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No peace in Ukraine until Russia's goals, still unchanged, are achieved, says Putin

❑ ASSOCIATED PRESS
MOSCOW, DEC 14

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday there would be no peace in Ukraine until the Kremlin realises its goals, which remain unchanged after nearly two years of fighting that has sent tensions soaring between Moscow and the West.

Speaking at a year-end news conference that lasted over four hours and offered him an opportunity to reinforce his grip on power, Putin gave some rare details on what Moscow calls its "special military operation".

He dismissed the need for a second wave of mobilisation of reservists to fight in Ukraine—a move that has been deeply unpopular. He said there are some 617,000 Russian soldiers there, including around 244,000 troops who were called up to fight alongside professional military forces.

> Putin: What's going on is a huge tragedy, a civil war between brothers on the opposite sides.

"There will be peace when we will achieve our goals," Putin said, repeating a frequent Kremlin line. "Victory will be ours."

Putin highlighted Russian military gains in Ukraine as the conflict's second winter approached. "Along the line of contact our armed forces, let's put it modestly, are improving their positions, almost all in an active stage and there is an improvement in the position of our troops," he said.

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POST PHOTO: SANJU POUDEL

Local women roast rice to prepare *bhuja* (puffed rice) at Pharena village in Sammarimai Rural Municipality of Rupandehi. In winter, women in the neighbourhood come to the house and use its oven to roast grains such as rice, maize, soyabean and gram, to be chewed for snacks. In return for using the facility in the locality, they give a share of their grains to the owner.

Sewa Lamsal becomes Nepal's first female foreign secretary

❑ ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, DEC 14

Yet another glass ceiling has been broken in Nepal.

On Thursday, Sewa Lamsal, senior-most joint-secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was promoted to the post of foreign secretary. With this decision, she has made history by becoming the first female foreign secretary in the seven-decade-old history of the Nepali foreign service that started in 1948.

SEWA LAMSAL/ FACEBOOK

The 25th foreign secretary, she is the first woman to lead the country's diplomacy, international relations, foreign affairs, and other functions of the foreign ministry, including passport distribution and consular affairs. Until her promotion to the post of secretary on Thursday, she had been heading the ministry's 'UN, international organisations, and international law division' and also served as the ministry's spokesperson.

>> Continued on page 2

High Court orders ex-minister Khand's release on bail

Bal Krishna Khand's case was sent to a single bench after a division bench couldn't give a unanimous decision earlier.

❑ BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, DEC 14

Overturning the decision of a subordinate court, the Patan High Court on Thursday directed the government to release former home minister Bal Krishna Khand on bail arguing that existing documents don't prove his direct involvement in the fake Bhutanese refugee scam.

The Nepali Congress leader will be free from judicial custody once he posts the bail amount of Rs3 million. A single bench of judge Krishna Ram Koirala ruled that the district court's decision to send Khand into judicial custody was unjustified.

Khand's case was sent to the single bench after a division bench on December 1 couldn't give a unanimous verdict on whether to continue his judicial custody or release him on bail. A division bench of judges Janak Pandey and Prakash Kharel failed to come to a unanimous decision as the two judges had different opinions.

While Judge Pandey was in favour of releasing him on Rs3 million bail, Kharel stood for upholding the Kathmandu District Court's decision. "The single bench issued the order in line with Judge Pandey's opinion," said Tirtha Raj Bhattarai, the high court spokesperson.

Koirala's bench has given two reasons for releasing Khand on bail. First, Keshab Dulal, a prime accused in the scam, has categorically denied having given money to Khand. Similarly, a letter written by former home secretary Tek Narayan Pandey to Narendra KC, about the financial dealings in the scam, doesn't mention Khand. KC, personal assistant to Khand when he was the home minister, was released after posting Rs1 million in bail as per a high court order earlier this month.

After a days-long hearing, the Kathmandu District Court on June 16 had sent 16 people, including Khand and former deputy prime minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi, to judicial custody. The district court had issued the order to dispatch 16 of the 18 defendants in the refugee scam to judicial custody.

The accused had challenged the decision in the Patan High Court. After the hearing, the court on December 1 upheld the June 16 decision of the Kathmandu District Court to send nine out of 16 people, including Rayamajhi, to judicial custody in the fake Bhutanese refugee case.

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DISTRICT DIGEST

Prohibitory order in Mahendranagar to thwart rally

KANCHANPUR: The Kanchanpur District Administration Office on Thursday imposed a week-long prohibitory order around the Sambidhan Chowk area of Mahendranagar. All gatherings, protests or demonstrations have been prohibited along the road stretch from Madan Chowk to Dashrath Chowk for one week. The order was issued to prevent a plan by the Rastriya Prajatantra Party to hold a mass meeting at Sambidhan Chowk crossroads, formerly known as Mahendra Chowk, and reinstate a statue of King Mahendra, which had been toppled during the 2006 people's movement. Other parties had threatened to foil the attempt to reinstate the statue and the order was issued to prevent possible clashes. RPP chair Rajendra Lingden and leaders Rabindra Mishra, Dhawal Shamsher Rana and Gyanendra Shahi have reached Mahendranagar to attend the rally. With the local administration's new decision, the party has now changed the venue of the rally. Leaders said preparations are underway to organise the event along the Sabjimandi road. The pro-monarchy and pro-Hindu state party RPP has announced protests demanding the reinstatement of monarchy and the Hindu state, and the scrapping of the federal system.

Elephant found dead in Khayarbari

JHAPA: An elephant was found dead near a sugarcane field in Khayarbari in ward 1 of Bahradashi Rural Municipality in Jhapa district on Thursday. According to the District Forest Office of Jhapa, farmers have installed electric fences around their sugarcane fields to protect them from elephants. It is suspected that the elephant might have died of electrocution. This takes the total deaths of elephants that died of electrocution in Jhapa district this fiscal year to three. Meanwhile, six people have died in elephant attacks in the district this fiscal year.

Students continue protest against corporal punishment

RAJBIRAJ: On Thursday, the students of Narendra Memorial Janata Secondary School located in Boriya in ward 16 of Rajbiraj Municipality demonstrated in front of the administrative office of the municipality, demanding action against the principal and the chairman of the school management committee accused of beating up and injuring two students. According to Bikash Kumar Mandal and Roshan Sah, grade 10 students of the school, they were badly beaten up by principal Ramanand Sunrait Yadav and chairman Ritesh Yadav on Tuesday when they protested against 'unnecessary' registration fees for grade 9 and 10. The duo had to seek medical attention for the injuries, they said. After beating up the students, the principal and the chairman had allegedly forced them to remove their clothes and recorded a video clip. They then threatened to post the video on the internet if the students told anyone about the beating, said Mandal. On Tuesday evening and Wednesday afternoon, the students had staged demonstrations in Rajbiraj demanding action against the accused.

Motorcyclist killed in road accident in Panchkhal

KAVRE: A motorcyclist died in a road accident at Hanumangadhi in ward 6 of Panchkhal Municipality in Kavrepalanchok district on Thursday. According to the District Police Office, the accident occurred around 8 am on the Araniko Highway when an out-of-control motorcycle while trying to overtake a bus crashed into another vehicle coming from the opposite direction. Police identified the deceased as a 34-year-old man from ward 12 of Panauti Municipality in the district. Further investigation into the incident is underway, police said.

A father's unyielding struggle to have son declared martyr

Surya Bahadur Sarki, 74, has been running from pillar to post seeking justice for his son, who died 33 years ago during the 1990 people's movement.

❑ SHIVA PURI
RAUTAHAT, DEC 14

Rana Bahadur Sarki from Maira in ward 2 of Gujara Municipality died on the street at Durbarmarg in Kathmandu at the age of 22 in the course of the people's movement on April 9, 1990.

After the death of Rana Bahadur, his father, Surya Bahadur Sarki, who is now 74 years old, has been fighting for justice for his son for 33 years. He has been asking the government to declare his son a martyr.

Surya says his son was shot dead by security personnel during a pro-democracy protest. "Democracy is here, but my son is gone. He has gone unrecognised by the democratic government for his sacrifice,' said Surya.

"Nobody can understand the pain of losing a young son. But whenever I feel bad, I pull myself together knowing that he sacrificed his life for the country and the greater good," he said. " I struggle with the fact that the government does not even acknowledge his sacrifice."

According to Surya, he visited the then village development committee's office, the current municipal office, the District Administration Office, the District Security Office, the District Police to the District Court countless times carrying documents as proof of his son's martyrdom, but he has always returned disappointed. "I even went to several party offices and met with the political leaders, but no one is willing to declare my son a martyr."

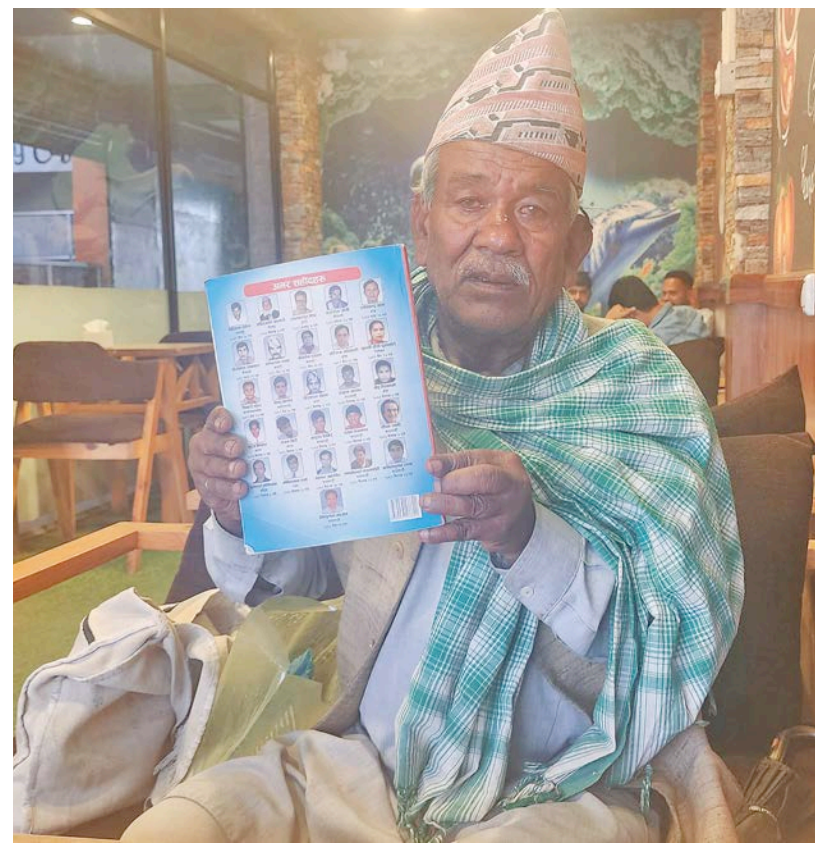
Surya says he has been sent from one office to the next with recommendation letters from various political leaders for his son to be declared a martyr. "But even after 33 years of running around offices and waiting on wooden benches for appointments with political leaders, I have nothing to show," he said. "Those who died for a much smaller cause have been accorded martyr status in this country because of political connections, while my son who fought for democracy has been forgotten."

The bereaved father submitted an application to the National Human Rights Commission on May 30, 2006, to help him get compensation from the government for the death of his son. The commission then wrote to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Later, on June 26, 2006, the ministry wrote to the District Administration Office, Rautahat, to start the process, including the verification of documents and the collection of data regarding Rana Bahadur, to declare him a martyr.

But thirty-three years later Surya's son is yet to be declared a martyr.

"They said the files were being sent to the concerned office. I never heard back. My son's files are now gathering dust at the Home Ministry," he said.

According to Narayan Prasad Bhattarai, spokesman of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the names of Rana Bahadur Sarki and many others have not been included in the list of martyrs because of incomplete paperwork. "There is important missing information on those files," he said. "If the district administration offices recommend the names again after thorough investigation for paperwork then their names can be included on the martyrs' list."



POST PHOTO: SHIVA PURI

Surya Bahadur Sarki, 74, holds a magazine with the pictures of the martyrs of Nepal's democratic movements, in this recent photo.

According to Jhamak Kumari Sarki, Rana Bahadur's 71-year-old mother, Rana Bahadur was the oldest among her five sons. He contributed to the family's expenses when he was alive. The family has not been able to recover financially after Rana Bahadur's untimely death, she says.

"After my son's death, my husband and I became wage labourers, working and earning every day to make ends meet. In the fiscal year 1997-1998, the government led by Krishna Prasad Bhattarai promised to give us Rs150,000 as immediate relief, but out of the total amount, we only received Rs50,000. After that, no leader or any authority has come to us," said Jhamak. "No one offers us help even when we ask for it."

Around a week ago, Surya obtained a new recommendation letter from the District Administration Office, Rautahat, and is now in Kathmandu, running from pillar to post, knocking on doors, looking for justice for his dead son.

Putin at annual press meet vows victory in Ukraine

>> Continued from page 1

"The enemy has declared a big counteroffensive, but he hasn't achieved anything anywhere," Putin added, claiming that the latest Ukrainian attempt to create a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Dnieper River also fizzled and Ukrainian troops suffered heavy losses.

He alleged Kyiv was sacrificing its troops in order to show some success to its Western sponsors as it seeks more aid.

"I believe it's stupid and irresponsible on behalf of the country's political leadership, but it's their business," he said.

Putin, who has held power for nearly 24 years and announced last week he is running for reelection, was greeted with applause as he arrived in the hall in central Moscow. He didn't hold his traditional news conference last year after his military failed to capture Kyiv and as the Ukrainian army retook lost territory.

But with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pleading for more US aid amid a stalling counteroffensive and fracturing Western support, he decided to face reporters once more—although the session is heavily choreographed and more spectacle than scrutiny.

It was the first time that Putin took questions from Western journalists since the fighting in Ukraine began. Ordinary citizens were able to submit questions alongside those from journalists, and Russian media said at least 2 million were sent in advance. The news conference began with questions about Ukraine and highlighted concerns some Russians have about another wave of mobilisation.

"There is no need" for mobilisation now, Putin said, because 1,500 men are recruited every day. As of Wednesday, 486,000 soldiers have signed contracts with the military, he said.

