



THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Dhangaedi Jomsom

India's devastating monsoon is a sign of things to come

Scientists warn Himalayan states should expect more unpredictable seasons.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BENGALURU, OCT 1

Sanjay Chauhan witnessed monsoon rains lash down over his home and farm in the Indian Himalayas this year with a magnitude and intensity he never experienced before.

"Buildings have collapsed, roads are broken, there were so many landslides, including one that has destroyed a large part of my orchard," said the 56-year-old farmer, who lives in Shimla of Himachal Pradesh.

"I had not seen anything like this." The devastation of this year's monsoon season in India, which runs from June to September, has been significant: Local government estimates say that 428 people have died and Himachal Pradesh suffered over \$1.42 billion worth in property damage since June.

Human-caused climate change is making rain more extreme in the region and scientists warn Himalayan states should expect more unpredictable and heavy seasons like this one. But the damage is also exacerbated by developers paying little mind to environmental regulations and building codes when building on flood- and earthquake-prone land, local experts and environmentalists say.

Damages to property in Himachal Pradesh this year were more than the last five years combined. Other regions also suffered heavy losses of lives, property and farmland—including the neighbouring state of Uttarakhand, Delhi and most northern and western Indian states.

>> Continued on page 2



People dependent on street business march in Kathmandu on Sunday, welcoming the agreement reached between the authorities and activist last week on taking an initiative to manage street vending.

Malaria end in doubt with 7 local cases

At least 432 infections have been reported from 39 districts since January.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, OCT 1

Nepal is likely to miss its malaria elimination target yet again, as seven new cases of indigenous infection have been reported from various districts across the country since the start of 2023.

Earlier, the government had committed to eliminating malaria by 2020, which was later extended to 2025.

To earn the 'malaria-free' status in 2026, Nepal needs to bring down indigenous cases or local transmission of the disease to zero, achieve zero deaths from 2023, and sustain zero cases for three consecutive years, according to the World Health Organisation.

Indigenous malaria cases are locally transmitted, in which infected persons do not have a history of travel to malaria-affected countries.

Imported cases of malaria have surpassed indigenous cases for several years.

"We are still verifying whether the malaria transmission is local," said Dr Gokarna Dahal, chief of the Vector Control Section at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division.

"If reported cases prove to be indigenous, we will again miss the target of disease elimination."

>> Continued on page 2

Sitting, ex-Pashupati officials charged with corruption

They are accused of mishandling 1.49 kg gold while installing a golden cover at the base of Shivalinga.

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU, OCT 1

The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority on Sunday filed corruption cases at the Special Court against three current and former officials of Pashupati Area Development Trust over alleged misuse of gold while laying peethikakavach, a gold sheet covering the base of the main Shivalinga at Pashupatinath Temple.

Peethikakavach gathers and channels liquid offerings like water and milk made to the Shivalinga. But most reports including government ones have wrongly mentioned it as jalahari, which is in fact a vessel with a hole at the bottom that is placed above the Shivalinga to make water offering.

The anti-graft body stated on Sunday that cases were filed against then-member secretary of the Trust Pradeep Dhakal, current member secretary Milan Kumar Thapa, who was the Trust treasurer, and store-keeper Arun Kumar Shrestha.

They are accused of misappropriating 1.491kg of gold valued at Rs11.70 million in the course of installing the peethikakavach. The amount was fixed based on the market price of gold on February 11, 2021, when it was purchased. In January 2021, then-prime minister KP Sharma Oli had announced to provide Rs300 million to the temple to install the gold peethikakavach.

The culture ministry accordingly released the money.

On February 11, 2021, the Trust had purchased 103.773 kg of gold from the Nepal Rastra Bank for the purpose. The purchased gold contained pure gold weighing as much as 102.614kg.

A Patan rolling mill was tasked with crafting the peethikakavach even without licence to do so.

According to the CIAA, after deducting impurities weighing 73.88 grams, it found the actual amount of pure gold used in peethikakavach came to 101.048 kg. And, the anti-graft body is suing them for the missing 1.491 kg.

>> Continued on page 2

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PALLO KIRAT LIMBUWAN NATIONAL FORUM

Central Committee Office Jhapa, Limbuwan
PRESS-STATEMENT
Wish for Human Unity and World Peace.

- Last king of Shah dynasty king Gyanendra Shah has proclaimed on Baisakh 8 and 11, 2063B.S. that the sovereignty was returned to the people. The 11th pedigree of Shah dynasty king Prithivi Narayan Shah had made a diplomatic treaty without war with three kings Pakharehang, Chotsahang and Thegekhirang among the seventeen federal kings of Pallo Kirat Limbuwan at present nine districts of Nepal (East of Arun river, west of Mechi river border, South of North east China Tibet.) in B.S. 1814. 04. 18. on Monday inscribing as you were the great emperor of the upper Himalayan, mountain and lower Terai plain region for the tenth generation.
- The treaty paper (Lalmohar Patra) was made with the promise that reads if I took the sovereignty of your kingdom by force, the sun, the moon and the billions of gods in the heaven, under the earth the god and goddesses those I adore may destroy and burn the sovereignty of my kingdom, royal customs and dynasty too into ashes. The sovereignty is dissolved as the promise has been violated by Shah dynasty kings.
- By violating the treaty, Singha Pratap Shah, the eldest son of king Prithivi Narayan Shah attacked Pallo Kirat Limbuwan with ten thousands of troops from Chainpur fort fifteen years later. At that time Kirat Limbu King Athinghang and Prime Minister Buddhikarna were in Pallo Kirat Limbuwan. A fierce war took place between General Karpokar and Shah troops in 1830-31 B.S. Singha Pratap Shah had attacked Morang and Chainpur for seventeen times. Because of the bravery of general Karpokar defeated the Shah troops. Athinghang became famous as Satrajite Raja (winner for seventeen times).
- Government of Nepal filed a case in Jhapa district court with the accusation of the State dismember on 21.01.2068, the property of the defendants was frozen, confiscated and sentenced to imprisonment. On Tuesday 6th Chaitra 2069, Appeal Court Ilam held that the state crime case would be dismissed for lack of jurisdiction as it should be tried by a special court. The cancellation decision was passed. The special court didn't deal at it.
- On 29.02.2065 King Gyanendra Shah has entrusted the preservation of the Royal palace, Royal Crown and Scepter to the constituent assembly. For sustainable democratic peace, he is living now as a commoner.
- The political parties that have reached the government responsible to the people are ruling by vying for seats, corruption in every sector, cheating the people. The descendants of Kirateswor Mahadev and Sodhungen Lepmuhang who achieved human civilization from the primitive stage in the kingdom of Kirat Limbu, Rai, Magar, Gurung and other ethnic groups during the establishment of the empire of Shah dynasty king Prithivi Narayan Shah who restored to the state of colonized tribes. For the achievement of Human right of the indigenous people, we have carried on the peace movement by filing a case in the UNO on 27th October 2011. The state has not addressed yet.
- The Ministry of Land reforms has prepared a geographical map of Kirat countries and the state of Nepal In 2021 B.S. to register private properties in the name of people. Within the geographical map of kirat kings of the kirat era is clear in the map with the Baisi and Chaubisi kings in the west, the Sen Dynasty kings and the kirat kings in the eastern region. It has been included for everyone's information. It is not addressed in the constitution of Nepal dated 2072.06.03 B.S. This is not an indigenous friendly constitution. It is entirely an Aryan oriented constitution.
- On the merits of democratic socialism, people can carry out a peaceful movement for the realization of fundamental rights without terror, killings and violence to get a quick response by submitting a memorandum to the people's accountable government of their state. As soon as possible the government should set up a negotiation committee. The government should resolve the demand of the movement within fifty days through the negotiation committee. If it cannot be resolved within fifty days, it should be resolved within six months. The state case of Pallo Kirat Limbuwan National Forum was started on 10th Chaitra 2064 B.S. and it has reached its end for 16 years. The government has not paid attention on it seriously. We urge the government to resolve it with human visionary knowledge. The peace movement is continue. It has obstructed to forward the policies and programs of peaceful movement.
- One hundred and sixteen Countries have supported the proposal made by king Birendra in the United Nations in 1990A.D. to declare Nepal as a peace zone. Do not keep it hidden. Make It known to people with structure. We request to believe that Nepal will be bright in the near future. Nepal is also a member of the United Nations but has not accepted the UN law.
- Finally, we wish for human unity and world peace. The four boundaries of states, dominions and the peace agreements should be respected in a visionary manner with human knowledge appropriately to the time and situation. After all, human unity and world peace is maintained.

Slogans

- 1) Long live Human Rights!
- 2) Long lives the United Nations!
- 3) Long live Pallo Kirat Limbuwan National Forum!
- 4) Long live Human Unity and World Peace!
- 5) Long live the Peace Declaration!
- 6) Long live Nations of the World as allies!
- 7) Long live We consider the world human as brothers.!

Chandra Prasad Yongya
Chairman
Pallo Kirat Limbuwan National Forum
Central Committee. Jhapa, Limbuwan

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NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Birendranagar tense after children's deaths

BIRENDRANAGAR: Birendranagar, the provincial headquarters of Karnali, remained tense on Sunday as well over the death of two boys in separate incidents. Eight-year-old Salam Pulami, a resident of Chamundabindrasi in Dailekh district and studying at a private school in Birendranagar, was found dead at the school hostel. According to the police, the boy was found hanging in the dormitory. Similarly, a six-year-old boy died after being hit by a motorcycle on the same day. The relatives of both the victims and the locals staged protest by burning tyres at different places in Birendra demanding probe into the deaths and strong action against the guilty.

4 kg of gold seized in Dolakha

DOLAKHA: Police seized an additional 4 kg of smuggled gold from Lamabagar in ward 1 of Bigu Rural Municipality in Dolakha on Sunday. According to the District Police Office, the gold was hidden under a heap of stones in a cropfield. Police had on Wednesday seized 4 kg of gold and another 3 kg in the district on Friday. "Two suspects have been taken into custody. Investigation is underway," said Deputy Superintendent of Police Dipak Khadka. It is suspected that the gold was sneaked into the country through the Nepal-China border.

Man held on rape charge

KHOTANG: A 24-year-old man from Jantehunga Rural Municipality-6 was arrested on charge of raping a five-year-old girl. The suspect allegedly raped the minor on Saturday. The security personnel took the accused into custody on Saturday night. The victim is undergoing treatment at Udayapur District Hospital, said police.

Curbing kala-azar spread proving difficult in hilly regions

Okhaldhunga district in Koshi province has been battling kala-azar for the past several years with the disease spreading wider every year.

KUMBHARAJ RAI OKHALDHUNGA, OCT 1

Kala-azar, a vector-borne disease generally found in Tarai districts, has also been taking its toll in Okhaldhunga, a hill district of Koshi Province, over the past few years. Manebhanjyang Rural Municipality is the hardest hit local unit in Okhaldhunga by kala-azar; also known as visceral leishmaniasis or black fever.

According to the Department of Health Services (DHS), Okhaldhunga district in Koshi Province and Kalikot district in Karnali Province are hugely affected by the black fever.

As many as 75 people were diagnosed with kala-azar in Okhaldhunga over the past five years.

According to the District Health Office, 10 people were diagnosed with kala-azar in the fiscal year 2019-20; 37 in 2020-21; 24 in 2021-22; four in 2022-23; and three people have been infected with the disease so far in the current fiscal year. All four infected people except one are from Manebhanjyang.

In Okhaldhunga district, kala-azar was first detected in Manebhanjyang in 2016. The DHS in coordination with the World Health Organisation (WHO) launched various health campaigns in the district.

Four days ago, a DHS team reached Manebhanjyang and conducted a public awareness event, conducting tests on suspects and their family members and immediate neighbours.

"We have come here with the aim of eradicating kala-azar from Manebhanjyang. In the first step, we will run tests on the samples collected from the recently infected patients and their families and neighbours. We will follow that up with full-fledged public awareness and control programmes to prevent further infection," said Uttam Koirala, senior public health officer of the DHS.



A team from the Department of Health Services collects details of kala-azar patients and their relatives at Udaipur village in Manebhanjyang Rural Municipality in Okhaldhunga. This picture was taken last week.

governments have also made collective efforts to control the spread of the disease such as sanitising the environment and distributing mosquito nets, among other things.

Ashrachan Rai, deputy chairman of Manebhanjyang, said that the rural municipality has allocated a budget of Rs200,000 in the current fiscal year for prevention and control of kala-azar. "People don't use sleeping nets here.

Since it's a hilly area, people don't feel the need for it. So we are now conducting awareness campaigns to inform people the importance of taking precautions like using sleeping nets," said Rai.

So far, there has been no detailed research to determine the presence of kala-azar infection in Manebhanjyang. According to Koirala from the DHS, kala-azar was limited to the 12 dis-

tricts of Tarai and gradually spread to the hilly region. Kala-azar is transmitted through the bite of infected female phlebotomine sandflies.

"So far, no studies have been conducted, but the gradual spread of the disease indicates that the climate in hilly areas is getting warmer and the mosquitoes and sandflies are moving to higher altitudes," he said.

