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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Janakpur Jomsom

TODAY

NATIONAL

Customs officials have arrested a man from Tribhuvan International Airport with around 14 kg of gold. Chandra Ghale of Gorkha was held at the airport on Thursday night soon after he landed in Kathmandu. Pg 2

WORLD

In a snow-covered field in western Poland, Ukrainian soldiers are being trained in trench warfare, just days before being sent to the front in what has become a grinding war of attrition against Russia. Pg 4

Palestinians fleeing Israel's expanding ground offensive crowded into an ever-shrinking area of Gaza as the Israel-Hamas war entered its third month on Friday. The UN warned that its aid operation is "in tatters". Pg 4



MONEY

After wheat, rice and sugar, India on Wednesday added dry onions to its list of food staples restricted for export. The move aimed at containing domestic prices ahead of the national election next year will affect Nepal. Pg 5

SPORTS



Nepal national U-19 cricket team lost their opening match of the ACC U-19 Asia Cup to Pakistan by seven wickets at the ICC Academy Oval-2 in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, on Friday. Pg 6



Kin of Aarti Sah, who was allegedly murdered by her in-laws in Janakpur, sit for the 176th day of their protest, at Shanti Vatika in Kathmandu on Friday. They shifted their agitation to the federal capital months ago after their demonstration in the province failed to yield justice.

Rights watchdog's recommendations snubbed, persistently

Amid government inaction on the recommendations, individuals flagged for action promoted and rewarded.

By BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, DEC 8

It's an old and rather depressing story. Despite their repeated commitments, successive governments have been indifferent to implementing the recommendations of the National Human Rights Commission.

Established in 2000, the constitutional human rights watchdog received 13,213 complaints until the last fiscal year. So far, it has recommended government action in 1,407 cases, criminal investigation and departmental action against officials involved, and monetary compensation for the victims.

However, only 15.3 percent of the recommendations have been fully implemented, as per the report for the fiscal year 2022-23 submitted to President Ramchandra Paudel on Thursday. While 39.2 percent of the recommendations have been partly addressed, 45.5 percent have yet to be implemented.

In the 23 years since its establishment, the commission has recommended actions against 358 individuals, but only 37 of them have been punished. In some instances, the government has promoted security officials named in the commission's investigation, instead of taking action against them.

As per the annual report, the commission has recommended monetary compensation totalling Rs280 million to the victims, but the government has distributed only Rs70 million. "Non-implementation of the recommendations has raised questions over the commission's significance. It has also shattered the victims' right to jus-

Justice," reads the report. "It has also promoted impunity."

Officials at the commission say the government's snubbing of the recommendations show it is not serious about protecting and promoting human rights. "The government either has to implement the commission's recommendations or give reasons, if any, for not implementing them," said Murari Kharel, acting secretary at the commission. "Right now, the recommendations remain unimplemented without any reason."

The report presented to the commission also says the government must be serious about heeding the recommendations.

Commission has asked the government to pay Rs280 million in total to the victims as relief.

Given the government's lack of action, the commission in October 2020 made public a list of 286 people, including former top government and security officials implicated in serious human rights violations over the past two decades, in an attempt to build pressure for action.

Among the total human rights violators implicated by the commission since its formation in 2000, the highest (98) are from the Nepal Police, followed by the Nepal Army (85) and then CPN-Maoist (65).

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Saarc leaders pledge unity amid challenges

Marking the 39th charter day amid stalled summit and regional tensions, heads of states and governments of South Asia call for revitalising the regional grouping.

By POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, DEC 8

In the face of an existential crisis, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) marked its 39th anniversary on Friday with leaders of member states expressing their determination to work together.

With the eight-member bloc struggling to convene regular summit meetings—the 19th, initially planned for Pakistan, was cancelled due to India-Pakistan tensions—Nepal has continued to chair the grouping since the

18th summit held in Kathmandu in November 2014. Similarly, the meetings of the Saarc foreign ministers, which is also called the Saarc Council of Ministers, remains stalled for the past three years.

On Friday, on the occasion of the 39th Saarc Charter Day, heads of governments of member states issued statements reaffirming their commitment to bolster the organisation for the full realisation of its charter objectives, according to the Kathmandu-based Saarc Secretariat.

The first Saarc Summit in Dhaka,

Bangladesh adopted the Saarc Charter on December 8, 1985.

A forum of eight countries in South Asia that are bound by ties of history and culture, Saarc, as per the charter, embodies the determination of its member states to regional peace, stability, amity and progress. This commitment is rooted in principles including sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence, non-use of force and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and peaceful settlement of disputes.

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Vladimir Putin of Russia: The autocrat eyeing a new world order

As Russia's military has largely repulsed the months-long Ukrainian counter-offensive, Putin has resumed foreign travel.

By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WARSAW, DEC 8

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who announced on Friday he is running for a fifth term, has over the past two decades built a system of domestic repression and confrontation with the West that is almost certain to guarantee his re-election.

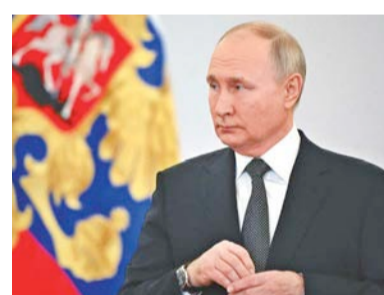
Ever since the former little-known KGB agent first became president on New Year's Eve 1999, he has consolidated power by bringing oligarchs to heel, banning any real opposition, and turning Russia into

an authoritarian state. Abroad, he has led world efforts to challenge the dominance of the West.

His grip on power further tightened in the wake of his decision to invade Ukraine in February 2022, with public dissent against the war effectively silenced through lengthy prison terms for critics.

Friday, the 71-year-old said after a military awards ceremony at the Kremlin that—as expected—he will run in next March's presidential elections.

His rule has risked being defined by the war in Ukraine, which has cost many thousands of lives and sparked unprecedented Western sanc-



Vladimir Putin

tions that have created major tensions in the economy. There were large anti-war protests

in the day after he ordered troops into Ukraine in the early hours of February 24, 2022.

They were quickly put down but were followed months later by more demonstrations when the government was forced to announce a partial mobilisation after Russia failed to topple Ukraine's government in the opening offensive of the war.

The most serious challenge to his long rule came in June 2023 when Yevgeny Prigozhin, a long-time ally and head of the Wagner mercenary group announced a mutiny to unseat the military leadership.

The bloody uprising threatened to tarnish Putin's self-created image as a

strategic genius who likes to compare himself to Peter the Great—the reform-minded emperor who expanded Russia's borders.

But in recent months, Putin has demonstrated his lasting power. Domestic opposition has been largely silent, the economy is growing again, the Russian military has largely repulsed a recent Ukrainian offensive, and he has resumed foreign travel.

Putin started out as an intelligence officer before embarking on a political career in the mayor's office in his native Saint Petersburg in 1991 as the Soviet Union was falling apart.

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NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

One dead, one injured in road accident

HETAUDA: One person died and another was injured in a road accident at Ratomato in ward 15 of Hetauda Sub-metropolitan City on Friday. According to the District Police Office, Makawanpur, a 32-year-old woman from Jitpur Simara, died in the accident. The accident involved a bus heading for Hetauda from Pathlaiya and a motorbike. The couple on the motorbike were seriously injured and were taken to the Hetauda Hospital, where doctors declared the pillion rider as brought dead. The 43-year-old husband is undergoing treatment.

Woman found dead under suspicious circumstances

GORKHA: A woman of about 30 years of age was found dead at Kumalgaun in ward 7 of Palungtar Municipality in Gorkha district on Thursday. According to Superintendent of Police Anupam Shrestha, the body was found wrapped in a blanket. "The incident is suspicious as the body has injury marks. An investigation is underway into the incident," said Shrestha. Police have yet to identify the body.

Despite occasional seizures, no let-up in gold smuggling

Man carrying 14 kg of the precious metal was held from Kathmandu airport on Thursday night. Government announces six-member investigation panel.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, DEC 8

Customs officials have arrested a man from the Tribhuvan International Airport with around 14 kg of gold.

Chandra Ghale of Gorkha was held at the airport on Thursday night soon after he landed in Kathmandu on a flydubai flight.

Director General of the Department of Customs Sobhakant Paudel said they started an investigation into his background and the real owner of the gold soon after the arrest.

Ghale was found to have attached the gold to his chest and also concealed the metal in his shoes.

Paudel said they were preparing to weigh and test the metal recovered from the man to determine its quality.

According to him, they started monitoring Ghale's call details and people in contact with him.

Officials had stepped up surveillance at the airport after being tipped off that Ghale will land on Wednesday. But he arrived on Thursday night.

Ghale was among the passengers disembarking at the last and was arrested soon after he got off the aircraft. He has been taken into police custody.

Meanwhile, the government on Friday formed a six-member probe to investigate the case. The committee is



At a press conference in Kathmandu on Friday, an official at the Tribhuvan International Airport Customs Office shows a bar of gold from a 14-kilo haul from Thursday night.

led by Maniram Paudel, chief of the airport customs office.

Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Prakash Subedi, customs officers Dillu Prasad Sharma, Prakash Niraula and Lokraj Dhungana and section officer Manju Thapa are members of the committee, according to Tokraj Pandey, chief customs administrator at the airport.

In the meantime, police arrested three other people from Nagdhunga as they were entering Kathmandu carrying 2 kg gold on Friday. According to Superintendent of Police (SP) Rabinendra Regmi of the Kathmandu Valley Crime Investigation Office, the three people travelling from Rasuwa to Kathmandu had concealed the gold inside the gearbox of a jeep.

The incidents come in a series of gold smuggling cases over recent days and months. In October, the government formed a high-level commission to conduct a detailed investigation into the incidents of gold smuggling in the country.

The government had agreed to form the commission led by former High Court chief judge Dilli Raj Acharya after the main opposition CPN-UML obstructed parliamentary proceedings for weeks saying that a serious investigation was essential to crack down on organised crime in gold smuggling in Nepal.

Russian leader Putin seeks fifth term

>> Continued from page 1

Yeltsin, Russia's first president, appointed him as head of the FSB security service in 1998, and as prime minister the following year.

It was a carefully planned strategy, culminating in his nomination as acting president when Yeltsin resigned.

Putin won his first presidential election in March 2000 and a second term in 2004.

His rise initially spurred hopes that Russia would reform and become a predictable, democratic partner on the global stage.

Putin gained popularity by promising stability to a country still reeling from a decade of humiliation and economic chaos following the Soviet collapse.

Then-US President George W Bush hailed him as a "remarkable leader". Russia's leader grew close with Germany's Gerhard Schroeder and Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, even as he clamped down on media and waged a ruthless war in Chechnya.

Two decades later, that goodwill has gone.