His remarks about another mobilisation were met with scepticism by some independent Russian media, which noted he had promised not to draft reservists for Ukraine and then reversed course and ordered a "partial" call-up. The move, which he announced in September 2022, prompted thousands of Russians to flee the country.

He reiterated that Moscow's goals in Ukraine—"de-Nazification, de-militarisation and a neutral status" of Ukraine—remain unchanged. He had spelled out those loosely defined objectives the day he sent in troops in February 2022.

The claim of "de-Nazification" refers to Russia's false assertions that Ukraine's government is heavily influenced by radical nationalist and neo-Nazi groups—an allegation derided by Kyiv and the West.

Putin has also demanded that Ukraine remain neutral and refrain from joining NATO.

He reaffirmed his claim that much of today's Ukraine, including the Black Sea port of Odesa and other coastal areas, historically belonged to Russia and were given away by Soviet founder Vladimir Lenin.

While Moscow had accepted the new reality after the USSR's collapse in 1991, Putin said he was forced to respond to what he described as an attempt by the West to turn Ukraine into a tool to challenge and threaten Russia.

"Russians and Ukrainians are one people, and what's going on now is a huge tragedy, a civil war between brothers who have found themselves on the opposite sides," he added.

Putin's last news conference was in 2021 as the US warned that Russia was about to send troops into Ukraine. He delayed an annual state-of-the-nation address until February 2023.

Relations with the US since then have plunged to new lows as the conflict continued. Russia detained Moscow-based US journalist Evan Gershkovich in March.

Shortly before Putin spoke, a Russian court ruled that Gershkovich, 32, must stay behind bars until at least January 30.

US citizen Paul Whelan, a corporate security executive from Michigan, also has been jailed in Russia since his 2018 arrest on espionage-related charges. Russia recently rejected an offer to bring home Gershkovich and Whelan, both labelled by the US government as wrongfully detained.

"We're not refusing to return them," Putin said on Thursday, adding he wanted to reach an agreement but "it's not easy." He refused to elaborate but said Washington "must hear us" and make an offer that satisfies Russia.

On the Israeli-Hamas war, Putin again deplored the death of thousands of women and children in Gaza, citing UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who called it a "graveyard for children". Putin urged stronger efforts to protect civilians and urged greater humanitarian aid, adding that Russia proposed setting up a field hospital in Gaza near the border with Egypt but Israel responded it would be unsafe. He reaffirmed a call for implementing a UN resolution on the creation of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Putin appeared calm and relaxed during questions, although he frequently cleared his throat, blaming the air conditioning. The event is primarily aimed at a domestic audience and is a chance for him to appear personally involved in resolving the problems of ordinary Russians and reinforce his authority ahead of the March 17 election. Responding to a final question about what kind of warning he would have given to himself from today's perspective when he started his first term in 2000, Putin said he would have warned against "naivety and excessive trustfulness regarding our so-called partners".

He also fielded questions from children in Russian-annexed Crimea about the leaking roof and mould in their sports hall, and a woman who addressed "my favourite president" to complain about the rising price of eggs. Putin apologised and blamed "a glitch in the work of the government," for not increasing imports quickly enough. Journalists lined up in freezing temperatures to enter the hall hours before Putin's arrival. Some donned traditional dress, including elaborate hats to catch his attention or held identifying placards. Although the event is tightly controlled, some online questions that Putin ignored appeared on screens in the hall.

"Mr President, when will the real Russia be the same as the one on TV?" one text message said, apparently referring to the Kremlin's control over the media that portrays Putin positively and glosses over the country's problems.

Another read: "I'd like to know, when will our president pay attention to his own country? We've got no education, no health care. The abyss lies ahead."

AFP/RSS

Russian President Vladimir Putin holding his year-end press conference in central Moscow on Thursday.

Lamsal makes history in Nepal's foreign service

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She joined the foreign service in 2010 as an under-secretary and served as ambassador to Pakistan from 2016 to 2020, and then deputy permanent representative, and minister plenipotentiary at the Permanent Mission of Nepal to the United Nations. She was promoted to the post of joint secretary just a year after she made a lateral entry from administrative service to foreign service. Since then she served (for almost 13 years) as joint-secretary at the foreign ministry in various roles.

A meeting of the promotion recommendation committee headed by the chairman of the Public Service Commission, Madhav Prasad Regmi, nominated Lamsal for promotion last Friday.

The post of secretary had been vacant since December 6 following the retirement of Bharat Raj Paudyal, who is taking up his new assignment as Nepal's ambassador to Canada.

"This is a proud and encouraging moment for Nepali women. It shows that women are as competent as men and can lead sensitive and important ministries like foreign affairs," said Indra Adhikari, former deputy director at the Institute of Foreign Affairs. "This is also a good example of inclusive and participatory democracy."

Born in Bhojpur, Lamsal will now lead the foreign ministry's administration, which has around 360 staff, officials, and diplomats. In the past, Sahana Pradhan of the CPN-UML, Sujata Koirala of the Nepali Congress, and Bimala Rai Paudyal of the UML became foreign ministers, but there had been no female foreign secretary in the ministry's 72-year history. She joined the civil service in October 1998 as a section officer at the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens.

"When women are appointed to high-ranking positions, there is a tendency to see their success as a gender-based favour or a result of quota," said Adhikari, adding, "but Lamsal's case is different. She is highly qualified and competent". One of her colleagues at the foreign ministry said Lamsal's confidence level greatly increased in the past three years when she started rigorously interacting with top foreign politicians and diplomats.

There were many congratulatory messages on social media as soon as the government decided to promote her to the post of foreign secretary.

She is taking charge of the foreign ministry at a time when the country is grappling with various external challenges emanating from domestic compulsions, geopolitical considerations, complicated ties with India, China, and major powers, as well as in the conduct of labour and climate diplomacy. These challenges coincide with a shifting geopolitical landscape, and the need to boost the efficiency of the foreign ministry.

Among those praising her promotion is former ambassador to Egypt Rambhakta Thakur who posted on X: "Yes, she made a history but also I hope she will make a milestone of her diplomatic career. She should be very careful in making decisions. There is nothing above the nation. Our sincere wishes for her bright future [sic]."

Lamsal has a master's degree in public administration from Tribhuvan University and completed her M.Phil in social change from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. "The breaking of the glass ceiling was not happening at the top bureaucratic level of foreign, finance, home, and defence ministries," former foreign minister Bimala Rai Paudyal said, adding, "today the ceiling has broken at the foreign ministry, which is a very positive development."

The other key ministries—finance, home and defence—should have female secretaries as well, said Paudyal.

Paudyal during her brief stint as foreign minister had worked with Lamsal. "She is professional, competent, and hardworking."

"She built her career at the foreign ministry so she knows how to handle things. Second, she is hardworking and can strike a balance between work and life, which is vital for a Nepali woman," said Paudyal.

Former home minister Khand ordered to post Rs3 million bail

>> Continued from page 1

The division bench, however, had ordered the release of others on bail.

Besides Rayamajhi, the bench refused to release Indrajit Rai, adviser to the then home minister Ram Bahadur Thapa, former home secretary Tek Narayan Pandey, Dulal, and former lawmaker Aang Tawa Sherpa of Nepali Congress. Also, middlemen involved in the case—Sanu Bhandari, Sandesh Sharma, Govinda Kumar Chaudhary and Sagar Rai—were denied bail.

The court ordered authorities to release Sandeep Rayamajhi, son of former deputy prime minister Rayamajhi, on a bail of Rs3 million, and Bhutanese refugee leader Tek Nath Rizal, Ram Sharan KC and Hari Bhakta Maharjan on bails of Rs1.5 million each.

Likewise, bail amounts for Narendra KC and Shamsher Miya were fixed at Rs1 million each. On the other hand, Laxmi Maharjan, Ashish Budhathoki, Tanka Kumar Gurung and Keshav Tuladhar have been released without bail.

On May 24, the District Attorney's Office, Kathmandu had filed criminal cases at the District Court against 30 individuals accused in the scam.

POST PHOTO

Congress leader and ex-home minister being produced at Kathmandu District Court earlier this year to face charges of being involved in the high-profile Bhutanese refugee scam.

They have been charged with four types of crimes—treason, organised crime, fraud and forgery. The accused have been charge-sheeted for collecting Rs 288.17 million from 115 victims—ranging from Rs150,000 to Rs4.8 million each—by promising to send them to the US as Bhutanese refugees.

In 2019, the then government led by KP Sharma Oli had formed a task force under then joint secretary Bal Krishna Panthi to recommend ways to manage Bhutanese refugees who remained in Nepal after the end of the third-country resettlement programme.

The taskforce submitted a report including 429 Bhutanese refugees who had been left behind. Later, the racketeers, in collusion with some top officials, prepared another report and added hundreds of other people to the list of refugees.

The final hearing on the scam involving dealing of millions of rupees is yet to start in Kathmandu District Court.

> On May 24, Nepal government charged 30 persons in the infamous Bhutanese refugee scam.

Legal experts say bail is a discretion of the court. "Let us not rush into judgement. Releasing Khand on bail doesn't mean he has gotten a clean cheat," senior advocate Dinesh Tripathi, chair of the Constitutional Lawyers' Forum, told the Post. "The court is yet to decide whether he is guilty."

CPN-UML chair Oli manhandled in Dhankuta

An 'inebriated' man tries to attack the ex-prime minister as he walks through a crowd of his party's supporters.

❑ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, DEC 14

CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli was manhandled by a man as the leader walked through a crowd of his party's supporters in Mahalaxmi Municipality-5 of Dhankuta on Thursday.

UML has termed the incident an abnormal behaviour shown by an inebriated man.

Police said a local named Mahesh Rai attempted to attack the former prime minister and was promptly held by security personnel and youths associated with the National Youth Federation of CPN-UML.

Rajbabu Maharjan, Dhankuta police spokesperson, said Rai was arrested in connection with the incident.

The UML has termed the incident an abnormal behaviour shown by an inebriated man. Rajendra Gautam, chief of UML publicity department, said the way the incident has been portrayed on social media has drawn the party's serious concern.

Meanwhile, police arrested 18 people campaigning against the Koshi nomenclature of Province 1.

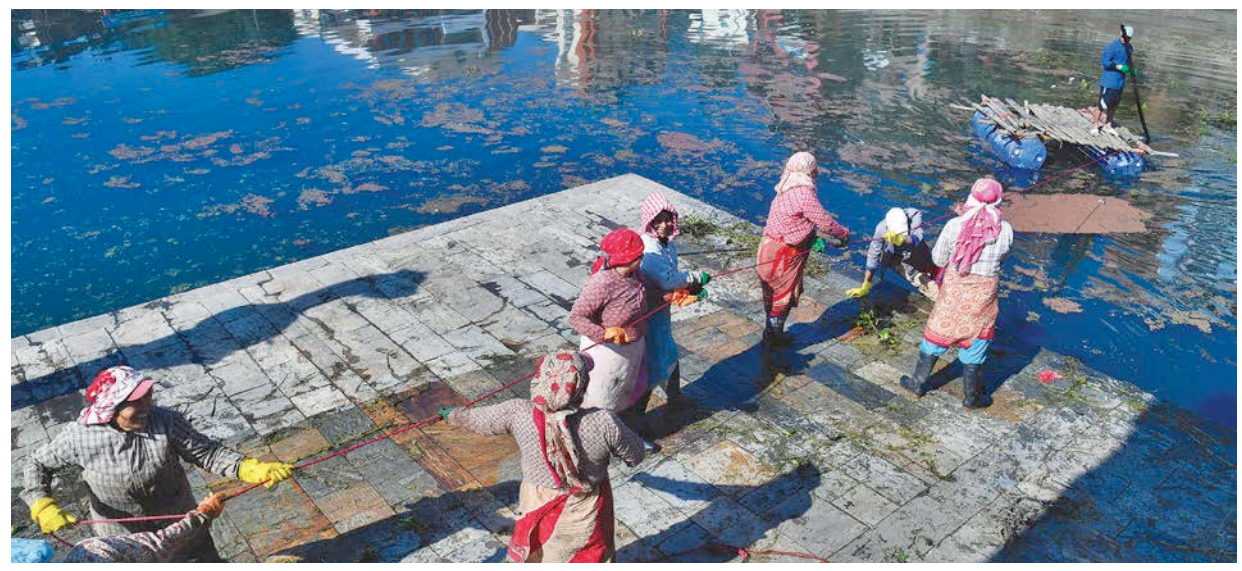
DSP Maharjan said they were arrested from Sidhuwa and Leguwa.

"We detained them in view of maintaining law and order," said Maharjan.

Top UML leaders including party chief Oli are on a weeks-long march along the Mid-Hill Highway. The journey that kicked off from Jhulaghat of Baitadi in the far-west on December 1 is scheduled to conclude at Chiwabhanjyang of Panchthar district in the east. The around 1776 km-long highway runs through 17 hill districts while the country's East-West Highway spans the southern belt from Jhapa to Kanchanpur over 1,000 km.

PHOTO COURTESY: KP OLI'S SECRETARIAT

KP Sharma Oli addresses a mass gathering in Tehrathum on Thursday.



POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

People remove weed from Bhajya Pokhari as part of a drive to clean up the pond in Bhaktapur on Thursday.

MP Koiri acquitted in 2015 murder of police official

The Mahottari District Court, however, has slapped life imprisonment on several accused including Loktantrik Samajbadi Party's provincial assembly member Abhiram Sharma.

❑ SANTOSH SINGH
DHANUSHA, DEC 14

The district court in Mahottari has acquitted Laxmi Mahato Koiri, the House of Representatives member elected from the CPN-UML, in the 2015 murder of an Armed Police Force (APF) officer.

According to Nutan Jha, registrar at the court, a single bench of judge Uddhav Prasad Bhattarai gave its verdict on Thursday. The court also acquitted Pawan Kapar, who was also charged in the murder and is in judicial custody.

