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.55
Qatari Riyal	36.57
Thai Bhat	3.69
UAE Dhiram	36.30
Malaysian Ringit	28.46
Korean Won (100)	9.96

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SHARES

Nepse (in percent) **2,004.45pts** **-0.29%**

HIGHEST LOSERS						
SPL -10	TSHL -10	ULHC -9.9	SLBBL -7.72	NMGMF -3.82	MBL -3.29	
MODERATE LOSERS						
RSDC -2.82	UNHPL -2.64	NRM -2.63	WNLB -2.61	MERO -2.58	BHL -2.56	
MODERATE GAINERS						
DOLTI 6.85	UHEWA 7.23	SIGS2 8	MBJC 8.66	SPC 8.68	SPLH 9.08	
HIGHEST GAINERS						
HURJA 9.96	HLBSL 9.97	EHPL 9.97	MHL 9.99	AHL 9.99	MKHL 10	

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BIZLINE

Devyani International Nepal opens first Special KFC outlet in Kathmandu

KATHMANDU: Devyani International Nepal Pvt Ltd announced its first special KFC outlet in Kathmandu, operated majorly by specially-abled speech and hearing-impaired women workforce, on the occasion of International Sign Language Day. The restaurant is staffed with a passionate and dedicated team of ten specially-abled individuals, well trained and equipped with skills to manage an entire restaurant, reads the press release issued by the company. This groundbreaking initiative marks a significant milestone in DIL & KFC's journey towards fostering a culture of an inclusive organisation and creating equal opportunities for all. (PR)

India to auction Jammu and Kashmir lithium reserves in few weeks, source says

NEW DELHI: India's federally administered region of Jammu and Kashmir will auction its lithium reserves over the next few weeks, a government source with close knowledge of the matter said on Monday. India, which has been exploring ways to secure supplies of lithium, a critical raw material used to make electric vehicle batteries, in February found its first lithium deposits in Jammu and Kashmir with estimated reserves of 5.9 million tonnes. "The auction will happen soon and some overseas miners have shown interest," the source said, declining to be identified. The federal mines ministry did not immediately reply to a Reuters email seeking comments. The source also said that KABIL, a state-owned joint venture formed to scout for minerals overseas, was in the "final stages" to secure a few lithium blocks in Argentina. Discussions with the Chilean government were also underway to secure lithium blocks although talks were still in early stages, the source added. (REUTERS)

India's monsoon starts delayed retreat

MUMBAI: India's monsoon rains started withdrawing from the northwest of the country on Monday, more than a week later than normal, the state-run India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in a statement. The monsoon, the lifeblood of India's \$3 trillion economy, delivers nearly 70 percent of the rain needed to water its farms and recharge reservoirs and aquifers. The monsoon generally begins in June and starts to retreat by September 17 but rains continued this year, helping to reduce a precipitation deficit after the driest August in more than a century hit some summer crops. Monsoon rains were 9 percent below average in June before rebounding to 13 percent above average in July. The weather office then registered 36 percent below average rains last month. "The southwest monsoon has withdrawn from some parts of Rajasthan. Conditions are favourable for the withdrawal of the monsoon from more northern states in the next one week," a senior IMD official said. (REUTERS)

Indians, Chinese apply to build electric vehicle plants

Automobiles are Nepal's second largest import after petroleum products in terms of value.

KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, SEPT 25

As oil-less Nepal makes a sharp turn towards electric vehicles (EVs), neighbouring auto giants India and China have lunged forward to establish assembly plants in the Himalayan republic.

Almost a dozen Indian and Chinese investors have proposed to set up factories in Nepal following a jump in sales of battery-powered automobiles, the Department of Industry said.

In the last two fiscal years, two Indian and eight Chinese investors have submitted proposals to open assembly plants to build two-wheelers, three-wheelers and four-wheelers.

One India Technology of Haryana, India plans to spend Rs62.50 million on a factory in Hetauda to assemble electric motorcycles and scooters, three-wheeler vehicles and four-wheeler vans. The company aims to produce 100 vans, 100 three-wheelers and 500 motorcycles and scooters annually.

Gujarat-based Spurt Electric has proposed opening an electric two-wheeler assembly unit with an investment of Rs22.50 million in the Bhairahawa Special Economic Zone.

The company plans to assemble 2,000 electric motorcycles annually. Several groups of individual investors from China have applied to open EV assembly plants in Kathmandu Valley and adjoining Kabhre district.

A group of five Chinese nationals have proposed to establish a Rs250 million plant in Lalitpur to assemble two- and three-wheelers. They plan to churn out 5,000 two-wheelers and 2,500 electric rickshaws annually.

Another group of five Chinese investors want to spend Rs250 million to build a factory in Kathmandu to assemble electric two- and three-wheelers. They have envisaged making 3,500 scooters and 3,000 rickshaws annually.

Similarly, a group of five Chinese nationals have proposed opening an assembly unit to produce two- and three-wheelers with an investment of Rs250 million. The company plans to assemble 3,500 electric scooters and 300 electric rickshaws annually at its plant in Kathmandu.

A group of four Chinese nationals have applied to invest Rs400 million on a factory on Sankhu Road to assemble 4,000 two-wheelers annually.

Another four Chinese nationals



A file photo shows a worker at the assembly line of an electric motorcycle at a factory in Bogor, near Jakarta, Indonesia.

plan to open an electric two- and three-wheeler plant in Lalitpur with an investment of Rs200 million. They have proposed to build 3,500 scooters and 3,000 rickshaws annually.

According to the department, another group of four Chinese investors have proposed assembling electric two- and three-wheelers in Kabhre. They plan to spend Rs250 million on a factory to assemble 3,500 scooters and 3,000 three-wheeler rickshaws annually. One Chinese national has proposed opening an electric scooter assembly unit in Godavari Municipality with an investment of Rs30 million. The company plans to produce 500 electric scooters annually.

Two Chinese nationals have proposed assembling electric two- and three-wheelers with an investment of Rs40 million in Suryabinayak

Municipality. They have proposed to manufacture 3,200 three-wheelers and 4,000 two-wheelers annually.

"Investors may have been attracted to open EV plants observing Nepal's lucrative automobile sector," said Sunil Rijal, vice-president of the Nepal Automobile Dealers' Association (NADA).

Automobiles are Nepal's second largest import after petroleum products in terms of value.

In fiscal 2018-19 before the Covid-19 pandemic, auto imports were worth Rs91.15 billion. Imports increased sharply to Rs123.69 billion in 2020-21 in the midst of the pandemic as people wanted to avoid crowds and travel in their own vehicles to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

According to the Department of Customs, vehicle imports plunged to

Rs51.96 billion in the last fiscal year after the government imposed an import ban to prevent the depletion of foreign currency reserves.

Industry insiders say that the government's preventive measures and rising fuel prices prompted Nepalis to switch to EVs.

In the last fiscal year, the import of EVs was worth Rs12.51 billion with the country importing 10,964 units of four- and three-wheelers. The import of electric two-wheelers amounted to 11,184 units worth Rs1.09 billion.