Joe Biden—the fifth US president of Putin's tenure—called him a "killer," even before the launch of full-scale hostilities in Ukraine.

After two stints as president, Putin switched back to being prime minister in 2008 to get around a constitutional ban on more than two consecutive terms.

But he kept the reins of power firmly in hand and returned to the presidency in 2012 despite pro-democracy protests in Moscow, winning a fourth term in 2018.

He jailed his loudest rival, Alexei Navalny, in 2021 shortly after being accused by the West and the opposition leader of ordering Navalny's poisoning with a Soviet-designed nerve agent.

The clampdown on opposition movements ramped up after the launch of hostilities in Ukraine, with thousands of Russians handed long prison sentences on newly beefed-up

editorial laws.

The West imposed sanctions that effectively cut off Russia from the global banking system, adding to the Russian leadership's siege mentality.

In October, Putin accused Europe of creating a "new Iron Curtain" and said Russia was building "a new world" that would not be based on Western hegemony.

He has also increasingly pushed a domestic agenda of nationalism and social conservatism, including most recently laws against Russia's LGBTQ community.

Persona non grata among Western leaders after the invasion, the Russian strongman has sought to pivot east, wooing India and China with increased energy exports.

After shrinking in 2022, the Russian economy began to grow again in the second quarter of this year despite high inflation, a weakening of the ruble and a drastic increase in defence spending.

The war failed in its initial aims to topple Ukraine's government and Russia was forced into a series of humiliating setbacks by the determined defence of the much smaller Ukrainian army.

But, as the war nears its second anniversary, Putin has been speaking with increased confidence about Russia's prospects on the battlefield—a topic he avoided for many months.

Russian forces have successfully held off a much-hyped Ukrainian counter-offensive and there are increasing doubts about the continuation of Western military supplies.

Wrangling in Washington in recent weeks has held up tens of billions in military aid for Ukraine, prompting alarmist warnings from the US administration.

"Congress has to decide whether to continue to support the fight for freedom in Ukraine... or whether Congress will ignore the lessons we've learned from history and let Putin prevail," National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said.

Poison Information Centre helping doctors to lessen severity and deaths

Health workers serving throughout the country could take help from national as well as international experts through the centre's hotline to save lives.



TU Teaching Hospital, Maharajgunj.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, DEC 8

A few weeks ago, a five-year-old boy from Kathmandu ingested levothyroxine sodium, a medicine used to treat hypothyroidism, which his mother had brought for her treatment. The boy was rushed to a nearby hospital when he developed fever and started vomiting.

In Jumla, a 15-year-old girl of a remote village consumed four 500 mg paracetamol tablets at a go in a rage. Her parents rushed her to the nearby health post.

Doctors at both health facilities called at 01 4502011, the hotline of the Poison Information Centre started by the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, and sought help for treating levothyroxine and paracetamol overdoses.

"We gave suggestions to the doctors and told them about the antidote to be used if required," said Dr Rakesh Ghimire, the centre's chief. "Both the patients were admitted to health facilities, put under medical observation, and discharged after they recovered."

These are among the 40 cases of poisoning by accidental drug overdose, attempted suicide by consuming pesticides and medicines dealt with by the centre in the last three months. The centre was officially launched on Thursday.

Pesticide ingestion is the second major cause of suicide after hanging in Nepal.

"Even health workers may not have the idea to treat cases of poisoning properly," said Dr Dinesh Kafley, the hospital director.

"This centre especially targets health workers serving throughout the country. Doctors at the centre will provide the latest data and information on the antidote for treating poisoning."

Studies show pesticide ingestion is the second major cause of suicide after hanging in Nepal. Of those who consume pesticides

to die, 95 percent ingest insecticides—aluminium phosphide, organophosphorus, aluminium and zinc phosphide, among others. Despite the authorities banning dichlorvos and the removal of most toxic formulations of aluminium phosphide from sale years ago, pesticide ingestion for suicide has not declined.

Each year around 7,000 people in Nepal commit suicide, according to the Nepal Police data.

Doctors say not only the intentional attempt of suicide, cases of accidental drug overdoses, ingestion of mosquito repellent, toilet cleaner, nutmeg the spice and toothpaste and mushroom poisoning often get reported.

"Family members panic and do their best to save their dear ones," said Rajesh Sharma Poudel of the centre. "Health workers could also refer the patients to the tertiary care centre if they do not know how serious the case is. We will help them with the best advice from national as well as international clinical toxicologists."

Doctors say that most of the patients get cured if taken to hospital on time as physicians know the proper antidote for poisons. They say that physicians treating poisoning may need to gain proper knowledge about treatment procedures, as detailed knowledge of toxicology is not taught in medical schools of Nepal. Toxicology is a separate discipline overlapping biology, chemistry, pharmacology and medicine.

It studies the adverse effects of chemical substances on living organisms and the diagnosis and treatment of the condition.

Experts say seeking support helps patients' relatives financially, as they do not rush mild cases to big hospitals hiring an ambulance.

Officials at the centre said they will also take help from TOXBASE, a database designed to meet the needs of first-line management of poisoning.

Despite setbacks, states vow to revitalise Saarc

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"The need for closer cooperation is ever greater, given the still existing old challenge like poverty, malnutrition, along with new and emerging challenges such as climate change, cybersecurity, and natural disasters exacerbated by adverse climate," Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal said in a statement issued on the occasion, adding, "In this context, we must reinforce the values of understanding, trust, solidarity and cooperation as enshrined in the Saarc Charter through common efforts and harmonious actions."

Although Afghanistan is also a Saarc member, it has been excluded from the process following the Taliban takeover of the country in 2021. As a founding member and chair of Saarc, Nepal is fully committed to doing its part to energise the Saarc process and make it more vibrant, effective and result oriented, said Dahal.

Meanwhile, Nepal, the current chair, has been facing criticism for not doing enough to revitalise the subdued Saarc process. The summit scheduled in Islamabad was cancelled after an attack on an Indian army camp in Kashmir. India accused Pakistan of the attack and decided to pull out, a decision that was backed by the majority of member states. The crisis in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover further complicated the Saarc process, with seven member states yet to recognize the new regime in Kabul.

"The founding objective of Saarc—to work together for the benefit of the people of South Asia—is possible only in an environment of peace and security," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in his message, adding, "India remains committed to realising this objective and will continue to adopt cooperative and positive approach in this regard."

"While we celebrate the anniversary of the Saarc Charter Day, let us resolve to work together to realise the shared vision for a peaceful and prosperous South Asia," said Modi.

Similarly, Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, the caretaker Prime Minister of Pakistan in his message on the occasion stated that Pakistan is fully committed to the organisation and is actively participating in Saarc processes and activities.

"Pakistan is a firm believer in the strength and potential of regional cooperation for national and regional development. It further believes that result-oriented regional cooperation can be achieved only by adhering to the cardinal principles of sovereign equality and mutual respect, as enshrined in the Saarc Charter," he said while expressing confidence in overcoming current hindrances, and enabling Saarc member states to forge ahead on the path of mutually-beneficial regional cooperation.

For the past few years, the Saarc Secretariat has been carrying out routine activities

and meetings of lower-level mechanisms are taking place, but no there have been no significant developments.

Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in her statement issued to mark the day, stressed the need for regional cooperation in view of the recent developments in world affairs. "As one of the founding members of Saarc, Bangladesh recognises the importance of Saarc for the socio-economic development of the people of the region through collective efforts in various cooperation areas, particularly in trade, investment, energy and connectivity."

"The Saarc region is undergoing many challenges. I believe our collective efforts could contribute to forging closer cooperation among the member states to overcome the challenges and make Saarc an effective and result-oriented regional organisation," she said.

Likewise, Chogyal Dago Rigdzin, the chief advisor to the Bhutan government, in his statement expressed Bhutan's readiness to collaborate with fellow member states in enhancing the Saarc process and achieving the common objective of peace and prosperity in the region.

Nepal remains chair of the bloc since the 18th summit in 2014.

Similarly, the new president of Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu, also called for a renewed commitment to Saarc charter principles for building a more resilient and interconnected South Asia.

"Let me today reiterate the Maldives' commitment to achieving the common goals of Saarc and express my sincere hope that as citizens of this region, we will be able to create sustainable peace and prosperity for our people," he said in his message.

Besides the seven heads of the governments and states, the foreign ministers of Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka also issued statements expressing their commitment to the stagnant Saarc process.

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena issued a separate statement and called for recognizing the Saarc's achievements by enhancing cooperation among the member states to advance towards the charter's objectives.

The president of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe said his country recognizes Saarc's immense potential, prospects, and opportunities available, which can be seized, through collective efforts.

"With an unrelenting commitment on the part of us, member states soldiering as one family, I am confident that Saarc can metamorphose into a more viable regional organisation to serve the prosperity of our region," said Wickremesinghe.

23 years on, NHRC struggles to make governments accountable

>> Continued from page 1

The commission has also implicated 16 civil servants and eight Armed Police Force personnel in rights abuses.

The government, on the one hand, is indifferent to implementing the recommendations, while the commission, the constitutional body authorised to protect and promote human rights, on the other hand, has fared dismally when it comes to investigating the cases lodged with it.

The number of complaints were high during the Maoist insurgency, which ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in November 2006. However, thousands of complaints including those from the insurgency remain unaddressed. As per the report, the commission is yet to decide on 4,100 complaints, most of them from the insurgency era.

"We have already completed our probe into 1,500 of the complaints. We may recommend action in those cases after the commission gives its final opinion," said Kharel. In each case, the chief commis-



National Human Rights Commission's Chief Commissioner Top Bahadur Magar (left) presents the watchdog's annual report to President Ramchandra Paudel at the President's Office on Friday.

sioner and the majority of commissioners make the final decision.

The commission has pointed out lack of adequate economic and human resources, absence of proper office facilities and traditional mindset to human rights as the barriers to its smooth operation. Of the 309 positions allotted to the commission, 93 including the secretary and three joint-secretary positions remain vacant.

Former officials at the commission say complaints have been piling up ever since the commission's establishment. Bed Bhattarai, a former secretary at the commission, said in addition to the lack of adequate resources, disputes within the commission and a low staff morale are responsible for delays in investigations.

"If the commission's leadership wants, it can hire temporary investigators in collaboration with the Nepal Bar Association or recruit retired police officials to expedite investigations. It is already too late to clear the backlog," Bhattarai told the Post. "But I don't think the commission, enmeshed in internal feud, would take any proactive measures."

