



THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXXI No. 297 | 8 pages | Rs.5
Thursday, December 21, 2023 | 05-09-2080



28.6° C -4.7° C
Janakpur Jumla

TODAY

NATIONAL

Immunisation drive against measles-rubella and typhoid is set to start on Thursday in Karnali Province, including the quake-affected districts considered highly vulnerable to outbreaks of these diseases. Pg 3

The anti-corruption commission has blasted the tendency of governments at all levels to make policy decisions through the Cabinet or similar authorities at sub-national levels to avoid its investigation. Pg 3

Nepal on Wednesday confirmed the death of another Nepali serving in the Russian army and identified the victim as Kundan Singh Nagal. This takes the tally of Nepalis killed in the Ukraine war to seven. Pg 3

OPINION

Frustration is growing in the business and professional sectors, and hordes of young people are leaving the country for better opportunities, writes *Chandra Mani Adhikari*. Pg 4



A woman uses the traditional mortar and pestle to husk rice at Bayala of Barekot Rural Municipality ward 1 in Jajarkot district on Monday. While mills are common in most parts of the country, this underdeveloped region is still without basic amenities, adding to people's hardships.

POST PHOTO: MAHESH KC

Army says expressway to Tarai won't be over in next 3 years under current laws

Chief of Army Staff Prabhu Ram Sharma shrugs off blame, says the defence force did not ask for the project. The government and politicians 'gave us the task'.

BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, DEC 20

Over six years into the construction of the Kathmandu-Tarai Expressway, Nepal Army has completed a little over a quarter of the project that has a price tag of over Rs200 billion.

The army in August 2017 started work on the national pride project with a plan to complete it in four years. With the project moving ahead at a snail's pace, the government in August 2021 extended the completion deadline to December 2024.

After assessing that the highway would not be ready by the extended deadline, the government further stretched the completion time till April 2027. However, given the sluggish progress in construction, even the army leadership is not confident of the project's completion three years later.

Presenting a progress report to the State Affairs and Good Governance Committee of the House of Representatives, Chief of Army Staff Prabhu Ram Sharma said it would be impossible to complete the project in 2027 without revising the existing Forest Act and the Land Acquisition Act.

"We have been asked to work on the fast track but the laws from the 1950's. If relevant laws are not in place on time, I cannot assure the project's completion in 2027," he said. "It would be an achievement even if just the track is ready and motor vehicles can ply the road by the deadline. After that, it will take two or three years more to complete the project."

The army leadership blames the executive and the legislature for the delayed work.

At Wednesday's meeting, the army leadership blamed the executive and the legislature for the delayed work. It takes nine months to get clearance to cut down four trees on the project site, he said. "We have been unable to clear the trees that I showed to the prime minister and the defence minister at the project side months ago," Sharma said.

>> Continued on page 2

Russia-Israel relations crumble over Gaza war

War against Ukraine has driven Russia into a different coupling, this time with Israel's sworn enemy Iran.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JERUSALEM, DEC 20

Among the nations condemning Israel's war in Gaza, one has stood out—Russia had built a growing friendship with Israel, but that dalliance is over, analysts said, erased by the shifting sands of Middle East geopolitics.

Just under two years ago, the picture had been very different.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Israel didn't join the West in sanctioning Moscow, a demonstration of the alliance of convenience between the two governments.

Now, Russia's President Vladimir Putin is among Israel's loudest critics and has refused to denounce Hamas's bloody October 7 attack.

Instead, his war against Ukraine has driven Russia into a different coupling, this time with Israel's sworn enemy Iran.

Russia has officially backed calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza at the UN, while early in the war Putin accused Israel of contemplating tactics comparable to Nazi Germany's brutal siege of what is now Saint Petersburg during World War II.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza says Israel's offensive, aimed at destroying Hamas, has killed more than 19,600 people, mostly women and children. In late October, Moscow went as far as to host envoys from the Palestinian militant group and Iran, which Moscow said included talks on releasing foreign hostages. Israel called the meeting "a reprehensible step that gives support to terrorism". This month, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi visited Moscow for talks with Putin, while on Wednesday Russia made a joint demand alongside the Arab League for a UN Security Council ceasefire resolution.

>> Continued on page 2

Poor report card prompts Dahal to pledge urgent action

The Prime Minister's Office reports lag in performance, with 21 ministries failing to achieve annual targets.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, DEC 20

The government's overall performance—from service delivery, budget expenditure, and governance to capital expenditure—has seen a sharp decline, according to a report from the Prime Minister's Office.

