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TODAY

NATIONAL

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WORLD

Israeli minister on Thursday outlined a plan for the post-war administration of Gaza, which has yet to be adopted by Israel's war cabinet. After the war is over, Palestinian bodies will assume the strip's governance. Pg 4

Rival Koreas fired artillery rounds into the sea as part of provocative drills along their disputed sea boundary, in violation of the fragile 2018 inter-Korean agreement, and threatened strong responses. Pg 4

MONEY

Nepal's anti-graft body has resumed probe into the 2017 Airbus deal. A source, however, said investigators struggle to summon the suppliers to record statements in connection with the \$209.6-million deal. Pg 5

SPORTS



Fast bowler Aamir Jamal took six wickets to help Pakistan take a slender first-innings lead over Australia on Friday before the home team's bowlers regained the advantage in the third cricket Test. Pg 6



Child marriage, teen pregnancy exacting heavy toll on Bajura girls

Efforts to curb child marriage ineffective due to deep-rooted traditions, local officials say.

By **ARJUN SHAH**
BAJURA, JAN 5

An 18-year-old girl from Mukhtkot village of Sappata region in ward 1 of Swamikartik Khapar Rural Municipality got married two years ago. A grade 10 student at the time, she quit her studies and soon became a mother. Her daughter is now nine months old.

In Mutikot village, several young girls below the age of 20 are already mothers.

The 18-year-old's neighbour, a 19-year-old girl, has an eight-month-old baby who is currently ill. The young mother is worried sick about her child as she does not know what ails her infant.

Most young boys and girls of Mukhtkot drop out of school before grade 10 and get married. By the time they reach their early 20s, they are parents to at least two children.

Dil Bahadur Rokaya, a teacher at Raghumata Secondary School in Sappata, said underage marriage is a decades-old problem in Sappata and it does not show any signs of abating.

"Since mid-April 2023, four female students studying in grades eight, nine, and ten have dropped out of school after getting married," said Rokaya. "While most girls who get married early stop coming to school as they get busy with household work and familial life, the boys start looking for ways to earn money to support their new family."

Young women age rapidly due to their poor health and lack of nutritious food.

According to the 19-year-old young mother, there are 255 Dalit families in Mukhtkot of Sappata and most of the young people in the families are already married.

"There is not a single family who can depend on their agricultural output to see them through the year. So our husbands leave the village to look for jobs to support us," she said. Her 20-year-old husband went to India for employment last November.

It is customary for young married boys of Musikot to go to India looking for jobs as there are no income-generating opportunities in the village. Paucity of arable land also makes it difficult for the families to survive on farming.

Early marriage and teen pregnancies have had adverse effects on the health of young mothers, says Mala Shahi, auxiliary nursing midwife of Mukhtkot Basic Health Centre. Women in Mukhtkot are facing several health problems such as anaemia, asthma, organ failure, and uterine diseases, among others.

"Young women age rapidly



A young mother (centre) in Sappata of Swamikartik Khapar Rural Municipality in Bajura.

due to their poor health and lack of nutritious food during and after pregnancy," she said.

"They also refuse to visit the health post even if they are suffering from health issues. It's the lack of awareness that keeps them away. They think it is normal practice to marry young and have children soon after. They do not think about the repercussions on their health."

However, when a free health camp was set up in the rural municipality last September, 864 women from Mukhtkot came for checkup.

Bhakta Kaila, senior auxiliary health worker of the health unit of the Swamikartik Khapar Rural Municipality, said, "Of all the women who came for checkup from Mukhtkot, 435 were suffering from serious illnesses. Most were ailing from uterine prolapse, vaginal bleeding, vaginal discharge, and asthma."

The specialist doctors at the camp concluded that most health issues faced by the women of Mukhtkot were due to early marriage, teen pregnancy, frequent pregnancies, poor nutrition, and insufficient rest during and after pregnancy.

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Jaishankar in Nepal: Some big deals—and a little controversy

Opposition leaders rap decision to allow Indian funding for small projects saying that it violates constitution.

By **ANIL GIRI**
KATHMANDU, JAN 5

Before wrapping up his 26-hour Kathmandu visit, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar made a meaningful remark in Kirtipur on Friday while inaugurating the Tribhuvan University's new library building, funded by India.

"Under the leadership of Prime Minister [Narendra] Modi, the government of India is committed to continue to redefine its relationship with partners in our neighbourhood, especially with Nepal," Jaishankar said.

After Modi came into power in 2014, India adopted the policy of "Neighbourhood first", and according to India's Ministry of External Affairs, Nepal is a priority partner of India under this policy.

"In recent years, we have witnessed the real transformation of India-Nepal relations," said Jaishankar. "This partnership has expanded multifold, and connectivity—physical, digital, and energy-related—has become the cornerstone for this expanding collaboration."

Jaishankar was in Kathmandu to co-chair the seventh meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission, where four agreements were signed and the foreign ministers of Nepal and India inaugurated three cross-border transmission lines.

Jaishankar also met former prime ministers including Sher Bahadur Deuba, KP Sharma Oli, Madhav Kumar Nepal, and leaders of several

Madhesh-based parties.

Unlike in the past, he did not spend much time inquiring about the domestic politics of Nepal, but stated that the ruling alliance would complete its full term, according to a leader.

But his visit was not free from controversy. The renewal of the agreement on the implementation of High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs), formerly known as "small development projects" has sparked debate, with a section of political leaders and civil society members expressing concerns about allowing India to invest up to Rs200 million per project through 'lax vetting process'.

Indian minister says there has been a real transformation of India-Nepal relations.

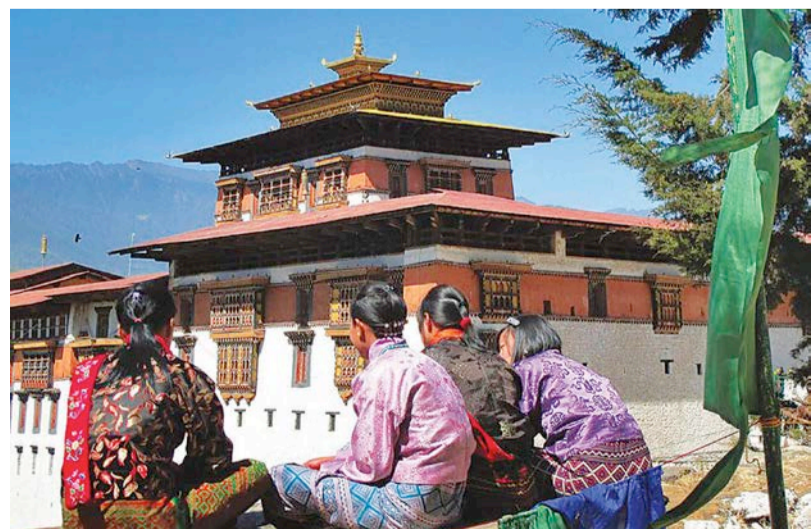
The main opposition CPN-UML has opposed the decision saying the government did not consult it.

But Foreign Minister NP Saud, talking to the Post, defended the extension of the terms and conditions of HICDPs saying it was done by following the same guidelines and modality used when the Nepal Communist Party—which has now broken into CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist Centre)—was in power in 2019.

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India, China eye strategic areas bordering 'last barrier' Bhutan

India is determined not to let China extend its sway over its 'natural sphere of influence.'



Bhutanese girls sit outside Rinpung Dzong in Paro Valley, Bhutan on March 16, 2011.

By **AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**
NEW DELHI, JAN 5

Squeezed between giant arch-rivals India and China, the landlocked mountain kingdom of Bhutan was long isolated by icy Himalayan peaks. But as Bhutan readies to elect a new

parliament in Thimphu on January 9, China and India are watching the contest with keen interest as they eye strategic contested border zones, analysts warn.

A "cooperation agreement" inked between Bhutan and China in October after talks over their disputed north-

ern frontier sparked concern in India, which has long regarded Bhutan as a buffer state firmly under its orbit.

Bhutan is "one of the last barriers" in China's bid to exert influence in South Asia, said Harsh V Pant, an international relations professor at King's College London told AFP.

India is determined not to let China extend its influence further across what New Delhi sees as its natural sphere of influence, wary after a swathe of muscular trade deals and loans by Beijing, including with Bangladesh, Nepal, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Thimphu and Beijing do not have formal diplomatic relations.

India, however, effectively oversaw Bhutan's foreign policy until 2007.

The relationship was "in exchange for free-trade and security arrangements", Britain's Chatham House think tank wrote in a December report.

The report included satellite photographs it said showed an "unsanctioned programme of settlement construction" by China in Bhutan's northern frontier region, which could "become permanent Chinese territory" pending the outcome of a border deal.

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NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Rautahat-Sarlahi road reopens with end of protest

RAUTAHAT: The protest by locals who blocked the Gaur-Chandranigahapur section of the Mahendra Highway for three days by setting up tents in the middle of the road ended on Friday afternoon. This happened after the authorities signed an agreement with



protesters to resume the construction of a bridge. They resorted to the protest to pressure the authorities to complete the Bagmati Bridge in Durga Bhagawati Rural Municipality on the Rautahat-Sarlahi border. The foundation of the bridge was laid on June 14, 2010, and even after 13 years, the construction remains incomplete. According to Nitesh Gupta, a local leader who is spearheading the protest, the bridge is an important project for connecting the western districts of Madhesh to the provincial headquarters of Janakpur. In the rainy season, citizens of the western district face several difficulties due to the absence of the bridge. Similarly, farmers in Rautahat and Sarlahi, who have crop fields on both sides of the river, are forced to take risky boat rides regularly. The protest ended after an agreement between the Postal Highway Directorate and the protesters to build a bridge, said Gupta.

Man held with fake banknotes

RAUTAHAT: Police arrested a 25-year-old man in possession of counterfeit Nepali currency from Patel Chowk in ward 8 of Debah Gonahi Municipality, Rautahat. Sandeep Jayaswal, a resident of ward 5 of Gujara Municipality, was detained with 1,843 fake bank notes of 1,000 denomination. The suspect was made public amid a press meet at the District Police Office on Thursday. "We launched a search operation in the area after police were tipped off that a racket of counterfeit currency is active in the district. "A detailed investigation is underway," said Superintendent of Police Mahendra Shrestha.

Absconding rape convict nabbed, jailed

KHOTANG: Police arrested a 45-year-old fugitive resident of ward 4 of Kepilashgadh Municipality and sent him to jail on Thursday. The man, convicted of raping a woman, was sentenced to seven years in prison by the Okhaldhunga High Court, Biratnagar, on January 6, 2022. According to Inspector Benu Karki, spokesperson for the District Police Office, Khotang, after the court verdict, the man on the run was arrested on Thursday. He was presented in the court the same day and sent to prison on Thursday evening, said Karki.

Curfew in Sarlahi local unit after man dies in protest

Local residents were protesting a municipal plan to hand over a health post to provincial authorities. Protesters claim the man died from police bullet.

OM PRAKASH THAKUR
SARLAHI, JAN 5

A curfew has been imposed in the Barahathawa market area in Sarlahi district after a youth died during a clash between police and protesters on Friday.

The curfew order will be in place until 8am on Saturday, Chief District Officer Komal Prasad Dhamala said.

The protest was organised by locals against the Barahathawa Municipality's decision to hand over a 15-bed primary health centre to the provincial authorities.

Police lobbed tear gas shells and fired gunshots into the air to disperse an unruly crowd that had gathered outside the municipality's office.

Tension ran high all day on Friday in Barahathawa after protesters vandalised the municipal office and Municipality chair Kalpana Kumari Katuwal's house, which is close to the municipal office. The protesters also set a motorcycle on fire.

Protesters claim that one of them died after being shot by the police. But the chief district officer said the cause of the death of the youth has yet to be ascertained.

The identity of the deceased was not immediately known.

According to Katuwal, the dispute occurred over discussions on whether to hand over the 15-bed municipal hospital in ward 6 by upgrading it to a 50-bed facility to the Madhesh provincial authorities. An all-party meeting was called to decide on the matter.

