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TODAY

NATIONAL

All seven community colleges in farwestern Achham district are at risk of closure due to low enrollment and high dropout rates. Also, most students are girls and they are forced to quit studies midway. Pg 2

Light rains are expected in the hills of Koshi, Bagmati, and Gandaki provinces Monday due to a Mediterranean disturbance. The rest of the country will see precipitation on Tuesday and Wednesday. **Pg 3**

OPINION

Addressing the impacts of changes in temperature and precipitation is beyond the scope of Nepali institutions, plus we don't know how the new changes will further impact the ecology, writes *Madhukar Upadhya.* Pg 4



□ MONEY

Galli Express Private Limited, the maker of Galli Maps app that helps navigate alleys and lanes of Nepal, has won Rs400,000 NYEF Startup Awards in Kathmandu on Friday. **Pg 5**

□ WORLD

Taiwan's President-elect Lai Chingte faces a challenging term with no parliamentary majority, opposition pushing to revive a contentious service trade deal with China, and threat of military action from Beijing. **Pg 6**

□ SPORTS





Members of the Magar community celebrate at Tundikhel parade grounds in Kathmandu on the eve of the Maghe Sankranti festival, Sunday. The festival, which marks the transition of the sun into capricorn, is observed by various communities in various ways.

Weeks after auto-renewal of trade treaty with India, Nepal wants revision

The bilateral trade treaty was automatically renewed in November without addressing several of Nepal's concerns.

Carl Krishana Prasain Kathmandu, Jan 14

Nepal and India have agreed to renew the bilateral treaty on transit, and also to discuss the treaty on trade, which was automatically renewed in November without addressing several of Nepal's concerns. This agreement was reached during the Nepal-India Inter-Governmental Sub-Committee (IGSC) on Trade, Transit, and Cooperation to Combat Unauthorised Trade held in Kathmandu on January 11 and 12.

With the automatic renewal of the Nepal-India trade treaty in November last year, trade experts said that Nepal lost an opportunity to negotiate and amend a few Articles important for the country to boost bilateral trade. The trade treaty was first inked in 1978 and the latest renewal was made in Neyamber 2022 without changes.

in November 2023 without changes. It is renewed every seven years. infrastructure at the border.

"We also discussed operating the Jogbani-Biratnagar railway and facilitating cargo-handling by India," said Tiwari.

The two countries discussed upgrading existing quarantine labs and accepting each other's lab certificates, he said.

"Discussions were also held on removing obstacles for Nepali goods to the Indian market," Tiwari said.

The Nepali side raised the recurring bans by India on the export of various food items including wheat, rice, sugar and onion. Such bans have been fueling inflation and smuggling in Nepal.

Nepali officials in a recent meeting brought up India's recurring

Student unions one on converting private schools into trusts

A bill registered in Parliament by the Dahal government in September doesn't make conversion mandatory.

BINOD GHIMIRE

Protesting against a provision in the school education bill, students wings of ruling and opposition parties have jointly stood in favour of mandatory conversion of private schools into trusts.

The bill registered in parliament by the Pushpa Kamal Dahal administration in September doesn't make it mandatory for existing private schools to get converted into trusts. Most private schools are registered under the Company Act.

Speaking before the Education, Health and Information Technology Committee of the House of Representatives on Sunday, student leaders from various parties in one voice claimed that converting the privately-owned schools into trusts is the only way to stop rampant commercialisation of school education.

Pancha Singh, chairperson of the All Nepal National Independent Union (Revolutionary), said the bill is against

the spirit of the constitution. "Education is not a business. But the proposed law, making the conversion voluntarily, goes against the spirit of the constitution," said Singh. "We must be mindful that the education Act is guided by the constitution." Earlier in August the govern-

ment had prepared the bill with a provision that the private schools must be converted into trusts within five years. But, following strong reservations from private school owners, the provision was omitted when the bill was registered in Parliament.

The bill that is under discussion in the House committee leaves it up to the existing schools whether to convert into trusts. Almost all the private schools registered under the Company Act don't want to convert their legal ownership. The bill, however, creates hurdles for new entrants in the private education sector, not allowing them to operate under the Company Act.

Altogether 152 lawmakers have proposed amendments to the disputed bill.

Arati Lama, chairperson of the CPN (Unified Socialist)-affiliated All Nepal National Free Student Union, said private schools must be converted into trusts within five years. "The constitution talks about socialism. How can we think of socialism by having two types of education? We must not backtrack on converting the private schools into trusts," she said. She argued that two classes of human resources were being produced by the two types of schoolsprivate and public. The bill that is expected to be presented in the federal parliament for endorsement in the upcoming session, has received amendments from 152 lawmakers. >> Continued on page 2







HUNTING FOOD ALL OVER NEPAL

Hosts New Zealand beat Pakistan by 21 runs in the second Twenty20 international in Auckland on Sunday taking a 2-0 lead in the five-match series. Pakistan posted 194/8 while Pakistan could manage only 173. **Pg 7** "Both neighbours agreed to resolve issues relating to trade and transit by revisiting the trade treaty," said Ram Chandra Tiwari, joint secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies.

Officials say the tentative date for the revision has not been fixed, but it could happen soon.

Shri Vipul Bansal, joint secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, India, led the Indian delegation.

According to the participants, there were detailed discussions on bilateral trade, transit, customs, quarantine, setting up food testing labs, and developing and upgrading trade-related bans on food exports.

"To tackle the ongoing smuggling of goods from India to Nepal, the two sides agreed to strengthen mechanisms in the field," said Tiwari.

According to experts at the South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment(SAWTEE), a Kathmandubased think-tank, removing duty-free market access to India for primary agricultural products will allow Nepal to levy duties on the heavily subsidised Indian agricultural goods.

>> Continued on page 5

Genocide case against Israel

Where does the rest of the world stand on the momentous allegations?



Palestinians mourn their relatives killed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip, outside a morgue in Rafah, southern Gaza on January 10.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, JAN 14

South Africa says more than 50 countries have expressed support for its case at the United Nations' top court accusing Israel of genocide against Palestinians in the war in Gaza.

Others, including the United States, have strongly rejected South Africa's allegation that Israel is violating the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Many more have remained silent.

The world's reaction to the landmark case that was heard Thursday and Friday at the International Court of Justice in The Hague shows a predictable global split when it comes to the inextricable, 75-year-old problem of Israel and the Palestinians. Sunday marks 100 days of their bloodiest ever conflict.

The majority of countries backing South Africa's case are from the Arab world and Africa. In Europe, only the Muslim nation of Turkey has publicly stated its support.

No Western country has declared support for South Africa's allegations against Israel. The US, a close Israel ally, has rejected them as unfounded, the UK has called them unjustified, and Germany said it "explicitly rejects" them.

China and Russia have said little about one of the most momentous cases to come before an international court. The European Union also hasn't commented.

US: 'Meritless' allegations

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on a visit to Israel a day before the court proceedings began that South Africa's allegations are "meritless" and that the case "distracts the world" from efforts to find a lasting solution to the conflict. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said genocide is "not a word that ought to be thrown around lightly, and we certainly don't believe that it applies here."

>> Continued on page 2

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NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Boy arrested on charge of rape



SALYAN: A 15-year-old boy from Sapmara in ward 6 of Sharada Municipality was arrested on Saturday on the charge of raping a six-year-old girl. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Nabin Karki of the District Police Office. the arrest was made based on the complaint of the victim's family that the boy raped the girl, who is a relative of the boy, on December 23. The boy was presented at the district court on Sunday and has been remanded into custody. In the district, 14 females were raped, and attempts were made to rape two by their own relatives in the current fiscal year, said Karki.

Elderly woman dies of burn injuries

BARDIYA: An octogenarian woman suc cumbed to burn injuries in ward 4 of Madhuwan Municipality in Bardiya district on Sunday morning. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Tilakram Aryal, Chinki Tharu, aged 87, of Bhullanchowk died after she caught fire while warming herself by a bonfire. The temperature has been dropping in various Tarai districts over the past few days due to a cold wave. Police said they are investigating the death

Two India-bound girls rescued from Gulariya border

BARDIYA: Police detained three persons for their alleged involvement in human trafficking from Ganeshpur border point in ward 11 of Gulariya Municipality on Sunday. At the initia tion of Sana Hat Haru Nepal, an organisation working against trafficking, the security personnel also rescued two India-bound adolescent girls aged 15 and 16. The suspects were taking the girls to India on motorcycles. Further investigation is underway, said police

Low enrollment, high dropout rates mar Achham campuses

Seven colleges are currently in operation in Achham and all of them have low enrollment.

MENUKA DHUNGANA ACHHAM JAN 14

All the community colleges in Achham, a hill district in Sudurpaschim Province, are on the brink of closure due to low enroll-

Seven colleges are currently in operation in Achham and all of them have low enrolment. Almost all college students in the district

"More than 80 percent of students in our campus are female. The male students prefer going abroad for foreign employment or to cities to pursue higher education after completing grade 12. The villagers are now without male youths. Our students are daughters or daughters-in-law who cannot or are not allowed to go outside their villages," said Chhatra Bista, chief at Achham Multiple Campus in Mangalsen.

enrol mainly in management and education streams but all of them do not continue till the final year. "Only a few students enrol in colleges now and some leave their

Until a few years ago, boys outnumbered girls in all educational institutions. It is still the same up to the high school level as parents favour boys over girls in schooling. But college enrollment of boys in Achham is very low.

There are several factors, according to Bista, behind the low enrollment rate in colleges. "Many people are discouraged from pursuing bachelor's level because it takes four years to complete the course. Lack of job guarantee further discourages students from pursuing bachelor's courses," said Bista.