Five years ago in 2018-19, electric two-wheeler imports totalled just 2,047 units worth Rs100.10 million. According to the Department of Customs, the import of four-wheelers amounted to 4,745 units worth Rs1.33 billion. EVs entered Nepal as far back as 1975, with the introduction of an

electric trolleybus line in Kathmandu. Although the trolley bus was officially put to a merciful end in 2009 after years of gross mismanagement, actual service had stopped years earlier.

In 1993, battery-powered Safa tempos, a number of which can still be seen on Kathmandu's streets, were introduced to replace diesel-run, smoke-pumping three-wheelers.

The Nepal government has introduced policies to encourage EV adoption. Unlike fossil fuel-powered four-wheelers, which incur taxes of up to 261 percent, private EV four-wheelers were taxed only 23 percent (10 percent import tax and 13 percent VAT) until the last fiscal year.

However, the government changed its policy in the current fiscal year. The customs duty on EVs below 50 cc is 10 percent. For 50-100 cc EVs, the customs and excise duties are 15 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

For EVs of 100-200 cc, the customs and excise duties are 20 percent each. For EVs in the 200-300 cc range, the customs and excise duties are 40 and 45 percent, respectively. For 300 cc EVs, the customs duty is 60 percent.

NADA Vice-President Rijal said the price of EVs would be even lower if they were assembled in the country. "The government has announced tax waivers on the import of components to assemble EVs," Rijal said.

The budget for the fiscal year 2022-23 has provisioned incentives for companies looking to establish electric four-wheeler plants in the country.

In the last fiscal year, the government announced a 40 percent income tax exemption for five years for electric car assembly units.

This fiscal year, the government has targeted to increase the per capita electricity consumption to 450-kilowatt hours with the aim of reducing fossil fuel imports significantly.

"Total electricity production will reach 3,600 megawatts by the end of the next fiscal year, according to the budget statement.

"Charging stations will be expanded, and private sector financing will be facilitated to promote the use of electric vehicles," the budget statement said.

Rijal said that considering EV sales and demand, Nepal is taking big strides. "But with frequently changing policies, investors are still uncertain."

Thailand receives Chinese tourists under a new visa-free policy



Chinese tourists takes picture with Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin (centre) on their arrivals at Suvarnabhumi International Airport in Thailand on Monday.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BANGKOK, SEPT 25

Top Thai officials welcomed hundreds of Chinese tourists at Bangkok's international airport on Monday, the first day of a new visa-free entry programme that officials say will boost the country's tourism industry that was badly damaged by the coronavirus pandemic.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin handed out gifts and posed for pictures as his tourism minister and other VIPs greeted about 300 travellers from Shanghai. The surprised tourists were entertained by Thai traditional dancers and drummers inside the arrivals area at Suvarnabhumi Airport.

"We are confident that this policy will greatly boost the economy," Srettha told reporters. He said that the government plans to promote Thailand's smaller cities as destinations for Chinese tourists to encourage them to stay longer and spend more. Addressing safety concerns among tourists, Srettha said it was the top priority of the authorities. There have been reports and rumours widely circulating on Chinese social media about fraud and kidnapping in Thailand.

A tourist from Shanghai, who identified himself only as Dai, said he was impressed with the "very lively" welcome ceremony at the airport, though he noted that the immigration officer who checked his passport did not immediately know about the temporary visa exemption policy. He said he plans to stay for two weeks and visit other cities besides Bangkok, includ-

ing Chiang Mai and Phuket.

Peng Chunyu and Wan Yi, who arrived on the same flight, said it was a great policy for Thailand to allow visa-free entry for Chinese. The process was "very smooth," said Peng. The two will stay for nine days and said they look forward to seeing Bangkok's Grand Palace, Wat Arun temple and Chinatown.

The visa exemption, which also applies to visitors from the Central Asian nation of Kazakhstan, will be effective until February 29. Tourism Minister Sudawan Wangsuphakijkosol said there has been about a 30 percent surge in accommodation and flight bookings since the policy was announced. China more than a decade ago became a major source of tourists to Thailand, with almost 11 million visitors in 2019, accounting for 27.6 percent of all arrivals that year before the pandemic devastated the tourist market.

The government proposed the visa exemption measure due to concern that the number of Chinese tourists might be lower than expected this year because of strict visa requirements. The target number of arrivals from China had been revised from 5 million to 3 million after a report from the state Tourism Authority of Thailand that around 1.4 million Chinese tourists came in the first six months.

Tourism Authority Director Thapanee Kiatphaibool said on Monday that the authorities were confident the number of Chinese arrivals could hit 4 million-to-5 million after the visa-free programme was introduced.

Striking Hollywood writers reach tentative deal with studios

REUTERS
LOS ANGELES, SEPT 25

Hollywood's writers union reached a preliminary labour agreement with major studios on Sunday, a deal expected to end one of two strikes that have halted most film and television production and cost the California economy billions.

The three-year contract still must be approved by leadership of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) as well as union members, before it can take effect.

The WGA, which represents 11,500 film and television writers, described the deal as "exceptional" with "meaningful gains and protections for writers."

"This was made possible by the enduring solidarity of WGA members and extraordinary support of our union siblings who joined us on the picket lines for over 146 days," the negotiating committee said in a statement Sunday.

The WGA settlement, while a milestone, will not return Hollywood to business as usual even if it is ratified. While writing may resume, the SAG-AFTRA actors' union remains on strike. Writers walked off the job on May 2 after negotiations reached an impasse over compensation, minimum staffing of writers' rooms, the use of artificial intelligence and residuals that reward writers for popular streaming shows, among other issues.

"We stuck it out," WGA liaison Caroline Renard said on Sunday. "This is a union industry, and it's about the people that make the actual product

that makes these company billions of dollars." One writer posted an image on social media of a picket sign that read simply: "The End."

The only comment from the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, the trade group representing Walt Disney, Netflix, Warner Bros Discovery and other major studios, came in a brief statement with the union. "The WGA and AMPTP have reached a tentative agreement," the statement said.

The proposed contract is still preliminary. The WGA's negotiating committee said it would share details only after it receives final contract language. After that, the negotiators will vote on whether to recommend the deal to leadership, which must then decide if they will present it to members for a vote.

Hollywood's dual strikes had shut down production of movies and TV series and sent late-night talk shows into re-runs. Efforts to restart daytime talk shows without writers, such as "The Drew Barrymore Show," collapsed this month, in the face of criticism from striking writers and actors.

At picket lines, protests took on the rhetoric of class warfare. Writers assailed media executives' compensation and said working conditions had made it hard for them to earn a middle-class living.