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WORLD

BRIEFING

Thailand, Myanmar to form aid task force as border unrest intensifies

TAK PROVINCE: Thailand and conflict-torn Myanmar will create a task force to boost humanitarian assistance to people displaced by fighting and could expand that to include other aid agencies, Thailand's foreign ministry said on Friday. Thailand hopes the plan will lead to constructive engagement between military-ruled Myanmar, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional bloc, and the international community, it said in a statement. Violence has intensified in Myanmar's border regions as an alliance of ethnic minority armies carry out coordinated attacks against the military, emboldening pro-democracy resistance fighters to target security forces elsewhere. The United Nations estimates more than 300,000 people have been displaced by fighting since the rebel offensive started in late October, among more than 2 million forced to flee since a 2021 coup and crackdown that triggered a backlash against the junta. The unrest is the military government's biggest battlefield challenge since the coup and has alarmed China and Thailand, with concerns about a refugee influx. "The Myanmar side will soon send a working team to Thailand to discuss this matter," Thailand's foreign ministry said of the aid task force. (REUTERS)

Zambia urges hope as races to find trapped miners

LUSAKA: A week after dozens of miners were buried by a mudslide in Zambia, the government said Friday it was committed to rescuing all those still trapped underground. Vice President Mutale Nalumango told parliament that operations to retrieve the about 36 workers would continue indefinitely, after a survivor was pulled from the rubble earlier this week. "I urge the nation and the affected families to remain hopeful," she said. "The government is doing everything possible to rescue the trapped miners." The miners became trapped last week when torrential rains set off a torrent of mud that buried the open cast mine in Zambia's main copperbelt region. A 49-year-old was rescued alive on Tuesday evening after five days below ground. Nalumango said the man was undergoing treatment at a local hospital where his condition has "greatly improved". But as time passes, hopes are dimming for others. No-one else has been discovered since authorities said on Wednesday they had found two dead miners. Nalumango said that family members of those trapped would be asked to be at the site to ease the identification process as more bodies are expected to be pulled out. (AFP)

US, South Korean, Japanese security advisers meet to discuss North Korea

SEOUL: The national security advisers of the United States, South Korea and Japan are meeting in Seoul on Friday and Saturday to discuss North Korea and other global issues as they step up trilateral cooperation, South Korea's presidential office said. Seoul's national security adviser, Cho Tae-yong, held bilateral talks with Japan's Takeo Akiba and the US' Jake Sullivan on Friday, during which they agreed to boost cooperation to curb North Korea's nuclear threat and missile provocations, according to South Korea's presidential office. They will hold a trilateral meeting on Saturday. The three countries condemned North Korea's launch of its first reconnaissance satellite last month for violating multiple UN Security Council resolutions. Pyongyang has dismissed criticism and said the move would enhance its capabilities to monitor the military activities of the United States and its allies. The row has fractured an inter-Korean military accord designed to curb the risk of inadvertent clashes between the Koreans, which remain technically at war. White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday the advisers would discuss regional issues of mutual concern, "particularly in the security environment" as they seek to build on their leaders' agreement at Camp David to deepen cooperation. (REUTERS)

Palestinians crowd into an ever-shrinking Gaza as Israel's war enters third month

The United Nations has warned that its aid operation is 'in tatters' because no place in the besieged enclave is safe.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
RAFAH, GAZA STRIP, DEC 8

Desperate Palestinians fleeing Israel's expanding ground offensive crowded into an ever-shrinking area of the Gaza Strip as the Israel-Hamas war entered its third month on Friday. The United Nations warned that its aid operation is "in tatters" because no place in the besieged enclave is safe.

The Israeli army said that over the past day its forces had struck about 450 targets in the tiny, densely populated Gaza Strip, signalling the continued intensity of a campaign that has already led to widespread civilian casualties and mass displacements.

Israel also dropped leaflets over parts of Gaza with a biblical warning to Hamas leaders that it would take "a life for a life, an eye for an eye."

A day after troops rounded up hundreds of Palestinians for questioning about suspected ties to Hamas, an Israeli government spokesman suggested that practice would continue.

The first images of such roundups emerged Thursday from the northern town of Beit Lahiya, showing dozens of men kneeling or sitting in the streets, stripped down to their underwear; their hands bound behind their backs and some with their heads bowed.

Israel has vowed to crush the military capabilities of Hamas, which rules Gaza, and remove it from power following the group's October 7 attack that sparked the war.

Israel's air and ground campaign initially focused on the northern half of Gaza, leading hundreds of thousands of residents to flee south. Intense battles continued in parts of the north in recent days.

"Airstrikes and random artillery shelling have continued intensely since last night until this morning," said Hassan Al Najjar, a journalist speaking by phone from northern Gaza. UN monitors said Israeli troops reportedly detained men and boys from the age of 15 in a school-turned-shelter in the town of Beit Lahiya, in the north.

Eylon Levy, an Israeli government spokesman, said Friday that authorities were questioning the detainees—who he said were picked up in Hamas strongholds—to determine whether they were members of the militant group.



Palestinians displaced by the Israeli ground offensive on the Gaza Strip arrive in the Muwasi area on Thursday.

Those detained were "military-aged men who were discovered in areas that civilians were supposed to have evacuated weeks ago," Levy said, indicating there would be more such sweeps going forward as troops move from north to south.

In central Gaza, leaflets were dropped on the refugee camps of Nuseirat and Maghazi with a message for Hamas officials.

"To Hamas leaders: A life for a life, an eye for an eye and whoever started is to blame. If you punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith you were afflicted," the leaflet read, using verses from the Muslim holy book, the Quran, that are similar to a warning in the Old Testament.

There has also been a dramatic surge in deadly military raids and an increase on restrictions on Palestinian residents in the occupied West Bank since the start of the war.

Israeli forces stormed into a refugee camp in the West Bank on Friday to arrest suspected Palestinian militants, unleashing fighting with local

gunmen in which six Palestinians were killed, health officials said. The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment on the operation.

Earlier this week, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres used a rarely exercised power to warn the Security Council of an impending "humanitarian catastrophe," and Arab and predominantly Muslim nations have called for a vote Friday on a Council resolution to demand an immediate cease-fire.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, appears likely to block any UN effort to halt the fighting, which was triggered by the deadly October 7 attack by Hamas militants on southern Israel. Still, US concern over the devastation is growing. US officials told Israel ahead of the expansion of its ground offensive to southern Gaza several days ago that it must limit civilian deaths and displacement, saying too many Palestinians were killed when it obliterated much of Gaza City and surrounding areas in the north.

Over the past week, Israeli forces

expanded their ground offensive into southern Gaza, with a focus on Khan Younis, the territory's second largest city. On Friday, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society said Israel's air force attacked a home facing the society's office in Khan Younis. It did not give details about casualties.

Medhat Abbas, a spokesperson for the Health Ministry in Hamas-controlled Gaza, reported a strike in the city of Deir al-Balah in central Gaza, saying it killed and wounded a number of people but gave no exact numbers.

The military says it makes every effort to spare civilians and accuses Hamas of using them as human shields as the militants fight in dense residential areas.

With the entire Gaza Strip under military assault, tens of thousands of people displaced by the fighting have packed into the border city of Rafah, in the far south of the Gaza Strip, and Muwasi, a nearby patch of barren coastline that Israel has declared a safe zone.

Ukrainian troops train in Poland for harsh winter warfare

REUTERS
WEDRZYN, POLAND, DEC 8

In a snow-covered field in western Poland, Ukrainian soldiers are being trained in trench warfare, just days before being sent to the front in what has become a grinding war of attrition against Russia.

Reuters was among a number of media organisations invited this week to watch the training, which was conducted by soldiers from Poland, France and Belgium, in Wedrzyn, around 40 kilometres from the German border.

"Most of the people have actually no military experience and they are taught how to execute some basic tactics," said one Ukrainian soldier. "We are taught how to use weapons in urban areas and in trenches."

The training was conducted by the Combined Arms Training Command, which was established as part of the European Union's efforts to aid Ukraine's military. Exercises have been held in 24 out of the bloc's 27 member states. "We will keep adapting because the situation on the battlefield is changing every day," said Lieutenant General Michiel van der Laan, Director General European Union Military Staff.

Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 and now controls nearly a fifth of its territory. A Ukrainian counterof-

Operations could be further complicated by the weather as the bitter winter cold sets in.

ensive, under way since June, has made no major breakthrough.

Ukraine's Commander-in-Chief General Valery Zaluzhnyi has said the war is moving towards a new stage of static and attritional fighting which could allow Moscow to rebuild its military power. Operations could be further complicated by the weather as the bitter winter cold sets in.

"I would say that winter is the most demanding season when it comes to the war. It severely limits our movement and manoeuvrability while the enemy clearly sees us through heat cameras and drones," said the Ukrainian soldier.

A second Ukrainian soldier said the training the troops were receiving in Poland would help them make progress in the counteroffensive.

"Fighting in the trenches is one of the most important elements in this war... I think that improving skills in this area will help our soldiers succeed on the battlefield," he said.

Chinese fighters, balloon cross Taiwan Strait a month before election

REUTERS
TAIPEI, DEC 8

Taiwan said on Friday that 12 Chinese fighter jets and a suspected weather balloon had crossed the Taiwan Strait's sensitive median line, in a ratcheting up of tensions about a month before the island's presidential election.

Democratically governed Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, has complained for the past four years of regular Chinese military patrols and drills near the island.

Taiwan holds presidential and parliamentary polls on January 13 and campaigning has kicked into high gear with how the next government handles relations with China a major point of contention.

Taiwan's defence ministry, offering details of Chinese missions on Thursday night, said 12 fighter jets had crossed the median line, that once served as an unofficial barrier between the two sides but which Chinese planes now regularly fly over.

In an unusual addition to its statement, the ministry said that around midday on Thursday it had also detected a Chinese balloon 101 nautical miles (187 km) southwest of the northern Taiwanese city of Keelung, which travelled eastward for about an hour, crossing the strait before disappearing.

Taiwan Defence Minister Chiu Kuocheng told reporters at parliament



People look across the strait from a lighthouse at the 68-nautical-mile scenic spot, one of mainland China's closest points to the island of Taiwan, Fujian province, China, on April 9.

that their "initial understanding" was it was probably a weather balloon, but felt the ministry had an obligation to report this to be public.

"Otherwise, if after other units or other countries have reported it, everyone will wonder why (we) did not report it. The defence ministry requires all our subordinate units to have a grasp of the enemy situation," he added.

China's defence ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

The potential for China to use of balloons for spying became a global issue in February when the United States shot down what it said was a Chinese surveillance balloon but which China said was a civilian craft

Armenia, Azerbaijan agree to take steps towards normalisation

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
YEREVAN, DEC 8

Arch-foes Armenia and Azerbaijan said Thursday they would exchange prisoners of war and work towards normalising their relations, in a joint statement hailed by the European Union and the United States as a breakthrough after three decades of conflict over disputed territory.

The Caucasus neighbours have long fought over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which Azerbaijan reclaimed after a lightning offensive against Armenian separatists in September.