"An all-party meeting was called today [Friday]. Despite requests for a peaceful resolution, five political parties issued a joint statement and attempted to influence the meeting," Katuwal said in a statement. "We issued a notice, adjourning the meeting, following which the parties called



Police bar local residents from the streets in Barahathawa in Sarlahi district on Friday afternoon after tensions flared up during a protest against Barahathawa Municipality's plan to hand over a local health centre to the provincial authorities.

for protests, shutting markets, public transport, and organisations. We had to adjourn the meeting amidst the tensions."

According to her, the situation turned violent when the all-party meeting was adjourned midway.

Friday's death is the third within a week and the fourth in the last one month resulting from clashes between the police and protesters.

Last Friday, two protesters died during a demonstration by job aspirants for overseas employment in Korea at

Balkumari in Lalitpur. The Korean language test candidates were staging demonstrations outside the EPS Centre building at Balkumari demanding the chance to appear for language tests for manufacturing jobs in South Korea.

POST PHOTO: OM PRAKASH THAKUR

The curfew order will be in place until 8am on Saturday, according to the chief district officer.

Twenty-five-year-old Laxmi Mukhiya Bin of Nansagaradhand in ward 1 of Simraungadh received bullet wounds in the back of his head. According to the Chief District Officer of Bara, Nawaraj Sapkota, Bin died on the spot and was taken to Narayani Hospital in Birgunj for post-mortem.

A protest was being held outside the municipal office in Simraungadh by the municipal staff and government school teachers against delayed payment of their salaries. The unpaid employees have been protesting against the municipality for the past two months. Over the past few years, cases of police brutality and excessive use of force have become more frequent in Nepal.

Baton-charging and physical violence at demonstrations are often employed to control protests while such events quickly spiral out of control when armed police intervene and resort to using guns to disperse the crowd.

Curbing child marriage in Bajura villages remains an uphill battle

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Ajaya BK, chairman of ward 1 of Swamikartik Khapar Rural Municipality, said that after men leave the village to earn money, the women work day and night to take care of family members.

According to the data of a 'smart survey' conducted by the Health Directorate, Sudurpaschim Province on 467 children between the ages of six to 59 months from nine local units in Bajura in the last fiscal year, 48.8 percent were stunted, 30.6 percent were underweight, and 8.6 percent were suffering from severe acute malnutrition.

DN Giri, data management officer at the directorate, said that 51.2 percent of children in Swamikartik Khapar Rural Municipality are underweight, which is the highest among local units in the district. The national prevalence of underweight infants during birth is 12 percent. Similarly, the number in Sudurpaschim stands at 20 percent.

"The directorate has made plans to reduce the number of underweight

children to 1.4 percent by 2030, but it will be very difficult to achieve that goal in remote areas such as Swamikartik Khapar," said Giri.

The study revealed that 55.8 percent of children in Swamikartik Khapar were stunted, 51.2 percent were underweight, and 11.6 percent had severe acute malnutrition.

According to Gyanendra Dawadi, province coordinator of the Multi Sector Nutrition Plan (MSNP), among the nine local units of Bajura, children of Swamikartik Khapar Rural Municipality, Jagannath Rural Municipality, and Himali Rural Municipalities—in the northeast region of the district—are highly affected by malnutrition.

"In Mukhtkot of Sappata, most women with poor economic conditions give birth at a young age and have many children. They do not seek treatment in health institutions in times of need, and do not get enough rest during and after pregnancy," said Dawadi.

Ajay BK, ward chair of ward 1 of Swamikartik Khapar Rural

Municipality, said their efforts to control child marriage have not been successful due to deep-rooted traditions.

"In one year, we separated 12 teenage couples who were married and living together, but the parents did not agree with our decision," said BK. "Also, the 12 girls were pregnant so we did not take action against their under-age marriage," said Ajay.

According to the District Health Office, Bajura, in the fiscal year 2022-2023, out of the total 3,061 deliveries in the district, 435 were under 20 years of age.

The National Census 2021 puts the number of married women and men in Bajura at 69,098 and, among them, 49,810 got married before the age of 20. Among the under-age marriages, 30,627 were women and 19,183 men.

The law bars marriage before the age of 20. But in most rural communities in the northeast region of Bajura, including Swamikartik Khapar's Sappata, where child marriage is common, women and men do not register their marriages.

According to ward chair Ajay BK, most under-age couples do not even have citizenship certificates.

"For newborns, birth registration is mandatory to get child support allowance, scholarships, and other financial assistance provided by the government. Most under-age parents do not register the births of the child to avoid legal hassles," said BK. "Some doctor their documents to increase their legal age."

The Constitution of Nepal has guaranteed children's fundamental right to be protected from violence, abuse, trafficking, and early and forced marriages. Article 39 Clause (5) states that no child shall be subjected to child marriage, transported illegally, kidnapped, or taken hostage. These actions are punishable under federal law.

Children who are victims of such actions have been guaranteed the right to receive compensation from the perpetrators, including their parents, according to the law. But the reality in places like remote Swamikartik Khapar's Sappata is

quite different.

Controlling early marriages and teen pregnancies is getting increasingly hard in Himali Rural Municipality too as the parents themselves encourage their wards to marry young, says Govinda Bahadur Malla the rural municipality chairman.

"Compared to the past couple of years, the practice of child marriage has decreased. But in the rural areas where people stick to age-old customs, it has not gone down," said Malla.

Bharat Bahadur Rokaya, chairman of Swamikartik Khapar Rural Municipality, said that in remote areas, especially in poor families where there is a shortage of food and other resources, girls are seen as a liability, so the parents marry them off at an early age.

"We have for long been conducting awareness campaigns to control child marriage, but have not been very successful. Currently, we are planning to get help from the police to increase public awareness and inform people that child marriage is a punishable crime," said Rokaya.

CPN-UML claims government did not consult it on national issues ahead of joint commission meeting

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"We have allowed the per project budget increase from Rs50 million to Rs200 million as it will benefit the country. The guidelines, modality, and the terms of reference remain the same as those prepared by the 2019 Oli government," said Saud.

The then Oli government amended some provisions of the "small grant project" in 2019 as the constitution of Nepal bars local and provincial units from directly seeking funds and projects from donors.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, speaking at a parliamentary committee on Friday, defended the government's decision to increase the budget for small projects from Rs50 million to 200 million.

"The government of Nepal should set up counter funds on the small grant projects," the prime minister said. "The projects will be implemented through joint investment and decision-making."

He also pointed out that India alone cannot decide to invest in HICDP projects. But UML Deputy General Secretary and former foreign minister Pradeep Gyawali argued that the HICDP agreement goes against the spirit of the constitution, which says local or provincial governments cannot seek direct foreign assistance. "This kind of arrangement would foster a rent-seeking mentality among our local units, leading them to queue up at the embassy for assistance," he said.

Likewise, organising a press conference at the party headquarters, UML's General Secretary Shankar Pokhrel criticised the government for not consulting the main opposition on issues of national concern ahead of the joint commission meeting.

Besides extending the deal on

HICDPs, Nepal and India during the joint commission meeting formalised a long-term power trade. The agreement will pave the way for Nepal to export 10,000 megawatts of electricity to India in ten years. The agreement will be valid for 25 years and will be automatically renewed every ten years.

"This is a positive development," said Gyawali. "Among our saleable products, energy is the key product, but there is also no need to be euphoric about it."

"India's decision to only buy the energy produced by itself or exclusively by Nepali investors is of concern. Investment from Nepal has reached a saturation point, while Indian companies have held back most projects. We have been unable to develop the Pancheshwar project for 27 years and India's GMR has been holding Upper Karnali for 14 years. India is also sitting on projects including Lower Arun, Phukot Karnali, and Tamor, among others," said Gyawali.

Another former Foreign Minister Kamal Thapa also welcomed the agreement on long-term power trade, but opposed the one on HICDPs.

"Ensuring the access of Nepali energy in the Indian market is a good decision. India's decision to import power from Nepal produced by Indian and other investors is commendable too. We have to take advantage of the Indian market. But the government's decision to give India a free hand to invest up to Rs200 million [in small projects] is akin to allowing it to run a parallel government in Nepal," said Thapa while addressing a press conference in Surkhet on Friday.

During the visit, some contentious issues between Nepal and India were expected to be raised. According to the statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the two foreign ministers expressed satisfaction at each other's support in regional, sub-regional,

and multilateral forums on issues of common interests.

"The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal mentioned the issues of additional air entry routes, and floods and inundation. Views were also exchanged on the review of Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950, security and boundary related matters," read the statement issued by the Nepali side after the joint commission meeting.

Indian statement was silent on air entry routes and 1950 treaty, among other issues.

But the Indian statement did not mention some contentious issues like additional air entry routes for Nepal, review of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950, and boundary-related matters.

Former foreign secretary Madhu Raman Acharya said Jaishankar's visit was a 'good and positive follow-up' to the visit of the prime minister to India last year and it is now up to the two sides to effectively mobilise bilateral mechanisms to implement the agreements reached during the meeting.

"Overall, the Indian concerns and interests were duly addressed and ours were not given much priority. Some agreements look positive. There is a tendency in Nepal to make negative comments when it comes to relations with India. Nonetheless, it does appear that some of our concerns did not figure in the meeting. We need to be more forceful to push our agenda in upcoming meetings," said Acharya.

After seeing off Jaishankar at the

Tribhuvan International Airport, Minister Saud said, "Together, we successfully concluded the important meeting of the Nepal-India joint commission and delivered positive outcomes for the mutual benefits of our countries. We will continue to work together to maintain this momentum in Nepal-India friendship."

During his stay in Kathmandu, Jaishankar also met office bearers of the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) and assured them that India would provide all possible help for Nepali cricket.

"Congratulations them on qualifying for the T20 World Cup," Jaishankar wrote in X, formerly Twitter, "assured them of India's support in their preparations. Underlined our commitment to the growth of cricket in Nepal," he added.

CAN office-bearers had requested India's support for the construction of a cricket stadium.

UML's Gyawali said political issues did not get any space at the meeting, which he said was a weakness on Nepal's part. "Our core concerns like air entry route, Agnipath scheme, trade treaty, receiving the report of Eminent Persons Group, and the widening trade gap with India did not figure in the meeting. This raises serious concerns," said Gyawali.

But foreign minister Saud said, "This is the first such meeting not to court any undue controversy. Some people in Nepal habitually oppose everything the government does."

"There is no truth that we did not raise our concerns. We raised them and discussed them. These tricky issues require a long time to address. We did achieve our long-term goals and set many other long-term targets even in such a short meeting. Every decision and agreement we have signed is guided by national interest," Saud said.

China and India are keenly watching Bhutan election

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China's foreign ministry told AFP in a statement of its "determination to strive for an early resolution of the boundary issue and the establishment of diplomatic relations".

"Beijing will anticipate that a deal consolidating its gains in northern Bhutan may lead to formal diplomatic relations and the opportunity to draw Thimphu into its orbit", Chatham House said.

"Any such deal would have far-reaching implications for India."

If China succeeds in that, Beijing "can push a view that India is now marginal in its immediate neighbourhood", Pant added.

New Delhi has been wary of Beijing's growing military assertiveness and their 3,500-kilometre shared frontier has been a perennial source of tension.

In 2017, there was a 72-day military standoff after Chinese forces moved into the disputed Doklam plateau, on the China-India-Bhutan border.

The plateau pushes south towards India's critical Siliiguri Corridor, dubbed the "Chicken's Neck".

The perilously narrow strip of land lies between Nepal and Bangladesh, and connects India's northeastern states with the rest of the country.

China and India fought a month-long war in the region in 1962.

"New Delhi would be concerned that, in the event of a deal demarcating Bhutan's northern border, attention may turn to territory in Bhutan's west which China disputes, including the Doklam plateau," Chatham House added.