According to the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division (EDCD), kala-azar was first seen in Nepal in 1980 in the 12 districts of Tarai, from Jhapa to Parsa. Earlier, the government had announced plans to eliminate the disease by the fiscal year 2018-19, but kala-azar was seen in Bhojpur, Okhaldhunga, Makawanpur, Palpa, Surkhet, and Kailali taking the total number of districts to 18. By 2020, the infection had reached 23 districts, including the hilly districts such as Bajura, Dailekh, Dang, Pyuthan, and Kalikot. According to the DHS, the disease was also seen in Lamjung in 2022. Nepal had now committed to eliminating kala-azar by 2025, but rise in cases in the area considered non-endemic in the past poses a serious challenge to meeting the target.

Weight loss, weakness, cough and fever that lasts from a few weeks to months are common symptoms of kala-azar. Delay in treatment can also lead to death, say experts.

The government provides rK39 kits at the primary health centres and other health facilities for free for kala-azar tests.

After kala-azar started infecting underprivileged communities such as the Musahar community in 2021, the government started providing Rs7,000 per patient—Rs5,000 for treatment and Rs2,000 for transportation.

According to DHS, 104 people are infected by kala-azar currently.

Malaria vectors are climbing altitudes

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Since January this year, 432 new malaria cases have been reported from 39 districts across the country.

According to the Disease Control Division, Nepal is among the UN health body's member countries with the potential to eliminate the disease by 2025. In April 2021, the UN health agency launched the E-2025 initiative to halt malaria transmission in 25 identified countries by 2025 and Nepal has committed to meeting the target.

Malaria is caused by Plasmodium parasites. Infected female Anopheles mosquitoes carry these deadly parasites, according to the World Health Organisation. Officials at the health ministry said that until now Plasmodium Vivax, a protozoan parasite, was responsible for most of the malaria cases in the country, which



causes relatively less severe disease.

However, cases of Plasmodium falciparum, which most often cause severe and life-threatening malaria, have been rising. The parasite is common in many countries in Africa and the Sahara desert.

Officials say, most of the districts that reported malaria cases are from hilly and mountainous regions.

Studies show vectors transmitting malaria have shifted to the hills and mountains, due to global warming and other factors that pose new challenges. Malaria has been reported even in the

mountain districts of Mugu, Bajura and Humla, which were considered non-endemic in the past.

The UN report 'Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability' states that at least six major vector-borne diseases affected by climate drivers have recently emerged in Nepal and are considered endemic, with climate change implicated as the primary driver.

The report also shows increasing evidence that global warming has extended the elevational distribution of Anopheles, Culex, and Aedes mosquito vectors above 2,000 metres in Nepal.

Malaria-related deaths had stopped since 2016, but five years later, in 2021, the country recorded one death from the disease.

Officials say most of the infections reported so far are cases imported from India. This has become a roadblock to the country's goal to eliminate the disease.

India is on the list of countries that have committed to eliminating the disease by 2030—five years later than Nepal. In the past, Nepal had sought India's help to cut the number of malaria cases.

Nepali officials met their Indian counterparts and drew their attention to the growing number of imported cases in Nepal. Officials had agreed to share information on malaria between the two countries in order to have effective control measures.

CIAA takes Pashupati Trust officials to court over 'missing' peethikakavach gold

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"As the investigation found clear differences between the procured gold and the gold used in peethikakavach, we filed corruption cases against them," said Bhola Dahal, the CIAA spokesman.

The CIAA blamed the then member secretary Dhakal and then treasurer Thapa, who was also the coordinator of the peethikakavach installation committee, for their failure to protect the gold in their custody. The anti-graft body also accused them of handing over the task of making the ornamental covering to people who had little expertise in the craft.

A rolling mill based in Patan Durbar Square was given the task of crafting the peethikakavach although it had no licence to do so, according to CIAA.

While talking about the role of Dhakal and Thapa, the CIAA has pointed out their suspicious activities.

In the chargesheet, the anti-graft body, citing the then co-treasurer of the Trust, Basudev Rimal, has claimed that at 11 pm on February 23, 2021, the accused officials prepared a report attesting to the presence of a total of 109.76 kg of gold including small amounts of other metals like copper and tin that were mixed with the gold to make it harder. Their report also said the peethikakavach weighing 96.822kg, barring the gold

band and a few gold nails, was installed on the Shivalinga, according to the chargesheet.

Dhakal and Thapa then allegedly took out the gold from the safe box at the Trust's store on March 4, 2021, without documentation, and provided a portion to the Silver Rolling Service to prepare the gold band for the Shivalinga.

Storekeeper Shrestha has been accused of dereliction of duty for allowing Dhakal and Thapa to take away the gold without documentation.

After complaints were registered at the CIAA, the anti-graft body launched an investigation into the matter. In June this year, the CIAA took out the peethikakavach from the Shivalinga and weighed it and found that there was a small difference between the documented and actual weights, according to reports.

According to the CIAA, the total gold was 107.46kg, which is close to 107.92kg, the weight stated in the Trust document.

Earlier, in April, the Office of the Auditor General in its 59th annual report had also flagged the peethikakavach installation process as being non-transparent.

The Auditor General's report citing the Trust's document said Trust officials had purchased 103.77kg of pure gold from the Nepal Rastra Bank for Rs801.10 million. Then 2.89kg of

copper, 1.249kg silver, 12.75gm zinc was mixed to the gold, taking the total weight to 107.924gm. These metals are added to the pure gold to make the gold harder and more durable.

Of the total gold used in the peethikakavach, 96.822kg was used for peethikakavach proper while a golden band covering it weighed 10.976kg. "The Trust, however, failed to provide details of whether the gold that remained after the installation of the peethikavach was then used for making the gold band," the Auditor General's report said.

Likewise, the Trust also failed to follow the Pashupati Area Development Trust (Second Amendment) Regulations while remunerating the artisans who made the peethikakavach, according to the apex audit body.

As per the regulations, the board meeting of the Trust decided to provide wages to the artisans directly from donors. Instead, they should have been paid by the Trust after receiving donations in its own bank account.

There are no records of the monetary contributions received for crafting the peethikakavach, which was carried out at a rolling mill at Patan Durbar Square. "But the Trust failed to produce the contract document signed with the rolling mill and details of the payments made to the 13 craftsmen," the report added.

के लामखुट्टेले तपाईंको परिवारलाई सताइरहेको छ?

यस्ता छन् लामखुट्टेलाई भगाउने ७ उपाय

- पानीका भाँडाहरू ढाक्नुहोस् ।
डोका र भ्रूयालमा जानी लगाउनुहोस् ।
लामखुट्टे भगाउने Buzzz Off जस्ता प्राकृतिक स्प्रेको प्रयोग गर्नुहोस् ।
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लामखुट्टेले पातपतंग र लेदो भरिएको नालीमा अण्डा पार्ने सक्छ ।
ढोका र भ्रूयालमा जानी लगाउनुहोस् ।
लामखुट्टे भगाउने निम र सिटोनेलाजस्ता विरुवा रोप्नुहोस् ।
बगैचाहरू सफा र कुँडाकर्कटमुक्त राख्नुहोस् ।
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Himalayan droughts and deluges set to worsen

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In the second week of July, 224.1 millimetres (8.82 inches) of rainfall descended on the state instead of the usual 42.2 millimetres (1.66 inches) for this time of the year — a 431 percent increase — according to the Indian Meteorological Department. Then for five days in August, 111.9 millimetres (4.41 inches) poured down on Himachal Pradesh, 168 percent more than the 41.7 millimetres (1.64 inches) it would typically receive in that timeframe.

The rainfall spurred hundreds of landslides, with overflowing rivers sweeping vehicles away and collapsing multiple buildings, many recently constructed hotels. Key highways were submerged or

destroyed and all schools in the region were shut. Around 300 tourists stranded near the high-altitude lake of Chandratlal had to be airlifted to safety by the Indian Air Force.

Jakob Steiner, a climate scientist with the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development, said rising global temperatures from human-caused climate change means more water evaporates in the heat, which is then dumped in heavy rainfall events.

And when all the water pours in one place, other regions are starved of rain.

In the south of the country, rain was so rare that the region had its driest monsoon season since 1901, the IMD said. The government of Karnataka in southern India declared drought conditions in most of the state.

Climate change compounds the phenomenon of weather extremes, said Anjal Prakash, a research director at the Indian School of Business, with droughts and deluges expected to intensify as the world warms.

In the Himalayas, the problem of climate change-boosted rain is worsened by unregulated development and years of devastation piling up with little time to adapt or fix the damage in between.

"Roads, dams and settlements have been built without proper environmental assessments or following building codes," said

Prakash. Unregulated development has also led to increased soil erosion and disrupted natural drainage systems, he said.

YP Sundaral, a geologist with Uttarakhand-based HNB Garhwal University, agrees.

"People here are building six-floor structures on slopes as steep as 45 degrees" in a region that is both flood- and earthquake-prone, Sundaral said. "We need to make sure development policies keep the sensitiveness of the Himalayas in mind to avoid such damage in the future."

When these structures almost inevitably topple year after year during monsoon rains, it creates a "cumulative impact", said local environmentalist Mansi Asher, meaning residents are now living with years of unaddressed devastation.

Ten years ago, an estimated 6,000 people died in flash floods caused by a cloudburst in Uttarakhand, which destroyed hundreds of villages; between 2017 and 2022, around 1,500 people died in Himachal Pradesh from extreme rain-related incidents; and earlier this year, at least 240 families were relocated away from the religious town of Joshimath after the ground caved in from over construction despite warnings from scientists.

Governments on the state and national levels have been looking at ways to address the destruction.

Himachal Pradesh's government announced a \$106 million disaster risk reduction and preparedness program with support from the French Development Agency this year to strengthen its response to extreme rainfall.

The state also published a comprehensive climate action plan in 2022 but many of the plan's recommendations, such as creating a fund to research climate challenges or helping farmers in the region adapt to changing weather conditions, have not yet been implemented.

The Indian federal government, meanwhile, has set an ambitious target of producing 500 gigawatts of clean energy by 2030 and has installed 172 gigawatts as of March this year. India is currently one of the world's largest emitters. The country also created a national adaptation fund for climate change, releasing just over \$72 million for various projects since 2015.

But these initiatives are too little, too late for apple farmer Chauhan and others picking up the pieces after an especially catastrophic monsoon season.

Chauhan, who's also the former mayor of Shimla, wants to see a firm plan that addresses climate change in the face of the region's growing population and development needs.

"Those in power really need to step up," he said.

सर्टिफिकेट हरायो
मिति २०७९/०३/२४ गते चितवनदेखि काठमाडौं मित्रनगरसम्म जाँदा मेरो निम्न व्यहोरा भएको त्रिभुवन विश्वविद्यालयको स्नातक तहको अरिजिनल सर्टिफिकेट र ट्रान्स्क्रिप्ट हराएको हुँदा पाउन हुने सहानुभावहरूले नजिकको प्रहरी चौकी वा फोन नं. ४८४४२२४४८, ४८२४२४२४४८ मा खबर गरिदिन हुन अनुरोध गर्दछु ।
नाम: सरस्वती भण्डारी
रजिष्ट्रेशन नं.: ६-२-९९९-२२७४-२००४
वर्ष: २०७९



Medical professionals demonstrate in front of the Kathmandu Medical College at Sinamangal on Sunday protesting a recent assault on a doctor at the institution. POST PHOTO

Commission formed to investigate recent gold smuggling cases

The four-member commission, led by former High Court Chief Judge Dilli Raj Acharya, has been given three months to submit its findings.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, OCT 1

After several weeks of negotiations, the government on Sunday formed a high-level commission to conduct a detailed investigation into the recent incidents of gold smuggling in the country.

The commission led by Dilli Raj Acharya, a former High Court chief judge, was constituted after an agreement among the major parties over its jurisdiction.

Despite several rounds of negotiations over the last few weeks, second-rung leaders across parties had failed to reach a consensus on the commission owing to differences over its jurisdiction. "A four-member commission has been constituted based on an agreement among the major parties," Minister for Communications and Information Technology Rekha Sharma, also the government's spokesperson, told media persons.

Former Additional Inspector General of Police Sahakul Thapa, former joint secretaries Kishor Jung Karki and Prem Raj Joshi are the other commission members.

After he returned from a two-week-long foreign trip on Saturday, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal started negotiations with the major parties, particularly the main opposition CPN-UML, for the formation of the commission.

According to the agreement, the commission will investigate the incidents of gold smuggling concealed inside electronic cigarettes and motorcycle brake shoes. It will also recommend changes in the existing laws and the investigation mechanism to control the smuggling of the precious metal. It is also mandated to study the investigation reports related to the smuggling cases and conduct further investigations if necessary.

According to the agreement, the commission will have three months to complete its job.

The UML, which had been resorting to House obstruction demanding a fair investigation of the smuggling incidents, withdrew its protests following a two-point agreement with the ruling parties over forming the panel.

With the agreement on August 22, the main opposition had agreed to allow the proceedings of the House of Representatives and the National Assembly.

As per the first point of agreement, the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB), which has been studying the gold haul, would continue to have

the authority to prosecute all those involved in the crime.

At the time, the parties had agreed to form an independent and neutral inquiry on September 22 to investigate repeated cases of gold smuggling thoroughly. The parties agreed that the commission to be formed as per the Commission of Inquiry Act would submit its recommendations addressing the necessary measures to check the crime, and also a blueprint for investigating such cases. However, the probe commission hadn't been formed as the ruling and opposition parties remained sharply divided over its jurisdiction.