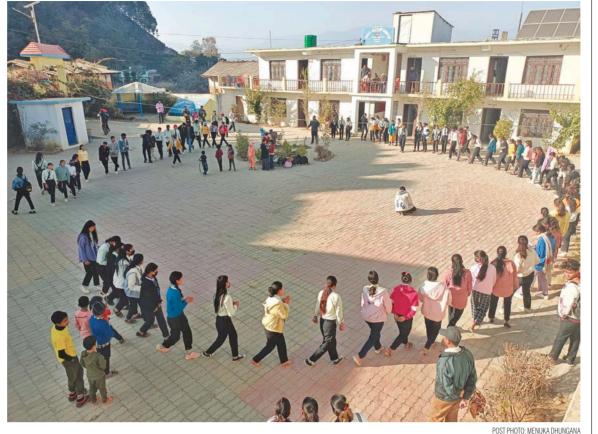
To attract students to continue their studies with the prospect of earning a living after studies, the Achham Multiple Campus is planning to offer classes on poultry farming, beekeeping and pheasant farming. "We are requesting various government authorities to provide financial support to run such classes," said Bista. He warned that many colleges would soon face closure unless students were linked with entrepreneurship and busi-

ment and high dropout rates.

are girls.

According to Bista, the students studies midway," he said.

Binita Adhikari, the chief of



Students at Achham Multiple Campus in Mangalsen, headquarters of Achham district, in this recent photo.

Panchadewal Campus located in Binayak, Panchadewal Binayak Municipality, said that the college is a centre for politics and not education.

"The campus with poor physical infrastructure becomes a political agenda for political parties during every election. But post-election there is no improvement. Due to the direct intervention of the political parties, students don't join the campus," said Adhikari

According to Adhikari, currently, Bachelor's in Education (B.Ed) and Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) are being taught at the college. The attendance rate of students, who are mostly females, is quite low, says Adhikari

"Using all the available resources, we have managed teachers for all the subjects to improve the quality of education on campus, but due to a lack of physical infrastructure, we have not been able to attract students," said Adhikari.

According to Bhim Budha, the chief of Janasiksha Campus located in Mellekh Rural Municipality, BBS and B.Ed courses are taught at the college with around 300 students. Out of the total number, only some 65 students attend classes regularly. Similarly, out of 300 students, 80 percent are female.

"Only around four male students come to the college regularly," said Budha. "The female students are also not very regular."

Budha said that there is also a problem of female students dropping out of school after getting married.

"The college will be on the verge of closure if we lose our female students," said Budha.

According to Ishwar Sodari, the chief of Kailash Multiple Campus and president of the Nepal Public Association, Campus Sudurpaschim, the number of students is decreasing at all 83 community colleges in Sudurpaschim.

'Students attend classes in their first and second years, but most of them stop in their third and fourth years. College officials have to reach out to the students to convince them to attend classes and exams," said Sodari. "Youths think that there is no point in pursuing four-years bachelor's courses. They see no job prospects.'

Sodari said that students both male and female quit studies as soon as other opportunities such as foreign employment and marriage prospects arise. "Students who are currently enrolled in community colleges will drop out right away if they get other opportunities,' Sodari said. "There are more students in language learning institutes than in colleges. If the government does not work to solve this issue soon, then the community colleges will shut down.³

Leaders demand 20 percent of national budget for education

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

While some lawmakers have favoured retaining private schools in the present form, some have lodged amendments saying such schools must be registered as trusts, even though the proposed duration for such registration varies between five to 10 years

Through amendment proposals, cross-party lawmakers have also proposed that the same rule apply to all schools, no matter when they are registered.

The CPN-UML-affiliated All Nepal National Free Students Union said the bill was introduced without adequate consultations with stakeholders. "There should be no private investment in school education. Let's give five to seven years for the conversion," said Samik Badal, chairperson of the union.

There is an old debate about the ownership of private schools. The High-level Education Commission in 2019 had recommended converting private schools into trusts within 10 years. It, however, was never made public by the government of the day, led by KP Sharma Oli. The private school operators had objected to the report.

Appearing before the House committee last week the representatives of the private schools had threatened to resort to street protests and submit the keys of their schools to the government if they were forced to convert into trusts. Government officials too have defended the bill saying the private schools must not be compelled to register as trusts.

Putting their views in the committee, officials at the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology had said last week that everyone should consider that Nepal embraces a three-pillar economic model-with the government, cooperatives and the private sector as actors-where private schools have an important place. "Our focus should be on monitoring private schools [not changing their ownership]," said Suresh Adhikari, secretary at the ministry. "The discussion's focus should be on increasing scholarships and controlling the monopoly [of schools] in fixing the fee structure.'

The student leaders said along with the strong regulation of private schools, those who hold government positions must be legally bound to enrol their children in public schools. Nepal Students Union President Dujang Sherpa said those who hold public office must enrol their children in public schools. "Only then will public education improve," he said.

The cross-party student leaders have demand ed a legal provision to make it mandatory for the government to set aside a minimum of 20 percent of the national budget for the education sector.

China, Russia, India remain silent on genocide case against Israel

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"We don't agree with what the South Africans are doing," U.K. Foreign Minister David Cameron said

of the case Israel fiercely rejects the allega-

The U.S., the U.K., the EU and others classify Hamas as a terrorist organization.

Israel's military response in Gaza has killed more than 23,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's ealth Ministry. The count doesn'

for Israel on Friday, the day the hearings closed, has symbolic significance given its history of the Holocaust, when the Nazis killed 6 million Jews in Europe. Israel was created after World War II as a haven for Jews in the vene in the case on Israel's behalf. The EU has only said that countries

have a right to bring cases to the U.N. court. Most of its member states have refrained from taking a position.

Turkey, which is in the process of

trated by the Israeli defense forces" and accused Israel of "indiscriminate targeting" of Gaza's civilian population.

The OIC is a bloc of 57 countries that includes Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt. Its headquarters are

as saying in the southern African nation's The Namibian newspaper.

Malaysia's Foreign Ministry demanded "legal accountability for Israel's atrocities in Gaza.'

tions of genocide and says i ing its people. It says the offensive is aimed at eradicating the leaders of Hamas, the militant group that runs the territory and provoked the conflict by launching surprise attacks on southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mainly civilians, and taking around 250 hostages.

Blinken said a genocide case against Israel was "particularly galling" given that Hamas and other groups "continue to openly call for the annihilation of Israel and the mass murder of Jews."

distinguish between combatants and civilians. It says more than two-thirds of the dead are women and children. Much of northern Gaza has become an uninhabitable moonscape with entire neighborhoods erased by Israeli air strikes and tank fire.

South Africa has also condemned Hamas' Oct. 7 attack but argues that it did not justify Israel's response.

German support for Israel

Germany's announcement of support

those atrocities

"Israel has been defending itself," German government spokesperson Steffen Hebestreit said. His statement also invoked the Holocaust, which in large part spurred the creation of the U.N. Genocide Convention in 1948.

"In view of Germany's history the Federal Government sees itself as particularly committed to the Convention against Genocide," he said. He called the allegations against Israel "completely unfounded." Germany said it intends to inter-

joining the EU in the a lone voice region. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his country provided documents that were being used against Israel in the case.

"With these documents, Israel will

be condemned," he said. Arab condemnation

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation was one of the first blocs to publicly back the case when South Africa filed it late last month. It said there was "mass genocide being perpe-

Saudi Arabia. Arab League, whose 22 member countries are almost all part of the OIC, also backed South Africa's case.

South Africa drew some support from outside the Arab world. Namibia and Pakistan agreed with the case at a U.N. General Assembly session this week. Malaysia also expressed support.

"No peace-loving human being can ignore the carnage waged against Palestinians in Gaza," Namibian President Hage Geingob was quoted

Vacancy Announcement

The British College offering British and international qualifications equipping students with the knowledge, skills and values they need for success in the global job market is seeking to recruit candidates for the post of Chief Technology Officer (CTO). The prospective candidates must meet following criteria:

Number of Required Position: 1

Type of Employment: Time bound (extendable) Working Station: As designated by the college Potential Date of Employment Commencement: within January 2024

Roles and Responsibilities

> Collaborate with executive management to align technology strategies with overall business goals. > Lead the development and enhancement of digital oducts and services in alignment with the college's ission and educational objectives.

Actively participate in the teaching of IT-related courses to udents, sharing industry knowledge and practical insights.

ualification

Doctorate degree preferred > Masters' degree required

equirements

Identify documents (Citizenship/Passport)

Proven experience in a senior technology leadership role

Excellent client-facing, leadership and analytical skills

Strong background in Information Technology, product anagement, and educational technology

Solid organisational skills including attention to detail and ultitasking skills

15 + years of experience in relevant field

ne interested candidates can email their application with a cent Curriculum Vitae to jobs@thebritishcollege.edu.np ithin 7 days from the publication of this advertisement.

ote: Nepali citizens are highly motivated to apply having alification and requirements mentioned and are given reference.

ease visit www.thebritishcollege.edu.np/pages/tbc-vacancies further details

China and Russia: Silence

China, Russia — which is also facing allegations of genocide in the world court — and the emerging power of India have largely remained silent, seemingly aware that taking a stand in such an inflammatory case has little upside and could irreversibly upset their relationships in the region.

India's foreign policy has historically supported the Palestinian cause, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi was one of the first global leaders to express solidarity with Israel and call the

Hamas attack terrorism.

Somewhere in the middle

A handful of South American countries have spoken up, including the continent's biggest economy, Brazil, whose Foreign Ministry said President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva backed South Africa's case. However, the ministry's comments did not directly accuse Israel of genocide but focused on the need for a cease-fire in Gaza.

