



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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## TODAY

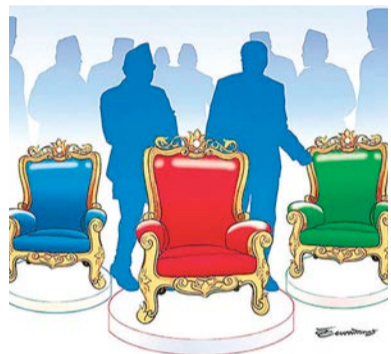
### NATIONAL

**Rajawan Bhandari and his wife Juni, both 77, of Pulaha in Palata Rural Municipality, Kalikot lost vision four years ago. Two weeks ago, they regained their eyesight following a free cataract surgery in Thirpu. Pg 2**

**A cooperative sector reform task force has suggested a temporary moratorium on the registration of new cooperatives and their expansion until other measures to stabilise the sector are implemented. Pg 3**

### OPINION

**The Nepali people have consistently fought for democracy, and the government system has repeatedly changed due to unmet expectations, writes Khim Lal Devkota. Pg 4**



### MONEY

**Onions has become pricier after India slapped a minimum export price to check shipments, and ensure adequate supplies for domestic use. Nepal sources almost all of its onions from the southern neighbour. Pg 5**

**Setting up a "loss and damage" fund for poorer nations hit by climate change dominated talks on Tuesday, a month before COP28 in Dubai, where delegates are set to tussle over the future of fossil fuels. Pg 5**

### WORLD

**Afghans return to Taliban rule as Pakistan moves to expel 1.7 million. UN refugee agency data shows 14,700 documented Afghans left Pakistan as of October 18, more than double the 6,039 last year. Pg 6**

**Muslim Americans and some Democratic activists say they will work to mobilise millions of Muslims to withhold cash and votes for Biden's 2024 reelection unless he takes urgent steps to secure a Gaza ceasefire. Pg 6**

### SPORTS

**Nepal progressed into the high-stake semi-finals of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 Asia Qualifier with a game in hand after defeating Malaysia by six wickets at the TU Cricket Ground. Pg 7**



**Shaheen Shah Afridi grabbed three wickets while opener Fakhar Zaman and Abdullah Shafique cracked half-centuries as Pakistan beat Bangladesh by seven wickets in the race for World Cup semi-final. Pg 7**

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United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres addresses a joint session of the federal parliament in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

## In Parliament, UN chief stresses victim-centric transitional justice

Antonio Guterres says Nepal needs more support to tackle impacts of climate change.

**BINOD GHIMIRE**  
KATHMANDU, OCT 31

Visiting United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres has reminded Nepali authorities that transitional justice is a complex process that will be considered successful only if it has victims at its heart.

Addressing a joint meeting of the

federal parliament on Tuesday, the chief of the global multilateral organisation said the transitional justice process must be "inclusive [and] comprehensive with victims at its heart".

He added that while truth and reparations are important, justice is also an inevitable part of the process. His statement comes at a time when the current ruling coalition is saying it is

largely a reconciliatory process where truth-seeking, relief and reparation should get more importance over other pillars.

"We know that transitional justice has the greatest chance of success when it is inclusive, comprehensive and has victims at its heart," Guterres said.

>> Continued on page 2

## Blinken: Nepal, US valued partners in Indo-Pacific region

Foreign Minister NP Saud urges renewal and expansion of trade preferences with the United States.

**ANIL GIRI**  
KATHMANDU, OCT 31

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has said that Nepal and the US are valued partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

Ahead of his meeting with Foreign Minister NP Saud at the State Department in Washington on Monday, Blinken said, "We have 76 years of diplomatic relations between Nepal and the United States, and Nepal is today a very valued partner in the Indo-Pacific."

"We are working together to ensure that we have a free, open, secure, prosperous region, and in so many ways, Nepal is leading, not just in the region but globally, as a very constructive actor in international organisations—of course, with so many peacekeepers who are trying to help people move from conflict to peace around the world."

During the then Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali's similar visit to Washington in December 2020, he had held talks with his US counterpart Mike Pompeo. Following their meeting the State Department had issued a statement highlighting Nepal's "central role" in a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific, among other things.

The statement issued by the State Department's spokesperson in 2018 had courted controversy in Kathmandu as the then KP Sharma Oli government struggled to endorse the Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact from parliament. The \$500 million compact

was the largest grant received from the US, but courted controversy due to its possible links with larger US strategic interests including the disputed Indo-Pacific strategy (IPS).

While ratifying the US grant from Parliament in February 2022, lawmakers also added a 12-point interpretative declaration, which categorically stated that Nepal will not be a part of any security, military or strategic alliance.

On returning from Washington, Gyawali refuted the State Department's statement and claimed that US officials had merely shared their Indo-Pacific vision and dis-

**Saud in on a US visit, the first by Nepal's foreign minister in four years after Gyawali.**

cussed Nepal's potential central role in it. "We conveyed and communicated to them that Nepal does not believe in any strategic alliances and will not enter into such activities," Gyawali had clarified.

Besides clarifications from both Nepali and US sides, a section of Nepali society continued to harbour suspicions that Kathmandu had already become part of the IPS, suggesting that this was the reason for Nepal's acceptance of the MCC grant.

>> Continued on page 3

## Israeli strikes level housing blocks in Gaza refugee camp

800,000 people said to have heeded Israeli military's call to flee from the northern part of the strip to the south.



Palestinians wounded in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip are brought to a treatment room of al Aqsa Hospital in Deir al Balah on Tuesday.

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
KHAN YOUNIS, GAZA STRIP, OCT 31

A flurry of Israeli airstrikes on Tuesday on a refugee camp near Gaza City levelled apartment buildings, leaving craters where they once stood, as ground troops battled Hamas militants across northern Gaza and attacked underground compounds.

Buoyed by the first successful rescue of a captive held by Hamas, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected calls for a cease-fire and again vowed to crush Hamas' ability to govern Gaza or threaten Israel following its bloody October 7 rampage, which ignited the war.

Several hundred thousand Palestinians remain in the northern part of Gaza, where Israeli troops and tanks reportedly have advanced on several sides of Gaza City, the sprawling urban centre.

In the Jabaliya refugee camp on Gaza City's outskirts, at least six airstrikes destroyed a number of apartment blocks in a residential area, the Hamas-run Interior Ministry said. It reported a large number of casualties but did not immediately provide details.

Footage of the scene from Al-Jazeera TV showed at least four large craters where buildings once stood, amid a large swath of rubble surrounded by

partially collapsed structures. Dozens of rescue workers and bystanders dug through the wreckage, searching for survivors beneath the pancaked buildings. A group of young men pulled two children from the upper floors of a damaged apartment block, cradling them as they climbed down.

More than half the territory's 2.3 million Palestinians have fled their homes, with hundreds of thousands sheltering in packed UN-run schools-turned-shelters or in hospitals alongside thousands of wounded patients. Israeli strikes have hit closer to several northern hospitals in recent days, alarming medics.

Thousands of people broke into its aid warehouses over the weekend to take food, as supplies of basic goods have dwindled because of the Israeli siege.

>> Continued on page 2



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NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Man held over wife's murder

**PARSA:** On Monday evening, police made public a 45-year-old man from ward 14 of Birgunj Metropolitan City who was arrested on the charge of killing his 28-year-old second wife. According to police, the woman was seriously injured after being beaten and stabbed by her husband and other family members on October 21. The woman died in the course of treatment at Birgunj Health Care Hospital on October 22. Police said they have also arrested two family members and a search for other absconding family members is on.

Two killed in road accident

**KAVRE:** Two people died in a mini-truck accident at Silabhanjyang of Panauti Municipality in Kavrepalanchok district on Tuesday. The vehicle carrying straw plunged around 600 metres from the road. Police identified the deceased as driver Rabin Acharya of ward 2 of Panauti and Shivabikram KC of ward 2 of Bethanchok Rural Municipality. Critically injured Acharya and KC were rushed to Scheer Memorial Hospital in Banepa where they died in the course of treatment. Police said Sharada Timalsina of ward 2 of Bethanchok was critically injured.

Dhangadhi to fine litterers

**DHANGADHI:** Since Sunday, Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City has started imposing a fine of Rs5,000 on shops that throw garbage on the road under their Clean Dhangadhi campaign. The sanitation unit of Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City issued a notice saying first time offenders will be fined and those littering again will not be allowed to run the shops. So far, only a butcher shop has been fined.

# Eye camp restores sight to scores of elderly in Kalikot

The two-day camp was organised by Palata Rural Municipality in collaboration with Nepal Netra Jyoti Sangh and Himalaya Eye Hospital.

**TULARAM PANDEY**  
KALIKOT, OCT 31

Rajawan Bhandari and his wife Juni Bhandari, both aged 77 now, of Pulaha in ward 1 of Palata Rural Municipality in Kalikot lost their vision completely over the last four years.

But, two weeks ago, the couple regained their eyesight after a cataract surgery at an eye camp organised in Thirpu village.

Akabar Bhandari gave his mother Juni a piggyback ride to the eye camp while his father Rajawan was carried to the camp by one of the villagers. The journey to the camp in Thirpu took about five hours, says Akabar.

"I cannot express my happiness in words. My world had gone completely dark. It is a blessing to be able to see again," said Rajawan while returning home from the camp. When the doctor removed the blindfolds after the surgery, their happiness was palpable in a photograph taken at that moment.

"My son carried me to the eye camp on his back. Now I can walk home on my own two legs," said Juni. The Bhandari couple returned home on foot from Thirpu following the cataract treatment.

According to Akabar, his father Rajawan started using prescription glasses 12 years ago. But he went completely blind four years ago. "My mother also could not see well. Life had become hard for them due to blindness," he said. "They had to depend on family members even for small tasks. Those difficulties are now over."

Many people like the Bhandari couple have benefited from the eye camp organised at Thirpu from October 14 to 16.

Mansur Budha, a resident of ward 4



Rajawan Bhandari and his wife Juni, along with other elderly people, beam with happiness after undergoing cataract surgeries at a free eye camp in Thirpu village in Kalikot, two weeks ago.

of Palata, was unable to see properly for more than three years. He also underwent a cataract surgery and regained his vision.

Budha said that his life was empty

without eyesight, and his heart was filled with joy after he regained his vision.

"I bless the doctor who conducted my surgery for bringing back my eye-

sight. I don't know how to repay the doctors and the health workers. I was unable to even move from one place to another without the help of others, but now I have regained vision and

independence," said Budha.

Mana Sanjyal, a 75-year-old woman from Tolibhid in ward 7 of Pachaljarana Rural Municipality, is able to see again after a surgery at the camp.

According to Sanjyal, for several years she suffered from blurred vision and had completely lost vision four years ago. After her surgery at the camp, Sanjyal regained her eyesight, thanked the doctor, and returned home with a smile.

Bishnu Rokaya, chairman of Palata Rural Municipality, said that the camp was set up since several elderly in the rural municipality were suffering blurred vision and declining eyesight, among other eye-related problems. "Most people were suffering in silence because they could not go to the district headquarters, Manma, for treatment," said Rokaya. "The eye camp was a blessing for many."

According to Rokaya, the camp was organised by Palata Rural Municipality in collaboration with the Nepal Netra Jyoti Sangh of Kalikot and Himalaya Eye Hospital of Pokhara. "All the surgeries were conducted free of charge," said Rokaya.

According to Dr Aashish Jammakattel, the chief of the camp, patients from Bajura, Mugu, and Kalikot received free treatment and surgeries at the camp.

Among the beneficiaries, 77 patients underwent cataract surgeries, and 601 people received free eye check-ups.

"During the camp, it was found that several cataract patients in Kalikot were suffering at home unable to visit the health facilities in Manma," said Jammakattel. "Such camps should be organised more often to cater to those in need."

# UN Secretary General Guterres reassures Nepal insurgency victims: 'You are not alone'

>> Continued from page 1

"When it centres on truth and reparations but also justice. When women participate fully. And when all victims of human rights violations can find meaningful redress."

Transitional justice—a crucial component of Nepal's peace process—together with climate change has been the core subject of Guterres' interest in his four-day trip that began Sunday.

In his address, he further mentioned that the process must help bring peace to victims, families and communities haunted by questions and scarred by injustice and help put the past to rest. Even as 17 years have passed since the peace process began in 2006, thousands of conflict victims are still fighting for justice.

Hours before his address, a group of victims, backed by civil society members, staged a demonstration in Babarmahal area of the Capital demanding a revision of the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and

Reconciliation Commission Act keeping victims at the centre and establishment of a credible process that wins the trust of all stakeholders. A bill to amend the Act awaits Parliament's approval.

The UN chief also said the transitional justice process must meet international standards and the Supreme Court rulings, as demanded by victims.

"You are not alone," he said. "The United Nations stands ready to support you to develop a process that meets international standards, your Supreme Court's rulings, and the needs of victims—and to put it into practice. The United Nations and Nepal are old friends."

Along with transitional justice, he touched on several issues including climate change, Nepal's contribution to the UN peace missions, digital divide, responsibilities of the big nations to smaller countries, and the humanitarian crisis the Israel-Hamas war has invited.

Having witnessed the catastrophe climate change has brought to the Himalayas in his visits to the Mount Everest and Mount Annapurna regions, Guterres said Nepal was facing huge consequences of the climate change despite its negligible contribution to global emissions.