The ruling parties had maintained that the commission would recommend revising the laws and changes in the existing mechanism for investigating such crimes if necessary. It can also study the CIB's report and recommend further investigation if any lapses are found.

The UML, however, claimed that it was not convinced that the police investigation has reached the masterminds of gold smuggling. It had been demanding the commission be allowed to conduct a fresh investigation if necessary. Its demand has been addressed through Sunday's agreement.

"The commission has been constituted in the spirit of a deal from August 22," Mahesh Bartaula, the UML's whip, told the Post. "We hope the commission traces the masterminds behind the smuggling."

The UML claims that the CIB's investigation has spared the political hands behind the smuggling.

On December 25 last year, the airport customs seized electronic cigarettes used to smuggle gold concealed in them.

The police later found that the former Speaker and CPN (Maoist Centre) vice-chair Krishna Bahadur Mahara and his son were in regular contact with a Chinese national allegedly smuggling gold through imported consignments of electronic cigarettes.

Images wherein the alleged smuggler was seen with former Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun and Maoist Centre leader Barsha Man Pun were widely circulated on social media. However, except Mahara's son, no other person has been interrogated.

UML, the second-largest party in Parliament, had threatened to bar the House from taking up its agenda if the commission was not constituted. The House met on Sunday.

High-speed Wi-Fi from Everest base camp

THE NATION
BANGKOK, OCT 1

Visitors to Mount Everest Tourist Base Camp 5,200m above sea level, are now connected from the top of the world with high-speed WiFi.

China Mobile Communications Corporation Co, Ltd (China Mobile) and Huawei have announced the successful launch of ultra-gigabit premium Wi-Fi services and F5.5G's leading technology, FTTR-B (Fiber-to-the-Room Business), enabling local administration staff and visitors alike to benefit from fast, reliable communication for their leisure and work needs.

At the Management Office of Everest Base Camp, staff are focused on the ecological conservation of the Himalayas. This work includes daily monitoring and checking of environmental protection devices, then reporting to the Mount Everest Administration Bureau with high-resolution photos, videos, and logs. The work was previously hampered by poor network connections, resulting in slow upload of videos, frame freezing, and unsuccessful attempts to send documents. With the newly installed high-speed FTTR-B network, communication has dramatically changed, allowing all staff at the camp, and tourists nearby to enjoy

premium Wi-Fi services.

The FTTR-B solution is also deployed at a hotel in the nearby town situated 4,200 meters above sea level. In the past, guests suffered from no network connection, frame-freezing and a slow response for the check-in system. Since the installation of the FTTR-B solution, up to 300 hotel guests can simultaneously enjoy high-speed Internet access while hotel operations are more efficient.



Fiber-to-the-Room (FTTR) is a way to provide high-quality gigabit all-optical Wi-Fi using optical fibre access to bring 10G networks to every room. As one of the key technologies of 5.5G, FTTR is characterised by ubiquitous 10G networks. While FTTR is primarily for home users, the FTTR-B solution was jointly launched by China Mobile and Huawei to provide ultra-gigabit all-optical

networking for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in China and is widely used in hotels and shops.

Huawei FTTR-B devices feature flexible triple-mode antennas installed on ceilings or walls to provide full Wi-Fi coverage in indoor areas, enabling users to enjoy a premium network experience anywhere. The solution uses Power-over-Fiber (PoF) cables to transmit signals and supply power to devices simultaneously, resolving problems of difficult power acquisition. In addition, Huawei's WeFTTR app provides functions such as network architecture management, one-click network optimisation, and self-service network configuration for IT staff in management offices and hotels, reducing operations and maintenance (O&M) workload. O&M engineers of China Mobile can also use the app to remotely locate network problems, improving the O&M efficiency.

In 2024, China Mobile will work with Huawei to extend the FTTR-B solution to the climber base camp situation. This will enable climbers to enjoy gigabit network services as they prepare to reach the summits at the world's top.

As a leading global ICT infrastructure provider, Huawei partners with operators such as China Mobile and helps many SMEs to realise digital transformation.

Children, mothers in Lumbini suffer from malnutrition

Gaps in public health awareness have turned malnutrition into a serious problem.

AMRITA ANMOL
BUTWAL, OCT 1

Goma Saru's one-year-old son weighs 5.9kg. He does not have an appetite and vomits every time he's fed. He suffers from bouts of fever and diarrhoea. A month ago, his 17-year-old mother took him to Chhahara Health Post, the local health post at Rainadebi Chhahara-4 in Palpa. The health workers at the facility diagnosed the infant with severe malnutrition and referred him to the Nutrition Rehabilitation Home in Butwal for treatment.

The infant has been receiving treatment at the rehabilitation home for the past one month.

Like her son, Goma too suffers from malnutrition. Married at the age of 15, Goma gave birth to her baby boy a year later. She is 17 and her body weight is 35kg.

"When I took my baby to the rehabilitation home, they told me I am also malnourished," said Goma. "I was not aware of the nutrition requirement for my baby and me."

Sapana Pun, 20, from Purnitghat in Kaligandaki Rural Municipality, Gulmi, has an 11-month-old daughter. The infant is feeble; she hardly eats and cries all the time. She has a swollen stomach and is always down with a fever. The mother took her child to the rehabilitation home in Butwal a month ago where the infant is receiving treatment for malnourishment.

"My daughter's health is improving since the treatment. She is eating nutritious food and is on a balanced diet," said Pun.

According to WHO, malnutrition refers to deficiencies or excesses in nutrient intake, imbalance of essential nutrients or impaired nutrient utilisation.

"Malnutrition among children and mothers is mainly caused due to the lack of breastfeeding to the newborn, dependency on processed and packaged food and lack of awareness of eating and feeding habits," said Netra Rana, a paediatrician at Lumbini Provincial Hospital. Rana added malnutrition affects children's physical as well as mental growth which in turn undermines the country's public health. Malnutrition weakens intellectual capacity, limits productivity in adulthood, and increases vulnerability to certain diseases, say experts.

Gaps in awareness have turned malnutrition into a serious problem in Lumbini province. Most people are unaware of malnutrition among children and fail to recognise the symp-

toms for timely treatment. Pregnant women and nursing mothers also suffer from the condition.

There is only one nutrition rehabilitation home in the Lumbini province. The Nutrition Rehabilitation Home in Butwal can provide treatment to 10 malnourished children at a time.

"Malnourished children from six months to five years of age and their mothers are kept at the nutrition home for treatment. The mothers are also taught to prepare nutritious foods for themselves and their children," said Parbati KC, a nurse at the nutrition rehabilitation home. According to her, around 150 children suffering from malnutrition receive treatment from the nutrition home in a year.

Lumbini Province, which comprises six Tarai and six hill districts, has relatively better infrastructure development than some other provinces. However, the child and maternal health status is lower than the national average.

According to a preliminary report of the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey-2022, stunting decreased from 57 percent in 2001 to 25 percent in 2022 in Nepal. While the country has made progress in reducing stunting among children under five, as many as 25 percent of children in Lumbini are stunted. Likewise, wasting, a debilitating disease that causes muscle and fat tissues to waste away among children under five, decreased from 11 percent in 2001 to eight percent in 2022. However, the wasting percentage stands at 16 in Lumbini province.

A recent study conducted by the Lumbini Health Directorate shows that child marriage and teen pregnancy, poverty, a lack of awareness about nutritious food are the leading causes behind the alarming rate of malnutrition among children and women in Lumbini.

According to the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey-2022, Lumbini has the second lowest rate of anaemia in the 15-49 age group of women among seven provinces of Nepal. As many as 44 percent women of the age group are suffering from anaemia in Lumbini and 52 percent in Madhesh province. Similarly, 19 percent of women of the same age group are suffering from wasting, the third lowest after Madhesh and Karnali.

The data of the Health Ministry of Lumbini province shows a total of 74 women died during pregnancy and postpartum period in the province in the last fiscal year of 2022-23. Twenty-eight of them suffered from anaemia.

"Anaemic women can suffer from haemorrhage during pregnancy and even during the postpartum period. Excessive bleeding may lead to death," said Sumita Gyawali, a nursing officer at the ministry.

Despite the alarming number of malnutrition cases in women and children in Lumbini, the provincial government has yet to take concrete steps to mitigate the health issue.

According to women and children's health activist Gyanu Paudyal, governments at all levels have failed to address the issues despite being aware of the situation. Besides some initiatives taken by the local governments, the authorities are yet to take significant measures to reduce malnutrition, stunting, wasting and anaemia among pregnant women, young mothers and their children.

According to Health Director Binod Kumar Giri, the local government distributes 'pregnancy nutrition kits' to pregnant women. The programme was introduced with the aim of improving the nutritional status of mothers and babies and safeguarding their health, Giri said.

The kits, which include half kgs of satu (a multi-grain flour), are distributed free of cost to all pregnant women who seek medical assistance in government-run health offices. The flour is made of a mixture of rice, wheat, corn, barley, wheat flour, chickpeas, and dairy products, and will last a month if taken 100 grams per day.

"This improves the immunity of the mother, increases lactation, and prevents the babies from getting malnourished," Giri added. The local government has also decided to take initiatives to spread awareness about nutrition and improve eating habits through various health programmes.

The lack of nutrition in food intake is a major reason for women and children being malnourished in the province, says Luvhari Budhathoki who works in public health and nutrition. Growing children should be fed nutritious food and be administered deworming medicine to reduce diarrhoea incidences, says Budhathoki.

Pratiksha Thapa, in charge of Butwal's child nutrition rehabilitation home, says that a change in eating habits should be practised for the health and safety of women and children. "We should eat at least four times a day," Adhikari said. "Instead of instant ready-made food, one should opt for homemade snacks, seasonal fruits, pulses, green vegetables, fish, meat, eggs and milk."

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OPINION



OUR VIEW

Breaking with conventions

This spontaneous in-party challenge to Oli's one-man show is something to be celebrated.

The 10th CPN-UML general convention in Sauraha, Chitwan in November 2021 cemented KP Sharma Oli's hold on the party machinery. At the time, the old UML party had just been revived following the breakdown of the Nepal Communist Party that he co-chaired with Pushpa Kamal Dahal. This was followed by the exit from the UML of senior leaders and former prime ministers Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhlanath Khanal. There was now no one to check Oli's growing ambition and power in the country's largest communist party. So, before being reelected party chairman at the 10th general convention, he handpicked the UML office-bearers and central committee members. Yes, there were a few voices of opposition, for instance from the likes of Bhim Rawal and Ghanashyam Bhusal. They had declared their candidacies for vital posts (Rawal, as a rebel candidate, was in fact standing against Oli for the post of party chair.) Oli ordered the convention delegates not to vote for them. That is exactly what happened. This was a depressing outcome for a party which, post-1990, practised the most vibrant internal democracy among the country's main democratic forces.

But as the party is in the process of picking leadership in seven provinces, Oli's grip seems to be loosening. At the recently concluded provincial conventions in Lumbini and Bagmati provinces, there were vigorous competitions for election to the regional committees. Similar scenes are unfolding at the ongoing conventions in Karnali and Koshi provinces. In all these places, the party rank and file defied the chair's diktat that such regional committees be elected through 'consensus', a code word to place Oli's loyalists at the head of these executive bodies. This spontaneous challenge to the chairman's authoritarian ways is something to be celebrated. Last year, it appeared that the country's biggest communist force was becoming a 'one-man show'. But thanks to its history of robust internal democracy, UML members soon began to chafe at the chairman's unilateral ways. Now even those deemed closest to the UML chairman dare to support candidates from outside the Oli camp.

That is the welcome bit. It would have been better still if the convention delegates could freely cast their ballots for candidates from outside set panels. Curiously, there have been videos circulating on social media that show senior party leaders making such panels. This was happening even after the UML outlawed such panels and threatened to annul the candidacies of those affiliated to them because these panels are basically factions centred on powerful leaders. So while it is good to see the courageous challenge of Oli's party leadership, the UML is still not back on its old course when panels were formed along ideological lines rather than around personality cults—and when most vital party decisions were made through coercion-free voting. Yet the UML is on the right path. Oli has tried to systematically suppress voices of opposition in the party and prevent the emergence of a challenger to his authority. He has not wholly succeeded. In the long run, the party will be stronger for it.

It is not the job of regulators such as the central bank to wish for higher stock prices.

PABAN RAJ PANDEY



Nepal Rastra Bank is being pushed to the wall. Self-serving elements are putting undue pressure on the central bank to end a policy rightly set in place two years ago to stop snorting equity bulls from taking on excessive leverage. Investor sentiment was dangerously exuberant then; it is dispirited now. It is possible it is time to gradually phase out the policy—or at least make some changes to dilute its effect. That is not the issue. The issue is the way in which attempts are being made to influence the decision-making process of an independent entity. Investors have for a long time been clamouring for getting rid of the policy. They are now joined by finance ministers—former and present.

The issue revolves around a policy instituted by the 2021-22 monetary policy, announced in July 2021, limiting margin loan per customer to Rs40 million at one bank and Rs120 million at multiple banks. The policy was amended in July 2022 with the 2022-23 monetary policy allowing Rs120 million per individual from one or multiple banks. Leading up to this year's monetary policy, investors were confident that Nepal Rastra Bank would get rid of the policy. The Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE) began to rally from 1808 on May 15 this year. The 2023-24 monetary policy, announced on July 23, made no changes. The NEPSE peaked at 2244 on July 24, troughing at 1931 on September 7.