South Africa's case against Israel is two-fold: It wants the court to say Israel is committing genocide and to issue an interim ruling ordering an end to its military campaign in Gaza. The court said it would decide on an interim ruling soon but, reflecting the gravity of the case, it could take years for a final verdict on the genocide charge.

Brazil said it hoped the case would get Israel to "immediately cease all acts and measures that could constitute genocide.'

Other countries have stopped short of agreeing with South Africa. Ireland premier Leo Varadkar said the genocide case was "far from clear cut" but that he hoped the court would order a cease-fire in Gaza.

It's uncertain if Israel would obey any order to stop its military action. Russia didn't when the same court told it to halt its invasion of Ukraine nearly two years ago.

Kathmandu Upatyaka Khanepani Limited, (KUKL) Board **Project Implementation Directorate (PID)** Anamnagar, Kathmandu

Ministry of Water Supply

Request for Expression of Interest

Design, Supervision and Contract Management Consultant (DSC/WW/03)

(First Publication Date: 22 December 2023)

AMENDMENT NO.1

(Date of issue of Amendment No 1: 15 January 2024)

All prospective Consulting Firms are hereby informed that the Following changes has been made in the Request for Expression of Interest.

Reference	Text in the EOI	Corrected Text as Amendment No. 1
EOI Notice	The Design Supervision and Contract Management	The Design Supervision and Contract Management
Serial No.3	Consultant must furnish list of similar projects executed in past seven years with summary of such projects and	Consultant must furnish list of similar projects executed in past ten years with summary of such projects and
	important financial details. The EOI is required to be submitted in the standard formats stipulated for this purpose. The EOI document, draft Terms of Reference (TORs), format for submission and other details can be	important financial details. The EOI is required to be submitted in the standard formats stipulated for this purpose. The EOI document, draft Terms of Reference (TORs), format for submission and other details can be
	downloaded from ADB website http://csrn.adb.org (click on "Nepal" find caption on "view" and download "TOR document") or PID website https://kuklpid.org.np/.	downloaded from ADB website http://csrn.adb.org (click on "Nepal" find caption on "view" and download "TOR document") or PID website https://kuklpid.org.np/.
EOI Form-	Please select most relevant projects to demonstrate the	Please select most relevant projects to demonstrate the
E. Project References	firm's technical qualifications and geographical experience (maximum 10 projects). The consultant must submit the experience certificate issued by the client completed within last 7 years . Proposal without experience certificates will not be considered for EOI evaluation.	firm's technical qualifications and geographical experience (maximum 10 projects). The consultant must submit the experience certificate issued by the client completed within last 10 years . Proposal without experience certificates will not be considered for EOI evaluation.

Kamal Ratna Tuladhar, long-time copy editor for the Post, dies aged 67



POST REPOR KATHMANDU, JAN 14

Kamal Ratna Tuladhar, a long-time desk editor for The Kathmandu Post and author best known for chronicling the journeys of Kathmandu's Newar merchants to Lhasa, died on Saturday. He was 67

Tuladhar was suffering from heart problems, said his eldest brother Amrit Ratna, who confirmed his death to the Post

On Saturday morning, Tuladhar was rushed to Novic Hospital in Thapathali, Kathmandu, where he breathed his last, according to Amrit Ratna

His final rites were performed at Shova Bhagwati later on Saturday.

Tuladhar used to copy-edit news and opinion articles for the Post's Business and Op-Ed pages

Tuladhar previously worked for the Himalayan Travel Trade Journal, Shangri-la, Nepal Traveler and The Rising Nepal.

He is the author of several books, including the widely-acclaimed 'Caravan to Lhasa', which chronicled the perilous journeys undertaken by Kathmandu's Newari merchants to and from Lhasa from the 1920s to 1960s

"Caravan to Lhasa is so much more than a history book, incorporating as it does bare facts while at the same time presenting them in a very lucid and entertaining-almost fictionalmanner," one reviewer wrote.

"I might have approached this as a story about adventure, but it would be equally appealing to the many who might regard it a reliable source of information about the history of Kathmandu-Tibet trade.'

Tuladhar also contributed numerous articles for the Post, his subjects including a legendary Kathmandu sculptor, the significance of Nepal Sambat and how Newar merchants would sequester themselves upon returning to their Kathmandu homes from Tibet in the 1950s, a piece that resonated with readers during the Covid pandemic.

Tuladhar worked at the Kathmandu Post from 2008 to 2023.

Western disturbances to cause rainfall in some hilly areas today

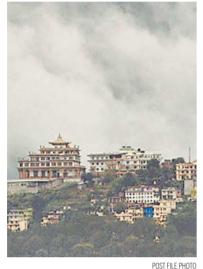
Experts say rainfall will lessen the pollution level. Change in weather system has worsened the Valley's air quality.

POST REPORT **KATHMANDU, JAN 14**

Some hilly areas of Koshi, Bagmati and Gandaki provinces are most likely to witness light rainfall on Monday, as a western disturbance originating in the Mediterranean is bringing a change in the ongoing weather system

The Meteorological Forecasting Division of the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology said that most parts of the country could witness light rainfall on Tuesday and Wednesday as well.

"High hills and mountainous areas will witness snowfall and the rest of the countries will witness rainfall on Tuesday and Wednesday," said Saroj Pudasaini, a meteorologist at the division. "This rainfall will lessen minimum temperature, meaning that cold will increase, lessen the dust pollution and remove fog and mist in the Tarai region.



Most parts of the country could witness light rainfall on Tuesday and Wednesday too.

Districts of the Tarai region have been witnessing thick fog in the morning for the last several days, which has also affected domestic flights and vehicular movements.

in the districts Earlier. Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces witnessed rainfall on December 5.

A lack of rainfall for a long time has raised the pollution level in the country.

On Sunday, the Kathmandu Valley ranked the 11th most polluted city in the world with PM2.5 levels reaching 170 per cubic meter (μ g/m3), as per IQ Air, a Swiss group that collects air-quality data from around the world.

Experts say that when air quality

reaches 151-200, it is considered unhealthy; everyone may experience problems, with sensitive groups feeling more severe effects.

When the Air Quality Index exceeds 300, it is considered "hazardous" for everyone and may prompt emergency condition alerts.

An elongated dry spell has made the year 2023 the warmest in Nepal in 13 years and the second warmest in the past 42 years.

According to the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, which maintains records of temperature, precipitation and other meteorological activities, the country received lower-than-normal precipitation, with the average maximum temperature rising above 0.7 degrees Celsius between January and October last

"The average maximum temperature of the country during January to October was 28 degrees Celsius, which is the second warmest year since 1981. It was +0.7 degrees Celsius above normal," said Sudarshan Humagain, a meteorologist at the department. "In 2010, the average maximum temperature was 28.1 degrees Celsius.'

Officials say that the final data for November and December is yet to be updated, which could make some difference in calculating average temperature increase.

A report prepared by the department states that during the same 10 months, the country received 11 percent lower-than-normal rainfall, which is the sixth lowest precipitation since 1981. The average maximum temperature from January to October was 0.7°C above normal. The average minimum temperature in the period was 0.2°C above normal.

This year, several stations broke previous records of extreme temperature and precipitation. Bandipur in Chatara in Sunsari, Tanahun, Chautara in Sindhupalchok, Dharan Bazaar in Sunsari, Damkauli in Nawalparasi East, Gorkha, Janakpur Airport of Dhanusha, Kanyam Tea Estate of Ilam, Okhaldhunga, Chitwan, Simara Airport of Bara, and Siraha recorded extreme temperatures.

Evidence indicates that the maximum temperature in Nepal is rising at a greater rate (0.05 degrees Celsius per year) than the minimum temperature (0.03 degrees Celsius per year).

Experts say extreme weather events-excessive rainfall in a short span of time, continuous rain for several days in the post-monsoon period, dry spells and droughts, below-average precipitation and above-normal temperatures in winter—have become more frequent in Nepal.

Nepal committed in not allowing anti-Chinese activities, Dahal says



Prime Minister Dahal said Nepal firmly adheres to the 'One China Principle'

POST REPORT

KATHMANDU, JAN 14

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Sunday said Nepal and China are close neighbours and reliable friends.

"Our relations stand on the solid foundation of the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence'. We understand each other's aspirations and sensitivities and extend support to each other in times of need in the spirit of true friendship," said Prime Minister Dahal while addressing the inaugural ceremony of the First Chinese New Year celebrations 'Voices of Spring. Golden Dreams' in Nepal.

Prime minister to leave for Uganda on Thursday

POST REPORT KATHMANDU, JAN 14

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is scheduled to leave for Uganda on Thursday leading a Nepali delegation to the 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement being held on January 19-20

The prime minister will be accompanied by his daughter Ganga Dahal.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Nepali delegation includes Minister for Foreign Affairs NP Saud, Foreign Secretary Sewa Lamsal and senior government officials.

The prime minister is scheduled to address the plenary session of the summit on the theme 'Deepening Cooperation for Shared Global Affluence' on Friday.

He will then attend the state banquet hosted by the President of Uganda Yoweri Kaguta Museveni in honour of the heads of delegation of NAM member states.

Prime Minister Dahal will hold bilateral meetings with heads of state, heads of government and other high

The prime minister said Nepal is committed not to allow any activities that are inimical to the interest of China

We oppose external interference in the internal affairs of a country Likewise, China also always stands firm in respect of Nepal's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and dignity," he said.

Dahal said civilisations in Nepal and China are connected not only by rivers and mountains but also by shared culture and people-to-people contacts

Recalling his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping during his official visit to China in September last year, the prime minister said he was glad to learn that agreements and consensus reached during the visit are being gradually implemented.