A meeting of government secretaries chaired by Chief Secretary Baikuntha Aryal on Monday took several decisions after the government fell short of the targets it set in its annual policies and programmes and the annual budget.

Experts observing the government's performance termed the current situation as "catch-22", saying the government has a difficult escape as it is caught in conflicting rules and limitations. The evaluation report published by the Prime Minister's Office on December 5 shows problems in service delivery, with 21 ministries and six other government agencies failing to achieve the targets, particularly in areas like fiscal distribution, infrastructure progress, governance reform, and social sectors.

According to the report, the four-month evaluation covered 27 government entities including 21 ministries, the National Planning Commission, the Office of the Nepal Investment Board, the National Vigilance Centre, the Public Procurement Office and the National Statistics Office. A total of 1,600 government-related activities, 3,421 milestones and 327 result indicators were identified and integrated into the PMO's evaluation system.

In the four months since the announcement of the annual budget, by mid-October, only 3.88 percent of government-related activities were completed and 8.13 percent of the milestones achieved, according to the report.

After poor performance and poor service delivery by various ministries and government agencies, the meeting of the government secretaries on Monday called for expediting efforts to achieve the milestones.

Only 3.88 percent of government-related works completed in four months of fiscal year.

At the meeting of government secretaries on Monday, chief secretary Aryal was visibly angry by the poor performance of government agencies and ministries, and threatened to take stern action against under-performing officials, according to a secretary who was present at the meeting.

As the government is all set to complete its year in office, the meeting also gave an eight-point instruction to ministries and government agencies to initiate immediate reforms.

>> Continued on page 2

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MONEY

As the deadline nears for Nepali internet service providers to clear dues to the broadband service providers in India, Nepal's telecom regulator has taken a firm stand—clear taxes and access foreign exchange. Pg 5

The government has hiked the price of sugarcane by 4 percent, to Rs635 a quintal. A Cabinet meeting set the minimum support price for this year's harvest, days after releasing the subsidy for last year's deal. Pg 5

WORLD

Colorado Supreme Court on Tuesday declared former President Donald Trump ineligible for the White House under the constitution's insurrection clause and removed him from the state's presidential primary ballot. Pg 6

SPORTS

Anjan Bista and Samiraj Thokar were on target as ten-man Jhapa squeezed their way into the top four and kept alive their Nepal Super League playoff hopes with a 2-0 win over Dhangadhi. Pg 7



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FOREX

US Dollar	133.38
Euro	145.93
Pound Sterling	168.79
Swiss Franc	154.61
Australian Dollar	90.24
Canadian Dollar	100.02
Singapore Dollar	100.27
Japanese Yen (10)	9.30
Chinese Yuan	18.68
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.55
Qatari Riyal	36.60
Thai Bhat	3.81
UAE Dhiram	36.32
Malaysian Ringgit	28.63
Korean Won (100)	10.25

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES

Nepse (in percent) 2,141.87pts 1.68%

HIGHEST GAINERS

BNIL 10	HDL 10	FOWAD 10	NRN 10	LEC 10	UMRH 10
SANIMA 0.11	API 0.1	MKJC 0.08	JBBL 0.06	PFL 0.03	JBLB 0.01

MODERATE GAINERS

MODERATE LOSERS

HIGHEST LOSERS

KDBY -3.82	NLBB -3.65	MMJUL -3.64	SHINE -3.45	TRH -3.39	GMFBS -3.35
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BULLION

PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 119,000
Silver	Rs 1,465

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

US bans pharmacy Rite Aid from facial recognition use

WASHINGTON: Pharmacy group Rite Aid was ordered Tuesday to stop using facial recognition for the next five years by a US regulator, which said the company falsely identified consumers as shoplifters using the technology. The case touches on one of the main concerns about the proliferation of artificial intelligence, and facial recognition in particular, which is deemed to potentially misidentify or discriminate against individuals, especially non-whites and women. “Rite Aid’s reckless use of facial surveillance systems left its customers facing humiliation and other harms,” said Samuel Levine, director of consumer harms at the Federal Trade Commission. **(AFP)**