In 2021, shortly after Nepal Rastra Bank tightened its margin loan policy, the NEPSE peaked intraday at 3227 on August 19, having nearly tripled from March 5, 2019, when it bottomed at 1099. Hindsight is always 20/20, but the margin restriction probably acted as a catalyst in pricking the prevailing bubble in the stock market. At the peak in August 2021, the NEPSE boasted a market capitalisation of just under Rs4.3 trillion, while the daily turnover exceeded Rs20 billion in three sessions, with an all-time high of Rs21.6 billion on the 15th. The market cap currently is around Rs3 trillion, which equates to 64 percent of the gross domestic product, and the daily turnover has shrunk to around Rs2 billion.



POST FILE PHOTO

Setting bad precedent

If Nepal Rastra Bank did not proactively act, the bubble likely would continue to inflate, and the eventual drop would exact bigger pain and suffering. Bubbles are intoxicating—until they burst. From its high, the NEPSE tumbled 44 percent to bottom at 1807 on June 24, 2022. That low was successfully tested on September 25, 2022, when the index tagged 1812, and again on May 15 this year. Bulls cannot afford to lose 1800. The index currently hovers around 2000 but has not been able to lift meaningfully off 1800. Fundamentally, the economy continues to be in the doldrums. Investors seem desperate for a positive catalyst. Hence the pressure on Nepal Rastra Bank to get rid of the margin loan policy.

Nepal Rastra Bank was condemned for reining in margin growth from the very beginning. Criticism has gone up of late. In the past month or two, politicians have joined the chorus. Some prominent names include Surendra Pandey and Dr Yuba Raj Khatriwada, who are both former finance ministers, with the latter also having served as Nepal Rastra Bank governor. In public forums recently, both commented that the Rs120-million cap is no longer needed. Pandey even advised Dr Prakash Sharan Mahat, the present finance minister, to ask Maha Prasad Adhikari, Nepal Rastra Bank governor, to take the blame and undo the damage. Mahat has requested Adhikari to be flexible about the Rs120-million cap.

There are a couple of issues

here. First, increasingly it feels like Adhikari is cornered. The Nepal Rastra Bank Act 2002 ensures autonomy to the central bank, but because of the way the board is set up and so forth, it also leaves room for interference. The board consists of the governor, the finance secretary, two deputy governors, and three members appointed by the government of Nepal. In other words, it is a four to three in favour of the government. Mahat will have his way should push come to shove. The faux pas he has committed is the way this is being handled. Mahat is a sitting finance minister and should not wash his dirty linen in public. This sets a bad precedent and puts the "autonomous" central bank in a bad light.

Margin debt cuts both ways

Secondly, the whole purpose of trying to get the Rs120-million cap scrapped is to push stocks higher. Bulls are hoping a lenient margin policy will act as a tailwind for the stuck-in-the-mud NEPSE. It very well may initially. The risk is what it might lead to. Nepali investors just went through an ordeal. Margin debt at banks and financial institutions was Rs40.9 billion in March 2019; by the time the NEPSE peaked in August 2021, it had surged to Rs108.6 billion. In good times, margin debt greases the wheels of the stock market, but it cuts both ways. Gains get multiplied, but so do losses. Just ask the investors who faced margin calls as the NEPSE tumbled 44 percent. Margin loan was Rs76.4 billion mid-August.

It is not the job of regulators such as Nepal Rastra Bank to wish for higher stock prices. Rather, often, they step up and shut down rowdy parties; they need to, just so the hangover is manageable. Politicians are a different breed. Their whole behaviour is dictated by the next election cycle. By nature, they take credit when things are going well and shift the blame when they are not. Adhikari is being scapegoated—plain and simple. A lenient margin loan policy may help stocks in the short term, but ultimately the NEPSE will reflect the economy—not only the present but where it is headed. In this respect, investors are not too excited about growth prospects—thus handing out a failing grade.

Confrontation between central banks and the executive branch is not that uncommon. We often hear of such instances even in developed nations such as the United States and Japan as well as emerging economies like India. Nepal's is a little different. It is a young democracy. The NEPSE only began trading in January 1994. This is the time to lay the foundation. Nepal Rastra Bank definitely does not want to give an impression that it effortlessly wilts under pressure. In central banking, signalling plays as important a role as the actual action itself. For now Adhikari is likely to raise the cap to, say, Rs160 million—ideal if he waits until the first-quarter review in November. But in no circumstances should he scrap the policy.

Pandey talks markets, money and macroeconomics on hedgopia.com.

MONDAY INTERVIEW NILAMBER ACHARYA

Constitution became more of a political than constitutional document

Our prime minister did not even mention the term Eminent Persons Group during his India visit a few months ago.

Nilamber Acharya was involved in drafting two of Nepal's most recent constitutions, first in 1990 and then in 2015. Nepal's former envoy to India Acharya was also a member of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) jointly formed by Nepal and India. The *Post's* Thira Lal Bhusal and Mohan Guragain sat with him to review the eight years of constitution implementation and the prime minister's recent foreign visits.

Eight years after the constitution's promulgation, how do you evaluate the statute in retrospect?

The aspect of the constitution's implementation has been quite weak and disappointing. We need to do a critical review and reform it as a priority.

So, has the time come to review the constitution?

When we review the constitution, we have to evaluate its implementation and re-examine what we did during this period. If we conclude that we don't need any amendments to the constitution but changes in laws and our practices are necessary, we can do the same. For instance, if we think that we committed mistakes in selecting candidates under the proportional representation category [of elections], then we can correct our practices as per the spirit of the constitution. The same applies to the implementation of federalism. We find some disputes on the list of concurrent powers [of the three tiers of government]. These can be resolved through reviews. Another problem is the instability of political coalitions. Now a distant-third party leads the coalition and that makes the government weak as it remains focused on how to stay in power. Such a government indulges in unhealthy practices. Foreign relations also suffer when the country is led by a politically weak prime minister as the leader may make unnecessary compromises with foreign powers to retain the seat.

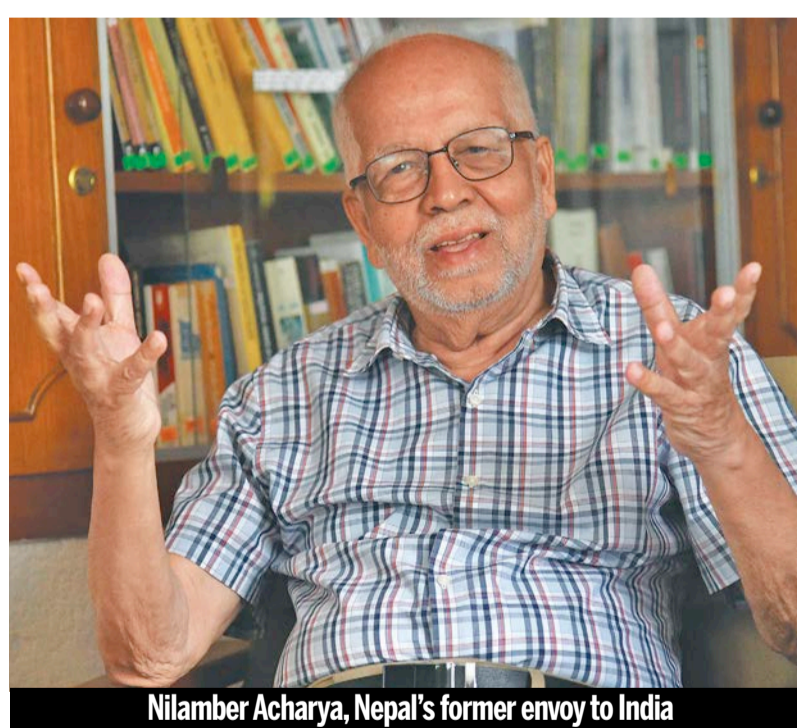
Are you suggesting that the constitution can't be properly implemented by a politically weak government?

Yes, because such a government doesn't prioritise long-term issues, such as the formulation of laws needed for full-fledged implementation of the constitution. Such a prime minister constantly worries about the government's longevity, and ends up forging unnatural deals. Such a government pardons a culprit convicted by the three tiers of court, even before the top court issues the full text. A strong government could have avoided such inappropriate decisions. Such activities naturally undermine the constitution and the rule of law.

We shouldn't forget the context in which the constitution was made. It was a document of compromise among various political forces. On the one hand, constitution-making was a part of the peace process that ended a violent movement and politically mainstreamed a militant force. On the other hand, it had to reject the autocratic monarchy. The Nepali Congress, the CPN-UML, and the then CPN (Maoist) forged an alliance while the monarchy was sidelined. Later, the Madhesi parties emerged as another political force and joined the process. It was a document of compromise among the various political forces but none owned it up wholeheartedly. While trying to strike a balance between these four forces, the constitution became more political than a constitutional document. That complexity has been affecting its implementation. If you study constitution-making worldwide, in most cases, it is led by a dominant force. Ours wasn't so.

All laws needed for full-fledged implementation of this constitution haven't been formulated. How do you see this tardiness?

Not all necessary laws have been formulated but political parties have passed laws that serve their vested interests. For instance, they swiftly amended the law to split a party as they needed. Likewise, laws are amended to pardon criminals to serve their interests. This is pure dishonesty. All these changes in the constitution and laws have been made only to prolong some politicians' stay in power.



Nilamber Acharya, Nepal's former envoy to India

The Supreme Court, the Constitutional Council and the constitutional bodies have been weakened to protect their positions. Political actors don't respect constitutional principles. We've seen in the past eight years that a politically weak government and unstable politics weaken the constitution and enfeeble the state even in foreign dealings. Our parties often forge 'package deals' involving give and take. That is the wrong approach. Such moves will open Pandora's Box and give rise to new disputes.

Some sections have started demanding revision of such important features as the federal republic system, electoral model and secularism. Has the time come for that?

We must be ready to debate these issues even if they are complex. We can't run away from them. Our history has settled some important issues like pluralism and parliamentary system. These can't be reversed. As far as

secularism is concerned, different groups have interpreted it to suit their interests.

Have foreign powers' concerns also come into play here?

Yes, it is there. We faced a blockade for the same as India expressed its reservations over the constitution. Another dissatisfaction over the constitution came after we incorporated our new map into it. Those who are against the republican system want to reinstate monarchy, and those who want provinces along ethnic lines are against this constitution. Those who want dictatorship dislike the democratic features of this constitution.

How can this constitution be sustained?

We must be cautious about any moves that intend to make it a failure. To safeguard this constitution, we should be ready to reform it without creating

fresh disputes in the process. If we don't do a critical and timely review of the constitution, there might be bigger problems down the line. The elements that don't want democracy to flourish in our country may be emboldened. Without timely revision, the constitution cannot withstand disruptive forces.

You were a member of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) jointly formed by Nepal and India to study and suggest measures to improve bilateral relations. The team completed its report years ago but India has avoided receiving it. What happens to the report now?

It's been five years since the EPG prepared its report. The team completed the task within the two years given. Both governments have acknowledged completion of the task. It should be formally received but the government concerned can decide which [measures] to implement.

Some sections are proposing that Nepal should make the report public and implement its provisions independently. Would it be appropriate?

First of all, Prime Minister [Pushpa Kamal Dahal], who was in India a few months ago, didn't even mention the term 'EPG' during the trip. Prime minister's visits are important mainly because thorny issues are discussed at the highest political level and an environment is created to resolve them. He said he avoided the issue so as not to spoil the climate. Why would it irk the Indian side? Is the report only in the interest of Nepal? It addresses the concerns of both sides as the panel had four members from India as well. So, there is no point in saying the EPG issue would irk India. Prime minister's visits are made for situations like this, where the leader properly communicates and convinces the counterpart and finds a solution. Other general issues can be resolved at the ambassador, secretary or joint secretary levels.

If the prime minister can't enter into complex issues like Limpiyadhura,

what is the point of such visits? In bilateral matters, we must raise concerns and register our claims properly when there are differences, even if they can't be resolved immediately. Had our government protested India's move to station its army at Kalapani right at the start, it would have been easier for us to tackle it now. Such mistakes have weakened us. We have to keep reiterating our claim even though a resolution may take time. We must make it clear that "we had to issue a new map because you issued a new map showing our territory in the first place".

When you were the ambassador in New Delhi, did you get any response from the Indian prime minister or the foreign minister in this connection?

Before the 2019 election in India, then-external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj told me India would receive the EPG report. Besides, at a function, Indian Prime Minister Modi, too, told me that they would soon receive it.

How do you evaluate the prime minister's recent visits to India, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and China?

Nepal holds the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) chair. But South Asian foreign ministers' meetings couldn't be organised on the sidelines of the UNGA, even though they were regularly held until a few years ago. We should have tried to make it happen. The prime minister didn't even utter the word SAARC during his India visit too. It looks like the prime minister is afraid to raise any issue that India dislikes. As far as the visits to India and China are concerned, I value them. We shouldn't evaluate these visits only in terms of what we got. Visits to our neighbours are important in themselves. The map issue should have been raised clearly with both our neighbours. We should not worry if one neighbour will be offended if we cooperate with another in our national interest. We should try to benefit from all friendly nations.