"I would like to underscore that our common path is to promote the development of the international order in a more just and reasonable direction, safeguard the common interests of developing countries, and make an effort to build a community with a shared future for humankind," he said

"While the world we are living in today is undergoing profound and complex changes in recent times, it is cultural fabrics, social cohesion and human affiliations that closely connect us. I am confident that these connections between Nepal and China shall grow from strength to strength in the coming days.

Spending ceiling for National Assembly candidates fixed

According to the commission, a canmission, said the ceiling was fixed as per Section 65 of the National Assembly Member Election Act and Rule 46 (1) of the National Assembly Member Election Regulations.

According to him, the candidates will be able to spend the money under various titles including purchasing voter lists, vehicles, vehicle fuel, publicity material, transportation, conference, interaction, publicity, office operation, representative mobilisation and various other topics.

The expenses details should be submitted to the commission within 30 days of the announcement of the election results, the commission said.

An election to elect 19 upper house members is scheduled for January 25.

dignitaries attending the summit, the foreign ministry said in a statement

The prime minister will return

The prime minister said Nepal

"Our commitment is strong, une-

straightforward, and

firmly adheres to the 'One China

unshakable. The change in domestic

and external situations has not influ-

enced and affected this principled

position of Nepal," he said. "Nepal

recognises China is the sole legal gov-

ernment representing the whole of

China, and Taiwan is an inalienable

clear on 'Taiwan Independence' in the

joint statement issued during my

"We have already made our position

part of China's territory.

recent visit to China.

The summit will be preceded by the

Kathmandu on Tuesday leading a Nepali delegation to the ministerial meeting of the summit. The ministerial meeting will be preceded by the

The summit will consider the report of the preparatory ministerial meeting, review the progress achieved in the implementation of the outcomes of the 18th Summit held in 2019, and conclude with the adoption of the Kampala Declaration.

Nepal is a founding member of the non-aligned movement and has been actively participating in all NAM Summits since its inception.

After the 19th NAM Summit, the third south summit is being held on January 21-22. Foreign Secretary Lamsal will lead the Nepali delegation to the south summit.

on Sunday.

Principle'.

quivocal,

home on January 21.

ministerial meeting on January 17-18. The foreign minister will leave

senior officials' meeting on January 15 - 16.

POST REPORT KATHMANDU, JAN 14

The Election Commission on Sunday fixed the ceiling for electoral spending for National Assembly candidates. didate will not be allowed to spend more than Rs350,000. Shaligram Poudel, the spokesperson of the com-

Balance between mitigation, adaptation key to S'pore's climate strategy

Singapore is already importing renewable energy, encouraging electric vehicles and imposing carbon taxes to reduce the reliance on burning fossil fuel for energy.

🗆 LYNDA HONG SINGAPORE, JAN 14

A warmer climate and its consequences of more extreme weather by the end of 2100 was predicted for Singapore in the third national climate change study released on Jan 5, 2024.

The Centre for Climate Research Singapore (CCRS) and the National Supercomputing Centre (NSCC) ran billions of climate data through supercomputers for the report to generate simulations for 3¹/₂ years that painted scenarios of Singapore's climate in the long term.

However, to prevent higher temperatures, heavier rainfalls, stronger winds, longer and more frequent dry spells locally, Singapore will need the help of the world to collectively reach the goal of net-zero carbon emission.

This is because the Republic produces only about 0.1 per cent of total emissions globally, said the report, making it difficult to lower global warming even if Singapore reaches net-zero emissions by 2050, which it aims to achieve by stopping greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere

Residual emissions from hard-toabate sectors can be cancelled out by buying carbon offsets or using carbon capture technology.

But even so, Singapore can play an important part in the global effort—by influencing change and encouraging improvements-and also concurrently implementing adaptations.

Mitigating climate change

Singapore is already importing renewable energy, encouraging the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) and imposing carbon taxes to reduce the reliance on burning fossil fuel for energy-the main culprit of global warming.

But the Republic will need to count on global efforts, particularly from large emitters like China, the US and European Union nations, to move the

needle to mitigate climate change. For Singapore, perhaps the most important facet of the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) hosted in Dubai in December was speaking with world leaders at the event.

Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu, who had co-facilitated talks on mitigation at COP28, said at the launch of the third climate change report that global efforts are currently insufficient to limit world temperature rise by 1.5 deg C, the goal of the Paris Agreement in 2015.

Professor Benjamin Horton, director of the Earth Observatory of Singapore at Nanyang Technology University, agreed, telling The Straits Times that the world will likely be warmer by 2.7 deg C by the end of the century "if we follow current policy settings"

Singapore, however, has been doing its part, to steer global efforts from further global warming,

Ms Fang Eu-Lin, sustainability and climate change leader at PwC Singapore, who attended COP28, noted: "Singapore's involvement in the COP28 negotiations and its outcomes allows us to facilitate and appreciate the nuances of transition pathways.

The collective decision reached at the COP28 to transition away from fossil fuels would need to be acted on.

"Developing countries, which are not as advanced in their transition, may have concerns around jobs and livelihoods," said Ms Fang.

Setting examples to transition away from fossil fuels is another way Singapore can influence the global community.

Another COP28 attendee, Assistant Professor Simon Schillebeeckx from Singapore Management University's business school, said that for Singapore, "our goal is to demonstrate that high development and high well-being are possible at a fraction of our current footprint".



Singapore will need the help of the entire globe to come together and collectively reach the goal of net-zero

"Our part to mitigate emissions should be significantly bigger than our footprint, simply because we are a much more affluent nation and benefit enormously from importing embedded carbon," he said.

Adapting for a changing planet

While the world gets its act together to reduce global warming, Singapore is making moves to ensure that the country can adapt to climate change.

The latest climate change study echoes findings from the last two studies that started in 2007, with updated forecasts on how weather elements would change by 2100, allowing policymakers to better plan for adaptation measures

In the worst-case scenario, the report estimates that as global warming melts glacier ice sheets, mean sea levels will rise by more than 1m by the end of 2100, and increase to 2m by 2150.

One clear example of Singapore's

adaptation measures—in this instance, implementing coastal protection-is the Long Island plan for the East Coast area. Engineering and

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



technical studies have been initiated to explore the feasibility of reclaiming three tracts of land spanning about 800ha-twice the size of Marina Bayoff East Coast Park in the coming decades.

More local data could help sharpen efforts

Singapore's climate change study was based on three of five Shared Socioeconomic Pathways, or SSPs, from the sixth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report released in 2021.

SSPs are the result of complex calculations based on global factors like future population growth, education, urbanisation, gross domestic product and technology to determine the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that would end up in the atmosphere.

These quantifiable SSPs help decision makers develop more accurate climate model projections, consequently determine key policies.

Unlike forecasts on the impact of global warming on Singapore's climate, the study did not specify projections on Singapore's socioe-conomic factors in the long term.

Assistant Professor Zhu Wenjun from the Nanyang Business School at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) noted that the study indicates "profound" impacts on business.

"Research indicates that higher temperatures can significantly impair human productivity, leading to reduced incomes. Global agricultural production will be disrupted, potentially affecting food prices and security," she said.

National University of Singapore (NUS) Koh Lian Pin, who is also NUS' chief sustainability scientist and a Nominated Member of Parliament, said that quantifying mitigation benefits can help project the societal impact of climate change. In other words, how these findings can be taken to the next step and connect the actions with the CCRS projections.

"For example, is it enough to fully phase in EVs by 2040, or is it too late? Maybe if we phase in EVs by 2030, we would have a bigger beneficial effect in terms of reducing temperatures, or reducing the risk of sea level rise," said Professor Koh.

Mr Brian Ho, sustainability climate leader at Deloitte Southeast Asia, noted: "Singapore's current focus is more on adaptation, with significant investments directed towards adaptation measures rather than emissions reductions. This approach might need to shift towards more proactive mitigation measures.

The middle path

There is little doubt that the planet continues to get warmer.

Temperatures in Singapore have already hit record highs. The hottest day in 2023-May 13, which saw 37 deg C in Ang Mo Kio-equalled the record mark for the highest daily maximum temperature, which was logged in Tengah on April 17, 1983. Singapore's experience follows global trends. The World Meteorological Organisation confirmed that 2023 is the world's hottest year, putting it at 1.35 deg C above the pre-industrial average, while 2022 is the sixth warmest.

Adaptation measures must be planned for and implemented to ensure Singapore's survivability in a warmer future. But just as science and technology have utilised data for adaptation, data must also be channelled into mitigation measures to stem the tide of climate change in the present.

As both Prof Koh and Deloitte's Mr Ho have noted, mitigation measures cannot be ignored, and instead must be sharpened with local context and socioe-conomic data, for more effective climate action.

More data-based analysis on the socio-economic impact of mitigation efforts will provide a clearer line between individual action and environmental impact. That clarity could help bring more Singaporeans on board with environmental issues, and spark more ideas to help with the country's cause.

This balance of mitigation action for change in the present, and the planning and implementation of adaptation measures for future survivability, is perhaps Singapore's best way forward

OPINION



Myopic on Melamchi

As soon as the obstruction in the valley's water supply is cleared, long-term solutions will again be shelved.

Starting today, the taps in Kathmandu Valley could be gushing with water again. After a gap of over six months, the Melamchi Drinking Water Project is all set to resume regular supply. In June 2023, the project had stopped supplying water to the Valley, citing potential damage to its main tunnel from monsoon floods. The water supply was supposed to be halted for two months, but the disruption continued for much longer, forcing valley dwellers to hit the streets. There is nothing we can do about the unpredictable rains and landslides, including in the Melamchi area of Sindhupalchok district. There was flooding on June 15, 2021 in the upper reaches of the Melamchi river's catchment, followed by a similar event on August 1, 2021. The origins of these events can be traced back to the 7.8-magnitude 2015 Gorkha Earthquake that increased the geological fragility of the catchment and its susceptibility to land instabilities. Again, given the growing unpredictability of weather patterns owing to climate change and the country's seismic vulnerability, these kinds of events are both inevitable and unpredictable.