For Bhutan, dwarfed by China, striking a deal makes sense, said Pant.

"If they don't resolve their border now, tomorrow they will be in an even more unfavourable position," he said. Suhasini Haidar, diplomatic editor

of The Hindu newspaper, said India was worried that a Bhutan-China border deal "seems imminent".

She said that Bhutan's "fast-tracking" of boundary talks with China after the 2017 Doklam standoff was a decision that "India has viewed with quiet concern".

Analysts say foreign policy plays little role in the domestic concerns of voters in Bhutan—about the size of Switzerland with around 800,000 people—who are more worried about high unemployment and young people migrating abroad seeking jobs.

However, India is the biggest source of investment and infrastructure in Bhutan—Thimphu's ngultrum currency is pegged to New Delhi's rupee—and boosting bilateral relations is key. "Any government coming to power will seek to shore up ties," Haidar said.

Bhutan has strong economic and strategic relations with India, "particularly as its major trading partner, source of foreign aid and as a financier and buyer of surplus hydropower", according to the World Bank. About 70 percent of Bhutan's imports come from India.

In December, Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck announced a special economic zone along its border with India.

Both hopefuls to become Bhutan's new prime minister speak enthusiastically about boosting links with New Delhi to lift Bhutan's \$3 billion economy.

India has already announced a slew of connectivity projects including a railway line to Bhutan, but much would depend on Indian investors.

"Bhutan will be seeking investments from other countries," said Haidar, adding it will be "significant" if Thimphu welcomes funds from China.

Nepal Army hands over Jit Gadhi Fort to Butwal Sub-metropolitan City

The historic fort commemorates Colonel Ujir Singh Thapa, who led the fight against British forces.

□ SANJU PAUDEL
TILOTTAMA, JAN 5

The Nepal Army on Friday handed over the Jit Gadhi Fort to the Butwal Sub-metropolitan City following the completion of its renovation.

Chief of the Army Staff General Prabhu Ram Sharma handed over the historic site to Mayor Khel Raj Pandey in the presence of President Ramchandra Paudel amid a special function, the Army said in a statement.

The fort is a historical landmark where the Nepali force, under the leadership of the then Colonel Ujir Singh Thapa (1871-1872 BS), fought the British with indomitable courage, skill and valour and won, the national army said.

The Nepal Army, in collaboration with the local government, has built some structures depicting battlefield

scenes at the fort. The historic site has 13 statues of those who fought in the war including a life-size statue of Colonel Thapa, war paintings, a garden and fortification walls.

Speaking at the event, President Paudel stated that the fort was a site of national pride and identity, as well as a sign of Nepal's victory against empirical powers.

In order to develop Jit Gadhi as a tourist destination, it is necessary to integrate it with other historical, archaeological, religious and cultural sites nearby, Paudel said.

"I am happy that the sub-metropolis has come up with strategic plans to transform the fort into a tourist spot through timely promotion."

Lumbini Province Head Amik Sherchan, Lumbini Chief Minister Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary, local representatives, and government officials also attended the programme.



A vehicle crosses a log bridge over the Nalgad stream on the way to Barekot from the Jajarkot district headquarters in this recent photo. Two years of planned road works remain incomplete even after nearly nine years since the contract agreement was signed. The dirt track is impassable for vehicles in the rainy season.

POST PHOTO: MAHESH KC

Experts find problems in the university set-up to select vice-chancellor

After prime minister's willingness to choose VC on merit, applications are solicited but the process is said to be flawed.

□ BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, JAN 5

Amid reiterated claims by the prime minister that university vice-chancellors would be appointed on the basis of merit, a search committee on Friday called applications from the aspirants to lead Tribhuvan University.

The committee headed by Minister for Education Ashok Kumar Rai invited applications along with a vision paper and professional work plan from the academics who have at least three years of experience in any office bearer position of the varsities. The notice met with criticism, saying the requirement of three years' experience limits the open competition. It contradicted Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's claim that the university leader would be appointed through open competition, they said.

The members of the Education, Health and Information Technology Committee of the House of Representatives also raised the question. "The criteria bar free competition. They must be revisited," said Bidya Bhattarai, a CPN-UML lawmaker. Sumana Shrestha, a Rastriya Swatantra Party lawmaker, said the criteria for the vice-chancellor selection should be discussed at the House committee.

After the controversy, Prime Minister Dahal directed the Rai-led



Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal

POST PHOTO

committee to change the criteria. According to the statement from Dahal's secretariat, he ordered a revision in the notice so that academics residing in Nepal or abroad are eligible to compete. A new notice would be issued on Saturday removing the provision of three years experience.

The new provision, according to Dahal's secretariat, would open the door for the appointment of competent leadership at the country's oldest and largest varsity. Dr Dharma Kant Banskota retired as the vice-chancellor in the first week of November and it took two months for the government to call the applications for his successor. Shiva Lal Bhusal has been leading

the TU as the acting vice-chancellor.

Though Dahal supporters have hailed the open call for applications, experts call it a tested and failed formula. In 2019, a search committee led by Giriraj Mani Pokharel, then minister for education, solicited similar applications for the vice-chancellors in six universities other than TU. Along with their curriculum vitae, the applicants also had presented their vision papers and work plans. But the selection, ultimately, was done based on the political sharing among the major parties.

The universities' laws authorise the prime minister, as an ex-officio chancellor, to appoint vice-chancellors from among the three names recommended by the search committees. It is up to the search committees how they recommend the three names.

Min Bahadur Bista, a professor at Tribhuvan University who is experienced in the education sector in Nepal and abroad, said there are slim chances that the minister-led search committee would pick the vice-chancellor independently.

"Going by history, there is ample reason to doubt that there would be the right selection even this time," he told the Post. "The present process of selecting the vice-chancellors must change."

Bista said if Dahal really wanted fair selection, he could have formed an independent search committee to pick

candidates.

Bista finds a problem in the notice which he believes doesn't appeal to the academics with high competency and integrity. "The vacancy notice is bureaucratic. Call for vice-chancellor positions should be different from other vacancy announcements," he said.

Those who have already been on such a search committee agree with Bista. Usha Jha, a former member of the National Planning Commission who was in the Pokharel-led committee, said there is a problem with the committee's formation.

"It is a given that a candidate recommended by the search committee has obligations to it," Jha told the Post. "Those recommended by the search committee cannot work independently even if they are competent. It is, therefore, necessary to have a law which makes open competition mandatory."

Experts say the vice-chancellor's position demands different qualities. One needs to be academically sound, must have managerial and leadership skills and good at coordination to qualify for the position, according to Bista.

"The vice-chancellor also needs to have a good network nationally and internationally so that s/he can generate resources. Selection of right candidates is necessary to bring the university on track," he said.

PMO restructured

□ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JAN 5

Pushpa Kamal Dahal has restructured the Prime Minister's Office. A total of 68 posts, including those of three secretaries and seven under secretaries, were cut in the downsizing on Friday.

While various units within the Prime Minister's Office were merged, a separate division has been established for information and technology to help develop a more advanced IT unit. Dahal in his address to the nation on December 26 had announced his plan to make structural changes in the office. A Cabinet meeting approved Dahal's proposal for the same on December 28. This decision has come as per the prime minister's commitment to make the administration more agile and functional, said Govinda Acharya, press adviser to the prime minister.

TIA customs area expanded

□ RASTRIYA SAMACHAR SAMITI
KATHMANDU, JAN 5

The Tribhuvan International Airport has expanded its customs check area.

According to TIA General Manager Pratap Babu Tiwari, widening of the congested area would lessen the hassles for passengers. "The customs check area at the international terminal has been expanded while the narrowed space inconvenienced passengers," he said. "The 'check-in area' of the entrance is also to be widened."

The airport office said the construction of the wider arrival terminal with two separate belts is in the final phase. Equipment was also provided to remove runway obstructions by pulling the aircraft out in case the landing gear collapsed. 'Disabled Air Cargo Recovery Kits' have been arranged at the airport.

India transformed, stronger, indeed a major power: Chinese paper

Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies Zhang Jiadong writes 'it appears that a transformed, stronger, and more assertive India has become a new geopolitical factor that many countries need to consider'.

□ THE STATESMAN
NEW DELHI, JAN 5

In a rare admission, the Chinese Communist Party's newspaper "Global Times" has stated "India has achieved outstanding results in economic development and social governance, and its great power strategy has moved from dream to reality."

dously compared to four years ago. However, potential risks and crises have also begun to unfold."

He wrote "What I feel about the 'Bharat narrative' in India," Jiadong said "On the one hand, India has made great achievements in economic development and social governance. Its economy has gained momentum and is on track to becoming one of the fastest-growing major economies."

Meanwhile, New Delhi has made progress in urban governance, he

wrote. "Although the haze is still serious, the distinctive smell that hit you as soon as you stepped off the plane four years ago has generally disappeared. This suggests that public environment in New Delhi has improved somewhat," he said.

Jiadong wrote that during his talks with Indian representatives, their attitude towards Chinese scholars was more relaxed and moderate, instead of being stubborn at times. For example, when discussing the "trade imbalance"

between China and India, Indian scholars used to primarily focus on China's measures to reduce the trade imbalance.

"But now they are placing more emphasis on India's export potential, actively seeking to reduce the trade deficit with China by taking the initiative and increasing Chinese imports from India," he wrote.

Furthermore, with its rapid economic and social development, India has become more strategically confi-

dent and more proactive in creating and developing a "Bharat narrative," he said.

In the diplomatic sphere, India has rapidly shifted towards a great power strategy. Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed power, he has advocated a multi-alignment strategy, promoting India's relations with the US, Japan, Russia and other countries and regional organisations. Now, India's strategic thinking in foreign policy has undergone another change and is clearly moving towards a great power strategy.

During his talks with Indian representatives, Jiadong found their attitude towards Chinese scholars more relaxed and moderate.

Regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict, India has distanced itself from the West and aligned itself more closely to the developing world, Jiadong wrote. At the same time, India's reservations about Western powers have significantly diminished, and its activities within Western countries have become more frequent, extending beyond organising large-scale diaspora events. The article said "in the political and cultural spheres, India has moved from emphasising its democratic consensus with the West to highlighting the "Indian feature" of democratic politics."

"Currently, there is even more emphasis on the Indian origins of democratic politics. Former National General Secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party Ram Madhav, has stressed the need for "India's version of democracy," the Chinese writer said.

"India not only seeks to escape the "political dwarf" resulting from its history as a colony, but also wants to act as a "world mentor" both politically and culturally.

In December 2023, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations organised the first "Knowledge India Visitors Programme," which brought together more than 77 scholars from 35 countries," he wrote.

Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar emphasised the importance of building a strong "Bharat narrative" and explained the "Bharat narrative" in terms of economics, development, politics, and culture.

Obviously, India no longer only regards cultural tradition as a channel to achieve its own interests or as a symbol to attract foreign tourists, but also sees it as one of the pillars of India's status as a great power, the Chinese writer said.

"Changes like this in internal and external policy are in line with the logic of India's long-held policy. India has always considered itself a world power. However, it has only been less than 10 years since India shifted from multi-balancing to multi-alignment, and now it is rapidly transforming towards a strategy of becoming a pole in the multi-polar world. The speed of such changes is rarely seen in the history of international relations," the article said.



India has moved from emphasising its consensus with the West to highlighting the 'Indian feature' of democratic politics, the writer says.

THE STATESMAN

WORLD

Fighting rages in Gaza as Israel defence minister lays out post-war plan

The health ministry in the Hamas-run territory says it recorded 162 deaths in the past 24 hours.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JERUSALEM, JAN 5

Bombing continued across Gaza on Friday as the world began to digest Israel's first proposals for the administration of the territory after its war with militant group Hamas, now approaching its fourth month.

With much of the Gaza Strip already reduced to rubble, air strikes continued through the night in the southern cities of Khan Yunis and Rafah as well as parts of central Gaza, AFP correspondents reported.