**The transitional justice process must meet international standards, Guterres reiterates.**

"What is happening in this country as a result of climate change is an appalling injustice and a searing indictment of the fossil fuel age. I am deeply concerned by those communities in Nepal facing the brutal impacts of the climate crisis. The United

Nations stands with them," he said, highlighting how monsoons, storms and landslides are growing in force and ferocity—sweeping away crops, livestock and entire villages—decimating economies and ruining lives. He also claimed that the glaciers in Nepal are melting at record rates leading to a loss of one third of them in just three decades.

Guterres said Nepal and other developing countries need far greater international support to help development, accelerate climate action, and weather the current global storms.

"I have proposed an SDG Stimulus that would release at least \$500 billion a year in affordable long-term finance for sustainable development and climate action," he said. "Developed countries must honour the promise of \$100 billion a year; and double adaptation finance, as a first step to devoting half of climate finance to adaptation. The most vulnerable must be at the centre of efforts to build climate resilience."

Through Nepal's Parliament he also urged leaders to act on climate without delay—with the biggest emitters leading from the front saying all countries must put the Acceleration Agenda I have proposed into effect, to limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

He appreciated Nepal's role in climate action, claiming it was on target to reach net zero emissions by 2045 and carrying out extraordinary reforestation efforts. Nepal has made remarkable progress in increasing the forest cover with its successful community forestry programme.

Echoing the concerns of the developing nations, Guterres said these countries must have far greater representation in international institutions. I have called for reform of the outdated United Nations Security Council and proposed measures to reform the global financial architecture—so that it better represents developing countries and responds to

their needs, he said.

"These proposals are gaining real traction—at this year's United Nations General Assembly and beyond. The United Nations Summit of the Future next year is an important chance to push further progress. I count on Nepal's support to help make the change we need a reality," he said.

On several occasions he said that Nepal and the United Nations were good friends, and he would work to ensure developing nations like Nepal are heard in global multilateral forums. As geopolitical tensions rise, global divisions are becoming deeper and more dangerous and smaller countries fear becoming collateral damage in competition between great powers, according to Guterres.

Stating that Nepal sets an example to the world on different fronts, he said, "This country is a promoter of peace, a champion of multilateralism, and a staunch supporter of sustainable development and climate action."

**Shambhunath Municipality**  
Office of Municipal Executive Kathauna, Saptari  
Madhesh Province Nepal  
Invitation for Bids  
First Date of Publication: 2080/07/15

**Contract Identification No: 01T/MB/Shmun/2080/081**

**1. Shambhunath Municipality** invites electronic bids from Nepalese eligible bidders for the construction of Na. Pa. Ko. Adhuro Prasashanik Bhawan Nirman Tatha Canteen Nirman Tatha Sauchalaya Nirman under National Competitive Bidding procedures. The estimated amount for the works is **Nrs. 4434712.95 exclusive of PS and VAT.**

**2. Eligible Bidders** may obtain further information and inspect the Bidding Documents at the office of **Shambhunath Municipality, Kathauna, Saptari** or may visit PPMO website [www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp](http://www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp).

**3. Bidder** should submit their bid electronically by downloading the bidding documents for e-submission from PPMO's e-GP system [www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp](http://www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp). Bidders submitting their bid electronically should deposit the cost of Bidding In the following Revenue account as specified below. Information to deposit the cost of bidding document in Bank:  
**Account Name: Shambhunath Municipality, Kathauna, Saptari**  
**Bank Name: Rastriya Banijya Bank, Kathauna, Saptari Office Revenue**  
**Account no. 2320100301010008: (for Purchasing bid)**  
**Cost of bidding document : NRs. 3000.00**

**4** Electronic bids must be submitted through PPMO's e-GP System [www . Bol patra. gov. np/ egp](http://www.Bolpatra.gov.np/egp) on or before 12:00 PM of 2080/08/14. Bids received after this deadline will be rejected.

**5.** The bids will be opened in the presence of Bidders' representatives who choose to attend at **2080/08/14, 1:00 PM** at office of **Shambhunath Municipal Executive Kathauna, Saptari Nepal.** Bids must be valid for a period of **90 days from the date of bid opening and must be accompanied** by scanned copy of the bid security in. pdf format of e-bid, amounting to a minimum of **Nrs. 1,33,000.00 (One Lakh Thirty Three Thousand Only)** which shall be valid for 30 days beyond the validity period of the bid.

**6.** If the last date of purchases or submission falls on a government holiday, then the next working day shall be considered as the last date. In such case the validity period of the bid and bid security shall remain the same as specified for the original last date of bid submission.

**7.** The Shambhunath Municipality reserve the right to accept or reject, wholly, partly any or all bid documents without assigning any reasons, Whatsoever. In case of discrepancies or error in bid notice or any other documents Municipal reserve the right to amend or correct any time.

**8.** Interested bidders may contact us during office hours for any further queries and information.  
**9816897030, 9842879468, 9801517537**

**Shambhunath Municipality**

# Gaza medics ignore Israeli evacuation orders

>> Continued from page 1

There has been no central electricity in Gaza for weeks, and Israel has barred the entry of fuel needed to power emergency generators for hospitals and homes.

UNRWA, which hundreds of thousands of people in Gaza rely on for basic services even in normal times, says 64 of its staff have been killed since the start of the war, including a man killed alongside his wife and eight children in a strike late Monday.

"This is the highest number ever of UN aid workers killed in any conflict around the world in such a short time," spokesperson Juliette Touma told The Associated Press. "UNRWA will never be the same without these colleagues."

The war has also threatened to ignite fighting on other fronts. Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group have traded fire daily along the border, and Israel and the US have struck targets in Syria linked to Iran, which supports Hamas, Hezbollah and other armed groups in the region.

The military said it shot down what appeared to be a drone near the southernmost city of Eilat and intercepted a missile over the Red Sea on Tuesday, neither of which entered Israeli airspace.

The Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen later issued a video statement claiming to have fired ballistic missiles and drones at Israel, saying it was the third such operation. They threatened to carry out more strikes "until the Israeli aggression stops."

Earlier this month, a US Navy destroyer in the Red Sea intercepted three cruise missiles and several drones launched toward Israel by the Houthis, who control much of northern Yemen, including its capital, Sanaa. Projectiles have also struck inside Egypt, near the Israeli border.

In the occupied West Bank, where Israeli-Palestinian violence has also surged, the army demolished the family home of Saleh al-Aroui, a senior Hamas official exiled over a decade ago. Ali Kaseeb, head of the local council in the village of Aroura, said the home had been vacant for 15 years. More than 8,500 Palestinians have

been killed in the war, mostly women and minors, the Gaza Health Ministry said Monday, without providing a breakdown between civilians and fighters. The figure is without precedent in decades of Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Over 1,400 people have died on the Israeli side, mainly civilians killed during Hamas' initial attack, also an unprecedented figure. Palestinian militants have continued firing rockets into Israel.

Larger ground operations have been launched north and east of Gaza City. Jonathan Conricus, an Israeli military spokesman, called Gaza City the "center of gravity of Hamas" but said strikes continue in other parts of the territory.

The military said it struck some 300 militant targets over the past day, including compounds inside tunnels, and that troops had engaged in several battles with militants armed with antitank missiles and machine guns. Video footage released by the military showed soldiers and a tank moving down a dirt road between two rows of demolished buildings, some of them three to four stories high.

Hamas released its own video showing what it said was a battle in northern Gaza on Sunday. A fighter wearing a GoPro-style camera emerged from a tunnel with a rocket-propelled grenade launcher and ran across sand dunes and shrubs with other militants amid the clatter of gunfire.

It was not possible to independently confirm reports by either side.

Casualties are expected to mount on both sides as the battle moves into dense, residential neighborhoods.

Conricus said some 800,000 people have headed the Israeli military's orders to flee from the northern part of the strip to the south. Northern Gaza was estimated to have a pre-war population of around 1.1 million.

The window to flee south may be closing, as Israeli forces reached Gaza's main north-south highway this week. Video circulating Monday showed a tank opening fire on a car that had approached a sand berm but was turning around. Gaza's Health Ministry said three people were killed.

Zaki Abdel-Hay, a Palestinian living a few minutes' walk from the road south of Gaza City, said people are afraid to use it. "People are very scared. The Israeli tanks are still close," he said over the phone, adding that "constant artillery fire" could be heard near the road.

Dawood Shehab, a spokesperson for Islamic Jihad, a smaller militant group allied with Hamas, told Al Jazeera television that its fighters were battling Israeli forces who were trying to cut off the main highway and a parallel coastal road farther west.

In a news conference late Monday, Netanyahu rejected calls for a ceasefire to facilitate the release of captives or end the war, which he has said will be long and difficult. "Calls for a cease-fire are calls for Israel to surrender to Hamas," he told a news conference. "That will not happen."

The military said on Monday that special forces rescued one of the estimated 240 captives seized by Palestinian militants during the wide-ranging assault. It said Private Ori Megidish, 19, was "doing well" and had been reunited with her family. Hamas has released four hostages, and has said it would let the others go in return for thousands of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, which has dismissed the offer.

Gaza's humanitarian crisis, meanwhile, continues to worsen.

The World Health Organization said two hospitals have been damaged and an ambulance destroyed in Gaza over the last two days. It said all 13 hospitals operating in the north have received Israeli evacuation orders in recent days.

Medics have refused such orders, saying it would be a death sentence for patients on life support. Israel says it targets Hamas fighters and infrastructure and that the militants operate among civilians, putting them in danger.

Israel has allowed more than 150 trucks loaded with food and medicine to enter Gaza from Egypt over the past several days, but aid workers say it's not enough to meet rapidly growing needs.

# Task force for moratorium on cooperative registration and service expansion

The International Monetary Fund says a lack of reliable data on these institutions makes it difficult to assess the level and severity of their risk to the overall financial sector.

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA  
KATHMANDU, OCT 31

A cooperative sector reform task force formed by the government has suggested a temporary moratorium on the registration of new cooperatives and their expansion until other measures to stabilise the sector are implemented.

According to the Financial Sector Stability Review Report of the International Monetary Fund released in early October, there are an estimated 30,879 cooperatives in the country. The number includes 14,484 savings and credit cooperatives.

As several savings and credit cooperatives are failing to pay back depositors, the government formed the task force headed by Jaykant Raut, a member of the National Planning Commission, to study the situation and recommend measures to correct the anomalies.

"One of the recommendations is a temporary moratorium on the registration of new cooperatives and the working area expansion for the existing ones," said Ganesh Prasad Bhatta, spokesperson for the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation.

The ministry received a report of the task force in early October. Bhatta said that the ministry had formed a committee headed by Joint-secretary Krishna Prasad Sapkota to plan the implementation of the recommendations by the Raut-led task force for the short, medium and long terms. The ministry has yet to make the report public.

"We will take a proposal to the Cabinet for immediate approval and draft a bill to implement the recommendations," said Bhatta.

Cooperatives, particularly the savings and credit ones, are struggling to pay back the depositors, giving rise to fears about the safety

of their money.

In the absence of strong laws and rules and regulatory agencies, chances are growing of cooperative promoters running away with the deposits.

After many fled, the victims are struggling to reclaim their money. Cooperative victims staged a sit-in at Maitighar, Kathmandu, for over two months since June, pleading for help in getting their savings back.

Hundreds of people who deposited their hard-earned cash in cooperatives are now in trouble as their operators have gone out of contact. Many of those who are in contact say that they can't give back the deposits immediately.

The government signed a seven-point agreement with protesting members in early August. The deal pledges measures to amend the laws to address the situation.

As per the deal signed in the presence of Cooperative Minister Ranjita Shrestha, the ministry will work on setting up the Deposit and Credit Guarantee Fund to secure the savings of cooperative depositors.

The ministry also agreed to proceed with establishing a credit information centre and a debt recovery tribunal to make the debt recovery process for cooperatives quick and effective.

All these agreements have also been included in the recommendations of a report prepared by the Raut-led task force. "Besides, the formation of the cooperatives debt recovery tribunal has also been recommended," said Bhatta.

Such a tribunal helps recover the loans from the defaulting borrowers. There is already a tribunal to help banks and financial institutions recover loans as licensed by the Nepal Rastra Bank.

According to Bhatta, the task force has also called for intensive monitoring of saving and credit

cooperatives and recovering the deposits even by selling off assets of the cooperative promoters.

One of the reasons behind cooperatives' failure to return deposits is the government stalling the transactions of the real estate over the past year, according to experts. Property ownership transfer has been relaxed only recently.

In an interview with the Post in June, Gauri Bahadur Karki, former chairperson of the Special Court who headed a commission formed in 2013 to look into troubled saving and credit cooperatives, said that the cooperatives investing deposits in real estate had caused the current crisis.

**The ministry has agreed to proceed with establishing a credit information centre.**

"After the government halted land plotting last year, many cooperatives failed to sell their property, which led to their failure to pay the promised interest. The depositors who could not recover their money staged protests," Karki said in the interview.

"The cooperatives continue to invest in land and pay interest after generating profits from selling such land. Otherwise, they would not be able to offer such a high interest rate on deposits."

Karki-led team had collected around 13,000 complaints from depositors of troubled cooperatives, a majority of them related to the Oriental Cooperative, run by the disgraced Sudhir Basnet and Rajendra Shakya, promoter of Guna Cooperative. According to Karki, the root cause of the problem

in cooperatives was experienced a decade ago too.

According to the IMF report, cooperatives now account for seven percent of the total financial sector lending. As the cooperative sector is poorly regulated and information on the organisations' financial health is scarce, assessing the severity of the risk has been difficult.