Yet these "natural" causes are not the only reasons for the suffering of the valley residents. Even if the water supply had to be halted for a while because of these natural calamities, each time, normal supply could have been restored much earlier than they did. For instance, after the June 2023 stoppage, there was more flooding in August which damaged the project's headworks and access roads. In light of the new damages, the previous repair contract needed to be revised, and the contractor paid extra for it. Yet the payment was delayed for months. In addition, even the suppliers of an earlier contractor started obstructing repairs, as they too had not been paid. Even when people are under an acute crisis, Nepal's slow government machinery refuses to pick up pace. As a more long-term solution, an Asian Development Bank report later suggested relocating the headworks to an area with a lower risk of devastating hazards. This, says the report, is vital as "extreme geomorphological and hydrological processes in the catchment... make it impossible to control all the landslides, floods, and debris flows that threaten the current location of the headworks." The suggestion was to build new headworks 500-600 metres above the current location.

The relocation of headworks would be a big step towards finding a more permanent solution. Yet here too there has been a delay in reviewing the design of the proposed headworks. There have been plenty of other excellent suggestions, from the ADB and other water disaster experts, for example, on measures to stabilise the river and control erosion. Yet neither the project operators nor the government at various levels seem serious about finding such long-term solutions. Given this reality, what is likely to happen in the next few days is that Melamchi water will start flowing again and the quest for long-term solutions will again be abandoned. No wonder that the project, which came into operation after nearly 30 years on the drawing board, continues to be cited as an exemplar of Nepal's botched post-1990 development model.

STARTING POINT

Addressing the impacts of climate change isn't within our institutions' scope.

MADHUKAR UAPDHYA



The closing of brick kilns, stone quar ries, a cement factory, and river-sand mining in the Kathmandu Valley were the fruits of a successful environment movement that started in the mid-1980s. The movement also helped remove smoke-belching three-wheelers from the streets and made "pollution-free" certificates mandatory for vehicles to keep the city's air clean. However, the drive to protect rivers and other water sources wasn't as successful. Despite investments in treatment plants, along with over four decades of 'raising awareness" and over five years of voluntary cleaning campaigns, Bagmati-the major river that flows through the valley, not only remains as polluted as ever but is as good as dead from a hydrological point of view.

These examples show that efforts to close brick kilns or stone quarries were successful because they were fights against specific business outfits that could be identified and targeted. But environmental issues resulting from multi-layered, multidimensional factors with no one or two outfits to point to aren't as easy to address, water pollution being one of them. Failing to infuse the movement to save water sources with a greater hydrological understanding and dedication has led to deepening water crises on all fronts.

This past year has been worrisome for water managers. A dry winter last year was followed by a rain-deficit summer due to El Niño, with groundwater in Tarai plummeting. It looks like winter rain is going to fail or arrive quite late this year, too. With insufficient summer rain and a dry winter, it's not only a question of water shortage and its effects on the economy but also the daily lives of people or the likelihood of forest fires for which we can prepare in the short term. What's more worrying is the emerging trend due to the

Deepening water crises



changes in temperatures and precipitation patterns that might have lasting impacts on every aspect of our ecology and, eventually, the natural environment that sustains what is around us. In places such as Kathmandu Valley, where water demand is high, the situation could deteriorate abruptly.

Valley's water

Water sources in the valley are diminishing fast. Downtown Kathmandu may get a steady water supply from Melamchi when it finally arrives, but there are many other parts that Melamchi's supply won't reach. Those areas are already suffering from scarcity. Ensuring adequate water supply to communities has become a major priority for elected representatives. But what can they do under the current circumstances with increasingly unreliable and unpredictable rainfall? Moreover, the situation could worsen because groundwater levels have been depleting for years due to overdrafts.

As more watershed areas get sealed off by roads and buildings preventing infiltration, groundwater recharge during the monsoon has been reduced to a minimal level. There are no plans in place to adopt artificial recharge practices. The remaining surface water sources have been polluted by a growing urban sprawl. Rivers aren't capable of augmenting groundwater even during monsoon because i) riverbeds have turned impermeable due to the loss of sand, and ii) farmlands in the flood plains have been covered by roads and buildings. Facilitated by newly built stone walls on both sides of the rivers, flood water is forced to leave the valley as fast as possible. We may continue to remain complicit to these wrongs as long as our water needs are met by the water market. Sadly, we aren't doing anything meaningful to address the water issue.

In the past, rainwater from the city areas went into the rivers through a network of drainages. But as more city areas became impenetrable, the runoff increased, requiring bigger pipes to drain it. The sewer, along with stormwater, is taken out of the city through the same drainage network And in this process, not even a drop of rainwater is allowed to seep into the ground. In a valley where groundwater used to be the major source of water for domestic and agricultural use, as well as the local ecology, this is the worst strategy one could adopt to disrupt the natural system of rainwater distribution.

The loser in the race

Our traditions and myths served a larger purpose than simply cultural rever-

ence. Celebrating Nag Panchami, offer ing oil lamps to the river on Narke Chadurdashi, or cleaning wells on Sithi Nakha helped protect water sources and keep the ecological environment intact. Unfortunately, that is not so anymore. Aquifers are empty, springs have dried, and streams flow only when it rains. Additionally, when climate change issues started to gain impor tance as a major environmental problem at the official level, local envi ronmental issues, such as the loss of water sources, were pushed aside. Subsequently, river pollution increased unabated, sand mining continued in the foothills, and air pollution control was largely left to the mercy of the rain.

The drying of streams, springs and aquifers isn't an isolated event but a result of a composite problem of changes in the natural environment worsened by anthropogenic influences over a long time. Needless to say, rampant abuse of the landscape in the name of development, the choking of drainage channels, diverting natural water flow to new areas and sealing off the soil with construction projects have only added to the complexity Unfortunately, addressing the impacts of changes in temperature and precipitation isn't within the scope of any of our institutions. Worse, we don't know how this emerging trend will change the ecology we grew up with if it hasn't already.

Now, we face the problem of failing to distinguish between an environmental problem and a climate change-induced problem-and sometimes a convoluted combination of both. This hasn't only weakened the traditional or communal ways of protecting the environment but also made our institutions that had been established to address these visible problems helpless. We now face environmental problems largely amplified by climate change. Therefore, these local environmental problems are seen across the landscape. It has affected those in the pre cariat who try to make a living with limited resources. For that reason, they haven't been able to draw as much attention as many other politically charged short-lived issues.

These lasting and widespread environmental issues will only get worse if not addressed with the required level of urgency. In the current dispensation, no clear path forward seems to have been pursued to manage what is manageable and save the local environment from the menace of climate change beyond the rhetoric of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

MONDAY INTERVIEW BIMALA RAI PAUDYAL

National Assembly can serve as a coordinating body between federal units

The upper house needs more women who have worked in the field of women's empowerment.

One-third members of the 59-strong National Assembly are retiring in March after completing their six-year term. One of them is Bimala Rai Paudyal, who was appointed as an area expert by then President Bidya Devi Bhandari on the recommendation of the KP Sharma Oli government. **Thira Lal Bhusal** of the *Post* talked to Paudyal, who holds a Phd in development studies, about her experience in the assembly, the body's functioning and its continued importance. their constituencies have constraints

In my case, I used to remind my fellow members that I was not obliged to follow the whip. I have registered amendments in certain bills in which the CPN-UML had issued a whip to its members asking them to endorse it. But it all depends on how the member made it to the House. If someone has reached there after appeasing party leaders, they can't go against the interests and instructions of such leaders. Representatives. The process now has

How productive has the upper house been in the past six years? Many people seem dissatisfied with its functioning and are questioning its relevance.

The assembly has just completed its first six-year term after the adoption of the new constitution. It should be taken as a learning period. So, it's too early to review the performance of the National Assembly and draw a definite conclusion on its relevance. We should analyse its positives as well as negatives in this period. It is too early to question its relevance as it has some beautiful aspects.

One beautiful thing about the upper house is that it reflects Nepal's diverse picture. Members are elected from all seven provinces under different clusters such as women, Dalits, marginalised communities, people with disability and under the other category. On top of that, the President appoints three members under the experts category on the recommendation of the government. So, this makes for an excellent composition.

The National Assembly members are elected by the representatives of provinces and local units. So, it can be a proper body to facilitate and coordinate between the federal units. Based on our six-year experience, we are amending regulations to fit the assembly for that role. We are including some provisions in its regulations to hold monthly discussions on issues related to implementation of the federal system, to consult the provincial assemblies while making laws, and to ask the National Assembly chair to hold yearly meetings with speakers of all provincial assemblies. This will help maintain coherence and harmony in the works of the federal and provincial levels, in turn sustaining our federal system.

Lawmakers elected directly from

as they are more occupied by local demands such as building roads, bridges, schools, etc. But National Assembly members have a luxury to see things mainly from national perspectives as they aren't under pressure from the people of their constituencies. Thus the upper house is a body that can think and make decisions by rising above partisan interests and constituency-based limitations.

There is a need for checks and balances in certain works of the House of Representatives. The government is more accountable to the lower house as the latter elects the prime minister. The lower house can make and break governments, the upper house can't do that. When the lower house may take politically-motivated decisions, the upper house can play a more mature role in national interest.

But political parties seem to be using the assembly to 'dump' the politicians beaten in elections. In this light, how can the assembly properly function?