The court, however, slapped life imprisonment on Loktantrik Samajbadi Party's provincial assembly member Abhiram Sharma in the same case. Jha said the district court on Thursday also sentenced Ramashankar Mishra alias Shankar Shahi, Pradeep Sah, Sanjaya Kumar Sah, Mohan Thakur, Surendra Pandey and Dharmendra Raya to life imprisonment in the case. Pradeep Sah and Sanjaya Kumar Sah are already in judicial custody.

POST PHOTO

Koiri was elected MP on a CPN-UML ticket.

Koiri, who was elected to the federal parliament from Mahottari-1 in November 2022, was accused of murdering Assistant Sub Inspector Thaman BK. A murder case was filed against 28 people including Koiri while 25 others were also accused of arson.

Among the accused, 20 individuals including Ramesh Prasad Sah, Savindra Chaudhary, Chandeshwar Sah, Raja Chaudhary, Devendra Chaudhary, Naresh Sah, Golu Sah, Hari Om Kumar Bhagat, Ravindra Ram Chamar, Ranjit Sah, Vicky Sah, Phule Yadav, Rohit Kumar Sharma, Lalbabu Win, Shambhu Sah, Anit Thakur, Anil Thakur, Devendra Yadav and former provincial assembly member Koshlay Yadav are absconding.

Cases regarding other suspects of the murder are pending.

Koiri is accused of dragging the policeman from a police van and killing him on September 11, 2015 in Jaleshwar of Mahottari in. The Dhanusha District Court had released Koiri on a bail of Rs100,000. But the Janakpur High Court, overturning the decision of the district court, had issued an arrest warrant against him.

Koiri was suspended as a lawmaker in May this year following a letter from the Nepal Police seeking the Speaker's support to arrest the UML lawmaker, who had been absconding for months.

According to officials at the Secretariat of the Federal Parliament, Koiri was suspended as per Rule 248 (3) of the House of Representatives Regulation 2023.

KMC to microchip all pet dogs

❑ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, DEC 14

The Kathmandu Metropolitan City has been preparing to microchip all dogs kept as pets by the metropolis's residents.

Officials hope microchipping the dogs will help pet owners locate their animals when they get lost. The measure also aims to hold owners accountable if they abandon their pets.

"Dog owners will have to pay the cost of microchips, which cost less than Rs 1,000," said Dr Awadesh Jha, chief of the Agriculture and Veterinary Department of the KMC. "We are planning to start microchipping next week."

Officials hope the measure will help owners locate their pets when they get lost.

Pet microchips are tiny devices that are inserted under a pet's skin. Officials said that the chip can be scanned and information about the owner stored in the chip can be accessed easily.

Jha said that the measure would discourage owners from abandoning their pets when they get old or sick. Officials estimated that there are around 20,000 pet dogs in the 32 wards of the metropolis.

"Owners have to register their pets, administer anti-rabies vaccine and get permission from the local authority," Jha said. "We will fine those who do not fulfil the procedures."

The metropolis warned that it can slap a fine of up to Rs5,000 to the owners who release their pets on streets to defecate but do not clean it up.

The KMC has sterilised over 4,300 dogs in the last two months. Nine different organisations got in contact to sterilise the stray dogs. Around 12,000 dogs have been administered anti-rabies vaccine and the vaccination programme will continue, officials said.

The KMC has also set up a shelter where injured and violent stray dogs will be housed. Officials said that the metropolis has already constructed a shelter for around 50 dogs and has ordered shelter for an additional 100 dogs.

3 airport staff arrested in gold haul

❑ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, DEC 14

At least three office assistants at Tribhuvan International Airport have been arrested on the charge of gold smuggling.

One Sushila Pandey was arrested to investigate her alleged involvement in the smuggling of the precious metal on Wednesday. Two others were arrested earlier.

According to Chief Customs Administrator Tokraj Pandey, the arrestees have been suspected of assisting gold smugglers.

Airport staff have been kept under surveillance after an investigation revealed the involvement of airport staff in assisting smugglers.

On December 7, Chandra Ghale, of Barpak, Gorkha, who arrived in Kathmandu by a flydubai flight, was arrested with 14 kg of gold at the airport. He had concealed the gold bars in a waistcoat-like vest that he was wearing.

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu

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- Clear decision-making capabilities, administrative experience along with interpersonal skills supporting teamwork.
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- Maintains all ledgers and journals and other accounting records of the hotel, sets down in the Hyatt Accounting and Systems Control Manual and related publications.
- Ensures that all hotel, company and local rules, policies and regulations relating to financial record keeping, money handling and licensing are adhered to, including the timely and accurate reporting of financial information.
- Understands Hyatt Corporation's and the hotel's tax obligations, using the assistance of locally appointed auditors or tax experts.
- Obtains the requisite licenses for foreign exchange dealing, imports, liquor, tobacco, and entertainment and so forth from the appropriate regulatory authorities.
- Liaises with both internal and external auditors in compliance with the hotel requirements.

Applicants are invited to incorporate curriculum vitae, a photocopy of citizenship/passport with relevant documents by Wednesday, 24 December 2023. Only short-listed candidates will be invited for tests/interviews.

HYATT REGENCY KATHMANDU

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E-MAIL: hr.kathmanduhr@hyatt.com

शम्भुनाथ नगरपालिका
नगर कार्यपालिकाको कार्यालय
कठौना, सप्तरी

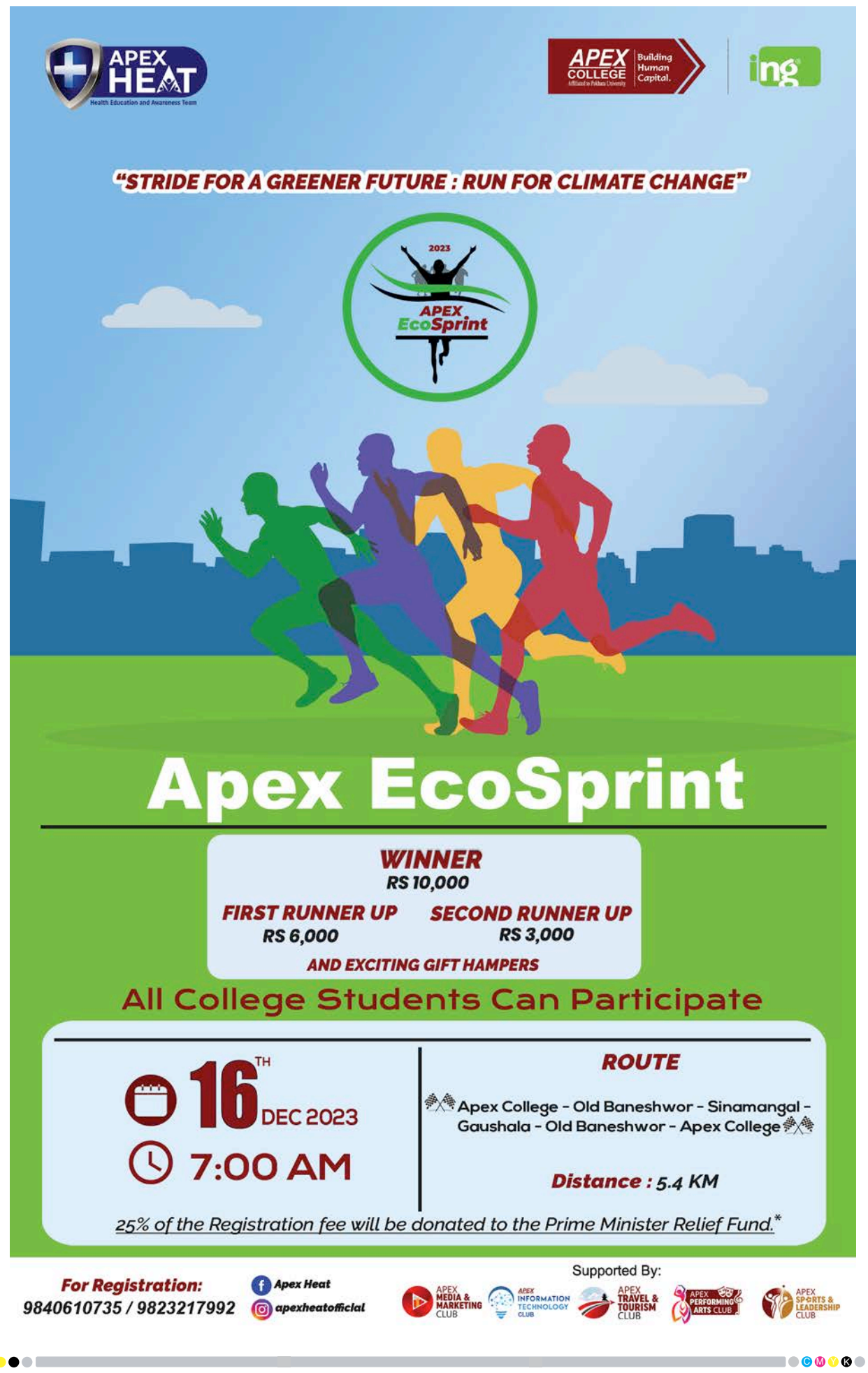
बोलपब स्वीकृतको आशय पत्र सम्बन्धी सूचना
मितिः २०८०/०८/२८

यस नगरपालिकाको मिति २०८०/०७/१४ गते प्रकाशित बोलपत्र (NCB) विद्युतिय खरिद प्रणालीबट आव्हान सूचना अनुसार तोकिएको मितिसम्म पर्न आएका बोलपत्रहरु मध्ये तपसिलमा उल्लेखित बोलपत्रहरु मूल्यांकन समतिबाट सारभुत रुपमा प्रभावग्राही देखिएको हुँदा तपसिलमा उल्लेखित बोलपत्रहरु स्वीकृतको लागि छनौट भएको हुँदा सार्वजनिक खरिद ऐन, २०६३ को दफा २७ को (२) को प्रयोजनार्थ सम्बन्धी सबै बोलपत्रदाताहरुको लागि यो सूचना प्रकाशन गरिएको छ ।

सि.नं.	ठेक्का नं.	कामको विवरण	छनौट बोलपत्रदाताको नाम र ठेगाना	कवोल अंक (मु.अ.कर सहित)
१.	01T/Shmun/SQ/2080/081	न.पा.को अधुरो प्रशासनिक भवन निर्माण तथा भवन अगाडी क्यान्टिन निर्माण तथा शौचालय निर्माण कार्य	श्री पि.आर. कन्स्ट्रक्सन लाहान ५, सिरहा	३७,५८,५८०/८५

बोद्धार्थः
१. श्री दास कन्स्ट्रक्सन राजविराज-४, सप्तरी
२. श्री बिशाल कन्स्ट्रक्सन राजविराज-४ सप्तरी
३. श्री बजरंगवली कन्स्ट्रक्सन लोहजरा सप्तरी
४. श्री पि. आर. कन्स्ट्रक्सन लाहान-५, सिरहा

प्रमुख प्रशासकीय अधिकृत



OPINION

OUR VIEW

Welcome to pink Nepal

As a queer-friendly society, with better investment, we stand to attract global LGBTIQ+ tourists.

The euphoria over the registration of marriage between Surendra Pandey and Maya Gurung, widely recognised as the first legal marriage of same-sex individuals in Nepal, is yet to die down. Meanwhile, there is yet another piece of news from Nepal to celebrate: An international conference to help LGBTIQ+ visitors travel to Nepal with pride, which is being planned sometime in January. Considered the first international queer tourism conference, it is expected to create a platform for nuanced discussions on making Nepal's tourism sensitive to the requirements of queer tourists. At a time when Nepal's global standing as a queer-friendly nation is growing, the conference will likely bolster the image. This also aligns with the country's democratic ethos that considers people belonging to different identity groups as equal citizens—although, of course, there are legitimate demands from people from various quarters, including queer people themselves, to be treated equally in letter and spirit.

Queer tourism, also called pink tourism, is a multi-billion dollar industry that remains not just untapped but is pushed to the margins as many societies are yet to come to terms with their moral standards. As arguably one of the most tolerant societies to queer people, Nepal stands to attract global LGBTIQ+ tourists. And, as the country's tourism slowly gets back to the pre-pandemic levels, widening the gender spectrum to include queer tourists will help it further buttress the economy. With the global queer consumer spending power estimated at $4.7 trillion, Nepal stands to gain from it if it extends its *Atithi devo bhava* (Guests are gods) adage to include queer people.

The proposed conference, while it may lay the groundwork for further discussions on opening up Nepali tourism to the queer clientele, would require substantial complementary work from the state. From building physical infrastructure suited to the requirements of the clientele to sensitising service sector operators and workers about the imperative of recognising non-heteronormative sexual choices of individuals, the state must first invest in the fundamentals. The attitudes of the authorities towards the queer community have changed for the better in recent years. But there is much more to do to normalise non-heteronormativity. The sooner the state invests in such physical and knowledge infrastructure, the better the chances of reaping the benefit from the clientele that is eager to see the normalisation of its choices.

The private sector, meanwhile, has much to gain by venturing into pink tourism. In several parts of the liberal world, there are dedicated travel agencies that cater to the LGBTIQ+ tourists. There is nothing better than to travel to new destinations with like-minded people, especially as it involves the question of safety, dignity and companionship. Moreover, the private sector can explore the idea of turning Nepal into a wedding destination for queer tourists.

By opening its majestic tourist destinations to the queer people, Nepal can gain financially while also fulfilling its fundamental social responsibility. This will also lead to better job prospects for members of the queer community who otherwise have a hard time finding jobs. Again, the normalisation of non-heteronormative choices will help boost the service sector financially while also making it a more humane space.

THEIR VIEW

Green financing

Can GIFT City maintain its competitiveness while adhering to the principles of sustainability?

In a momentous declaration, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has unveiled a transformative vision for Gujarat's financial hub, GIFT City, transcending its established fin-tech prowess to position it as a global epicentre for climate financing. This strategic recalibration seamlessly aligns with India's net-zero emissions goal by 2070, necessitating a monumental $10 trillion investment, with a substantial portion envisioned to be secured through global sustainable finance. During his virtual inaugural speech at the Infinity Forum 2.0, Mr. Modi emphatically underscored the pivotal role of the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) in propelling GIFT City towards becoming a nexus for sustainable finance. The Prime Minister's emphasis on GIFT IFSC as an influential channel for green capital underscores its potential not only to facilitate but spearhead India's ambitious transition to a low-carbon economy. Of particular significance is the Prime Minister's call for the development of innovative financial products such as green bonds and sustainable bonds.