"It's been a long road, and I'm ready to take the next step forward, which is just like healing for our guild and getting back to work on ourselves," "Harlem" writer Brandon K Hines said on Sunday. The work stoppages took a toll on camera operators, car-

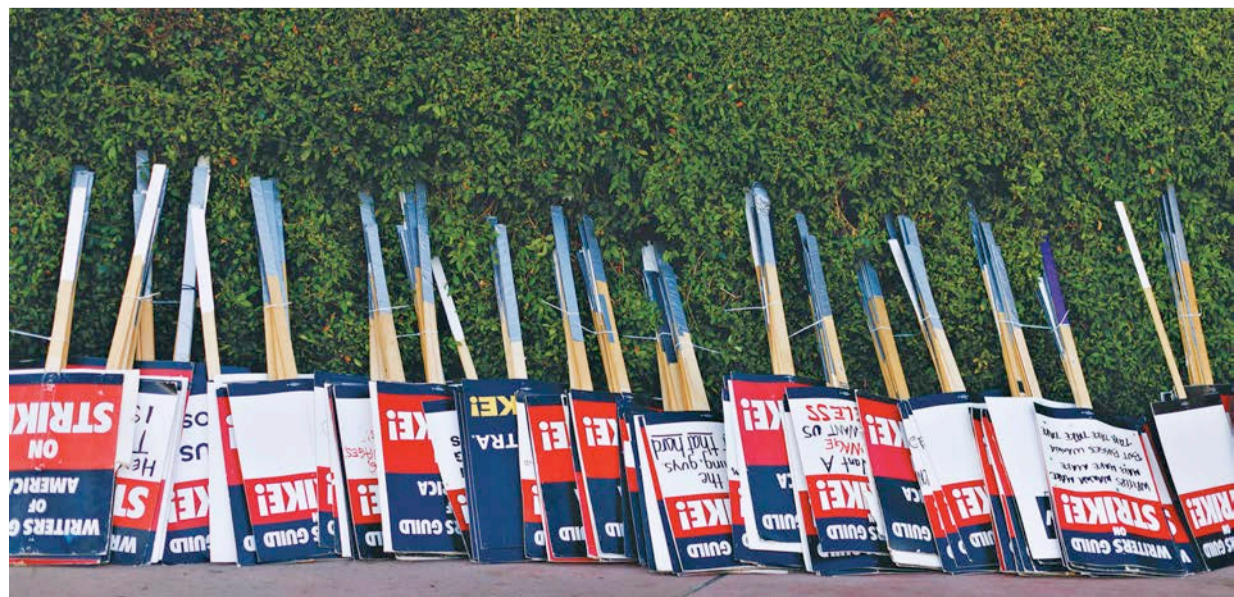
penters, production assistants and other crew members, as well as the caterers, florists, costume suppliers and other small businesses that support film and television production.

The economic cost is expected to total at least \$5 billion in California and the other US production hubs of New Mexico, Georgia and New York, according to an estimate from Milken Institute economist Kevin Klowden.

Four top industry executives—Iger, Warner Bros Discovery CEO David Zaslav, Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos and NBCUniversal Studio Group Chair Donna Langley—joined negotiations this week, helping to break the months-long impasse.

As with past writers' strikes, this job action responds to Hollywood capitalising on a new form of distribution—and writers seek to participate in the newfound revenue. The 100-day strike in 2007-08 focused, in part, on extending guild protections to "new media," including movies and TV downloads as well as content delivered via ad-supported internet services.

This time around, a central issue is residual payments for streaming services, which writers said represented a fraction of the compensation they would receive for a broadcast television show. Writers also sought limits on AI's role in the creative process. Some feared that studio executives would hand a writer an AI-generated script to revise, and pay the writer at a lower rate to rewrite or polish it. Others expressed concerns about intellectual property theft if existing scripts are used to train artificial intelligence.



A file photo shows strike signs await outside Disney Studios in Burbank, California, US.

WORLD

BRIEFING

Libya says Derna mayor, other officials detained after flood

BENHAZI: The mayor of Libya's eastern city of Derna was detained along with other officials on suspicion of mismanagement and negligence over the collapse of dams that flooded the city two weeks ago, Libya's attorney general's office said on Monday. The attorney general's office, based in the capital Tripoli, said it had issued orders to detain eight local officials over the collapse of dams in a storm, which unleashed the torrent that swept neighbourhoods into the sea, killing thousands. Those detained included the mayor and an official in charge of water resources, it said, without identifying them. Angry residents have blamed the authorities for the collapse of the dams, which had been built to hold back the flow into the seasonal riverbed running through the city.

Taiwan expects to deploy two new submarines by 2027

TAIPEI: Taiwan hopes to deploy at least two new, domestically developed submarines by 2027, and possibly equip later models with missiles, to strengthen deterrence against the Chinese navy and protect key supply lines, the head of the program said. Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, has made the indigenous sub program a key part of an ambitious project to modernise its armed forces as Beijing stages almost daily military exercises to assert its sovereignty. President Tsai Ing-wen, who initiated the program when she took office in 2016, is expected to launch the first of eight new submarines on Thursday under a plan that has drawn on expertise and technology from several countries—a breakthrough for diplomatically isolated Taiwan. Admiral Huang Shu-kuang, Tsai's security adviser, who is leading the program, said a fleet of 10 submarines—which includes two Dutch-made submarines commissioned in the 1980s—will make it harder for the Chinese navy to project power into the Pacific.

North Korea says cooperation with Russia 'natural' for neighbours

SEOUL: North Korea on Monday slammed South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol for criticising its cooperation with Moscow following leader Kim Jong Un's Russia visit, saying it is "natural" and "normal" for neighbours to keep close relations. Yoon, speaking at the UN General Assembly last week, said that if Russia helped North Korea enhance its weapons programmes in return for assistance for its war in Ukraine, it would be "a direct provocation." In a piece carried by KCNA news agency, the North denounced Yoon for "malignantly" slandering its friendly cooperation with Russia, and said Yoon was serving as a "loudspeaker" for the United States. "It is quite natural and normal for neighbouring countries to keep close relations with each other, and there is no reason to call such practice to account," it said. Kim returned home last week from a week-long trip to Russia in which he and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to boost military and economic cooperation.

Italian Mafia boss Messina Denaro dies of cancer

ROME: Italian Mafia boss Matteo Messina Denaro, who was convicted of multiple murders and was arrested in January after spending 30 years on the run, has died of cancer, officials said on Monday. Messina Denaro, 61, was suffering from cancer of the colon at the time of his arrest. As his condition worsened in recent weeks, he was transferred to a hospital from the maximum-security jail in central Italy where he was initially held. He fell into a coma on Friday and never regained consciousness. (AGENCIES)

Philippines vows to remove floating barrier placed by China's coast guard

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MANILA, SEPT 25

Philippine officials vowed on Monday to remove a floating barrier placed by China's coast guard to prevent Filipino fishing boats from entering a disputed lagoon in the South China Sea. They said the 300-metre-long barrier at the entrance to the lagoon at Scarborough Shoal is "illegal and illegitimate." Chinese coast guard vessels laid the barrier, held up by buoys, on Friday as a Philippine government fisheries vessel approached. More than 50 Philippine fishing boats were outside the shoal at the time, the Philippine coast guard said. "We condemn the installation of floating barriers by the Chinese coast guard," Philippine National Security Adviser Eduardo Ano said. "The placement by the People's Republic of China of a barrier vio-

Taliban weighs using US mass surveillance plan, met with China's Huawei

The mass camera rollout will involve a focus on 'important points' in Kabul and elsewhere, a minister says.