Let me talk about my own experience. My first two years in the assembly were quite encouraging. The then government and the President selected me as an expert based on my experience in the development sector. I was told to work using my expertise. That boosted my confidence. I found some lawmakers from across the political spectrum to be quite competent, qualified and mature. As the constitution made it mandatory to legislate over 100 laws within two years of its promulgation, we had a full plate. We were quite busy. The debate was productive and decent, even as lawmakers in the lower house were engaged in blame games.

Things started to get worse after two years. One-third of the 59-member house completed their two-year term. New members got elected. But the assembly didn't get ideal members in the second lot. The President appointed an active politician under the expert quota. Thus, politicians started to weaken the assembly. After the dissolution of the House of Representatives in 2021, the assembly effectively went into a hibernation. It could have held regular meetings, discussed issues of public concern and addressed them. At the time, the government unveiled its annual budget via a press conference. In the absence



of the lower house, it would have been better had the budget been presented in the assembly. Such activities were disappointing.

What type of candidates are ideal for the assembly?

The women who have sincerely worked for women's empowerment can play an important role. There is gender violence and disparity within political parties. They can raise a strong voice against gender violence in the House. Someone who is a committed cadre may not go beyond the party's instructions. We in the assembly held prolonged discussions on a proposal to remove statutory limitations to file a case when a girl is raped. We drafted a resolution motion. Representatives from all political parties were initially positive about it. Later, the lower house forwarded the bill to the assembly. It only increased the statutory limitation from one year to two years instead of removing the provision.

Surprisingly, women lawmakers were mum as the political parties issued a whip on the issue. I was the only one to protest. I used the privilege of an expert lawmaker appointed by the President. I had expected women lawmakers would defy party instruction in such a serious case. Six Dalit youths were killed in Jajarkot in 2020. Dalit lawmakers agitated for some days but they couldn't take any substantive action against that.

We need experts on subjects like information technology, climate change, disaster management and economy. When our government signs various international treaties and agreements that need to be endorsed by the Federal Parliament, such texts should be carefully studied. But many members don't even go through them.

Do members appointed by the President like you get freedom to work independently? And do they work as per that spirit?

But in certain cases you also defended the CPN-UML, erstwhile prime minister KP Sharma Oli and then President Bidyadevi Bhandari.

At the time, the court was hearing the case of dissolution of the House of Representatives. The President was also attacked from various quarters on the row. The issue was sub judice in the top court. But my concern was particularly about the attack made on the basis of her gender. The President wouldn't have faced the particular abusive words had the President been a man. And, even those who had become ministers and deputy prime ministers were using such offensive words. Should leaders use gender-insensitive words for such an institution? The statements and videos circulated at the time were disrespectful and insulting to all women. One can question the President based on his/her acts but not based on gender. Thus I defended the institution, not the individual. That was an exception. Otherwise, I mostly worked independently.

Do you blame the politicians or the system for the assembly's poor repute?

The problem is the intent of politicians. Candidate selection process suggests the same. There are some minor faults in the system. The assembly is taken as a House that exists uninterrupted whereas the term of the lower house ends every five years and prime ministers may even dissolve it earlier. Then, there should have been a provision mandating the assembly to oversee federal parliament affairs in absence of the lower house. For instance, we discussed many bills in the assembly and forwarded them to the lower house. Similarly, some bills were long under discussion in the lower house. All of them lapsed with the termination of the House of

to start from the beginning. This is a waste of the state's resources. So, there should be a provision to entrust the assembly with the responsibility of owning up such bills.

In principle, the assembly is taken as a body to crosscheck the work of the lower house but in practice it acts like a subordinate chamber. What is your experience?

In our bicameral system, the two Houses should complement each other. They have their own importance. The House of Representatives might be more effective in making the government accountable as it elects the prime minister and it can impeach top office bearers. But at times it might be ineffective due to over-politicisation. But the National Assembly works beyond partisan interests and by cross-checking certain decisions of the lower house.

Can you give an example of the upper house correcting the work of the lower chamber?

The media council bill wouldn't have been passed had the upper House not worked on it thoroughly. Similarly, the bill on relations between federal, provincial and local levels was the one in which the assembly worked very well. We rewrote the bill on Yogmaya Ayurved University by consulting the stakeholders. There are more such examples.

The assembly has made an important contribution in research and study. We prepared a report on the laws that were formulated and that are yet to be finalised by the federal as well as provincial levels in line with the constitution. Now the government has a ready-made checklist in this regard. We helped make post-legislative review mandatory. Under this system, the implementation status and relevance of the law will be studied and reviewed, five years after the introduction of a new law.

We in the assembly introduced similar other criteria in the lawmaking system. The first tenure also proved that the National Assembly can better coordinate among the federal units even as the House of Representatives and the government struggle to effectively implement the federal system.

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THE KATHMANDU POST

MONEY

FOREX

US Dollar	132.98
Euro	145.63
Pound Sterling	169.60
Swiss Franc	156.01
Australian Dollar	88.91
Canadian Dollar	99.16
Singapore Dollar	99.86
Japanese Yen (10)	9.18
Chinese Yuan	18.55
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.46
Qatari Riyal	36.46
Thai Bhat	3.81
UAE Dhiram	36.20
Malaysian Ringgit	28.61
Korean Won (100)	10.12
	Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES												
Neps	e (in p	1	2,120.62pt 1.51%									
]	ERS										
HPPL 10	KPCL 10	TPC 10	MBJC 10	MMKJL 10	TVCL 9.99							
	М	NERS										
HDL 0.2	MPFL 0.17	HIDCL 0.16	SMB 0.11	SHL 0.08	EBLD85 0.02							
	Ν	SERS										
NBLD87 -0.13	0.01		AD8283 -0.05	SBL NM -0.04	BD87/88 -0.01							
		HIGHES	T LOSE	RS								
MMF1 -9.53	NUBL -4.31	SIGS2 -2.91	NICFC -2.71	SBCF -2.53	MKLB -2.49							
BULLION PRICE PER TO												
F	Fine Go	Rs 119,200										
S	Silver	Rs 1,420										

SOURCE: FENEGOSID/

BIZLINE

Africa's biggest diesel, aviation fuel refinery starts production LAGOS: Africa's biggest diesel and aviation fuel refinery built by the continent's richest man has started production, the company said on Saturday, calling it a "big day for Nigeria". The 650,000 barrel-per-day Dangote refinery could be a game changer when fully operational by

helping end Nigeria's reliance on fuel imports. The delayed megaproject built by Nigerian billionaire Aliko Dangote said it hoped the products would be on the market this month, but it was not clear when the refinery will reach full capacity production or start refining petrol. The facility sits on 2,635 hectares (6,500 acres) of land at the Lekki Free Zone on the edge of Lagos city and cost an estimated \$19 billion, according to local media. (AFP)

UK remains ready to act against attacks on shipping: Cameron LONDON: Britain remains ready to act to "defend freedom of navigation" foreign minister David Cameron said on Sunday in the wake of joint US-UK air strikes on Yemen. "We've demonstrated that we're prepared to follow words and warnings with action and that is incredibly important. Cameron told broadcaster Sky News. He suggested further strikes could occur if the Huthi rebels, who control much of Yemen, continue to target ships in the Red Sea. "We have to act. Not acting is also a policy and it was a policy that wasn't working," he said. "It's not just the goods that are coming to this country... it is also grain ships on their way to Ethiopia and Sudan to feed some of the poorest and hungriest people in the world." (AFP)

India agrees to address Nepal's concerns on trade and transit treaties

>> Continued from page 1

According to SAWTEE research, Nepal can't afford to continue to provide tariff-free access to Indian agricultural products. Therefore, select primary agricultural products, including cereals, must be removed from the list of primary products on which both countries are currently providing reciprocal tariff-free access.

Nepali jute products have been subjected to anti-dumping duties in India for the past seven years. In theory, according to SAWTEE, dumping is said to occur when goods are exported for less than they are sold in the domestic market or third-country markets, or at less than the production cost. Nepali jute products manufacturers say they are not doing so.

India is Nepal's largest trading partner, accounting for more than 65 percent of its total trade.

According to the Department of Customs, the year-on-year imports from India to Nepal, in 2019-20, jumped to Rs735.29 billion.

It further increased to Rs971.60 billion in 2020-21. Imports started ballooning and crossed the trillion mark in 2021-22, reaching Rs1.20 trillion, the highest-ever on record.

The imports, however, dropped to Rs1.02 trillion in the last fiscal year that ended in mid-July 2023.

Likewise, exports from Nepal to India in 2019-20 were at Rs70.10 billion, which increased to Rs106.37 billion in 2020-21

Exports, too, kept increasing and reached a historic high of Rs155.22 billion in 2021-22. In the past fiscal year, exports dropped by 31.26 percent to Rs106.68 billion.

The trade deficit with India, currently, stands at Rs921.16 billion.

Trade experts said that increasing trade deficit, failure to participate in the value chain, presence of non-tariff barriers, preference erosion and adverse impact of the treaty on primary and agriculture sectors are the emerging trade issues between Nepal and India.

A press statement issued by Nepal's Industry Ministry on Sunday said India is ready to address the issues raised by the Nepal side to ease cargo

Startup award



Nepal's trade deficit with India currently stands at Rs921.16 billion

movements through the Biratnagar-Bhairahawa border points.

Discussions were held on removing weight restrictions for cargo trucks plying the Kakarvitta-Phulbari-Banglabandha trade highway by reviewing the transit treaty, according to the statement.