Both countries have said a peace agreement could be signed by the end of the year, but peace talks—mediated separately by the European Union, the United States and Russia—have seen little progress.

The two sides agreed in Thursday's joint statement to seize "a historical chance to achieve a long-awaited peace in the region". "The two countries reconfirm their intention to normalize relations and to reach the peace treaty," the statement said.

Baku will free 32 Armenian prisoners of war, while Yerevan will release two Azerbaijani servicemen, according to the statement. They also agreed to continue discussions on "more confidence building measures, effective in the near future".

As a sign of good faith, Armenia announced it was withdrawing its bid to host UN-led climate talks next year, paving the way for Azerbaijan's candidacy.

The annual negotiations on fighting climate change, known as COPs, rotate among regions and were due to be hosted by an Eastern European country in 2024 after this year's COP28 in Dubai.

"As a sign of good gesture, the Republic of Armenia supports the bid of the Republic of Azerbaijan to host (COP29) by withdrawing its own candidacy," the statement read.

"Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan do hope that the other countries within the Eastern European Group will also support Azerbaijan's bid to host."

A grouping of Eastern European nations must unanimously choose the COP29 host, but Russia is reportedly opposing an EU member holding the event as tensions with the bloc run high during the war in Ukraine.

Dozens of Zimbabwe elephants die as climate change dries up Hwange park



An official inspects the tusk of a dead elephant in Hwange National Park on Thursday.

REUTERS
HWANGE NATIONAL PARK, ZIMBABWE, DEC 8

Dozens of elephants have died of thirst in Zimbabwe's popular Hwange National Park, and conservationists fear losing more as a drought caused by climate change and the El Nino global weather pattern dries up watering holes.

The seasonal El Nino, which causes hotter, drier weather throughout the year, has been exacerbated by climate breakdown, scientists say, a cause of concern at the ongoing COP28 discussions on climate action in Dubai.

Hwange has no major river running through it, and animals rely on solar-powered boreholes, Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's rainy season runs from November to March, but it has barely rained so far this year.

Parks and Wildlife Authorities (Zimparks) official said.

"We are relying on artificial water because our surface water has declined. Since elephants are water dependent, we are recording more deaths," Zimparks principal ecologist at Hwange National Park, Daphine Madhlamoto, told Reuters.

The elephant population in Hwange is 45,000, and a fully grown elephant requires 200 litres (53 gallons) of water daily. But with water sources dwindling, the solar-powered pumps at the 104 boreholes or wells have not been able to draw enough water.

Reuters saw dozens of elephant carcasses near watering holes, and park officials said other elephants have died in the bush providing ready prey for lions and vultures.

"The park has been witnessing the impact of climate change. We have been receiving less rains," Madhlamoto said.

Zimbabwe's rainy season runs from November to March, but it has barely

rained so far this year. The drought is expected to continue into 2024, according to Zimbabwe Meteorological Services.

Zimparks said animals are being forced to walk long distances to search for water and food, and several herds of elephants having crossed into neighbouring Botswana. Conservation groups are trying to supply extra water by desilting watering holes and pumping more water through solar wells to help deal with the crisis.

Zimbabwe has an elephant population of nearly 100,000, but the capacity only for a little more than half of them, meaning the national parks are overwhelmed, Zimparks said.

FOREX

US Dollar	133.72
Euro	144.18
Pound Sterling	168.27
Swiss Franc	152.88
Australian Dollar	88.36
Canadian Dollar	98.54
Singapore Dollar	99.89
Japanese Yen (10)	9.25
Chinese Yuan	18.67
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.65
Qatari Riyal	36.67
Thai Bhat	3.78
UAE Dhiram	36.41
Malaysian Ringgit	28.67
Korean Won (100)	10.20

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 118,800
Silver	Rs 1,460

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

India's central bank holds rates as inflation eases

MUMBAI: India's central bank again left interest rates unchanged on Friday, saying that easing inflation and a stable financial outlook had tempered economic headwinds. The benchmark repo rate—the level at which the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lends to commercial banks—has stood at 6.50 percent since February, following a series of hikes to curb rising prices last year. The Indian economy “presents a picture of resilience”, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said in a press conference. “Fundamentals remain strong.” Inflation spiked at 7.4 percent in July but was now five percent, Das said, adding that the bank had raised its GDP growth forecast for 2023-24 to seven percent, up from an earlier 6.5 percent. (AFP)

China's Xi says economic recovery 'still at critical stage'

BEIJING: President Xi Jinping said that China's economic recovery is at a “critical stage”, state broadcaster CCTV reported Friday, as sluggish domestic activity and property sector woes drag on a post-pandemic rebound. “At present, the country's economic recovery is still at a critical stage,” Xi said at a meeting of China's Communist Party Politburo, the country's top decision-making body, according to CCTV. Xi urged measures to boost the economy, saying that “the development situation facing the country is complex, with increasing adverse factors in the international political and economic environment”. “It is necessary to focus on accelerating the construction of a modern industrial system, expand domestic demand, (and) prevent and defuse risks,” said Xi. (AFP)

US sets 2028 as target for first high-speed train

WASHINGTON: The United States will have its first high-speed train—between Los Angeles and Las Vegas—in 2028, the Biden administration said Friday as it unveiled a series of major rail investments. This project called Brightline West, from the name of the Florida-based company that will build and operate it, will receive up to \$3 billion in financing, the administration said in a statement. This high-speed line spanning 218 miles (350 kilometers) between Las Vegas and downtown Los Angeles is supposed to slash the current five-hour car journey time to two hours and 40 minutes. US President Joe Biden, who is a big fan of train travel from his days as a senator commuting to Washington from Delaware, was scheduled to visit Las Vegas Friday to make the formal announcement of this line and other infrastructure upgrades that will receive federal money. (AFP)

Spain chief Calvino to head EU's lending arm

MADRID: Spain's Economy Minister Nadia Calvino, the newly-named European Investment Bank (EIB) chief, is a politician who is well-versed in EU lore and a pragmatist with experience of navigating power struggles. Since its creation in 1958, the EIB has had seven presidents, “all of them men, and never a Spaniard,” the 55-year-old economist said while putting her name forward to become the first woman to run what is effectively the EU's financial arm. And she's done it: Calvino was appointed to the EIB's top job at a meeting of European finance ministers, beating out Denmark's Margrethe Vestager. She will replace Germany's Werner Hoyer whose second six-year term as EIB president finishes at the year's end. (AFP)

After wheat, rice and sugar, India bans onion exports

Friday's ban, according to the market observers, would send the price of the vegetable to over Rs200 per kg in Nepal's retail market. It is already in short supply.

POST REPORT KATHMANDU, DEC 8

After wheat, rice and sugar, India on Wednesday added dry onions to its list of food staples slapped with sweeping export restrictions.

The move aimed at containing domestic prices ahead of the national election next year will greatly affect Nepal.

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

Following the Indian ban, the Kalimati Fruits and Vegetables Market Development Board, the country's largest vegetable market, has removed dry onion from its price list on its website.

Many online groceries and supermarkets have started placing “stock not available” tags on their website since Friday.

The ban, which became effective on Friday, will last until March 31, according to the notification issued by India's Directorate General of Foreign Trade. The notification, however, says cargoes of vegetables that started loading before the notification can still be exported.

The export of onions will also be allowed based on permission granted by the government of India to other countries based on the request of their governments, according to the notification. A similar provision exists for rice, wheat and sugar shipments.

The board said that on December 1, Nepal imported 98.94 tonnes of onions from India, which dropped to 38 tonnes on December 3.

The imports further dropped to 25.5 tonnes on December 5. From December 6, or Wednesday, the board kept the



POST FILE PHOTO

In mid-November, the price reached Rs150 per kg. Before the minimum export price, India had imposed a 40 percent export duty on onions.

onion price list out of its website.

Mohan Baniya, president of the Potato, Onion Import Export and Wholesaler Association, said until Thursday, they have been importing around 15 trucks of onion [a truck can ship 25 tonnes] to the Kathmandu Valley. “Today [on Friday], 3-4 trucks are entering through different customs points,” he said. “These may be the last consignments of onions.”

Nepali traders say that an export ban on onions was imminent because of the low production in India.

In the first week of November, ahead of the Tihar festival, onions suddenly became pricier after India slapped a minimum export price to check shipments and ensure adequate supplies for its domestic consumers.

After the minimum export price was slapped, the wholesale price of

onion jumped to Rs125 per kg from Rs75 per kg previously.

In mid-November, the price reached Rs150 per kg. Before the minimum export price, India had imposed a 40 percent export duty on onions.

Friday's ban, according to the market observers, would send the price to over Rs200 per kg in retail as the market has started to see a shortage of onion, which is an essential in Nepali

kitchens. Onion currently costs Rs120 per kg in retail.

Officials at the Kalimati market say that if the government fails to request India and ease the supply through the quota system, there could be havoc.

In Nepal, potatoes, onions and other daily consumable farm products are supposed to be exempt from VAT under the Tax Act of 1996. However, the government amended the law through the Financial Bill 2023 and removed 170 goods from the tax-free imports list in the current budget.

Nepali consumers pay taxes totaling 23.5 percent on potatoes, onions and other vegetables, fruits and food items—9 percent agriculture service charge, 1.5 percent advance tax and 13 percent VAT.

The duty imposed by the world's biggest exporter of onions is aimed at dampening local prices ahead of key state elections.

According to the Department of Customs, Nepal imported 180,190 tonnes of onions worth Rs6.75 billion from India in the last fiscal year.

The onions sold in Nepal come mainly from Nashik, Indore, Kanpur and Gujarat in India. Nepal depends on imported onions as domestic production is negligible.

China is another source of onions for Nepal, but the Chinese product is mostly used for making salads, mainly in hotels and restaurants.

In November 2019, the price of onion hit a new high of Rs250 per kg in Kathmandu Valley after India slapped a ban on onion exports in September of the same year to maintain domestic availability.

The ban caused a severe shortage of onions all over Asia including Nepal. The embargo was lifted in March 2020. India again stopped onion exports from September 2020 to January 2021.

Solar grids offer clean-power hope to rural Africa

Tripling renewable energy, including solar, is on the agenda at COP28 climate talks taking place in Dubai.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE SABON GIDA (NIGERIA), DEC 8

Working as a nurse in her rural Nigerian village, Andat Datau faced more than her share of challenges. But delivering babies by torchlight was always hard.

Off-grid for years, her Sabon Gida village relied on diesel generators or lamps and, like millions of other Africans, Datau often got no light at all.

But a year ago, Datau's village in north central Nasarawa State hooked up to a solar-powered mini-grid supplying half of her community's households and most businesses with almost constant electricity.

Sabon Gida now has more light at times than Lagos, Nigeria's economic capital, where many get by on around half a day's power—at times much less—from the unstable network.