REUTERS
KABUL, SEPT 25

The Taliban are creating a large-scale camera surveillance network for Afghan cities that could involve repurposing a plan crafted by the Americans before their 2021 pullout, an interior ministry spokesman told Reuters, as authorities seek to supplement thousands of cameras already across the capital, Kabul.

The Taliban administration—which has publicly said it is focused on restoring security and clamping down on Islamic State, which has claimed many major attacks in Afghan cities—has also consulted with Chinese telecommunications equipment maker Huawei about potential cooperation, the spokesman said.

Preventing attacks by international militant groups—including prominent organisations such as Islamic State—is at the heart of the interaction between the Taliban and many foreign nations, including the US and China, according to readouts from those meetings. But some analysts question the cash-strapped regime's ability to fund the program, and rights groups have expressed concern that any resources will be used to crack-down on protesters.

Details of how the Taliban intend to expand and manage mass surveillance, including obtaining the US plan, have not been previously reported.

The mass camera rollout, which will involve a focus on "important points" in Kabul and elsewhere, is part of a new security strategy that will take four years to be fully implemented, Ministry of Interior spokesman Abdul Mateen Qani told Reuters.

"At the present we are working on a Kabul security map, which is [being completed] by security experts and [is taking] lots of time," he said. "We already have two maps, one which was made by USA for the previous government and second by Turkey."

He did not detail when the Turkish plan was made.

A US State Department spokesman said Washington was not "partnering" with the Taliban and has "made clear to the Taliban that it is their responsibility to ensure that they give no safe haven to terrorists."

Pakistani journalist freed by his captors

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ISLAMABAD, SEPT 25

A prominent Pakistani television journalist who went missing more than four months ago after being arrested by police returned home on Monday after being freed, police and his colleagues said.

It is widely believed that Imran Riaz Khan, known for publicly supporting jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan, was being held by security agencies. The two men are not related.

Imran Riaz Khan was arrested at an airport in Sialkot city in Punjab province in May as he tried to leave the country after sharing a video message saying that the space for him to do his job was shrinking in Pakistan and he was leaving so he could continue his professional work.

He went missing after his arrest, and since then his family had been trying to determine his whereabouts. Security agencies are notorious for holding people without producing them before the courts as required by law. Police in Sialkot announced Monday on X, formerly known as Twitter, that he had been "safely

recovered" and was "now with his family." They provided no further details. Hamid Mir, a prominent TV journalist, confirmed that Khan had reached his home in Lahore. Khan's lawyer, Mian Ali Ashfaq, also confirmed his freedom on social media, without saying who had held him. No one has claimed responsibility for Khan's abduction. The international media watchdog Reporters Without Borders and Pakistan's journalist community had demanded his release. Khan has more than 5 million followers on X and is highly popular among supporters of former Prime Minister Khan, the country's leading opposition figure who was ousted in a no-confidence vote in April 2022. The former prime minister was arrested in August on corruption charges and sentenced to three years in prison which was later suspended, though he remains in jail.

Imran Riaz Khan had written extensively and produced TV shows in support of the ex-prime minister before going missing. Imran Khan's party, Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf, welcomed his release.

Washington lays no claim to the sea passageway, a major global trade route, but US Navy ships and fighter jets have carried out patrols for decades to challenge China's expansive claims and promote freedom of navigation and overflight. China has told the US to stop meddling in what it says is a purely Asian dispute. The Chinese barrier denies Filipinos access to the rich fishing lagoon surrounded by underwater coral outcrops, Philippine coast guard spokesperson Commodore Jay Tarriela said.

It's the latest flare-up in long-simmering territorial disputes in the



A file photo shows Taliban fighters standing guard in Kabul, Afghanistan.

A Turkish government spokesperson didn't return a request for comment.

Qani said the Taliban had a "simple chat" about the potential network with Huawei in August, but no contracts or firm plans had been reached.

Bloomberg News reported in August that Huawei had reached "verbal agreement" with the Taliban about a contract to install a surveillance system, citing a person familiar with the discussions.

Huawei told Reuters in September that "no plan was discussed" during the meeting.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said she was not aware of specific discussions but added: "China has always supported the peace and reconstruction process in Afghanistan and supported Chinese enterprises to carry out relevant practical cooperation."

There are over 62,000 cameras in Kabul and other cities that are monitored from a central control room, according to the Taliban. The last

major update to Kabul's camera system occurred in 2008, according to the former government, which relied heavily on Western-led international forces for security.

When NATO-led international forces were gradually withdrawing in January 2021, then-vice president Amrullah Saleh said his government would roll out a huge upgrade of Kabul's camera surveillance system. He told reporters the \$100 million plan was backed by the NATO coalition.

"The arrangement we had planned in early 2021 was different," Saleh told Reuters in September, adding that the "infrastructure" for the 2021 plan had been destroyed.

It was not clear if the plan Saleh referenced was similar to the ones that the Taliban say they have obtained, nor if the administration would modify them.

Jonathan Schroden, an expert on Afghanistan with the Centre for Naval Analyses, said a surveillance system would be "useful for the Taliban as it seeks to prevent groups like the

Ethnic Armenians flee Karabakh after breakaway region's defeat

REUTERS
STEPANAKERT-KHANKENDI, SEPT 25

Thousands of ethnic Armenians fled the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh on Monday, queuing up for fuel and jamming the road to Armenia after their decades-old separatist state was defeated by Azerbaijan in a lightning military operation.

The leadership of the 120,000 Armenians who call Karabakh home told Reuters on Sunday that they did not want to live as part of Azerbaijan and that they would leave for Armenia because they feared persecution and ethnic cleansing.

In the Karabakh capital, known as Stepanakert by Armenia and Khankendi by Azerbaijan, crowds of people were loading belongings into buses and trucks as they left for Armenia.

Refugees who reached Armenia told Reuters they believed the history of their breakaway state was finished.

"No one is going back—that's it," Anna Agopyan, who reached Goris, a border town in Armenia, told Reuters. "The topic of Karabakh is over now for good I think."

Srbuhi, a mother of three who reached Armenia, shed tears as she held her young daughter.

"I left everything there," she said. The Armenian government, making preparations for thousands of refugees, said that as of 5 am on Monday, more than 2,900 people from Nagorno-Karabakh had crossed into Armenia.

The ethnic Armenian leadership said it would remain in place until all those who wanted to leave what they call Artsakh were able to go. Meanwhile, they urged residents to hold back from crowding the roads out, to allow the evacuation of the injured.

"We inform you that all citizens who wish to move from Artsakh to Armenia will have that opportunity," the leadership said. It said free fuel would be provided later on Monday for all those who wanted to leave the territory.

The Armenians of Karabakh, a territory internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan, were forced into a ceasefire last week after a 24-hour military operation by the much-larger Azerbaijani military.

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev was due to host his ally Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Monday in the autonomous Nakhchivan exclave—a strip of Azerbaijani territory separated from the rest of the country by Armenia.

Islamic State ... from attacking Taliban members or government positions in Kabul."