This deliberate effort signals a commitment to establishing intricate market mechanisms for green credit. This strategic move not only positions GIFT City as a financial hub but as a pioneering force, attracting environmentally responsible investments and capitalising on the global momentum favouring sustainable finance. Furthermore, Mr. Modi strategically spotlighted opportunities within the aviation and shipping sectors. The exponential growth in India's air travel and aircraft fleet uniquely positions GIFT City as a hub for aircraft lessors. The city's offerings, complemented by IFSCA's ship leasing framework, align seamlessly with the rising trend of using water routes for transporting goods. This presents a strategic opportunity for GIFT City to capitalise on the surging demand in the maritime transportation sector. This holistic approach, integrating sustainable finance, fin-tech and strategic positioning in aviation and shipping, paints a comprehensive picture of GIFT City's evolution into a dynamic, multifaceted financial hub. Mr. Modi's call for inputs from experienced individuals underscores a collaborative ethos, acknowledging the paramount importance of industry expertise in shaping GIFT City's trajectory. GIFT-IFSC, already a tax-neutral financial centre, aspires to rival established hubs like Singapore by offering fiscal incentives and a more relaxed regulatory environment. It is a strategic positioning that underscores India's determination to carve out a distinct niche in the global financial landscape. However, such aspirations are not without challenges. They raise questions about the balance between environmental goals and economic viability. Can GIFT City maintain its competitiveness while adhering to the principles of sustainability? Striking this delicate balance will be crucial, requiring a nuanced approach to regulation and incentives to ensure that businesses find it lucrative to participate in the green transition. All said, GIFT City is a strategic initiative that not only mirrors global trends but also stands resolute in its alignment with sustainability imperatives, emerging as a beacon in India's financial horizon. Mr. Modi's forwardthinking strategy positions GIFT City as a pioneer, not just in economic growth, but in shaping a resilient, environmentally conscious financial future.

— The Statesman (India)/ANN

Climate justice

How will climate funds and solutions reach the most marginalised and vulnerable?

BISHAL THAPA

RSS

Inequality, injustice and discrimination, which marginalise communities and people, are entirely the results of human construct in much the same way as human activities have caused global warming. Marginalised people and communities now also disproportionately bear the climate impacts of global warming.

Clean energy technologies could be used to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit global warming. Adaptation and resilience measures could assist people to cope with a warming world. But how will these solutions reach vulnerable and marginalised people and communities?

Structures that have perpetuated inequality, injustice and discrimination have cemented over decades and centuries. These structures persist and remain deeply endemic across the governments of many poor and developing countries. They continue to deprive marginalised and vulnerable communities of essential social services, economic growth, developmental benefits and political decision-making.

Will the international order on climate change rely on the same governments, many of whom are not always responsive to the needs of marginalised and vulnerable communities, to deliver clean energy, adaptation, and resilience solutions to those most in need?

Establishing a fund to help the poor recover from the loss and damage of climate impacts is one part of the solution. Finding the gateways to reach them is another.

Climate choices

The 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference, more commonly called the Conference of Parties or COP28, held in Dubai between 30 November and 12 December, brought together approximately 80,000 people from across governments, businesses, non-governmental organisations and media, as it did activists and curious onlookers.

Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal attended the conference, leading a large delegation of ministers, secretaries, senior government officials, and representatives from non-governmental organisations, development agencies, think tanks and businesses.

A day after COP28 began, Dahal chaired a high-level event where UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Prime Minister of Andorra Xavier Espot Zamora and representatives from several other countries also participated. Titled "Call of the Mountains: Who saves us from the climate crisis?" the session sought to highlight the climate change impacts on hills and mountains.

The UN Secretary-General said Nepal had "lost close to a third of its ice in just over 30 years—a direct result of the greenhouse gas pollution heating our planet."

The ice melting from Nepal's glaciers is swelling lakes, which are increasingly at risk of bursting from the water pressure building within.

"Melting is accelerating, and unless we change course, we will unleash a catastrophe," he warned. An avalanche, earthquake or breach would result in devastating floods downstream that wipe out entire communities.

Experts speaking at Prime Minister Dahal's session noted that there are approximately 21 glacial lakes in Nepal at high risk of bursting. One way to deal with such risks is placing warning systems within these glacial lakes, which could inform downstream communities in the event of a flood. It wouldn't entirely prevent the damage but would give communities enough time to get out of the way.

Across the 21 glacial lakes at risk of bursting, only two are monitored. Monitoring systems are currently being installed in another two. Why haven't warning systems been installed in the 17 remaining glacial lakes at high risk of bursting? This illustrates how historic inequality, injustice and discrimination influence the choices that governments make on climate.

The failure to install warning systems on the high-risk glacial lakes in Nepal isn't due to a lack of resources. On average, each warning system could cost about $1 to $2 million. Even if it were double that, the total cost of installing warning systems across all of Nepal's high-risk glacial lakes would be well below $100 million.

For comparison, consider the following. Nepal spent approximately $305 million to build the international airport in Pokhara, borrowing approximately $265 million for it. Another $80 million was spent on building the Bhairahawa airport, borrowing approximately $48 million. Both airports are currently stranded, operating at far less capacity than projected.

Over the last decade, Nepal has spent approximately $42 million, borrowing half of that, to develop project reports for the 1,061 megawatt (MW) Upper Arun Hydro Power Project. Over the next few years, it expects to borrow about $2.5 billion to build large hydropower projects so that Nepal can benefit from electricity exports to India.

Nepal has borrowed approximately $150 million to underground Kathmandu's electric distribution system with the aim of reducing electricity losses, improving reliability and beautifying the city.

In the meantime, the UN Secretary-General and Nepal's Prime Minister are calling on the world to heed Nepal's "Call of the Mountains" and asking "who saves us from climate change." In this case, Nepal could save itself or at least protect its people with warning systems on all high-risk glacier lakes.

The resources to protect vulnerable communities from glacial lake outbursts are within Nepal's resource capabilities. But they have not been installed.

"Nepal, and other vulnerable mountain countries, are being pounded by a crisis that is not of their making," the UN Secretary-General said at the session. Climate change and its impact are certainly not of Nepal's making. But the decision to leave many high-risk glacial lakes without warning systems and expose communities to the risks of devasting floods is certainly of Nepal's own doing.

Whose voices?

Nepal has many development needs: Airports, hydropower plants, underground power distribution lines, warning systems on high-risk glacial lakes and many more. All these projects offer tremendous development benefits. But in poor, resource-constrained countries like ours, choosing what to build depends on whom you ask and who selects the priorities.

Vulnerable and marginalised people and communities are not the ones determining those priorities. In Nepal and across many other developing countries, vulnerable and marginalised people and communities do not yet have a voice that can influence decision-making.

Inequality, injustice and discrimination persist, and governments and political systems are not always responsive to these.

At COP28, the international community agreed to establish a loss and damage fund to support poor, vulnerable and high-risk communities suffering from the impacts of climate change. The fund had garnered commitments of approximately $700 million by the time the conference ended. These resources, and at much higher levels than what was committed, are urgently needed. However, these funds must be able to reach vulnerable and marginalised people and communities that are most in need.

Climate finance must not embolden the same inequalities, injustice and discrimination that have left people and communities vulnerable and marginalised in the first place.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), a framework for measuring key development metrics, provides a basis for evaluating how countries are performing against these goals. The loss and damage fund must be better integrated with the SDGs. It must also require governments to be more responsive and accountable to those who have historically been left behind.

It isn't sufficient for the world to hear the call of the melting mountains and rising seas. The call of the people living in the melting mountains and the rising seas must also be heard.

Fight to educate Afghan girls

Afghanistan is the only country where girls are prohibited from attending school beyond the age of eleven.

GORDON BROWN & **YASMINE SHERIF**

It has now been over two years since the United States military ended its decades-long war in Afghanistan, and the world's attention has predictably shifted to the horrific conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine. But the mess left behind by the chaotic US withdrawal has not been cleaned up—far from it. Since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, the country's economic and humanitarian crises have deepened and sharpened.

Conditions for Afghan girls and women, in particular, have deteriorated rapidly, shattering their hopes for their personal and professional lives. In edict after edict, the new theocratic government has systematically stripped them of their fundamental human rights, including to an education. As a result, Afghanistan has become the only country in the world where girls are prohibited from attending school beyond the age of 11.

Millions of Afghan girls are being denied a chance to develop their talents and fulfil their dreams, putting a generation at risk of lasting damage and jeopardising the country's economic future. Worse, those girls and women who fled to Pakistan to continue their education will once again be denied schooling. The Pakistani government recently ordered the expulsion of 1.7 million undocumented Afghans, around 700,000 of whom sought refuge in the country after the Taliban's takeover.

But the Taliban is not a monolith: Some government officials seemingly recognise the critical importance of their daughters returning to school. In November, Rangina Hamidi, an education minister before the Taliban's return to power who had just visited Afghanistan, suggested that the Taliban could be convinced to reopen girls' secondary schools.

For that to happen, however, the international community would need to engage much more actively with the Taliban, and help its more moderate voices prevail over the hardliners. Hamidi's experience, and that of others, suggests that there are increasingly apparent internal divisions within the Taliban regime over the education of girls and women.

REUTERS

In this context, Muslim-led delegations should visit Afghanistan and meet with both the Taliban's formal governing cabinet in Kabul and its leadership council—comprising religious leaders—in Kandahar. The aim would be to open lines of communication and express support for reversing the ban on girls' education.

The dire situation in Afghanistan demands urgent action. Even before the Taliban regained power, the country was one of the world's poorest and most underdeveloped. Now, more than two years into Taliban rule, the economy has all but collapsed, and millions of Afghans don't know where their next meal will come from. The United Nations World Food Program has warned that acute malnutrition is above emergency thresholds in 25 of 34 provinces and is expected to worsen. Moreover, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that two-thirds of Afghanistan's population—a staggering 28.3 million people—would need urgent humanitarian assistance to survive this year, owing to long-term drought-like conditions and crippling economic decline.

Despite these stark figures, the Taliban's religious leadership has continued to hack away at the rights of girls and women, often to the exclusion of other policy objectives. This systematic discrimination includes not only denying girls and women access to secondary and tertiary education, but also restricting their freedom of movement, expression, and association and prohibiting them from almost all forms of employment.

The participation of women in public life is heavily constrained, as they often cannot leave their homes without a maharam (male relative). Moreover, the Taliban has effectively removed any possibility for women to seek justice through the judicial system. After UN experts visited Afghanistan earlier this year, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) concluded in a report that the Taliban's discriminatory and misogynistic policies and harsh enforcement methods constitute "gender persecution and an institutionalised framework of gender apartheid." Richard Bennett, the OHCHR Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan, described it as a "crime against humanity."

Diplomatic recognition of the Taliban government, let alone fully normalised relations, is certainly out of the question as long as religious edicts deprive girls and women of their basic human rights. But that does not preclude the international community from taking steps to promote gender equality.

One such step would be developing new channels of communication—possibly though Qatar or the United Arab Emirates—with Taliban officials who understand that Afghanistan needs to educate all young people. The internal divisions within the regime have opened a window, albeit a small one. We must seize this chance to help give the world's most oppressed girls and women the opportunity to realise their potential.

Brown, a former prime minister of the United Kingdom, is the UN Special Envoy for Global Education and Chair of Education Cannot Wait, and Sherif is the executive director of Education Cannot Wait.

— Project Syndicate

FOREX

US Dollar	133.64
Euro	145.93
Pound Sterling	169.29
Swiss Franc	153.7
Australian Dollar	89.75
Canadian Dollar	99.35
Singapore Dollar	100.52
Japanese Yen (10)	9.45
Chinese Yuan	18.73
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.62
Qatari Riyal	36.65
Thai Bhat	3.82
UAE Dhiram	36.39
Malaysian Ringgit	28.6
Korean Won (100)	10.33

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES

Nepse (in percent) ▲ 1,994.60pts 0.32%

HIGHEST GAINERS					
BNL	HLBSL	NHDL	NRM	NICL	DOLTI
10	10	10	10	9.99	9.98
MODERATE GAINERS					
UNL	NESDO	DORDI	SHEL	NBL	CGH
0.13	0.07	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03
MODERATE LOSERS					
SPC	NICBF	LBBL	PRVU	NIMB	SRBLD83
-0.13	-0.12	-0.12	-0.06	-0.05	-0.01
HIGHEST LOSERS					
GLBSL	MLBS	CYCL	MBLD87	GIBF1	NMFBS
-4.98	-4.78	-4.04	-3.96	-3.75	-3.75

BULLION

PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 118,800
Silver	Rs 1,455

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

Nepal's forex reserves rise to a record $12.75 billion

Economists, however, warn the piling up of foreign exchange reserves is a warning sign of a potential recession.

❑ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, DEC 14

The central bank said that Nepal's gross foreign exchange reserves increased 8.9 percent to an all-time high of $12.75 billion in mid-November, boosted by remittances.

Economists, however, have warned that the piling up of foreign exchange reserves is a warning sign of a potential recession.

"As imports are dropping, foreign exchange reserves are increasing. This is a warning sign for our consumption-based economy," said Nara Bahadur Thapa, former executive director at the Nepal Rastra Bank.

A high level of imports indicates robust domestic demand and a growing economy.

"But if these imports are mainly productive assets, such as machinery and equipment, this is even more favourable for the country since productive assets will improve the economy's productivity in the long run," said Thapa.

The central bank said that merchandise imports decreased 3.8 percent to Rs512.50 billion.

Imports of readymade garments, MS wire rods, bars, and coils, electrical equipment, textiles, and aircraft spare parts, among others, increased, whereas imports of crude soybean oil, gold, petroleum products, crude palm oil, and MS billet, among others decreased.

According to the Nepal Rastra Bank, its reserves increased 10.8 percent to Rs1.49 trillion in mid-November, from Rs1.34 trillion in mid-July, the beginning of the current fiscal year.

