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TODAY

NATIONAL

Two projects in Nepal have been listed as the 'outcome' of Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation that concluded on October 18. Deputy PM Narayan Kaji Shrestha attended the event in Beijing. Pg 3

OPINION



Nepal's public fund scenario is criticised for inefficient allocation, misappropriation, low capital expenditure, revenue leakages and inadequate oversight, writes Hari Sharma. Pg 4

MONEY

Once a major cash crop of Eastern Tarai, and proud symbol of the dawn of industrialisation in the country, jute is now fighting for its life. The government has dropped the commodity from its priority list. Pg 5

SPORTS

Five-time champions Australia edged out gallant New Zealand by five runs in a World Cup thriller on Saturday. Australia piled up 388 all out as Travis Head top-scored with 109 and David Warner made 81. Pg 7



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Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba (right) welcomes CPN-UML chief KP Sharma Oli to a tea party at Sanepa, Lalitpur on Saturday. POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

Human Rights Commission requests global alliance to save its 'A' status

The umbrella body of human rights institutions from 127 countries is expected to make the decision within a week.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, OCT 28

The National Human Rights Commission has requested the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) to be allowed to retain its global "A" status, claiming that it has been working effectively in human rights protection hand in hand with civil society.

After holding a review for two consecutive years, a GANHRI sub-committee on accreditation (SCA) in October last year recommended downgrading the national human rights watchdog to the "B" category. Before taking the final decision of downgrade, the commission on Wednesday was allowed to present its defence.

Surya Dhungel, a commission member, said he confidently argued that the commission must not lose its present status as it is working to safeguard human rights.

"I said that the commission deserves the 'A' status for the effective role it has been playing to protect and promote human rights in close cooperation with civil society," Dhungel told the Post.

"I also highlighted that the government was positive about introducing a bill to amend the commission's Act to allocate the authorities to the commission in line with the Paris Principle. I

am hopeful that GANHRI will halt the downgrade."

Alteration of the accreditation of the commission's "A" status was on the agenda of the GANHRI's annual session for 2023, held from Monday to Thursday.

The umbrella body of human rights institutions from 127 countries is expected to take the final call within a week, according to Dhungel.

Commission member Dhungel says NHRC must not lose its rank given its good work.

The SCA decided to review the commission's present status following complaints from various human rights organisations, mainly over the appointments of the NHRC's chairperson and members. After two reviews in 2021 and 2022, the GANHRI recommended the downgrade, saying the appointment process was flawed and the commission hadn't played an effective role in safeguarding the rights of marginalised and minority communities.

>> Continued on page 2

Nepal's power could light more of India after new import rule

As the energy mix is reset, imported hydropower will count in Indian distributors' renewable energy obligation.

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU, OCT 28

Nepal will have a chance to export more hydroelectricity to India as the southern neighbour introduces a new rule allowing Indian distributors to incorporate imported hydropower into the renewable energy quota set for them.

In a new notification issued last week, India's power ministry set a new quota of renewable energy that distribution companies should meet starting from the fiscal year 2024-25.

Minimum quotas related to wind energy, hydro renewable energy, distributed renewable energy and other renewables have been set.

While setting the quota, the ministry also told the distribution companies that they can also meet the quota by importing hydropower.

The hydro renewable energy component may also be met from hydropower projects located outside India, as approved by the central government on a case-to-case basis, the notification states.

Earlier, they were told to fulfil the quota by buying only the power produced domestically.

The notification issued in January 2021 and modified in July last year forced distribution companies to buy a specified percentage of hydropower from domestic projects, not from foreign producers, in a policy

called Hydropower Purchase Obligation (HPO).

According to a statement issued by Kul Man Ghising, managing director of the NEA, Nepal and Bhutan could benefit from the new rule—if it is implemented. The new rule is said to come into force on April 1, 2024.

"Nepal had long been requesting the Indian government to incorporate hydroelectricity from outside India into the HPO, which now has been done," said Ghising.

Earlier, distributing firms in India relied on domestic output to honour renewable rule.

"It will allow India's distribution companies to buy hydropower, and Nepal's hydropower can get a greater market in India."

In bilateral meetings, Nepal had been requesting the Indian side to include Nepal's hydropower in HPO. The issue was raised during the energy secretary-level—ninth and 10th Joint Steering Committee (JSC)—meetings between the two sides, according to Prabal Adhikari, power trade director at the NEA. The 10th meeting was held in February in Jaipur, India.

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Gaza Strip under blackout as Israel says it attacks Hamas 'everywhere'

According to aid agencies, humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding for 2.3 million people.

REUTERS
JERUSALEM, OCT 28

Gaza was largely cut off from the outside world on Saturday as Israel rained more bombs from the air and suggested its long-promised ground offensive against Hamas militants controlling the Palestinian enclave was underway.

Israel said troops sent in on Friday night were still in the field whereas previously it had made only brief sorties during three weeks of bombing to destroy Hamas whom it said killed 1,400 Israelis, mostly civilians, on Oct. 7. "We attacked above the ground and under ground, we attacked terror operatives of all ranks, everywhere," Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said in a video statement. "The operation will continue until a new order."

Israel's military renewed a call for civilians to move south from the north where it says Hamas is hiding under civilian buildings. Palestinians say nowhere is safe.

Gaza has been under an almost complete communications blackout since Friday evening, which the Palestinian Red Crescent blamed on Israel.

Military spokesperson Daniel Hagari said Israel would allow trucks with food, water and medicine to enter Gaza, indicating that bombing might pause, at least in the area of its border with Egypt where some aid has trickled in. Aid agencies say a humanitari-



A sign is held reading 'stop bombing Gaza' at a rally of the pro-Palestinian community 'Furkan Movement' in Dortmund, western Germany on Saturday. AFP/RS

an catastrophe is unfolding for Gaza's 2.3 million people who are under a total Israeli blockade. Health authorities in the Hamas-run enclave said 7,650 Palestinians, also mostly civilians, have been killed since Israel's bombardment began.

World Health Organisation (WHO) head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said the blackout was blocking ambulances and evacuations of patients and denying people safe shelter.

He and other aid agencies said they

could not contact their staff, but a representative from the International Committees of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Red Crescent in Gaza got an audio message out.

William Schomburg said medics were working around the clock while also dealing with personal tragedies. "I spoke to one doctor who had lost his brother and cousin the night before," he told the BBC in a clip the ICRC posted on X.

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NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Two boys drown in Kanda River

DHANGADHI: Two boys, aged six and seven, drowned in the Kanda river in Kailali district on Friday. According to Birendra Bishwakarma, Deputy Superintendent of Police at the Area Police Office in Sukhad, the deceased are six-year-old Dipsan Malla and seven-year-old Aayush Malla of Bardagoriya Rural Municipality-6. The victims had been to the stream to take a bath, police said.

Humla police chief suspended on abuse charge

BIRENDRANAGAR: Deputy Superintendent of Police Bhimlal Bhattarai, chief of Humla District Police Office, has been suspended on the charge of abusing his colleague. Nepal Police Headquarters suspended Bhattarai after a complaint accused him of abusing a fellow police woman while he was under the influence of alcohol. Rabintra Khanal has been sent to replace Bhattarai. He had faced a departmental action some three years ago on the charge of consuming liquor and not following commands during his posting at the Butwal Area Police Office.

Teams reach Mugu to probe death of four family members

MUGU: Three different investigation teams of Nepal Police have reached Mandu village to probe the suspicious death of four family members. According to Deputy Inspector General of Police Bhim Dhakal, two teams from Karnali Province Police Office have been dispatched to the incident site and a police team from Jumla has also reached Mugu. Shreedevi Bohara, 26, and her three children were found dead inside their house on Friday.

NHRC scrambles to save its 'A' status

>> Continued from page 1
Dhunge said though he defended the commission's role, he didn't talk about the appointment process as the matter was sub-judice in the Supreme Court.

The Constitutional Council led by then-prime minister KP Sharma Oli had nominated chairpersons and members to various constitutional bodies, including the NHRC, based on a revision to the Constitutional Council Act enforced through an ordinance on December 15, 2020. After the Council's nominations, President Bidya Devi Bhandari on February 3, 2021 appointed the chair and four commissioners to the NHRC. They were appointed without going through parliamentary hearings in the absence of the House of Representatives.

Over half a dozen writ petitions challenging the ordinance and the appointment process are sub-judice in the Supreme Court. The hearing on the petitions has been slated for December 6.

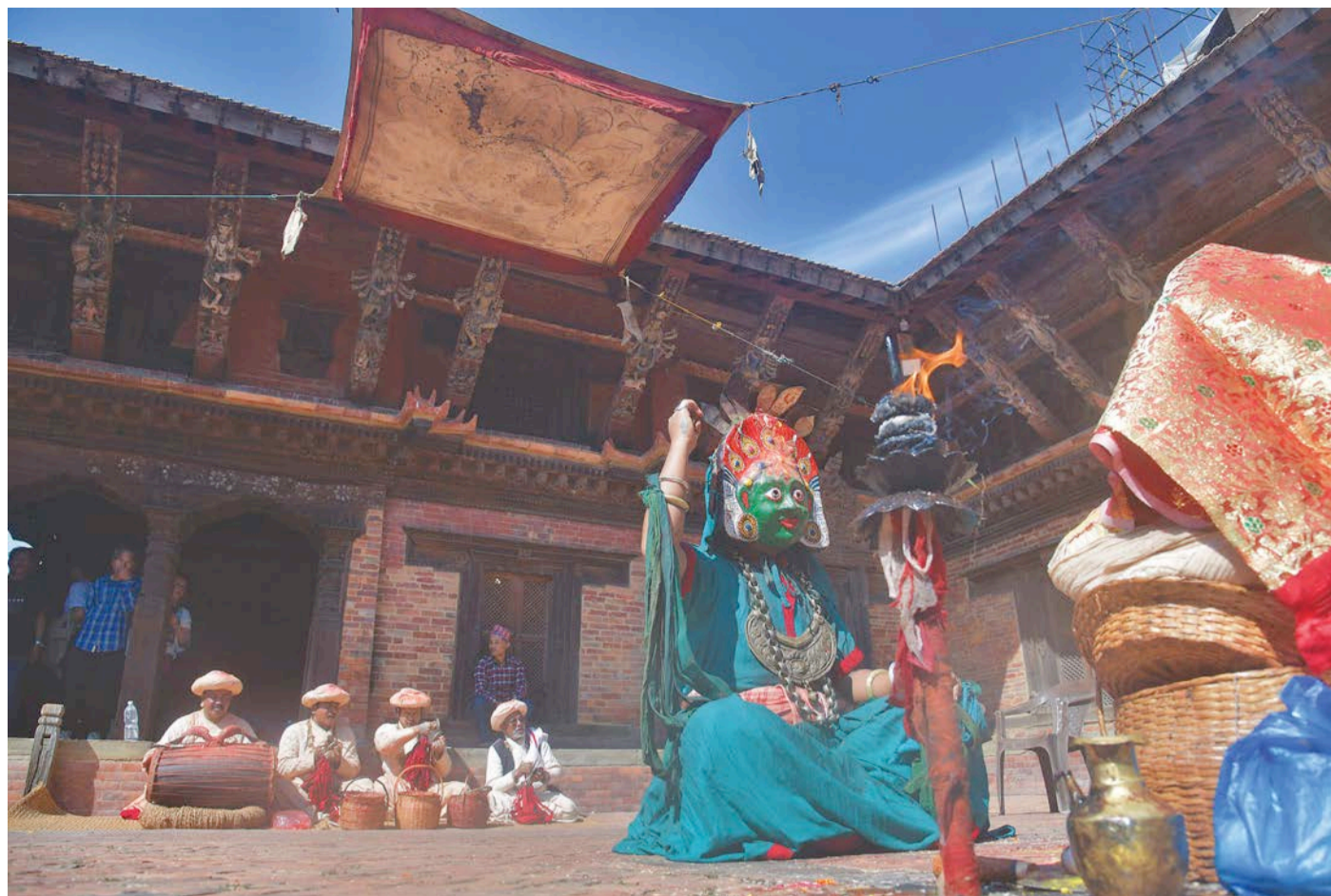
The SCA says that the appointments do not align with the Paris Principles. Adopted in 1993 by the United Nations General Assembly, the Paris Principles set six criteria that national human rights institutions must follow. These include autonomy from the government and the independence guaranteed by the constitution, besides adequate competence, pluralism and the availability of resources and powers to carry out investigations.

The commission has been arguing that the Supreme Court was testing the legality of the appointments while also reiterating that the appointments adhered to the Paris Principles.

Those informed about the accreditation process say it is possible for GANHRI to wait for a few months if the commission had strongly made its case. "I believe GANHRI can wait until the court ruling. However, it depends on how strongly the commission defended itself," Bed Bhattarai, a former secretary at the commission, told the Post. "But, yes, it would be right to wait for the court ruling, which will possibly come in December." The GANHRI accreditation sub-committee meeting in 2021 didn't take any decision on the NHRC's fate as it waited for the court order. However, as the court did not decide on the matter even in a year, the sub-committee in October 2022 recommended downgrading the NHRC to 'B' category.

Only the country whose human rights commission is graded "A" can put forth its opinion in deliberations at the UN Human Rights Council and vote on its decisions. Similarly, only such countries can contest or vote for the leadership position in GANHRI and the Asia Pacific Alliance of Human Rights Institutions.