The Taliban already closely monitor urban centres with security force vehicles and regular checkpoints.

Rights advocates and opponents of the regime are concerned enhanced surveillance might target civil society members and protesters.

Though the Taliban rarely confirm arrests, the Committee to Protect Journalists says at least 64 journalists have been detained since the takeover. Protests against restrictions on women in Kabul have been broken up forcefully by security forces, according to protesters, videos and Reuters witnesses.

Implementing a mass surveillance system "under the guise of 'national security' sets a template for the Taliban to continue its draconian policies that violate fundamental rights," said Matt Mahmoudi from Amnesty International.

The Taliban strongly denies that an upgraded surveillance system would breach the rights of Afghans. Qani said the system was comparable with what other major cities utilise and that it would be operated in line with Islamic Sharia law, which prevents recording in private spaces.

The plan faces practical challenges, security analysts say.

Intermittent daily power cuts in Afghanistan mean cameras connected to the central grid are unlikely to provide consistent feeds. Only 40 percent of Afghans have access to electricity, according to the state-owned power provider.

The Taliban also have to find funding after a massive economic contraction and the withdrawal of much aid following their takeover.

The administration said in 2022 that it has an annual budget of over \$2 billion, of which defence spending is the largest component, according to the Taliban army chief.

The discussion with Huawei occurred several months after China met with Pakistan and the Taliban's acting foreign minister, after which the parties stressed cooperation on counter-terrorism. Tackling militancy is also a key aspect of the 2020 troop-withdrawal deal the United States struck with the Taliban.

Russian air strike damages Odesa port infrastructure, grain facilities, Kyiv says

REUTERS
KYIV, SEPT 25

An overnight Russian air strike on the southern Ukrainian region of Odesa caused "significant damage" to port infrastructure and destroyed some grain storage facilities, Ukrainian officials said on Monday.

"Another massive attack on Odesa! ... The attack resulted in the destruction of grain storage facilities and significant damage to the seaport," Economy Minister Yulia Svyrydenko, economy minister, said on X.

Oleh Kiper, the Odesa region governor, said the facilities that were hit had almost 1,000 tons of grain in storage.

The Russian attack on Odesa was the latest in a series of missile and drone strikes which Kyiv says are intended to prevent Ukraine, a major grain producer and exporter, shipping its agricultural products to the world.

"The sea port in Odesa suffered significant damage," Ukraine's southern military command said on the Telegram messaging app, also reporting a fire in a hotel that was not in use. Ukrainian air defences destroyed 19 Iranian-made Shahed drones and 11 cruise missiles overnight, the vast majority of them were directed at the Odesa region, the military said.

It said Russia also fired two hypersonic missiles that destroyed grain storage facilities.

Kiper said a woman was hit by shrapnel and taken to hospital in an attack which energy ministry said damaged power grids and cut off power to more than 1,000 consumers in the Odesa region.

Ukraine's ability to ship grain has been hit by Russia's decision in mid-July to quit a UN-brokered deal that had allowed safe shipments via the Black Sea, with Moscow saying not enough was being done to improve its own exports.

Kyiv is increasingly shipping grain along the Danube River, by road and by train, and has established a "humanitarian corridor" hugging the Black Sea coast to ship grain for African and Asian markets.

The first two vessels carrying grain to use the corridor left the Black Sea port of Chornomorsk last week.



Residents sit inside a bus in central Stepanakert before leaving Nagorno-Karabakh, a region inhabited by ethnic Armenians on Monday.

They will attend a ceremony for a gas pipeline that will bring gas to Nakhchivan and inaugurate a newly modernised military installation in the exclave, Turkey said.

The Azerbaijani victory alters the delicate balance of power in the South Caucasus region, a patchwork of ethnicities crisscrossed with oil and gas pipelines where Russia, the United States, Turkey and Iran are jostling for influence.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Armenia had relied on a security partnership with Russia, while Azerbaijan grew close to Turkey, with which it shares linguistic and cultural ties.

The United States has said it was deeply concerned by Azerbaijan's military operation, which Baku launched on September 19 after what it said were terrorist attacks on its civilians by Karabakh fighters.

The Armenians of Karabakh said Russia, the West and Armenia itself had abandoned them, and some spoke through tears of the end of an era for the Karabakh Armenians.

Petya Grigoryan, a 69-year-old driver, said his village in what the Armenians know as the Martakert district of Karabakh had been pummeled by Azerbaijani armed forces. There were two KAMAZ-truckloads full of civilian dead in the village, he said.

"There was nowhere to bury them," Grigoryan told Reuters. Of the 500 villagers, he said 40 had

got out.

Reuters was unable to independently verify his account but it chimed with the outline given by other ethnic Armenians fleeing Karabakh, which Azerbaijan says will be turned into a "paradise" and fully integrated.

Azerbaijan's victory reverses a humiliating defeat the country suffered as the Soviet Union broke up, which left around a seventh of its population homeless and Armenians in control of swathes of territory around Karabakh.

Nagorno-Karabakh has over the centuries come under the sway of Persians, Turks, Russians, Ottomans and Soviets. It was claimed by both Azerbaijan and Armenia after the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917 and in Soviet times it was designated an autonomous region within Azerbaijan.

From 1988-1994 about 30,000 people were killed and more than a million people, mostly ethnic Azeris, displaced as the Armenians threw off nominal Azerbaijani control in what is now known as the First Karabakh War. Azerbaijan gained back swathes of territory in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in a war in 2020.

Erdogan, who backed Azerbaijan with weaponry in the 2020 conflict, said last week he supported the aims of the Azerbaijan's latest military operation but played no part in it.

Armenia says more than 200 people were killed and 400 wounded in last week's Azeri operation.

Nepal to date India in semis

The hosts beat the Maldives 4-1 to progress into the SAFF U-19 Championship last four as Group A runners-up. India top Group B with a 2-1 win over Bhutan, who also advance.



SAFF U-19 CHAMPIONSHIP 2023		
Nepal	4-1	Maldives
India	2-1	Bhutan

Nepal's Samir Tamang celebrates after scoring against the Maldives during the SAFF U-19 Championship at the Dasharath Stadium on Monday.

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, SEPT 25

Nepal progressed into the semi-finals of the SAFF U-19 Championship 2023 after they thrashed the Maldives 4-1 in their last group match at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu on Monday.

Samir Tamang scored a double while Prashant Laksham and Nirajan Dhimi scored one each for the hosts in a tense game that saw three red cards and a lot of bad blood.

Two-time champions Nepal were under pressure to deliver after facing a 1-0 defeat against Pakistan in their opening match on Thursday that had left their hopes hanging by a thread.

The hosts left behind their hangover and were already leading 2-0 before the half-an-hour mark, with Laksham and Tamang pulling the strings.

Laksham, who had forced the Maldives goalkeeper Mohamed Yaamen into a sharp save in the sixth minute, volleyed home a wonderful long ranger thanks to a poor clearance by defender Yoosuf Shaah.

Tamang added Nepal's second in the 30th minute, outpacing the Maldives defenders to find a clever through pass from Dhimi before finessing a low shot into the far post.