Bangladesh garment workers sacked after wage protests

DHAKA: For a decade, the nimble fingers of Bangladeshi garment worker Naim Pramanik sewed shirts and trousers for top Western brands, to be worn by the wealthy across the world. Now the 28-year-old is unemployed, sacked after daring to take part in protests demanding a fair wage. “Some clothes we make are sold at \$100 a piece in shops in America and Europe,” he said, showing the labels of American fashion giant Tommy Hilfiger and British brand George. “We don’t get more than \$100 a month.” **(AFP)**

Waning influence of OPEC+ in spotlight as prices flag

LONDON: Despite slashing oil production for months on end and announcing new cuts in late November, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its ten allies have struggled to boost flagging prices. Moreover, the OPEC+ group faces pressure on multiple fronts, as rising US crude production, a looming transition away from fossil fuels, and reports of discord among members have added to the challenges. Prices are sitting at their lowest level in nearly six months despite the cartel’s announcement in November to further cut output. They have jumped in recent days as cargo shippers and oil firms say they will avoid using the Red Sea and Suez Canal because of drone and missile attacks by Huthi rebels. But they still remain below \$80 a barrel. **(AFP)**

UK inflation hits lowest level in more than two years

LONDON: British inflation has slowed sharply to the lowest level in more than two years on falling petrol prices, official data showed Wednesday, easing a cost-of-living crisis after aggressive interest-rate hikes. The Consumer Prices Index hit 3.9 percent in November from 4.6 percent in the previous month, attaining the weakest rate since September 2021, the Office of National Statistics said. The news handed a further boost to embattled Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak after inflation had already achieved his goal of falling below five percent in October. **(AFP)**

ISPs must clear tax dues to access foreign exchange: Regulator

India’s bandwidth providers—Tata and Airtel—have told Nepali ISPs to clear the dues amounting to around Rs3 billion by December 31 or face supply disruption.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, DEC 20

As the deadline nears for Nepali internet service providers (ISPs) to clear dues to the broadband service providers in India, Nepal’s telecom regulator has taken a firm stance—clear taxes and access foreign exchange.

India’s bandwidth providers—Tata and Airtel—have given a deadline of December 31 to Nepali internet service providers to clear the dues of nine months totalling Rs3 billion or face supply disruption.

The Indian companies have warned they would stop providing bandwidth service to Nepal if the Nepali companies failed to clear the dues. This may impact the internet services of private operators, other than the state-owned Nepal Telecom.

On Sunday, the internet service providers and Nepal Telecommunications Authority, the telecom regulator, held a meeting to discuss the issue, said Santosh Paudel, director of Nepal Telecommunications Authority.

A first round of meetings has been completed, said Sudhir Parajuli, president of Internet Service Providers’ Association of Nepal.

“There is still confusion regarding the clearance of taxes on the non-telecommunications service,”

“We did not have to pay taxes on non-telecommunications services for the fiscal year 2017-18 largely due to the directive issued by the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee [of the past parliament]. On Sunday, we discussed why the authorities did not do the same for two other fiscal years 2018-19 and 2019-20 as per the committee directive,” Parajuli said.

He said the private-sector operators need to be exempted from taxes on the non-telecommunications service for two fiscal years.

The authority responded that it would study the matter before reaching any conclusion, he said.

Paudel said that the government is not yet convinced to exempt the taxes for the internet service providers for those two fiscal years.

“The decision is now on the hand of the government to go against the



The average bandwidth cost is \$2 per Mbps per month.

The authority responded that it would study the matter before reaching any conclusion.

Office of Auditor General report and exempt the taxes,” said Paudel.

“Also, the law needs to be amended to waive the taxes,” he added.

Last week, internet service providers met with Minister of Communications and Information Technology Rekha Sharma and briefed her on the situation.

Sharma said they would discuss and resolve the issues, said Parajuli.

Parajuli said that the decision to waive the taxes on non-telecommunications components was published in the Nepal Gazette after the parliamentary committee’s ruling.

“Why is the government then forcing us to pay the taxes?”

According to internet service providers, if an internet service costs Rs1,000, almost 50 percent is allocated

to support and maintenance services.

The sales of goods, support and maintenance charges and other charges unrelated to telecommunications are exempt from royalties and taxes, as per the directive issued by the parliamentary committee.

According to the association, Nepali private internet service providers have been buying international bandwidth from two Indian companies—Tata and Airtel.

The average bandwidth cost is \$2 per Mbps per month. Two years ago, it was expensive—the average price was \$4 per Mbps per month—which has now dropped.