स्क्रटर हरयो
मिति २०८०/०७/०१ गते काठमाडौं जिल्ला कागेश्वरी मनोहरा न.पा-८ गोडाटार स्थित घरमा पार्किङ गरिराखेको बा.प्र.०२-०३५ प २०८७ नं. को हरियो रंगको DIO LED DLX होण्डा स्क्रटर हरयाको हँसा पाउनु हुने महानुभावले फोन नं. ९८१८३१३४५० वा नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालयमा खबर गरिदिनु हुन अनुरोध गर्दछ।
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Masked performers stage the Thecho Navadurga dance at Mulchowk in Patan Durbar Square on Saturday.

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

Kulekhani reservoir remains below its storage capacity this year

The possibility the reservoir being filled up nears zero as monsoon has already left the country.

PRATAP BISTA
HETAUDA, OCT 28

The reservoir of Kulekhani Hydropower Project, the country's only reservoir type power plant, has remained below its storage capacity this year.

The possibility of the reservoir being filled up nears zero as monsoon, which causes almost 90 percent rains in Nepal, has already left the country. Around seven metres of water is yet to be filled up.

On July 16, the water level dropped to 1,495.4 metres, this year's lowest.

Kulekhani's reservoir would have been filled up as of now unless the power project generated electricity in June and July, said Dharendra Chaudhary, chief of Kulekhani Hydropower Project-I. "All three units of Kulekhani Hydropower Project were operated in June and July with the view that the reservoir would overflow during the rainy season," he said.

Kulekhani-I, II and III have the installed capacity of generating 60, 32 and 14 mega watts, respectively. All three power projects were operated from 15 to 20 hours on a daily basis in June-July.



The reservoir spans seven kilometres in length and 300 metres wide.

POST FILE PHOTO

The reservoir, spanning seven kilometres in length and 300 metres wide, was built to hold 1,530 metres of water as up to 1,484 metres of water can be used to generate electricity. Water level was at 1,522.40 metres in the reservoir at 4pm on Saturday. According to officials, the water level in the reservoir was 1,525.5 metres during this time last year.

"It stopped raining heavily in the water catchment areas of the reservoir this season," said a senior techni-

cian at the Kulekhani-I requesting anonymity. "The reservoir possibly remains below its storage capacity this year."

He, however, said that there won't be any problem with electricity in the dry season this year.

On July 16, the water level dropped to 1,495.4 metres, this year's lowest. According to the power project officials, the water level keeps on increasing in the monsoon season and rises by around eight centimetres on a daily

basis now.

Daman, Palung, Bajrabarahi, Chitlang of Thaha Municipality and Markhu as well as Phakhel of Indrasarowar Rural Municipality of Makwanpur district are the water catchment area of Kulekhani, the biggest artificial reservoir in the country.

Kulekhani Hydropower Project-I came into operation in 1982. The reservoir initially had its capacity of storing 85.3 million cubic metres of water. However, the capacity has dwindled to 59.99 million cubic metres now due to collection of debris on the reservoir bed.

According to the technicians, the electricity generation capacity has also decreased with dwindling water storage capacity of the reservoir. A total of 211.1 million units of electricity could be generated with the water stored in the reservoir when it came into operation around 41 years ago. But the power generation capacity plunged to around 144.7 million units now due to siltation.

"Around 170,000 cubic metres of debris including sand, soil, stones and foliage have accumulated on the bottom of the reservoir," said an engineer of Kulekhani-I, demanding the debris be dredged out from the reservoir. "The increasing level of the reservoir will certainly affect the capacity of three power projects."

Kulekhani hydel projects, owned by the Nepal Electricity Authority, operate Nepal's only reservoir plant and its cascades at full capacity usually during the dry season when the output of the run-of-the-river projects is low.

Situation in Gaza 'worst it had been', with no power and no fuel

>> Continued from page 1

The few journalists who made contact with the outside world also said the situation was the worst it had been.

"If you are dying, you can't ring up the ambulance service. If you are struck, whatever happens, you can't communicate with anyone," Plestia Alaqad said in a video.

Drones and planes buzzed in the background.

"There is no internet, no network, no service, no fuel to move around by car, no electricity, nothing," she added.

Video from the Israeli side of the heavily-fortified fence on Saturday morning showed explosions sending up clouds of smoke among a line of ruined buildings.

Al Jazeera, which broadcast live satellite TV footage overnight showing frequent blasts in Gaza, said Israeli air strikes had hit areas around the enclave's main hospital, Al Shifa, in Gaza City in the north.

Israel's military accused Hamas on Friday of using the hospital as a shield for its tunnels and operational centres, an allegation the group denied. Reuters could not verify reports of strikes near the hospital.

An Al Jazeera correspondent, reporting live on Saturday morning, said after a night of heavy bombardment Palestinians were taking the dead and injured to hospital in their cars.

Some of the relatives of people captured in Israel during the October 7 Hamas assault demanded a meeting with the Israeli government after what they called "the most terrible of all nights".

"None of the war cabinet bothered to meet with the families of the hostages to explain one thing—whether

the ground operation endangers the well-being of the 229 hostages in Gaza," the Hostages and Missing Persons Families Forum headquarters said.

Gallant said he would meet with family representatives of the hostages on Sunday.

Another relative of hostages, Yosi Shnaider, said Israel's military operation was the only way to release them.

"We can't wait anymore," he said.

Israel said rockets were still being fired at it from Gaza and released footage of its ground forces, including a column of tanks, operating inside the territory, though it did not specify when it was from.

Fighter jets killed the head of Hamas' aerial wing, Asem Abu Rakaba, a key figure in the October 7 attack on Israel's southern towns, it said.

"He directed the terrorists who infiltrated Israel on paragliders and was responsible for the drone attacks on IDF [Israel Defense Forces] posts," the military said.

Fighter jets had also struck 150 underground targets in the northern Gaza Strip, including Hamas tunnels, underground combat spaces and other underground infrastructure, killing others from the group.

The armed wing of Hamas, the al-Qassam brigades, said early on Saturday its fighters were clashing with Israeli troops in Gaza's north-eastern town of Beit Hanoun and in the central area of Al-Bureij.

"Al-Qassam Brigades and all Palestinian resistance forces are fully prepared to confront the aggression with full force and thwart the incursions," it said.

The United States and other Western countries have offered strong

support to Israel but urged it to hold off on a ground offensive for fear of high casualties among Palestinians and a widening conflict.

Hamas is backed by Iran, which also supports militias in Lebanon, Syria,

Iraq and Yemen. US troops have come under fire from Iran-backed groups in Iraq and Syria. Washington has been moving more military assets to the region.

The Israeli military reported a new

India's new rule on renewable quota a 'welcome initiative'

>> Continued from page 1

"It is a welcome initiative by the Indian government for cross-border trading of power," said Adhikari. "It will help Nepal promote hydropower development by ensuring its market in India and encourage the Indian entities concerned to import more and more hydropower from neighbouring countries like the hydropower-rich Nepal in the coming years."

For the past few years, the southern neighbour has been fixing the quota of renewable energy for its distribution companies as it aims to grow the share of renewable energy in its total energy mix.

As per the latest notification, it aims to maintain the share of renewable energy to a minimum 29.91 percent in fiscal 2024-25 and increase it to 43.33 percent by the fiscal 2029. The quota of hydroelectricity has been fixed at 0.38 percent for the fiscal 2024-25. This must be jacked up to 1.33 percent by fiscal 2029-30.

Any shortfall in specified renewable energy consumption targets will be treated as non-compliance and a penalty imposed, the notice states. The Energy Conservation Act, 2001 specifies the rate of penalty.

Currently, India allows Nepal to sell 632MW of electricity in its market. As much as 522MW has been cleared for sale in India's exchange market—both day-ahead and real-time markets. Nepal has been selling 44MW in the real-time market after the southern neighbour opened the door for competition in July.

Under a five-year agreement, the NEA has been selling 110MW of power to the NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam Limited, India's nodal agency for bilateral electricity trade with its neighbours, and the electricity is being sold in India's Haryana state.

Nepal's power developers are yet to get the licence to export electricity but they see prospects of them selling power in India in the future. As there is no legislation allowing the private sector in the trade, they cannot trade power in or outside the country.

"Once the private sector can trade power legally, Nepal's private actors can also take advantage of the new rules introduced by the Indian government," said Ananda Chaudhary, vice-president of the Independent Power Producers' Association, Nepal (IPPAN). "Nepal's private sector has long been lobbying with the Indian authorities to include Nepal's hydropower into the HPO."

Even though the southern neighbour has not been quick enough to open its market to Nepal's power sector, it is doing so gradually. Nepal still has concerns over another policy of the Indian government—its order of December 2 last year to waive Interstate Transmission System (ISTS) charges for electricity generated by new projects.

The waiver, already available to solar and wind power projects, will not apply to the hydroelectricity Nepal exports. This, according to Nepali officials and private sector developers, results in Nepali producers losing the competitive edge in the Indian power market.

"We want India to waive ISTS charges, which will help Nepal's power to be competitive in the Indian market," said Chaudhary. "We have raised this issue at various forums with Indian authorities too."



People check the destruction following Israeli strikes on Al-Shatee camp in Gaza City on Saturday.

AFP/RS

Valley sees 103 incidents during Dashain, two killed

KATHMANDU: Dashain this year has become peaceful except for a few incidents in the Kathmandu valley, according to the traffic police.

Although there were sporadic incidents between Phulpati, the seventh day of Dashain on October 21, and October 27, there have not been major criminal activities and incidents of theft and robbery and road accidents, said Senior Superintendent of Police Dinesh Raj Mainali, spokesperson for the Kathmandu Valley Police Office.

In terms of peace and security, the festival this year has concluded more amicably than in previous years. Surveillance involving a special security plan and police in civvies was held in potentially risky areas. Surveillance was carried out in all three districts using trained dogs and drones, he said.

"Dashain became peaceful as a result of mobilising additional security personnel. Now, there is a plan to continue the watch until Chhath," Mainali said. However, in sporadic incidents numbering 103, two people were killed and 118 others injured.

Fifty-one incidents were related to traffic in which one person was killed and 73 injured. One person died and 13 others were injured in 13 incidents of fighting. In 10 incidents of theft, three people injured by the use of homemade weapons.

In three gambling-related incidents, 22 gamblers were arrested—seven from Kathmandu, 13 from Lalitpur and two from Bhaktapur. Cash around Rs500,000 was confiscated from them, police said. (RSS)

Two projects of Nepal listed as Belt and Road outcome

However, rather than being new ventures, the projects are already in operation in Nepal. The outcome document remains mum on Pokhara airport.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, OCT 28

Two mini projects of Nepal have been listed in the outcome document of the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF), which concluded on October 18 in Beijing. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Narayan Kaji Shrestha had participated in the forum.

The Chinese side, in a statement released on October 18, mentioned the Panda Pack project and Amity Living Water Project as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. However, rather than being new ventures, the projects are already in operation in Nepal.

According to the website of the Panda Pack project, it was launched in February 2019 by the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation jointly with Alibaba Philanthropy. "The Panda Pack Project aims to improve the basic learning conditions of primary school students in need and help the development of quality education in beneficiary countries. With the theme of 'Gifts for Panda Land', it embodies the good wishes of the Chinese people to the children in beneficiary countries, and express the friendship of Chinese people and strengthens people-to-people ties," says the website.

The Panda Pack Project had helped 742,151 students by 2020, said the website. The project is being implemented in Myanmar, Nepal, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Laos, Pakistan and Namibia.

According to the website of the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, it was registered in

ND ROAD FORUM FOR INTERNATIONAL LEVEL FORUM ON GREEN DEVELOPE

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18 OCTOBER 2023 BE



Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha addresses the forum, which concluded on October 18.

Lalitpur in 2015 as a nongovernmental organisation (NGO). Through its Nepal office, the CFPA has successfully implemented a series of development aid projects based on local needs. The programmes centre on United Nations Sustainable Development Goals such as no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well being, quality education, clean water and sanitation, decent work and economic growth.

The outcome document of the second Belt and Road conference in 2019

China has mentioned the Panda Pack project and Amity Living Water Project as part of BRI.

had incorporated the Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network, including

cross-border railway. Nepal signed China's BRI framework agreement in 2017 but not a single project, its critics in Nepal argue, has been taken up or negotiated since.

Under this framework, China has already started conducting a feasibility study, which is expected to be completed in another four years, of Kerung-Kathmandu railway.

Unlike what Chinese ambassador to Nepal Chen Song had stated about the Pokhara International Airport—that

it is a flagship BRI project in Nepal—the outcome document remains mum on the airport.

One day ahead of the inauguration of the Pokhara airport on December 31, 2022, the Chinese Embassy wrote in its Twitter (X) account: "This [Pokhara airport] is the flagship project of the China-Nepal BRI cooperation."

The Chinese embassy also congratulated the government and people of Nepal on the connectivity milestone. But the statements by the embassy and Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Chen Song were countered by the government of Nepal, saying that not a single project under the flagship of BRI has been signed between the two countries.

Both Foreign Minister NP Saud and Tourism Minister Sudan Kirati had denied the Chinese claim. After strong reservations and denial from ministers and senior government officials, the Chinese side has probably backtracked on its claim, a senior official at the Prime Minister's Office said, asking not to be named. "As the BRI is a bilateral pact, any decision taken under the framework should be accepted by both sides."

The second project included in the outcome document of the third BRI conference is the Amity Living Water Project in Nepal. The X account of Amity Living mentions that the organisation is a faith-based Chinese NGO dedicated to working for social development around the world. The NGO works in the water and sanitation sector.

According to the Social Welfare Council's website, Transform Nepal Sarlahi has on different occasions received donations from the Amity Foundation China.