Also in the agenda were expanding Indian railroads to the integrated checkpoints in Bhairahawa and Dodhara-Chandani in Mahendranagar, which are currently under construction. Similarly, Nepal and India discussed setting up well-facilitated food labs at major Nepal-India trade border points including Panitanki, Jogbani, Nautanwa, Nepalgunj road and

The food labs can be established at customs points or elsewhere, the statement said. The meeting agreed to conduct a fourth phase technical meeting to review the trade treaty between Nepal and India for the expansion of bilateral trade and to minimise Nepal's rising trade deficit.

According to a press statement issued by the Embassy of India in Kathmandu, there were extensive discussions on ways to bolster trade and investment ties.

"Both sides discussed mutual market access for pharmaceuticals and Ayurvedic products. The Indian side highlighted the need for an intellectual property rights regime under the Paris Convention for encouraging foreign direct investment," said the press statement issued by the Indian embassy in Kathmandu.

The agenda also covered discussions on the review of the Treaty of Transit and the Treaty of Trade, proposed amendments to existing agreements, strategies for enhancing investment, harmonising standards, and synchronised development of trade infrastructure, according to the

press statement. "One of the highlights of this meeting was the focus on bilateral initiatives aimed at further strengthening the seamless cross-border connectivity between India and Nepal through the construction of new integrated check posts and railway links," the press statement reads.

"Both sides were committed to implementing these initiatives, reflecting the shared vision of prosperous bilateral trade.'

Canada, facing housing shortage, to consider cap on international students

REUTERS WINNIPEG, JAN 14

Canada is considering a cap on the number of international students allowed to live in Canada, Immigration Minister Marc Miller said according to a CTV report, as the government faces criticism for a housing affordability crisis.

Canada depends on immigration to drive its economy and support an aging population and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been ramping up annual immigration. The housing crisis has been blamed on an increase in migrants and international students fueling demand for homes just as inflation has slowed construction.

Miller said in a taped interview with CTV Question Period that the Liberal government is considering a cap on international students in the first and second quarters this year.

'That volume is disconcerting, Miller is quoted by CTV as saying, referring to the number of interna tional students in Canada. "It's really a system that has gotten out of control." He did not say how much of a reduction in international students the government is considering.

Miller's spokesperson could not be immediately reached. Official data show there were more than 800,000 foreign students with active visas in 2022, up from 275,000 in 2012.

Canada is a popular destination for international students since it is relatively easy to obtain a work permit.

The Liberal government floated the idea of capping the number of foreign student visas in August, but Housing Minister Sean Fraser said then that the government had not yet made a decision of whether to pursue that option. Miller said he planned to discuss the problem with provincial counterparts. Trudeau's Liberals have seen their popularity plummet after more than eight years in office, with polls placing them well behind the official opposition Conservatives led by Pierre Poilievre, who have criticized the government for not properly managing the housing issue.

Syrian farmers abandon the land for steadier jobs

Agriculture was once a pillar of northeast Syria's economy.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE JAABAR AL-SAGHIR (SYRIA), JAN 14

After years of war, drought and economic crisis, Omar Abdel-Fattah was forced to rent out his farmland in northeast Syria, preferring a more ling costs are dealing a heavy blow to agricultural production and the families that depend on it to survive.

Abdel-Fattah found a job at a water pumping station run by the area's semi-autonomous Kurdish administration. It pays around \$70 a month,

brutal "caliphate" in Syria until their ouster from the city in 2017. In the town of Qahtaniyah, Jassem

al-Rashed, 55, said agriculture was his only income for 30 years but now it has become a "loss"

His children initially helped him on

Galli Maps wins NYEF

Banbasa

Ghana secures debt deal as part of IMF loan

ACCRA: Ghana has reached an agreement with external creditors for a debt restructuring that was key to its \$3 billion credit line with the IME the government and the lender said. Facing its worst economic crisis in decades. Ghana agreed to a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to help shore up its public finances and better manage its heavy debt load. Ghana's economic outlook will be a major part of campaigning for the presidential election in December when President Nana Akufo-Addo's New Patriotic Party will seek an unprecedented third term in office. Ghana received its first \$600 million tranche of the IMF loan in May last year. (AFP)

Go First's lenders seek investor bids by January 31

MUMBAI: Lenders to India's Go First have set Jan. 31 as the deadline for financial bids to acquire the airline. two banking sources said on Sunday. Go First filed for bankruptcy protection in May but lenders have more recently been considering liquidating the airline after failing to secure new investors. "Banks have decided to give the resolution process another go and allow those suitors who have shown prior interest a chance to submit a concrete bid," said a banker with a state-run bank that has exposure to Go First. (REUTERS)

POST REPORT KATHMANDU, JAN 14

Galli Express Pvt Ltd has bagged the NYEF Startup Awards in the finale held on Friday. The award carries a cash prize of Rs400,000.

Galli Maps, Galli Express's flagship product founded by Raj Bikram Maharjan, is the most detailed map of Nepal that features information on house numbers, alleys and 360 views.

Quickfox Consulting and PetMama Nepal shared the first runner-up prize, which comes with a Rs200,000 cash prize. Quickfox Consulting was represented by Sona Singh. The startup provides advanced RPA solutions, streamlining tedious, rule-based tasks for companies. This solution enhances



sets higher customer service standards by eliminating manual errors and time-consuming processes

PetMama Nepal led by Nikita Jalan is a one-stop pet care solution offering grooming, retail, a pet hotel, a pet bakery, and a dog daycare service. PetMama Nepal also bagged the Audience Choice Award of Rs50,000.

Meanwhile, Dursikshya Education, spearheaded by Krishna Pandey, bagged the the Social Enterprise Award, which recognises the profound impact startups have on addressing social challenges and comes with a cash prize of Rs50,000. Dursikshya is an innovative educational organisation committed to advancing STEM education

job to provide for his family.

"It breaks my heart to see someone else working my land," said Abdel-Fattah, 50, who grew wheat, cotton and vegetables in Jaabar al-Saghir, in Syria's Raqa province, for three decades.

He said he had to abandon agriculture to make ends meet and provide an education for his eight children because he can "no longer keep up with the costs of farming", including irrigation.

Agriculture was once a pillar of northeast Syria's economy.

The region was the country's breadbasket before 2011, when the government repressed peaceful protests, triggering a conflict that has killed more than 500,000 people and displaced millions. Now the effects of climate change—particularly rising temperatures and drought-along with spiral-

side selling hardware and other items to get by

Some of his relatives have also rented out their land, while others have left Syria because of the dire financial situation there, Abdel-Fattah said.

He urged the Kurdish administration and international agricultural organisations to provide "support and loans" for farmers in the area.

"This is the only solution to save agriculture, help farmers and encourage them to return to their fields again," he said.

Across vast swathes of Raga province, empty farmland sits beside cultivated fields where farmers and workers harvest crops, including potatoes and corn.

Syria has endured more than 12 years of civil war, and Raqa was the centre of the Islamic State group's

the land, but now he looks atter th crops alone.

"Two of my children work in the livestock trade, and two others left for Europe, while three others joined the traffic police and security forces," he said. "Farming is no longer right for them, after the recent years of drought," he added.

In November, the World Weather Attribution group said that humancaused climate change had raised temperatures, making drought about 25 times more likely in Syria and neighbouring Iraq.

Suhair Zakkout is the spokesperson in Damascus for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

She has previously told AFP that 'Syria's agricultural production has fallen by approximately 50 percent over the last 10 years" because of war and climate change.

Adecco chief says AI will create new jobs

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE ZURICH, JAN 14

Artificial intelligence raises serious concerns for jobs but it will also create new positions, the head of Adecco, the world's biggest temporary staffing agency, told AFP.

From meteorologists to lawyers and screenwriters, generative AI capable of creating content-such as the chatbot ChatGPT-could change the contours of many professions.

But it will also create new positions, according to Denis Machuel, the chief executive of Zurich-based Adecco.

How will AI disrupt the world of work?

Machuel: "It's probably the largest disruption and revolution that we've seen in decades. It's going to be massive. And let's be clear, no one really knows or can really anticipate with a precise view what's going to happen in the next five years.

"All this productivity enhancement helps people do more but also destroys some of the jobs people are doing. There is definitely an element of jobs being created and jobs that are being destroyed. We've seen that with the internet, with digitalisation.

"What we've seen in the past tells us that there is more or less a balance between the two.

"Technology brings a lot of better understanding of interaction between people and markets but it also brings complexity. And that complexity requires more people to deal with it.

"GenAI will bring productivity on one side but it will also bring more proof-points, more data, more ways of looking at relationships, products and services. And for all these, we need people.

Are some jobs more at risk than others?

Machuel: "It's probably a bit too early to precisely describe jobs that are fundamentally at risk. Because we have to look at the tasks behind them.

"If you only compute information, gather information and synthesise it, then your job is at risk, be it a job in finance, in legal, in business, because.. it is what GenAI does.

"Probably white-collar workers will be more impacted than blue-collar workers-at least in the short term.



AFP/RSS DeRUCCI's T11 Pro AI mattress is on display at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

"Within the white collar space, the things that are linked to massive information management will be more disrupted than the skills that are linked to relationship building, to strategic thinking or problem-solving. "However, we know that there

are limits.

"Take the example of a lawyer or of paralegal: computing an immense number of legal decisions can be done by GenAI. "However, the deep and subtle understanding of a complex legal situation and problem-solving skills that are needed to put things together is still very human-related.

"Usually, the sort of mundane tasks that can be automated are not the most exciting for people to do. So if you can automate that, it gives you more time to concentrate on the nicer things."

How is AI used at Adecco?

"We've signed a partnership with Microsoft to create a career platform that will advise companies and workers on their path, supporting their reflection on the type of skills and jobs they could go for.

"Opening horizons on things people didn't necessarily imagine but could be achievable for them. "There are quite a few workers whose skills are transferable. "The good news about GenAI is that there is a positive explosion of possibilities of upskilling and re-skilling through these tools.