According to the Management and Information System report of Nepal’s telecom regulator, the number of fixed broadband subscribers—wired and wireless—reached 10.7 million as of mid-August, compared to 8.64 million in the same period last year.

Fixed broadband (wired) covers 40.72 percent of the total population.

There are 20 ISPs in the country.

Parajuli said the payment for 1 terabyte purchased by Vianet, Subisu, WorldLink, and ClassicTech, among others, has been halted.

Toyota subsidiary to halt all shipments over rigged safety tests

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO, DEC 20

Toyota subsidiary Daihatsu said Wednesday it will suspend shipments of all car models in Japan and abroad, following news it had rigged safety tests.

The announcement came after an independent panel also found the malpractice dated back to 1989, when the oldest instance was confirmed and reports said the firm faced on-site inspections by government officials.

Toyota, the world’s biggest carmaker, expressed its “sincere apologies” over the issue and said it would carry out “a fundamental reform”.

The panel was set up earlier this year to probe a safety scandal that emerged in April.

The investigation “found new irregularities in 174 items within 25 test categories” in addition to wrongdoing

previously detected in April and May involving door parts and side-collision tests, Toyota said.

With certification being a “major prerequisite” for an automobile manufacturer to conduct business, “our misconduct that surfaced this time amounts to disregard” of that very process, Daihatsu president Soichiro Okudaira told reporters, before bowing deeply to apologise.

In a statement, Toyota also recognised the “extreme gravity” of Daihatsu’s neglect, which has “shaken the very foundations of the company as an automobile manufacturer”.

“Daihatsu decided today to temporarily suspend shipments of all Daihatsu-developed models currently in production, both in Japan and overseas,” the auto titan said in a statement.

The panel of outside experts attributed the decades-long irregularities in

part to “an excessively tight and rigid development schedule”.

Daihatsu employees were “exposed to the intense pressure to pass crash tests on their first attempt” to minimise the number of vehicles destroyed and thereby “reduce costs”, committee chair Makoto Kaiami told reporters.

“No failure can be forgiven”—that was the kind of mindset,” he said.

With the latest findings, the number of car models linked to wrongdoing now totals 64, including some sold under the Toyota brand which will also be suspended.

The firms said it was unaware of any accidents that have arisen from the falsification, but “thorough technical verification” was underway.

Public broadcaster NHK reported that Japan’s transport ministry will conduct an on-site inspection of Daihatsu on Thursday.

Government hikes sugarcane price by Rs25 to Rs635 per quintal

The government on Wednesday increased the price of sugarcane by 4 percent year on year.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, DEC 20

The government on Wednesday increased the price of sugarcane by 4 percent to Rs635 per quintal.

A Cabinet meeting fixed the minimum support price of sugarcane at Rs635 per quintal for this fiscal year’s harvest, according to Minister for Communications and Information Technology Rekha Sharma, who is also the government spokesperson.

Of the total Rs635 per quintal, Rs565 is the support price, which includes transportation and production costs, and profit.

Similarly, Rs70 is the subsidy provided by the government per quintal.

The minimum support price is the government-guaranteed price for farmers set annually.

The government announced a cash subsidy scheme in 2018 after the farmers complained that the money they get from the mill owners was insufficient to cover their costs.

In Nepal, sugarcane harvest normally begins in mid-November.

The floor price of sugarcane in the last fiscal year was set at Rs610 per quintal.

The decision comes on the heels of a protest by farmers in Sarlahi demanding the subsidy amount for the sugarcane sold last year and the minimum support price for the fresh harvest.

Farmers said they have received only Rs21 out of Rs70 per quintal as a subsidy announced by the government for last year’s harvest.

They had demanded the sugarcane price at Rs750 per quintal, considering the increase in the price of sugar and farmers’ production cost. Sugar sold for a record Rs160 per kg during Dashain after India banned the export of the sweetener.

Sugar at present costs Rs115 per kg in the market. In the same period last year, the price of sugar was Rs90 per kg.

Sugarcane production has been on the decline over the last few years. In

2019-20, Nepal produced 3.4 million tonnes of sugarcane, which dropped to 3.18 million tonnes in 2020-21, according to the Agriculture Ministry statistics. In 2021-22, the output further dropped to 3.15 million tonnes.

Low production led to a shortage of sugar this festive season.

As shortage was rampant during the Tihar festival, the state supplier Salt Trading Corporation rationed the sweetener to 2 kg at the unit price of Rs115 per consumer.