New Saarc secretary general assumes office

Golam Sarwar is the 15th secretary general of the regional grouping and the third from Bangladesh.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, OCT 28

New Secretary General of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation Golam Sarwar of Bangladesh assumed duties this week, according to the Saarc Secretariat. Sarwar is the 15th secretary general of Saarc and the third secretary general from Bangladesh.

As per the Saarc tradition of leading the secretariat on the basis of alphabetical order, it was Afghanistan's turn to recommend the new secretary general. But as the new regime in Kabul is yet to be recognised by the Saarc member states, Bangladesh got the chance to recommend the new secretary general after Sri Lankan veteran diplomat Esala Ruwan Weerakoon completed his tenure in March.

Addressing the staff of the secretariat at a welcome reception, Sarwar conveyed his gratitude to the member states for the opportunity



Golam Sarwar

given to him to serve the association. He further emphasised the need to raise the profile of the regional body and highlighted the need to

engage actively and effectively to serve the member states to accomplish the entrusted important mandates to the secretariat, according to a statement issued by the secretariat on Saturday.

"In this regard, he sought continued support from the member states," reads the statement. Sarwar is a career diplomat who joined the Bangladeshi foreign service in 1991. He has served extensively in different capacities both at home and abroad.

He earlier served as Bangladesh ambassador to Malaysia, Oman and Sweden, with concurrent accreditation to Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland. He was the Consul General of Bangladesh in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and worked in various Bangladeshi missions such as Yangon, Kuala Lumpur, Kathmandu and Washington DC. In his long diplomatic career, Sarwar represented Bangladesh on numerous occasions in various regional and international forums.

Nepal supports UN resolution for immediate truce in Israel-Hamas war

The resolution calls for an 'immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce' between Israeli forces and Hamas militants.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, OCT 28

Nepal has voted in favour of a United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for a "durable and sustained humanitarian truce" in the Israel-Hamas war. The resolution, proposed by Jordan and backed by over 45 member states, was approved by a vote of 120 to 14, with 45 nations abstaining. The resolution calls for an "immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce" between Israeli forces and Hamas militants in Gaza.

It also demands a "continuous, sufficient and unhindered" provision of lifesaving supplies and services for civilians trapped inside the enclave, as reports suggest Israel has expanded ground operations and intensified its bombing campaign. An amend-

ment proposed by Canada and backed by over 35 member states including the US seeking an explicit condemnation of Hamas did not pass, failing to get two-thirds support. The amendment received 88 votes in favour, 55 against, and 23 abstentions. Among South Asian countries, India and Bhutan voted in favour of the resolution; Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives voted against it; while Nepal abstained.

Countries put forward arguments for and against the amendment and explained their positions on the adopted resolution. Earlier in the day, several countries took the floor, reiterating the impact of the crisis on civilians and underscoring the imperative to ensure aid finally flows into the enclave as supplies of food, water and fuel reach critically low levels.

AI to preserve oral history of 'comfort women'

The project, The Eternal Testimony of Chinese 'Comfort Women', is based on interviews with a 94-year-old survivor from Hunan province, Peng Zhuying.

LIA ZHU
SAN FRANCISCO, OCT 28

After years of efforts, US and Chinese researchers and peace activists have developed an interactive system that uses artificial intelligence to narrate the biography of a Chinese "comfort woman" and enables viewers to have a "conversation" with her.



The project, The Eternal Testimony of Chinese 'Comfort Women', is based on interviews with a 94-year-old survivor from Hunan province, Peng Zhuying. It allows viewers to ask Peng questions about her life experiences and hear responses in a real-time, life-like conversation, said the creators.

Calling it "a powerful tool for history and anti-war education", Peipei Qiu, executive director of the project and a professor of Chinese and Japanese at Vassar College in New York, said the interactive system revolutionises the concept of oral history.

"It effectively deepens our understanding of the brutality of the war through the experience of speaking with a war atrocity survivor and listening to her story in her own voice," Qiu told China Daily.

"Warfare continues to inflict death and human suffering around the globe. Now it is more important than ever for us to learn from what happened in the past wars," said Qiu, author of the award-winning book, Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves.

"As the survivors of World War II are leaving us one by one — in China, only 12 confirmed 'comfort

women' are still alive — I hope our project can help preserve the experience of speaking with war victims for generations to come, making a lasting contribution to history and world peace," she said.

Peng was born in July 1929 in the town of Yueyang in Hunan. In 1938, during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), the Imperial Japanese Army invaded and gas-bombed her hometown, killing her mother and younger brother and leaving Peng blind.

In 1944, the then 15-year-old Peng was kidnapped and imprisoned for

ing and raping them, in every country they occupied. Ironically these women were called "comfort women".

Due to their brutal treatment, most of the women died during the war. Those who survived were traumatised and stigmatised for having been raped. Until recently, like many other "comfort women" survivors, Peng kept her horrific experience to herself.

The project of preserving Peng's oral history is a "remarkable international collaboration", said Qiu. The idea was inspired by the Dimension in Testimony program

of the University of Southern California's Shoah Foundation in 2018. In 2019, Lillian Sing and Julie Tang, retired San Francisco Superior Court judges and co-founders of the "Comfort Women" Justice Coalition (CWJC), spearheaded the fundraising and initial planning for the project.

At the end of 2019, an international production team was set up, comprising the members of CWJC, the Nanjing Museum of the Site of the Lijixiang Comfort Stations, and the USC Shoah Foundation.

Despite interruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the team managed to conduct interviews with Peng for five days in October 2020. She was interviewed in her own dialect, and her answers were recorded and sent to the US.

"The USC technical team and our CWJC volunteers devoted a tremendous amount of time and effort toward the post-interview production process. We were particularly mindful to ensure that Peng's narratives in the Yueyang dialect were accurately transcribed in Chinese and translated into English faithfully and naturally. Both the transcription and the translation were verified against the interview recordings multiple times," said Qiu.

The public beta test of the system was recently launched at the Nanjing Museum. Qiu's team is still working on improving the system as the program is still being "trained".

As questions from visitors vary, sometimes the system can't correctly interpret every question, she explained.

"The visitors' questions can help train the system and improve the quality of dialogues between the visitors and Peng. Currently, we are also working on the English version of the program, hoping to make it available for English-speaking audiences soon," she said.

— China Daily



People visit the former site of a 'comfort women' station at Liji Lane to mark the International Memorial Day for 'Comfort Women' in Nanjing, China, on August 14.

a month until the Japanese troops withdrew from the area. As a "comfort woman", the teenager endured sexual violence, humiliation, and physical trauma, all of which resulted in lifelong health problems, including the inability to have children.

During the war, the Japanese forces captured and sexually enslaved hundreds of thousands of women and girls, repeatedly abus-

The interactive system uses artificial intelligence to narrate the biography of a Chinese 'comfort woman'.

के लामखुट्टेले तपाईंको परिवारलाई सताइरहेको छ?

यस्ता छन् लामखुट्टेलाई भगाउने ७ उपाय

- पानीका भाँडाहरू ढाक्नुहोस् ।
- जमेको पानी हटाउनुहोस्: लामखुट्टेले जमेको पानीमा अण्डा पार्छ, त्यसैले पानी जम्ने नदिनुस्, घरबबर पानी जम्ने ढिब्या र खान्डाखुल्डी हटाउनुस् ।
- नाली सफा गर्नुस्: लामखुट्टेले पातपतिंगर र लेदो भरिएको नालीमा अण्डा पार्न सक्छ ।
- ढोका र भ्यालमा जानी लगाउनुहोस् ।
- लामखुट्टे भगाउने निम र सिट्रोनेलाजस्ता विरुवा रोप्नुहोस् ।
- बगैँचाहरू सफा र कुँडाकटमुक्त राख्नुहोस् । फ्लाडी र अन्ना घाँसमा लामखुट्टे लुक्छन् ।
- लामखुट्टे भगाउने Buzzz Off जस्ता प्राकृतिक स्प्रेको प्रयोग गर्नुहोस् ।



100 प्रतिशत प्राकृतिक स्प्रे 'Buzzz Off' ले लामखुट्टे र किरा भगाउँछ । यसले लामखुट्टेको टोकाइबाट बचाउने मात्र होइन लामखुट्टेको टोकाइबाट लाग्ने रोगहरू रोक्नसमेत सहयोग पुर्याउँछ । 'Buzzz Off' ले बालबालिकासहित सबै जनाका लागि लामखुट्टेबाट सुरक्षित, विश्वसनीय र स्थायी सुरक्षा दिन्छ ।

Buzzz Off मा समावेश सामग्री

- सिट्रोनेला तेल
- नीम तेल
- ल्याडको तेल
- युक्लिप्टस तेल
- दातचिनी तेल
- सुन्धिल तेल

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Big festivals in post-political times

|| WORDS & ECHOES ||

Festivals directly touch the lives of the people and lay bare their living conditions.

ABHI SUBEDI



A juxtaposition of the greatest Nepali festivals Dashain, Tihar and Chhath with the country's post-political times could sound a little unusual. But I am doing so struck by the festive mood of the country on the one hand, and the somewhat overt interest and shifting developments in the country's political matters on the other. I take Dashain as an example here. This festival has always given some breathing space for Nepali politicians in terms of pausing to plan, negotiate and forget the ire and fire of ongoing political imbroglios. This has been a factor in both turbulent and peaceful times in the country. Political players and power contenders appear to have been using this occasion to negotiate and meditate.

Festivals everywhere share some characters. Use of festivals for power positioning in society is one. The larger community is ignored in such situations. Authority and patronage emanate from individuals and institutions on such occasions. A festival like Dashain combines such factors. We can see that in who gives blessings to others or who shows a pattern of patronage and hierarchy. The festivals generate performances. As a performance-savvy person, I see that as a very important feature of the festivals. But the artists and performers, the musicians who accentuate the performative character of the festival, are put at the lower spaces even though it is they who give character to the festival. They have always been categorised as Dalits or people whose performance is crucial for the festival. Ironically, the people of the so-called higher echelons, despite their lack of ability to appreciate music and art, become the audience.



POST ILLUSTRATION

Blessings to the people

This hierarchy cuts deeper. People of such higher echelons who also are placed at the higher positions in the power structure are chosen to offer blessings to the people. People go to them and form lines to receive *tika*, for example. Such a system can be seen in the ritual functions in the West also. We are familiar with the festival in Athens in the fifth century BC. As they were based on a system of patronage, festivals, especially Dionysia, were used for the leaders of the city. Dashain, unlike Dionysia, has a broader base; it encompasses wide groups and communities. People during Dashain, for example, can create their own comfortable microcosm and form a culture of intimacy, warmth and love. The family hierarchy and the system of senior and junior are not included in this argument. That is cultural and a mutually arranged moment of warmth and celebration.

The other thing that strikes me is the present state of politics in Nepal. Why it is relevant to bring in politics here is that both big festivals and politics share some common conditions. Festivals show the characters of those who live in the country and those who go to work, mainly in India, and return at the time of the festival. The condition of people's existence becomes clearer at the time of the festival. The management of

the economy, market and life in general are affected by politics. Reports show that people find life harder during festival times inasmuch as they involve the management and conditions of the celebrations. Despite the atrocities of the times, people are driven by a desire to lead a normal life, even for a brief period of time. How to manage life during festivals and post-festival times is the main question. Festivals directly touch the lives of the people, and lay bare the conditions under which they live. They are the brief happy interludes created with great efforts by the people.

But we are grappling with a situation that can be characterised as overtly political. Our times and our conditions of relationship are shaped by politics. I personally find that state of consciousness as an encouraging sign of positive development. But politics, if it deviates from its normal path, can create confusion in the lives of the people. Some features of Nepali politics indicate the post-political condition. If we listen to people talking about politics and the political situation, we find that certain conditions of disillusionment are becoming a force to reckon with. Who is on the rise and what kind of politicians are taking centre stage speak volumes. The hope and enthusiasm dominating the earlier phase of Nepali constitutional politics are in decline. Fewer

attempts are being made to understand the causes properly. Forming power alliances at the centre and in the provinces has become not a normal political process but a game of chess.

I feel sad to think about the politics in Koshi, which is my province. What is happening there is a minuscule drama of what could happen everywhere else in federal Nepal. The politics of alliances and opposition and the widening gap between the people and those in power do not bode well. The condition has triggered negative responses from a large section of society that we can see from the available media information of various natures.

There is a strong need to seek a language that is free from mere jargons. All the Nepali political parties now must have begun to feel that the political and so-called ideological and principled jargons do not function anymore because people think and act in post-political times, which is now. Post-politics is not anti-politics. It is a mode of action and thinking that does not solely rely on established and traditional politics but follows discussions about alternate political theories that have captured forums, academia and free discussions. I would not say that is entirely absent in Nepali political practices. But what is worrying is that some kind of a culture of jest, a state of farce that Karl Marx in *Eighteenth Brumaire* said is a state of politics, a condition that replaces the serious or what he said tragedy, appears to dominate our politicians' language.

Feudal practices

The element of celebration in post-politics is waning slowly. The festivals cannot entirely replenish what is lost. The sense of celebration that the festivals represent and teach us is that, to be able to celebrate the politics of the times, the people who consider indulgence in politics and nothing else as the dharma of life should change their behaviour. They should understand that they have a great responsibility to establish the norm of relationships and interpersonal communication, and cultivate a minimum sense of celebration.

Finally, I want to confess that I like the festivals that evoke good memories, woes, and moments of joy and contemplation. But those who are acting in conditions of post-politics and rule the roost should act with a sense of common bonding with the people in society by freeing themselves from the feudal practices of hierarchy, casteism and narrow sense of humanism on the occasion of the festivals.