FOREX

US Dollar	133.17
Euro	140.79
Pound Sterling	162.46
Swiss Franc	145.53
Australian Dollar	85.69
Canadian Dollar	98.08
Singapore Dollar	97.53
Japanese Yen (10)	8.92
Chinese Yuan	18.24
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.51
Qatari Riyal	36.52
Thai Bhat	3.65
UAE Dhiram	36.26
Malaysian Ringgit	28.36
Korean Won (100)	9.85

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES

Nepse (in percent) **1,971.10pts**
-1.65%

HIGHEST LOSERS					
SFME	UHEWA	AHL	MEHL	CLI	MCHL
-10	-10	-10	-10	-10	-9.97
MODERATE LOSERS					
SFMS	USHEC	ULHC	MHL	LVF2	TSHL
-9.37	-9.31	-9.22	-9.08	-8.21	-7.98
MODERATE GAINERS					
SAMAJ	SAPDBL	NBSF2	NBF2	NICFC	USLB
1.91	1.96	2.42	4.09	4.17	4.72
HIGHEST GAINERS					
KEF	GILB	BHPL	KOBY	PHCL	SPHL
5.56	5.93	5.95	6.05	6.07	10

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 108,000
Silver	Rs 1,360

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

India central bank says 96 percent of 2,000-rupee notes returned

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Saturday it would extend its deadline to return the country's highest denomination 2,000-rupee (\$24) currency notes by a week to October 7. "As the period specified for the withdrawal process has come to an end, and based on a review, it has been decided to extend the current arrangement for deposit/exchange" till October 7, the RBI said in a statement. While the notes cannot be exchanged at banks after the deadline, people can still do so at 19 designated RBI issue offices, the statement said. The RBI said in May it would withdraw the notes, permitting their exchange or deposit until September 30. The currency continues to be a legal tender. The total value of 2,000-rupee notes in circulation was down to 140 billion rupees as of September 29 from 3.56 trillion rupees as of May 19, the RBI said. The RBI said 96 percent of the 2,000-rupee currency notes had been returned as of Friday, worth 3.42 trillion rupees (\$41.19 billion). (REUTERS)

Oil-reliant Saudi revises budget, projects deficit

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has revised down its budget projections and now expects to record a deficit this year, the finance ministry said late Saturday, reflecting rising expenditures and falling oil revenue. The Gulf kingdom, the world's biggest crude exporter, had planned for a surplus of 16 billion Saudi riyals (\$4.27 billion) in 2023 but now predicts a deficit of 82 billion Saudi riyals (\$21.86 billion), or two percent of GDP, according to the ministry's pre-budget statement. A deficit of 79 billion riyals, or 1.9 percent of GDP, is expected next year, the statement said. Saudi Arabia in December announced it had recorded its first annual budget surplus in nearly a decade, benefiting from oil price hikes that resulted from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Oil revenue this year has fallen by 17 percent as prices have dipped and Riyadh has cut production in a bid to boost them. (AFP)

South Korea September exports fall at mildest pace in a year

SEOUL: South Korea's exports slowed their fall in September, in contrast to market expectations, marking the mildest decline in a yearlong downturn, a hopeful sign for the global economy from the bellwether industrial economy. Overseas sales by Asia's fourth-largest economy fell 4.4 percent from a year earlier to \$54.66 billion, trade data showed on Sunday, compared with an 8.3 percent loss in August and a 9.1 percent decline tipped in a Reuters survey of economists. It was the 12th consecutive month of a decline in exports but the narrowest in the streak. The decline in China-bound shipments eased to 17.6 percent, the slowest in 11 months, while exports to the United States rose 8.5 percent and those to the European Union by 6.5 percent. Exports of semiconductors fell 13.6 percent, the slowest in a year. (REUTERS)

Gasoline prices rolled back at PM's order

On Saturday, state-owned monopoly Nepal Oil Corporation had jacked up fuel prices by Rs2 to Rs6 per litre.

□ KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, OCT 1

Nepal Oil Corporation on Sunday tossed out its auto pricing mechanism and rolled back fuel prices following an executive order by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

On Saturday, the state-owned oil monopoly had jacked up gasoline prices by Rs2 to Rs6 per litre after receiving a new price list from its sole supplier Indian Oil Corporation. The price of a 14.2-litre cooking gas cylinder was hiked by Rs215 per cylinder to Rs2,110.

Addressing Parliament on Sunday, Prime Minister Dahal said he had ordered the price increase to be cancelled.

"The corporation was gradually making a profit and paying back its loans a few months ago. That was an appropriate time for the corporation to implement the auto-pricing mechanism, but it was against consumer sentiments and sufferings," he said.

"I issued a directive to roll back the decision without consulting with the concerned ministers and ministries because the oil corporation cannot take an independent decision to hike prices in the present context. The corporation is part of the government, and its decision cannot be different. So, the price hike was rolled back given the current pressing situation."

When Nepal Oil Corporation launched the auto pricing system, which transfers global price fluctuations to the retail price of gasoline, experts were cynical about its efficacy as petroleum products have always been a political commodity in Nepal.

The auto pricing mechanism had been non-functional for nine years before it was revived on July 17.

Even though the pricing formula was restored, it only applied to petrol, diesel, kerosene and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), and not jet fuel, which had experts crying foul.

The government company has not given any credible reason why aviation fuel was left out.

On Sunday, the prime minister said auto pricing was against the public's choice.

An unnamed senior official of the corporation said, "After years, we implemented an automatic price mechanism by enacting a law. The domestic price increases and decreases according to fluctuations in the international market which the law has clearly mentioned. But this time too, it has not been followed."

He added, "The implementation of an automatic price mechanism can only be continued if consumers and the political parties support it."

Economist Pushkar Bajracharya said that the government had made the right decision in the given situation when everything was becoming expensive. "But it is a populist deci-



SHUTTERSTOCK

The fuel auto pricing mechanism had been non-functional for nine years before it was revived on July 17.

sion. This kind of short-term decision is not sustainable," he said.

"The government needs to be clear about its policy. The government needs a certain provision to tackle the crisis situation," he said.

"Sunday's decision which was taken unilaterally by the prime minister is not based on system and policy, and it will not be helpful in controlling inflation either."

After the price rollback, the corporation said it would now offset the losses through the Price Stabilisation Fund, and requested the government for a cash bailout. But interestingly, according to corporation officials, it doesn't have a penny in the Price Stabilisation Fund.

On Saturday, the corporation had raised the price of petrol by Rs2 to Rs185 per litre, and of diesel and kerosene by Rs6 per litre to Rs179 per litre, based on the pricing formula.

The price of aviation fuel was increased by Rs8 per litre to Rs144 per litre for domestic airlines, and to \$1,095 per kilolitre for international airlines, effective from Saturday midnight.

Issuing a press statement after the price rollback, the corporation said that fuel prices would now be adjusted from the Price Stabilisation Fund to offset the losses.

The corporation said as per the new tariff, it would incur a loss of Rs350 million monthly.

According to the corporation, it

would incur a loss of Rs2 on every litre of diesel sold, Rs5 on every litre of aviation fuel sold, and Rs181 on every litre of LPG cylinder sold.

However, the corporation enjoys a profit of Rs2 on every litre of petrol sold.

"The price hike has been rolled back following the prime minister's directive considering the upcoming festivals," the corporation said. It added it was seeking bailout funds from the government.

Manoj Kumar Thakur, deputy director of the corporation, said there was no money in the Price Stabilisation Fund. "We don't even know how much the government will provide to offset the losses," he said.

"The corporation has total liabilities of Rs30 billion, including a Rs2.10 billion loan from the government. The corporation has settled a Rs24 billion debt to Indian Oil Corporation by using the Price Stabilisation Fund," Thakur said.

The government put Rs500 million as seed money in the Price Stabilisation Fund and the corporation deposits 1 percent of its sales revenue in the fund.

"We are assessing the modality to adjust the increased prices," said Thakur.

Consumer rights activists say there is no provision in the work procedure of the automatic price mechanism to increase the price by more than 5 percent.

"The automatic price mechanism is not being implemented fairly and honestly," said Bishnu Prasad Timilsina, general secretary of the Forum for Protection of Consumer Rights-Nepal.

"The price of petrol in Nepal was around Rs180 per litre when the crude oil price was more than \$130 per barrel, and the retail price is still the same when the crude oil price is down to around \$90 per barrel," he said.

"There is a need to conduct a study of the automatic price mechanism," Timilsina said.

"The price of cooking gas is the same for household users and commercial users. Hotels get a 13 percent VAT refund privilege but ordinary consumers are compelled to pay the full price," he said.

Lawmakers say there is no competition in the oil business as the government company has a monopoly.

Lawmaker Rabi Lamichhane told Parliament on Sunday that Nepal Oil Corporation does the oil business, imports oil itself, regulates itself and always says it is in a loss. "But it also pays bonuses to its employees," he said.

"Nepal's petroleum business has a longstanding problem and it needs to be resolved," he said.

Brent crude oil price reached \$92 per barrel on Sunday, and international news reports say that it may reach \$100 per barrel by the end of this year.

Indonesia is set to launch Southeast Asia's first high-speed railway

□ ASSOCIATED PRESS
JAKARTA, OCT 1

Indonesia is launching Southeast Asia's first high-speed railway, a key project under China's Belt and Road infrastructure initiative that will cut travel time between the capital and another major city from the current three hours to about 40 minutes.

The project has been beset with delays and increasing costs, and some observers doubt its commercial benefit, but President Joko Widodo has championed it and will be inaugurating the 142.3-kilometre railway as it begins commercial operations on Monday.

The Chinese-made bullet train, called "Whoosh," will connect Jakarta with Bandung, the heavily populated capital of West Java province. Widodo, along with other high-ranking officials, is expected to ride the Whoosh from its first station, Halim KCBJ in eastern Jakarta to Bandung's Tegalluar station, the last of the line's four stations.

The \$7.3 billion project, largely funded by China, was constructed by PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia-China,

known as PT KCIC, a joint venture between an Indonesian consortium of four state-owned companies and China Railway International Co Ltd. The joint venture said the trains will be the fastest in Southeast Asia, with speeds of up to 350 kph.

Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, the coordinating minister for maritime and investment, said China Railway has agreed to transfer its technology to Indonesia so that in the future the country's high-speed trains can be made domestically.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang took a test ride early last month while visiting Jakarta for three days of talks with leaders of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations and other countries. Li rode the train from Halim KCBJ station to the next station, in West Java's Karawang city, a 40-kilometre ride that took about 11 minutes. He then returned on the same train.

Widodo took a 25-minute test ride on the train a week later and told reporters that he felt comfortable sitting or walking inside the bullet train even at its top speeds. He urged people to switch from cars to mass

transportation to reduce congestion and pollution, adding that congestion in Jakarta and Bandung is estimated to cost the economy more than \$6.5 billion a year.

PT KCIC has also been running a two-week, free-of-charge public trial prior to the inauguration.

Indonesia broke ground on the project in 2016. The line was originally expected to begin operations in 2019, but was delayed by disputes over land acquisition, environmental issues and the Covid-19 pandemic. It was planned to cost 66.7 trillion rupiah (\$4.3 billion), but the amount ballooned to 113 trillion rupiah (\$7.3 billion). The trains have been modified for Indonesia's tropical climate and are equipped with a safety system that can respond to earthquakes, floods and other emergency conditions. The 209-metre train has a capacity of 601 passengers. Ticket prices had not been finalised as of Saturday, but PT KCIC estimated one-way prices per passenger would range from 250,000 rupiah (\$16) for second class to 350,000 rupiah (\$22.60) for VIP seats.

Passengers going to downtown Bandung need to take a feeder train from the Padararang station that will add a further 20 minutes, with an estimated cost about 50,000 rupiah (\$3.20).

The rail deal was signed in October 2015 after Indonesia selected China over Japan in fierce bidding. It was financed with a loan from the China Development Bank for 75 percent of the cost. The remaining 25 percent came from the consortium's own funds. The project is part of a planned 750-kilometre high-speed train line that would cut across four provinces on Indonesia's main island of Java and end in the country's second-largest city, Surabaya.

"I'm so happy and very excited that finally we can ride a bullet train in Indonesia," said Christianto Nusatya, a Jakarta resident who joined a public test ride last week. "But still, I would prefer to choose a regular train or car, because Jakarta-Bandung is too short and not worth it to be reached by high-speed train."



AP/RS

A file photo shows people walking near a high-speed train during a test ride in Jakarta.

NICCI, BCCI ink MoU



PHOTO COURTESY: NICCI

Shreejana Rana, president of NICCI, underscored the potential of the Indo-Pacific region.

□ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, OCT 1

The Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI) and the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) marked a historic moment in economic collaboration with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) during the inaugural day of the Indo-Pacific Economic Conclave 2023 held in Kolkata, India on Thursday.

The MoU, a testament to the commitment of both organisations to enhance bilateral economic relations between Nepal and India, was formally inked by Shreejana Rana, President of NICCI, and Subir Chakraborty, President of BCCI, in a ceremony that symbolises a new era of economic cooperation.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Conclave 2023, organised by the BCCI, served as the ideal platform for this landmark agreement, according to a statement issued by NICCI.

Rana raised critical issues facing the Indo-Pacific region, including cargo shipment, infrastructure development, logistics optimisation, supply chain efficiency, visa regulations, and more.

In her address, Rana underscored the immense potential of the Indo-Pacific region, highlighting its economic dynamism, cultural diversity and capacity for innovation.