The Maldives' frustration had already reached a boiling point after conceding twice and it spilled over when Sujan Dangol unnecessarily challenged Mohamed Iyaan Hassan. Scuffle broke out between the two and both were sent off by Bhutanese referee Pema Tshewang.

Tension continued soon after the restart as well when Mohamed Aiham Anwar deliberately pushed Anil Bomjan, whose cool gesture was not enough for Afzal Mohamed to hold back his annoyance.

Adam Layaan Rasheed lifted some pressure off the Maldives in the 58th minute, taking advantage of a glitch in the Nepali defence line up to convert a cross from Ahmd Zahaan Nazeer from close range.

But Dhimi rubbed salt to the Maldivian wounds, sneaking past the cat-napping defenders to tap in a beautiful low cross from Laksham in the 88th minute.

Another tussle erupted quickly

after Shanaan Rasheed Rashaad and Ashwin Ghorasainee both went down during a tackle and the Maldives' Afzal was shown a yellow for failing to control emotions.

Tamang then killed off the game in the sixth minute of the second half injury time with a header off Dipak Thapa Magar.

But Afzal was not done yet and was shown a second yellow, and a red card after the final whistle for angrily protesting referee Tshewang's decisions.

The Maldives exited the tournament with one point, which they earned after playing a 1-1 draw against Pakistan on Saturday.

Nepal will now play against Group B winners India, who defeated Bhutan 2-1 at the Dasharath Stadium later in the evening.

Pakistan advanced to the last four as group winners and will meet Bhutan, who had overcome a two goal deficit to beat Bangladesh 4-3 in their opening match.

Bangladesh bowed out without a win. They had lost their opener 3-0 against India, the winners of the other two editions of the SAFF U-19 Championship.

Thapa reaches second round in boxing

The boxer defeats Dio Koebanu of Indonesia 4-1 in the men's 46-51kg preliminary round.

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, SEPT 25

Nepali boxer Rabin Thapa advanced into the round of 16 in the Asian Games after pulling off a victory in his first bout at the Hangzhou Gymnasium in China on Monday.

The 23-year-old defeated Dio Koebanu of Indonesia 4-1 in the men's 46kg to 51kg preliminary round of 32. He earned 145 points against 140 points secured by his Indonesian opponent.

Other two Nepali boxers—Binita Thapa Magar and Dipesh Lama—made early exits. Thapa Magar lost to Chinese Taipei's Nien Chin Chen in women's 60kg to 66kg preliminary round of 16 on the basis of referee stop contest. Lama was defeated by Nishant Dev of India in men's 63.5kg to 71kg preliminary round of 32 on the basis of points.

Taekwondo

Nepal's taekwondo player Anjali Tamang failed to progress beyond pre-quarterfinal round despite winning her preliminary bout at the Li'an Sports Culture and Exhibition Centre in women's U-49kg weight division. She registered a 2-0 victory over Cambodia's Lyden Kry after the first round scores were tied at seven each but she managed to pull off a 10-4 win in the second round.

In the pre-quarterfinal, the 20-year-old Tamang suffered a 2-0 defeat against Thai pugilist Panipak Wongpattanakit. She faced a 12-0 defeat in the first round and 10-0 in the second round.

Rahul Kumal made an early exit from losing their first bout. Kumal was defeated by Saudi Arabia's Riad Nasser A Hamid 12-4 and 5-1 to lose 2-0 in the men's U-58kg weight division.

3X3 Basketball

Nepal succumbed to a comprehensive 22-4 defeat against mighty Japan in their first game of women's 3X3 Basketball. They are placed in Pool B that also includes Chinese Taipei and Kazakhstan.

Cycling

Suraj Rana Magar and Usha Khanal of Nepal both failed to complete the distance in the mountain bike cross country event. In the men's cross country measuring 25.5km, Rana Magar picked up an injury in the second lap. Khanal, competing in women's 20.56km women's cross country, withdrew following hyperthermia.

Judo

Nepal's all three judo players—Manita Shrestha Pradhan, Jang Bahadur Saru and Punam Shrestha—faced defeats on Tuesday. The trio were defeated by ippon, the highest points obtained in judo. Shrestha Pradhan lost to Turkmenistan's Maysa Pardayeva in women's U-57kg round of 16, Saru was defeated by the



NEPAL'S EVENTS AND RESULTS

3x3 BASKETBALL

WOMEN'S ROUND ROBIN POOL B
Nepal **4-22** Japan

BOXING

MEN'S 46-51KG PRELIMINARIES ROUND OF 32
Rabin Thapa **4-1** Dio Koebanu (Indonesia)

WOMEN'S 60-66KG PRELIMINARIES ROUND OF 16

Binita Thapa Magar lost to Nien Chin Chen (Chinese Taipei) - RSC

MEN'S 63.5-71KG PRELIMINARIES ROUND OF 32

Dipesh Lama **0-5** Nishant Dev (India)

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL (GROUP D)

Nepal **0-8** Japan

JUDO

WOMEN'S 57 KG ELIMINATION ROUND OF 16
Manita Shrestha Pradhan **0-10** Maysa Pardayeva (Turkmenistan)

MEN'S 81KG ELIMINATION ROUND OF 32

Janga Bahadur Saru **0-10** John Viron Ferrer (Philippines)

WOMEN'S 70KG ELIMINATION ROUND OF 16

Punam Shrestha **0-10** Nyam-Erdene Batsuuri (Mongolia)

RUGBY SEVENS

MEN'S PLACING 9-13
Nepal **0-55** Philippines

Nepal **0-36** Thailand

TAEKWONDO

MEN'S 81KG ROUND OF 32
Rahul Kumal **0-2** Riad Nasser Hamdi (Saudi Arabia)

WOMEN'S 49KG ROUND OF 32
Anjali Tamang **2-0** Lyden Kry (Cambodia)

WOMEN'S 49KG ROUND OF 16
Anjali Tamang **0-2** Panipak Wongpattanakit (Thailand)

TENNIS

MEN'S SINGLES ROUND 2
Abhishek Bastola lost to Chak Lam Coleman (Hong Kong) 6-2, 6-0

Pradip Khadka lost to Shintaro Mochizuki (Japan) 7-5, 6-1

MIXED DOUBLES ROUND 2

Abhilasha Bista and Abhishek Bastola lost to Aldila Sutjiadi and Christopher Benjamin (Indonesia) 6-0, 6-0

WOMEN'S DOUBLES ROUND 1

Abhilasha Bista and Mahika Rana lost to Dayeong Back and Boyoung Jeong (South Korea) 6-1, 6-0

WUSHU

MEN'S 65KG 1/8 FINAL
Saman Ghushry 0-2 Chanachai Kamolklang (Thailand)



Nepal's Rabin Thapa competes against Dio Koebanu of Indonesia.

Philippines John Viron in men's U-81kg round of 32 while Shrestha went down against Nyam-Erdene Batsuuri on Mongolia in women's U-70kg round of 16.