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Please google your pitches before writing to us. If you're submitting an article that the Post or other publications have already covered, tell us why your piece is important.

Make sure that your piece is original. Authors who plagiarise or get AI tools, including ChatGPT, to write their pieces are blacklisted.

The Post receives dozens of pitches daily from aspiring writers, students, analysts, activists, entrepreneurs and diplomats. We cannot respond to every single email, but if we like your idea, we will get back to you within a week.

— Editors

THEIR VIEW

Unemployed graduates

The year-on-year surge in unemployment is not limited to any specific field.

The picture of graduate unemployment that emerges from the latest survey of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) should not come as a surprise. According to the Labour Force Survey 2022 released on Wednesday, 12 percent of university graduates—or nearly 8 lakh—were unemployed last year, representing the highest percentage of unemployment among jobseekers from all levels of education. For context, the unemployment rate among people having higher secondary degrees was 8.87 percent, and it was 2.82 percent among those who completed secondary education. While the national average is also depressing, what troubles us more is why so many graduates, after having invested so much and gone through multiple layers of self-development, are still struggling to find employment.

Because of the difficulties of measuring/defining unemployment as well as the concerns over the reliability of government-produced figures, some experts believe the actual number of the unemployed will be much higher. One may recall that an Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) report in 2014 claimed that 47 percent of university graduates were unemployed. Then, a 2017 estimate by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) went a step further, reporting a staggering 66 percent unemployment among graduates. Even if we stick with the relatively measly BBS figure, it still drives home the urgency of creating more opportunities for educated jobseekers.

The year-on-year surge in unemployment is not limited to any specific field; even engineers and medical professionals, generally deemed to be in high demand, are facing similar challenges. It is essential to understand that the increased rate of graduate unemployment cannot be attributed solely to a lack of skills or qualifications, although having proper skills certainly helps. There are market realities that cannot be denied, including the protracted fallout of Covid-19 and ongoing economic downturn as well as the declining investment in job creation. The uncertainties surrounding the upcoming general election may further shrink fiscal space for the employers. All this suggests that there will not be imminent relief for graduates.

Against this backdrop, it is vital that the authorities take the employment situation seriously. Graduates should be the backbone of a nation's workforce, driving its progress and innovation. When that doesn't happen, it risks falling behind. Lack of opportunities creates frustration and anger among the youth, which may have far-reaching sociopolitical consequences. Therefore, the authorities must urgently adopt a comprehensive strategy with a focus on providing marketable skills through training and internships, supporting entrepreneurship, reforming the education sector, and addressing the broader economic issues and providing incentives for investment and job creation.

— The Daily Star (Bangladesh)/ANN

Ethics in utilising public purse

Nepal's legal and institutional frameworks can yield expected results only with ethical approaches.

HARI SHARMA



Oriental philosopher and statesman Chanakya is well-known for his ethical disposition while utilising public funds. In a famous allegory, he used two lamps while working—one for public work and another for personal. The lamp that used public fuel was never used for personal work. Public coffers, the prime source of government funding, carry people's expectations towards a nation's prosperity and happiness. An ethical approach to public

Management Act's provisions for intergovernmental funds transfer in the respective tiers. In the broader sense, public funds also include trust and community funds established for wider public welfare. The government's budget cycle paves the way for the primary utilisation of public funds. Proper execution of the nation's budget cycle provides a conspicuous ethical picture.

As per statutory provisions, all three tiers of government are involved in the activities of the budget cycle. The effectiveness of the annual budget and programmes contributes to the national development priorities, which sprout from the ethical disposition while implementing plans and policies. Nepal's public fund scenario is widely criticised for its inefficient allocation, misappropriation of funds, perennial low capital expenditures, revenue leakages, implementation inefficiencies, favouring special interests and inadequate oversight and monitoring. The ethical lines get expunged from the very process of budgetary allocations, drawing perpetual criticism of prevalent pork bar-

stick to measure the progress of implementation—suffers due to ethical lapses in implementation arrangements. For instance, around 62 percent of capital expenditure in the fiscal year 2022-23 and an average below 70 percent in the last 10 fiscal years demonstrate a gloomy picture. Moreover, perennial hasty spending at the end of the fiscal year raises serious ethical questions and demands a proper review of capital expenditure trends in Nepal.

Monitoring and reviewing have been neglected for far too long in Nepal's budget execution. Although periodic budget review exists, it applies a general perspective rather than project and programme-specific review and feedback. Monitoring practices are oblivious to ethical dimensions and are plagued by uncertain ritualistic routines that rarely incorporate feedback implementation mechanisms. Project site monitoring that demands institutional intervention is sometimes guided by populist paradigms, with sectoral ministers' site visits resulting in unrecorded on-field directions to implementation units, neglecting systemic feedback

ethical ecosystem. Financial Procedure and Fiscal Accountability Act, 2019, which came into effect after Nepal embraced federalism, prescribes a systemic budget formulation procedure that makes mandatory provision for a medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF), a three-year rolling budget system, which has to reconcile with annual budget and programmes. The Act also provisions the concept of a project bank where evidence-based projects with techno feasibility studies and detailed project reports are listed for budget allocation. The practice of project banks, MTEF and prioritisation of development activities into priority 1(P1), P2 and P3 for budget allocation purposes intends to deter pork barrelling. Similarly, the line ministry budget information system, provincial budget information system, sub-national treasury regulatory application and computer-based government accounting system are the measures to smoothen the budget cycle in different government tiers in Nepal.

The Right to Information Act, 2007 has a mandatory provision of trimester proactive disclosures by government agencies, thereby ensuring transparency in utilising public funds. Easy access to daily receipts and payment status on the financial comptroller general office website shows the government's efforts towards transparency in public funds. Aside from this, anti-corruption and good governance-related acts and practices like public hearings are essential steps towards transparency and accountability.

Despite the efforts, the ethical ecosystem in Nepal's public fund utilisation encounters an unconducive socio-political environment of ethical deterioration. Legal and institutional frameworks can produce expected results only when ethical conscience permeates our activities. The beauty of law is replicated in its implementation with the right intention, not in its disregard. Political leaders, bureaucrats and the general public, including other governance actors, need to internalise ethical values, thereby creating a conducive ethical environment. The public profile of leaders should be channelled to promote moral values. Decisive policy intervention towards initiating and designing ethics-related curricula from the school level can inculcate moral behaviours in students who are the nation's future pillars. Enhancement of moral authority in words and actions is what Nepal is lacking at the moment. An ethical environment filled with moral and ethical values should be Nepal's prime priority to enhance society's depreciated moral consciousness.

Sharma is an undersecretary with the Government of Nepal.



SHUTTERSTOCK

coffers demands utilising the funds with the right intention while strictly adhering to legal provisions. Deviation from this opens the way for misappropriation, misutilisation and underutilisation of public funds, hampering noble development initiatives. So, the ethical aspect of public funds should be a prime concern for all governance stakeholders and the government.

In Nepal, public funds comprise tax and non-tax revenue, official development assistance, loans, revenue from public enterprises and government income from various sources. Each tier of the government has the statutory provision of federal, provincial and local-level consolidated funds. There is also the provision of divisible funds—owing to the 2017 Intergovernmental Fiscal

relying in all tiers of government. The big concern on ethical grounds is the manipulation of budget allocation by influential leaders and sitting ministers to their home districts.

The implementation deficit of budgetary allocations also raises ethical questions. Frequent and untimely transfer of project officers, political favouritism in transfers, inefficient and delayed bidding processes and capacity constraints heavily hit the budget implementation. Midway budget transfer to unrelated sectors is common in Nepal despite the Ministry of Finance controlling it. Implementation constraints emerge from the personnel's ethical lapses and political influence, deterring the placement of the right man in the right place. Capital expenditure—a yard-

stick to measure the progress of implementation—suffers due to ethical lapses in implementation arrangements. For instance, around 62 percent of capital expenditure in the fiscal year 2022-23 and an average below 70 percent in the last 10 fiscal years demonstrate a gloomy picture. Moreover, perennial hasty spending at the end of the fiscal year raises serious ethical questions and demands a proper review of capital expenditure trends in Nepal.

Monitoring and reviewing have been neglected for far too long in Nepal's budget execution. Although periodic budget review exists, it applies a general perspective rather than project and programme-specific review and feedback. Monitoring practices are oblivious to ethical dimensions and are plagued by uncertain ritualistic routines that rarely incorporate feedback implementation mechanisms. Project site monitoring that demands institutional intervention is sometimes guided by populist paradigms, with sectoral ministers' site visits resulting in unrecorded on-field directions to implementation units, neglecting systemic feedback

FOREX

| | |
|-------------------|--------|
| U.S. Dollar | 133.50 |
| Euro | 141.03 |
| Pound Sterling | 162.01 |
| Swiss Franc | 148.35 |
| Australian Dollar | 84.85 |
| Canadian Dollar | 96.95 |
| Singapore Dollar | 97.49 |
| Japanese Yen | 8.90 |
| Chinese Yuan | 18.24 |
| Saudi Arab Riyal | 35.58 |
| Qatari Riyal | 36.60 |
| Thai Bhat | 3.69 |
| UAE Dhiram | 36.35 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 27.94 |
| Korean Won | 9.85 |

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

| | |
|-----------|-----------|
| Fine Gold | Rs116,000 |
| Silver | Rs 1,400 |

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BRIEFING

Tata to make iPhones in India after buying Wistron business

NEW DELHI: Tata Group is set to start assembling Apple iPhones in India after Wistron Corp approved the sale of its Indian manufacturing unit to the salt-to-software conglomerate, a minister said on Friday. A Tata company will start making iPhones in India for domestic and global markets, Deputy Minister for Information Technology Rajeev Chandrasekhar said on social media platform X. The Wistron board approved the sale of Wistron InfoComm Manufacturing India Private Limited to Tata Electronics Private Limited for an estimated \$125 million, according to a statement from the Taiwan-based supplier shared by the minister. Wistron did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Apple has been touting India as its next big growth driver as it looks to move some production away from China. The tech giant began iPhone assembly in the country with Wistron in 2017, before expanding through contracts with firms including Foxconn, and Pegatron Corp. In December 2020, the Wistron plant in Karnataka state's Narasapura was forced to shut for three months after workers destroyed property during protests over non-payment of wages, causing millions of dollars in losses. (REUTERS)

Flights in China to increase 34 percent above pre-pandemic levels

BEIJING: China's aviation regulator said it will increase domestic flights to 34 percent above pre-pandemic levels, a move that will further boost the recovery of Chinese airlines. China's top airlines reported their first quarterly profits in more than three years on Friday, fanning industry hopes for China's big three state carriers to finally step out of the difficulties brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Civil Aviation Administration of China will roll out its winter and spring season flight plan on Sunday, which will last until March 30, according to the summary of a Friday press conference on the website of CAAC News, which is run by the aviation regulator. There will be 96,651 domestic flights a week, or 34 percent higher than the same period four years ago, with 7,202 new weekly flights brought on by the opening of 516 new domestic routes. The increase in domestic flights focuses on connections between regional and hub airports like Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, the regulator said. International flights, while slower to recover, are also picking up steam. In the next five months there will be 16,680 weekly flights, with passenger flights expected to reach 71 percent of the total four years ago. (REUTERS)

Elon Musk's X launches two new premium subscription plans

CALIFORNIA: Elon Musk's social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, rolled out two new subscription plans on Friday, including a Premium+ tier for users willing to pay for an ad-free experience. The Premium+ plan, priced at about \$16 per month, includes all the tools and features offered by the platform, minus the ads, the company said in a post on the platform. It will, however, be available for users accessing the platform through a web browser for now, it added. The basic tier is priced at \$3 per month but is not ad-free. X is also planning to bundle video and audio calling for some users, in a push to turn the platform into an everything app. Musk has been exploring several options to extensively monetise the social media platform, which he acquired for \$44 billion in October 2022. (REUTERS)

Anti-dumping duty may wipe out jute industry

The government has dropped the jute industry from its priority list. The golden fibre doesn't look like it has a future in Nepal, say insiders.

By BINOD BHANDARI
BIRATNAGAR, OCT 28

Once a major cash crop of the eastern Tarai, and proud symbol of the dawn of industrialisation in the country, jute is now fighting for its life.

Even as jute farmers switch to other crops due to low returns, fancy plastic bags and sacks are flooding the Nepali market.

The government has dropped the jute industry from its priority list even though global demand for ecological packaging has strengthened its export potential.

The golden fibre doesn't look like it has a future in Nepal, say insiders.

Akbar Hussain, a jute farmer of Dhanpalthan Rural Municipality, Morang, complains that they don't get a fair price for their crops.

"There's also a scarcity of labourers," said Hussain, who has been growing jute for decades. "Most farmers in my village have switched to other crops because of the hassles."

According to him, the price of jute last year was Rs11,000 per quintal. This year, the price has dropped to Rs9,000 per quintal.

Although the government has banned the use of plastic, demand for jute has not increased.

The Ministry of Forests and Environment slapped a complete ban on plastic bags below 40 microns by publishing a notice in the Nepal Gazette on September 15, 2021. This was not the first time the government had banned plastic.

Jute fibre is obtained from the stalks of the jute plant. After harvesting, the stalks are gathered into bundles and soaked in water for about a month.

The fibres are then separated from the stem in long strands washed in clear, running water and dried in the sun.