The Israeli army said its forces had "struck over 100 targets" across Gaza over the past 24 hours, including military positions, rocket launch sites and weapons depots.

The health ministry in the Hamas-run territory said it had recorded 162 deaths over the same period.

A fighter jet bombed the central area of Bureij overnight, killing "an armed terrorist cell", the army said, after what it described as an attempted attack on an Israeli tank.

And "a number" of Palestinian militants were killed in clashes in Khan Yunis, a city that has become a major battleground, the army said.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant's plan for the "day after", shared with the media late Thursday but not yet adopted by Israel's war cabinet, says that neither Israel nor Hamas will govern Gaza and rejects future Jewish settlements there.

The minister's outline proposals were unveiled on the eve of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's fourth trip to the region since a Hamas attack on October 7 triggered the war.

Blinken arrived in Turkey on Friday on the first leg of a tour that will also take him to Greece and several Arab states before he heads to Israel and the occupied West Bank next week.

According to Gallant's proposals, the war will continue until Israel has dismantled Hamas's "military and governing capabilities" and secured the return of hostages.

After Israel achieves its objectives -- for which the proposal sets no timeline -- Palestinian "civil committees" will begin assuming control of the territory's governance, it said.



This picture taken from Rafah on Friday shows smoke billowing over Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip during Israeli bombardment, amid continuing battles between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

Israel launched its campaign against Hamas after the militant group's October 7 attack, which resulted in the deaths of around 1,140 people, most of them civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

The militants also took around 250 hostages, 132 of whom remain in captivity, according to Israel, including at least 22,600 people, most of them women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

Conditions for Gaza's civilians are

precarious, with the United Nations estimating 1.9 million people are displaced.

AFP TV footage on Friday showed entire families, seeking safety from the violence, arriving in Rafah in overloaded cars and on foot, pushing handcarts stacked with possessions.

"We fled Jabalia camp to Maan [in Khan Yunis] and now we are fleeing from Maan to Rafah," said one woman who declined to give her name. "[We have] no water; no electricity and no food."

A spokesman for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, told AFP that Rafah is overwhelmed by the influx. "The city is usually home to only 250,000 persons. And now, it's more than 1.3 million," said Adnan Abu Hasna.

Abu Mohammed, 60, who fled to Rafah from Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza, said he believed the

future of the territory was "dark and gloomy and very difficult".

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society reported renewed shelling and drone fire in the area around Al-Amal hospital in Khan Yunis on Friday after seven displaced people, including a five-day-old baby, were killed while sheltering in the compound.

Civilian deaths have soared during the conflict and the UN has warned of a humanitarian crisis that has left hundreds of thousands displaced, facing famine and disease.

During his visit, Blinken plans to discuss with Israeli leaders "immediate measures to increase substantially humanitarian assistance to Gaza", State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said.

"We don't expect every conversation on this trip to be easy. There are obviously tough issues facing the region and difficult choices ahead," he added.

North Korea fires artillery at sea against South military 'gangsters'

REUTERS
SEOUL, JAN 5

North Korea fired more than 200 artillery rounds on Friday near a disputed maritime border with South Korea in another escalation of tension between the rivals and prompting the South to take "corresponding" action with live fire drills.

North Korea later said it conducted firing drills as a "natural response" to military actions by South Korea's "military gangsters" in recent days. It also threatened an "unprecedented strong response" if Seoul continued to make provocative moves.

The exchange led residents of two remote South Korean islands on the western maritime frontier to evacuate to bomb shelters at the instruction of the South's military, before it fired live rounds towards the disputed Northern Limit Line (NLL) border.

The firing by North Korea caused no civilian or military damage in the South, South Korea's military said.

"This is an act of provocation that escalates tension and threatens peace on the Korean peninsula," South Korea's Defence Minister Shin Won-sik said as he supervised the firing drills.

The North Korean artillery shells all landed on the northern side of the sea border, a South Korean military spokesman Lee Sung-joon said in a news briefing, adding that the South Korean military has been monitoring the North's moves along its shores with the cooperation of the US military.

South Korea's Defence Ministry said Marine brigades based on the Yeonpyeong and Baengnyeong islands fired at sea to the south of the NLL border demonstrating "overwhelming operational response." The South Korean drills involved mechanised artillery and tanks.

North Korea's Army General Staff said its defensive coastal units fired 192 rounds as part of its drills "as natural response by our military against military actions by South Korea's military gangsters", the official KCNA news agency reported.

The drills had no impact on South Korean islands near the maritime border as claimed by the South, the statement said, calling the assertion "an

attempt to mislead public opinion."

China, which is North Korea's main political ally, urged restraint and called on the two sides to resume dialogue.

Yeonpyeong is home to just over 2,000 residents and troops stationed there, about 120 km (75 miles) west of Seoul and accessed by ferries that take more than 2-1/2 hours.

Leif-Eric Easley, professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul, said it was not unusual for North Korea to fire artillery in the area during winter drills.

"What's different this year is ... Kim Jong Un has publicly disavowed reconciliation and unification with the South," he said.

The North Korean artillery shells all landed on the northern side of the sea border.

In remarks to a major party meeting last week, the North Korean leader said unification with the South was not possible and Pyongyang was fundamentally changing its policy towards the South, which it now sees as an enemy state.

The waters near the disputed NLL have been the site of several deadly clashes between the North and South Korea including battles involving warships and the sinking of a South Korean corvette in 2010 by what is believed to be a North Korean torpedo, killing 46 sailors.

In November 2010, North Korean artillery fired several dozen rounds at Yeonpyeong island, killing two soldiers and two civilians, in one of the heaviest attacks on its neighbour since the Korean War ended in 1953.

North Korea said at the time it was provoked into taking action by South Korean live-fire drills that dropped shells into its territorial waters.

Drawn up at the end of the Korean War as an unofficial border, Pyongyang did not dispute the NLL until in the 1970s, when it began violating the line and arguing for a border further to the south.

BRIEFING

Train collision in Indonesia kills four, injures 42

JAKARTA: A train collision in Indonesia's West Java province on Friday killed four people and injured 42, local police said, as authorities investigated the cause of the crash. Video images from broadcasters MetroTV and Kompas TV showed passengers being helped out of train carriages, some of which had gone off the rails entirely. The four dead were crew members, said Ibrahim Tompo, a spokesperson for West Java province police, adding that a total of 478 passengers were aboard the trains. Two crew members had died after they were squeezed between carriages, Ibrahim said. "But one body still could not be evacuated because it was still buried in the debris from the cars," he said. Ambulances gathered to take the injured to hospital, police said, following the collision at 6:03 a.m. (11:03 GMT) near the provincial capital of Bandung. The cause of the crash not immediately clear, but train operator PT KAI and the provincial government have said they will investigate, along with transport safety officials. Land transport accidents are common in Indonesia. (REUTERS)

Iran arrests suspects over bomb blasts, mourners demand revenge: State TV

KERMAN: Mourners on Friday wept over the coffins of victims of two deadly blasts in Iran, and the interior minister said a number of suspects had been arrested over the attacks claimed by Islamic State. Crowds chanted "revenge, revenge" in state TV footage of the funerals in the city of Kerman, the scene of Wednesday's explosions, the bloodiest such attacks in Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Nearly 100 people were killed in the blasts at a memorial service for military commander General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated in Iraq in 2020 by a US drone.

The explosions took place amid a tense mood in the region as Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza neared the three-month mark. Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi told state TV a number of suspects had been arrested. "Our country's capable intelligence agencies have found very good clues regarding elements involved in the terrorist explosions in Kerman and a section of those who had a role in this incident have been arrested," he said without elaborating. Deputy Interior Minister Majid Mirahmadi said: "Various individuals have been arrested in five cities in five provinces, who have supported this incident or been linked to it." (REUTERS)

Biden to mark January 6 with new warning—Trump threatens US democracy

REUTERS
WASHINGTON, JAN 5

President Joe Biden on Friday will mark three years since the January 6 attacks on the US Capitol with a warning to voters that Republican Donald Trump, his likely 2024 election opponent, is a threat to the country's standing as a free democracy.

Trump, president from 2017 to 2021, who is leading the field for the Republican nomination for president, contested his defeat in the 2020 election, prompting thousands of his supporters to attack the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

The failed bid to stop formal certification of the result killed five people and injured dozens of police officers.

Speaking near George Washington's Revolutionary War-era winter headquarters in Pennsylvania, Biden, a Democrat, will kick off his 2024 campaign with the pitch that he represents a continuation of the style of democratic government Americans have grown up with and that a vote for Trump would be a leap into a dark, uncharted future.

Biden was scheduled to deliver his remarks a day before the January 6 anniversary to avoid a forecast winter storm.

As president, Biden has warned about the future of US democracy before, including on the first anniversary

of January 6, and in a fiery September 2022 speech where he called Trump and his Republican followers extremists who threatened to take the country backward.

Republicans challenging Trump in the 2024 nominating contest have mostly steered clear of criticizing Trump's actions on that day, as opinion polls show Republican voters are less likely to blame Trump for his actions on January 6 than they were three years ago.

Whether Biden's Friday speech will make an impact 10 months before Election Day—in a politically polarized country where voters get news and information from wildly different sources—remains to be seen.

The 2024 race is expected to be closely contested, and Biden aides see Pennsylvania, home to Biden's Scranton birthplace, as a must-win state. He won in 2020 with 50.01 percent of the vote.

In 2016, Trump won Pennsylvania with 48.58 percent of the vote. Biden's arguments have done little to soothe his own supporters' concerns about the state of the economy or his age, 81.

Trump, 77, holds a marginal, two-point lead in a head-to-head matchup with Biden, 38 percent to 36 percent, with 26 percent of respondents saying they were unsure or might vote for someone else, according to the latest Reuters/Ipsos poll.

In new year, Ukraine unleashes more drones and missiles at Russian areas

Goal is to unsettle Russians as Vladimir Putin seeks another six years in power on March 17.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KYIV, JAN 5

Russian air defences downed dozens of Ukrainian drones in occupied Crimea and southern Russia on Friday, officials said, as Kyiv pressed its strategy of targeting the Moscow-annexed peninsula and taking the 22-month war well beyond Ukraine's borders.

Air raid sirens wailed in Sevastopol, the largest city in Crimea, and traffic was suspended for a second straight day on a bridge connecting the peninsula, which Moscow seized illegally a decade ago, with Russia's southern Krasnodar region. The span is a crucial supply link for Russia's war effort.

The Russian Defence Ministry said its defences intercepted 36 drones over Crimea and one over Krasnodar, part of an emerging pattern of intensified Ukrainian aerial attacks in recent days.

A Ukrainian Neptune anti-ship missile also was destroyed over the north-western part of the Black Sea, the ministry said.

The developments came after three people were injured Thursday night by other Ukrainian rocket and drone attacks on the Russian border city of Belgorod and the surrounding region, said Belgorod Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov. He posted photographs on Telegram of an apartment building



In this photo taken from video released by Russian Defence Ministry Press Service on Friday, Russian soldiers fire from aboard a Ka-27 helicopter of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

with some windows shattered and damaged cars. He said authorities could help those wanting to move farther from the border. On January 6, Ukrainian attacks on Belgorod killed 25 people, officials there said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pledged to hit more targets on the Crimean Peninsula and inside Russian border regions this

year. The goal is to unsettle Russians as President Vladimir Putin seeks another six years in power in a March 17 election. A Ukrainian attack on military facilities in Crimea on Thursday affected a command centre and the peninsula's air defence system, according to a spokesperson for Ukraine's southern joint forces, Nataliia Humeniuk.

India Navy rescues bulk carrier crew after Arabian Sea hijack attempt

REUTERS
NEW DELHI, JAN 5

The Indian Navy on Friday rescued the crew of a merchant vessel after its attempted hijack in the Arabian Sea and said it had not found any pirates on board.

An Indian Navy warship intercepted the Liberian-flagged MV Lila Norfolk bulk carrier less than a day after it received a report that the vessel had been hijacked about 460 nautical miles off Somalia.