Rugby Sevens

Nepal's rugby team suffered defeats in both matches of the day played to determine rankings. They succumbed to a humiliating 55-0 defeat against the Philippines and 36-0 against Thailand. They have already crashed out from the group stage after losing to China, the UAE and Afghanistan on Sunday.

Tennis

Nepal's tennis team also lost all four games of the day. In the mixed doubles second round match, Nepal's pair of Abhishek Bastola and Abhilasha Bista suffered a 6-0, 6-0 defeat against Indonesian opponents. The women's doubles match saw Nepal's pair of Bista and Mahika Rana lose 6-1, 6-0 to South Korean opponents.

In the men's singles second round match, Nepal's Abhishek Bastola lost to Hong Kong's Chak Lam Coleman Wong 6-2, 6-0. Pradip Khadka also faced a similar feat in the second round match going down 7-5, 6-1 against Japan's Shintaro Mochizuki. He had defeated Timor-Leste's Antonio Mendes in straight sets of 6-0, 6-0 on Sunday.

Wushu

In the women's wushu changquan, Nepal's Sushmita Tamang finished eighth among 11 players. She earned 9.410 points. The men's Taijiquan saw Nepal's Pasang Sherpa finish at the bottom of the table among 18 players earning 9.013 points.

Football

In the women's football, Nepal succumbed to a huge 8-0 defeat against Japan, who had recently played in the women's FIFA World Cup and crashed out of the quarter-finals. The second defeat of Nepal, who had gone down 2-0 by Vietnam in their first match, meant they crashed out from group stage with a match in hand. They will play against Bangladesh on Thursday.

Phoenix, Kathmandu University win

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, SEPT 25

Phoenix College of Management and Kathmandu University started their Apex ICC Cup 2023 T20 cricket tournament campaign with wins at the Mulpani Cricket Ground on Monday.

Phoenix defeated Shikshantar College by 31 runs, while Kathmandu beat St Xavier's College by 25 runs on DL method after the rain interrupted the play.

Raj Kumar Shah scored 59 off 47 balls to help Phoenix post 114-6 in 17 overs before Krish Ayer's 3-10 and Sujit Shrestha's 2-15 helped them

restrict Shikshantar to 83-9.

Kathmandu posted 138-6 in 20 overs after Shaswot Paudel made 37 off 30 balls and Rohit Sapkota played 32-ball 32.

Xavier were 31-2 when the rain intervened in the 7.8 overs. The match was called off and Kathmandu won by 25 runs.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

This is a great moment to meet someone new through your circle, especially someone open to having a heart-to-heart. If committed, consider discussing with your lover who their favorite friends are and plans the group of you can make.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Be in touch with your partner, children, or domestic life on an emotional level and discuss how you're feeling about the pressures of the job. If you open up, they'll better understand where you're coming from.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Be honest and direct. Don't hide from your feelings. Discuss what is working for you and what kind of attention or affection you may still need. Your partner will be open to your thoughts and suggestions.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

By opening your awareness, you can improve your relationships going forward. Everyone has their own vision—whether it's a new suitor you're courting or your long-term partner. Peer up and watch the dance of the moon today, Gemini.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

The moon is shifting and turning today, Leo. It's time to address your authentic feelings as of late with your significant other without being defensive, running away, or brushing them under the rug.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

It is a good time to sit down with your dearest and discuss the work-life balance you both are taking part in. Sometimes, it just takes a little bit of extra effort to make time for each other and maintain your relationship.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Having a heart-to-heart with the one who you adore could come much easier today if you take the lead and focus on how you can both grow closer. You or they may be feeling the need for a little bit more adventure.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

You'll be deep in your emotions about these themes and situations. It's a great day to sit home and relax, light some candles and incense, and get in touch with your coziest self. Treat yourself and your lover to a home-cooked meal.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

It's a great day to sit down with your sweetheart and have a heart-to-heart. It doesn't have to be just about feelings, though. It can be about anything that swims up into your consciousness. Share deep discussions about topics that fascinate you.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

You could notice that you're a bit more focused on your sense of self-worth. If you think others are validating and accepting you in the ways you need, don't be afraid to be vulnerable. The moon can help you embrace your most sensitive side.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

You'll be especially sensitive and emotional, which isn't the norm for you because you tend to be quite logical and intellectual around your heart's desires and motivations. But don't run from whatever pops up.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

You'll be feeling a bit more sensitive and out of your body as if you're floating between the spiritual and physical realms. Get in touch with what your intuition is saying to you about your personal or romantic life.

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- Jolts
 - Billy — Williams
 - Cable car
 - "There ought to be —!"
 - Interprets
 - Use a whetstone
 - Smaller version
 - Award show host
 - St. Vincent Millay
 - Carob (3 wds.)
 - Unknown person John —
 - Intend
 - Of the best quality
 - Silky
 - Patriot Nathan
 - Draw a certain way
 - Sowing need
 - Football's — Manning
 - Nest egg letters
 - Chinese "way"
 - "Damn it!"
 - Bloodhound's motivation
 - Poetic time
 - Mean
 - Strong — type
 - Before
- DOWN**
- Crams
 - Inter —
 - Raja's mate
 - Steal using trickery
 - Test drive car
 - For one
 - Perfect place
 - Double-wall bottle
 - Took the bus
 - Tennis player — Kournikova
 - Fermented honey drink
 - Scorn
 - "— Street"
 - Foot digit
 - Life story
 - Ways of doing
 - Light lunch

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

R	A	S	H	D	A	R	E	S	A	S	A	P
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C	A	R	E	G	I	V	E	R	V	E	R	S
G	L	A	D	E	Y	O	D	E	L	W	A	N
R	A	R	E	S	T	A	U	N	T	P	O	I
A	N	E	W	W	A	S	T	E	F	I	R	N
S	A	N	M	I	C	K	D	E	L	U	G	E
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M	A	D	R	E	G	R	A	N	D	I	O	S
J	R	I	S	A	L	O	N	G	N	A	P	S
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SUDOKU

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6	2	1	9	5	3	4	8	7
5	8	9	2	7	4	3	6	1
4	9	2	8	6	7	5	1	3
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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Understanding post-exam stress

Psychologist Rampukar Sah explains the causes, symptoms, and coping mechanisms for this overlooked issue.



RUKUSHA GIRI
KATHMANDU

As students pass through life phases, they encounter new experiences and connect with others while acquiring knowledge. For many, school becomes a second home, and the years of learning bring positive and negative outcomes. In Nepal, students often spend long hours in school, and these experiences, both good and bad, can teach us valuable lessons.

Examinations are a crucial part of a student's journey, serving as assessments of their knowledge. However, these high-stake exams can also take a toll on their mental health. After the exams, many students experience a real and debilitating phenomenon known as post-exam stress.

Rampukar Sah, a Clinical Psychologist, holds an MPhil degree from Tribhuvan University and specialises in children and adolescent psychiatry, with training from NIMHANS in India. He works at Kanti Children's Hospital and runs Subha Mangal Group, providing psychological services since 2016. Here, Sah explains the causes, symptoms and coping mechanisms of post-exam stress.