After being gathered and packaged, the dried fibres are taken to the mills where they are woven into fabric, ropes and gunny sacks.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Nepali jute factories have been importing 80 percent of raw jute from India and Bangladesh and exporting 95 percent of their output to India.

According to the Directorate of Agriculture Development in Koshi province, the jute acreage was 40,000 hectares in Morang alone until 20 years ago. Now, it has shrunk to 5,070 hectares.

In Sunsari and Jhapa, jute farms covered 20,000 hectares and 10,000 hectares, respectively. Now the farms occupy 1,300 hectares and 550 hectares, respectively.

Till two decades ago, Nepal used to produce 80,000 tonnes of jute annually. Production now has plunged to 10,000

tonnes, according to the directorate.

Jute expert Mohan Chandra Ghimire said Nepal was once a jute exporter. Now, it has become a net importer. The country imports jute and jute products from India and Bangladesh. Nepali jute factories have been importing 80 percent of their raw jute from India and Bangladesh and exporting 95 percent of their output to India.

There are a dozen jute mills in the Sunsari Morang Industrial Corridor, but only half of them are functioning.

"Only 20 percent of the raw materials used by these jute mills are produced domestically. The rest are imported," said Raj Kumar Golchha, president of the Nepal Jute Mills Association. According to the Trade and Export Promotion Centre, in the last fiscal year, around Rs8 billion worth of jute products were exported to India. The products were made using jute fibres imported from India and Bangladesh.

Government officials say that they are launching schemes to revive

India unlikely to join global cooling pledge at COP28, government sources say



REUTERS

The 'COP28 UAE' logo displayed during the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

By REUTERS
NEW DELHI/LONDON, OCT 28

India is unlikely to sign onto a global pledge to reduce cooling-related emissions at the COP 28 climate meeting, citing the need for the world's most populous country to have affordable cooling, two government officials told Reuters.

The pledge to cut cooling-related carbon dioxide emissions by at least 68 percent by 2050 compared with 2022 levels was developed by the United Nations Environment Programme's Cool Coalition and COP28 host the United Arab Emirates.

The pledge would require major investments by countries to shift to sustainable cooling technologies and also raise the cost of such products.

It is expected nations will announce their decision on the cooling pledge at

the annual climate conference in Dubai from November 30 to December 12.

India and China, two of the world's key economies and carbon emitters with a combined population of over 2.8 billion, are key to the success of the cooling pledge.

India is "probably the single most important country for this pledge," said Brian Dean, head of energy efficiency and cooling at Sustainable Energy for All, which helped to develop the pledge.

"They've been ahead of the curve on doing what's needed for their country on cooling with the India Cooling Action Plan. And it would be a really important global signal if they were to sign the pledge," he said.

New Delhi is not willing to undertake targets above those committed to in 1992 under the multilateral Montreal Protocol to regulate

production and consumption of ozone depleting chemicals and hydro-fluorocarbons used in refrigerators, air conditioners and insulating foams, the government officials said.

India's environment ministry did not reply to a request for comments. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity as India's stand is still being considered.

The country aims to reduce its power demand for cooling across sectors by 20 percent-25 percent by 2038 under its own cooling action plan announced in 2019.

"India's per capita emissions and energy consumption are very low.

Its cooling requirements are set to grow multifold in the coming years and it cannot risk committing to investments that will make cooling expensive," one of the government officials said.

The South Asian country's electricity consumption for household air conditioners is expected to increase nine-fold by 2050, outpacing growth in every other major household appliance, according to data published this week by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Between 2019 and 2022, India's electricity consumption for air conditioning increased 21 percent and nearly 10 percent of its electricity demand comes from those appliances.

Its per capita carbon emissions are around 2 metric tons against the world average of around 5 metric tons.

Ukraine war orders starting to boost revenues for big US defence contractors

By REUTERS
WASHINGTON, OCT 28

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is starting to boost defence contractors' revenues, as customers such as the US government restock supplies shipped to Ukraine and countries around Europe arm themselves with an eye on Moscow's aggressions.

US defence contractors such as Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics and others expect that existing orders for hundreds of thousands of artillery rounds, hundreds of Patriot missile interceptors and a surge in orders for armoured vehicles expected in the months ahead will underpin their results in coming quarters.

New contracts to supply Ukraine directly—or backfill US weapons sent to Ukraine—were signed late last year, and now revenue is flowing to the big defence contractors. Lockheed, General Dynamics and RTX all reported better than expected results over the past several days, and executives expect both the conflict in Ukraine and Israel's war with Palestinian militant group Hamas to drive up near-term demand.

"We've gone from 14,000 [artillery] rounds per month to 20,000 very quickly. We're working ahead of schedule to accelerate that production capacity up to 85,000, even as high as 100,000

rounds per month," Jason Aiken, General Dynamics' chief financial officer, said on a call with Wall Street analysts on Wednesday.

"And I think the Israel situation is only going to put upward pressure on that demand."

The General Dynamics' Combat Systems unit, which makes armoured vehicles, tanks and the artillery Ukraine uses, saw its revenue rise almost 25 percent versus the same period a year ago.

RTX, which makes AMRAAM rockets used in Ukraine, said on Tuesday's earnings call with Wall Street analysts it has received \$3 billion of orders since Russia's February 2022 invasion that are related to replenishing Ukraine and US war stocks, and the company expects more.

Third-quarter sales for Northrop Grumman's Defence Systems segment rose 6 percent on high demand for ammunition and rocket motors used in guided multiple-launch rocket systems (GMLRS), which play a crucial role in supporting Ukraine's defence efforts against Russian forces.

This is part of a global trend. Sweden's Saab raised its full-year sales outlook on Thursday on the back of strong defence demand and Germany's Rheinmetall said third-quarter profit jumped on strong demand for weapons and ammunition.

Disney at a crossroads, after 100 years of innovating entertainment

By REUTERS
FLORIDA, OCT 28

As Walt Disney turns 100, investors worry it's beginning to show its age. The share price dropped to its lowest level in nearly nine years as the company stumbles in the age of streaming.

But adapting to the times is not a new challenge for Disney, rather it's been a point of survival throughout the company's history.

A century ago when "Disney" was a single person, not a global company worth over \$150 billion, emerging sound and colour technologies rattled the silent film industry.

But Walt Disney had a strong motivation for embracing these new tools—to capture the audience.

"He wanted his animation to be believable, he wanted it to transcend what we typically think of as animation," said Chris Pallant, professor of animation and screen studies at Canterbury Christ Church University in the United Kingdom.

Disney Studios opened in Hollywood in 1923—geographically and conceptually distant from the animation powerhouses in New York. Disney envisioned a future in which animated features would garner the same

respect as the live-action films being shot down the street.

He obsessed over quality and poured money into producing cartoons that would resonate with his audience. He wrote that observing the real world was key and animation must have, "a foundation of fact, in order that it may more richly possess sincerity."

The studio formalised 12 principles of animation which transformed static sketches into lively characters on a screen. Veteran animators taught the principles to each of the new artists who joined the studio to ensure consistency.

Walt Disney entered the animation scene as a young businessman, well positioned to capitalise on existing techniques and embrace new tools. He and his studio harnessed sound, colour and 3D camera technology with an organised and scalable approach, which was not necessarily cost-effective but produced high-quality animations. Seemingly each time Disney's projects were financially successful, he would use the money to double his aspirations for the next film. "In a way," Pallant said, "Disney survives his own ambition."

Disney Studios managed to lead the Western animation industry for decades through its innovations and



REUTERS

A file photo shows people at the Walt Disney World Magic Kingdom theme park in Orlando, Florida, US.

dedication to captivating stories. But its reign would not last as a new technology arrived and Disney was

late to greet it.

By the turn of the century, Pixar's progress in computer-generated ani-

mations had eclipsed Disney's traditional hand-drawn style, namely with the first totally computer-generated animation "Toy Story". But Disney didn't need to innovate its way out of its problems this time. It could rely on a new tool: money. Merchandise, theme parks and cable TV had filled the company's pockets for decades. Disney bought Pixar in 2006 for \$7.4 billion, and with it, Pixar's ability to enchant audiences with pixels.

As a hand-drawn studio, Disney's eventual recognition of computer animation is an important moment, said Pallant who is also the president for the Society for Animation Studies. "I think that is an echo back to an earlier life," Pallant said. "They were not afraid to move with the times. That shows you the willingness to reinvent themselves as a 75- or 80-year-old company."

Now at the 100-year mark, streaming poses yet another challenge. Disney's early gambles in new technology produced quality films that distinguished the studio from its competitors. Later, embracing computers preserved the studio as a major player in animation.

Now, stockholders are closely watching what Disney will do as it moves into its next century.

WORLD

BRIEFING

At least 28 dead, 18 missing after ArcelorMittal mine fire in Kazakhstan

ALMATY: At least 28 people have died and 18 remain missing after a mine fire in Kazakhstan, the Ministry for Emergency Situations said on Saturday. Operator ArcelorMittal Temirtau, the local unit of the Luxembourg-based steelmaker, said 206 of 252 people at the Kostenko mine had been evacuated after what appeared to be a methane blast. It said 18 people had sought medical attention. Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who expressed condolences to the victims' families and declared a national day of mourning on October 29, ordered his cabinet to stop investment cooperation with ArcelorMittal Temirtau. The government and company also confirmed they were working to finalise a deal to nationalise the company, which operates the country's biggest steel mill. "ArcelorMittal can also confirm, as communicated earlier today by the government of Kazakhstan, that the two parties have been in discussions concerning the future of ArcelorMittal Temirtau and recently signed a preliminary agreement for a transaction that will transfer ownership to the Republic of Kazakhstan," the miner said. "ArcelorMittal is committed to completing this transaction as soon as possible in order to minimise disruption to the greatest extent possible."

Roadside bomb kills 2 soldiers and troops kill 1 militant in northwest Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Two Pakistani soldiers and one militant were killed in a roadside bomb explosion and in a separate shootout during an overnight military operation against militant activity in the northwest alongside the border with Afghanistan, the military said on Saturday. A military statement said an intelligence-based operation was conducted in the Tirah valley of Khyber district late Friday night. One militant was killed and two others were wounded and arrested. The military said two of its soldiers were killed when a roadside bomb exploded while a security patrol was passing by in South Waziristan overnight. Security troops were conducting a search operation in the area to eliminate militants involved in the attack.

Some 28 killed, 60 injured in Egypt car crash, state media reports

CAIRO: Some 28 people have been killed and 60 others injured on Saturday in a multiple-vehicle collision in Egypt's Beheira governorate about 132 kilometres north of the capital Cairo, state media reported. An oil leak from one car caused the collision with some vehicles catching fire, the state-run Al-Ahram newspaper quoted police sources as saying.

US, China agree to work toward an expected Biden-Xi summit

WASHINGTON: The US and China have agreed to work together toward an expected summit between presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping next month, US officials said on Friday, following hours of meetings between Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi and senior US diplomats in Washington. In the first visit by a Chinese foreign minister to Washington since 2018, veteran diplomat Wang Yi also met Biden for an hour, talks that the White House described as a "good opportunity" in keeping lines of communication open between the two geopolitical rivals with deep policy differences. Wang's meetings with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and US national security advisor Jake Sullivan spanning over two days totalled nine hours, US officials said, describing these interactions as "candid and in-depth". Biden's top aides raised Washington's key concerns: the need to restore military-to-military channels between the two countries, Beijing's actions in the East and South China Sea, Taiwan, human rights, the flow of fentanyl precursors and the cases of Americans detained in China, US officials said.

Crowds throng Taipei as Taiwan celebrates east Asia's largest Pride march

TAIPEI: About 150,000 people marched through Taipei on Saturday in a riotous and noisy celebration of LGBTQ+ equality and diversity at east Asia's largest Pride march, with Vice President Lai Ching-te becoming the most senior government leader ever to attend. The event took place ahead of Taiwan's presidential and parliamentary elections in January, and Lai, leading opinion polls to be elected president, joined the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) delegation, seeking to cement its position as a defender of liberal values. Lai, speaking to reporters before joining the march around half way through, thanked those who had worked to support equality and the legalising of same sex marriage in 2019, which President Tsai Ing-wen and her DPP championed. (AGENCIES)

Israel expands ground operation in Gaza and bombs Hamas tunnels

More than 1.4 million people have fled their homes, nearly half crowding into UN schools and shelters.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JERUSALEM, OCT 28

Israel on Saturday expanded its ground operation in Gaza with infantry and armored vehicles backed by "massive" strikes from the air and sea, including the bombing of Hamas tunnels—a key target in its campaign to crush the territory's ruling group after its bloody incursion in Israel three weeks ago.

The bombardment also knocked out communications in Gaza, creating a near-blackout of information from the besieged enclave and largely cutting off the territory's 2.3 million people from the outside world.

The military released grainy images Saturday showing of tank columns moving slowly in open areas of Gaza and said warplanes bombed dozens of Hamas tunnels and underground bunkers.

"The forces are still on the ground and are continuing the war," said the army spokesman, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, indicating that the next stage has begun in what is expected to evolve into an all-out ground offensive in northern Gaza.

Early in the war, Israel had already amassed hundreds of thousands of troops along the border. Until now, troops had conducted brief nightly ground incursions before returning to Israel.

Hagari said the ground forces were backed by what he described as massive strikes from the air and sea. He said two key Hamas military commanders were killed overnight, arguing that Israel was facing a "weakened" enemy. There was no immediate confirmation from Hamas.

Communications in Gaza were knocked out by Israel's intense bombardment late Friday, enabling the military to largely control the narrative during a key new phase in fighting. Palestinians were thrown into isolation, huddling in homes and shelters with food and water supplies running out. Electricity was knocked out by Israel in the early stages of the war.