"The lack of reliable data on these institutions makes it difficult to assess the level and severity of the risk they pose to the [country's] overall financial stability due to their linkage to banks and financial institutions," the report said. "There is evidence of serious governance and liquidity issues as well."

According to the IMF Report, the savings and credit cooperatives are relatively large providers of financial services in terms of customers and number of institutions but are mostly supervised at the local level by inexperienced authorities. The largest savings and credit cooperatives exceed the size of some of the Class B and C banks and financial institutions. And, there is a governance issue even though they are filling a critical (financial) access gap, according to the IMF.

"They are largely unsupervised and show signs of widespread governance issues, insider abuse, over-lending, and liquidity constraints that have prevented customer access to their deposits," it said.

In the past, planned regulations faced setbacks because of political influence of cooperative operators, who didn't want strong laws and regulatory agencies, according to Karki.

The global monetary adviser has called for a formal information sharing agreement with cooperative authorities to ensure a timely flow of data on saving and credit cooperatives.

# As harvesting season starts, so does open burning

The growing use of combine harvesters in the Tarai region also fuels the open burning of agriculture residue.

ARJUN POUDEL  
KATHMANDU, OCT 31

Officials deployed from the environment division of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City on Monday fined Rs5,000 each to two traders from India for open burning in the Kalimati area.

Officials say that those traders were ripening raw bananas by burning chaff and husks.

"Open burning is illegal not only in the metropolis but all over the country," said Rabin Man Shrestha, chief of the division. "We will take stern action against anyone polluting the city by burning in the open."

With the end of the monsoon and onset of harvesting season, open burning, which is among the chief culprits for the rise in the level of air pollution, is set to rise throughout the country.

Air quality across the country, mainly in the Kathmandu Valley, will reach unhealthy levels to hazardous levels in the coming days.

However, unlike the Kathmandu metropolis, most local levels throughout the country have not yet realised that preventing open burning is their responsibility.

"Open burning has already started in Tarai region," said Bhupendra Das, an air quality specialist, who has carried out research on the impact of open burning of crop residue. "No concerned agency has taken any measures to prevent open burning yet."

According to a report titled 'A model-ready emission inventory for crop residue open burning in the context of Nepal', trends in dry matter generation have increased from 2003/04 to 2016/17 and so have the trend of emissions in the country.

Das, who is one of the authors of the report, said that the growing use of combine harvesters by farmers, especially in the Tarai region, is among the reasons for the rise in the generation of dry matter and emissions.

"Use of combine harvesters has become popular in Tarai region but it has its fallout," said Das. "The combine harvesters cut the paddy in the middle and the farmers burn the residue."

The increase in labour migration in the country has raised labour charges, which

has in turn increased the popularity of the use of machines in agricultural work in the Tarai region.

Apart from that, the short span of time between the harvesting of paddy crops and the cultivation of wheat encourages farmers to burn agricultural residue.

Environmentalists say that they are not against the use of modern technology in agricultural work but in favour of climate-smart technology, which not only reduces the cost but also the pollution. For that, concerned authorities should take initiatives to encourage the farmers, according to them.

"Alternative uses of residue (for animal feed, bio-briquette production, raw materials for industries, etc), deployment of modern technology (modified combine harvesters, reaper harvesters, and happy seeders) and emission control policies ought to be considered among the foremost steps to reduce air pollution," the report states.

Along with the burning of agricultural residue, incidents of forest fire and several other factors—emissions from brick kilns, factories, vehicular movements and construction activities, among others, will contribute to the deterioration of the air quality of the country.

Experts say the deterioration of air quality seriously affects public health. According to doctors, poor air quality causes short- and long-term effects on public health. Bad air quality can cause pneumonia, bronchitis, conjunctivitis, skin allergy, stroke and heart problems, among others, in the short term, and ulcers and cancer of the lungs and intestine, kidney disease and heart problems in the long run.

Experts blamed the apathy of the authorities in enforcing measures to improve air quality and the people are bearing the brunt of their indifference.

Das said that launching awareness drives against the hazards of open burning, making waste management effective, prohibiting burning of waste in the open, and restricting unnecessary vehicular movement can help improve air quality. "All agencies concerned, especially local bodies, should shoulder responsibilities to lessen the emissions, especially those from open burnings," he said.

# Nepal, United States stress timely implementation of MCC projects



United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Nepal's Foreign Minister NP Saud meet in Washington.

>> Continued from page 1

Foreign Minister Saud left Kathmandu for the US on Sunday on an official visit. Such a visit at the foreign minister's level is taking place after nearly five years.

During the meeting with Blinken, Minister Saud was accompanied by the Nepali Ambassador to the US Sridhar Khatri and other senior officials from the ministry and the embassy. With Blinken was US Ambassador to Nepal Dean Thompson and senior officials from the Department of State.

Matthew Miller, spokesman of the State Department, said that at the meeting both Saud and Blinken emphasised the strength of the US-Nepal partnership and highlighted the role of MCC compact in Nepal's infrastructure development and cross-border power trade.

The Secretary and Foreign Minister also praised over 60 years of partnership on Peace Corps Volunteers' service in Nepal, reads the State Department statement issued after Monday's meeting.

In addition, they discussed expanding US International Development Finance Corporation's investment in Nepal, including providing a new \$125 million loan to a Nepali bank to offer loans to small- and medium-sized enterprises, according to Miller.

Secretary Blinken also expressed the United States' condolences over the deaths of 10 Nepali students in the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, and concern for Bipin Joshi, who remains missing.

A statement issued by the Nepali embassy in Washington said that during the meeting, both sides expressed satisfaction with the current state of bilateral relations and reaffirmed their commitment to expand and deepen engagements in areas of mutual interests.

The foreign minister highlighted development priorities of Nepal in the context of the country's graduation from the least developed country and

called for enhanced support from the United States in the areas of trade and investment, market access, food security and IT sector, among others, said the statement.

He requested the United States for reauthorisation and expansion of Nepal Trade Preference Program (NTPP) and GSP facilities by adding new exportable items of interest for Nepal, according to the statement.

Both sides stressed the importance of timely implementation of the projects under the MCC, the statement said.

Appreciating Nepal's progress in consolidating democratic governance, Secretary Blinken said that the US government wishes to see Nepal as a strong and prosperous democracy, according to the Nepali Embassy.

Secretary Blinken assured Foreign Minister Saud that the US would continue its support for Nepal's development endeavours, reads the statement, adding, "the two sides also exchanged views on Nepal-US cooperation in multilateral forums, and other matters of common concern in regional and global affairs, including the ongoing situation in the Middle East."

Before the meeting, Blinken said the US and Nepal are working to deepen their relations, particularly with more people-to-people ties, as well as economic ties and investment, according to the statement issued by the State Department.

"And in so many ways, Nepal is leading, not just in the region but globally, as a very constructive actor in international organisations—of course, with so many peacekeepers who are trying to help people move from conflict to peace around the world," the statement quoted Blinken as saying.

In response, Saud thanked Blinken for taking the time to meet, despite the challenging situation in the Middle East.

Minister Saud is also scheduled to meet senior officials from the MCC, USAID, the Nepali community in Washington, and experts in the field of information technology, among others.

# Cryptocurrencies in Pakistan: A high-tech replacement for hawala-hundi?

Challenges of transferring foreign currency means many are turning towards ease of cryptocurrencies.

FATIMA S ATTARWALA  
ISLAMABAD, OCT 31

Under-invoicing solar panels and bags filled with cash to move dollars informally are so last century. There are more high-tech ways to remit money across borders without alerting the authorities, and one such way is through cryptocurrencies.

The new hawala/hundi guy is stablecoins like Tether (commonly known as USDT). Stablecoins are different from regular free-floating cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin in that they seek to ensure price stability within the crypto-verse. Their goal is to maintain a constant value, regardless of wider crypto market fluctuations, and are often pegged to different assets such as fiat currency.

USDT is the most popular stablecoin, and it is pegged to the value of the US dollar. So whether the dollar to PKR exchange rate is at Rs250 or Rs350, a single unit of USDT will always be worth \$1.

Locals can use rupees to buy USDT to buy Bitcoin. In this case, think of USDT as a token at a university cafeteria: you use rupees to buy a token, which you present at the buffet line to be able to purchase lunch. The token is not legal tender, that is you cannot use it to buy a packet of Kurkure at the local khokha, but you can use it to purchase samosay in the buffet line.

Given the challenges of transferring foreign currency inside and outside the country, many are turning towards the ease of USDT, which, when transferred, can be converted back into fiat money.

On one hand, the government is trying to incentivise remittances. On the other hand, IT professionals working for overseas clients bemoan the challenges of bringing home their hard-earned dollars. People are leaving the country, but the inflow of official remittances is falling. This is in part because remittances have moved towards stablecoins.

"I am 100 per cent sure it is happening," says Shabbar Zaidi, former chairman of the Federal Board of Revenue. "It is a form of hawala/hundi, with a different structure. Pakistan's potential for remittances is about \$40 billion, but it is spread over small amounts," he said.

In FY23, Pakistan received \$27bn in remittances, down from \$31.3bn in FY22. This indicates that nearly \$10bn might have been diverted towards various informal channels, including stablecoins. Instead of the hassle of formal channels to send money, a person in the US can send transfer remittances in 15 minutes because it is a faster process where no physical cash changes hands.

"Some people use the business-to-business market to transact in USDT. Even when dollars were not easily available, USDT could be bought, which could then be used to trade in cryptocurrencies or be kept as a hedge," says payment expert Moiz Hussain, chief financial officer (CFO) at Neem Exponential

Financial Services.

"Many companies that export, as well as freelancers for international firms, opt to be paid in stablecoins like USDT. So if you sell to a company in the US, instead of sending dollars, they convert it to USDT and send it to Pakistan," says Hussain.

While 1 USDT is equal to \$1, the PKR to USDT rate fluctuates at a premium. So if USD is trading at Rs300 in the open market, USDT could be trading at Rs305.

"USDT mirrors USD, but crypto's fluctuations impact USDT. When the crypto's market is down, people sell crypto to liquidate their positions, which increases demand for USDT and pushes up its price. So the gap can increase from Rs5-6 to Rs8-9," Hussain says.



While for a lot of laypeople, the intricacies of the cryptoverse are still baffling, the adoption rate in Pakistan is one of the highest in the world, according to blockchain data platform Chainalysis, which ranked the country number eight on the 2023 Global Crypto Adoption Index.

"Regardless of the exchange rate, the pace at which crypto is being purchased in Pakistan continues to grow," says Zeeshan Ahmed, country general manager at Rain Financial. "Remittances have moved from

banking channels to crypto channels, and a lot of freelancers are being paid in it as well."

However, the volume or percentage of informal trade being conducted in stablecoins is hard to gauge. "Cryptocurrency is difficult to track because of its nature. However, common sense dictates that if more people are moving abroad, but remittances are declining, then the money is being moved by some means," says Ahmed.

His hypothesis is supported by observations in Chainalysis' recent report, which notes that a high share of activity happening in Pakistan is through peer-to-peer exchanges, common in emerging markets or countries with stricter capital controls.

"A need for wealth preservation in the face of high inflation and currency devaluation appears to be the reason many Pakistanis have turned to crypto," says the report, quoting Ahmed. Since the bulk of Pakistan's transaction volume, especially the purchase of stablecoins, takes place through informal P2P markets, it can't easily be identified on-chain, states the report.

Over the last decade, cash in circulation has jumped from 28pc to 41pc as a percentage of bank deposits and from 22pc to 29pc as a percentage of total money, according to an article in Dawn. This means that a lot more people are walking around the country with wads of Rs5,000 notes in their pockets. Higher cash in circulation indicates an increase in the informal economy.

When the money needs to be transited across borders, the use of USDT comes in handy. While many, even those in the upper echelons, appear to be blind to crypto, those with some tech knowledge have more enlightened ways of remaining under the radar.

- Dawn



The adoption rate of cryptocurrencies in Pakistan is one of the highest in the world.

OPINION



OUR VIEW

Climate of fear

The way we abuse nature is tantamount to destroying our own health and livelihood.

Nepal has for decades been experiencing the worst impacts of climate change, and the repercussions have only gotten worse in the past few years. Glaciers are melting at an alarming rate—65 percent faster in the past decade than in the previous one. Monsoon each year brings devastating floods and disasters, taking a heavy toll on people's lives and livelihoods. No less problematic are the unprecedented changes in the weather patterns and rainfall and declining snow in the mountains. Glacial runoff and retreat, once uncommon, are now frequent. Worse, Nepal's mountain regions have witnessed a temperature rise of 1.8 degrees Celsius when global warming is measured at 1 degree Celsius on average.

The efforts of the global community to mitigate the climate chaos in countries like Nepal—which have a small share of carbon emissions but bear the brunt of climate change—are insufficient. The recent remarks of UN Secretary-General António Guterres on the impacts of climate change in the Himalayas and the livelihoods of Nepalis, are thus pertinent. Visiting the Mt Everest region on Monday, Guterres witnessed a grim picture of the mountains and melting glaciers. He then took the issue to the world through X, a social media platform, stating, "...Glaciers are retreating; we cannot retreat. We must move forward with climate action." Further, from the Annapurna Base Camp on Tuesday, he reiterated the need to stop "this war" against nature. It was a stirring call for the world's leaders to act against climate change without further ado.