She shed light on concerns related to visa regulations, non-tariff barriers,

Apple says it will fix problems blamed for making iPhone 15 too hot to handle

□ ASSOCIATED PRESS
CALIFORNIA, OCT 1

Apple is blaming a software bug and other issues tied to popular apps such as Instagram and Uber for causing its recently released iPhone 15 models to heat up and spark complaints about becoming too hot to handle.

The Cupertino, California, company said on Saturday that it is working on an update to the iOS17 system that powers the iPhone 15 lineup to prevent the devices from becoming uncomfortably hot and is working with apps that are running in ways "causing them to overload the system."

Instagram, owned by Meta Platforms, modified its social media app earlier this week to prevent it from heating up the device on the latest iPhone operating system.

Uber and other apps such as the video game Asphalt 9 are still in the process of rolling out their updates, Apple said. It didn't specify a timeline for when its own software fix would be issued but said no safety issues should prevent iPhone 15 owners from using their devices while awaiting the update.

"We have identified a few conditions which can cause iPhone to run warmer than expected," Apple in a short statement provided to The Associated Press after media reports detailed overheating complaints that are peppering online message boards.

The Wall Street Journal amplified the worries in a story citing the overheating problem in its own testing of the new iPhones, which went on sale a week ago.

It's not unusual for new iPhones to get uncomfortably warm during the first few days of use or when they are being restored with backup information stored in the cloud — issues that Apple already flags for users.

The devices also can get hot when using apps such as video games and augmented reality technology that require a lot of processing power, but the heating issues with the iPhone 15 models have gone beyond those typical situations.

In its acknowledgement, Apple stressed that the trouble isn't related to the sleek titanium casing that houses the high-end iPhone 15 Pro and iPhone 15 Pro Max instead of the stainless steel used on older smartphones.

Apple also dismissed speculation that the overheating problem in the new models might be tied to a shift from its proprietary Lightning charging cable to the more widely used USB-C port that allowed it to comply with a mandate issued by European regulators.

NICCI, BCCI ink MoU



PHOTO COURTESY: NICCI

Shreejana Rana, president of NICCI, underscored the potential of the Indo-Pacific region.

ers, environmental sustainability, and climate change, all of which can significantly affect cross-border trade and investment.

Rana put forth a comprehensive set of solutions.

These proposals encompassed infrastructure development initiatives aimed at improving regional connectivity, simplification of trade agreements to reduce trade barriers and enhance economic integration, harmonisation of regulations to expedite cross-border trade processes, and measures to promote supply chain flexibility.

She also highlighted the significance of cultural exchanges, educational programmes and tourism as instruments to promote greater understanding and cooperation among nations. She stressed the importance of fostering a sense of regional identity and unity as a means to bolster cooperation further.

As part of the seamless connectivity agenda and to promote bilateral and regional tourism, Rana unveiled the recent release of a Coffee Table Book on Spiritual Circuits between Nepal and India. This beautifully curated book features five religious circuits—Ramayana, Mahabharat, Shivshakti, Buddhist, and Sikh—in both countries.

Following its successful unveiling in Nepal, plans are underway for a grand launch in India, enhancing cultural exchanges and promoting tourism.

WORLD

BRIEFING

Ukraine shot down 16 of 30 Russian drones, air forces say
KYIV: Ukraine's air defence systems shot down 16 out of around 30 drones that Russia launched on Ukraine's territory overnight, Ukrainian Air Forces said on Sunday. It said on Telegram messaging app that drones were launched from the southern, southeastern and northern directions. Authorities said the central Ukrainian Cherkasy region was under the attack. "At night, the enemy massively attacked our Cherkasy region with attack drones. Unfortunately, there were hits on industrial infrastructure in [the city of] Uman," Cherkasy Governor Ihor Taburets said on Telegram. "As a result, fires broke out in warehouses. In particular, where grain was stored," he said, adding that one person was injured. The Ukrainian presidential office said in a statement that civilian infrastructure and warehouses were also damaged in the southern Mykolaiv region and eastern Dnipropetrovsk region.

Russia's Medvedev says British training troops in Ukraine could be legitimate targets
MOSCOW: Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on Sunday suggested that British soldiers training Ukrainian troops in Ukraine would be legitimate targets for Russian forces, as would German factories producing Taurus missiles should they supply Kyiv. Medvedev, who is deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, and has become an increasingly hawkish and anti-Western figure in Russian politics, said such steps by the West were bringing World War Three closer. In a post on Telegram, Medvedev first directed his ire towards recently appointed British Defence Minister Grant Shapps, who said in a newspaper interview that London wants to deploy military instructors to Ukraine, in addition to training Ukrainian armed forces in Britain or other Western countries as at present. "[This will] turn their instructors into a legal target for our armed forces," Medvedev wrote on Telegram. "Understanding perfectly well that they will be ruthlessly destroyed. And not as mercenaries, but namely as British NATO specialists."

Powerball jackpot rises to \$1.04 billion
DES MOINES: The Powerball jackpot climbed to an estimated \$1.04 billion after no players hit it big on Saturday night, continuing a stretch of lottery futility lasting for more than two months. The numbers drawn were: 19, 30, 37, 44, 46 and red Powerball 22. The jackpot for the next drawing Monday night remains the world's ninth-largest lottery prize of all time. The \$1.04 billion jackpot is for a sole winner who opts for payment through an annuity, doled out over 30 years. Winners almost always take the cash option, which for Monday's drawing would be an estimated \$478.2 million. Those winnings would be subject to federal taxes, while many states also tax lottery prizes.

Nightclub fire kills at least seven in Murcia in Spain
MADRID: At least seven people have been killed in a fire in a nightclub in Murcia in southeast Spain, the mayor said, adding that rescuers were still searching for people unaccounted for after the blaze. The fire broke out in the early hours of Sunday in Teatre nightclub in Atalayas, on the outskirts of the city, emergency services said on social media platform X. Footage released on the X account of Murcia's fire service showed firefighters working to control flames inside the nightclub. The fire had destroyed part of the roof, the footage showed. "The number of deaths inside the Atalayas nightclub has risen to seven," Murcia Mayor Jose Ballesta wrote on X. "We are devastated," he said on Spanish TV channel 24h, adding rescuers were still searching for several people reported missing. Ballesta told 24h the fire started at around 6 am and had now been brought under control.

Pakistani Taliban attack a police post in eastern Punjab province, killing one officer
MULTAN: Pakistani Taliban fighters attacked a police post in eastern Punjab province early Sunday, killing one officer and injuring three others, and triggering a shootout that killed two of the attackers, officials said. The attack occurred in the Mianwali district of Punjab province and led to an intense exchange of fire as reinforcements arrived at the besieged police post, said Imran Nawaz, a spokesman for the counterterrorism police. A group of 10 to 12 militants attacked the Kundal police post in the Easa Khel area of Mianwali, close to the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, after midnight, Nawaz said. The exchange of gunfire continued for hours, during which two of the attackers were killed and a third was wounded but escaped with the others, Nawaz said. A search operation was underway to find the attackers, he said. (AGENCIES)

Slovakia ex-prime minister who pledged to end Ukraine aid wins election

A liberal rival vows to seek partners to prevent the former leftist prime minister's return to power.

REUTERS
BRATISLAVA, OCT 1

Slovakia's Robert Fico, who won an election after pledging to end military aid to Ukraine, was in pole position to start talks on forming a government on Sunday while a liberal rival vowed to seek partners to prevent the former leftist prime minister's return to power.

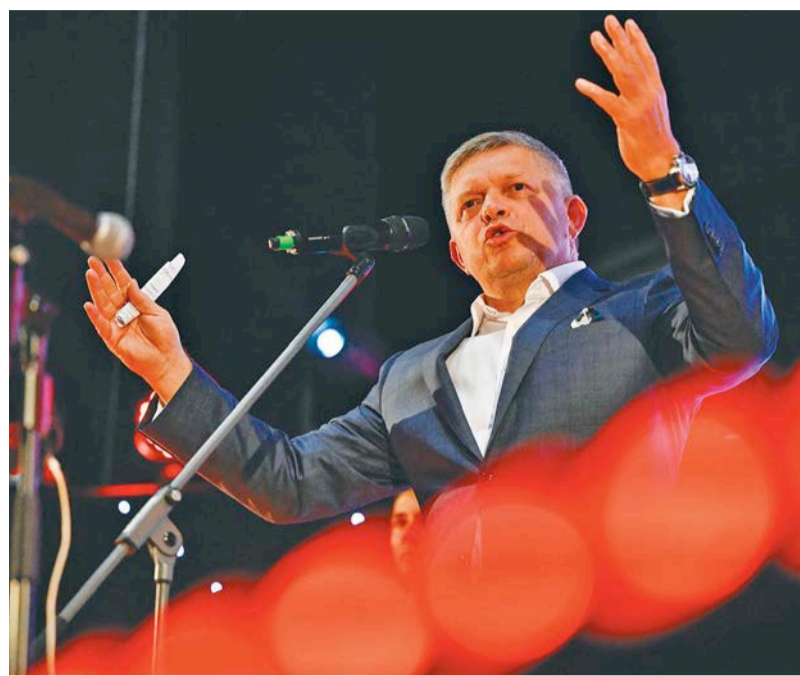
With 99.98 percent of voting districts reporting in the Saturday election, Fico's SMER-SSD party scored nearly 23 percent of the vote, followed by almost 18 percent for the Progressive Slovensko (Progressive Slovakia, PS) party.

The winner is expected to be given a political mandate by President Zuzana Caputova to try to find a majority, and form a government if successful.

A government led by Fico and his SMER-SSD party would see NATO member Slovakia joining Hungary in challenging the European Union's consensus on support for Ukraine, just as the bloc looks to maintain unity in opposing Russia's invasion.

The result—with SMER-SSD in need of coalition partners to rule—sets up the third-placed moderate leftist HLAS (Voice) as kingmaker.

HLAS leader Peter Pellegrini, who has previously said his party leans closer to SMER-SSD on policy, said on Sunday that the chance for a stable coalition and agenda priorities would guide negotiations,



A file photo of Slovakia's former prime minister and leader of SMER-SSD party Robert Fico.

which could last days or weeks.

Seven factions crossed the threshold to sit in the next parliament. As the party with the most votes, SMER-SSD is expected to be given the first chance to form a government, and it is likely to turn to the nationalist, pro-Russian Slovak National

Party and HLAS to gain a majority.

The party will hold a news conference at 1:00 pm (1100 GMT) to discuss the election results.

HLAS had not made Ukraine a campaign issue, with Pellegrini saying during campaigning that ammunition supplies were good for Slovakia's

defence industry. Its party programme has also backed having a united EU against Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

A Fico-led government would signal a further shift in central Europe against political liberalism, which may be reinforced if the ruling conservative Law and Justice (PiS) wins an election in Poland later this month.

Fico has leaned close to Hungary's leader, Viktor Orban, who congratulated the Slovak politician on his victory with a post on X social media platform on Sunday saying "Guess who's back!"

"Always good to work together with a patriot. Looking forward to it," Orban said.

Fico's party is critical of social liberalism, which it says is imposed from Brussels.

PS, which is liberal on green policies, LGBT rights, deeper European integration and human rights, will also court HLAS, with PS leader Michal Simecka on Sunday saying he still saw an option to form a ruling coalition.

"We believe that this is very bad news for Slovakia," Simecka told a news conference of SMER-SSD's victory.

"And it would be even worse news if Robert Fico succeeds in forming a government," he added. "We will do everything...so that Robert Fico does not rule in Slovakia."

Turkey says attackers set off bomb at Ankara government building



Security forces are seen following a bomb attack in Ankara, Turkey on Sunday.

REUTERS
ANKARA, OCT 1

Turkey's government said two terrorists carried out a bomb attack on Sunday in front of the Interior Ministry buildings in Ankara, leaving both of them dead and wounding two police officers in the capital city's first blast in years.

They drove up to the building's main entrance and set off the explosion in the area that is home to ministerial buildings and parliament, the interior minister said. The blast killed one of the attackers and authorities "neutralised" the other, he added.

Reuters footage after the blast

showed a Renault cargo vehicle parked, windows shattered and doors open, amid debris scattered on the street surrounded by soldiers, police, ambulances, fire trucks and armoured vehicles. The bomb on Ataturk Boulevard was the first in Ankara since 2016, and comes on the day that President Tayyip Erdogan is set to attend the opening session of parliament, located one kilometre away.

A senior Turkish official told Reuters the attackers had hijacked the vehicle and killed its driver in Kayseri, a city 260 km southeast of Ankara, before carrying out the attack. One of the injured officers suffered shrapnel injuries, he added.

"Two terrorists came with a light commercial vehicle in front of the entrance gate of the General Directorate of Security of our Ministry of Internal Affairs and carried out a bomb attack," Ali Yerlikaya, the interior minister, said on social media platform X.

He added that one blew himself up and the other was "neutralised", which usually means was killed, while the two officers were slightly injured in the incident at 9:30 am. "Our struggle will continue until the last terrorist is neutralised," he said, echoing condemnation by other Turkish officials. Police also announced they would carry out controlled explosions for "suspicious package incidents" in other parts of Ankara.

Authorities did not identify any specific militant group. The incident comes almost a year after six people were killed and 81 wounded in an explosion in a busy pedestrian street in central Istanbul. Turkey blamed Kurdish militants for that.