With the internet cut, Palestinians in Gaza travelled by foot or car to check on their relatives and friends after a night of airstrikes described by some as the most intense they had witnessed, even during previous Gaza wars.

"The bombs were everywhere, the building was shaking," said Hind al-Khudary, a journalist in central Gaza and one of a few people with cell phone service. "We can't reach anyone or contact anyone. I do not know where my family is."

The loss of internet and phones also dealt a further blow to a medical and aid system that relief workers say was already on the verge of collapse under Israel's weeklong seal. More than 1.4 million people have fled their homes, nearly half crowding into UN schools and shelters. Aid workers say the trickle of aid Israel has allowed to enter from Egypt the past week is a tiny fraction of what is needed.

Gaza hospitals have been scrounging for fuel to run emergency genera-



Palestinians pass by the destruction after the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip in Rafah on Saturday.

tors that power incubators and other life-saving equipment.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, which runs an extensive network of shelters and schools for nearly half the displaced Gaza residents, has lost contact with most of its staff, spokeswoman Juliette Touma said on Saturday. She said that coordinating aid efforts was now "extremely challenging."

Tedros Adhanom, head of the World Health Organisation, said the blackout has made it impossible for ambulances to reach the injured. "We are still out of touch with our staff and health facilities. I'm worried about their safety," he wrote on the X platform, formerly known as Twitter.

The intensified air and ground campaign also raised new concerns about dozens of hostages dragged into Gaza on October 7. On Saturday, hundreds of relatives of hostages gathered in a square in downtown Tel Aviv, demanding to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

Some in the group demanded that Israel push for the release of all hostages before proceeding with the campaign against Hamas. Protesters wore shirts emblazoned with the faces of their missing relatives under the word "kidnapped" and the words "Bring them back."

The families "feel like they're left behind and no one is really caring about them," said Miki Haimovitz, a former lawmaker and spokeswoman for the group. "No one is talking to them. No one is explaining what's going on."

In Cairo, Egyptian President Abdel

Fattah el-Sissi said his government was working to de-escalate the conflict through its talks with the warring parties to release prisoners and hostages. He didn't provide further details.

Hagari, the army spokesman, said the confirmed number of hostages was 229, after four were released in recent days through mediation by Qatar and Egypt. He dismissed media reports about a possible cease-fire deal in exchange for the release of hostages, saying Hamas was engaged

The forces are still on the ground and are continuing the war, army spokesman says.

in a "cynical exploitation" of the anxieties of relatives of hostages.

The communications blackout in Gaza also heightened the anxiety of Palestinians with relatives in the territory. Wafaa Abdul Rahman, director of a feminist organization based in the West Bank city of Ramallah, said she hadn't heard for hours from family in central Gaza.

"We've been seeing these horrible things and massacres when it's live on TV, so now what will happen when there's a total blackout?" she said, referring to scenes of families that have been crushed in homes by airstrikes over the past weeks.

Israel says its strikes target Hamas fighters and infrastructure and that

the militants operate from among civilians, putting them in danger.

The Palestinian death toll in Gaza has soared past 7,300, more than 60 percent of them minors and women, according to the territory's Health Ministry. A blockade on Gaza has meant dwindling supplies, and the UN warned that its aid operation helping hundreds of thousands of people was "crumbling" amid near-depleted fuel.

More than 1,400 people were slain in Israel during Hamas' October 7 attack, according to the Israeli government. Among those killed were at least 311 soldiers, according to the military.

Palestinian militants have fired thousands of rockets into Israel. The overall number of deaths far exceeds the combined toll of all four previous Israel-Hamas wars, estimated at around 4,000.

Gallant, the Israeli defence minister, said on Friday that Israel expects a long and difficult ground offensive into Gaza soon. It "will take a long time" to dismantle Hamas' vast network of tunnels, he said, adding that he expects a lengthy phase of lower-intensity fighting as Israel destroys "pockets of resistance."

His comments pointed to a potentially gruelling and open-ended new phase of the war after three weeks of relentless bombardment. Israel has said it aims to crush Hamas' rule in Gaza and its ability to threaten Israel. But how Hamas' defeat will be measured and an invasion's endgame remain unclear. Israel says it does not intend to rule the tiny territory but not who it expects to govern—even as Gallant suggested a long-term insurgency could ensue.

Acapulco ravaged by looting after Hurricane Otis

REUTERS
ACAPULCO, OCT 28

Looting ravaged the Mexican city of Acapulco after the iconic beach resort was hammered this week by Hurricane Otis, a record-breaking storm that killed at least 27 people and left thousands of residents struggling to get food and water.

Otis pounded Acapulco with winds of 165 miles per hour (266 km per hour) early on Wednesday, flooding the city, tearing roofs from homes, stores and hotels, submerging vehicles, and severing communications as well as road and air connections.

The cost of devastation left by the Category 5 storm was estimated at billions of dollars, and over 8,000 armed forces members were sent to help the stricken port recover.

"Right now, money's no use to us because there's nothing to buy, everything's been looted," 57-year-old Acapulco resident Rodolfo Villagomez said after Otis tore through the city. "It was total chaos. You could hear it here hissing like a bull."

On Thursday evening, people carried off goods including food, water and toilet paper from stores. "We came to get food, because we don't have any," a woman told Reuters.

Reuters video showed people carrying boxes from a wrecked supermarket and loading up cars. Inside, shelves were bare.

"There were acts of looting in some places because there was an emergency," President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said on Friday, urging residents not to take advantage of the situation.

Elsewhere, household detritus was littered among ruined deck chairs and jumbles of mangled trees outside

wrecked homes.

Speaking at a regular press conference, Lopez Obrador said the government would help people in the city of nearly 900,000 in the southern state of Guerrero, one of Mexico's poorest.

But many residents said the aid was insufficient.

"All the stores are closed or destroyed," said Raul Busto Ramirez, 76, an engineer who works at Acapulco's airport. He blamed looting on shortages and said ATM machines were out of action, leaving people with no cash.

The government has released little information about dead and injured, saying only that four people are also missing. Some officials privately express concern the death toll will rise.

Letitia Murphy said she began to worry when she lost contact with her ex-husband and father of her two children, 59-year-old Briton Neil Marshall, who was in Acapulco when Otis hit.

Murphy said she found out on social media he had died after residents discovered his body close to where he was staying.

"We can't even get information about him," she told Reuters by phone. "It's horrible that we don't know what to do."

Another weather front that could produce more heavy rain is expected to gain strength off Central America in the coming days, again moving toward southern Mexico.

Mexican authorities said Otis was the most powerful storm ever to strike Mexico's Pacific coast.

It caught forecasters by surprise, gathering strength with unexpected speed before it came ashore, and surpassed initial predictions.

Iranian teen injured on Tehran Metro has died, state media says

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DUBAI, OCT 28

An Iranian teenage girl injured weeks ago in a mysterious incident on Tehran's Metro while not wearing a headscarf has died, state media reported on Saturday.

The death of Armita Geravand comes after her being in a coma for weeks in Tehran and after the one-year anniversary of the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini which sparked nationwide protests at the time.

Geravand's October 1 injury and now her death threaten to reignite that popular anger, particularly as women in Tehran and elsewhere still defy Iran's mandatory headscarf, or hijab, law as a sign of their discontent with Iran's theocracy.

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported Geravand's death, without noting the wider unrest surrounding the headscarf law.

What happened in the few seconds after Armita Geravand entered the train on October 1 remains in question. While a friend told Iranian state television that she hit her head on the station's platform, the soundless footage aired by the broadcaster from outside of the car is blocked by a bystander. Just seconds later, her limp body is carried off.

Iranian state TV's report, however, did not include any footage from inside the train itself and offered no explanation on why it hadn't been released. Most train cars on the Tehran Metro have multiple CCTV cameras, which are viewable by security personnel.

Geravand's parents appeared in



In this image from surveillance video aired by Iranian state television, women pull 16-year-old Armita Geravand from a train car on the Tehran Metro in Tehran, Iran on October 1.

state media footage saying a blood pressure issue, a fall or perhaps both contributed to their daughter's injury.

Activists abroad have alleged Geravand may have been pushed or attacked for not wearing the hijab. They also demanded an independent investigation by the United Nations' fact-finding mission on Iran, citing the theocracy's use of pressure on victims' families and state TV's history of airing hundreds of coerced confessions.

The Associated Press has not been able to confirm the exact circumstances of what caused Geravand's injuries.

The Hengaw Organisation for Human Rights, which reports on abuses in Iran's western Kurdish region and earlier published a photograph

Indians given death penalty in Qatar accused of spying for Israel, sources say

REUTERS
NEW DELHI/DOHA, OCT 28

Eight Indian former naval officers who were handed the death penalty by a court in Qatar on Thursday were charged with spying for Israel, a source in India and another in Qatar said.

Neither New Delhi nor Doha has officially stated the charges against the eight who were arrested in August 2022.

In India, a government official aware of Doha's stance said the Qatar authorities had accused them of spying for Israel.

The eight Indians will be able to appeal the death sentence, the source briefed on the case in Qatar told Reuters, as well as also saying they had been charged with spying for Israel.

Both sources spoke on condition of anonymity given the sensitivity of the case.

A spokesperson for India's foreign ministry did not respond to a request for comment about the sources' comments.

There was no immediate reply from Qatar's foreign ministry.

More than 800,000 Indian citizens live and work in Qatar.

There was no immediate response from the prime minister's office in Jerusalem, which oversees Israel's intelligence services.

The ruling comes as Doha is trying to negotiate with the Palestinian militant group Hamas for the release of over 200 hostages seized during its October 7 rampage in Israel, which is pummeling Gaza with aerial strikes in response.

The case involving the eight Indians, who were working on a submarine project with a private company for the Qatari authorities, could also become a diplomatic headache for New Delhi, which depends heavily on Qatar for its natural gas needs.

The Indian government said on Thursday that it was "deeply shocked" that Qatar's Court of First Instance had awarded the death penalty to the eight Indians, adding it was "exploring all legal options".

New Delhi had said that it attaches "high importance to this case" and will "take up the verdict with Qatari authorities". The government said it would not comment further due to the "confidential nature of the proceedings". Jairam Ramesh, a spokesperson for India's opposition Congress party urged the Indian government on Thursday to "use its diplomatic and political leverage with the Qatar government" to do utmost to get them released at the earliest.

More than 800,000 Indian citizens live and work in Qatar.

Iranian teen injured on Tehran Metro has died, state media says

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DUBAI, OCT 28

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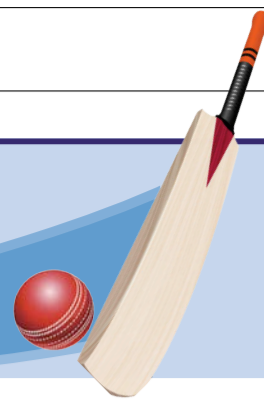
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Geravand's parents appeared in

ICC MEN'S CRICKET WORLD CUP INDIA 2023



Australia edge New Zealand in thriller

With a total of 771 runs, it is the highest-scoring World Cup game, one that stretched to a final over epic.



New Zealand's Lockie Ferguson (left) and Trent Boult shake hands with Australian players after they lost the match against Australia in Dharamshala, India, on Saturday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE DHARAMSALA, OCT 28

Five-time champions Australia edged out gallant New Zealand by just five runs in the highest-scoring World Cup game in history on Saturday.

Australia piled up 388 all out as Travis Head top scored with 109 and fellow opener David Warner made 81.

New Zealand battled hard with Rachin Ravindra making 116, Daryl Mitchell adding 54 and Jimmy Neesham supplying late fireworks with a 33-ball fifty before they finished on 383-9 in 50 overs.

With a total of 771 runs, it was the highest scoring game at a World Cup, beating the 754 scored in South Africa's win against Sri Lanka earlier in the tournament.

"That was awesome. Sometimes I have to remember I'm out in the field, not a spectator. A fantastic game, they kept coming at us," said Australia skipper Pat Cummins.

In a dramatic final over played out in the shadow of the Himalayas, New Zealand needed 19 to win.

Trent Boult scampered for a single before Mitchell Starc donated five wickets.

Neesham, one of the stars of the 2019 final which New Zealand lost to England, then took six runs off the next three balls.

However, attempting another two, he was run out from a fine throw by Marnus Labuschagne from the fence.

That left Lockie Ferguson, who had injured his Achilles in the field, needing to perform the heroics off the last ball.

Starc fired the ball in on a full length and Ferguson could only push it to the covers, leaving the Kiwis heartbroken.

"It was a fantastic game of cricket. There were ebbs and flows throughout the 100 overs," said New Zealand captain Tom Latham.

"To get so close hurts. It was a fantastic game."

The result left both sides with four wins and two defeats each and well-placed for the semi-finals.

Earlier, Head, playing his first match of the tournament after being sidelined with a broken hand, reached his fourth one-day international hundred off 59 balls with 10 fours and six sixes.

The 29-year-old had brought up his 50 off 28 balls and then made the most of being dropped on 70 and 75.

He was eventually clean-bowled by off-spinner Glenn Phillips with Australia reaching 206-2 at the half-way stage.

With Warner, Head had put on 175 in the first 20 overs before his veteran partner was dismissed.

Head, Warner blitz

Warner, who turned 37 on Friday, had been looking for a third successive century but eventually fell for 81 when he chipped a catch back to Phillips.

Phillips then accounted for Steve Smith (18) as he claimed career-best figures of 3-37 before fellow spinner Mitchell Santner got in on the act.