Not that Nepal hasn't done anything to combat the consequences of climate change. The country has committed to working on adaptation, damage and loss, and climate financing on global platforms like the United Nations Climate Change Conference. However, the country, as usual, lags in terms of implementation. For instance, according to locals in the Annapurna region, in the last four decades, Annapurna Base Camp has faced severe impacts of climate change; however, the government has failed to pay heed and protect the area from glacial erosion. Similarly, in COP26, Nepal pledged to reduce greenhouse gases by 45 percent by 2030 and adopt clean, alternative and renewable energy. Unfortunately, the country's road to clean energy seems long and serpentine.

Moreover, Nepalis have to realise that the way they abuse nature, and pollute rivers and air, is tantamount to destroying their own health and livelihood. Now is the time to give up the complacency that comes with Nepal being a negligible contributor, producing 0.1 percent of total global greenhouse emissions. We should keep in mind that Kathmandu is often ranked as the most polluted city in the world. Only when we adopt sustainable development practices can we cut down the country's emissions and be in a position to question other countries for their share in carbon emissions.

It is important for both the government and the public to work together to keep further devastation at bay and create a better future for everyone. As Guterres emphasised, we have to act now. With the world preparing for COP28 starting November 30 in the United Arab Emirates, this time, Nepal should back up its pledge to protect the people and environment with robust plans, policies and delegation. The commitment and action of countries around the globe, including Nepal's, should be to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees. Humanity's future depends on it.

GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY

Leaders of the movement for federalism are in power, but its implementation is lacking.

KHIM LAL DEVKOTA



The government's reluctance to implement federalism properly is proven by many examples. One prominent illustration is the failure to create a police force at the provincial level. The provincial governments still do not have their own police force. Another example is the government's failure to enact federal civil service laws. Their absence has created significant challenges at the subnational levels. Lack of control over the security force and civil service personnel raises questions about the autonomy and effectiveness of the subnational governments.

The government's ability to promote good governance and ensure the success of the federal system is in question.

The Inter-Province Council (IPC), comprising the prime minister and chief ministers, convened in December 2019 and endorsed an action plan to facilitate the implementation of federalism across 29 distinct thematic areas and 84 points.

As per the timeline, most of the activities were to be completed by April 2019. However, the Prime Minister's Office reports that many of these activities have not been executed. Several critical laws pertaining to education, agriculture, tourism and others, besides the criteria for the formation of local government services, were to be drafted by April 2019. That hasn't happened either.

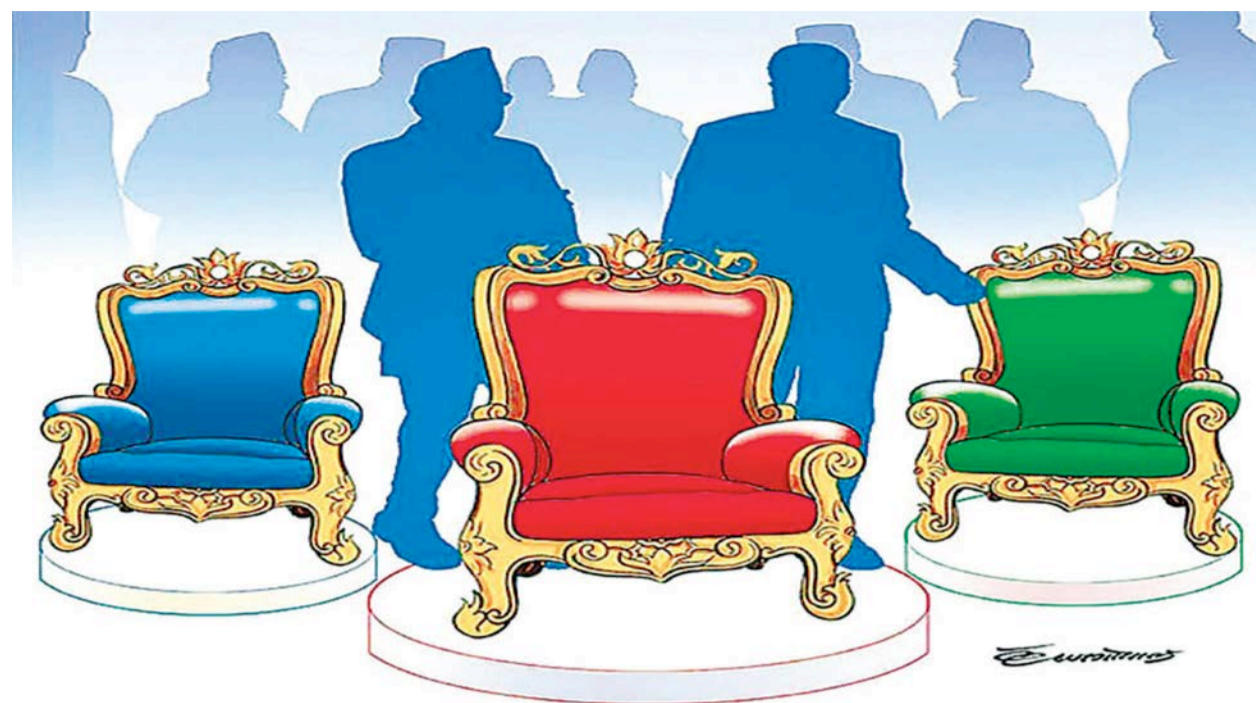
Furthermore, it must be pointed out that no IPC meeting has taken place for four years. The government's failure to implement the IPC decisions, and the prolonged postponement of its meetings, are clear evidence of its insincerity.

What the people want

The Nepali people have consistently fought for democracy, and the government system has been changed repeatedly due to unmet expectations. Over the past 75 years, Nepal has seen seven constitutions and experimented with various forms of government. These frequent constitutional and system alterations have disrupted the nation's development and prosperity.

What the people truly desire is development, good governance, prosperity, peace and security, the rule of law, and other progressive improvements, rather

Do something, anything



POST ILLUSTRATION

than a specific government system. Therefore, in order to align with the people's expectations, a 15-point resolution regarding the implementation of federalism was introduced in the National Assembly in June 2022. This resolution aims to enhance the overall government system, including reforms in intergovernmental relationships, and address the core concerns of the populace.

The Assembly unanimously approved the resolution, and instructed the government to implement it. On October 14, 2022, a cabinet meeting approved the action plan related to the resolution's implementation. However, it appears that the government is unaware of its own action plan, let alone the Parliament's instructions. According to the action plan, the IPC meeting should take place every year in March-April. Yet, as of today, there has been no progress in scheduling a meeting.

The action plan included a schedule to collaborate with the Policy Research Institute aiming to ensure consistency in policymaking and law formulation across all three tiers of government. Regrettably, this initiative has not commenced as of yet. Furthermore, a decision was made not to allocate small schemes and programmes under the name of conditional grants from the current fiscal year 2023-24. Even then, many small plans and programmes have been distributed through the budget statement.

While the constitution grants the Fiscal Commission the authority to determine the overall pool of fiscal transfers, legislation has curtailed the commission's rights. The action plan has outlined that corrections in the laws will be made within a year, but no progress has been made thus far. Likewise, the action plan outlined the adjustment of the provincial police force within a year, which has also not seen any progress. Additionally, the

action plan promised to resolve the issues faced by subnational-level employees by the end of the second week of July 2023, but there has been no visible improvement in their situation. Considering these facts and evidence, it is apparent that the government may not be fully committed to the proper implementation of federalism.

The Federalism Implementation Study and Monitoring Parliamentary Special Committee, formed by the National Assembly in June 2022, presented a report in October 2022. This report encompasses recommendations that touch upon various aspects of governance, such as formulating and implementing laws to protect the rights of economically disadvantaged and marginalised groups. It also addresses issues raised by the Constitutional Commission and delves into administrative, fiscal, and political federalism.

The Assembly, in response to the committee's report, instructed the government to execute these recommendations. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal pledged to sincerely oversee its implementation. The report, if executed sincerely, has the potential to resolve citizen concerns and enhance the governance and federalism system. Recommendations include drafting laws to ensure inclusive representation in state organs and women's participation in the electoral system, both at the federal and provincial levels. The creation of a joint Parliamentary Committee for Federalism, the development and implementation of an action plan based on parliamentary committee recommendations, and the establishment of a decentralisation plan to delegate responsibilities to subnational levels are highlighted.

Moreover, the report suggests organising training and public awareness programmes on federalism, democracy, and the rule of law from the central to the local levels. It also emphasises the

need for equal and easy access to state services, the safeguarding of the rights of marginalised communities, and the creation of a trustworthy environment to combat violence, abuse and discrimination against vulnerable groups.

People's disillusionment

Implementing fundamental rights, including social security, dignified living conditions for senior citizens, and the guarantee of human rights, is considered essential. To maintain consistency within the administrative system and the spirit of the federal democratic republican governance, the report suggests forming a high-level administration reform commission chaired by the prime minister. It advocates for a legal and policy framework to ensure that the chief executive officer of the local level is not below the under-secretary level. Discussing matters in sectoral thematic committees before presenting bills in Parliament is recommended to maintain consistency in laws across different government tiers.

While the report serves as a valuable foundation for comprehensive government reform, it is disheartening that the government's implementation appears insincere. The leaders who spearheaded the movement for republic and federalism now hold power, but their commitment to implement federalism properly seems lacking. Currently, support has surged for the former king and new political parties, potentially due to the government's underperformance and people's disillusionment with the established political parties. Failure to meet the people's expectations could lead to increased dissatisfaction with the system. To address this, the government and major political parties must align their actions with citizen expectations. It is a time for honest action rather than indulging in idle gossip or blaming others.

THEIR VIEW

Back to work

It is crucial that lawmakers set aside partisan priorities and find common ground.

With the United States House of Representatives having elected its new Speaker, Mike Johnson, an atmosphere of urgency now pervades Capitol Hill. With just over three weeks left until the expiration of a stopgap funding measure on November 17, the government is at risk of shutting down. Simultaneously, President Joe Biden is advocating substantial new spending to support allies Israel and Ukraine as well as enhance security along the US-Mexico border. This confluence of events underscores the complex challenges facing the nation and the imperative of bipartisanship.

Government funding battles have dominated the US Congress over the past year, with recent partisan disputes coming dangerously close to pushing the country to the brink of defaulting on its substantial debt. A diverse set of opinions, priorities, and divisions among lawmakers have made reaching a consensus an arduous task. This past month, intra-party fighting among Republicans almost resulted in a partial government shutdown, as hard-line members rejected an agreed-upon discretionary spending limit, calling for additional cuts instead.

The ramifications of such divisions are not limited to political spectacle. High-interest rates have driven up the government's borrowing costs and created a record \$1.7 trillion deficit. Speaker Johnson faces the immediate challenge of averting another government shutdown and his inexperience in the role adds complexity to the process. His call for an aggressive schedule and a desire to advance spending legislation are commendable, but these initiatives will require astute negotiation within the narrowly Republican-controlled House and across the aisle in the Senate, which has a two-vote Democratic majority.

The urgency surrounding government funding intersects with President Biden's request for \$106 billion in new spending to aid Israel, Ukraine and fortify the US-Mexico border. This request hinges on bipartisan support. Its outcome remains uncertain, given the array of ideological positions and partisan priorities. The Senate, despite previous delays, is making progress on bipartisan funding bills. Its hope to pass appropriations for various programmes is promising, but the continued fiscal warfare between the Senate and House Republicans remains an obstacle.

The division over spending priorities, as well as differences over issues like border security and aid to Ukraine are points of contention that require resolution. In these challenging times, the role of bipartisanship cannot be understated. The fate of government funding and America's fiscal health hinge on collaboration between lawmakers with diverse perspectives. It is crucial that lawmakers set aside partisan priorities and find common ground. While each side may have deeply held convictions, the urgency of the moment demands cooperation. The functioning of government agencies is at stake, making it imperative to put the interests of the American people first. Whether Mr Johnson, described once as a "despicable bigot of the highest order", is the man to steer the House in these fractious times is another matter.

— The Statesman (India)/ANN

Towards an inclusive health system

We need to create people-centred health systems through community engagement.

JHABINDRA BHANDARI



Health system governance is a newly developed concept referring to the rules and norms that shape roles, responsibilities, incentives and interactions in the health sector. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 has called basic health care a fundamental right. The National Health Policy 2019 and the Nepal Health Sector Strategy 2023-2030 have been instrumental in developing and expanding a health system based on social justice and good governance. The strategic interventions aim to strengthen the social health protection system, integrating the most disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

Local governments play a significant role in ensuring an inclusive health system through a broad range of legal, policy, planning and monitoring instruments. Considering the contributions from public and private service providers, including poor and marginalised communities in the health system, is crucial for achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Earlier, there was no clear focus on the healthcare provision of disadvantaged and marginalised populations. Local governments had limited political autonomy to prioritise their resources in the health sector. After implementing federalism, these governments are more accountable and responsible towards addressing basic human rights, including health services. The Local Government Operations

Act 2017 provides ample opportunity to prioritise and address the needs of marginalised and disadvantaged people.

Addressing inclusion

There is a growing acknowledgement of the need for an inclusive health system governance to improve healthcare access for those whose health needs are unmet. The ever-increasing healthcare needs of adolescents, youth, sexual and gender minorities, people with disabilities, migrants and indigenous communities shouldn't be compromised. We must explore how the interactions and relationships between people, health

incentives have been invaluable in improving their access to health care services in remote areas where the service coverage is still low.

From an anthropological perspective, understanding the existing social, cultural, economic, geographic and political barriers in the communities is vital to realistically address the issues of inclusion, diversity and equity in health. The prevailing indigenous health practices and cultural norms also influence people's motivation to seek care in health facilities.