Neighbour India, too, imposed restrictions on sugar exports for the first time in seven years by capping this season’s exports at 10 million tonnes, to prevent a surge in domestic prices after mills sold a record volume on the world market.

With India’s restriction and domestic production failing to meet the demand, the sugar price shot up during this festive season.

Due to perennial hassles in getting payments and the government fixing an ‘unsustainably lower’ price for their produce, farmers have started looking for alternative crops. Many sugarcane farmers are planting mustard, for instance.

According to Minister Sharma, the government decided to dole out Rs520 million in subsidy to sugarcane farmers immediately.

The prime minister’s secretariat said that a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal with the ministers and officials concerned had decided to release the amount.

In 2018, the government started the practice of fixing the floor price for sugarcane in a bid to end the lingering conflict between sugarcane farmers and sugar producers.

Sugarcane growers and sugar mills routinely engaged in a bitter dispute over the floor price during the harvest time every year.

Before the government began setting the floor price, sugarcane prices in Nepal were normally based on the rates paid by Indian mills to their farmers.



Low production led to a shortage of sugar in the recent festive season.

On yer bike: London firms turn to cargo bikes

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON, DEC 20

On a busy north London street, plumber Ben Hume-Wright zipped through the heavy rush-hour traffic to his next job by bike.

Trades such as his used to rely on vans but many are now choosing to do more business using two or sometimes three wheels.

Since switching his Ford diesel pickup truck for an electric cargo bike two years ago, Hume-Wright said he has been busier than ever.

“I used to take on a maximum of five or six appointments” a day, he told AFP as the traffic ground forward behind him.

“I’ll now book in six, seven and possibly even eight, because I know that I’m not going to get stuck in traffic.”

Hume-Wright set up in 2010 and was reliant on his van for 11 years. But now describes it as a “glorified shed” handy for storing parts and tools.

When faced with a big installation job, he gets a supplier to deliver bulkier items directly to the client’s address. He then shows up on his bike with just the tools needed for the job.

“It’s cheaper, I don’t have any of the fuel costs and I just enjoy it. It’s a lot more fun,” he said.

Transport for London (TfL), the local government body responsible for

most of the British capital’s transport network, launched its first “Cargo Bike Action Plan” earlier this year.

It wants to “promote and enable” their growth, given a rise in polluting van deliveries from online shopping since the pandemic. The use of cargo

bikes, which can cost several thousand pounds (dollars), also increased during lockdown and encouraging their use chimes with Mayor Sadiq Khan’s aim of a carbon net-zero city by 2030.

TfL estimates that the move towards



Co-founder of green logistics company Zhero, Joe Sharpe, rides a cargo bike near Sadie Coles HQ gallery, one of Zhero’s clients, in London on October 27.

cargo bikes could save up to 30,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions a year across Greater London by that time.

Cargo bikes were popular across northern Europe until the mid-20th century but fell out of favour as motorised vehicles gained ground.

Their revival began in the early 2000s in cycling-crazy Denmark and the Netherlands, which unlike London are blessed with flat terrain and good cycling infrastructure.

The number of cargo bikes on the streets of Copenhagen increased from 20,000 in 2020 to more than 40,000 in 2022, the city said. In Germany—Europe’s largest market for E-cargo bikes—165,000 units were sold in 2022.

Ben Jaconelli, chief executive of leading E-bike and E-cargo bike firm Fully Charged, said UK growth has been “astronomical”.

He co-founded the firm in 2014, when the sight of an electric cargo bike was a rarity. “Nowadays, it’s almost rare not to see,” he added.

The Bicycle Association, a UK trade body, reported a 30-percent increase in UK sales of E-cargo bikes in the year to May 2023.

Contributory factors include the controversial expansion of London’s ultra-low emission zone, which charges the drivers of the most polluting vehicles. Logistics company Zhero is also committed to using the bikes. It

transports fine art between studios, galleries and related businesses such as framers. Like Hume-Wright, environmental considerations were a key factor for the switch. But co-founder Joe Sharpe called it a “straight-up financial decision”.

“It’s cheaper to move things by cargo bikes than it is by van,” he said near Sadie Coles HQ gallery, a regular client in the busy Soho district.

“They’re the most logical vehicle for moving things around the city.. Sometimes we might be doing 30 to 40 deliveries a day on a cargo bike.

“In a van, eight to 10.”