What is post-exam stress?
Post-exam stress refers to the emotional and psychological distress individuals experience after undergoing a rigorous examination or evaluation. The severity and manifestation of this stress can vary from person to person. It's essential to note that post-exam stress isn't limited to students; even professionals who undertake

certification or licensure exams can be affected.

Its causes and symptoms
Post-exam stress can manifest in various ways and can affect most individuals who go through any examination in their lives. In Nepal, there's often a lack of understanding of children's psychology, particularly concerning exams. For instance, students taking exams like the Secondary Education Examination (SEE)

It can have physical manifestations, such as headaches and sleep disturbances.

have a few months of free-time before receiving their results. Additionally, there's no formal education about mental health, leaving students without the knowledge they need to understand their feelings and struggles.

When Nepali students take exams, they often experience pressure from their families, schools, and society. While some stress after a test is normal, post-exam stress makes it challenging to handle frequent exams over an extended period. Post-exam stress typically arises when students feel immense pressure to perform well. Parents, too, often feel pressured to motivate their children during

exams but may provide limited support beyond reassuring them that everything will be fine.

In some cases, parents are required to accompany their children during medical procedures but may forget to do so. Even children with existing mental health issues are made to undergo these procedures. When the results aren't favourable, parents may respond with criticism rather than acknowledging their child's efforts. This, in turn, leads to stress and anxiety before and after these exams. In Nepal, there have been instances of students taking their lives due to societal expectations, highlighting a lack of comprehensive understanding of students' mental health and the immense pressure for high performance.

Adolescents often have plenty of idle time after exams, allowing them to dwell on their thoughts. This can result in post-exam stress, characterised by heightened anxiety in the days and weeks that follow. Even if students feel confident in their performance, they may still experience self-doubt and mood swings ranging from anger to depression. The stress and anxiety linked to exam results can be particularly burdensome, causing students to question their abilities



Rampukar Sah, clinical psychologist



MENTAL HEALTH

Power of delayed gratification

The ability to control impulses and prioritise long-term goals over immediate pleasures plays a pivotal role in our success.



DIPESH TANDUKAR

Would you rather receive Rs100,000 in 6 months or Rs120,000 in seven months? Most people would choose to wait for an extra month to receive the larger sum in seven months. It seems logical, right?

Now, let's consider another scenario. Would you rather have Rs100,000 right now or Rs120,000 a month later? In this case, most people would opt for the immediate Rs100,000 rather than waiting for the extra Rs120,000 a month later. But, if we think about it, the only difference between the two scenarios is the word "now". Both options involve waiting for one month. The introduction of the word "now" can lead to inconsistent decisions.

These subtle changes in decision-making may not seem significant, but they can have a profound impact on our lives. Our proximity to a reward often influences our emotional responses and choices. These seemingly small shifts in decision-making can shape our future significantly.

In the 1970s, Stanford researcher Walter Mischel conducted a famous experiment on delayed gratification known as "The Marshmallow Test". You can find videos of the test easily on YouTube via a simple search. In this test, four-year-old children were each given a marshmallow and the choice to eat it right away or wait a couple of minutes to receive a second one. Surprisingly, some children could resist the temptation and waited for the second marshmallow. This ability to delay gratification and exercise self-control had a direct correlation with their future success.

Those who could control their desires tended to be more successful later in life.

Let's consider another example: the time we spend endlessly scrolling through social media on our mobile devices. Whether it's TikTok, Facebook, or Instagram, we know there are more important things to do, but it's easy to get lost in these platforms for hours. Why? Because they provide instant gratification. However, as soon as we stop, we often feel a sense of regret for wasting our time.

The Marshmallow Test and the social media example offer insights into our self-control and ability to delay gratification. Children often struggle with self-control because they fail to see the benefits of patience. However, as we grow older, we develop more self-control and become better at delaying rewards. We're willing to wait longer for better outcomes and prioritise important tasks over immediate pleasures.

Responding to situations instead of reacting requires a level of self-control. Reacting immediately to a situation may feel satisfying, but it often reflects our inability to delay action for a better response.

We often hear the phrase, "Live each day as if it were your last." It's an inspiring motto, encouraging us to enjoy life to the fullest. However, if you really started to live your life as if it were actually your last, you would come across a series of problems. If we lived every day as if it were our last, we might neglect basic hygiene, avoid work, and indulge in unhealthy habits. This approach can lead to financial troubles or even legal issues. The profound sentiment of living for the present must be balanced with responsible planning for the future.

In reality, we follow our daily routines, maintain our health, nurture relationships, work towards our goals, and make efforts because we understand the importance of self-control and delaying immediate gratification for a better tomorrow.

Instant gratification is undoubtedly appealing, but the better we can control our impulses and actions, the more rational our decisions become. This control empowers us to make choices based on our goals rather than being dictated by immediate circumstances. It's worth reflecting on whether we're in control of our actions or if our actions are in control of us.



Tandukar is an organisational psychologist at Happy Minds, a mental health and well-being platform.

Versace taps Barbie; Stone takes front row at Tod's

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MILAN, ITALY

Rain forced more than one fashion house to scramble for indoor locations in Milan and fashionistas to find a way to move about the gridlocked Italian city without the threat of a drenching Friday.

Some scenes from inside the runway shows on the third day of Milan Fashion Week's mostly womenswear previews for Spring-Summer 2024.

It's a Barbie world at Versace

Donatella Versace tapped the Barbie zeitgeist with a collection that managed to be both girlish and sophisticated at the same time.

In Versace's Barbie world, gingham and checks were the stars, in mostly pastels, the perfect palette for straight mini-dresses, flouncy shorts and collarless skirt suits, featuring pretty details like covered buttons and bow-shaped barrettes.

For Power Barbie, there were black-and-white check suits, leather combos and cocktail dresses, worn with an open-toe heel that pulled up into a leather sock. Standout looks included a checked coat that fanned around the form and a padded V-neck black cocktail dress.

And where there is Barbie, Ken is sure to follow, wearing a blue silken shirt tucked lazily into black trousers, or a lime-green leisure suit. He is not above borrowing Barbie's embroidered twinset.

Versace knows how to close a runway show, bringing out Gigi Hadid in a slinky yellow dress with a plunging neckline, followed by Claudia Schiffer in a lime-and-silver check slip dress. Kendall Jenner opened the show in a satiny white shift and silver shoes.

Sweet farewell at Tod's

Sharon Stone, Quinta Brunson and Olivia Palermo had front-row seats for the curtain call of Tod's designer Walter Chiapponi, who is moving on after four years at the brand.

Models traversed a cavernous workshop filled with carpentry, classical statues and the painted backdrops for La Scala opera house productions, shadowed by a robot video camera on wheels. The setting underlined Tod's fusing of traditional Italian craftsmanship with technology.

Chiapponi's swan song collection focused on essential luxury, featuring clean lines and an understated colour story in mostly muted monochromes but enlivened by some acid green.

Leather goods claimed a starring role. Wide belts defined the silhouette, giving shape to long shirt dresses and crisp, airy blouson tops, and offering utility with tiny, snapped pockets and a hook for mesh gloves.



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