Inclusive health system governance demands adequate institutional arrangements and capacities. However,



POST FILE PHOTO

institutions and local governments are positioned in the local context. It is also fascinating to understand how these relationships impact the accessibility of health services for poor and marginalised communities, in particular.

Effective representation and engagement in the health system are crucial as we experience noble progress in local governments with inclusive policies that empower marginalised communities, providing easy access to healthcare services. Moreover, the provision of free health care, outreach clinics, health campaigns and financial

functional regulatory measures, effective community participation and engagement in decision-making are more likely to enhance transparency, accountability and responsiveness to public expectations. There is a critical need to identify and address the governance bottlenecks by developing evidence-based policy options for strengthening health system governance.

Concerted efforts are required to strengthen existing oversight and management committees for effective community engagement and local resource mobilisation for health care services.

Moreover, orientation on their role and responsibilities is crucial to ensure health equity and social justice. It is necessary to build the institutional capacity of local governments in preparedness and health emergency response during disaster and health emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

People-centric health systems

Nepal has made remarkable progress in reducing overall morbidity and mortality among mothers and children under five by enhancing access to maternal, children, newborn and reproductive health services. However, there is a need to ensure equitable delivery of quality health services for the most disadvantaged and marginalised communities at the local level. The persistent social, cultural, economic and geographic barriers to health care must be addressed in local health planning. Effective use of health and population data is crucial to identify the gaps and improve the performance of the health interventions at large.

Unfortunately, we continue to face several challenges to ensure adequate trained human resources, good health infrastructure, robust monitoring and evaluation systems, uninterrupted supplies of medicines and other logistics in the rural health facilities. It is time to enhance responsive and people-centred health systems by fostering dialogue and effective community engagement. This mechanism not only empowers local communities but also helps hold local governments accountable for their political commitments.

Additionally, health literacy is crucial for empowering local people to enhance informed decision-making. This enables their engagement in actions regarding collective health promotion to address its social determinants. Local governments' roles and responsibilities to deliver public health services more effectively are indispensable in the federal context. Finally, the key to ensuring health for all lies in political commitment and social accountability.

Bhandari is a health policy analyst.

## FOREX

US Dollar	133.51
Euro	142.36
Pound Sterling	162.78
Swiss Franc	148.03
Australian Dollar	85
Canadian Dollar	96.6
Singapore Dollar	97.8
Japanese Yen	8.83
Chinese Yuan	18.25
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.59
Qatari Riyal	36.62
Thai Bhat	3.71
UAE Dhiram	36.35
Malaysian Ringit	28.02
Korean Won	9.91

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

## SHARES

Nepse (in percent)	1,864.40pts
	0.76%
HIGHEST LOSERS	
SONA	-5.71
NIBLGF	-4.43
MERO	-4.36
BPW	-4.28
MCHL	-4.18
IHL	-4.18
MODERATE LOSERS	
KKHC	-0.06
AHL	-0.06
PPCL	-0.05
SJCL	-0.04
USLB	-0.04
NTC	-0.04
MODERATE GAINERS	
NICSF	0.13
CBBL	0.11
MANDU	0.11
JALPA	0.09
PRVU	0.06
CHDC	0.04
HIGHEST GAINERS	
MSLB	6.05
EBLDB6	3.9
HATHY	3.45
CYCL	3.42
KLBSL	2.79
SABSL	2.77

## BULLION

PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs116,000
Silver	Rs1,420

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

## BIZLINE

## Terraces Resort and Spa wins prestigious title at SATA



**KATHMANDU:** The Terraces Resort and Spa received the prestigious South Asian Travel Award (SATA) 2023 in the "Leading Wellness and Spa" category, marking a significant milestone in the realm of South Asian hospitality. The grand SATA 2023 Awards Ceremony, a glittering event attended by luminaries from the travel and tourism industry, was held at the Grand Sheraton Hotel in Bangalore. The prestigious honour was received by Amrit Dhakal, sales and marketing manager of Terraces Resort. As a winner of the South Asian Travel Award 2023, The Terraces Resort and Spa set its position as a distinguished destination for wellness and spa enthusiasts while adding another feather to the realm of luxury hospitality in Nepal, the resort said in a statement. SATA is an annual event that recognizes and celebrates excellence in the travel and tourism industry across South Asia.

## Europe stocks rise despite economic gloom

**LONDON:** European stocks rose Tuesday after a mixed Asian session despite spreading economic and geopolitical uncertainty on the eve of a US interest-rate decision. World oil prices rebounded somewhat, having tanked Monday on easing fears of a worsening regional Middle East conflict. Investors in Europe set aside news that eurozone economy shrank by 0.1 percent in the third quarter after an anaemic 0.2-percent growth in the second quarter. Italy recorded zero economic growth to narrowly avoid recession and France slowed to 0.1-percent growth, data showed one day after news that Germany's power-house economy shrank 0.1 percent. "Stocks traded higher in Europe on Tuesday, despite Asian shares closing mixed, while economic and geopolitical uncertainties linger," noted ActivTrades analyst Pierre Veyret. (AFP)

## Pfizer reports loss as Covid-19 revenues shrink

**NEW YORK:** Pfizer reported Tuesday a loss following a sharp fall in the sales of its Covid-19 vaccine and therapeutic from pandemic peaks. The drug-maker reported a third-quarter loss of \$2.4 billion, compared with \$8.6 billion in profits in the year-ago period. Results were dented by a \$5.6 billion inventory write-down in Covid-19 therapeutic Paxlovid and vaccine Comirnaty. The results came after Pfizer on October 13 lowered its forecast due to the precipitous drop in company revenues as Covid-19 rates have declined. In the third quarter, revenues fell 42 percent to \$13.2 billion. But following solid third-quarter growth in non-Covid products, Pfizer said the company was on track to reach its 2023 targets thanks to recent government approvals of new medications. (AFP)

## Onions become pricier after India moves to curb exports

Householders are paying Rs150 per kg for the pungent bulb, which is indispensable in Nepali kitchens.

□ KRISHANA PRASAIN  
KATHMANDU, OCT 31

Onions suddenly became pricier after India slapped a minimum export price to check shipments, and ensure adequate supplies for its domestic consumers.

Nepal gets almost all of its onion requirement from the southern neighbour, and any ripple there is amplified when it reaches Nepali bazaars.

On Sunday, the wholesale price of onion jumped by 60 percent to Rs122.50 per kg from Rs75 per kg previously. Householders were paying Rs150 retail for the pungent bulb, which is indispensable in Nepali kitchens.

Market analysts say the price may breach the November 2019 record of Rs250 per kg if fresh harvests are delayed in India.

The Indian government on Saturday imposed a minimum export price of \$800 per tonne till December 31 to maintain sufficient availability of onion to domestic consumers at affordable prices.

The minimum export price is imposed for all varieties of onion except Bangalore Rose and Krishnapuram onions; and for cut, sliced, or broken in powder forms, according to the notification of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade, India.

In India, the average retail price of onion shoots up by 57 percent to IRs47 per kg on Monday due to the low production.

The Kalimati Fruits and Vegetable Market had fixed the wholesale price of onion at Rs107 per kg on Sunday. The price swelled to Rs120 on Monday.

According to Indian media reports, a delay in the monsoon onion sowing period due to weather reasons resulted in less coverage and late arrival of



POST FILE PHOTO

On Sunday, the wholesale price of onion jumped by 60 percent to Rs122.50 per kg from Rs75 per kg previously.

the crop. There is a tight supply situation in India, which resulted in price increases.

Nepal has experienced a decrease in supply of the essential vegetable after India imposed the minimum export price.

According to officials at the Kalimati fruit and vegetable market, Nepal received 63 tonnes of onions on Monday, down from 100 tonnes last week. The Kalimati market is the largest

wholesale market for fresh production in the country.

"The Indian government's move to impose the minimum export price on onion has largely impacted Nepali consumers amid the festive season," said Binay Shrestha, information officer at the Kalimati Fruits and Vegetable Market Development Board. The price of onion is also high in India.

"The combined effect of India's new

export policy and the Nepal government's imposition of VAT on onion from mid-July has sent prices soaring," said Shrestha.

"These days, traders are hesitating to import onion due to the fluctuating rates. We are not sure to what level the price will increase in Nepal," he said.

Before the minimum export price, India had imposed a 40 percent export duty on onion.

The duty imposed by the world's

## Climate 'loss and damage' dominates UAE talks ahead of COP28

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ABU DHABI, OCT 31

Setting up a "loss and damage" fund for poorer nations hit by climate change dominated preliminary talks on Tuesday one month before COP28 in Dubai, where delegates look set to tussle over the future of fossil fuels.

Around 70 ministers have gathered since Monday at the Emirates Palace, a luxurious resort in the United Arab Emirates capital Abu Dhabi, to hammer out details before next month's UN climate summit, the most important since the landmark Paris agreement in 2015.

"The main focus for the moment is clearly the loss and damage fund," said French Energy Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher.

The agreement to set up a dedicated fund to help vulnerable countries cope with climate "loss and damage" was a flagship achievement of last year's COP27 talks in Egypt. But countries left the details to be worked out later.

A series of talks this year have tried to tease out consensus on fundamentals like the structure, beneficiaries and contributors—a key issue for richer nations who want China to pay into the fund.

The last round of negotiations in mid-October ended in failure, with a next round scheduled from November 3-5 in Abu Dhabi. "We were one or two days away from an agreement" during the last round, a European negotiator said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak on the issue.

But several disagreements, including on

beneficiaries, delayed a breakthrough.

"The United States does not want to put in a penny if China is a potential beneficiary," the negotiator said.

Developing nations are demanding negotiators nail down the fund's operation, governance, location, contributors and beneficiaries, and a timeline for payouts, at the November 30-December 12 COP28 summit.

## Around 70 ministers have gathered since Monday in the United Arab Emirates capital Abu Dhabi.

But many are sceptical of the willingness of rich countries to establish the fund, even temporarily, through the World Bank, which is "not fit for purpose for broader development issues," said Michai Robertson of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia does "not want any wording that would expand the list of donors beyond the developed countries", said the European negotiator.

Even if these hurdles are settled by COP28, it remains to be seen how much money rich countries are willing to front.

In 2009, they pledged to supply \$100 billion of climate finance every year to developing nations, but failed to meet the 2020 deadline. There are hopes the goal will be met this year.

The loss and damage fund is based on vol-

untary contributions and is not an "obligation", Pannier-Runacher told AFP after chairing a Tuesday session on the fund.

The French minister said an agreement must be quickly reached to avoid turning the fund into a "pretext" to delay discussions on phasing out of fossil fuels.

COP28 will draw up the first official assessment of humanity's efforts to respect the 2015 agreement and its ambition to limit global warming "if possible to 1.5 degrees C" since the pre-industrial era.

For the first time, the world is flirting with the limit this year. The global climate, over several years, is considered to have already warmed by about 1.2C, accompanied by a procession of natural disasters.

In recent months, the debate on the end of fossil fuels, an essential engine of global warming, has become more important than ever in the UN negotiations.

In about 30 years of COP meetings, the only progress on hydrocarbons was a coal-reduction target at COP26, and there have been no decisions on oil and gas.

"I know there are strong views about the idea of including language on fossil fuels and renewables in the negotiated text," said COP28 president Sultan al-Jaber on Monday, calling on countries to find "common ground".

Earlier in July, Jaber, who heads the UAE's oil giant ADNOC, said that "phasing down fossil fuels is inevitable"—a statement he has not repeated this week.

"It's too early (for discussions), and would block negotiations even before the start of the COP," said a member of his entourage on condition of anonymity.

## Sri Lanka raises taxes again to unblock IMF bailout

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
COLOMBO, OCT 31

Sri Lanka on Tuesday announced a goods and services tax rise after the International Monetary Fund held back a bailout loan tranche because of its failure to meet revenue targets.

The island nation defaulted on its \$46 billion foreign debt last year during an unprecedented economic crisis.

Its government has dramatically hiked taxes and cut generous consumer subsidies to repair its ruined finances in line with an IMF rescue plan.

Government spokesman Bandula Gunawardana said another tax rise was needed after the IMF held back a \$330 million loan tranche because Sri Lanka's tax revenue was still not meeting outlays.

"For us to unblock the next instalment of the loan, we need to raise more revenue," he told reporters. "There is no other choice." Gunawardana said Sri Lanka's Value Added Tax would be raised from 15 to 18 percent in January to boost state revenue.

Sri Lanka saw months of food, fuel and medicine shortages at the peak of last year's crisis, when the country ran out of foreign exchange to finance essential imports.

Months of protests forced then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to temporarily flee the country and resign.

Last month, the IMF said it had reached an agreement with Sri Lanka to disburse the second tranche of its \$2.9 billion loan plan. The release of the funds is subject to approval by its executive board, which has not yet been granted.

"The authorities remain committed to the ambitious reform agenda... and their reform efforts have been commendable," IMF said in a statement.

They noted Sri Lanka's "rapid" drop in inflation, from 70 percent in September last year to just 1.3 percent by September this year.

But the Washington-based lender of last resort has also cautioned that Sri Lanka's "full economic recovery is not yet assured".

## Fresh clashes as Bangladesh garment workers protest low wage

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ASHULIA (BANGLADESH), OCT 31

Bangladeshi police clashed on Tuesday with thousands of garment workers demanding fair wages for the clothing they make for major Western brands, a day after similar protests left at least two people dead.

Police said tens of thousands of workers at dozens of factories had launched strikes in Ashulia and Gazipur, the country's largest industrial city, with authorities firing tear gas and rubber bullets as crowds smashed up factories and blocked roads.