Vans—or more specifically a fleet of E-vans—are still a part of Zhero’s business, in part for insurance reasons. Zhero are insured for up to £25,000 (nearly \$32,000) to transport artwork by bike, but that rises tenfold when transporting art in an E-van.

Sharpe hopes that the insurance world will adapt to the changing norms of logistics companies, but concedes that vans may always be “a part of the fabric” of cities.

Back in the warren of railway arches that make up Fully Charged HQ, an optimistic Jaconelli declared that this is “the decade of the E-cargo bike”.

“Ultimately, I believe that all businesses will be using electric cargo bikes in some capacity in the future,” he said. “Why would they not?”

Jhapa keep alive playoff hopes

Goals from Bista and Thokar give Jhapa a 2-0 win over Dhangadhi, sending the Elephants up to forth.



Players of Jhapa celebrate after scoring a goal against Dhangadhi during the Nepal Super League at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, DEC 20

Ten-man Jhapa squeezed their way into the top four of the Nepal Super League standings after they defeated Dhangadhi 2-0 at Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

Anjan Bista and Samiraj Thokar scored after break to help the Elephants climb two places up to fourth in the table that reignited their hopes to make the playoffs.

A draw or a win would have sent Dhangadhi into the playoffs but the outcome leaves the top four race wide open as the group stage nears the end.

Pokhara Thunders, on 14 points, booked their ticket to the playoffs on Tuesday with a 1-0 win over Butwal Lumbini.

Dhangadhi are second with 12 points and face tricky Pokhara in their last group fixture on Friday.

Jhapa, who have 10 points, kicked Kathmandu Rayzrs out of the top four position but the defending champions still have two matches on hand.

Kathmandu, on nine points, face Birgunj United on Thursday before taking on third-placed Lalitpur City, who have 10 points, on Saturday.

Up next for Jhapa is Chitwan, who are out of contention along with Sporting Ilam.

Dhangadhi were the only unbeaten side of the franchise league and started as favourites but it was Jhapa who almost found the net three seconds into the game when Prashant Laksham stole the possession from Rohan Karki to set up Jorge Peiaez Sanchez but Dhangadhi goalkeeper Mohamad Taha reacted quickly to foil the effort.

Dhangadhi's Ahmed Hijaji was a constant threat and deadly with his finishing touch.

But Jhapa's goalkeeper Stefan Cupic was better and thwarted Hijaji's destructive attempts twice in the first half, with the Lebanon forward's first whack at target coming through a volley as early as the third minute. Hijaji also tried another stab with a second and more powerful volley from the outside edge of the area in the 20th minute but Cupic stretched full length to make a brilliant save.

Cupic also brilliantly kept out a curling freekick from Kamal Shrestha two minutes later.

Cupic is the most successful goalkeeper in the league this season having conceded only twice in seven matches. He has now kept clean sheets in five matches.

Jhapa's struggle rested far up front as Oriol Mohedano Segura's men had been able to score only twice before Wednesday.

Sanchez was wasteful again, missing another golden opportunity after failing to execute a routine task of controlling the ball in front of the goal in the 24th minute but the Spaniard definitely teased Taha with a powerful shot in the closing minutes of the first half.

Captain Bista found the breakthrough eight minutes after the break heading in a precise cross from his national team mate Chhring Lama.

Dhangadhi sent in Olawale Afeez after the hour mark in search of an equaliser but Cupic guarded the post to protect the lead, saving a lofted header from Fode Fofana in the 69th minute.

But Jhapa added their second goal in the 76th minute, courtesy of Pradip Lama's

smart cut-back that evaded the stretched palms of Taha before finding Sanchez who rolled the ball towards the empty net.

Sanchez could have written his name on the scoresheet but Samiraj Thokar poked the already goal-bound ball from the goalline to make sure it went in.

The frustrated Sanchez then found himself confronted by his own teammate Cupic in the dying minutes after letting through the wall a Dhangadhi freekick that went just wide of the post.

The most undesirable moment for Jhapa was the sending off of Diraj Thatali who was shown a straight red for a nasty tackle on Saimon Limbu.