Similarly, the reserves held by banks and financial institutions increased 6.4 percent to Rs205.95 billion in mid-November from Rs193.59 billion in mid-July.

Foreign exchange reserves are assets held on reserve by a central bank in foreign currencies. Foreign exchange reserves are central bank funds used to make sure there's enough foreign currency to pay for imports. Based on the imports of four months of 2023-24, the foreign exchange reserves of the banking sector are sufficient to cover the prospective merchandise imports of 13.6 months and merchandise and services imports of 11.3 months.

With money piling up in the banks, and imports dropping, it has affected the consumption, the lifeline of Nepal's economy.

Thapa said consumption is an engine that drives economic growth, particularly for a country where there is low production and export.

"Money comes from abroad as remittance and makes the market vibrant in Nepal," said Thapa.

"Now consumption is down because young people are leaving the country on a massive scale, which obviously will hit the retail sector." Lack of opportunities at home pushed nearly a million Nepalis to try their luck abroad in the last fiscal year.

The out-migration trend has not stopped. In the first four months of the current fiscal year, the number of Nepali workers—both institutional and individual—taking first-time approval for foreign employment stood at 137,475 and taking approval for renewed entry stood at 68,841.

This means more than 200,000 Nepalis already left the country in the first four months.

Their departure, however, has increased the remittance inflows, growing 26.4 percent to Rs477.96 billion in the review period.

Due to the low demand, construction, mining, and quarrying sectors are in the doldrums. Crash in the stock market, real estate, and low business confidence have rattled the economy.

When young people leave the country, its repercussions start to be visible in consumption. People hardly show up in major markets to buy mobile phones, cars, furniture, gold, and clothes.

"The colleges are empty," said Thapa. "The hospitals are also struggling to remain afloat." The once-booming restaurants too are struggling to get young customers.

Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat on Wednesday, however, claimed that the country's economy is on the "right track".

There is no money in the market. Where is the money going then?

Thapa said money is being spent on smuggling the gold.

Nepal's infamy as a hub for gold smuggling, which reached a new high back in July after the seizure of 60kg of gold, continues to grow.

"Tonnes and tonnes of gold are being smuggled. This will rattle the economy," said Thapa. The borrowings of the banks, too, are not healthy.

Private sector credit from the banking and financial institutions increased Rs99.40 billion, or 2.1 percent in the review period. On a year-on-year basis, credit to the private sector from banking and financial institutions increased by 4.4 percent in mid-November.

The foreign direct investment, too, has slowed. In the review period, net foreign direct investment remained at Rs3.64 billion.

The central bank report, however, shows that the current account remained at a surplus of Rs96.38 billion in the review period against a deficit of Rs37.79 billion in the same period of the previous year.

The balance of payments remained at a surplus of Rs147.11 billion in the review period against a surplus of Rs20.03 billion in the previous year.

POST FILE PHOTO

Due to the low demand, construction, mining, and quarrying sectors are in the doldrums.

❑ BIZLINE

German institutes lower 2024 growth forecasts

FRANKFURT: Two leading economic institutes cut their growth forecasts for Germany for next year, saying continued uncertainty and a budget crisis will weigh on Europe's beleaguered top economy. The Ifo institute slashed its 2024 projection to 0.9 percent, from 1.4 percent previously. The DIW institute reduced its forecast to 0.6 percent from 1.3 percent. The export-oriented German economy is struggling through a lacklustre phase and is expected to shrink this year due to high inflation, an industrial slowdown and weakness in key trading partners. Ifo warned of continued weakness in the final stage of 2023, which would impact 2024. **(AFP)**

EU court rejects Brussels appeal over Amazon tax ruling

BRUSSELS: A top EU court rejected Thursday Brussels' appeal against a ruling blocking its bid to force Luxembourg to recover 25 million euros ($272-million) in back taxes from Amazon. The ruling, the final word in the case, was a blow not just to the European Commission but to the EU's competition commissioner, Margrethe Vestager. "The Court of Justice confirms that the Commission has not established that the tax ruling given to Amazon by Luxembourg was a State aid that was incompatible with the internal market," the court said in a statement. "In its judgment handed down today, the Court of Justice rejects the appeal brought by the Commission," it added. **(AFP)**

Japan, UK, Italy sign joint fighter jet treaty

TOKYO: Japan, Britain and Italy signed Thursday a treaty formalising plans to jointly develop a next-generation fighter jet to pool resources and better face new threats. "This combat air aircraft, due to take to the skies by 2035, aims to harness next-generation technologies and become one of the world's most advanced, interoperable, adaptable and connected fighter jets in service globally," Britain's defence ministry said after the signing in Tokyo. "The supersonic stealth jet will boast a powerful radar that can provide 10,000 times more data than current systems, giving a battle-winning advantage," the statement said. **(AFP)**

Meta rolls out Twitter rival Threads in the EU

BRUSSELS: Facebook owner Meta's text-based app Threads arrived in the European Union on Thursday, months after its global launch in July, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said. Threads is a spin-off of the Instagram photo app and is intended to be a rival to X, formerly known as Twitter, after that platform alienated many users and advertisers following Elon Musk's purchase last year. "Today we're opening Threads to more countries in Europe. Welcome everyone," Zuckerberg said on Threads. Threads went live in 100 countries this year but not in the EU. Meta officials cited regulatory clarity as the reason for delaying the social network's arrival in Europe. **(AFP)**

ADB approves $166 million support for urban resilience in Nepal

❑ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, DEC 14

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a $166 million financing package to boost the local economy in Nepal by building climate- and disaster-resilient cities that promote sustainable tourism and provide residents with a better quality of life.

The Urban Resilience and Livability Improvement Project aims to contribute to the economic growth, resilience, and livability of Devdaha, Lumbini Sanskritik, Sainamaina, Siddharthanagar, and Tilottama municipalities, as well as Janakpur sub-metropolitan city and Pokhara metropolitan city.

ADB will strengthen the municipalities' resilience to climate and disaster risks through infrastructure development by constructing 150km of stormwater drainage, rebuilding 100km of roads, and 45km of footpaths—responsive to the needs of children, women, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

It will establish bicycle lanes to promote clean and healthy mobility.

"This project supports the government's current National Urban Development Strategy to improve planning and investments in urban corridors and drive sustainable economic growth. It also continues ADB's long-term engagement with Nepal to strengthen municipal governance and improve basic services delivery," said ADB Senior Urban Development Specialist Laxmi Sharma.

> ADB's financing package includes a $6 million grant from the Asian Development Fund.

"ADB's support will help the concerned municipalities to design climate-resilient urban infrastructure, develop tourism potential, and strengthen institutional capacity to achieve their full economic potential and sustainable growth."

According to a press statement issued by the ADB, the project will support the development of tourism to boost the local economy. It will improve historical, cultural, and natural heritage sites in each project municipality and incorporate gender equality and social inclusion-responsive features to increase opportunities for women and disadvantaged groups' access and socioeconomic benefit.

It will promote biodiversity conservation and beautify public areas, including greening parks and open spaces, including the Siddharthanagar Dandha river corridor.

The project will build the capacity of municipalities and the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction on financial management and revenue generation, urban resilience planning, and ecosystem management.

It will also support community internships and skills improvement programmes, particularly for women and disadvantaged groups.

ADB's financing package includes a $6 million grant from the Asian Development Fund, which provides grants to ADB's poorest and most vulnerable developing member countries.

Nepal's telecom regulator revokes licences of 3 telcos

❑ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, DEC 14

Nepal's telecom regulator has revoked the operating licence of three telecommunications service providers after they failed to renew themselves.

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority published a notice on Wednesday saying that the licences of United Telecom, Putalisadak; Max Net Solutions, Koteshwar and Chitwan Network were revoked.

The authority said the service providers failed to deposit the renewal charges in a given time, and their licences were cancelled automatically according to the Telecommunications Act, 1997.

The authority has also ordered the companies to pay the pending amount by January 12.

The authority also warned the service providers of action if they fail to settle the dues within the given time.

According to the authority, United Telecom was issued the licence on October 22, 2003, which expired on October 22, 2023.

Max Net Solutions was issued the operating licence on November 22, 2018. It expired on November 22, 2023. Chitwan Network received the licence on November 28, 2018, which expired on November 28, 2023.

Before this, the authority cancelled the licences of Himalayan Gorkha Net, Askina Cable Network, Galkot Link, Surkhet Cable Net, Hamro Net TV, Reliant Techno Networking and Mega Cable Net five months ago.

"We took the action as per the prevailing laws," said Santosh Paudel, director of Nepal Telecommunications Authority.

The authority, however, refused to provide details on their dues.

Under the existing regulation, if the licence of telecom service providers is cancelled automatically, all the property, infrastructure, telecommunications process and network come under the control of the authority.

According to the regulation, the service provider needs to pay the government liabilities within three months after the authority takes control of the telecommunications company.

If the service provider again fails to pay the liabilities, the government will raise it by auctioning off their property.

'Where is the money?' COP28 deal throws spotlight on funding

❑ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS, DEC 14

After COP28's landmark call for the world to move away from fossil fuels, experts say the pressure is on to fast-track—and fund—the global energy transition.

The agreement was a compromise wrestled out of countries with sharply conflicting interests by the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, hosting COP28 in the last days of the hottest year humans have recorded so far.

It calls for "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner"—after three decades without naming the main driver of planet-heating pollution.

With rapidly-accelerating climate impacts slamming communities across the planet, observers said this was both a major milestone and the very minimum needed to steer the world onto a safer track.

The bigger challenge will be turning the promise of the COP28 agreement into sweeping global decarbonisation that comes close to the goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius from preindustrial levels.

COP28's goal to triple global renewables capacity and double the rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030 will require significant investment, particularly in developing countries least responsible for warming.

An editorial in Indonesia's Jakarta Post on Thursday called on rich polluters to scale up finance.

AFP/RSS

US climate envoy John Kerry (left) and his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua give a joint news conference at the end of the COP28 climate summit in Dubai.

"COP28, where is the dough?" it asked. The Dubai text acknowledged that trillions of dollars are needed by debt-stricken developing countries to meet their climate targets this decade as they face worsening warming impacts.

But Senegal's climate envoy Madeleine Diouf Sarr, Chair of the Least Developed Countries Group, said it "fails to deliver a credible response to this challenge", calling for 2024 UN climate talks to work to close the gap. Countries in Dubai were tasked with responding to a damning assessment of progress on the world's existing flagship climate promise—the 2015 Paris deal's commitment to limit warming to "well below" 2C and preferably to the safer 1.5C threshold.

At 1.2 degrees of warming, scientists have said climate change was a major driver of the extreme heat that has scorched across the planet this year and stoked massive fires in parts of Canada.

It increased the severity of devastating drought in the Horn of Africa—and then exacerbated catastrophic flooding in the same region.

"Until fossil fuels are phased out, the world will continue to become a more dangerous, more expensive and more uncertain place to live," said Friederike Otto, senior Climate Science lecturer at the Grantham Institute, Imperial College London.

Before COP28, Earth was heading towards disastrous heating of between 2.5C and 2.9C by 2100, according to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

The Dubai decision had not changed the reality that the world is not on track, said its Executive Director Inger Andersen.

"Now the hard work of decarbonisation must begin," Andersen said, calling for greater financial support for poorer countries in their energy transitions.

Observers said a lack of specifics on finance in the COP28 text sets the stage for the issue to dominate COP29 talks next year in Azerbaijan and ups the pressure for sweeping climate-focused reforms of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Nicholas Stern, of the Grantham Research Institute at the London School of Economics, said countries should respond to the COP28 decision with "a huge increase in investment" in clean energy and green growth.

That is particularly needed in developing countries, except China, which face an estimated $2.4 trillion annual cost by 2030 to meet their climate and development priorities. The International Energy Agency estimates global clean energy investments need to reach $4.5 trillion a year by 2030. That is a steep increase from the $1.8 trillion this year, helped by policies in the United States, Europe, China and India.

IEA chief Fatih Birol called on countries to follow through on COP28 with more "concrete policies", in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

Nevertheless, "spectacular" growth of technologies like wind and solar, as well as electric vehicles, has enabled the IAE to forecast that world fossil fuel demand will peak this decade.

That prognosis has been shrugged off by fossil fuel producers.

They plan to continue to expand oil, gas and coal despite the message from climate scientists that this would push the world beyond the 1.5C target.

Observers say loopholes in the Dubai text include the focus on fossil fuels for energy—potentially leaving out polluting products like plastics and fertilisers—as well as a nod to gas as a "transition fuel".

Bill McKibben, the founder of environmental campaign group 350.org, said while the COP28 call to shift from fossil fuels may seem like "the single most obvious thing one could possibly say about climate change", it could give activists a powerful new argument.

"We need to insist that the clear, plain meaning of the language is, the fossil fuel era is over," he wrote in his newsletter.

BRIEFING

Finland to sign defence pact with US

HELSINKI: Finland will on Monday December 18 sign a defence cooperation agreement with the United States, the Finnish government said on Thursday, to grant the US military broad access across the Nordic country to the vicinity of its long border with Russia. Russia's Nordic neighbour Finland became the NATO military alliance's newest member earlier this year in response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. "The fact that there will be no need to agree on everything separately, makes organising peace time operations easier, but above all it can be vital in a crisis," Finland's Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen told reporters. The agreement with the United States is aimed at allowing swift military access and aid to Finland in case of conflict, officials said ahead of the announcement. The agreement lists 15 facilities and areas in Finland to which the US military will have unimpeded access and where it can also store military equipment and ammunition. **(REUTERS)**

UK bans entry for those responsible for settler violence against Palestinians

LONDON: British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said on Thursday that those responsible for settler violence against Palestinians would be banned from entering Britain, following a similar plan by the European Union. UN figures show daily settler attacks in the Israeli-occupied West Bank have more than doubled since the Palestinian militant group Hamas's deadly October 7 attack on Israel from Gaza. "Extremist settlers, by targeting and killing Palestinian civilians, are undermining security and stability for both Israelis and Palestinians," Cameron said on social media site X, formerly known as Twitter. "Israel must take stronger action to stop settler violence and hold the perpetrators accountable. **(REUTERS)**

Israel vows to fight on in Gaza despite deadly ambush, rising international pressure

Israel might have hoped that the war and its hardships would turn Palestinians against Hamas, hastening its demise.