Gazipur alone is home to more than a thousand plants that make clothing for brands such as H&M and Gap.

"Workers hit the streets as their salaries can no longer cover rising food expenses," said Al Kamran, a senior garment union leader in Ashulia. Bangladesh is one of the world's largest garment exporters, with the industry accounting for 85 percent of the South Asian country's \$55 billion in annual exports.

But conditions are dire for many of its four million apparel workers.

"Some 15,000 of the workers joined protests for a wage hike at separate places in Ashulia," Mahmud Naser, deputy police chief of the Ashulia industrial area, told AFP.

Union leader Kamran disputed those figures, reporting some 50,000 workers had downed tools in Ashulia

alone, with soaring prices a key driver. The cost of some basic foodstuffs, like potatoes and onions, had more than doubled since last year, Kamran said.

"House rents have also spiked. The only thing that has not increased is salaries," Taslima Akter, the head of the Garment Sramik Samhati union, has said the compensation manufacturers are offering is "less than what a worker got in 2017" once inflation and currency depreciation were taken into account.

Police said protesters had set fire to tyres, broken windows at factories and blocked a key highway connecting the industrial area with the capital Dhaka.

Officers responded by firing "rubber bullets and tear gas," said Naser, the deputy chief in Ashulia, adding there were no reports of injuries.

The protests erupted early last week, but violence escalated on Monday when tens of thousands left their shifts and staged protests in Gazipur, where a six-storey factory was torched by workers, leading to the death of one labourer.

Another worker was killed during clashes between police and protesters.

Bangladesh is home to around 3,500 garment factories making clothing for some of the world's largest retailers and brands, but the basic monthly wage for workers is just 8,300 taka (\$75). Unions said the workers vented their anger on the streets after the



A cargo truck burns on the street after it was torched by garment workers in Shapipur on Tuesday.

powerful manufacturers' association offered a 25 percent raise, ignoring demands for a new monthly minimum basic wage of 23,000 taka—nearly a threefold increase.

The South Asian country of nearly 170 million has overtaken its neighbour India in per capita income, with

the garment industry at the centre of its impressive growth over the past two decades. But wage protests pose a major challenge to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has ruled the country with an iron fist since 2009. A resurgent opposition has challenged her rule as she readies for elections

due before January.

Her government set up a panel this year to set a new minimum wage.

Unions say that garment factory owners—who include ministers and influential lawmakers—have played a role in fixing the minimum wage during past negotiations.

## WORLD

## Afghans return to Taliban rule as Pakistan moves to expel 1.7 million

UNHCR data shows that 14,700 documented Afghans left Pakistan as of October 18 this year, more than double the 6,039 in all of last year.

REUTERS  
KARACHI, OCT 31

As the clock ticked down to the November 1 deadline, Pakistan set for undocumented migrants to leave the country, Muhammad Rahim boarded a bus from Karachi to the Afghan border.

"We'd live here our whole life if they didn't send us back," said the 35-year-old Afghan national, who was born in Pakistan, married a Pakistani woman and raised his Pakistan-born children in the port city—but has no Pakistani identity documents.

The Taliban government in Afghanistan said some 60,000 Afghans returned between September 23 to October 22 from Pakistan, which announced on October 4 it will expel undocumented migrants that do not leave.

And recent daily returnee figures are three times higher than normal, Taliban refugee ministry spokesman Abdul Mutaleb Haqqani told Reuters on October 26.

Near Karachi's Sohrab Goth area—home to one of Pakistan's largest Afghan settlements—a bus service operator named Azizullah said he had laid on extra services to cope with the exodus. Nearby, lines formed before competitor bus services headed to Afghanistan.

"Before I used to run one bus a week, now we have four to five a week," said Azizullah, who—like all the Afghan migrants Reuters interviewed—spoke on condition that he be identified by only one name due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Reuters interviewed seven refugee families in Sohrab Goth, as well as four Taliban and Pakistani officials, community leaders, aid workers and advocates, who said Islamabad's threat—and a subsequent rise in state-backed harassment—has torn families apart and pushed even Afghans with valid papers to leave. The Pakistani Interior Ministry did not immediately return a request for comment.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said in a statement that the expulsion plan was compliant with international norms and principles: "Our record of the last forty years in hosting millions of our Afghan brothers and sisters speaks for itself."

Pakistan is home to over 4 million Afghan migrants and refugees, about 1.7 million of whom are undocumented, according to Islamabad. Afghans make up the largest portion of migrants—many came after the Taliban retook Afghanistan in 2021, but a large number have been present since the 1979 Soviet invasion. The expulsion threat came after suicide bombings this year which the government—without providing evidence—said involved Afghans. Islamabad has also blamed them for smuggling and other militant attacks.

Cash-strapped Pakistan, navigating record inflation and a tough International



Afghan families on board a truck head toward a border crossing point in Torkham, Pakistan, on Tuesday.

Monetary Fund bailout programme, also said undocumented migrants have drained its resources for decades.

Despite the challenges facing migrants, Pakistan is the only home many of them know and a sanctuary from the economic deprivation and extreme social conservatism that Afghanistan is grappling with, said Samar Abbas of the Sindh Human Rights Defenders Network, which is helping 200 Afghans seeking to remain.

#### Rise in returns

In early September, an average of 300 people crossed the border into Afghanistan daily, according to international organisations working on migration, who provided data on condition that they not be identified due to the sensitivity of the matter. After Islamabad announced the November deadline, crossings jumped to roughly 4,000, the organisations said.

These figures are small compared to the number of people to be affected in the coming days. The information minister for Balochistan,

which borders Afghanistan, told Reuters it is opening three more border crossings. For weeks, state-run television has run a countdown to November 1 on the top of its screens.

Federal Interior Minister Sarfaraz Bugti warned that law enforcement agencies will start removing "illegal immigrants who have ... no justification" being in Pakistan after Tuesday. They will be processed at "holding centres" and then deported, he told reporters, adding that women, children and the elderly would be treated "respectfully."

Reuters could not determine how long they might be detained in the centres.

Pakistani citizens who help undocumented migrants obtain false identities or employment will face legal action, Bugti warned.

"Post-November will be very chaotic and there will be chaos in the Afghan refugee camps," said Abbas, the advocate.

The UN refugee agency UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said Pakistan's plans create "serious protection risks" for women and girls forced to

leave. Restrictions in Afghanistan, especially on female NGO workers, have led to shrinking employment opportunities for women there.

While Pakistan says it will not target Afghans with legal status, many with proper documents also find themselves being targeted, according to migrant advocates.

UNHCR data shows that 14,700 documented Afghans left Pakistan as of October 18 2023, more than double the 6,039 in all of last year.

The agency said in a statement that 78 percent of recent returning Afghans it spoke to cited fear of arrest in Pakistan as reason for their departure. There are more than 2.2 million Afghan migrants in Pakistan with some form of documentation recognised by the government that offers temporary residence.

Roughly 1.4 million of them hold Proof of Registration (PoR) cards that expired on June 30, leaving them vulnerable. Islamabad says it will not take action against people with invalid cards, but Abbas said police harassment has ramped up since the expulsion threat.

More than a dozen migrants that Reuters

spoke to corroborated the claim, which was also repeated by Taliban diplomats in Pakistan. Karachi East Police Superintendent Uzair Ahmed told Reuters that while there might be "one or two" instances of harassment, it was non-systemic and offenders would be investigated. Many Afghans with legal status told Reuters they feel compelled to leave out of fear of being separated from family members without documentation.

Hajira, a 42-year-old widow in Sohrab Goth told Reuters she has the right to remain in Pakistan, as do two of her four sons. The other two don't. Fearing separation from her children, she plans on leaving with her sons and their families before the deadline expires.

Majida, a 31-year-old who was born in Pakistan, lives with her husband and their six children in an apartment complex in Sohrab Goth, a squalid suburb whose narrow streets are filled with heaps of garbage. She said her family has PoR cards but has still been subject to harassment: a brother-in-law and nephew were detained by local authorities for several hours before being released. Reuters could not independently verify her account.

When Majida fell ill earlier in October, her husband refused to help her pick up medication at a nearby pharmacy out of fear of detention. "We don't have a home or work (in Afghanistan)," she said.

**Pakistan is home to over 4 million Afghan migrants and refugees, about 1.7 million of whom are undocumented.**

"Obviously, we think of Pakistan as our home, we've been living here for so long."

#### Pressure in Afghanistan

Back in Afghanistan, the influx of returning migrants and refugees has exerted pressure on already limited resources that are stretched by international sanctions on the banking sector and cuts in foreign aid after the Taliban takeover. The Afghan Ministry of Refugees says it intends to register returnees and then house them in temporary camps. The Taliban administration said it will try to find returnees jobs.

The unemployment rate more than doubled from the period immediately before the Taliban takeover to June 2023, according to the World Bank. UN agencies say around two-thirds of the population is in need of humanitarian aid.

"We had our own barbecue shop and meat shop here. We had ... everything. We were guests here," said 18-year-old Muhammad just before he boarded Azizullah's bus back to Afghanistan.

## No ceasefire in Gaza, no votes, Muslim Americans tell Biden

REUTERS  
WASHINGTON, OCT 31

Muslim Americans and some Democratic Party activists say they will work to mobilise millions of Muslim voters to withhold donations and votes towards President Joe Biden's 2024 reelection unless he takes immediate steps to secure a Gaza ceasefire.

The National Muslim Democratic Council, which includes Democratic Party leaders from hotly contested states likely to decide the election, such as Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania, called on Biden to use his influence with Israel to broker a ceasefire by 5 pm ET (2100 GMT) on Tuesday.

In an open letter entitled "2023 Ceasefire Ultimatum", the Muslim leaders pledged to mobilise Muslim voters to "withhold endorsement, support, or votes for any candidate who endorses the Israeli offensive against the Palestinian people."

ground onslaught.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday he would not agree to any cessation of the attacks on Gaza. US national security spokesman John Kirby said, "Hamas is the only one that would gain from that right now."

Representative Rashida Tlaib, a Palestinian American lawmaker from Minnesota, on Monday released a 90-second video on X, the social media site formerly known as Twitter, decrying Biden's support of what she called "Israel's genocidal campaign in Palestine," adding, "Don't count on our vote in 2024."

Basim Elkarr, executive director of the Sacramento Valley Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), said Muslim votes could be crucial for Biden in his 2024 bid for a second term, noting that Michigan's 16 electoral votes were won by a narrow margin of just 2.6 percent in 2020.

Muslim Americans in Minnesota, where Biden plans to visit on Wednesday, last week issued a similar ceasefire ultimatum, with a noon Tuesday deadline. They said they planned a protest on Wednesday when the president visits their state.

Biden's reelection campaign had no immediate comment. Biden hosted a meeting last Thursday with a handful of Muslim leaders, a White House official said, adding that administration officials continue to meet with Arab and Muslim community members concerned by Biden's handling of the crisis.



Israeli artillery fires near the border with the Gaza Strip on Tuesday.

## Northern China chokes under severe pollution

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BEIJING, OCT 31

Tens of millions of people across northern China were under severe pollution warnings on Tuesday, with authorities urging them to reduce outdoor activities as a greyish smog enveloped the region.

Several areas of north China's Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, home to over 100 million people, are suffering from some of the worst pollution they have seen in months.

In the capital Beijing, authorities Monday issued an orange alert—the country's second-highest pollution warning. "There has been more smog in the past two days... it really has an effect," said office worker Fu Dalin, 27.

"Because the smog is so serious, I won't go out for a run like usual, and will just have to stay at home," he told AFP in a business district in downtown Beijing.

Another resident of the capital, Xu Gengying, said the pollution wouldn't stop her from going about her everyday life. "We still go out when we need to, if there's something to do. Just avoid doing some exercise outdoors—no jogging," she said.

In several areas in densely populated Hebei province, which surrounds

the capital, authorities issued their highest red alert. Air quality monitoring firm IQAir on Tuesday listed Beijing as the fifth most-polluted major city on Earth, just ahead of Indian megalopolis Mumbai.

Authorities urged residents to "to reduce going out and strenuous outdoor exercise in the near future," according to state news agency Xinhua. They were also limiting the number of construction and transport vehicles allowed on the roads.

In parts of Hebei, one official forecast showed that hazy conditions brought visibility down to lower than 50 metres.

In the nearby city of Tianjin, south of Beijing and home to 15 million people, the meteorological bureau advised anyone suffering from respiratory issues to refrain from going outside and to wear a mask if they do.

Official forecasters say the smog, which they blamed on "unfavourable weather conditions", will linger in the region until temperatures drop from unseasonably mild highs later this week. Should a red alert be issued in Beijing, that would trigger measures such as reducing traffic by prohibiting emitting vehicles with licence plates ending in even and odd numbers from driving on alternate days.



People walk along a business street in Beijing on Tuesday.

The Chinese capital declared "war on pollution" after winning the Winter Olympics bid in 2015, shutting down dozens of coal plants and relocating heavy industries to shed its status as one of the world's most polluted cities.

But while there has been improvement in recent years, air quality remains far below World Health

Organization standards.

China is the world's biggest emitter of the greenhouse gases driving climate change, such as carbon dioxide.

Greenpeace said in April that China has approved a major surge in coal power this year, accusing it of prioritising energy supply over its pledge to reduce emissions from fossil fuels.