Santner beat the defences of Mitchell Marsh (36) and the left-arm-er then dismissed Labuschagne (18) after the batsman had been dropped on one.

Neesham had middle-order danger-man Glenn Maxwell caught at long-off by Trent Boult for a 24-ball 41.

Maxwell had come into the match fresh from a World Cup record 40-ball hundred against the Netherlands.

Josh Inglis raced to a 28-ball 38, putting on 62 for the seventh wicket with skipper Pat Cummins (37).

In reply, New Zealand, runners-up in the last two World Cups, saw Will Young (32) and Devon Conway (28) put on 61 for the first wicket before both fell to Josh Hazlewood.

Mitchell hit his third fifty of the tournament to follow his 130 last time out against India but fell on 54 when leg-spinner Adam Zampa had him holing out to long-on with his team on 168-3 after 24 overs.

Mitchell put on 96 for the third wicket with Ravindra.

The 23-year-old Ravindra, who scored 123 in the opening win over England, reached three figures from 77 balls with seven fours and five sixes.

But with New Zealand needing 97 to win off 60 balls, Ravindra was caught in the deep off Australian skipper Pat Cummins for a fine 116.

That left the Kiwis on 293-6 but they battled hard to take the game to the final over thriller.

Netherlands rout Bangladesh

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE KOLKATA, OCT 28

Netherlands captain Scott Edwards led from the front as his side enjoyed another World Cup success with an 87-run hammering of Bangladesh.

Saturday's victory in Kolkata followed the non-Test side's shock defeat of South Africa earlier in the tournament.

The Netherlands, as was the case against South Africa, were indebted to wicketkeeper-batsman Edwards, whose innings top-score of 68 led a recovery from 63-4 to 229 all out.

The Tigers, chasing a seemingly modest target of 230, collapsed to 70-6 and were eventually dismissed for 142 at Eden Gardens, despite their opponents being without ill spinner Roelof van der Merwe.

This latest reverse meant Bangladesh had suffered five defeats in six World Cup games.

The Netherlands' win was all the more creditable as it followed their World Cup record 309-run defeat by Australia. Edwards, however, was dropped twice on nought in the same Mustafizur Rahman over, Liton Das flooring him in the gully before wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim grassed a tougher, diving chance.

Netherlands paceman Paul van Meekeren followed up with fine figures 4-23 as the Tigers were bowled out with more than seven overs remaining.

Bangladesh lost both their openers on 19. They were 63-4 when van Meekeren had Tigers captain Shakib Al Hasan caught behind for just five, the star all-rounder trying to cut a lifting ball that was too close to him.

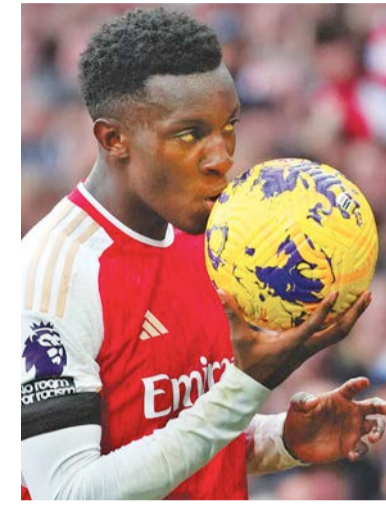
The Tigers were all but beaten at 70-6 when Mushfiqur was bowled for one by a fine van Meekeren delivery that jagged back.

Fellow veteran Mahmudullah, fresh from a hundred against South Africa, only managed 20 before he was well caught by Dutt off Bas de Leede—an example of the Netherlands' superior fielding.

Van Meekeren ended the match when he had Taskin Ahmed caught in the deep.

Chelsea slump again as Nketiah stars for five-star Arsenal

Mauricio Pochettino's Chelsea have just one home win from their past 13 games in the league.



Arsenal's Eddie Nketiah kisses the ball to celebrate after scoring his side's second goal at Emirates Stadium on Saturday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE LONDON, OCT 28

Chelsea slumped to another damaging home defeat against Brentford on Saturday as Eddie Nketiah hit a hat-trick in a 5-0 win for unbeaten Arsenal against bottom club Sheffield United.

Mauricio Pochettino's Chelsea appeared to have turned a corner in recent weeks, taking seven points from their three previous fixtures, but their 2-0 defeat means they have just one home win from their past 13 games in the league.

Ethan Pinnock took advantage of non-existent marking to head the visitors in front shortly before the hour mark after Chelsea had failed to capitalise on their first-half dominance.

Robert Sanchez was embarrassed in added time after joining his team's attack for a corner, failing to catch Neal Maupay in a race as he broke with the ball, allowing Bryan Mbembo to score in an empty net to compound home fans' woes.

The result means Brentford leapfrog Chelsea into 10th place in the Premier League table, pushing Pochettino's men into the bottom half.

"I'm not happy and think the players also and the whole club is not happy about the run (at home)," said the Argentine manager.

"It's a long time that we need to be more consistent here and very disappointed with this. We feel the responsibility that we need to change the dynamic."

The former Tottenham boss said on

Friday that Christopher Nkunku is nearing a comeback from the knee injury that has prevented the £52 million (\$63 million) signing making a competitive appearance yet for his new club.

On this evidence, the French international's return cannot come soon enough as Chelsea's other new striker, Nicolas Jackson, again failed to fire.

"If you don't score, you need to blame ourselves," said Pochettino. "We were not nasty or clinical in front of the goal."

Nketiah hat-trick

It was a different story for Arsenal, who roared back from 2-0 down to draw against Chelsea last week to preserve their unbeaten league record.

Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta shuffled his pack—including dropping captain Martin Odegaard to the bench—for the visit of Sheffield United and Nketiah celebrated his recall in style.

Arsenal broke through a resolute Blades defence as Declan Rice's pinpoint pass was collected by Nketiah, who made no mistake with a close-range finish past Wes Foderingham.

Nketiah doubled up when Foderingham failed to deal with a Bukayo Saka corner and palmed the ball into the path of the England striker, who lashed home to make it 2-0.

Nketiah's hat-trick was sealed in style as he smashed home from 20 yards.

Arsenal were awarded a penalty after a lengthy VAR check for an Oliver Norwood foul on Fabio Vieira, the Portuguese midfielder taking the spot-kick himself and sending Foderingham the wrong way to make it 4-0.

Another substitute, Takehiro Tomiyasu, completed the rout in stoppage time.

The win lifts Arsenal two points behind pacesetters Tottenham, who beat Crystal Palace 2-1 on Friday.

Struggling Burnley took the lead against Bournemouth through Charlie Taylor but Antoine Semenyo levelled midway through the first half for the south coast club with a superb individual goal.

Bournemouth took the lead in the 76th minute when Philip Billing chipped over goalkeeper James Trafford from long-range.

Newcastle, who have won four of their past five league games, take on Wolves in the late kick-off.

High-flying Liverpool and Manchester City are in action on Sunday.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19) Boldly pursue transformations you've been meditating on, taking action toward who you want to be. Good vibes flow later, smoothing out energetic shockwaves still lingering from yesterday's eclipse.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) You'll be in a unique position to execute creative ideas with as much clarity as you'd envisioned them with, dear Cancer. This also promotes having fun with and seeking adventure in the process. Friendly faces could land in your path this afternoon.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) Pay attention to the ideas that conjure passion, dear Libra, especially regarding creative projects that might lead to financial gain. Now is also a good time to reward your hard work with new tools to help you execute artistic ideas.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) You may be called to take the lead in organising large gatherings with family and friends, dear Capricorn. This pushes you to take responsibility for establishing a sense of community, but don't be afraid to delegate tasks if you need it.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) Seek sharp-witted companions who inspire you to learn, aligning yourself with those motivated to grow and passionately embrace life. You'll benefit from some extra allure later today, helping you win over any cuties you've been flirting with.

LEO (July 23-August 22) You'll feel motivated to tackle projects around the home today, dear Leo. Create a list of chores that must be handled and any supplies you may need, elevating your space before the holiday season rolls in. Touch base with your senses.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) You won't be in the mood to mess around when it comes to personal goals, bulldozing through obstacles while outsmarting competition. Luckily, you'll have a chance to relax this afternoon. These vibes also pair well with a date night or friendly outing.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) You'll feel motivated to make a name for yourself today, dear Aquarius, strengthening your will and ability to master your own path. Good vibes flow later, bringing the focus to your domestic sphere, which may inspire a day of deep cleaning.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) Your efficiency and intellect operate at peak performance today, dear Gemini. Use this energy to knock items off your to-do list, making room for projects you feel truly inspired by. Nurturing energy manifests later today, asking you to pamper yourself.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22) Your mind and body work together seamlessly, motivating you to execute passion projects or creative ideas you've been playing with. Take a moment to connect with your gratitude by generously sharing love, putting you in a benevolent and spiritual headspace.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) You'll feel much under the surface today, dear Archer, raising passions as you work toward goals from behind the scenes. Use this energy to troubleshoot creamer projects or brainstorm for the future, trusting your gut instincts while applying logic and organisation.

PISCES (February 19-March 20) Follow your instincts and the fire that burns within, moving away from what is expected of you if your soul calls for another path. Spread joy with sweet comments or flirtatious exchanges as afternoon rolls in, bringing romance your way.

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- 1 Partially
- 5 Touch
- 9 Folklore creatures
- 13 Seed appendage
- 14 Hooded snake
- 15 Use a phone
- 16 Small monkey
- 17 Planet's path in space
- 18 Hotel chain
- 19 Jeans fabric
- 21 Musician in an orchestra
- 23 Pinch
- 26 "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea"
- 27 Moral
- 29 Spud
- 32 Knight's title
- 33 Plate of mixed greens
- 35 Wild
- 37 Name in Genesis
- 39 Ease (2 wds.)
- 41 Judge
- 42 Piano part
- 44 Sub's echolocation system
- 46 Foot digit
- 47 Summarize
- 49 Stop sign shape
- 51 Expert airman
- 52 Boldness
- 53 Set off
- 57 Lubricated
- 60 Mob VIP
- 61 Plant exudation
- 64 Allies' opponent in WWII
- 66 Too
- 67 Sends out
- 68 Arum family plant
- 69 Adolescent
- 70 Knots and Adams
- 71 Portent
- DOWN**
- 1 Monopoly piece
- 2 Like the Painted Desert
- 3 Less fat, less sugar
- 4 Jerk away
- 5 Pro
- 6 Decline gradually
- 7 Actor — Stoltz
- 8 Up-to-date news
- 9 Worshipful one
- 10 Role in "La Boheme"
- 11 Disparages
- 12 Long cut
- 14 Causing laughter
- 20 Rainbow goddess
- 22 Frond
- 24 Dads and granddads
- 25 Military unit
- 27 Source of down
- 28 Swap
- 30 Muse of poetry
- 31 Boca —
- 32 Weaken
- 34 Doltish fellow
- 36 Actor Tommy — Jones
- 38 Coconut cookie
- 40 Supporters of the arts
- 43 Require
- 45 Sitar player — Shankar
- 48 Looked
- 50 Italian ice cream
- 53 Begone!
- 54 Pallid
- 55 Domed room
- 56 Test-drive car
- 58 Annual physical
- 59 Terrible
- 62 Wicked behavior
- 63 "— a girl!"
- 65 "— of a Preacher Man"

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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

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| | 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 | |
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| | | | | 51 | | | | | 52 | | | |
| 53 | 54 | 55 | | | | 56 | | 57 | | 58 | 59 | |
| 60 | | | | | | 61 | 62 | 63 | | 64 | | 65 |
| 66 | | | | | | 67 | | | | 68 | | |
| 69 | | | | | | 70 | | | | 71 | | |

SUDOKU

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

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

FICTION PARK

The servant's entry

Raju, hailing from the countryside, had no prior acquaintances in the city until he befriended a resourceful fruit vendor.