Mini-grids—small power stations usually supplying rural communities—are not new. But the drop in solar technology costs over a decade has prompted a growth in clean energy mini-grids, with rural Africa poised to benefit the most.

“It was stressful holding torchlights,” Datau told AFP at her clinic.

“Even giving injections without electric light would make it difficult

for us.” Nearly 600 million Africans live without electricity access, and in Nigeria alone that figure is 90 million—about 40 percent of the population in the continent's most populous nation.

And while Africa may have the most potential to generate solar power, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), the continent lags behind installed capacity.

Africa is responsible for the smallest amount of greenhouse gas emissions.

Tripling renewable energy, including solar, is on the agenda at COP28 climate talks taking place in Dubai.

Africa is responsible for the smallest amount of greenhouse gas emissions but is often impacted the most while also under pressure to avoid fossil-based development.

Solar mini-grids are not a low-scale solution: The World Bank and IEA see them as one of the most viable ways to get fossil-free access to electricity for rural sub-Saharan Africa.

In a report this year, the bank said solar mini-grid use expanded from only 500 installed in 2010 to more than 3,000 installed now. Another 9,000 are seen coming online in a few years.

Still, scaling up solar in Africa faces huge challenges, including securing investors wary of its viability, inflationary pressures on equipment, better state financing and clear policies to promote its use.

To meet the sustainable development goals of bringing power to 380 million in Africa by 2030, 160,000 mini-grids are needed. The current pace sees only 12,000 new grids by then, according to the World Bank's Energy Sector Management Assistance Program.

Already though for Sabon Gida—a rice-farming community an hour from Nasarawa state capital Lafia—a year of solar power has brought changes beyond light to Datau's small clinic. Sabon Gida is one community in a private-public initiative involving the World Bank and US-based mini-grid maker Husk Power Systems with the country's Rural Electrification Agency.

“Light... it was only for the rich before, they were the ones using power generators in their homes,” Dauda Yakubu, a traditional Sabon Gida community chief, said. Solar is now the cheapest source of energy for utili-

ty-scale power—an attractive proposition for Africa where poor investment and badly maintained power networks often mean limited energy.

The World Bank says Nigeria's “market-driven” approach to solar mini-grids already helped bring more than 100 projects online, while Ethiopia and Zambia have passed new regulations to attract private investment.

Kenya also introduced favourable regulations for a public-private initiative for 150 mini-grids, the bank said.

“Solar mini-grids are integral to Nigeria's energy transition plan,” Abba Aliya at Nigeria's Rural Electrification Agency said.

“The government views this model as the most effective means to rapidly increase electricity access.”

Solar in Africa still needs more work, especially financing and creating profitable models. States often lack funds for large-scale projects while small-scale projects aren't viable for the private sector, said Abel Gayia, a researcher for Abuja-based think tank Clean Technology Hub.

Still, combining new technology such as electric transport and green hydrogen with solar mini-grids could make projects more attractive as well as efforts to “bundle” mini-grid investments together, he said.

CNI's Nepal's Startup Fest slated for December 23

POST REPORT KATHMANDU, DEC 8

The Young Entrepreneurs Forum, an arm of the Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI), is organising the second edition of Nepal's Startup Fest on December 23 in Kathmandu.

The event aims to promote startups by attracting investments with innovative ideas and promoting the ‘Make in Nepal’ campaign, the organiser said on Friday.

More than 250 startups have submitted proposals. Among them, 10 to 12 startups will be shortlisted and will get potential investors, following their presentations, to launch their projects, according to the organiser.

Tele Venture, NIMB Ace Capital, Reliable Venture, Lotus Holdings, Alfa Plus Ventures, Himalayan Capital, Team Ventures, Global Equity Fund, Aadyanta Fund Management and Neoteric Nepal have committed capital investments in the startup fest.

The fest is being organised in coordination with the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies and the National Planning Commission.

The first edition of Startup Fest was held in 2022. It drew Rs240.50 million in investments.

Fed up with poor pay, Vietnam workers turn to TikTok

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BAC GIANG (VIETNAM), DEC 8

Vi Thi Anh spent half a decade doing monotonous low-paid work in industrial hubs near Vietnam's capital Hanoi, assembling mobile phones for global electronics companies including Samsung.

Then she discovered she could earn vastly more hawking food products to thousands of followers as one of the country's growing cadre of TikTok livestreamers.

Communist Vietnam's supply of cheap labour has attracted some of the world's top companies, but climbing salary expectations have enticed many young people to leap into the exploding business of social commerce—whether to boost their incomes or to extricate themselves from dead-end jobs.

Anh, 23, said she earned just \$400 per month in her “boring” factory job, barely enough to cover her rent and food, before she was laid off in 2021 thanks to falling orders from the West.

She found another factory job, but soon “turned to full-time livestreaming so I could earn more for my family,” Anh told AFP, the thick rice noodles she sells online laid out behind her, drying in the sun.

On her TikTok channel, which has over 350,000 followers and 15 million likes, orders fly in for the \$4 noodle packs, made by her uncle.

“This pack of noodles is so colourful, but completely safe and delicious,” Anh tells her audience, pointing to red, yellow and purple bundles.

Between June and September this



AFP/ISS

This photo taken on November 7 shows a mobile phone being used to shoot a video of TikToker Vi Thi Anh taking noodles to drying for TikTok at her workshop in Bac Giang province.

year, more than 118,000 people, mostly in the garment and footwear sector, lost their jobs in Vietnam, according to official figures.

At her home in northern Bac Giang province, Anh said that like she did, workers fear “that if they are laid off, they have no way of earning a living”.

Livestreaming, she said, offers a way to ease that worry.

Nearly 80 percent of Vietnam's 100 million people have access to the internet, and according to a recent survey by the data agency Statista, a similarly high percentage of Gen Z use TikTok.

“Farmers, workers and students can easily start their own channels,” said Nguyen Doan Ky, co-founder of the DC 3 Do agency, which offers social media and livestreaming services.

“Online selling used to be only for businesses or shop owners. Now it is an opportunity for everyone.”

As in neighbouring China, where farmers are making big money on TikTok, e-commerce is booming in Vietnam, with sales growth averaging 30 percent year over year for the last decade.

Vietnam is one of the world's top 10 growth markets and turnover is

expected to reach more than \$20 billion this year, according to the ministry of industry and trade. Coming from the country's rural and mountainous north, Luong Quang Dai never imagined he would become an influencer with 420,000 followers online.

He earns 10 times as much as he did before livestreaming thanks to his popularity on Tiktok and Facebook, selling dried bananas, vermicelli noodles and a tea mix made in his neighbourhood.

“We can save up to 100 million dong per month (\$4,000) and at the same time help create jobs and a stable income for relatives and friends,” the 33-year-old told AFP from his farmhouse in the forests of Bac Kan province. In his youth, Dai spent two years trying to find a route out of the hard, spare life of a farmer, moving to the city in a familiar story of urban migration.

But failing to earn enough for even basic necessities, he returned to his home in the countryside, where two-thirds of Vietnamese still live.

In addition to farming, he began to post videos on social media of him and his wife feeding chickens and harvesting bamboo in the depths of the forest. The simplicity of the posts soon earned him an enormous following, and he began to sell his produce in huge quantities.

“Social media has changed my life completely,” Dai told AFP.

Tran Thanh Nam, an education psychology expert, cautioned that although social commerce has become popular, TikTokers needed to keep updating their skill sets.

“Businesses that take off in a short space of time... can also turn into failures quickly,” he said. But he understood the appeal, he added.

“Becoming a worker in a factory or industrial zone is a way to use up all one's youth and health... and they lose a lot of other opportunities.”

मोटरसाइकल हरायो
मिति २०८०/०७/१८ गते दिउसी अन्दाजी १६:१५ बने का ति टोखा न.पा. वडा ८ मैरीगाउँवाट Engine No. DKXCMG24311, Chassis No. MD2A13EX7MCG92641 नाम्दनी प्रदेश ०२, ०३२३ १८०३५ नंको २२०सि ति को कालो रातो रंगको पत्थर मोटरसाइकल हराएकोले पाउनु हुने महानुभावले नजिकको प्रहरीचौकी वा निम्न ठेगानामा खबर गरिदिनु हुन विनम्र अनुरोध गर्दछु।
सवारी घनी : मञ्जो कमार दनुवार
ठेगाना : हत्ये ८, सिन्धुली
सम्पर्क : ९८४९२०२५४१

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SPORTS | MEDLEY

Nepal open ACC U-19 Asia Cup campaign with loss

Dev Khanal's side suffer a seven-wicket defeat against Pakistan. Holders India beat Afghanistan by seven wickets in another Group A match.



Nepal's Gulshan Jha celebrates a wicket of Pakistan during the ACC U-19 Asia Cup in Dubai on Friday. (Right) Nepal batter Uttam Thapa Magar raises his bat after scoring a half-century.

SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, DEC 8

Nepal national U-19 cricket team lost their opening match of the ACC U-19 Asia Cup to Pakistan by seven wickets at the ICC Academy Oval-2 in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates on Friday.

Pakistan's Azan Awais and wicket keeper and captain Saad Baig scored half centuries to help their side comfortably chase down a target of 153 with 142 balls remaining.

Nepal, invited to bat first after los-

ing the toss, were bundled out for 152 in 47.2 overs following a batting debacle that was triggered by a fiery spell from towering Pakistan paceman Mohammad Zeeshan who returned the match figures of 6-19 to record the second-best bowling figures for Pakistan U-19 in youth one-day internationals. Shaheen Shah Afridi's 6-15 against Ireland in July, 2018 remains the best figure by a Pakistani bowler at U-19 level.

Amir Hassan, who took 2-15, struck early, removing opener Tilak Bhandari

for seven in the third over before Ubaid Shah trapped Aakash Tirthpathi leg before in the eighth over.

Nepal were already in big trouble at 46-5 in the 17th over, with Zeeshan striking twice to remove captain Dev Khanal for a duck with his fourth ball in the 12th over and Bhandari's opening partner Arjun Kumal for 21 in the 16th over.

Nepal senior team regular Gulshan Jha failed to impress with the bat after being bowled out by Ali Asfand (1-43) for 1 in the 17th over.

Uttam Thapa Magar hit 51 runs off 76 balls and Dipesh Kandel made 31 runs facing 59 deliveries in their 68-run partnership to steady the ship. Thapa Magar hit three boundaries and two maximums.

But Zeeshan returned to break their stand dismissing Kandel in the 34th over before polishing off the tail, sending back Bishal Bikram KC (1), Bipin Rawal (0) and Aakash Chand (5).

In reply, Nepal took two early wickets with the help of Jha, who caught and bowled Shamyil Hussain in the

third ball of the first over and had Shahzaib Khan caught by Kandel.