During a spate of violence in 2015 and 2016, Kurdish militants, Islamic State and other groups either claimed or were blamed for several attacks in major Turkish cities. In March 2016, 37 people were killed in Ankara when a bomb-laden car exploded at a crowded central transport hub.

Ankara's chief prosecutor launched an investigation on Sunday into what it also called a terrorist attack.

Erdogan was set at 7:30 pm to attend the opening of parliament, which in the coming weeks is expected to consider ratifying Sweden's bid to join NATO after Turkey had raised initial objections and delayed enlargement of the bloc.

Charles Michel, European Council president, said he strongly condemned what he called the terrorist attack, while EU Commissioner for Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi said it supports Turkey "in its fight against terrorism".

Maldives opposition candidate Muizzu wins presidential vote

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MALE, OCT 1

Maldives opposition candidate Mohamed Muizzu, who supports closer ties between the Indian Ocean archipelago and China, won the presidential runoff on Saturday with more than 53 percent of the vote, local media reported.

The election has turned into a virtual referendum on which regional power—India or China—will have the biggest influence in the small nation. Muizzu promised he would remove Indian troops from the Maldives and balance the country's trade relations, which he said were heavily in India's favor.

Mihaaru News reported that incumbent President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, seen as pro-India, had received 46 percent of the vote and that Muizzu had won by more than 18,000 votes. Official results were expected on Sunday.

"With today's result we have got the opportunity to build the country's future. The strength to ensure the freedom of Maldives," Muizzu said in a statement after his victory. "It's time we put our differences aside and come together."

We need to be a peaceful society," Muizzu also requested that Solih transfer former President Abdulla Yameen to house arrest from prison.

It was a surprise win for Muizzu, who entered the fray as an underdog. He was named only as a fallback candidate closer to the nomination deadline after the Supreme Court prevented Yameen from running because he is serving a prison sentence for money laundering and corruption. Yameen's supporters say he's been jailed for political reasons.

"Today's result is a reflection of the

Mali Tuareg rebels claim military base following clashes

REUTERS
BAMAKO, OCT 1

Mali's northern Tuareg rebels said on Sunday that they had seized another military base from the Malian army following fighting in the north of the country.

The military base is the fourth taken in a series of attacks the rebel alliance, called the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), has carried out since August following the departure of a UN peacekeeping mission that for years helped maintain a fragile calm.

Mohamed Elmaoulouf Ramadane, a spokesman for the CMA told Reuters on Sunday that they had taken control of the Bamba military base in the Gao region. He gave no further details.

The Malian army said in a post on X social media site that "intense combat against terrorists was ongoing at the Bamba locality", adding that more details will follow.

The CMA attack on Bamba, following those on military bases in Lere, Dioura and Bourem in the past weeks signals intensifying clashes as both sides seek to control territory in the desert centre and north of the West African country, just as UN peacekeepers withdraw.

The Malian army has also come under attacks from insurgents linked to al Qaeda and Islamic State.

The Tuaregs have long complained of government neglect and sought autonomy for the desert region they call Azawad.



Mohamed Muizzu

patriotism of our people. A call on all our neighbours and bilateral partners to fully respect our independence and sovereignty," said Mohamed Shareef, a top official of Muizzu's party. He told The Associated Press that it was also a mandate for Muizzu to resurrect the economy and for Yameen's release.

Neither Muizzu nor Solih got more than 50 percent in the first round of voting earlier in September.

Solih, who was elected president in 2018, was battling allegations by Muizzu that he had allowed India an unchecked presence in the country. Muizzu's party, the People's National Congress, is viewed as heavily pro-China. Solih has insisted that the Indian military's presence in the Maldives was only to build a dockyard under an agreement between the two governments and that his country's sovereignty won't be violated.

US Congress averts government shutdown

REUTERS
WASHINGTON, OCT 1

The US Congress passed a stopgap funding bill late on Saturday with overwhelming Democratic support after Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy backed down from an earlier demand by his party's hardliners for a partisan bill.

The Democratic-majority Senate voted 88-9 to pass the measure to avoid the federal government's fourth partial shutdown in a decade, sending the bill to President Joe Biden, who signed it into law before the 12:01 am ET deadline.

McCarthy abandoned party hardliners' insistence that any bill pass the House with only Republican votes, a change that could cause one of his far-right members to try to oust him from his leadership role.

The House voted 335-91 to fund the government through November 17, with more Democrats than Republicans supporting it.

That move marked a profound shift from earlier in the week, when a shutdown looked all but inevitable.

A shutdown would mean that most of the government's 4 million employees would not get paid—whether they were working or not—and also would shutter a range of federal services, from National Parks to financial regulators.

Federal agencies had already drawn up detailed plans that spell out what services would continue, such as airport screening and border patrols, and what must shut down, including scientific research and nutrition aid to 7 million poor mothers.

"The American people can breathe a sigh of relief: there will be no government shutdown tonight," Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said after the vote. "Democrats have said from the start that the only solution for avoiding a shutdown is bipartisanship, and we are glad Speaker McCarthy has finally heeded our message."



Thousands of people gather for a march to support the opposition against the governing populist Law and Justice party in Warsaw, Poland on Sunday. Polish opposition leader Donald Tusk seeks to boost his chances for the parliament elections due on October 15.



India look to end decade of hurt

India have not won an International Cricket Council event since the 2013 Champions Trophy, and the 2011 triumph on home soil remains their last World Cup title.

India have all their frontline players available after welcoming back Jasprit Bumrah, KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer from injury.

REUTERS NEW DELHI, OCT 1

India's success off the field has not been matched by their performances on it at World Cups over the last decade but with a near-perfect buildup, familiar conditions and recent history on their side, the hosts are favourites to end their title drought.

Rohit Sharma and his men head into the 50-overs showpiece event as the world's top-ranked ODI team and with the hopes of a cricket-mad country of 1.4 billion on their shoulders.

Despite their huge financial muscle, India have not won a global title since lifting the 2013 Champions Trophy but their smooth run-up to the World Cup has given fans optimism that Rohit's side are set to put that right.

India won the Asia Cup last month, beating former world champions Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the tournament, and have all their frontline players available after welcoming back Jasprit Bumrah, KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer from injury.

Rohit has spoken frequently about his desire to win a global title and even as firecrackers were going off in Colombo after the Asia Cup final the opener told fans to put their celebrations on hold until they win the World Cup. "You don't get World Cups served on a platter," he told reporters last month. "You have to really work hard and that is what we have been doing all these years."

Home advantage
Home comforts could prove crucial at the World Cup.

India's players know every inch of the venues and are well used to the evening dew that makes the ball slippery in the second innings.

With Rohit and Shubman Gill forming a redoubtable opening pair, and stalwart Virat Kohli following them in at number three, India have the kind of batting experience which could prove invaluable, especially while chasing.

While the top order trio bring a certain assuredness, Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav provide

the X-factor. With the ball, India have a sprightly pace attack led by Bumrah, and have almost wrapped Kuldeep Yadav in cotton wool after the left-arm wristspinner was named Player of the Series at the Asia Cup.

"We don't want to expose him a lot," Rohit explained after the spinner played only one match in the home series against Australia.

Of India's three all-rounders, Hardik Pandya has the ability to win a match on his own, plundering runs in the death overs or cranking up the speed to prise out wickets in the middle overs.

India will also take encouragement from the performances of home teams at the tournament, with the hosts winning the last three editions, beginning with India in 2011.

Of the current squad only Kohli was part of Mahendra Singh Dhoni's side which beat Sri Lanka in the final in Mumbai 12 years ago.

After that win, Indian players hauled Sachin Tendulkar onto their shoulders and gave him a victory lap,

with Kohli saying he deserved that honour after carrying the side for more than 20 years.

Kohli may not get another chance to win the World Cup as he will be almost 39 by the time the next edition rolls in 2027.

Perched on his team mates' shoulders on a victory lap of the world's largest cricket stadium after the October 19 final would be a fitting World Cup farewell for another Indian batting great.

INDIA AT ODI WORLD CUP

BEST RESULT
Winners (1983, 2011)

2019 RESULT
Lost to New Zealand in the semi-finals

INDIA'S GROUP FIXTURES

Oct 8 vs Australia	Oct 29 vs England
Oct 11 vs Afghanistan	Nov 2 vs Sri Lanka
Oct 14 vs Pakistan	Nov 5 vs South Africa
Oct 19 vs Bangladesh	Nov 12 vs Netherlands
Oct 22 vs New Zealand	

Nepal progress into men's cricket quarters at Asiad

Paudel scores a half-century and Bohara takes a six-wicket haul to guide the Rhinos to a 138-run win over the Maldives.

SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, OCT 1

Captain Rohit Paudel scored a half-century and Abinash Bohara took six wickets as Nepal national men's cricket team defeated the Maldives by 138 runs to advance into the quarter-finals at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China on Sunday.

Opting to bat first after winning the toss, Paudel smashed 52 runs off 27 balls and put on a record 70-run partnership for the fifth wicket with Gulsan Jha, who played 35-21, to guide Nepal to a big total of 212-7 at the Zhejiang University of Technology Cricket Field.

The partnership between Paudel and Jha is Nepal's highest for the fifth wicket in T20Is that eclipsed the 61-run stand by Aarif Sheikh and Binod Bhandari during their four-wicket win over Hong Kong in October 2019.

Paudel was run out in the 18.4 overs while Jha was caught by Hussain Saadhin off Tholal Mohamed Raya in the 14.6 overs.

Kushal Malla, who hit the fastest men's T20I hundred in Nepal's world records-smashing 273-run win against part-timers Mongolia on Wednesday, was unbeaten on 47 facing 20 deliveries.

Opener Kushal Bhurtel scored 35 runs off 18 balls before he was trapped leg before by Mohamed Miuvaan.

The Maldives' Nazwan Ismail took three wickets that included the wickets of Aasif Sheikh (6), Binod Bhandari (13) and Sundeep Jora (5).

But it was pacer Bohara who won it for Nepal with his sensational bowling display. Bohara returned the match figures of 3-4-0-11-6 to restrict the Maldives to 74 in 19.4 overs, becoming the first Nepali bowler to take six wickets in a T20I match.

Bohara's magic started in the sixth over when he removed Fared Shius (10) and Nazwan in the successive balls before dismissing Tholal Mohamed Raya two balls later to puncture the Maldives' run-chase.

Bohara then cut off the tail getting rid of Hussain Saadhin (3), Mohamed Miuvaan (0) and Naseer Naail Ismail (0) in the last over to give Nepal a comprehensive victory and a place in the last eight from Group A.

Second-placed Maldives and winless Mongolia crashed out.

Hong Kong also progressed into the quarter-finals as Group B winners. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan received direct entry into the last eight as top five ranked teams in the ICC T20I rankings as of June 1, 2023.

India are fielding a cricket team at the Asian Games for the first time.



19th Asian Games Hangzhou 2022

MEN'S CRICKET

GROUP A, HANGZHOU

TOSS: Nepal, bat first.

Nepal 212-7

Rohit Paudel 52 (27), Kushal Malla 47* (20), Gulsan Jha 35 (21), Nazwan Ismail 4-0-17-3

Maldives 74 (19.4/20 overs)

Muaviath Ganee 36 (34); Abinash Bohara 3-4-0-11-6
Nepal win by 138 runs.

GROUP B, HANGZHOU

TOSS: Hong Kong, field first.

Japan 127

Lachlan Yamamoto-Lake 60 (36), Kendel Kadowaki-Fleming 32 (25); Ayush Shukla 4-0-23-2, Anas Khan 4-0-23-2

Hong Kong 133-5 (18.5/20 overs)

Nasrulla Rana 36* (18), Babar Hayat 30 (23); Kohei Kubota 3-0-14-1

Hong Kong win by five wickets.

TABLE

GROUP A

TEAM	P	W	L	T	N/R	PT	NRR
Nepal	2	2	0	0	0	4	10.275
Maldives	2	1	1	0	0	2	-1.700
Mongolia	2	0	2	0	0	0	-11.575

GROUP B

TEAM	P	W	L	T	N/R	PT	NRR
Hong Kong	2	2	0	0	0	4	3.507
Japan	2	1	1	0	0	2	-0.015
Cambodia	2	0	2	0	0	0	-3.500

GROUP C

TEAM	P	W	L	T	N/R	PT	NRR
Malaysia	1	1	0	0	0	2	3.650
Singapore	2	1	1	0	0	2	0.650
Thailand	1	0	1	0	0	0	-4.950

QUARTER-FINALS

India	Pakistan
Sri Lanka	Bangladesh
Afghanistan	Nepal
Hong Kong	Group C winners

India's women's cricket team won the gold medal in their maiden appearance defeating Sri Lanka by 19 runs last week.