❑ ASSOCIATED PRESS
RAFAH, GAZA STRIP, DEC 14

Israel vowed to keep fighting in Gaza until it crushes Hamas after one of the deadliest single battles of the war for its soldiers, even as it faces mounting international calls for a cease-fire and unease on the part of its closest ally, the United States.

The ambush in Gaza City, one of the hardest hit areas of the war, showed Hamas' resilience and called into question whether Israel can defeat it without wiping out the entire territory. Support for Hamas has surged among Palestinians—in part because of the militant group's stiff resistance to a far more powerful foe—while the US has expressed growing discomfort over civilian deaths.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan was visiting Israel on Thursday, days after President Joe Biden said that Israel was losing international support because of its "indiscriminate bombing."

Israel has imposed a total siege on northern Gaza, including Gaza City, and has flattened much of it in what is already one of the 21st century's most devastating military campaigns. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to fight to the end, "even given the great pain and the international pressure," saying late Wednesday that "nothing will stop us."

The ambush took place Tuesday in the dense neighbourhood of Shijaiyah, which was also the scene of a major battle during the 2014 war between Israel and Hamas.

The dead included two high-ranking officers. A total of 116 soldiers have been killed in the ground offensive, which began October 27. Heavy fighting has raged for days in Shijaiyah and other areas in and around eastern Gaza City that were encircled earlier in the war. Tens of thousands of people remain in the north despite repeated evacuation orders, saying they don't feel safe anywhere in Gaza or fear they may never return to their homes if they leave them.

AP/RSS

Palestinians look for the survivors of an Israeli strike in Rafah, Gaza Strip, on Thursday.

The military released footage on Thursday from northern Gaza showing dozens of men with their hands above their heads walking in a straight line out of a damaged building. Four of the men could be seen carrying assault rifles over their heads and setting them down in the street, along with what appeared to be several ammunition magazines.

The military said the men had exited the Kamal Adwan Hospital after troops battled militants in a nearby building. It described all of them as suspected militants, without providing evidence. The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said 70 medical workers and patients were detained when Israeli forces raided the hospital earlier this week, including the hospital director. The UN humanitarian office said the hospital had 65 patients, including 12 children in intensive care, at the time of the raid.

It was not immediately clear if the military and the Health Ministry were describing the same event.

Israel says it is rounding up men in northern Gaza as it searches for Hamas fighters, and recent videos have shown dozens of detained men stripped to their underwear, bound and blindfolded in the streets. Some released detainees have said they were beaten and denied food and water.

In the video released by the military on Thursday, all the men appeared fully clothed except the four carrying weapons, who were shirtless. Israel's air and ground assault, launched in response to Hamas' unprecedented attack into southern Israel on October 7, has killed more than 18,600 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza.

The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths. Its latest count did not specify how many were women and minors, but they have consistently made up around two-thirds of the dead in previous tallies. Thousands more are missing and feared dead beneath the rubble. Nearly 1.9 million Palestinians have been driven from their homes, with most seeking refuge in the south, even as Israel has continued to strike what it says are militant targets in all parts of the territory.

Residents reported two Israeli airstrikes overnight in Rafah, the southernmost town along the Egyptian border. An Associated Press reporter saw 27 bodies brought into a local hospital early Thursday.

One woman burst into tears after recognizing the body of her child.

"They were young people, children, displaced, all sitting at home," Mervat Ashour said as she and others mourned their relatives. "There were no resistance fighters, rockets, or anything."

New evacuation orders issued as troops pushed into the southern city of Khan Younis earlier this month have pushed UN-run shelters to the breaking point and forced people to set up tent camps in even less hospitable areas. Heavy rain and cold in recent days has compounded their misery, swamping tents and forcing families to crowd around fires to keep warm.

Israel has sealed Gaza off to all but a trickle of humanitarian aid, and UN agencies have struggled to distribute it since the offensive expanded to the south because of fighting and road closures.

Turkish MP dies after suffering heart attack in parliament

❑ REUTERS
ANKARA, DEC 14

An opposition Turkish lawmaker died on Thursday, two days after suffering a heart attack and collapsing in front of parliament as he finished a speech criticising the government's policy toward Israel.

Hasan Bitmez, 54, a member of parliament from the opposition Felicity (Saadet) Party, died in Ankara City Hospital, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca told reporters in televised remarks.

A graduate of Cairo's Al Azhar University, Bitmez was the chairman of the Centre for Islamic Union Research and had previously worked for Islamic non-governmental organisations, his parliament biography shows. He was married and a father of one. Parliament's official broadcast showed Bitmez collapsing to the floor after having been standing at the podium before the general assembly on Tuesday.

He had been criticising President Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AK Party (AKP) over Turkey's ongoing trade with Israel despite the war in Gaza, and despite the government's sharp rhetorical criticism of Israel's military bombardment.

"You allow ships to go to Israel and you shamelessly call it trade... You are Israel's accomplice," Bitmez said in his speech after placing a banner on the podium reading: "Murderer Israel; collaborator AKP".

"You have the blood of Palestinians on your hands, you are collaborators. You contribute to every bomb Israel drops on Gaza," he told lawmakers during debate over the foreign ministry's 2024 budget.

After finishing the speech, Bitmez suddenly fell backward on the floor, with other MPs rushing from their seats to help.

Koca said afterward that an angiography revealed that the two main veins in his heart were completely blocked.

China mediated Myanmar junta peace talks with rebels, Beijing says

❑ REUTERS
BEIJING, DEC 14

China has mediated peace talks between Myanmar's ruling military and rebel groups, and the parties agreed on a temporary ceasefire and to maintain dialogue, Beijing said on Thursday.

The fighting, largely in northern Shan state, has caused worry in neighbouring China. Around 300,000 people have been displaced since a rebel offensive began on October 27, according to the UN, which says more than 2 million people have been made homeless since Myanmar's military coup in February 2021. The talks were held in China in recent days, the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement, without giving more details.

China hopes that the parties concerned in Myanmar will implement the agreements and the consensus reached, exercise maximum restraint and take the initiative to ease the situation on the ground, it said.

"China has been working tirelessly to stop the war and promote talks among the relevant parties in Myanmar, and has pushed for the de-escalation and cooling-down of the situation," ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said.

Mao said there had been a marked decline in the number of clashes and exchanges of fire in northern Myanmar, "which not only serves the interests of the relevant parties in Myanmar, but also contributes to the maintenance of tranquillity along the China-Myanmar border".

Invitation for Electronic Bids
Government of Nepal
Ministry of Communication and Information Technology
National Information Technology Center
Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal

Supply and Delivery of Support and Subscription License of Enterprise Email

IFB No.: NITC/G/NCB-01/080-81
Date of publication: 2080/08/29 (December 15, 2023)

1. The National Information Technology Center, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu has annual program towards the cost of Procurement of Supply and Delivery of Support and Subscription License of Enterprise Email and intends to apply part of the funds to cover eligible payments under the Contract. Bidding is open to all eligible Bidders from all countries
2. The National Information Technology Center, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu invites electronic bids from eligible bidders for the Procurement of Supply and Delivery of Support and Subscription License of Enterprise Email under National Competitive bidding– Single Stage Two Envelope procedures specified in Public Procurement Act and Regulations.
3. Under the Single Stage, Two Envelope Procedure, Bidders are required to submit simultaneously two separate sealed envelopes, one containing (i) the Technical Bid and the other (ii) the Price Bid, both in turn enclosed in one sealed envelope as per the provision of ITB 23 of the Bidding Document.
4. Eligible Bidders may obtain further information and inspect the bidding documents at the office of National Information Technology Center, (NITC) Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal Email: info@nitc.gov.np, Tel: +977-01- 4211917 or may visit e-GP system: www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp.
5. Bidding documents is available online and can be downloaded from e-GP system: www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp. Interested bidders shall register in the e-GP system and deposit the cost of bidding document amounting NRs. 5,000.00 (Five Thousand Only) in the following bank.
   Name of the Bank: Rastriya Banijya Bank Limited, Singhadurabar Kathmandu
   Name of the Office: National Information Technology Center, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu
   Office Code No.: 358003503
   Office Account No.: 1000100200010000
   Revenue Head No.: 14229
6. Pre-bid meeting shall be held at National Information Technology Center, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu on Paush 18, 2080 (January 03, 2024) at 11:00 AM.
7. Interested Bidders shall submit the electronic Bids through www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp to the above office of National Information Technology Center, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal on or before 12:00 Noon on Paush 29, 2080 (January 14, 2024)
8. Bids shall be opened in presence of Bidders' representatives who choose to attend on 13:00 hours on Paush 29, 2080 (January 14, 2024) at the office of National Information Technology Center, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal. Bids must be valid for a period of 90 days counting from the day of bid opening and must be accompanied by bid security, amounting to a minimum NRs. 10,00,000.00 (Ten Lakhs Only), which shall be valid for minimum 30 days beyond the bid validity period. If the last date of submission and opening falls on a government holiday, then the next working day shall be considered the last day. In such a case the bid validity and bid security validity shall be recognized with effect from the original bid submission deadline.

Why the Indian Ocean could be China's Achilles' heel in a Taiwan war

❑ REUTERS
HONG KONG, DEC 14

Every day, nearly 60 fully loaded very large crude-oil carriers sail between the Persian Gulf and Chinese ports, carrying about half of the oil that powers the world's second-largest economy.

As the vessels enter the South China Sea, they ply waters increasingly controlled by China's growing military, from the missile batteries and airfields at its bases on disputed islands to its stealthy Type 055 destroyers.

But when crossing the Indian Ocean, joined by others headed to China from Africa and Brazil, these tankers lack protection in a naval theatre dominated by the US

A dozen military attaches and scholars say that vulnerability is now being scrutinised as Western military and academic strategists discreetly game scenarios about how a conflict with China over Taiwan, or elsewhere in East Asia, could evolve or escalate.

In a major war, Chinese oil tankers in the Indian Ocean "would find themselves very vulnerable", said David Brewster, a security scholar at the Australian National University.

"Chinese naval vessels would effectively be trapped in the Indian Ocean and ... they would have little or no air support, because there are no bases or facilities of its own that (China) could rely on."

Four envoys and eight analysts familiar with discussions in Western and Asian capitals, some speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive topic, said this enduring weakness gives China's adversaries a ladder of escalatory options, especially in a drawn-out conflict, like Russia's war on Ukraine.

These scenarios range from harassment and interdiction operations against Chinese shipping that could divert Chinese naval vessels to the region, up to a blockade and beyond.

In a full-scale war, the tankers - capable of carrying 2 million barrels of oil - would be prizes to be sunk or captured, reflecting naval actions of last century in which combatants targeted their enemies' economic resources, three analysts said.

These options could be used to dissuade China from launching action, or later to raise costs on an invasion of Taiwan. Less clear is how this vulnerability shifts Beijing's calculations toward Taiwan, the people said.

China's defence ministry did not respond to questions about its position in the Indian Ocean.

Chinese strategists are aware of the problem but ultimately any decision to launch military action would be taken by President Xi Jinping, according to People's Liberation Army (PLA) documents and retired officers.

Xi has instructed the PLA to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027, US Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns said in February. China has been increasing military manoeuvres ahead of the island's elections in January. Since taking power in 2013, Xi and other Communist Party leaders have stressed the importance of a modernised military that can project power globally and secure China's vital trade routes.

REUTERS

This undated photo shows Diego Garcia, the largest island in the Chagos archipelago and site of a major US military base in the middle of the Indian Ocean leased from Britain in 1966.

But amid fears of conflict, some of the analysts said China would struggle to protect these lifelines even as its energy demands increase, making a protracted war over Taiwan difficult to sustain.

China imported 515.65 million tons of crude oil in the 11 months through November, or 11.27 million barrels per day, official data show, an annual increase of 12.1 percent. The Pentagon estimates about 62 percent of China's oil and 17 percent of its natural gas imports transit the Malacca Strait and South China Sea, key Indian Ocean gateways.

China is moving to diversify supplies, with three pipelines from Russia, Myanmar and Kazakhstan accounting for roughly 10 percent of its crude-oil imports in 2022, according to customs data and state media.

Western sanctions on Moscow after its invasion of Ukraine have also led China to stockpile more cheap oil from Russia, its top supplier.

Food is a more complex picture. China's soybean imports—used for animal feed—are shipped in part via the Indian Ocean but other commodities such as potash, needed for fertiliser, arrive via other routes.

China has an extensive network of military satellites but just one dedicated military base, and no air cover from land or sea, for Indian Ocean naval deployments. In its October annual report on China's military, the Pentagon lists 11 potential Chinese bases on the ocean's fringes, including Pakistan, Tanzania and Sri Lanka. Those locations reflect Chinese diplomatic and commercial outreach under Xi's Belt and Road Initiative.

But these have not emerged as hard military assets, with neither a permanent PLA presence nor publicly known guarantees of access in a conflict, the attaches and an Asian diplomat said. The Pentagon report notes, in language used for the first time this year, that China still "has little power projection capability" in the Indian Ocean. China's initial overseas base in Djibouti, on the ocean's western edge, opened in 2017 and hosts 400 marines, reflecting Chinese involvement in international piracy patrols around the Horn of Africa since 2008.

But the base has no airfield and is flanked by military facilities of seven other countries, including the US, France and Britain.

The US Indian Ocean presence remains in stark contrast, reflecting its Cold War build-up. The US 5th Fleet is based in Bahrain while the Japan-headquartered 7th Fleet operates out of Diego Garcia, a U.K.-administered atoll with runways for long-range bombers and a lagoon adapted to house US aircraft carriers.

To the east, Australia is increasing patrols using its submarine-hunting P-8 Poseidon aircraft and is expanding a west-coast base for British and US nuclear-powered submarines and, eventually, Australian nuclear-powered boats. Zhou Bo, a retired PLA senior colonel and a security fellow at Beijing's Tsinghua University, said he was aware of foreign debates about China's vulnerabilities but the scenarios were hypothetical.