About five to six armed people boarded the vessel on Thursday, according to a report received by the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) agency, which said the ship's crew had gathered in the ship's citadel. The navy said all 21 crew on



A bird flies past the newly built INS Chennai, India's third indigenously designed guided missile destroyer, ahead of its commissioning into the Navy in Mumbai, November 2016.

board, including 15 Indians, had been evacuated and a warship was helping to restore power so the vessel can resume its voyage.

The vessel was destined for Khalifa bin Salman in Bahrain, according to British maritime security firm Ambrey. It was not immediately clear what it was carrying.

"The attempt of hijacking by the pirates was probably abandoned with the forceful warning by the Indian Navy, marine patrol aircraft, of interception by an Indian Naval warship," the navy said in a statement.

The Indian Navy has increased its surveillance of the Arabian Sea after recent attacks in the region.

The hijacking and attempted hijacking of commercial ships in the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea resumed in

December after a six-year lull. Experts believe pirates have been encouraged by U.S.-led anti-piracy naval forces diverting their attention to the neighbouring Red Sea to thwart attacks there by Houthi rebels.

Data from the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region shows at least three hijackings in December. The previous such incident was reported in 2017.

"The sudden revival in ship hijacking and attacks can only be attributed to the pirates' willingness to take advantage of the fact that the focus of anti-piracy maritime forces has largely shifted from the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea," Abhijit Singh, head of the Maritime Policy Initiative at the Observer Research Foundation think tank in New Delhi, said.

FOREX

| | |
|-------------------|--------|
| US Dollar | 133.35 |
| Euro | 145.51 |
| Pound Sterling | 168.73 |
| Swiss Franc | 156.31 |
| Australian Dollar | 89.04 |
| Canadian Dollar | 99.72 |
| Singapore Dollar | 100.15 |
| Japanese Yen (10) | 9.18 |
| Chinese Yuan | 18.64 |
| Saudi Arab Riyal | 35.56 |
| Qatari Riyal | 36.58 |
| Thai Bhat | 3.84 |
| UAE Dirham | 36.31 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 28.65 |
| Korean Won (100) | 10.12 |

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION

PRICE PER TOLA

| | |
|-----------|------------|
| Fine Gold | Rs 119,500 |
| Silver | Rs 1,420 |

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

AIDIA, VIF to collaborate in economic diplomacy



KATHMANDU: The Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA) and Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), New Delhi signed a memorandum of understanding to establish a framework for collaboration on enhancing cooperation in the field of economic diplomacy and international relations. The MoU was signed between Sunil KC, founder of AIDIA, and Arvind Gupta, director of VIF, on January 3 in New Delhi, India. This strategic partnership is poised to fortify the relationship between the two organisations and foster joint initiatives in addressing global challenges in the domain of economy, diplomacy and international relations, the AIDIA said in a statement. The VIF was founded by Ajit Doval, who is currently the national security adviser to Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi. It is dedicated to fostering high-quality research, and comprehensive studies, and serving as a platform for constructive dialogue and conflict resolution. AIDIA is a Kathmandu-based independent, non-partisan, foreign policy think-tank founded in March 2014.

Maersk says to avoid Red Sea for foreseeable future

COPENHAGEN: Shipping giant Maersk said Friday that it would divert all vessels around Africa instead of using the Red Sea and Suez Canal for the "foreseeable future" after Yemeni rebels attacked its merchant ships. The Danish company cited the highly volatile situation and noted that the security risk remains high. "We have therefore decided that all Maersk vessels due to transit the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden will be diverted south around the Cape of Good Hope for the foreseeable future," it said in a statement. (AFP)

Global food prices drop 13.7 percent in 2023: FAO

PARIS: World food prices fell in 2023, with considerable declines for grains and oils as supply concerns eased, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization said Friday. Overall, world food commodity prices fell 13.7 percent in 2023 compared to the previous year, Rome-based FAO said. The FAO's cereals price index fell 15.4 percent last year, "reflecting well supplied global markets" compared to 2022, when prices soared after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a major grain exporter. While supply concerns eased for wheat and maize, the opposite was true for rice due to the impact of the El Nino weather phenomenon and India restricting exports. (AFP)

UK car market improves but tipped to stay below pre-pandemic levels

LONDON: Britain's car market grew last year but is expected to remain permanently below the level it was at before the Covid-19 pandemic, an industry body said Friday. The number of new vehicles registered in the United Kingdom increased by around 17.9 percent in 2023, according to data from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT). The group's chief executive, Mike Hawes, described the rise as "very positive," particularly in the "relatively negative economic context". (AFP)

Anti-graft body resumes probe into 2017 Airbus deal

An official source said that investigators have been struggling to summon the plane suppliers to record their statements in connection with the \$209.6-million deal, the biggest in Nepal's aviation history.

□ SANGAM PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, JAN 5

Nepal's apex anti-graft body has issued summons to the representatives of five different international agencies involved in the 2017 purchase of two Airbus A330s.

In a notice issued on Thursday, the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has summoned Deepak Sharma, president of International Supply Chain, AAR Corp, United States; Christian Nuehlen, who is a representative of German Aviation Capital GmbH Germany, German Aviation Capital Singapore, and also the director of Hi Fly X Ireland Limited; and Oleg Calistru, finance director of German Aviation Capital GmbH Germany.

"This is to notify that the following individuals are required to appear at the CIAA's Tantal Office in person with a passport and a recent photograph in Room No. 108 within 15 days of this notice for the investigation purpose of alleged corruption in the purchase of A330-200 aircraft by Nepal Airlines Corporation.

Disregarding this notice will result in further legal action as per the prevailing laws of Nepal," reads the notice.

The notice issued on Thursday, however, is not the first one.

In the first week of December last year, the anti-graft body had issued summons to the same persons. Before that, in March 2019, and then in April. "It's a part of the regular investigation process," said CIAA spokesman Narahari Ghimire.

When asked why the summons are issued repeatedly, Ghimire did not elaborate.

An official source said that the investigation team has been struggling to summon the officials to record their statements in connection with the \$209.6-million Airbus purchase deal, the largest ever in Nepal's aviation history.



POST FILE PHOTO

An official source said that the investigation team has been struggling to summon the foreign officials to record their statements.

It's been five years since the first summons were issued and the CIAA still has been issuing them, although the notice allows only 15 days for the officials to be present and record their statements.

A retired investigator at the CIAA told the Post that the statement recording process has become lengthy due to various issues.

"In 2019, when we asked Airbus, the aircraft manufacturer, to provide us with the details regarding the actual cost of the two aircraft, the company suggested we communicate through a diplomatic channel. And accordingly, we wrote to the French embassy in Kathmandu."

"We didn't receive an answer from the embassy. I am retired now."

He said that without knowing the cost, the investigation will get nowhere.

"The cost details will provide a clue on how much money Nepal Airlines paid to its supplier and what was the cost that the supplier paid to the manufacturer. We should know the cost

gap to know whether there is any irregularity, since the specifications of the planes which were found to be different from what was ordered."

According to officials, during the Covid period, the Supreme Court decided to close its non-urgent court proceedings, including activities in other government agencies and the CIAA, which stopped the investigation from proceeding ahead.

The CIAA could have restarted the investigation now, the retired CIAA official surmised.

Former officials at the CIAA said that the recording of statements of all those involved in the deal in Nepal has been completed.

In January 2019, the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee had concluded that the procurement of the two wide-body aircraft by Nepal Airlines had caused a loss of Rs4.35 billion to the government.

Following the allegations, on March 27, 2019, the apex constitutional body for corruption control issued a first public notice asking the firms—Hi Fly

X Ireland Limited, Dublin; AAR International Inc, USA; German Aviation Capital GMBM, Frankfurt; Hi Fly-Transporte Aereos [Hi Fly Airlines], Lisbon, Portugal; and Norton Rose Fulbright, Munich, Germany—to appear before the authority's office in Tantal within 15 days.

The parliamentary committee had questioned the motive of the Nepal Airlines Corporation and Hi Fly Portugal for forming a special purpose vehicle—Hi Fly X Ireland—to specifically handle the procurement process. The committee has termed Hi Fly X a "fictitious" company and has suspected "massive financial irregularities" in the deal.

Stating that Ireland is the biggest tax haven in the world used by multinationals to shelter profits, the lawmakers suspected Nepal Airlines Corporation might have reached the deal with the company "to evade taxes". While advance payment was released to the Portugal-based Hi Fly Transporte Aereos, the rest of the

US auto sales boosted by price cuts in 2023

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW YORK, JAN 5

US vehicle sales got a boost from strong demand in 2023, due in part to attractive offers by automakers and dealers in the face of high interest rates and stubborn inflation.

Industry experts estimate that around 15.5 million vehicles were delivered in the country last year, marking an increase of almost 13 percent from 2022.

"Auto sales ended up being much stronger than most expected in 2023," said Garrett Nelson, senior equity analyst at CFRA Research.

"We're getting closer to pre-covid levels," he told AFP. Sales exceeded 17 million vehicles annually over the 2015-2019 period.

Nelson expects sales to rise by three percent in 2024, to around 16 million units. Automotive research firm Edmunds is less optimistic, however, expecting just a one percent rise in sales to 15.7 million units.

According to Nelson, sales have benefited from improved supply chains and more inventory at dealers. There was also greater choice for buy-

ers, who took advantage of promotions, price cuts and federal subsidies.

Electric vehicle maker Tesla, for example, was among those to lower prices.

"Prices overall were down about two to three percent, much more than that for electric vehicles, but they're still at elevated levels," Nelson said.

Holding on to its crown as the top-selling automaker in the United States last year was General Motors, which claimed a 16.3 percent market share and reported 2.6 million in vehicle sales. GM "had great success" with affordable SUVs, said its North America president Marissa West. This enabled it to sell more than one million SUVs in a year for the first time.

Shoppers are "seeking options on the affordable side of the new vehicle market," according to Edmunds.

It added that vehicles below \$50,000 are sold out within an average of 30 days, compared with 47 days for more expensive models.

Meanwhile, the share of electric vehicles in the market should continue rising, from 6.9 percent in 2023 to eight percent of all sales in 2024, Edmunds said.

Amsterdam 'fashion library' takes aim at clothes waste

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
AMSTERDAM, JAN 5

Ikram Cakir hands over a multi-coloured blue and white blouse and selects a similar item, this time in hot pink. Welcome to Amsterdam's "fashion library".

Billed as one of the world's only physical centres for renting used and new clothing, the "big shared wardrobe" in the Dutch capital is a response to clothes waste and fashion industry pollution.

Hundreds of brightly coloured trousers, coats and overalls are sorted by brand or style, each with a tag indicating a sale price or how much it costs to rent the item per day.

The daily rental price varies from around 50 euro cents (\$0.55) to a couple of euros, depending on the customer's loyalty—how often he or she rents clothes and how many are borrowed.

For Cakir, a 37-year-old NGO campaign manager, the concept is "just really good".

"So many clothes are bought and then never used," she told AFP. "This is an excellent way to wear

new clothes without depleting the planet," added Cakir.

Globally, the equivalent of a truckload of clothes is burnt or buried in landfills every second, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a charity focused on eliminating waste and pollution.

Fashion is responsible for one quarter of the pollution of the world's waters.

The textile industry is also a major polluter, causing between two and eight percent of global carbon emissions, according to the United Nations in 2022. In the era of fast fashion, the average person buys 60 percent more clothing than 15 years ago, while each item is kept for only half as long, the UN says.

Fashion is responsible for one quarter of the pollution of the world's

waters and a third of microplastic discharges into the oceans—toxic substances for fish and humans.

All this prompted Elisa Jansen to open "LENA, the fashion library" in a trendy area in central Amsterdam, with her two sisters and a friend.

"Why did we open in 2014? Because the fashion industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world," she told AFP. The library also has an online section, plus drop-off and collection points in other Dutch cities.

"Always new clothes. Good for the planet. Experiment with your style. Try before you buy," reads a poster hanging above LENA's counter and washing machines, summing up its philosophy.