NEPAL SUPER LEAGUE							
RESULT							
Jhapa		2-0		Dhangadhi			
Anjan Bista 53'							
Samiraj Thokar 76'							
PLAYING THURSDAY							
Kathmandu Rayzrs		17:00		Birgunj United			
STANDINGS							
Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	PT
Pokhara Thunders	7	4	2	1	7	4	14
Dhangadhi FC	7	3	3	1	7	6	12
Lalitpur City	7	2	4	1	7	4	10
Jhapa FC	7	2	4	1	4	2	10
Kathmandu Rayzrs	6	2	3	1	6	5	9
Sporting Ilam	8	2	2	4	6	8	8
Butwal Lumbini	7	2	1	4	5	8	7
FC Chitwan	7	1	3	3	5	8	6
Birgunj United	6	1	2	3	7	9	5

Chelsea back from brink to reach League Cup semis

Beaten three times in their previous five games, the Blues show fighting spirit to overcome Newcastle 4-2 on penalties in the quarter-finals.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON, DEC 20

Chelsea came back from the brink to reach the League Cup semi-finals with a dramatic penalty shoot-out victory against Newcastle after Mykhailo Mudryk's last-gasp equaliser on Tuesday.

Mauricio Pochettino's side were joined in the semi-finals by Fulham, who beat Everton on penalties, and second-tier Middlesbrough, 3-0 winners against Port Vale.

Beaten three times in their previous five games, a wretched run that started with their 4-1 loss at Newcastle, Chelsea showed some much needed fighting spirit to win the quarter-final 4-2 on penalties after a 1-1 draw at Stamford Bridge.

Languishing in 10th place in the Premier League, Chelsea were two minutes from being knocked out before Ukraine winger Mudryk came to the rescue with the leveller that set the stage for the Blues' shoot-out success.

Pochettino's only silverware as a manager is a French league title and domestic cup with Paris Saint-Germain.

Chelsea's progress keeps the Argentine in contention for his first trophy in England after he lost the 2015 League Cup final during his time at Tottenham.

"We are so happy. The fans and the club deserve this sort of feeling. It's a big motivation," Pochettino said. "We are so young. We are creating a very good bond. This type of result will help us." The defeat was a painful blow for Newcastle, who failed in their attempt to avenge last season's League Cup final loss to Manchester United at Wembley.

After crashing out of the Champions League group stage, Newcastle's exit was another setback for the Saudi-backed club in their bid to land a first major trophy since 1969.

"It hurts a lot. We defended really well but didn't get over the line," Newcastle manager Eddie Howe said.

"It's a very painful moment for us. We'll just have to accept it and digest it."

Newcastle had been gifted the lead by Chelsea's shambolic defending in the 16th minute.

Callum Wilson seized possession inside his own half and accelerated away from Thiago Silva as his lung-bursting run carried him into the Chelsea area.

Benoit Badiashile should have snuffed out the danger, but the defender's woefully miscued attempt to clear allowed Wilson to fire home with ease. With 20 minutes left, France forward Christopher Nkunku came on for his Chelsea debut after a prolonged injury absence since his close-season move from RB Leipzig.

Two minutes into stoppage time, Chelsea forced a shoot-out as Newcastle defender Kieran Trippier made a hash of dealing with a cross, misdirecting his header to Mudryk, who drilled into the bottom corner.

Trippier's misery was compounded when he smashed Newcastle's second penalty wide in the shoot-out.

Nkunku converted Chelsea's third penalty in his first significant contribution for the club.

Djordje Petrovic sealed Chelsea's victory as he

dived to his left to make a brilliant save from Matt Ritchie's kick.

Fulham progress

Fulham moved into the semi-finals for the first time after a 7-6 shoot-out win against Everton following a 1-1 draw at Goodison Park.

Cottagers boss Marco Silva enjoyed a measure of revenge on the club that sacked him in 2019 by leading Fulham into their first domestic semi-final since the 2002 FA Cup.

Tosin Adarabioyo scored the decisive spot-kick after Everton's Idrissa Gueye hit the post.

Amadou Onana had missed a chance to win the tie for Everton earlier in the shoot-out when his kick was saved by Bernd Leno.

Fulham went ahead in the 41st minute through Michael Keane's own goal before Everton substitute Beto equalised with eight minutes left.

"It's incredible what the players have been doing," Silva said. "We wanted to make history in the football club."

Middlesbrough cruised past third tier Port Vale to reach the semi-finals for the first time since they lifted the trophy in 2004.

Michael Carrick's Championship side ruined Vale's first quarter-final appearance with goals from Jonathan Howson, Morgan Rogers and Matt Crooks.



Chelsea's Mykhailo Mudryk (left) celebrates with Christopher Nkunku after scoring against Newcastle during the English League Cup quarter-final football match at Stamford Bridge in London on Tuesday.