Should China and the West clash militarily in the Indian Ocean, such a conflict by nature would be "almost uncontrollable" in scale and location, Zhou said. "At that point it is a major war involving a lot of countries," he said. Still, he said, China would gradually expand deployments and basing options to strengthen its position.

Military attaches and analysts tracking Indian Ocean deployments say China generally maintains four or five surveillance vessels and a similar number of warships and an attack submarine at any time. But China is yet to test its most potent assets in the Indian Ocean, one former Western intelligence analyst said.

PSG, Porto progress into Champions League last 16

PSG draw 1-1 away to Dortmund to go through. Porto make the last 16 with a 5-3 win over Shakhtar.

❑ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS, DEC 14

Paris Saint-Germain and Porto qualified for the Champions League last 16 on Wednesday as Newcastle bowed out of Europe after losing 2-1 at home to AC Milan.

PSG drew 1-1 away to Group F winners Borussia Dortmund to go through as runners-up after Milan came from behind to beat Newcastle at St James' Park and eliminate Eddie Howe's side.

Newcastle, who needed to win and for PSG to drop points to keep their first Champions League campaign in 20 years alive, took the lead through a brilliant Joelinton strike in the first half.

But Christian Pulisic equalised on the hour and substitute Samuel Chukwueze broke Newcastle hearts with an 84th-minute winner, although it wasn't enough for Milan to overhaul PSG.

The French champions, in danger of a first group stage exit since the Qatari takeover in 2011, fell behind when Karim Adeyemi scored early in the second half in Germany.

Warren Zaire-Emery came to the rescue for PSG five minutes later after Kylian Mbappe weaved into the box, his pass deflected out to the teenager who advanced towards goal before slamming home a powerful shot.

Mbappe, whose PSG future will again come into sharp focus in January, had an effort ruled out for offside but the point was enough in the end for the visitors, who finished level on points with Milan but progressed thanks to a better head-to-head goal difference.

AFP/RSS
Kylian Mbappe

Porto made the last 16 at the expense of Shakhtar Donetsk after a 5-3 win over the Ukrainians.

The hosts only needed to avoid defeat at the Estadio do Dragao to progress from Group H with Barcelona, and an early Galeno goal put Porto ahead.

Danylo Sikan hauled Shakhtar level but Galeno netted again before Mehdi Taremi made it 3-1 to the Portuguese side.

An own goal gave Shakhtar a lifeline but 40-year-old Pepe eased Porto nerves with his team's fourth and Francisco Conceicao then put the game to bed, with Eguinaldo bagging a late consolation.

Royal Antwerp claimed a famous 3-2 win over Barcelona as George Ilenikhena netted a stoppage-time winner.

The Belgians twice led courtesy of goals from Arthur Vermeeren and Vincent Janssen but Barcelona replied through Ferran Torres and Marc Guiu, who looked to have salvaged a draw before Ilenikhena's heroics.

Manchester City became just the second English club to win all six Champions League group stage games with a 3-2 victory at Red Star Belgrade.

Twenty-year-old Micah Hamilton and Oscar Bobb scored their first goals for the club before Hwang In-beom pulled a goal back for the Serbian champions.

Kalvin Phillips scored his first City goal with a late penalty as Aleksandar Katai struck a consolation for Red Star in added time.

Defending champions City had already wrapped up top spot in Group G ahead of RB Leipzig, who won 2-1 at home to Switzerland's Young Boys.

Benjamin Sesko and Emil Forsberg got the goals for Leipzig either side of Ebrima Colley's equaliser in a frenetic five-minute spell in the second half.

Atletico sealed first place in Group E as Antoine Griezmann and Samuel Lino struck in a 2-0 victory over runners-up Lazio.

Celtic ended a 15-game winless streak in the group stage with Gustaf Lagerbielke's late header earning Brendan Rodgers' team a 2-1 victory over Feyenoord.

Luis Palma's first-half penalty put the Scots on top but their barren run looked destined to continue when Yankuba Minteh levelled with eight minutes left.

Dhangadhi overcome Chitwan to maintain unbeaten run

Olawale Afeez's goal two minutes into the game gives Yougal Kishor Rai's men a 1-0 win.

POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA
Dhangadhi's Olawale Afeez (third left) celebrates after scoring against Chitwan during the Nepal Super League in Kathmandu on Thursday.

❑ SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, DEC 14

Dhangadhi moved to the top of the Nepal Super League table after they defeated Chitwan 1-0 at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu on Thursday.

The victory maintained tournament favourites Dhangadhi's unbeaten run in the season and also returned the last edition's runners-up, who had drawn their last two matches, back to winning ways.

Dhangadhi have 11 points from five matches, two ahead of Lalitpur City, who have nine points. Defending champions Kathmandu Rayzrs and Pokhara Thunders are one point behind Lalitpur but Kathmandu sit in the third position due to goal difference.

Dhangadhi started brightly and took the lead after just two minutes when Olawale Afeez took Chitwan goalkeeper Bishal Shrestha by surprise, placing a long shot into the far top corner.

The early goal gave Dhangadhi control of the match but Yougal Kishor Rai's men had to withstand a series of deadly attacks, including a penalty, to keep Chitwan at bay.

Chitwan constantly knocked the door of the opponents looking for the equaliser, with Tshring Gurung coming closer to goal in the 38th minute when Nawayug Shrestha followed a good work from Rafiq Aminu to set him through at goal but Dhangadhi's Randip Paudel stood firm to keep out Gurung's shot.

> Dhangadhi climbed to the top of the standings with 11 points.

Mehrajuddin Waddo's side were finally rewarded for the pressure in the third minute of the first half added time after Richard Osei Agyemang ended up handling the ball when his teammate Rohan Karki tried to clear the ball from the crowded area.

Bimal Gharti Magar stepped up to take the spot kick but Dhangadhi goalkeeper Tikendra Thapa, who was playing his first match, made a brilliant save to deny Chitwan the equaliser.

Chitwan continued the bombardment after the restart as well and Gharti Magar forced a save from goalkeeper Thapa in the 49th minute.

Thapa was the hero again in the 53rd minute when he prevented Shrestha's header from going in with a high-flying save.

At the other end, second-half substitute Aashish Chaudhary had a golden opportunity to double the lead in the 57th minute when Afeez intercepted a poor pass from Marko Ivanovic at the left side of the box, evading the advancing goalkeeper Shrestha simultaneously, and cut back for Chaudhary but the forward failed to put the ball into the empty net.

Chitwan kept on probing for an equaliser and almost did get it in the added time of the second half when goalkeeper Thapa's unsuccessful attempt to punch away a corner allowed Afriyie Quah to fire a low shot from close range but Agyemang made a goal line clearance as Dhangadhi held on.

A third loss in six matches puts Chitwan unchanged in the seventh position, and level on five points with eighth-placed Birgunj United. Sporting Ilam are at the bottom with four points.

Chitwan have managed only one victory in the Nepal Super League across the two editions. Their only win of the franchise tournament came when they beat Birgunj 2-1 two weeks ago.

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

RESULTS		
Atletico Madrid	2-0	Lazio
Celtic	2-1	Feyenoord
Dortmund	1-1	PSG
Newcastle	1-2	AC Milan
Red Star	2-3	Man City
Leipzig	2-1	Young Boys
Porto	5-3	Shakhtar
Antwerp	3-2	Barcelona

STANDINGS							
Group E							
Team	**P**	**W**	**D**	**L**	**GF**	**GA**	**PT**
Atletico Madrid	6	4	2	0	17	6	14
Lazio	6	3	1	2	7	7	10
Feyenoord	6	2	0	4	9	10	6
Celtic	6	1	1	4	5	15	4
Group F							
Team	**P**	**W**	**D**	**L**	**GF**	**GA**	**PT**
Dortmund	6	3	2	1	7	4	11
PSG	6	2	2	2	9	8	8
AC Milan	6	2	2	2	5	8	8
Newcastle	6	1	2	3	6	7	5
Group G							
Team	**P**	**W**	**D**	**L**	**GF**	**GA**	**PT**
Man City	6	6	0	0	18	7	18
Leipzig	6	4	0	2	13	10	12
Young Boys	6	1	1	4	7	13	4
Red Star	6	0	1	5	7	15	1
Group H							
Team	**P**	**W**	**D**	**L**	**GF**	**GA**	**PT**
Barcelona	6	4	0	2	12	6	12
Porto	6	4	0	2	15	8	12
Shakhtar	6	3	0	3	10	12	9
Antwerp	6	1	0	5	6	17	3

TEAMS QUALIFIED FOR LAST 16	
Bayern Munich	Atletico Madrid
FC Copenhagen	Lazio
Arsenal	Borussia Dortmund
PSV Eindhoven	Paris Saint-Germain
Real Madrid	Manchester City
Napoli	RB Leipzig
Real Sociedad	Barcelona
Inter Milan	Porto

NEPAL SUPER LEAGUE

RESULT		
Chitwan	0-1	Dhangadhi
		Olawale Afeez 2'

FRIDAY'S FIXTURE		
Lalitpur City	17:00	Jhapa

STANDINGS							
Team	**P**	**W**	**D**	**L**	**GF**	**GA**	**PT**
Dhangadhi	5	3	2	0	6	3	11
Lalitpur	5	2	3	0	7	3	9
Kathmandu	5	2	2	1	5	4	8
Pokhara	5	2	2	1	4	3	8
Butwal	6	2	1	3	5	7	7
Jhapa	5	1	3	1	2	2	6
Chitwan	6	1	2	3	5	8	5
Birgunj	5	1	2	2	6	7	5
Ilam	6	1	1	4	5	8	4

ACC U-19 ASIA CUP

SEMI-FINALS (THURSDAY)		
UAE	11:15	Pakistan
Bangladesh	11:15	India

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Find empowerment in your ambitions, seizing the day by taking your responsibilities seriously and letting go of baggage, roadblocks, or personal reservations that may have hindered your climb up until this moment.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Consider how you can transform your circumstances this morning, pushing you to find a balance between strategy and faith. Believe that you can reach great heights while taking accountability for the steps you must take to climb higher.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
A cleansing energy washes over you in the morning. You'll have a chance to release once you've awakened, so be sure to let go of emotional weight as you get ready today. You'll feel uplifted with heightened intuition and luck.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
You'll find empowerment through love once you've awakened, though you should take care to set boundaries with situations that have caused you to fall off balance. Work hard to receive big rewards in the afternoon, so you can enjoy the weekend.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
Replace unsavoury patterns with healthier ones, finding empowerment with each smart decision you make. Sweetness finds you mid-morning, and if moving away from certain rituals causes you to feel on edge, you'll have a chance to reclaim balance soon.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
Focus on creating sustainable work habits, taking into consideration your goals, current responsibilities, and overall health. Emotional exchange can increase the intensity of your most valued connections.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
Demand a little more of yourself today. Though your emotions may be tested when striving to reach new heights, you'll thank yourself later for implementing a bit of internal tough love. be sure to have fun while honouring your creative spirit.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
Moments of enlightenment may change the way you think this morning. Feel free to play with new ideas, understanding that empowerment is often found when we release preconceived notions. it may be wise to centre your weekend plans around the home.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
Take a moment to examine your relationship with wealth and materialism this morning. Move boldly later in the afternoon, finding healing as you challenge yourself to face obstacles with confidence and passion, even if you're not totally certain of the outcome.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
Allow your personal perspective to shift, finding empowerment by redefining yourself and your place in this world. Honour your passions and emotions today, nurturing the people, hobbies, and situations that have continuously offered peace.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
You'll have a chance to embrace release today, encouraging you to close chapters, break patterns, and find renewal. If you've been looking to carve out a name for yourself, now would be a good time to showcase what makes you unique.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Consider a social media or screen detox today. These vibes are perfect for deactivating accounts, emphasising the importance of technological boundaries. Don't feel guilty about cancelling plans in favour of hibernating this weekend.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Happy
5 Leavening agent
10 Partner
14 Actress — Reinhart
15 Come to pass
16 Dies —
17 Applications
18 "Blue — Shoes"
19 Singer — Diamond
20 Noisy bird
22 Summer footwear
24 Slippery —
25 Data units
26 World as it is (2 wds.)
30 Holds a grudge
33 Sleeve
34 Lean
36 Pile of poker chips
38 — Lanka
39 Inventor — Howe
41 Persona — grata
42 Therefore
45 Office communication
46 Payable
47 Dummies
49 Worship
52 Battery terminal
54 Something sticky
55 Term of affection (2 wds.)
58 Bamboozled
62 Actor — Estrada
63 Swell out
66 — bean
67 Military assistant
68 Delight
69 At any time
70 Marsh plant
71 Judge
72 Torn

DOWN
1 Morose
2 Actress — Kudrow
3 "Shake — —!"
4 Drive away
5 Sierra Nevada attraction
6 Old French coin
7 High card
8 Frothy
9 Special pleasures
10 Attitude
11 Length times width
12 Caudal appendage
13 Morays
21 Sick
23 Traps for fish
25 "I'll — it when I see it"
26 Too hasty
27 Went wrong
28 — acid
29 Thin layer
31 Comedian — Sykes
32 Pathfinder
35 Make more manageable
37 Body joint
40 Vocalist
43 Made a metallic noise
44 Italian volcano
48 Sad
50 Long long time
51 Worker on a housetop
53 Singer — Reese
55 Pome fruit
56 Cleveland's lake
57 Neap —
59 Tsunami
60 Bet in roulette
61 Go fast
64 Cracklin' — Bran
65 Consumed

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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