Jansen's career began in vintage shops so she said she has "always worked in recycling clothes".

But the vintage business did not allow her to acquire new items and she found it too homogenous a style.

"That's when I got the idea of sharing clothes in a massive shared wardrobe," she said. Customers sign up for a 10-euro fee, allowing them to borrow or buy clothes from the collection.

AI breathes new life into old trends at CES gathering

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SAN FRANCISCO, JAN 5

The annual tech industry fair known as the Consumer Electronics Show is regaining momentum after the pandemic, with artificial intelligence (AI) infusing everything from bicycles to baby bottles.

The gadget extravaganza referred to as CES formally kicks off Tuesday in Las Vegas, boasting more than 3,500 exhibitors and expecting some 130,000 visitors. CES exhibitor and attendee numbers have jumped each year since the Covid-19 pandemic caused it to be an online-only event in 2021.

"After Covid some people thought they were not going back," Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanesi told AFP. "But, smaller companies that don't have the brand power to get attention they deserve at their own events are deciding to be part of the conversation at CES."

While the show is increasingly a showcase for startups, big brands such as Amazon, Google, Intel, Netflix, Samsung, Sony and TikTok will also be there next week, according to the Consumer Technology Association organizing the event. Analysts expect it to be the year of AI when it comes to product pitches at CES.

"I do not suggest anyone create a game at CES to take a drink any time someone says AI, because you will be drunk before CES even starts," Techspontential analyst Avi Greengart quipped.



REUTERS

Attendees watch a display on curved OLED screens at the LG Electronics booth during CES 2023, in Las Vegas, Nevada, US in January last year.

Models on which AI is built have improved dramatically since last CES and the debut of OpenAI's ChatGPT, and they are being applied in meaningful ways for consumers, according to Greengart.

"There is little doubt that the tech ecosystem gathering in Las Vegas will focus on AI everywhere and on-device generative AI," said Forrester principal analyst Thomas Husson.

"The biggest theme will be about how AI can power new invisible and immersive consumer experiences."

Innovations on display at CES will include technology-packed glasses for the blind from Lumen that let wearers know where it is safe to walk, even avoiding puddles, according to the startup.

Meanwhile, Shift Robotics will let people try out its latest Moonwalkers shoes that let people walk at a running pace without breaking a sweat.

AI will be featured in homes, sound systems, automobiles, televisions, baby bottles, beds and more, according to pitches sent out by exhibitors.

"There is going to be a lot of AI and AI-washing similar to the green washing we saw a few years ago," Milanesi said, noting that not all products will deliver.

Eye-popping televisions from LG and others will be on display, along with automotive innovations as cars and the technology built into them are showcased.

"CES has become an automotive show," analyst Greengart told AFP. "Cars have become rolling software platforms, or consumer elec-

tronics with wheels, and you can be sure there are going to be a lot of announcements."

Chip makers including Intel will spotlight their latest semiconductors designed to handle complex computing tasks. Nvidia plans a special address at CES on Monday focusing on consumer technologies and robotics.

Nvidia chips are in hot demand by companies looking to power generative AI. Greengart expects health to be among the big CES themes, with sensors built into mirrors, wearables and more to measure vital signs.

L'Oreal chief executive Nicolas Hieronimus will be among the CES keynote speakers for the first time, joining peers from Walmart, Qualcomm and Siemens on the show roster. Snap co-founder and chief Evan Spiegel will take part in a panel discussion on brand loyalty.

With the recent release of Meta's Quest 3 virtual reality headset and with Apple expected to hit the market early this year with its Vision Pro, a lot of small companies at CES are expected to show off gear to compete in the "spatial computing" and mixed-reality market.

Sustainability promises to be a more meaningful trend at CES than in the past as more companies adopt practices such as environmentally friendly packaging and using recycled materials in products and rechargeable batteries, according to analysts. "Some of the sustainability gains are starting to get real," Greengart said.

SPORTS | MEDLEY



Members of Nepal U-19 men's cricket team pose for a group photo in Kathmandu on Friday, before leaving for South Africa to participate in the 2024 ICC U-19 Cricket World Cup, which is set to start on January 19.

Nepal to open T20 World Cup against the Netherlands

SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, JAN 5

Nepal will begin their 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup against the Netherlands on June 4, according to a fixture released by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Friday.

remaining sides will be divided into two groups of four. The Super Eight takes place from June 19-24. The top two teams from each group in the Super Eight will make it to the semi-finals, which will be held on June 26 and 27.

NEPAL'S T20 WORLD CUP FIXTURES

Table with 2 columns: Date and Opponent. Rows include June 4 vs Netherlands, June 11 vs Sri Lanka, June 14 vs South Africa, and June 16 vs Bangladesh.

BRIEFING

Kehrer joins Monaco on loan

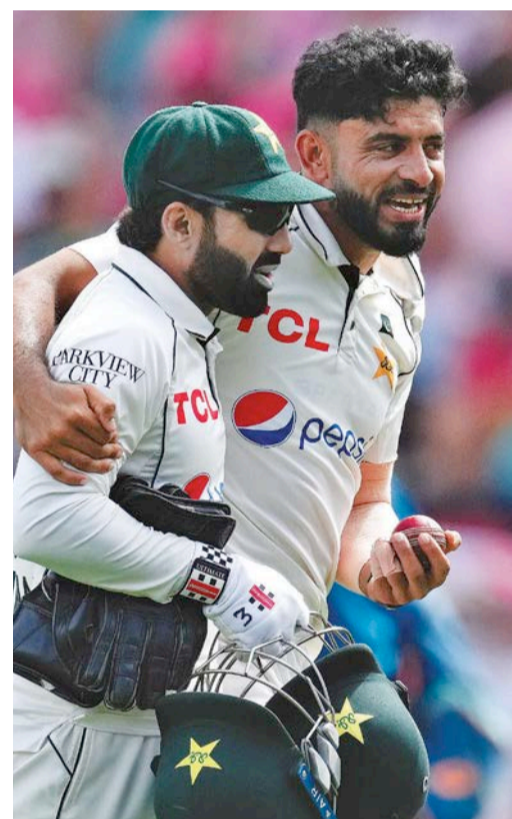
LONDON: Germany defender Thilo Kehrer has joined AS Monaco from West Ham United on loan to the end of the season and with a view to a permanent move, the Premier League side said on Friday.

Barcelona's title defence alive

BARCELONA: Ilkay Gundogan stroked home a stoppage time penalty to grab champions Barcelona a barely deserved 2-1 win at Las Palmas on Thursday.

Jamal stars for Pakistan but Australia's bowlers hit back

The pacer takes six wickets to help Pakistan claim a slender first-innings lead but Hazlewood snares four wickets to leave the match in the balance.



Pakistan's Aamer Jamal (right) celebrates after taking six wickets against Australia.

ASSOCIATED PRESS SYDNEY, JAN 5

Fast bowler Aamer Jamal took six wickets to help Pakistan take a slender first-innings lead over Australia on Friday before the home team's bowlers regained the advantage in the third cricket Test.

Khawaja (47) and Travis Head (10) in earlier spells, then dismissed Australia skipper Pat Cummins lbw for a second-ball duck in his 21st over.



Australia's Josh Hazlewood celebrates bowling out Pakistan's Sajid Khan.

HOROSCOPE

Horoscope section with zodiac signs: ARIES, TAURUS, GEMINI, CANCER, LEO, VIRGO, LIBRA, SCORPIO, SAGITTARIUS, CAPRICORN, AQUARIUS, PISCES. Each sign includes a brief description of the day's energy.

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS: 1 On-campus housing, 5 West Coast sch., 9 Final-sale warning (2 wds.), 13 Notion, 14 Mother-of- —, 16 Center, 17 Glass container, 18 Equivocate, 19 Witticism, 20 Salad plant, 22 Figure with radiating segments, 24 Aim, 26 Small case, 27 Traveling show, 31 Pate de foie —, 34 Mature, 35 Art movement, 36 Car type, 38 Poet —, 40 Synthetic fiber, 43 Challenge, 44 "Dancing With the —", 46 "To — his own", 48 Kind of soup, 49 Go offstage, 50 Runner in a race, 52 Glass piece, 55 Lacerated.

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED grid with words filled in. Includes a list of words: 27 Cries like a crow, 28 Playing marble, 29 Unwind, 30 Shoestrings, 32 Make fit, 33 Garment for a ranee, 37 Come close to, 39 Look-alike siblings, 41 Engrossed, 42 Word puzzle, 45 "On the double!", 47 Charter, 49 Silver State, 53 Star that flares, 54 Poetic muse, 56 Paddy plant, 57 Lab compound, 58 Shrinking Asian sea, 59 Insult, 61 Musician — Clapton, 62 Landlord's due, 63 Diner sign, 66 Poetic contraction.

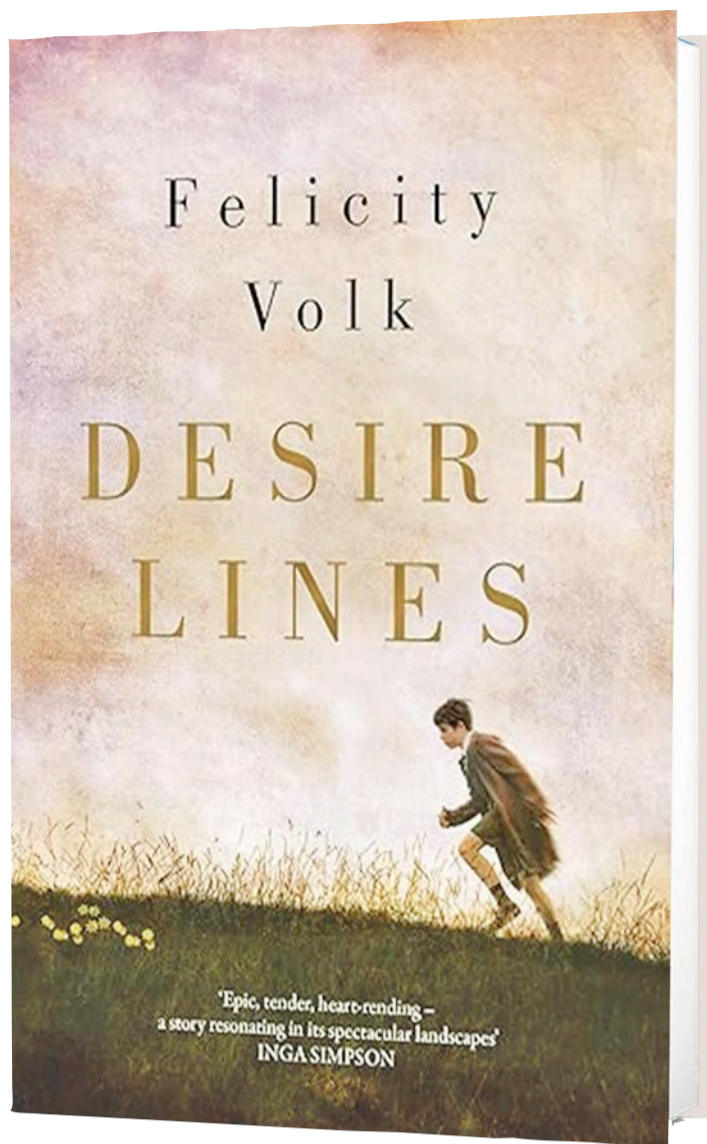
Large crossword puzzle grid with numbers 1-73 indicating starting points for clues.

SUDOKU

Sudoku puzzle grid with numbers 1-9. Includes 'YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION' and 'DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★'.

Love and loss across decades and continents

'Desire Lines' by Felicity Volk explores the love, relationship and enduring bonds of its protagonists, while also addressing concerns of environmental diplomacy and celebrating feminism.