## Iran says proxies won't 'remain silent' on Israel-Hamas war

Cross-border attacks launched by Iran-backed groups in Lebanon and Syria as well as Yemen could inflame the region.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
DOHA, OCT 31

Iran said on Tuesday it was "natural" for Tehran-backed groups to attack Israel in light of its war on Hamas,

warning of a wider spillover if no ceasefire is reached.

The remarks were made by Iran's top diplomat Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Qatar's capital Doha where he met with Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and his Qatari counterpart to discuss a push for a diplomatic breakthrough.

"It is natural that the resistance groups and movements do not remain silent against all these crimes" committed by Israel, Amir-Abdollahian said in remarks relayed by Iran's foreign ministry.

"They will not wait for anyone's advice, therefore we need to use the last political opportunities to stop the war," he said after talks with Sheikh Tamim, warning the situation could "get out of control".

Israel launched its assault in response to an unprecedented attack by Hamas on October 7 when its militants poured across the Gaza border, killing more than 1,400 people, mostly civilians, and taking more than 230 hostages, according to Israeli authorities.

Since then, Gaza's Hamas-run

health ministry says 8,500 people have been killed, more than 3,500 of them children.

In the face of the growing crisis, Iran-backed groups in Lebanon and Syria as well as Yemen have launched cross-border attacks that many fear could inflame the region.

**Iran and Qatar are fierce backers of Palestinian cause and have Hamas links for communication.**

Amir-Abdollahian's statement came hours after Tehran-backed Huthi rebels in Yemen claimed responsibility for a drone attack on southern Israel, with the group vowing to continue its attacks.

Shortly afterwards, the Israeli military said its forces intercepted a "surface-to-surface missile" fired towards Israeli territory from the area of the Red Sea, saying it was "successfully

intercepted" by the 'Arrow' aerial defence system.

Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman said the pair had discussed "the dangerous escalation of confrontations in the Gaza Strip and West Bank and the importance of advancing immediate ceasefire efforts", in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

"We also stressed the need to intensify regional efforts to prevent the expansion of violence and conflict in the region," he said.

Both Iran and Qatar have been fierce supporters of the Palestinian cause and have open channels of communication with Hamas, the Islamist rulers of Gaza.

The wealthy Gulf emirate, which hosts the largest US military base in the Middle East, also hosts the political office of Hamas and is the main residence of its self-exiled leader Ismail Haniyeh.

It has used its channels with Hamas, established with US blessing, to play a lead role in the release of four of the hostages held by militants in Gaza.

# Nepal sail into T20 World Cup Asia Qualifier semi-finals

The Rhinos beat Malaysia by six wickets to reach the last four with a match in hand.



POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Nepal's Kushal Malla (right) and Sundeep Jora fist bump during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 Asia Qualifier Group A match against Malaysia at the TU Cricket Ground in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

SPORTS BUREAU  
KATHMANDU, OCT 31

Nepal progressed into the high-stake semi-finals of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 Asia Qualifier with a game in hand after defeating Malaysia by six wickets at the TU Cricket Ground in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

Kushal Malla scored a half-century and Kushal Bhurtel continued his fine form with a 25-ball 43 as the Rhinos chased down Malaysia's 165-9 total in 18 overs at the loss of four wickets.

Bhurtel, who scored a fifty in an eight-wicket win over Singapore in the tournament opener on Monday, put on a 49-run stand with Aasif Sheikh, who scored 32 runs off 23 balls, to give Nepal a bright start.

After Bhurtel departed in the sixth over, caught by Sharvin Muniandy off Pavandeep Singh, Malla smashed seven sixes and two fours in his explosive knock of 34-ball 65 and shared a 67-run partnership with Aasif to make the work easy.

Both Aasif and Kushal were caught and bowled by Muhammad Amir, who also dismissed captain Rohit Paudel for a cheap two.

But victory was already within reach and Sundeep Jora added 18 to finish off the game.

Earlier, Malaysia opener Syed Aziz

STANDINGS					
GROUP A					
TEAM	P	W	L	PT	NRR
Oman	2	2	0	4	1.350
Nepal	2	2	0	4	1.322
Malaysia	2	0	2	0	-1.245
Singapore	2	0	2	0	-1.370

GROUP B					
TEAM	P	W	L	PT	NRR
UAE	2	2	0	4	1.496
Bahrain	2	1	1	2	0.164
Hong Kong	2	1	1	2	-0.100
Kuwait	2	0	2	0	-1.623

scored 68 runs off 49 balls after electing to bat first and put on a 58-run opening stand with Zubaidi Zulkifle, who racked up 24 off 16 balls, to give Malaysia a solid start.

But once Zulkifle fell to Abinash Bohoara in the sixth over, Malaysia lost wickets at regular intervals, with Bohara taking three more, including the wickets of Muhammad Amir, Syazrul Idrus and Fitri Sham.

Gulsan Jha dismissed Aziz in the 15th over while Sandeep Lamichhane and Rohit Paudel took a wicket apiece.

Two wins in as many games give Nepal four points in Group A.

Oman also progressed into the

semis after they defeated Singapore by 22 runs to register their second victory out of two matches.

Aqib Ilyas scored 63 runs off 35 balls and opener Pratik Athavale 42 off 32 balls to help Oman post a huge 174-6.

In reply, Singapore could only make 152-8.

Nepal now meet Oman on Thursday in their final group match that will decide the group winners. Oman currently occupy the top position due to net run rate.

The United Arab Emirates cemented their chance to advance into the semis from Group B after a five-wicket win over Kuwait gave them four points from two games.

Bahrain—on two points—also kept alive their hopes of advancing into the semis with a 20-run win over Hong Kong, who also have two points.

The UAE next face Hong Kong and Bahrain play Kuwait in Thursday's deciding fixtures which will determine the two semi-finalists from Group B.

The two finalists will book their spot at the T20 World Cup 2024 in West Indies and United States.

Nepal are aiming to reach the World Cup for the first time since 2014.

The T20 World Cup 2014 in Bangladesh was Nepal's only appearance at a World Cup.



# Pakistan eliminate Bangladesh from semi-final contention

A third win in seven games lifts the Pakistanis to fifth, their hopes of finishing in the top four still depend on favourable results in other games.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
KOLKATA, OCT 31

Shaheen Afridi's record-breaking haul of 3-23 helped Pakistan end their four-match losing streak at the Cricket World Cup and eliminate Bangladesh from semi-final contention with a seven-wicket win on Tuesday.

Another woeful batting display by Bangladesh saw them bowled out for 204 as Afridi became the fastest bowler in ODI history to grab 100 wickets, doing it in his 51st game. The left-arm Pakistan pacer surpassed Australian pacer Mitchell Starc, who achieved the feat in 52 games.

### SCOREBOARD

EDEN GARDENS/TOSS: BANGLADESH BAT FIRST.

**Bangladesh 204** (45.1/50 overs)

Mahmudullah 56 (70), Mohammad Wasim 8.1-1-31-3, Shaheen Shah Afridi 9-1-23-3

**Pakistan 205-3** (32.3/50 overs)

Fakhar Zaman 81 (74), Abdullah Shafique 68 (69); Mehidy Hasan 9-0-60-3

*Pakistan win by seven wickets.*

*Player of the match: Fakhar Zaman*

STANDINGS					
TEAM	P	W	L	PT	NRR
India	6	6	0	12	1.405
South Africa	6	5	1	10	2.032
New Zealand	6	4	2	8	1.232
Australia	6	4	2	8	0.970
Pakistan	7	3	4	6	-0.024
Afghanistan	6	3	3	6	-0.718
Sri Lanka	6	2	4	4	-0.275
Netherlands	6	2	4	4	-1.277
Bangladesh	7	1	6	2	-1.446
England	6	1	5	2	-1.652

Fit-again Fakhar Zaman, one of the three changes Pakistan made, made a triumphant return from his knee injury and made 81 off 74 as Pakistan cruised to 205-3 in 32.3 overs.

Zaman and Abdullah Shafique (68) combined in a 128-run opening wicket stand before Shafique fell lbw to off-spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz (3-60).

Captain Babar Azam's below-par World Cup continued when he holed out at long-on after scoring 9 and Zaman missed out on his century while going for another big shot against Miraz.

Zaman had to sit out the last five



POST PHOTO

Fakhar Zaman (81 runs) (left) and Abdullah Shafique (68 runs) combined in a 128-run opening wicket stand to help Pakistan lose their four-match losing streak.

games due to a knee injury, but dominated Bangladesh's timid spin and pace with his powerful hitting as he smashed seven sixes and three boundaries, with one of his sixes measured at 95 metres.

Pakistan's third win in seven games lifted them to number five in the points table, their hopes of finishing in the top four still depend on favourable results in other games.

A sixth successive loss left Bangladesh just ahead of defending champions England at the bottom of standings on net run-rate with only two points, which also puts their qualification for 2025 Champions Trophy in danger. The top seven teams at the World Cup plus hosts Pakistan will qualify for the eight-team event.

Afridi surpassed Starc when he pinned Tanzid Hasan leg before wick-

et off his fifth delivery after Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan won the toss and elected to bat.

Usama Mir then plucked a superb low catch of Najmul Hasan Shanto in Afridi's next over at mid-wicket and Muftiqur Rahim was beaten by Haris Rauf's length ball and was caught behind as Bangladesh slumped to 3-23 inside the batting powerplay.

Top-scorer Mahmudullah (56) and Litton Das (45) revived Bangladesh with a 79-run stand before Pakistan's pacers rattled the opposition with reverse swing in the latter half of the innings.

Mahmudullah was undone by Afridi's brilliant delivery as the right-hander was clean bowled and Mohammad Wasim mopped up the tail by claiming three wickets off his seven balls as Bangladesh innings folded meekly in 45.1 overs.

## HOROSCOPE

### ARIES (March 21-April 19)

It may be difficult to switch gears and focus on the present, making it important to give yourself extra time to gear up for the workday ahead. Luckily, you will maintain composure even when faced with deep emotions.

### TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

It would be easy to roll out of bed, grab your phone, and lose yourself to your social media feeds. Curb distractions by rooting yourself to the present, and consider putting your phone on "do not disturb" mode.

### GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

It may be difficult to maintain healthy boundaries with yourself and others. Don't feel guilty about putting your guard up around people you're unsure of, but try to maintain a sense of grace and composure in the process.

### CANCER (June 22-July 22)

You may feel preoccupied this morning so give yourself space to dream, but try not to let restrictive feelings of self-doubt creep in. Bring structure to your personal goals, leaning into spiritual practises that can help you stay on track.

### LEO (July 23-August 22)

Watch out for disingenuous people in your social sphere today. Frenemies will hide more easily, making it important that you save intimate details for only your closest friends. Try to schedule some alone time before the day comes to a close.

### VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

You may feel unrested when you awaken this morning. Do what you can to stay balanced, looking for ways to bring self-care into your daily responsibilities. The vibe lightens later today, inspiring you to socialise, flirt, and connect in meaningful ways.

### LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Watch out for unpleasant dreams in the early hours. Strive to maintain harmony, even if you must request support from others. You'll feel more in control later today, as you will create internal structures that will allow you to thrive.

### SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

you may feel like you're losing touch with your true self, especially if you've been struggling with certain relationships. Reach out for support from higher power if you feel the need to work with positive mantras and the power of faith.

### SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Try not to read into strange encounters with loved ones, as doing so could cause you to internally weave tales. Opportunities to shed your skin emerge later today, helping you brush off any incidents that caught you off guard this morning.

### CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Try to keep your mind and body aligned this morning. You'll feel a shift later in the day, bringing a supportive energy to the table. Lean into romance in the evening, whether you're flying solo or with someone sweet.

### AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Seek approval from within instead of outside sources. You'll sense a shift later in the afternoon, connecting you with your body and emotions. Lean into these vibes by treating yourself and investing in simple pleasures that feed into your wellness goals.

### PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Take space to honour and nurture your emotional needs, especially if you've been feeling spread thin. Consider grabbing a buddy for dinner and a few laughs before heading in for the night, letting the spirit of friendship elevate you.

## CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- 1 Sharp flavor
  - 5 Sierra —
  - 10 In the company of
  - 14 God of love
  - 15 Poppy product
  - 16 Prescribed amount
  - 17 Poet —
  - 18 Teasdale
  - 19 Speed
  - 18 City on the Tiber
  - 20 Backpack
  - 22 Plundering attacker
  - 24 Bee house
  - 25 End-of-week exclamation
  - 26 Beam
  - 28 Hard copy
  - 32 "Rock Around the —"
  - 33 Noble's title
  - 34 Expert
  - 35 Sibilant sound
  - 36 Projecting part
  - 37 Cookie fruit
  - 38 Top-rated
  - 39 Seal with putty
  - 40 Antler branches
  - 41 Breathes
  - 43 Heaps
  - 44 Romance lang.
  - 45 Swanky dance
  - 46 Went by

- DOWN**
- 1 Assignment
  - 2 "— for All Seasons"
  - 3 Director Ephron
  - 4 Website art
  - 5 Desert in California (var.)
  - 6 Swiftly
  - 7 Data storage hardware
  - 8 Groove
  - 9 Coming into view
  - 10 Off course
  - 11 Attitude
  - 12 "Woe —!"
  - 13 Doe, for one
  - 21 Lustrous fabric
  - 23 Slangy negative
  - 25 Luggage compartment
  - 26 Slab
  - 27 Exodus leader
  - 28 Collects into a puddle
  - 29 Think
  - 30 Compulsions
  - 31 Fling
  - 32 Burn partly
  - 33 Heartless
  - 36 Perfect place
  - 37 Some dental work
  - 39 Mention
  - 40 List
  - 42 Flower part
  - 43 Obvious
  - 45 Asian pepper plant
  - 46 Way
  - 47 Sunscreen ingredient
  - 48 Trig function
  - 49 Coffee
  - 50 From — to nuts
  - 51 "The Simpsons" bus driver
  - 52 Aerie
  - 55 "Toy Story" dinosaur

### PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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			24				25					
	26	27					28			29	30	31
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46	47	48					49			50	51	52
53							54	55		56		
57							58			59		
60							61			62		

## SUDOKU

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

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

			3	6				
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	1			8	7			
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	4	8				9		6
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

# Bald, brazen and beloved: Bipin Karki is Bhasme Don

The film, at times funny and witty, is too drenched in the nostalgia of its prequel.