But Awais and Baig resisted the Nepali bowlers to make short work of the target. Awais played an unbeaten 56 runs off 62 balls and Baig hit 50 off 56 balls to put on a 108-run stand to take Pakistan close to victory.

After Baig fell to Tirthpathi in the 25th over—caught by Subash Bhandari, Zeeshan (not out 20 off eight balls) hit two fours off Jha before wrapping up the victory with a stylish six.

Record eight-time champions India also made a flying start to their U-19 Asia Cup campaign with a seven-wicket victory over Afghanistan in the other Group A match.

India, after electing to field first, bowled out Afghanistan for 173 after Raj Limbani and Arshin Kulkarni took three wickets each.

Afghanistan opener Jamshid Zadran top scored for his team with 43 runs off 75 balls.

In the run chase, Kulkarni cracked an unbeaten 70 runs off 105 balls and Musheer Khan made not out 48 to guide India to 174-3.

India have won eight of the nine editions of the U-19 50-over tournament since its inaugural edition in 1989.

Hosts UAE take on Bangladesh and Japan face Sri Lanka in the Group B fixtures on Saturday.

The top two teams from each group will progress to semi-finals.

Nepal next face Afghanistan on Sunday before concluding their group campaign against India on Tuesday.

ACC U-19 ASIA CUP

GROUP A, ICC ACADEMY OVAL 2

TOSS: Pakistan U-19, field first.

Nepal U-19: 152 (47.2/50 overs)

Uttam Thapa Magar 51 (76), Dipesh Kandel 31 (59); Mohammad Zeeshan 9.2-1-19-6

Pakistan U-19: 153-3 (26.2/50 overs)

Azan Awais 56* (62), Saad Baig 50 (56); Gulsan Jha 8-1-54-2

Pakistan U-19 win by seven wickets.

GROUP A, ICC ACADEMY

TOSS: India U-19, field first.

Afghanistan U-19: 173 (50/50 overs)

Jamshid Zadran 43 (75); Arshin Kulkarni 8-0-29-3

Raj Limbani 10-0-46-3

India U-19: 174-3 (37.3/50 overs)

Arshin Kulkarni 70* (105), Musheer Khan 48* (53)

India U-19 win by seven wickets.

GROUP A

STANDINGS

Table with columns: TEAM, P, W, L, T, N/R, PT. Rows: Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Nepal.

NEPAL SUPER LEAGUE

RESULT

Table with columns: Team, Score, Opponent. Row: Birgunj United 0-0 Jhapa.

SATURDAY'S FIXTURE

Table with columns: Team, Time, Opponent. Rows: Dhangadhi 13:00 Sporting Ilam, Butwal Lumbini 17:00 Kathmandu Rayzrs.

STANDINGS

Table with columns: Team, P, W, D, L, GF, GA, PT. Rows: Pokhara, Dhangadhi, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Chitwan, Butwal, Ilam, Jhapa, Birgunj.

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

RESULTS

Table with columns: Team, Score, Opponent. Rows: Everton 3-0 Newcastle, Tottenham 1-2 West Ham, Brighton 2-1 Brentford, Palace 0-2 Bournemouth, Fulham 5-0 Forest O, Sheffield 0-2 Liverpool.

STANDINGS (TOP FIVE)

Table with columns: Team, P, W, D, L, GF, GA, PT. Rows: Arsenal, Liverpool, Aston Villa, Man City, Tottenham.

Klopp happy with Liverpool progress despite hurdles

REUTERS LONDON, DEC 8

Liverpool boss Juergen Klopp is satisfied with his team's progress in a season of transition where they brought in a host of new recruits, with the Anfield club sitting second in the standings after 15 games.

Liverpool's engine room was rebuilt in the close season with five midfielders leaving the club, while injuries have also made things difficult, but Klopp's side have weathered the storm to sit two points behind leaders Arsenal.

Although they were dealt another blow after losing Joel Matip to a potential season-ending injury, Klopp said other clubs could also be in the same boat with games coming thick and fast in the busiest period of the season.

"I wanted to create a basis early on in pre-season and then to become a real team, you have to overcome diffi-

culties. We got that with red cards, being down in games - and we could overcome that," Klopp told reporters on Friday.

"I am just happy with the development up until this point. We had to replace some of the strongest characters in world football. Our new leadership group are all experienced, world class footballers, so that's helpful.

"All teams are probably only two injuries away from a real problem, we're in the middle of a tricky period with a lot of football and a lot of opportunities."

Saturday's early kickoff at Crystal Palace offers Liverpool the chance provisionally to go top of the standings, but they will be without injured midfielder Alexis Mac Allister while goalkeeper Alisson is still a doubt.

Klopp said Liverpool could have got a better points haul at this stage but added that the title race is tight with several contenders.



Jhapa's Yogesh Gurung (left) and Birgunj United's William Opoku Asiedu run for the ball during the Nepal Super League at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu on Friday. Jhapa and Birgunj played a goalless draw.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19) A sweet and intimate energy fills the air this morning, dear Aries, inspiring emotional exchange, prolonged cuddle sessions, and the joys of sleeping in. A desire for leisure drives you, though you should take care to mind your spending.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) You'll crave an intimate audience, dear Cancer, regarding the perfect morning breakfast in bed with that special someone or brunch with your bestie. Your creative influence will reach further than you might anticipate.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) A bit of retail therapy may be in order this morning, dear Libra, giving you the cosmic green light to indulge. This celestial union can also help you reclaim stability within your romantic life, though you may need to let go of disappointment from the past.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) A sentimental and inclusive energy surrounds you this morning, dear Capricorn. Use this energy to expand your social sphere, reaching out to anyone you feel connected to but haven't gotten to know that well. Just be mindful to keep personal secrets under wraps.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) Allow your cares to melt away with the dawn of another weekend, sweet Taurus, fully romancing yourself and anyone lucky enough to call you their companion. Don't hesitate to go big when immersing yourself in art and beauty.

LEO (July 23-August 22) Consider hosting an intimate gathering from the comfort of home as the, dear Leo, putting you in a nurturing and loving mood. These vibes pair well with cooking breakfast for loved ones, though a restorative bath or stretching session offers an alternative path.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) The moon continues its journey through your sign, dear Scorpio, forming a celestial union that brings a harmonious start to your weekend. Take a moment to check in with your desires, using this cosmic climate as an excuse to spoil yourself.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) Give yourself props for all the achievements you've reached, dear Aquarius. This celestial union can help you conquer any imposter syndrome you've been battling, and you'll have a chance to release feelings of self-doubt that were instilled in you as a child.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) Avoid passive requests for assistance, dear Gemini, trusting that loved ones will follow through for you when you are direct about what you need. This cosmic climate also encourages self-care and acts of wellness, giving your body a chance to restore itself.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22) You'll have the ability to speak poetically and intensely this morning, dear Virgo. Be free with your words if they are kind, especially when directed toward that special someone. Spiritual reinforcements will find you.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) Focus on nurturing yourself and healing wounds, dear Archer. This cosmic climate also encourages sharing with someone you can trust, reminding you that you do not have to traverse darkness alone. Avoid nitpicking yourself or others.

PISCES (February 19-March 20) High vibrations accompany you into the weekend, sweet Pisces. You'll find that it's easy to give and receive love, though you should find time to connect with a higher power as well. Your intuition could feel slightly overwhelming.

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS 1 Flanders of fiction 5 Dressed like Superman 10 Summit 14 Early Ron 22 Hidden passenger 24 Creative 25 Baseball's — Musial 26 Fertile place in a desert 30 Bury 34 Cook in oil 37 Tex-Mex fare 39 Underwater explorer 40 Persist 42 Lower oneself 44 "It's all the — to me" 45 Bitter tasting 47 Fervent hope 49 Not high 50 School day division 52 Neither hot nor cold

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

Crossword grid with filled-in words: LAMP, UBOAT, VAN, OLEO, NORIA, SALE, FOAL, BOARS, TITI, TELLER, ETERNAL, LEROS, DEVI, MANIKIN, REPAIST, DEWEELY, NEVER, ALAENOMAN, SOLE, DORMS, PRODILK, ONDECK, HERALDS, THEATRE, HASTEN, HULL, AGAVE, TALE, AGED, TIBBERAS, TOM, ESSEN, RENT.

- DOWN 1 "America's — Wanted" 2 Musical drama 3 Metric unit 4 Simple shelter (nyph.) 5 Legal tender 6 Sharp — — tack 7 Stones 8 Prepares manuscripts 9 Mean 10 Legendary lost continent 11 Shipmates 12 Homer Simpson's mom 13 Circular current 21 Blue-green 23 Fairy godmother's baton 27 Mournful 28 Frosted 29 Cousin to a blouse 31 ellipse 32 Office note 33 Make tea 34 Dither 35 Event at Pimlico 36 River in Belgium 38 Pointed arch 41 Three-cornered hat (var.) 43 Snooze 46 Ring event 48 Silent performer 51 Fears greatly 53 Peril 55 Beatles' " — — Be" 57 Lasso 58 Is appropriate for 59 Song for two 60 Birthright seller 61 Action word 62 Distant body 63 Swelled 64 Dance movement 67 Literary collection

Large empty crossword grid with numbers 1-74.

SUDOKU

9x9 Sudoku grid with some numbers filled in.

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

9x9 Sudoku grid showing the solution to yesterday's puzzle.

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Between love and despair

Subin Bhattarai's 'Priya Sufi' explores the human experience, delving into themes of love, resilience and the significance of facing life's challenges.



Priya Sufi
Author: Subin Bhattarai
Year: 2018
Publisher: FinePrint

part, where they struggle to express their love, risks becoming monotonous. My initial assumption of this being just another love story was almost correct until it wasn't.

Bhattarai's writing style is gripping and enticing. From start to finish, the reader embarks on an emotional journey. The ease of words coupled with a firm expression of emotions makes the read truly worthwhile. Additionally, the nuanced portrayal of characters allows readers to be active participants in their lives, not just passive observers.

The love story between Sada and Sarthak unfolds smoothly, providing comfort to both until an illness disrupts their lives. This significant event, wrapped in suspense, creates tension, driving the narrative forward. Bhattarai's skillful pacing keeps readers engaged and eager to uncover the unfolding mysteries.

Sada's future appears bleak as she battles illness, and Sarthak, unable to be her constant caretaker, gradually withdraws support, leaving Sada emotionally shattered. This sudden shift in their relationship becomes a turning point, thrusting Sada into emotional turmoil and physical vulnerability.

As their connection cools, Sada's sister, Sufi, steps in as a surprising source of support despite their strained history. The pressures of society and gossip from neighbours intensify Sada's struggles, pushing her to contemplate suicide as an escape from her perceived burdensome existence.