DESIRE LINES
 Author: Felicity Volk
 Year: 2020
 Publisher: Hachette Australia

ACHYUT WAGLE

The novel 'Desire Lines', written by the current Australian ambassador to Nepal, Felicity Volk, is a spaghetti bowl of several desire lines crisscrossing multiple themes of love, relationship, emotional gratification, career and, of course, life in its entirety. The plot is knitted over at least two-thirds of a century, beginning in the early 1950s, covering an equally vast geography spanning Australia through Asia to the Arctic Circle, the cold ice caves of Norway to the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.

These 'lines', per se, run through the 'desires' of Volk's protagonists to keep their relationship alive for fifty long years despite asymmetries in their preferences and proven disloyalty, evoke extreme psycho-social questions surrounding passion, compassion and compulsion. Equally powerfully, the novel brings a contemporary pragmatic imperative of global environmental diplomacy home for international cooperation as personified in the endeavour to preserve the seeds of the Australian plants under the Arctic snow.

The opening line of the novel, "Are you still a liar?", delivered as an anniversary text message from Evie Waddell to Paddy O'Connor, serves as an irresistible hook, hinting at a series of distrust and betrayals unfolding through flashback sequences. Paddy, the male protagonist from London, had a highly troubled childhood with an alcoholic, philanderer and abusive father. He was eventually sent out to Australia as one of the farmer child migrants at the tender age of seven. In stark contrast, the female protagonist, Evie, comes from a happy upbringing and chooses to leave her husband for Paddy, who has developed a successful career as a trained engineer.

The novel explores the timeless theme of lovers coming together in unconventional circumstances with unlikely partners, providing a relatable lens on human civilisation's history of complex relationships.

What's particularly unique in this novel is the enduring relationship of the protagonists spanning five decades despite an unusually



BOOK REVIEW

profound lack of trust. The mystery lies in why Evie recalls Paddy on their anniversary, considering his significant lies and contented family life with another woman—a puzzle that unravels the complexities of love-hate dynamics and the resilience of companionship explored in the novel.

The author subtly introduces a new threshold for women's endurance, tenderness and capacity to forgive seemingly boundless deceit. This might serve to affirm the enduring sanctity of marital bonds or the deep emotional connection that, once institutionalised and socially acknowledged, persists. The novel delves into the motivations behind truth and lies, particularly within romantic relationships, expanding into a broader philosophical discussion.

The narrative doesn't dictate a resolution, leaving questions open-ended. Should lies intended to strengthen love be forgiven by the other partner? Can relationships endure continuous deceit and fundamental differences in personality and approach to life? What psychological bond keeps these partners together for so long? The novel invites readers to ponder these questions without prescribing definitive answers.

However, the author intriguingly challenges common beliefs about the significance of 'firsts', such as first love, commonly found in traditional literature. She asserts, "Lasts were important, she thought. Last conversations, last declarations of love, the last act of making love. There always was a last; you just didn't always know you had experienced it. Not until later, often not until too much time had passed to preserve the memory, preserving its essence for the frequent revivals nostalgia would demand."

While exploring the backstory in fiction is a familiar storytelling approach, Volk's

unconventional style, marked by aesthetic anarchism in constructing her own syntactical realm and challenging grammar and punctuation norms, enhances the novel's allure. The intricate interweaving of plots involving diplomacy and its protocols, the intricacies of professions like horticulture and engineering, and detailed descriptions of locations and attire might, at times, appear demanding to follow. This is precisely why the novel has grown in thickness to a substantial 440 pages.

Additionally, for a genuine understanding of the comparison between the architectures of Cambodian temples and Norwegian ice vaults, designed to safeguard seeds for the future, it is important for readers to possess a well-rounded knowledge, if not personal experience. However, this might be a challenging expectation in an era dominated by Twitter and TikTok consumerism, which often overshadows genuine creativity in arts and literature. The inclusion of sub-plots addressing indigenous issues and the intentional celebration of feminism enhances the overall narrative.

The novel provides a realistic portrayal of love experiences, the challenges of separation, and the persistent desire to reconnect. The unwavering sense of public duty exhibited by the female protagonist adds a layer of authenticity to the novel, prompting readers to sense strong autobiographical elements woven into the narrative.

The novel is undoubtedly a compelling read that has more nuanced philosophical, psychological, and humanistic underpinnings compared to commercial cheap fiction. The natural maturity expounded in Volk's work is but natural to be expected from a diplomat trained in linguistics with personal exposure to the world of films, arts and creative writing.

Wagle, the registrar of Kathmandu University, writes a regular column on politics and economics for the Post.



Winter Fest at KUSoL



Kathmandu University School of Law is organising a 'Winter Fest' on January 13. The event will have different stalls with things, including games and food. Attendees can also experience live musical performances and a DJ session.

Where: Kathmandu University School of Law, Dhulikhel, Kavre
When: January 13
Time: 10:30 am to 5:30 pm
Ticket: Rs150 (including Rs50 worth of coupons)

Week-long Children's Winter Camp

Kidzee Preschool is organising a winter camp for children aged 3 to 10 years from January 7 to 14. Children will be engaged in activities including pottery, futsal, camping, nature walks and scavenger hunt.

Where: Kidzee Preschool, Kalanki, Kathmandu
When: January 7 to 14
Time: 9:30 am to 4:00 pm
Fee: Rs9,500 (includes meals), Online pre-registration required

Under-12 Basketball Tournament

Ballers Academy is organising a basketball tournament for boys under 12 years of age today at Merlion Gymnasium.

Where: Merlion Gymnasium, Lazimpat, Kathmandu
When: January 6
Time: 10:00 am onwards
Entry: Free

Nepali Travellers Meet-Up

Hangout with other travellers and learn more about the Solo Travel Award, organised by Nepali Travellers, today.

Where: Hostel Nextdoor, Kupondole, Lalitpur
When: January 6
Time: 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm
Entry: Free

Free Health Camp

On the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of Kamana News Publications, Nepal Samacharpatra and The Rolling Stones School are organising a free health camp.

Where: The Rolling Stones School, Bhimsensthan, Kathmandu
When: January 10
Time: 11:00 am to 4:00 pm
Entry: Free

NCIT HackFest

Nepal Open Source Klub is organising a 'hackfest' for NCIT students from January 11 to 13. The winning team will get a prize worth Rs100,000 at the event.

Where: NCIT College, Balkumari Road, Lalitpur
When: January 11 to 13

Time: 7:00 am to 6:00 pm
Registration: Free



Maths and Physics Olympiad

Maths And Physics Society of Pulchowk Campus—Institute of Engineering is organising a maths and physics olympiad on Thursday.

Where: Pulchowk Campus—Institute of Engineering, Pulchowk, Lalitpur
When: January 11 and 12
Time: 4:05 pm onwards
Entry: Rs50

Nepal International EV Show

Nepal International EV Expo is the largest gathering of the electric vehicles industry in the country. The event will have discussions with experts and industry visionaries on trending topics, including battery technologies.

Where: Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu
When: Till January 7
Time: 10:00 am to 6:00 pm
Entry: Free

Nepal Wood International Expo

The ongoing 9th Nepal Wood International Expo will have numerous national and international decision-makers discuss key issues including digitalisation, sustainability skilling and supply chain management.

Where: Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu
When: Till January 7
Time: 10:00 am to 6:00 pm
Entry: Free

International Conference on Environmental, Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology

The International Conference on Environmental, Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology is a platform for global participants to share ideas and experiences in trending technologies.

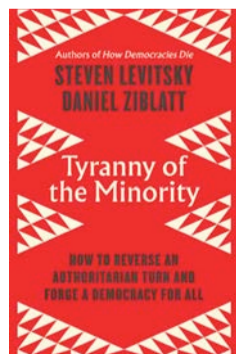
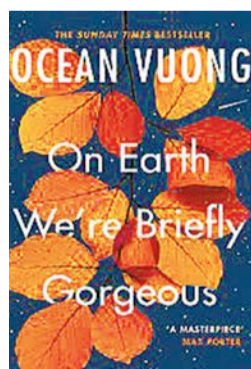
Where: The Everest Hotel, New Baneshwar, Kathmandu
When: January 10
Time: 9:00 am to 6:00 pm
 Pre-registration required



BEST-SELLERS | NEW RELEASES

Fiction

1. On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong
2. When I Am with You by Durjoy Datta
3. After Lives by Abdulrazak Gurnah
4. The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas
5. The Cuckoo's Calling by Robert Galbraith



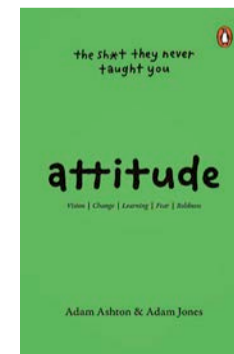
Tyranny of the Minority
 Author: Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt
 Price: Rs1,278.40
 Publisher: Viking

'Tyranny of the Minority' by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt explores America's fierce journey towards a multiracial democracy, facing an emerging authoritarian backlash. Levitsky and Ziblatt, authors of the bestselling 'How Democracies Die', present a compelling analysis using global examples to illuminate the threat to democratic foundations. They argue that the outdated US Constitution exposes the nation to minority rule, enabling parties to subvert popular will. The book issues a timely call to reshape American democracy before it unravels, drawing parallels with historical transformations. Readers interested in politics, history, and contemporary challenges will find this book enlightening.



The Christmas Swap
 Author: Talia Samuels
 Price: Rs798.40
 Publisher: Penguin Books

'The Christmas Swap' by Talia Samuels is a delightful holiday romance that redefines the typical festive love story. Margot Murray, a no-nonsense businesswoman, and Ben Gibson, a charming but unlucky-in-love sweetheart, strike a deal to fake a relationship during the holidays. The narrative unfolds in a picture-perfect manor, promising a romantic escape from London. However, the plot takes an unexpected turn as Margot finds herself falling in love—not with Ben, but with his sister, Ellie. Samuels crafts a heart-warming tale that blends humour, unexpected twists, and the magic of Christmas with well-developed characters and witty dialogue that adds a touch of charm. This book will appeal to readers who appreciate unconventional romances.



Attitude
 Author: Adam Ashton and Adam Jones
 Price: Rs318.40
 Publisher: Penguin Books

'Attitude' by Adam Ashton and Adam Jones emphasizes the power of attitude in navigating life's uncertainties. Extracting insights from great minds, the authors distil key principles into five pillars: Vision, Change, Learning, Fear and Boldness. The book encourages readers to set a clear vision, acknowledging that the journey's destination depends on intentional choices. Embracing change is presented as essential for personal growth, despite the inherent discomfort. Learning, a continuous process, is vital for bridging gaps between current and desired states. The authors redefine fear as a catalyst for progress rather than an impediment. And finally, they advocate for boldness, urging readers to embrace confidence and take action.



Non-Fiction

1. Elizabeth by Gyles Brandreth
2. 8 Rules of Love by Jay Shetty
3. Lata Mangeshkar: A Life in Music by Yatindra Mishra
4. Missing in Action by Pranay Kotasthane, Raghu S Jaitley
5. Princess by Jean Sasson

Ekta Books

The psychology and politics of Bangdel's art

The first posthumous exhibition of artist and art historian Lain Singh Bangdel in London, titled 'Lain Singh Bangdel: Mountains and Migration', was organised by Bonhams in November.

□ SANYUKTA SHRESTHA

Lain Singh Bangdel lived through the pre-partition era of India and the artworks he produced during his formative period speak of his growing affiliation with the creative milieu of Bengal. In an unpublished essay from 1979, he quoted a popular saying from his times in Calcutta: "What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow." He noticed the city's political awareness and valued it no less. He made his way to Europe just when India was building its independent national identity. Throughout his stay in Europe, his works continued to search for a Nepali identity, firstly through 'Muna Madan' and later revisiting the central theme of mountains. Both of these need to be analysed before even trying to understand the politics of his art.

The first posthumous exhibition of Bangdel in London, titled 'Lain Singh Bangdel: Mountains and Migration', was organised by Bonhams from November 11 to 21, which gave me a rare opportunity to look at a wide range of his works from different time periods.