URZA ACHARYA  
KATHMANDU

**B**hasme Don is a man of our times. He plays PUBG on his phone, mixes modern English slang in his Nepali and gives *daan* via QR codes. He also thinks he rules Pashupati—coming up with elaborate ruses to make money—cheating visitors for money, bullying and beating up other swindlers and spouting sharp one-liners.



But Pashupati is home to many others like him. It is when Kali Prasad (played by Saugat Malla)—a former wrestler—arrives that Bhasme Don's 'donness' is challenged, and what follows is an almost 'cat-and-mouse' sequence of them trying to one-up each other.

'Bhasme Don' is a sequel to the much-beloved film 'Pashupati Prasad', released in 2016. The first film follows the turbulent life of Pashupati Prasad, whose ill fate brings him to the banks of the sacred Bagmati, where he makes friends and foes. Bhasme Don (played by Bipin Karki)—although a minor character—was appreciated by many thanks to his unusually raspy voice, signature matrix sunglasses and quirky persona. The second series, 'Pashupati Prasad 2: Bhasme Don', is a spin-off focusing solely on Bhasme Don and his life after the events of the first film.

As the movie opens, Bhasme Don is currently fasting—aka abstaining from violence—to absolve his previous sins. The violence part is pretty much handled by his mini-goons who follow his orders. One fine day, he decides to look for his birth parents, who dropped him off at an orphanage when he was a child. For this, he needs to

gather Rs1,000,000 to pay as a bribe to a corrupt orphanage official.

It is wholly unclear why Bhasme Don, who is shown throughout both films using violence and extortion to get what he wants, doesn't just threaten or lock up the official for information—he could've used his mini goons. He is unusually placid and compliant and self-sacrifices to move the plot forward.

Around him, Pashupati is, once again, an entity of its own—a place of life and death, of transcendence and restraints. We are thus introduced to a



**Pashupati Prasad 2: Bhasme Don**  
**Released on:** October 21  
**Director:** Dipendra K Khanal  
**Cast:** Bipin Karki, Saugat Malla, Swastima Khadka, Prakash Ghimire  
**Language:** Nepali  
**Duration:** 2 hours 30 minutes  
**Now showing:** QFX, Big Cinemas, One Cinemas

new character—Swastima Khadka, as a 'Devi' who survives on *daan* given by devotees for blessings and selfies. Malla's Kali Prasad—who the writers thought should be Madhesi (with the accent and all)—also finds himself asking for blessings from Pashupati to free his daughter from hospital bills.

Karki embodies Bhasme Don to a T and is the saving grace of this film. His raspy laughter, hilarious one-liners, and empathetic dialogues draw you in, and Karki brilliantly humanises the 'anti-hero'. Other than that, the film is too nostalgic and dependent on the first films—there are cameos of all the previous characters of the first film, and many just feel incredibly out of place. It is so stuck on what happened in the first film that writer Khagendra Lamichhane's prose feels almost narcissistic and, thus, does a disservice to Bhasme Don's own arc, which never gets to grow beyond the cat-and-mouse storyline.

'Bhasme Don' also employs similar catharsis and plot points to move the story forward—abrupt betrayals, sudden and irrational obstacles for the main character—that it becomes bland because we've already seen it in the first film. The overhead shot where Bhasme Don is talking to Pashupati while looking up to the sky—perhaps a direct reference to the first film—is tolerable and would've been more than enough to connect the two films.

One thing that was particularly fascinating was the duality of Bhasme Don and Kali Prasad; each committed crimes for a relatively noble cause: Bhasme Don so he could find his birth parents, Kali Prasad, so that he could bring back his daughter. The perception of these characters is a battle of ethics—Kantian or utilitarian—as each tries to justify their actions on the basis of their good 'end goal'.

'Bhasme Don' fails to trust itself and its capability to tell a unique, subtle and powerful story without cliches and predictable plotlines. When filmmakers are too busy thinking about where to add the next betrayal, suspense or social message in their film, they forget that good character buildups are, oftentimes, more than enough.

# From 2014 nostalgia to 2023 reality—it's time for '1989'

MARIA SHERMAN  
LOS ANGELES, US

**T**aylor Swift's reimagined '1989' is here, the album that ushered in the first Peak Swift era—revisited at the height of her massive pop culture dominance.

Released in 2014 and named for her birth year, the original '1989' signified a sonic rebirth. Swift had shed the Nashville country roots of her first four studio albums and announced herself a full-fledged pop superstar.

'1989 (Taylor's Version)', out Friday, takes that version of Swift—then in her mid-20s, living in New York, prepared to take on the world with an arsenal of '80s synth sounds and a new producer named Jack Antonoff—and includes five unreleased "vault" tracks that deliver more clues about the artist she was then.

Previous 'Taylor's Version' releases have been more than conventional rerecordings, arriving with new music, Easter eggs and visuals that deepen understanding of her work. The project—the fourth of six rereleases—was instigated by music manager Scooter Braun's purchase and sale of her early catalog and represents Swift's effort to control her own songs and how they're used.

Her return to '1989'—the album where she began to confront media portrayals of herself and in song—comes at another Swift popularity crescendo but also during a 2010s nostalgia (Yes, it's only 2023. Yes, the nostalgia is real).

Listeners will dive deep into the vault tracks for clues into Swift's mind around 2014. 'Slut!' may recall her contentious relationship with the press, which fixated on her alleged romantic relationships and the songs she'd write once they ended.

They'll find connections to 'Out of the Woods' on 'Is It Over Now?' in the lyrics "when you lost control / red blood, white snow." They'll wonder who made her pretend to like acid rock and mega yachts on 'Now That We Don't Talk'. But more insight will be found in thinking about where Swift was at the time, what came next, and how that mirrors the current moment.

Brittany Spanos, senior writer at Rolling Stone, puts it simply: "People just get easily sick of anyone who's super famous. And I think that we haven't had a lot of monocultural kind of celeb moments like this in a minute," she says of Swift in 2023.

Rebecca Jennings, a senior correspondent at Vox covering social platforms and the creator economy, sees a connection between the 2014 eras as being "post-recession" and 2023 being "post-COVID," a time where Swift succeeds because there's a sort of cultural "bouncing back vibe," a time where people want celebratory music.

In 2014, that was Swift finding her pop sound with '1989'.

In 2023, it's becoming the most successful version of herself, and rereleasing '1989' while on the top of her game.

—Associated Press



AP/RS



## MY PODCAST PICKS



**Erina Tamrakar**

Tamrakar is a freelance artist and the co-founder of E-Arts Nepal.

### >> Pratirodh Podcast

Hosted by Bachchu Himangshu, Pratirodh Podcast covers a variety of subjects, including art, poetry, literature, social and gender issues, and the voices of indigenous communities.

This podcast is perfect for me to listen to whenever I'm free or working in my art studio. It educates me about significant matters in the art and literary scene, as well as broader societal concerns.



### >> KhojPatra

KhojPatra is a Podcast that mostly covers contemporary arts, paubha arts and cultures in Nepal. Some of the topics discussed in this podcast include Mithila artistry and sculpting. The discussions are led by people within the art community, who also share their experiences.

### >> Herne Katha

One of my absolute favourite video podcasts is Herne Katha, which is hosted by Bidhya Chapagain and Kamal Kumar: It offers valuable insights into the lives of the people of Nepal, their diverse communities, challenges, and stories. With more than 100 episodes available, I find myself captivated by the countless engaging narratives they share.



### >> Paradygm Podcasts

Paradygm Podcasts is a delightful listen, covering a range of topics from Nepali cinema and travel to hiking and adventure sports in Nepal. Hosted by Sisan Baniya, this weekly podcast has aired over 50 episodes, some lasting an hour, while others extend to 3 hours or more.

# All about kegel exercises

Fitness instructor Rajan Munikar shares the importance of proper technique while doing these exercises.

RUKUSHA GIRI  
KATHMANDU

**I**ncorporating kegel exercises into your daily routine can significantly benefit your overall health and well-being. These simple exercises, focusing on the pelvic muscles, can be easily performed by anyone, anywhere.



Fitness instructor **Rajan Munikar** from I Fit Nepal emphasises the importance of kegel exercises for good health. Here, he gives us clear, step-by-step instructions for performing kegel exercises at home.

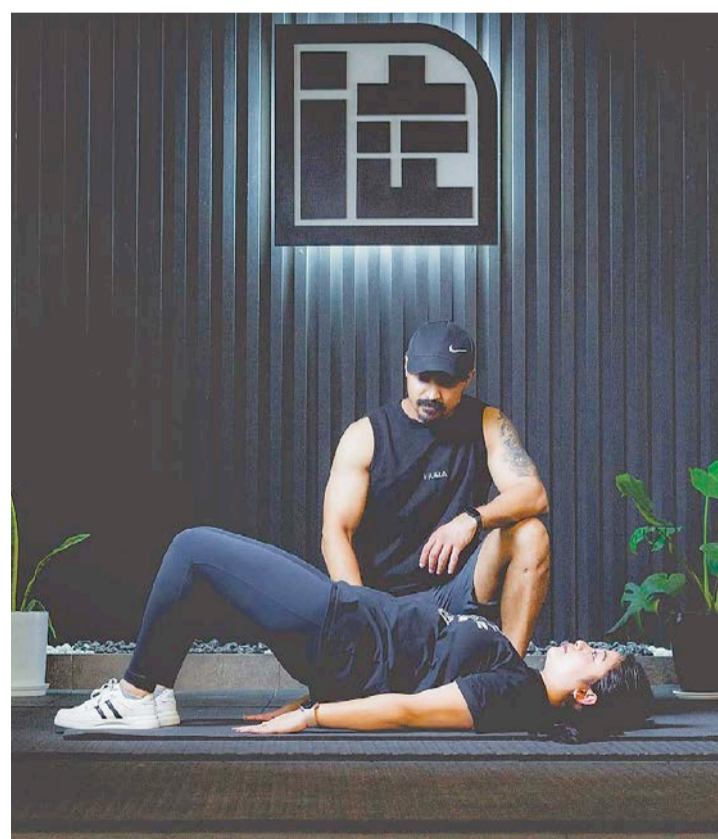
### The basics

Kegel exercises are highly beneficial workouts that, unfortunately, remain unfamiliar to many. Proper guidance is crucial to ensure that this exercise is performed correctly, as incorrect execution can lead to adverse effects on the body. Kegel exercises strengthen the reproductive muscles by contracting and relaxing the muscles that support the bladder and other pelvic organs.

For individuals with poor physical health, it is recommended that kegel exercises be performed regularly and preferably more than once. These exercises are particularly useful for those who experience incontinence—lack of voluntary control over urination or defecation—in their pelvic region.

### Its benefits

By increasing the tone and strength of the pelvic floor muscles, kegel exercises can facilitate improved bladder control.



The benefits of improving pelvic health extend far beyond these two areas, as a strong pelvic floor can help to promote better overall body function.

Incorporating a daily practice of kegel exercises into your routine can help to strengthen the pelvic floor, which in turn can lead to a reduction in urine incontinence and a decrease in the frequency of leaks. This is particularly beneficial for women who have experienced pregnancy or childbirth, as both can directly weaken the pelvic floor muscles.

Pelvic organ prolapse can be averted by strengthening the pelvic floor muscles that support the organs. This condition occurs

when the pelvic organs descend into the vaginal canal due to muscle weakness. Kegel exercises are an effective means of preventing and reducing the severity of this disease.



Rajan Munikar

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF RAJAN MUNIKAR

Because pregnancy and childbirth place significant stress on the pelvic floor muscles, kegel exercises are particularly advantageous for women during and after pregnancy. The exercises can help to restore muscle strength and prevent complications such as urinary incontinence. Completing kegel exercises throughout and after pregnancy is highly recommended for optimal recovery.

### The process

Performing kegel exercises is simple and can easily fit into your daily routine, taking just a few minutes. Before you begin, identify your pelvic floor muscle by stopping the flow of urine and feeling for a distinct sensation.

Make sure your bladder is empty before you start. Tightening your pelvic floor muscles can cause problems. To do the exercise, contract the muscle by squeezing or drawing it upward and inward. Imagine trying to stop urine flow or prevent gas passage. Avoid tightening your abdomen, buttocks, or thighs. Concentrate only on the pelvic floor muscle.

Once you have contracted the pelvic floor muscles, you need to hold the contraction for a few seconds, then release and rest for a few seconds. Repeat the cycle several times. Gradually increase the duration and repetition. Consistency is essential to see results.

### Unmasking the myths

Kegel exercises are often misunderstood, with some thinking they're only for women. However, both men and women can benefit from them. Men should do kegel exercises regularly but not excessively. They can be done anytime and anywhere, as they only involve contracting and relaxing the muscles in the pelvic region. These exercises improve bladder control and pelvic health.