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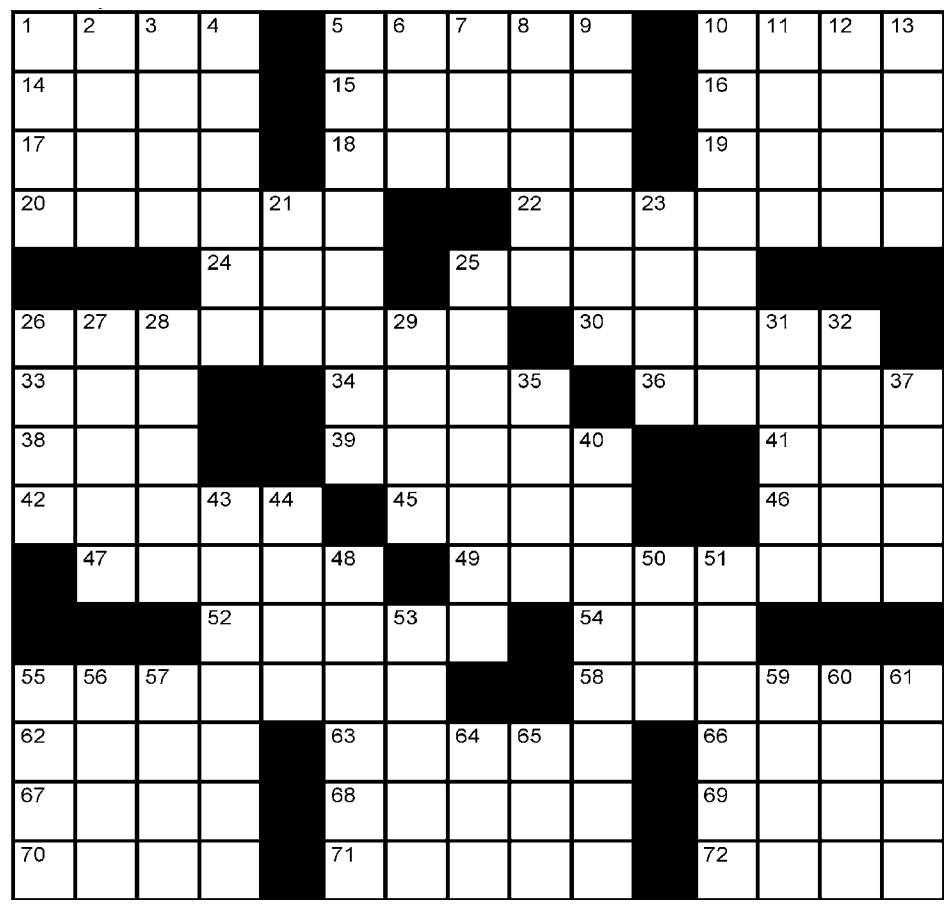

SUDOKU

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

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

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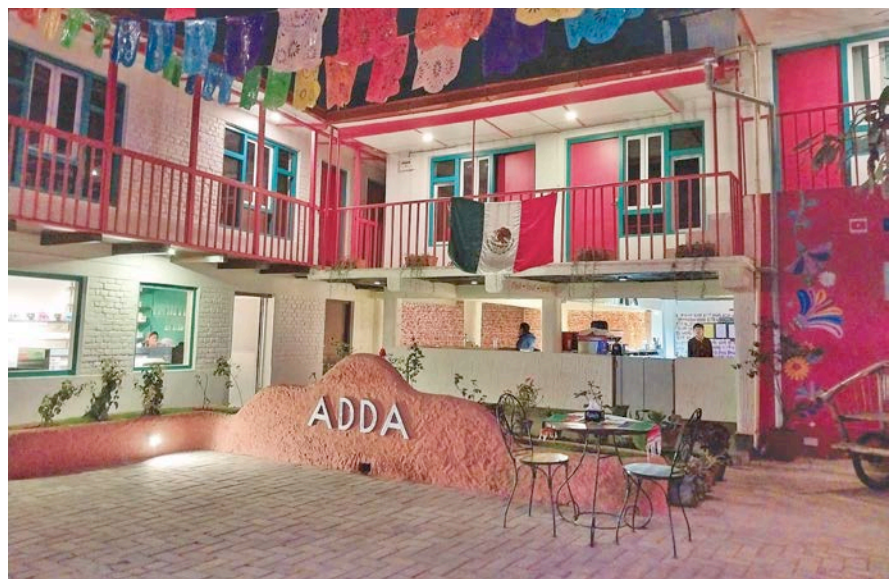
Spicing things up, Mexican way

Casa Mexicana in Gairidhara, Kathmandu, is a welcoming space that offers a fusion dining experience.

❑ MANUSHREE MAHAT
KATHMANDU



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF JAVIER AND INGRID HERRERA

When Monica Tapia arrived in Nepal, she had a vision: to bring the delights of Mexican cuisine to Kathmandu. Soon after her arrival, she set her plan in motion, selecting a location and crafting a menu with her husband, who shared her passion for cooking and travel. The dream became a reality in February 2017 with the opening of Casa Mexicana in Kathmandu.

Despite the difficult task of having to accumulate a whole new culture and language, Tapia enjoyed it. Introducing Mexican cuisine to locals initially proved challenging, yet over time, Casa Mexicana gained momentum.

"We realised that people in Nepal are open to trying new things and dishes. There's a natural hesitation at the beginning, but with time, we found our footing and developed a loyal customer base," says Tapia.

Monica Tapia, the owner of Casa Mexicana.

She believes that food can unite people, transcending cultural and language barriers. Nearly seven years since its inception, Casa Mexicana's kitchen is predominantly staffed by Nepalis, guided by Tapia to capture the essence of Mexican cuisine in Nepal.

There were a few challenges due to the availability of some ingredients, leading to the substitution of certain items with Nepali alternatives. Initially, sourcing the right type of corn flour for making corn tortillas was a hurdle, so they started using a different flour. The taste of avocados in Nepal differed from that in Mexico, so the Casa team added new ingredients to achieve an authentic Mexican guacamole. Tapia also had to design her own recipe for Pambazo—a deep fried Mexican sandwich, because they couldn't find a lot of the ingredients for the recipe in Nepal. Interestingly, zucchini, commonly used in Mexican dishes, was not well-received by Nepali diners.

Tapia observed a shared preference between Nepali and Mexican taste buds—both favouring flavourful food over bland options. While both nationalities appreciate spiciness in their meals, it was noted that the spice preference extended beyond just chili-dependent heat.

Casa began as a small venture, starting off more as a cafe than a restaurant, but the Gairidhara restaurant has now grown to offer ample space for diverse customers. Upon entering, you're greeted with warm hospitality, affirming that choosing to dine here was a good decision. The spacious interior unfolds with a gleaming bar straight ahead, and to the right, servers don traditional Mexican attire, part of the Mariachi outfit, complete with *sombreros* (wide-brimmed Mexican men's hats).

According to the founders, the restaurant aims to provide an authentic Mexican experience, evident in its fabric pattern from the Otomi tribal Mexican group, and décor reminiscent of Mexico. Tapia believes dining at a restaurant is not just about the food; it's also about the experience, and the ambience. Customers can even don *sombrero* hats casually hanging on the walls for a complete immersion into this Mexican haven. The seating arrangement is thoughtfully designed to cater to various dining preferences—from general dining areas for casual meals to elaborately designed private rooms with fireplaces and long meeting tables, ideal for business dealings.

Tapia mentions that Casa's menu reflects typical Mexican restaurants, offering burritos, quesadillas, sopes, pambazo, enchiladas and more, ensuring an authentic Mexican taste. Her personal favourite, the pambazo, is a fried sandwich with a special pepper sauce called

Sopes is a corn casserole with beans and fillings.

TASTE OF THE TOWN

Guajillo, served with cheese and a special salsa. Another standout, the sopes, is a corn casserole with beans, featuring fillings like mushroom, rajas paneer, potatoes and tinga mushroom, topped with cream cheese and veggies.

During our visit to Casa Mexicana, we opted for the burrito, curious to experience an authentic Mexican version compared to our homemade attempts. The chicken burrito we tried was delightful, packed with beans, cheese, chicken and served with red rice, potatoes and salsa. The burrito offered a well-balanced plate of flavours that was both satisfying and delicious.

At Casa, the servers welcome you with a friendly disposition, making you feel comfortable exploring new tastes. Following their suggestion, we tried the ponche, a warm Mexican fruit-based drink brimming with sugarcane, apples and guava, pear, mandarin and shakhar, to sweeten the ponche. It left us with the belief that tasty dishes can also be healthy.

The next dish we ordered was a dessert—Tres Leches; after all, it is what Casa Mexicana does best. This spongy, light cake is topped with a cream made from three different kinds of milk—coconut, condensed, and whole milk. Traditionally, the Tres Leches is made with evaporated milk, but since that's not widely available in Nepal, Tapia replaced it with Coconut milk. It practically melts in the mouth, offering a sweet sensation without being overly intense. Plus, the generous portion size makes it a winner all around.

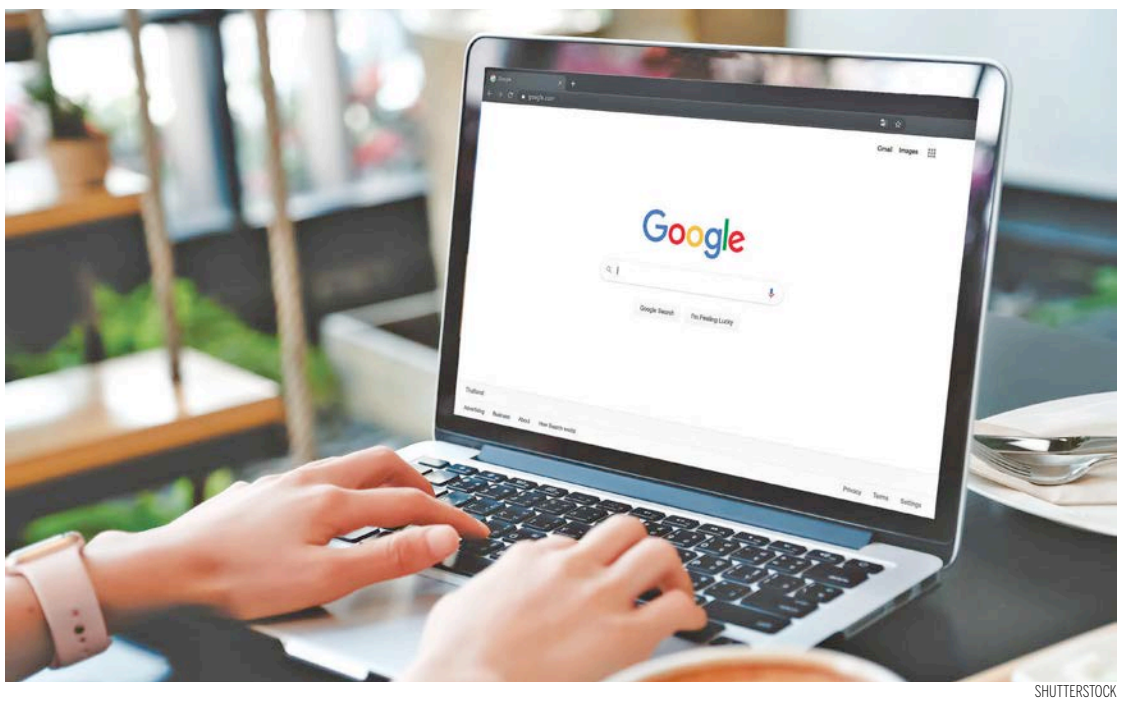
Tapia is optimistic about Casa Mexicana's future and is currently pleased with the success they've achieved in Nepal. While she envisions opening similar restaurants worldwide, she's content with having found a home in Nepal. There are also plans to introduce more menu items in the future, including more soups best for the winter, and a few more different kinds of Mexican dessert, ensuring that their customers will have even more of the incredibly tasty Tres Leches and other delicious Mexican desserts to enjoy.

Tres Leches is a spongy, light cake.

Ponche, a warm fruit-based Mexican drink.

What did you Google in 2023?

Israel-Hamas war, 'Jawan' and Barbenheimer are among the year's top internet searches.



SHUTTERSTOCK

❑ ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK, US

Your Google search history for 2023 has arrived.

Well, actually, the world's. On Monday, the California-based tech giant released its 'Year in Search', a roundup of 2023's top global queries, ranging from unforgettable pop culture moments (hello, Barbenheimer), to the loss of beloved figures and tragic news carrying worldwide repercussions.

The ongoing Israel-Hamas war topped news trends in 2023, per Google's global data, followed by queries related to the Titanic-bound submersible that imploded in June, as well as February's devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

Damar Hamlin was Google's top trending person on search this year. A safety with the NFL's Buffalo Bills, Hamlin experienced a near-death cardiac arrest on the field during a January game, but has since completed a celebrated comeback. Actor Jeremy Renner, who survived a serious snowplow accident at the start of 2023, followed. Meanwhile, the late Matthew Perry and Tina Turner led search trends among notable individuals who passed away.

In the world of entertainment, 'Barbie' dominated Google search's movie trends this year—followed by Barbenheimer co-pilot 'Oppenheimer' and Indian thriller 'Jawan'. In TV, 'The Last of Us', 'Wednesday' and 'Ginny and Georgia' were the top three trending shows in 2023.

Yoasobi's 'アイドル(Idol)' was Google's top trending song. Jason Aldean's 'Try That In A Small Town'—which soared in the charts after controversy this summer—and Shakira and Bizarrap's 'Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol 53' followed.

> Damar Hamlin was Google's top trending person this year. Actor Jeremy Renner followed.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg for Google's 2023 global search trends. Bibimbap was the top trending recipe. Inter Miami CF, the new home of Argentine soccer superstar Lionel Messi, led Google's sports teams trends. And in the U.S. specifically, many consumers spent 2023 asking why eggs, Taylor Swift tickets and sriracha bottles were so expensive—while 'rizz' (recently named Oxford's word of the year) was a frontrunner for trending slang definition inquires.

You can find more data, including country-specific lists and trends from years past, on Google's 'Year in Search' archive. The company says it collected its 2023 search results from Jan. 1 through November 27 of this year.

Google isn't the only one to publish annual data as 2023 draws to a close—and from dictionary lookups to music streams, chances are, you've probably seen other lists recapping online activity this year. Last week, for example, Wikipedia released its year-end list of most-viewed entries—with its article about ChatGPT leading the pack.

To mark the search engine's 25th birthday, Google also released top search data "of all time" across various specific categories. Since 2004 (when the company's trends data first became available globally), the most-Googled Grammy winner of all time has been Beyoncé, for example, while Portuguese soccer great Cristiano Ronaldo is the highest-searched athlete, and the most-searched movie or TV cast is 'Harry Potter'.

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