Mountains

Surrounded by Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal, the Himalayan foothills of Darjeeling left a deep impression on Bangdel in his childhood. When he was twenty years old, life took him away from the mountains, but they remained the central theme of his artworks for twenty-two odd years until he eventually returned to Nepal. Serving as the refuge for his Nepali identity, the theme of the mountains recurred in his works from the initial realistic watercolour 'Himalaya' (1955) to a semi-abstract 'Moon Over Kathmandu' (1862) and eventually a fully abstract 'Abstract I & II' (1969) and 'Song of Himalaya' (1973).

'Moon Over Kathmandu' was one of his first works on return to Nepal that paved the way for modern art in Nepal through a solo exhibition. However, it was not until he went to the US for a Fulbright scholarship on Nepal's art history that he gave the best out of his artistic genius. With the 'Abstract' series, Bangdel definitely attained his career-best, not only doubling the size of his canvas but also widening his artistic horizon. What Beatriz

Cifuentes Feliciano has called Bangdel's aesthetic language referencing both Western trends and his local heritage, can be seen in full swing in some of these works. Starting from a more subtle palette involving various shades of brown, grey and olive, mountains fill in his subconscious through angular geometries that compose a cross-like stretch across the canvas.

The palette has then moved either to more figurative shapes and vivid colours along the same style or a greener rendition of the fertile soil of Kathmandu Valley. They looked more like variants than a complete branching off his new-found abstraction. While many of these were painted during his productive stay in Ohio, this very style also progressed to a more clustered and grid-like multi-coloured montage like 'My Childhood Valley' (1971). The way he elaborated his 'Abstract' series during the 1970's is also a great reminder of his consistent experimentation with art. In the same decade, much younger artists like Krishna Manandhar (SKIB-fame) also started experimenting with abstract landscapes. Still, Bangdel kept exploring non-figurative mountain themes, which gave him his signature style.

Migration

Art historians like Owen Duffy have earlier drawn similarities between Bangdel's 'Full Moon Night' (1952) and 'Moon Over Kathmandu' (1862) owing to the unmissable shared features, including the salmon coloured Moon, abstract cityscape and reflections of the mountain terrains in the overall composition. Bangdel's paintings have been discussed for their geometric abstraction that amalgamates two of his lifelong inspirations—the city and the mountains. However, his artworks are yet to be analysed through the rare lens of a migrant's homecoming and the psychological elements that thus form the basis of his artistic expression.

Bangdel's abstraction of Kathmandu is not necessarily a purely lived reality but a juxtaposition of the Kathmandu he viewed half his life from outside Nepal, and the one he eventually arrived but after a major political change. 'Moon Over Kathmandu' hence represents the ultimate culmination of a long search for his own identity



Muna Madan Departing Scene, 1959

as a migrant and his playing a part in the systematic development of a new national identity for generations to come. While 'Full Moon Night' has a striking similarity with 'Houses' painted by Sayed Haider Raza in the same year, this theme was also visited a few years earlier by Jaqueline Lamba. Unlike in Raza's work, the houses in Bangdel's 'Full Moon Night' do not stand straight but are almost melting like Salvador Dali's iconic clock from 'The Persistence of Memory' (1931). They are chaotically disoriented and their ugliness resounds the views of the artist. A naked tree is silhouetted in the foreground which reveals an inherent sadness of loss and inadequacy. The tree is also tightly fenced, leaving very little area around it, which hints at the artist's suffocation in a foreign land.

To me, the recurring terracotta-coloured Moon in both of the above works from Paris and Kathmandu represents his search for the Nepalese identity of Darjeeling where the Nepali literary movement was strong. In his 1969

interview with Eugene Register-guard, he referred to the sunset in Mt. Kanchenjunga as a long-lasting impression from his childhood, which must have been a shade of golden orange in colour. In a two-dimensional canvas, Bangdel's moon is on one side of the abstract cityscape, stretch-

In the year 1991, he returned to an abstract and semi-abstract series of paintings with democracy as their central theme.

ing from top to bottom, whereas he helplessly looks at it from the other side. Besides the main moon, there are other faded and smaller moons too, which could represent several other social identities he had become a part of while living in Calcutta, Paris and London.

Muna Madan

While most Nepalis would be nearing a midlife crisis in their mid-30s, Bangdel was writing love poems from Paris to his wife Manu Thapa. Manu was a professional nurse in London who supported him financially. As an anagram of 'Muna'—the female protagonist in the love ballad, she embodied the melancholy of a long-distance relationship already immortalised in the all-time Nepali literary bestseller 'Muna Madan'. Bangdel's 1959 series 'Muna Madan', however, was more than just a visual narration of the celebrated literature. Borrowing heavily from Picasso's blue period, the characters have lyrical bodies with elongated limbs that stretch towards each other. Standing tall across the height of the canvas, everything else is subdued by their inner grief while these figures invariably look down to the world around them. The colour gradually changes from bright and vivid to faded and dull, as the narration shifts from the couple's union to a tragic separation.

The series is also executed quite schematically in terms of the choice of backdrops. The lovers rejoice under an open sky with boundless pleasure. On the other hand, in 'Muna Madan Departure Scene', the pastel colour palette captures the emotional moment in all its softness and the suffocation inside the room is shared by an okhal, a traditional Nepali mortar. Known as okhali in the local dialect, it is still preferred to modern grinder machines in most households of Darjeeling. Almost symbolically without its pestle, the same lonely mortar reappears next to a mourning Madan in the piece titled 'Madan's Agony'.

Unlike the more recent cover of the actual book, where Tekbir Mukhiya has illustrated both Muna and Madan hugging each other, only Muna puts her hand around Madan in Bangdel's version. Madan, who is leaving for Tibet to earn a living, consistently poses with his hands crossed, which almost serves as a testament to Bangdel's own helplessness and longing for his supportive wife. Given that Nepal always formed the central theme throughout Bangdel's breadth of work, one wonders if this series is also an outcome of something more than his personal love life—the longing for a place he called his homeland but could only visit at the age of 42.

Politics

With dilapidated buildings and the presence of local dwellers, Bangdel's formative watercolour titled 'Suburbs of Calcutta' (1943) is more lively than the sleeping city depicted in 'Full Moon Night'. Interestingly, he did not choose one of the colonial buildings, which perhaps presents him as a socialist, just as most of his literary works do. It is hence important to research whether he was simply a 'right man in the right place' or his creativity was also critically engaged with the changing politics of the '60s and the '90s Nepal.

After banning the political parties in 1960, King Mahendra needed to establish a national identity which resonated with his idea of a new Nepal. In his agenda was also the modern art movement for which he invited Bangdel to Nepal. In a way, his government was shaping how the liberal arts community should function and Bangdel was the chosen actuator. One can hence argue whether Bangdel's contribution to Nepali modern art was out of his genuine feeling of the need for it and whether such an intervention could have been any better alternative for organic development. Bangdel believed that politics and art cannot go together. However, whether his own career as an artist acted as a vehicle for a wider political movement is open to discussion.

It is hard to find any evidence either in Bangdel's literary or artistic works if his idea of Nepali identity took a leap further in search of his Rai ethnic identity. Darjeeling was thriving as a Nepali linguistic hub where authors like Paras Mani Pradhan and Indra Bahadur Rai were instrumental in standardising and further developing the Nepalese state-backed Nepali language. Whether he had any realisation of being an instrument to Nepal's national identity building at the expense of cultural diversity is also not clear.

Bangdel was fond of the French art critic Andre Malraux. In the early 70s, Malraux was vocal about Bangladesh's liberation war against the suppression of its Bengali speakers. 'This was a time when Bangdel had just completed his Fulbright scholarship on art history in the US, and it is quite unlikely that he would have completely disconnected himself from Malraux's opinions.

In the year 1991, Bangdel returned to an abstract and semi-abstract series of paintings with democracy as their central theme. After two terms as chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, Bangdel had retired a year before the 1990 People's Movement for Democracy which makes it clear that he himself was not a part of the movement. As a spectator's narrative, his visual montage of street protests adopted a figurative style. The eventfulness of his themes overwhelmed the depth of his artistic expression and not the other way around. We are hence left to ask if it was actually 'felt by heart and soul' which he once claimed as his process of abstraction. In this last leg of his artistic journey, the colours began to distance themselves from nature, brushstrokes disagreed with any visual coherence and the compositional legacy from his earlier success with abstraction was more technical than subconscious.

My major critique of this final phase of Bangdel's creative output remains that it was a response to a certain sociopolitical climate but hardly a precursor to change. It might have worked as a reminder of recent political influences but they definitely did not aim at becoming a creative strength of our society to provoke its politics. This holds true to date for our overall dismal achievement since the advent of modern art in Nepal while we still have a long way to go.



Shrestha is an art historian who works as a teaching assistant with Art History Link-Up at the Courtauld Gallery in London, UK.



Full Moon Night, 1952



Moon Over Kathmandu, 1962

Jisoo, Jennie of Blackpink ready for new solo chapters

□ THE KOREA HERALD
SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

Jisoo of Blackpink is following her bandmate Jennie's lead in establishing her own agency for her solo career. According to industry sources, she is setting up a K-pop agency with her brother to be called Blisssoo. With the support of her new agency, the artist is to focus on building up an acting career.

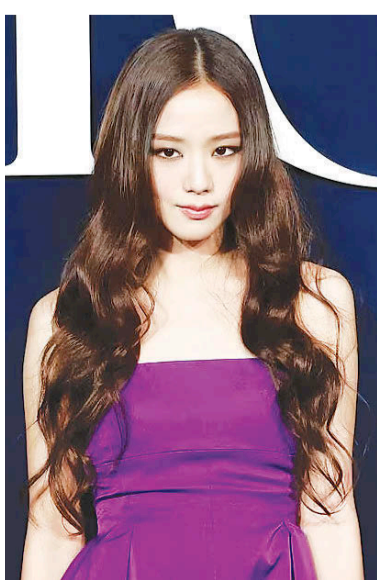
Jisoo's first dive into the world of cinema will be in 'Omniscient Reader'. The film is based on a Korean web novel of the same title that has recorded 200 million views so far. She is also set to star in Coupang Play's highly anticipated zombie drama

'Influenza', which is expected to premiere this year.

Fellow Blackpink member Jennie also announced in December last year that she had established her own agency, OA, with her mother. She is set to be a guest on KBS' late-night music talk show 'The Seasons: Lee Hyo-ri's Red Carpet' and will be a fixed member of tvN's new variety show 'Apartment 404'.

This is the first time in five years for Jennie to star in a variety show as a fixed member.

All four members of K-pop sensation Blackpink extended their exclusive contract with YG Entertainment last month for group projects, but not for individual activities.



REUTERS

Former chief justice Karki engages in insightful session with law students

□ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU

Former chief justice Hari Krishna Karki participated in a 'Special Interaction Session' at Kathmandu University School of Law (KUSoL) on Thursday. The event was organised by the Nepali Kanuni Sahitya Samiti (Nepali Law Literature Committee) of KUSoL, in collaboration with the Public Defender Society (PDS) Student Network.

Professor Rishikesh Wagle, the dean of KUSoL, extended a warm welcome to all attendees and expressed gratitude to Karki for sharing his insights with law students and recounting his journey in the legal field.

Suresh Raj Sharma, the founding vice-chancellor of Kathmandu

University (KU), emphasised the significance of subjects like law, social sciences and business, highlighting their equal importance alongside natural science and technology, which are sometimes given more attention.

When Karki took the stage, he began by narrating his personal journey in the legal profession. He emphasised the importance of sticking to the facts while advocating, noting that, generally, people seldom intervene except the judge. "Regardless of the profession we choose, we must adhere to the rule of law," he stated, underscoring the crucial role of studying law.

Karki also discussed the impact of political interference on the appointment of judges and elaborated on how he maintained accountability throughout his tenure as chief justice.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF NEPALI KANUNI SAHITYA SAMITI OF KUSOL