The quarter-finals begin on Tuesday.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Expect plot twists and pleasant surprises your way. Good vibes flow, asking you to follow your desires and passions. Look for opportunities to relax mid-afternoon, as a dreamy energy is in the air that's perfect for embracing leisure.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

You will be in a playful and rebellious mood, although you may need to slow down and check in with your emotional needs to ground and nurture yourself. Tonight is a good time to connect with your surroundings and five senses.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Pay attention to your thoughts to break free from restrictive patterns. You may feel yourself doubting your own authority, so find ways to boost yourself up while maintaining a positive internal dialogue. Luckily, you will find support through your social sphere.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Appreciate the strangeness surrounding you, and touch base with your intuition and spirituality if you start to feel out of sorts. Consider hitting the town with your bestie or that special someone this evening, helping to deepen important bonds.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

A limitless energy takes hold this morning, so lean into these vibes by pushing the envelope a bit, boldly pursuing your highest aspirations. You'll sense a shift tonight, that will urge you to nurture your community throughout the next two days.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Your thoughts, hopes, and dreams could manifest in strange ways this morning. Don't be afraid to communicate your desires to the other side, but remember to be clear with your words, both spiritually and in the real world.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

You may be surprised by the behaviours of others today. You may feel movement in your love life, so don't be afraid to make moves to get your heart where it wants to go. Lay low this evening to release stress.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Your heart may surprise you, and you may feel excitement in your love life that will encourage you to approach relationships unconventionally. Be careful to maintain healthy boundaries with anyone you're unsure of.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Try not to let your emotions cloud your judgment, and remember to handle your responsibilities. Lean into your spirituality, and be brave while having fun with life. Later tonight a romantic energy will encourage you to embrace love.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

You may feel your intuition heightened, though you'll want to take each sign or synchronicity with a grain of salt. Invest in your most intimate relationships and family dynamics, and encourage emotional exchange as a way to deepen bonds.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

A dreamy energy is in the air, though you should be mindful to stay grounded. Consider sharing your visions for the future with someone you love, opening the floor to collaboration and shared dreams. Laughter and creativity will be shared tonight.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Don't be afraid to share some of your more creative or wild ideas this morning. Plant seeds for the future, either through financial investments or outlining strategies for your next bold move. You'll feel drawn to the comforts of home tonight.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Fellows
- Celebrity
- Coffee or cocoa
- From the top
- Observes
- Perry's creator
- Island in Indonesia
- Order of chivalry
- Incentive
- Showy flowers
- Rotisserie rod
- Kitchen appliance
- UCLA athlete
- Perpetual
- "— is believing!"
- Store
- Keanu Reeves in "The Matrix"
- Fuzz
- Fish feature
- Molten rock
- 007, for one
- Greek portico
- Designer
- Coco —
- Netting
- Bar that pivots
- Assistant
- Look after
- Help recall
- Certain criminal
- Florida swamp

DOWN

- "Chocolate" dogs
- Med. school subject
- Sign in a market
- Beach vacation essential
- Hint
- Breakfast treat (var.)
- Elevator name
- Body part
- Fallen back
- Love personified
- Succulent plant
- Beatty and Flanders
- Tremble
- River in England
- Go — — smoke
- Genesis figure
- Light brown sandwich
- Coiffure
- Greek island

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
13				14			15		16			
17				18				19				
20				21				22				
23							24					
25	26						27			28	29	30
31							32			33		
34							35			36		
37				38	39			40	41			
42				43				44				
45								46				
47	48	49						50		51	52	53
54							55			56		
57							58			59		
60							61			62		

SUDOKU

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

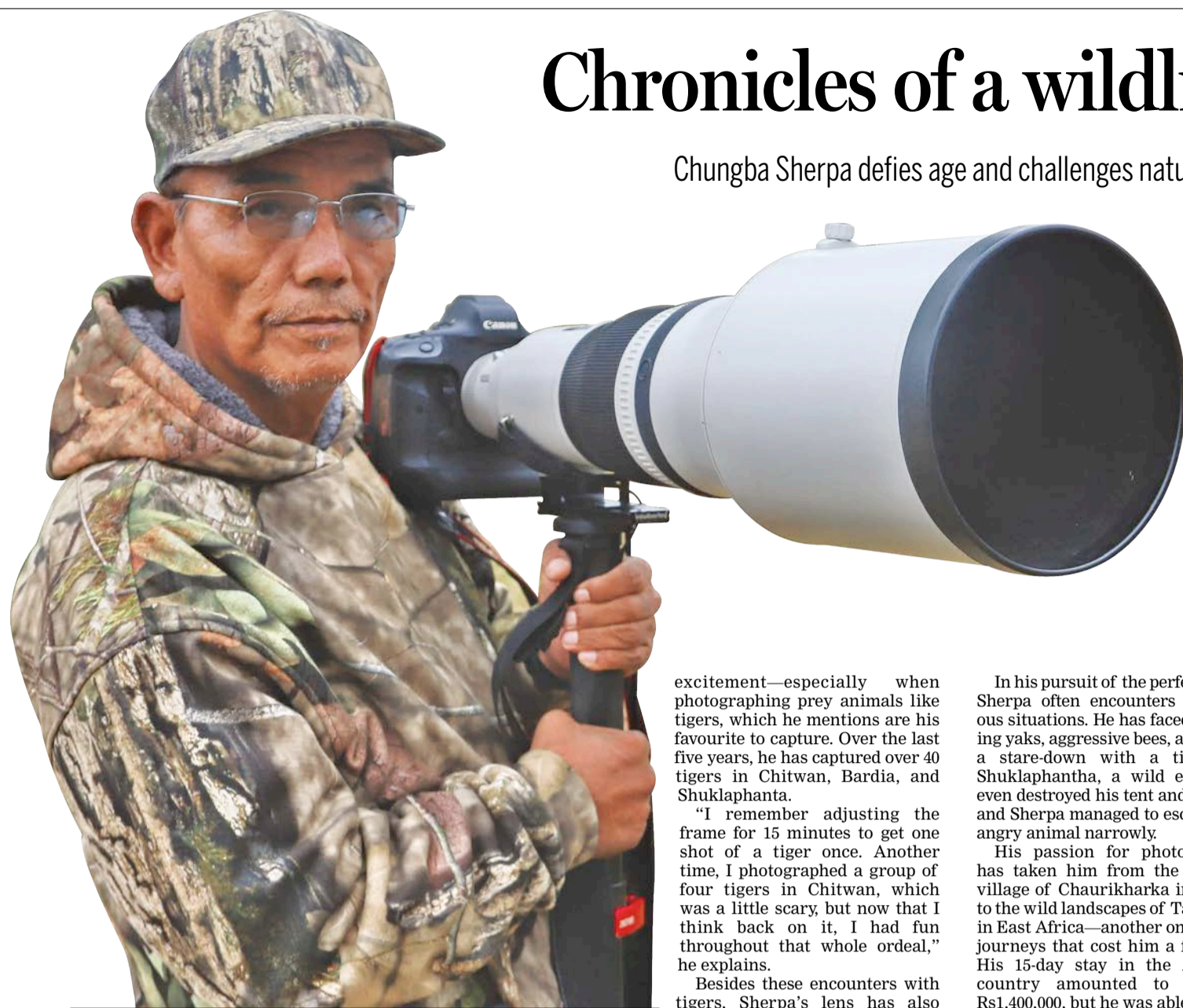
YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Chronicles of a wildlife photographer

Chungba Sherpa defies age and challenges nature's extremes to capture Nepal's fauna.



TEXT & PHOTOS: MANOJ PAUDEL
KAPILVASTU

Chungba Sherpa, now in his early 60s, has found a unique passion in the later years of his life—wildlife photography. While most individuals retire and start living in a more relaxed manner at his age, Sherpa is on a constant quest, navigating the heat of Tarai and the biting cold of the Himalayas, journeying in cars or helicopters, trying to capture the beauty of nature through his lens.



WHY DO IT

Born and raised in Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality Ward 2, Chaurikharka in Solukhumbu, he is no stranger to harsh climates and rugged terrains. This has helped him in many of his photography adventures as well. In a pursuit to capture a snow leopard, Sherpa waited out in the wilderness, battling unpredictable weather and deserted settlements for over two weeks, camping out in a tent. But the leopard never showed up, and he returned home disappointed.

Sometime later, Sherpa ventured into the Annapurna Conservation Area, intent on getting a shot of the leopard this time. His determination paid off

on the sixteenth day as the elusive creature made a rare appearance, and Sherpa seized the opportunity, capturing the shy leopard in over forty frames, varying the angles. "Out of the forty-two pictures, eighteen turned out to be beautiful," he reveals, adding that his personal favourite is one where the leopard is looking down into the lens directly.

Sherpa's dedication was put into perspective when an incident involving an American photographer, Kittiya Pawlowski, unfolded. Pawlowski's alleged snow leopard picture stirred controversy on social media, later proven to be fake. Sherpa's authentic and hard-earned photographs, especially the ones taken after days of patient waiting, gained newfound appreciation in light of this revelation.

Photography wasn't always Sherpa's sole focus. While he was interested in the field from a young age, familial responsibilities led him to work in the tourism business, temporarily setting aside his passion for the lens. With his children now established professionals, Sherpa found his way back to his true calling, with their wholehearted support amplifying his joy.

His journey into wildlife photography began five years ago. He invested significant time and energy into it, taking online classes from institutions in India, the US, and Malaysia.

According to Sherpa, he realises just how much he loves adventure every time he ventures into the wild. His heart races with

excitement—especially when photographing prey animals like tigers, which he mentions are his favourite to capture. Over the last five years, he has captured over 40 tigers in Chitwan, Bardia, and Shuklaphanta.

"I remember adjusting the frame for 15 minutes to get one shot of a tiger once. Another time, I photographed a group of four tigers in Chitwan, which was a little scary, but now that I think back on it, I had fun throughout that whole ordeal," he explains.

Besides these encounters with tigers, Sherpa's lens has also captured other creatures. High-altitude locations often become his workspace, and he relies on

He spends long hours in tents equipped with all the necessary gear, including camouflage clothing and various lenses.

high-quality equipment to capture his shots. He spends long hours in tents equipped with all the necessary gear, including camouflage clothing and various lenses. His equipment usually weighs around seven to eight kg.

Last October, he reached Limi Valley in Humla, near the Chinese border, to photograph the wildlife in the area. Here, he came across a species of wild yak that hasn't been photographed much. He captured a stunning image of the animal from about 15 to 30 meters away. This adventure alone cost him about Rs500,000—he took a helicopter from Simikot to Thakchi (near the Chinese border) and set up camp at an altitude of over 5,100 metres for three nights. But he believes all of it was worth it as this feat opens opportunities for wildlife study and research in Nepal.

"As far as I know, the only other time this species of wild yak was photographed (before) was in 2015 by the researcher Geraldine Werhahn. The same image is used in our Rs5 notes," he says.

In his pursuit of the perfect shot, Sherpa often encounters dangerous situations. He has faced charging yaks, aggressive bees, and even a stare-down with a tiger. In Shuklaphanta, a wild elephant even destroyed his tent and tripod, and Sherpa managed to escape the angry animal narrowly.

His passion for photography has taken him from the remote village of Chaurikharka in Nepal to the wild landscapes of Tanzania in East Africa—another one of his journeys that cost him a fortune. His 15-day stay in the African country amounted to around Rs1,400,000, but he was able to capture another elusive animal that hasn't been photographed a lot at the Tarangire National Park—the serval cat. He also managed to photograph many other animals, including lions, hippos, zebras, and giraffes.

Sherpa's work transcends boundaries. His photographs have been featured in newspapers, journals, calendars, and books worldwide—from Hong Kong and India to Switzerland and beyond—becoming windows into Nepal's natural beauty. He firmly believes that his work is a testament to his homeland—a showcase of its magnificence and an invitation to the world to witness the splendour of Nepal's wildlife.



Join the Excitement!



COMING SOON

Novelist Haruki Murakami hosts Japanese ghost story reading

He has been a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature for more than a decade.



MARI YAMAGUCHI
TOKYO, JAPAN

Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami hosted a ghost story reading event in Tokyo amid growing attention before the announcement of this year's Nobel Prize in literature, an award he is a perennial favourite to win.

Murakami said at the reading last week that he enjoys scary stories and wanted to write more of them. The event featured one from the 18th-century collection 'Tales of Moonlight and Rain', which intrigued Murakami since his childhood and is known to have inspired his work.

The classic collection written by Akinari Ueda and

called 'Ugetsu Monogatari' in Japanese explores a blurry borderline between the real and surreal, which Murakami said in a guide he contributed to a 2021 magazine made him wonder which side he was on.

Borders and walls are important motifs in Murakami's writing. Protagonists in his stories often travel through walls or between two worlds and encounter mysterious, exotic characters. While Murakami has said he grew up mostly reading Western novels, some experts have also noted the influence of Ueda's stories in some of Murakami's work.

Murakami has been a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature for more than a decade, and the winner of the 2023 prize is scheduled to be announced on October 5. If he wins, he will be the first Japanese writer since Kenzaburo Oe in 1994 to be named a Nobel laureate.

Japanese media have also mentioned novelists Yoko Ogawa and Yoko Tawada as possible contenders in recent years, and international media have also put Chinese fiction writer Can Xue and American novelist Thomas Pynchon on the list of this year's potential winners.

The pending Nobel Prize did not come up at the ghost story event. Kayoko Shiraishi, a veteran actress known for ghost tale monologues, performed Ugetsu's 'The Kibitsu Cauldron', a story of an imprudent man who marries a priest's good daughter despite a cauldron's fortunetelling revealing a bad omen. The protagonist meets a horrendous end after betraying his wife, who becomes a vengeful spirit.

Murakami said he enjoyed Shiraishi's "scary" performance in multiple roles and said he would like her to try 'The Mirror', one of the short horror stories he wrote in 1983.

— Associated Press