The nuanced portrayal of characters makes readers believe they are not just observers but active participants in the characters' lives.

Beyond its intricate narrative, 'Priya Sufi' distinguishes itself through its thematic depth. Bhattarai delicately addresses the sensitive issue of suicide, emphasizing resilience and the importance of confronting life's challenges. The novel becomes a symbol of hope, urging readers, particularly the youth, to face life's complexities with courage and determination.

Sada, burdened by her physical limitations, feels like a weight on her father and sister. The novel powerfully expresses the psychology of a young woman full of zeal and desire, suddenly confined to bed. The storytelling is crafted in a way that deeply resonates with the reader, evoking a profound sense of empathy for the protagonist's struggles.

In terms of character development, Sada's introverted nature and inclination to dwell on the past make her a relatable yet challenging protagonist. In contrast, Sufi's positivity and ability to forgive and forget provide a clear contrast, highlighting the novel's central theme of choosing resilience over despair. Sarthak's character adds another layer, illustrating the impact of a present-focused approach on relationships.

'Priya Sufi' extends beyond the boundaries of a typical novel. Bhattarai, known for his earlier works in the romance genre, takes a bold step in this narrative by blending elements of love, motivation and introspection. The characters' complexity, combined with the novel's overarching message of resilience, establishes it as a significant contribution to Nepali literature. This novel not only engages readers but also prompts them to reflect on life's profound journey.

college lovebirds whose lives take a dramatic turn.

This unique narrative device adds layers of complexity and depth to the storytelling, drawing readers into the interconnected lives of the characters.

At the heart of the story is Sada, a microbiology master's student residing in Budhanilkantha. Her strained relationship with her younger sister, Sufi, becomes a captivating subplot, exploring the com-

plexities of sibling dynamics. Subin Bhattarai adeptly portrays the emotional distance created by jealousy, providing a relatable and authentic dimension to the characters.

The introduction of Sarthak and the gradual development of romance with Sada adds emotional depth to the novel. Their comical conversations and mannerisms entertain, but the prolonged opening



BOOK REVIEW

ANISH GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU

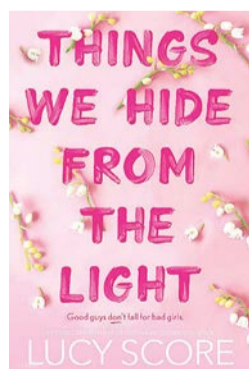
When I began reading 'Priya Sufi', I assumed this would be any other cliché love story, but my patience in continuing with the book proved worthwhile as it was more than just a plain narrative. It was a profound exploration of the human experience, captivating themes of love, resilience and the importance of confronting life's challenges. The novel not only captures the intricate dynamics of familial relationships but also serves as a motivational guide, encouraging readers to seek meaning and purpose in the face of adversity.

The novel's opening scene, set against the backdrop of a broken-down vehicle on the highway from Birgunj, sets the tone for a chance encounter that becomes the linchpin for the entire narrative. The author, through the eyes of a female passenger compelled to share her story, introduces readers to a family grappling with the aftermath of a suicide attempt. The narrator, well-informed about the details, seizes the moment to share the intricate story of Sada and Sarthak, two

BEST-SELLERS | NEW RELEASES

Fiction

1. Things We Hide from the Light by Lucy Score
2. The Berlin Exchange by Joseph Kanon
3. Heart Bones by Colleen Hoover
4. To Paradise by Hanya Yanagihara
5. Victory City by Salman Rushdie



Honeybees and Distant Thunder
Author: RikuOnda (Translated by Philip Gabriel)
Price: Rs1118.40
Publisher: Penguin Random House

'Honeybees and Distant Thunder' orchestrates a touching story of love, courage, and rivalry in a coastal town near Tokyo during a piano competition. Aya, a former prodigy, reunites with childhood friend Masaru and competes alongside the mature Akashi. The wildcard, 16-year-old Jin, adds an unpredictable sweetness to the story. RikuOnda weaves music, bees, and thunder into a vibrant tale, immersing readers in a sensory experience. The novel's unpredictable twists and turns lead to a surprising ending, challenging preconceptions about sacrifice and the true cost of pursuing one's passion. Onda's storytelling prowess shines through in this book.



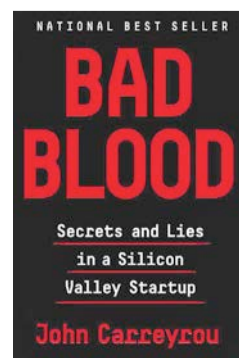
The Love Stories of the Bible Speak
Author: Shannon Bream
Price: Rs1438.40
Publisher: Harper Collins

'The Love Stories of the Bible Speak' by Shannon Bream explores the profound insights on biblical romance, friendship, and faith. From Adam and Eve to David and Jonathan, Bream challenges conventional views, revealing God's intricate design for relationships. In this enlightening journey through the Bible's love stories, Bream skillfully extracts lessons from both the uplifting and challenging aspects of these tales. By doing so, she demonstrates how God's love transcends our earthly understanding, reshaping our perspectives on life, relationships, and each other. This concise guide reminds readers that God's unwavering love sustains and guides.



Let's Talk About Loneliness
Author: Simone Heng
Price: Rs638.40
Publisher: Hay House

Simone Heng's 'Let's Talk About Loneliness' masterfully addresses the paradox of our hyper-connected yet isolating world. As a human connection specialist, Heng draws from her personal journey, leaving a bustling life to care for her mother, to explore the true essence of loneliness. This insightful book breaks down the global loneliness epidemic whilst challenging stereotypes and revealing how technology complicates our sense of connection rather than solving it. With eloquence, Heng also bestows upon readers with guidelines to authentic relationships, importance of distinguishing genuine connections from superficial ones.



Non-Fiction

1. Bad Blood by John Carreyrou
2. What If? by Randall Munroe
3. Spare by Prince Harry
4. Under My Skin by Doris Lessing
5. The Book You Wish Your Parents Had Read by Philippa Perry

Ekta Books



Night Market at The Yellow House

Night Market at The Yellow House is offering a delightful evening filled with local flair; featuring over 40 artisans and vendors showcasing hand-made products, jewellery, apparel, handicrafts, home decor and delectable baked goods.

Where: The Yellow House, Sanepa, Lalitpur
When: December 9
Time: 4:00 pm to 9:00 pm
Entry: Free



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE YELLOW HOUSE/FACEBOOK

Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival

The 11th edition of the Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival is going to be organised from Saturday to Tuesday. The inauguration session will be held at 1:00 pm on Saturday at Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu.

Where: Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu
When: December 9 to 12
Time: 1:00 pm onwards on December 12, 10:00 am onwards all other days
Entry: Free



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

The Sovereign Forest Exhibition

The Sovereign Forest by Indian artist Amar Kanwar in collaboration with Sudhir Pattnaik/ Samadrusti and Sherna Dastur is being held at Nepal Art Council from December 9 to March 31.

Where: Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal, Kathmandu
When: December 9 to March 31
Time: 11:00 am to 7:00 pm
Entry: Free



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEPAL ART COUNCIL/FACEBOOK

Kathak Bhela

Nritya Aagan is hosting 12th edition of their Kathak Bhela. Dancer Subima Shrestha will perform at the event alongside guest artists Sanskriti Rauniyar and Nalini Dhakal. Additionally, Suresh Raj Bajracharya (sitar), Jonisha Poudel (vocals), Moe Nicolas Edmunds Guevara (guitar), Nimesh Kapali (tabla) and Mansi Oli (pakhraj) will play live music at the event.

Where: Nritya Aagan, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur
When: December 9
Time: 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm
Ticket: Rs1,000 (pre-registration required)



PHOTO COURTESY OF NRITYA AAGAN/FACEBOOK

Championing change

Fighting for LGBTQI+ issues and indigenous people's rights for nearly 10 years, Rukshana Kapali was listed as one of this year's most inspiring women in the world by BBC.



AYSE TURCAN
KATHMANDU

In the days following November 21, Rukshana Kapali garnered considerable attention. At times, she felt it was a bit overwhelming. The spotlight was on her due to her inclusion in the BBC 100 Women 2023 list. Annually, the BBC showcases a compilation of the most inspiring and influential women globally. This time, Rukshana Kapali found herself among notable individuals such as human rights lawyer Amal Clooney, Brazilian indigenous rights activist Sonja Guajajara and campaigner Michelle Obama.



Rukshana Kapali made it to the list for finding her own way of exploring the diversity of gender and sexuality, and fearlessly expressing her views. This hasn't been easy, as transwoman Kapali describes herself as part of the project Sheisthory, a social campaign led by Voices of Women Media where women tell their stories.

Even in childhood, before fully understanding the concept of gender, Kapali began to feel that the way society wanted her to be did not correspond with the way she felt. In ninth grade, after hearing the word 'transgender' for the first time, she started researching and reading all the articles she

could find about gender diversity and identity.

Taking charge of her identity, Kapali adopted the name Rukshana Kapali and bravely came out at school, where she faced harsh discrimination and even physical attacks. Things got better in high school, where she started to explore yet another part of her identity while studying Nepal Bhasa. Since her parents didn't want to speak the language with her, she learned it by herself and got involved in the Newa community.

Since embarking on her activism journey at the age of 15, nearly a decade has passed for Kapali. She clarifies that the causes she fights for have been shaped by life's challenges rather than personal choice. "It's not like I got to choose the causes I fight for," she explains. Her activism stems from experiencing discrimination and choosing not to remain silent but to speak out.

Advocating for the rights of transgender and queer individuals, Newa people, and those from "lower" castes like the Jugi, Kapali employs various methods, including litigation, advocacy, writing, and translating books—it is difficult to understand how a 24-year-old has achieved so much. The BBC listing, to her, feels like a recognition of her work and efforts in overcoming numerous barriers.

Furthermore, she has successfully directed the spotlight towards her current causes: advocacy work and legal aid for the Queer Youth Foundation (QYF). The not-for-profit organisation, co-founded by Kapali a few years ago, focuses on addressing issues related to queer people and human rights. Beyond legal advocacy, it also engages in awareness campaigns and resource generation.

On this day, Kapali is heading to Pokhara, where she and her colleagues from the QYF are handling

Her activism stems from experiencing discrimination and choosing not to remain silent but to speak out.

three cases related to the gender recognition of transgender individuals. Altering one's gender from what was assigned at birth to their self-identified gender as a teenager or adult remains a challenging process. Despite some legal progress in recent years, there are no established procedural laws, by-laws, or regulations guiding the citizenship-changing process based on gender identity, she points out.

"This is why we began filing petitions under the extraordinary jurisdiction of the high courts," she explains. Case by case, they approach the courts to assist individuals in changing their documents, striving to navigate the complexities of gender recognition.