□ SUGAM GAUTAM

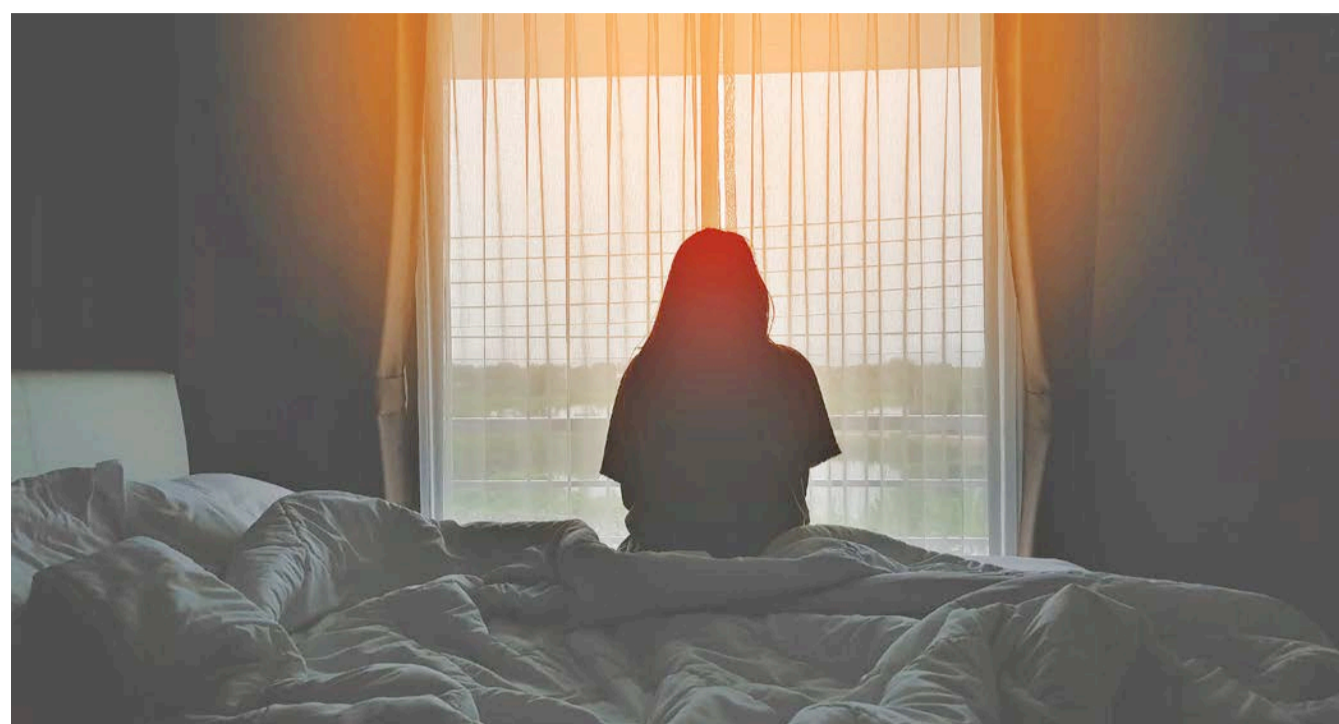
On the very first day, when Raju entered his mistress's room with a glass of milk, he sensed that something was amiss with this city woman who had lost her husband a few months ago in a tragic road accident. Raju's connection with a fruit vendor down the street had opened the door to this household job. Before this, he had never served as a servant. He was willing to undertake any job where he wouldn't be subjected to harsh scolding. In the restaurant where he had previously toiled as a dishwasher, the owner had an uncanny knack for finding faults in his work. Sometimes, the owner would insist that the frying pan still had soap residue and send him back to rewash the dishes.

Raju was reprimanded for his slow pace, with the owner often remarking, "You're such a slow worker!" What irked Raju the most was the owner's reluctance to pay his salary on time. "The business is slow. You'll have to wait another week," was a common refrain. Frustrated with the owner's ill-treatment, Raju searched for other job opportunities.

Raju, hailing from the countryside, had no acquaintances in the city until he befriended a resourceful fruit vendor who peddled an assortment of fruits in front of the Jaya Complex. The fruit vendor's business wasn't particularly lucrative, but the limited clientele he had displayed remarkable loyalty—a trait he cherished.

Among his regular customers was the Bastola family. However, following her husband's demise, Rukmini seldom frequented the stall. The fruit vendor was well aware that her husband's passing had adversely impacted his business. Her husband had been health-conscious, purchasing kilos of fruit to prepare juice in the morning. After his passing, Rukmini only visited the stall once or twice a week. Previously recognised as a devoutly religious woman, her transformation from devout to atheist was stark. The loss of her husband had utterly reshaped her life. The fruit vendor noticed her cheeks growing hollow and her skin taking on the pallor of a ripe pumpkin.

"Madam, you seem to be growing weaker. Are you not eating properly?" he inquired one evening. She didn't appreciate the remark, but the truth was undeniable. Most mornings, she languished in bed, dreading the thought of preparing meals for herself. Typically, she would rouse herself around 9 am to cook a simple breakfast of noodles. The refrigerator exuded the foul odour of spoiled tomatoes and fruits, and clothing was strewn haphazardly about the floor.



SHUTTERSTOCK

House cleaning seemed superfluous to her. Her days were confined to her home, and during the day, she grappled with a profound loneliness. At 34, she was loath to be tethered to her residence. Making friends, going out with a partner, and engaging with children were the activities that people her age enjoyed, yet she found herself without suitable company. Had her late husband fathered children, their presence would have provided solace. Regrettably, he hadn't been able to grant her that blessing, leaving her with cherished memories and substantial wealth sufficient to sustain her without doing any work.

Rukmini's parents had passed away long before her marriage, and her husband's siblings resided in another part of the city with their parents. They were all affluent, and they weren't concerned with Rukmini's decisions regarding the grand house and Abinash's bequeathed properties. Following their son's death, Abinash's parents had visited Rukmini on only two occasions.

"Don't worry, *beta*. Everything will be fine," the mother had consoled her before departing. They felt sympathy for the young Rukmini, yet there was little they could do. Privately, the family harboured hopes that Rukmini would bear children, but the impediment lay with Abinash. Rukmini wasn't infertile; it was her husband who was. On one occasion, Abinash's mother had offered Rukmini

the opportunity to live with them, but she had declined, reassuring them that she could manage on her own.

"Madam, your house is quite expansive. I suggest hiring some domestic help to manage it. They can cook for you and handle household chores," the fruit vendor suggested during one of Rukmini's visits to the fruit stall. With each visit, the vendor observed her deteriorating condition

Rukmini's parents had passed away long before her marriage, and her husband's siblings lived in another part of the city with their parents.

and felt sympathy for this wealthy woman whose life, in his estimation, seemed devoid of possibilities. Her collarbones jutted out, resembling protruding roots on a forest path. Rukmini didn't entertain the vendor's suggestions, but deep down, she understood that the vast house was unmanageable and would require regular tending. "It's true that I'm struggling to maintain the house, but finding a trustworthy servant isn't easy these days."

"That's true, madam," the vendor

acknowledged with a smile, revealing yellowed gums. "If you come across someone trustworthy, let me know. I'll consider hiring a servant. I would prefer someone who knows how to drive, as the car has been unused for quite some time, and I'm unable to drive," Rukmini articulated her requirements.

The following day, the fruit vendor contacted Raju and inquired if he would be willing to work as a servant. "A servant? I've never worked as a servant before," Raju responded.

"Only well-off families can afford servants, mister. You'd only have to wash a single dish, unlike at the restaurant where you currently labour," the vendor chuckled in his customary manner. Raju wasn't initially keen on this job, but he was open to anything that would spare him the drudgery of dishwashing at the restaurant, where the owner habitually withheld his salary.

For over a month, Raju attended a driving school to acquire driving skills. Within three months, he became qualified to drive on highways. A few weeks later, when Rukmini visited the fruit stall one evening, the fruit vendor broached the topic of hiring a servant. "Madam, he's a good man from a distant village, and he also knows how to drive. He used to work as a waiter in a restaurant," the vendor remarked as Rukmini said, "Send him to my house tomorrow."

Raju was taken aback by the sheer size

of the house when he arrived. The antique-style mansion covered an expanse of 80 metres, boasting a lush front garden and a rear yard for light exercises and yoga. In his village, houses were a fraction of this size. Rukmini, upon seeing Raju, was equally surprised. She had anticipated an elderly servant, but her assumptions were wrong. Raju's jet-black hair was slicked back, and his well-defined jawline lent him a youthful air despite being well into his thirties.

Raju had also envisioned an elderly, frail woman as his mistress. Although 34 wasn't old, Rukmini appeared drained of energy. Raju could discern fatigue in her eyes, isolation in her countenance and a yearning for care. Nevertheless, Raju had not come to rectify her life with love. He was merely a servant, and his duty was to perform his work diligently and earn his wages.

On the first day, after serving a glass of milk to Rukmini's room and descending for some rest, Raju couldn't help but recall how she had stared at the blank ceiling, seemingly lost in thought. He felt sympathy for her, understanding the irreplaceable loss she had suffered. On the other hand, after sipping the milk Raju had served, Rukmini felt a sense of lightness. She felt as though Raju was there to care for her, not just as a servant, but as a friend or perhaps something more.

It was only Raju's first day, yet she already felt shielded in his presence. That night, she fell into a deep slumber, and upon waking in the morning, she reached a conclusion: she didn't require a servant; she craved companionship from someone who would stand by her side through all of life's challenges. Her house didn't need a servant; it needed a man. And Rukmini's heart whispered that this man was none other than Raju.

The previous day, she had no inkling that she would experience something like this. Life is unpredictable, and anything can happen at any time, she told herself. However, this newfound happiness was accompanied by fear. What if Raju didn't find the work suitable and decided to leave the house? Something deep within her told her that she needed this man to stay with her. While he might see her as a mistress, for Rukmini, he was her sole companion, her saviour. The once-lonely Rukmini, suffocated by loneliness, now saw a river of possibilities flowing her way. She belonged to this stream and would follow wherever it led her.



Gautam is a writer from Pokhara.

Keeping the Deuda tradition alive

Niruta Khatri pursued her passion for Deuda music and is working to revitalise the fading art form. She had to overcome a challenging upbringing and family doubts to do so.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF NIRUTA KHATRI

□ MENUKA DHUNGANA
ACHHAM

We often hear Nepalis abroad deeply cherish their homeland despite the inevitability of living in foreign lands, distant and often cold. This sentiment of longing and isolation can be described in two lines of a Deuda song:

*'Ja ghar ko samachar leiya, maal jaanya kaag
Pardeshi hu, pardeshi chhu, pardesh mero bhag'*

*(Bring the news of home, oh, crow, the messenger
I'm a dweller of foreign lands, where I am destined to be)*

These words encapsulate the emotions of people from the Far West and Karnali regions, scattered worldwide, who fondly recall Nepal through Deuda songs. Among them is Niruta Khatri, a 27-year-old singer from Dhakari Rural Municipality Ward 2 of Achham. Raised in a remote village, she stands as possibly the first Achhami female singer to gain recognition both nationally and

volleyball professionally," she reflects. "But the confines of our village offered no path to excel. My family's situation pained me deeply, so I had to abandon my dreams."

After completing her SLC (now SEE), Khatri contemplated a career in radio. A radio station in Achham offered basic journalism training and a guaranteed job afterwards. Despite disagreements within her family, she made a challenging seven-hour journey on foot to attend the training in Managlsen. "It felt like a massive achievement," she recalls, reflecting on those early days. "With no family support, I pondered deeply on how to return to the village if I were to fail the training."

Fortunately, after the week-long course, she immediately started working at the radio station. This marked the beginning of her professional journey. Hosting musical programmes and Deuda-centric shows in the Achhami language, she found her love for Deuda music flourishing.

"Broadcasting Deuda programmes in the Achhami language, engaging in dohori with radio callers, ignited my journey into Deuda singing," she explains. "After spending two years at an FM station in Achham, I moved to Doti and continued similar work. It was during this time that I became more deeply involved in my singing," she shares. However, opportunities didn't come knocking; Khatri had to actively search for openings, knocking on many doors to make her mark in the industry.

One day, she got an opportunity to visit Kathmandu. "On that visit, with the support of artists from Achham, I recorded a song and returned to the village." Even after recording songs, her family still didn't have faith in her future aspirations. However, her life took a turn when she sang that song, opening doors to new opportunities. From that moment, she dedicated all her time to her passion.

She explains that Deuda songs about love, affection, happiness and sorrows have gained immense popularity. Her compositions have struck a chord with fans of the genre.

In 2019, Khatri performed in various events in Qatar, India and Nepal. She was even invited to Korea by the Far West Society Korea for a performance. The singer reveals that being recognised as a Deuda singer makes her very happy.

Shawn Levy talks about 'All the Light We Cannot See'

□ ASSOCIATED PRESS

Shawn Levy knew he had to direct the Netflix limited series 'All the Light We Cannot See', when he read a scene between the main character Marie and her father:

"I remember being knocked out emotionally and deciding, 'I don't want to share. I want to do all these episodes myself, and I want to direct it like a four-hour movie,'" said Levy, who was also a fan of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel it's based on.

Levy, a dad to four daughters, wanted to honour this father-daughter relationship because it's "the heart of the show."

"I get it. I know when it looks fake, and I know when someone is doing right by this beautiful, intimate relationship between a daughter and her father."

Debuting November 2, the story follows Marie (played by newcomer Aria Mia Loberti), alone and in hiding in German-occupied France and a Nazi soldier named Werner (Louis Hoffman). He's an orphan who was drafted against his will. The two connect because of a radio broadcast that had a pivotal presence in their childhoods.

Levy, who has years of experience producing and directing, says the project was a growth opportunity for him. Loberti, who is blind like her character, had never acted before. He spoke to The Associated Press about the series, and his pals Hugh Jackman and Ryan Reynolds.

Talk about the process to cast the protagonist, Marie.

I increasingly felt like the way to do this best, not just right, but best, was to try and cast this lead role authentically. That meant casting someone who was a low vision or blind themselves. And after a global search, I found Nelle Sutton to play the young Marie and Aria

Mia Loberti to play the young adult Marie. But truly, it was a needle in a haystack-level miracle to find them. Even more astonishingly, they had never acted or even auditioned before.

Were there a lot of rehearsals?

I don't subscribe to extensive rehearsals. This comes partly because I've directed a lot of newcomers, and usually, they are kids. I don't think that a natural quality in a new actor is helped by extensive rehearsals. What I'm betting on is inherent personality, inherent realness, and I want to do everything I can to preserve that. Usually, we do a table read, or in this case, as everyone else was reading the script, Aria had memorised the script. She had memorised her lines in all four episodes. Again, this isn't a stage play. No actor memorises the whole screenplay before you start, but Aria did.

What did you learn?

I certainly learned how to be thoughtful and concise in my word selection when giving a directorial note. But mostly what I learned is how different the world can be in navigating it without sight, but also in how it treats people and presumes things about people who are without sight or have low vision. It gave me a very personal human experience that deepened my understanding and my empathy. I'm grateful.

AP/ISS
Producer-director Shawn Levy poses for a portrait in his office.