HOROSCOPE



ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Your barriers will be dissolved this morning. Gear up for new beginnings or opportunities, taking initiative toward future goals. Keep your distance from authoritative or destructive personalities and monitor your relationship with control. Document your goals and focus on yourself.



TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Trust your instincts and practical thinking. Reflect on upcoming events and how they affect you. Later, focus on your spiritual side to let go of fear and negativity. Your confidence grows in pursuing personal goals and defining who you are.



GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Today, speak up to overcome challenges and fix past errors for stability. Meet new people for potential connections. Take alone time to reset your body and mind. Let go of things that don't benefit you in the weeks ahead.



CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Focus on your faith and close friends, showing your strong dedication. Stay calm and set boundaries when challenged. Think about how you want to stand out amongst the crowds. Tonight marks a time of peace, love, and positivity.



LEO (July 23-August 23)

This morning, your keen eye helps you cut out what you don't need. Focus on bigger goals. Stay organised if things get chaotic tonight. Handle challenges calmly and stay in control, putting you in a serious and practical mindset.



VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Today brings clarity to your close friendships. Express your needs and be open to what friends or counterparts want. Negotiate for yourself, as it could lead to new chances. Your mood improves, bringing luck and fulfilment to your spiritual side.



LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

You'll be emotionally in charge, figuring out past issues and your role in them. Being productive heals. Stay focused on your goals. Love is uplifting, so connect with loved ones. Tonight, think about commitment and emotional security in your life.



SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Express yourself and be creative. Plan goals carefully for a brighter future. Be careful with your words tonight, especially when giving advice. Love is around, but take care of yourself too. Your thinking gets sharper in the next few weeks.



SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Feel secure emotionally knowing what makes you feel safe. Share creative ideas when you can. Be cautious with people you don't trust tonight, especially if you think they might try to bring you down. Listen to your body stress-free night.



CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Clear up misunderstandings to show responsibility and strength. Trust your instincts and act quickly when it feels right. Be aware of moodiness tonight, and don't let others control or make you change if it doesn't feel right. Strengthen supportive relationships.



AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Quick insights will help you understand confusing thoughts. It might be hard to set limits. Spend time alone to find your strength. Make home cosy and take care of yourself. You'll feel like resting in the next few weeks.



PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Friendships you started earlier are growing. Be wise with money. Clean up old social media posts and think about taking a break. You'll be more focused, bringing energy to ideas. You'll feel secure as you find your place in society.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Defect

5 Madrid mister

10 Strongbox

14 First rate (hyph.)

15 Hunger for

16 Old Greek weight

17 Granny

18 Medieval stringed instrument

19 Plummeted

20 "La — Vita"

22 Stopped for a while

24 Runners' place

27 Adage

28 Terribly cruel

30 Thick slices

33 Dove's cry

34 Light gas

36 Not at all original

38 Insects

40 Ceremonies

42 Enthusiasm

43 Nibbles

45 Grip for a standee

47 Bus. abbr.

48 Ciphers

50 Malevolent glare (2 wds.)

52 Wrath

53 Removed, as printed matter

DOWN

1 Follower

2 Washday amount

3 — Domini

4 Affluence

5 Sensational headline

6 Before

7 Seize

8 "It's deja vu all — again"

9 Nook

10 Computer programs

11 Have — in your bonnet

12 Pleat

13 Sofa shape

21 Turning point

23 Ice melter

25 Genus of dogs

26 Gnarled

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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

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28 Greek architectural order

29 — mention

31 Actor — Bob Thornton

32 Condition

33 Subway alternative

35 Gall

37 Gridiron player

39 Rebellion

41 Large marine creature

44 Dried out

46 Accused's answer

49 Very good

51 Fit to be eaten

54 Asylum

55 "Don't Tread —"

56 Slide off course

58 Cheer

59 Therefore

60 Once around the track

62 Eagle

63 Came upon

65 Negative

SUDOKU

6 9 2 8 5 7 3 4 1

8 1 7 3 4 2 9 5 6

5 3 4 9 6 1 2 8 7

4 7 8 1 2 9 5 6 3

1 6 9 5 8 3 7 2 4

3 2 5 4 7 6 1 9 8

2 8 1 7 9 4 6 3 5

9 4 3 6 1 5 8 7 2

7 5 6 2 3 8 4 1 9

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