Kapali, now in her third year of law studies, possesses a significant advantage in providing legal support to people. Her legal expertise extends beyond aiding the LGBTQI+ community; she also champions the cause against forced evictions of Jugi people, her family's Newa caste. In addition to law, she holds a bachelor's degree in linguistics and is proficient in eleven languages at varying levels. Her fascination with languages began in the 7th grade, inspired by a teacher who ignited her interest.

Currently motivated by the potent combination of language skills and legal knowledge, Kapali is eager to expand her linguistic repertoire. Her current goal is to learn the most widely spoken language in all South Asian countries, followed by the second major language in each country—a pursuit she whimsically refers to as her "South Asian bucket list of languages."

Reflecting on LGBTQI+ rights, Kapali acknowledges notable changes since she embarked on her advocacy journey. While not describing it as radical, she notes substantial improvements. There's increased discourse on queer people's rights, heightened visibility of the community, expanded spaces and improved connections, she observes.

When asked about her plans for the next ten years, Kapali takes a moment to reflect before stating, "I know for sure that I'm gonna be a lawyer." Beyond that certainty, she intends to persist in her current advocacy work. She expresses a desire to pursue a PhD, possibly conducting research on gender rights in South Asia—a field where she can leverage her existing language skills and those she aims to acquire. With a cheerful laugh, she envisions becoming "Doctor Rukshana", a childhood dream that she is determined to achieve. There's little doubt she'll attain this goal.

The Transgender Pride Parade, organised by the Queer Youth Group, is happening in Kathmandu today. The meeting point is Pukhusi Kyaba, opposite Ratnapark. The parade starts at 12 pm.

Best movies of 2023

The Associated Press film writers select four of the year's biggest films.

LINDSEY BAHR & JAKE COYLE

The Associated Press Film Writers Lindsey Bahr and Jake Coyle's picks for the best movies of 2023:

Oppenheimer
Christopher Nolan has had so many major films in a relatively short time, that 'Oppenheimer' might seem like a given, rather than the triumphant fusion of everything he's passionate about: Large format film; the tension between humanity and science; the turmoil of a brilliant mind; and the wonder of an exceptional group coming together to make an impossible thing (in this case a nuclear weapon) but also on a meta level, the film.

The Zone of Interest
Like 'Oppenheimer', the horror in Jonathan Glazer's 'The Zone of Interest' is what is unseen. Depiction bubbled up as a hot topic this year, as though audiences aren't intelligent enough to imagine the worst. In 'The Zone of Interest', it's only a wall that separates one Nazi family from the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Glazer's film is a masterclass in atmosphere: A chilling, artful representation of the not so grey areas of complicity.



Alma Pöysti (left) and Jussi Vatanen in a scene from 'Fallen Leaves'.

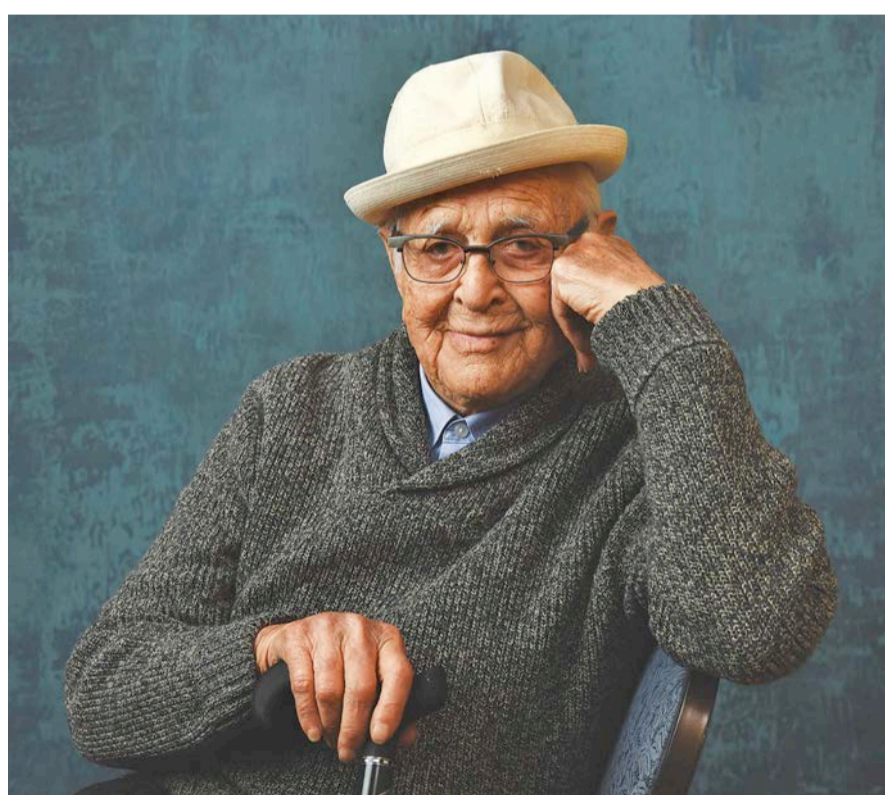
Fallen Leaves
Loneliness and lousy bosses are everywhere in the cold world of Finnish filmmaker Aki Kaurismäki's latest. But there are stirring signs of life beneath the deadpan surface of 'Fallen Leaves,' a minimalist fable about a maybe-romance between two working-class loners (Alma Pöysti, Jussi Vatanen). Kaurismäki doesn't need much—a trip to the movies, a few good songs, a dog named Chaplin—to say a lot. An 82-minute balm for a bleak world.

The Holdovers
Alexander Payne's latest, with its cozy, Christmas New England environs, has sometimes been compared to a warm blanket. But there's a strong anti-authoritarian streak running through 'The Holdovers', much like the '70s films it models itself on. The cast, including Paul Giamatti, Da'Vine Joy Randolph and newcomer Dominic Sessa, is flawless. There's plenty of warmth here, but there's rage, too—including a lament for a lost spirit of American filmmaking.

—Associated Press

How Norman Lear changed television and with it, American life

The candour and comedy he brought to the airwaves in the 1970s sealed his status.



DAVID BAUDER
NEW YORK, THE US

In many American living rooms, the 1960s didn't really begin until January 12, 1971.

That was the night the comedy "All in the Family" debuted, almost instantly changing television and American society with it. Creator Norman Lear, who died at age 101 on Tuesday, was the man behind that transformation.

The series introduced the brash bigot Archie Bunker, his "dingbat" wife Edith, his feminist daughter Gloria and his liberal son-in-law Mike "Meathead" Stivic. From their house in the New York City borough of Queens, they co-existed loudly and watched the world spin uncontrollably.

Archie Bunker, portrayed by Carroll O'Connor, embodied the "American Way"—as most middle-aged white Americans understood it at the time—and watched in confused exasperation as "others" redefined it.

Coming out of a tumultuous decade of fundamental change, and smack in the

middle of a contentious war overseas, these realities were hardly foreign to most Americans. They just rarely saw them reflected on television after dinnertime, after the nightly news was over.

He helped television come of age

If not in its infancy, television was barely out of its adolescence at the time. Most people had only one set in their homes—my family had upgraded from black-and-white to colour less than two years earlier—and viewers watched the same handful of over-the-airwaves channels. Television programmers—watched closely by network censors and the Federal Communications Commission—rarely tread on topics that risked upsetting anyone.

"Before 'All in the Family,' television comedy was a vast playground for witches, Martians and crazy ladies who constantly dressed in disguises or mistook their husband's boss for the milkman," Aljean Hermetz wrote in The New York Times in 1972.

"Relationships were relentlessly stapled out of cardboard and then wrapped in

cellophane with professional-looking bows," Hermetz wrote. "The few non-plastic situation comedies were gentle and relatively melodramatic and contained no meanness."

Bunker was incredulous at a Black neighbour portraying Santa Claus—after all, he reasoned, everyone knew Santa was white, right? He reacted in shock when Sammy Davis Jr. kissed him on the cheek. England, he said, was a "fag" country—a word you wouldn't hear on network television today. Even the sound of a flushing toilet was novel for TV then.

Menopause, miscarriage, marital spats—it was all fair game. Viewers learned to confront reality, and their differences, and find things to laugh about.

"I never thought of the shows as groundbreaking," Lear told the Harvard Business Review in 2014, "because every American understood so easily what they were all about. The issues were around their dinner tables. The language was in their schoolyards. It was nothing new."

In lasting until he was 101, Lear lived long enough to see his work appreciated by those who didn't live through it the first time.

The show was such a success, and so quickly, that in 1972, the liberal lead character in Lear's sitcom 'Maude' was deciding to undergo an abortion—the year before the Supreme Court legalised abortion with the Roe v. Wade decision.

It wasn't without controversy. Lear asked TV Guide and other publications not to include "abortion" in their pre-show synopses. Two CBS stations in Illinois didn't air it. The network didn't want to air it, either, until Lear told them they'd have to find another show for their Tuesday night schedule.

He broadened the voices that were heard

That was the power that Lear had at the time. By the 1974-75 season, he was behind five of the 10 most-watched programs. And across the 1970s, whether it was race or gender or single parenthood, Lear used that power to create other sitcoms that reflected worlds that had rarely, if ever,

been seen on television before.

There was the junkyard owner memorably portrayed by comic Redd Foxx in 'Sanford and Son' ("This is the big one, Elizabeth," he'd say, clutching his chest and pretending to have a heart attack). There was the struggling Black family in the Chicago projects in 'Good Times' (with the 'dy-no-mite' son portrayed by Jimmie Walker).

And most memorable of all, there was the striving Black family acclimating into a Manhattan "deluxe apartment in the sky" in 'The Jeffersons', a series introduced each week by the unforgettable theme song 'Movin' on Up.'

Actress Bonnie Franklin showed viewers the struggles and triumphs of a single mom raising two daughters in 'One Day at a Time', a series that made Valerie Bertinelli America's sweetheart.

It was a run of creative and commercial success never truly duplicated—certainly

not by Lear, who had his share of later strikeouts and, for a younger generation, became better known as a liberal activist.

The candour and comedy he brought to the airwaves in the 1970s sealed his status, however, and any television show with realism at its core owes Norman Lear a debt.

In lasting until he was 101, Lear lived long enough to see his work appreciated by those who didn't live through it the first time. 'One Day at a Time', for example, was remade from 2017 to 2020 with a Cuban family at its centre. And Jimmy Kimmel lovingly helped produce televised run-throughs of some of Lear's classic scripts acted by current stars.

Somehow, it worked. The exercise proved the durability of his scripts—and, instead of sounding dated, how so much of what they discussed is still relevant today.

—Associated Press



Comedian Jerry Lewis (left) Ed Simmons (centre) writer Norman Lear (background right) and producer Ernie Glucksman for 'The Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis Show', in New York in 1951.