"We've created a curriculum vitae maker with an AI-powered tool that helps people generate their own CV.

"On the daily tasks of our recruiters, I was mentioning this chatbot that interacts with thousands of candidates very quickly.

"It gives the possibility for our recruiters to spend more time in the human relationship, and not in a database search. "That means a recruiter can spend more time with people than doing the mundane tasks.

BRIEFING

India protests UK diplomat's visit to Pakistan-controlled Kashmir

MUMBAI: India said on Saturday it had lodged a protest over a senior British diplomat's visit to Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, saying the trip this week had infringed on India's "sovereignty and territorial integrity". Kashmir is claimed in full, but controlled only in part, by nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, which have fought two wars and engaged in numerous clashes over the Himalayan region since 1947. British High Commissioner to Pakistan Jane Marriott visited Pakistani Kashmir along with an official from the UK Foreign Office on January 10. India's Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement. India's Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra has lodged a "strong protest" to the British High Commissioner to India about the visit, the ministry said, calling the trip "unacceptable". Asked to comment on the Indian pro test, a spokesperson for the British Foreign Office confirmed Marriott's visit and added: "She met with the UK-Pakistani diaspora, played in a football match with street children and visited a bakery." (REUTERS)

Hundreds of firefighters battle Western Australia wildfire

SYDNEY: Hundreds of firefighters on Sunday battled an out-of-control bush fire near Western Australia's capital Perth, prompting authorities to urge residents in the fire's path to flee. More than 25 bushfires were burning on Sunday in the vast state, with resi dents in the rural shires of Gingin and nearby Chittering, about 60 kms north of Perth, at risk from the fast-moving blaze, according to fire authorities. A high-risk bushfire sea son is underway in Australia due to an El Nino weather event, associated with events such as cyclones, droughts, heatwaves and wildfires. A state Department of Fire and Emergency Services spokesperson said 240 firefighters were battling the blaze, which was at emergency level, the highest threat rating. "If the way is clear, leave now for a safer place, the agency said on its website. The blaze, which has burnt through 417 hectares of bushland, broke out on Saturday. The nation's weather forecaster on Sunday issued a warning for "extreme fire danger" in some parts of Western Australia state amid a heatwave alert in place since Saturday. (REUTERS)

North Korea launches suspected ballistic missile, thought capable of hitting US bases

Experts say Kim likely wants to see South Korean liberals win the election in a blow to conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol.

ASSOCIATED PRESS SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA, JAN 14

North Korea fired a suspected intermediate-range ballistic missile into the sea on Sunday, South Korea's military said, two months after the North claimed to have tested engines for a new harder-to-detect missile capable of striking distant US targets in the region.

The launch was the North's first this year. Experts say North Korea could ramp up its provocative missile tests as a way to influence the results of South Korea's parliamentary elections in April and the US presidential election in November.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that it detected the launch of a ballistic missile of an intermediate-range class from the North's capital region on Sunday afternoon. It said the missile flew about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff called the launch a provocation that poses a serious threat to peace on the Korean Peninsula. It said South Korea's military will maintain its readiness to overwhelmingly respond to any provocations by North Korea.

assessment The South Korean suggests North Korea could have launched a new intermediate-range ballistic missile, whose solid-fuel engine the North said it had tested in mid-November.

The missile is mainly designed to hit US military bases in the US Pacific territory of Guam, which is about 3,400 kilometers (2,110 miles) from Pyongyang, the North's capital. With a range adjustment, the missile can also be used to attack closer targets-the US military installations in Japan's Okinawa island, according to Chang Young-keun, a missile expert at the Korea Research Institute for National Strategy in Seoul.

Built-in solid propellants make missile launches harder to detect than liquid-fueled missiles, which must be fueled before launch and cannot last long. North Korea has a growing arsenal of solid-fuel short-range missiles targeting South Korea, but its existing Hwasong-12 intermediate-range missile is powered by liquid-fuel engines.



A TV screen shows a file image of North Korea's missile launch during a news program at the Seoul Railway Station in South Korea, on Sunday.

Japan's Defense Ministry said its analysis showed the missile traveled at least 500 kilometers (300 miles) at the maximum altitude of 50 kilometers (30 miles), data that suggest North Korea may have fired a short-range and not an intermediate-range missile. Japan and South Korea said they closely exchanged information about the launch with the United States, but they didn't immediately explain the discrepancy in data.

In a trilateral call later Sunday, senior diplomats from South Korea, the US and Japan condemned the North Korean launch and stressed that a North Korean provocation would lead to the three countries strengthening their security cooperation, according to South Korea's Foreign Ministry.

The last time North Korea performed a missile launch was December 18, when it test-fired its Hwasong-18 solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic

missile, the North's most advanced weapon. The Hwasong-18 is the country's only known solid-fuel ICBM and it's designed to strike the mainland US On January 5, North Korea fired a barrage of artillery shells near the disputed western sea boundary with South Korea, prompting South Korea to conduct similar firing exercises in the same area. The site is where the navies of the two Koreas have fought three bloody sea battles since 1999, and attacks blamed on North Korea killed 50 South Koreans in 2010.

In recent days, North Korea has also been escalating its warlike, inflammatory rhetoric against its foes ahead of an election year in South Korea and the US Last week, leader Kim Jong Un called South Korea "our principal enemy" and threatened to annihilate it if provoked.

Experts say Kim likely wants to see South Korean liberals win the election

in a blow to conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol, who has taken a hard line on the North. They say Kim also wants former US President Donald Trump to be elected again because he may believe he could win US concessions if Trump returns to the White House. Kim has been pushing hard to enlarge his nuclear and missile arsenals since his high-stakes diplomacy with Trump broke down in 2019. In recent months, North Korea has also been expanding its military and other cooperation with Russia.

The US government said it has evidence that missiles provided by North Korea to Russia had been used in the war in Ukraine. In a joint statement last week, the US, South Korea and their partners said the missile transfer supports Russia's war of aggression and provides North Korea with valuable technical and military insights

New volcanic eruption threatens Icelandic fishing village in Grindavik

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE REYK IAVIK JAN 14

A new volcanic eruption sent flames, smoke and lava spewing out near the Icelandic fishing port of Grindavik on Sunday, only hours after villagers were evacuated to safety, authorities said.

It was the North Atlantic nation's fifth volcanic eruption in under three years. The most recent occurred just weeks ago on December 18 in the same region, southwest of the capital Reykjavik.

The eruption began at 8:00 am (0800 GMT) on Sunday, the Meteorological Office (IMO) said. Jets of glowing orange lava flowed out and a huge smoke cloud rose against the sky at sunrise. "A crack has opened up on both sides of the dykes that have begun to be built north of Grindavik,' the Met Office wrote.

Jets of glowing orange lava flowed out and a huge smoke cloud rose against the sky at sunrise.

"From measurements from the Icelandic coastguard helicopter, the (lava's) perimeter is now about 450 metres (yards) from the northernmost houses in the town," it said.

Seismic activity had intensified overnight and the few dozen remaining residents of Grindavik were evacuated around 3:00 am, public broadcaster RUV reported.

"The town had already been successfully evacuated in the night and no lives are in danger," said President Guoni Johannesson on X, formerly Twitter. "Infrastructure may be under threat," he wrote, adding that airline flights had not been affected.

Most of the 4,000-strong population of Grindavik had moved out as precaution on November 11 after scientists said a tunnel of magma was shifting beneath them. A series of small earthquakes-sometimes hundreds per day-created large cracks in roads, homes and buildings

Kerry, US climate envoy, to leave Biden administration

ASSOCIATED PRESS WASHINGTON, JAN 14

John Kerry, the US special envoy on climate, is stepping down from the Biden administration in the coming weeks, according to two people famil-

"The climate crisis is a universal threat to humankind and we all have a responsibility to deal with it as rapidly as we can," Kerry said in a visit to Beijing last summer, when he met with Vice President Han Zheng on climate matters.

At international climate

Taiwan's new president faces 'tough' time with China pressure, no parliament majority

REUTERS TAIPEI, JAN 14

Taiwan's president-elect Lai Ching-te could face a tough four years in office vith no parliamentary majority, an opposition which wanted to re-start a vexed service trade deal with China and the ever present threat of military action from Beijing. Lai, from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), won on Saturday by a comfortable margin though with less than half the vote but his party lost control of parliament on which Lai will have to rely to pass legislation and spending. Lai takes office on May 20. China wasted little time in pointing out most electors voted against Lai, with its Taiwan Affairs Office saying that the DPP "cannot represent the mainstream public opinion" on Taiwan, though it did not name Lai directly unlike in the vote's run-up when it regularly called him a dangerous separatist.



could form a line to pressure the central government." Both Taiwan's largest opposition party the Kuomintang (KMT) and small Taiwan People's Party (TPP) campaigned to re-start services pact Neither have confirmed if they will work together in parliament, though the TPP's chairman Ko Wen-je said on Saturday they will play the role of a "critical minority" The defeated KMT candidate Hou Yu-ih did not directly answer a question on the two parties teaming up on Sunday, saying only that "opposition parties have the responsibility of being opposition parties" China has rebuffed Lai's calls for talks. Lai and his party reject Beijing's sovereignty claims and say only Taiwan's people can decide their future Hu Xijin, former editor of the widely-read state-backed Chinese newspaper the Global Times who remains a prominent Chinese commentator, wrote a social media post that it was irrelevant who Taiwanese voted for when it came to bringing the island under Chinese control ultimately.

with his plans

Kerry, a longtime senator and secretary of state, was tapped shortly after Joe Biden's November 2020 election to take on the new role created specifically to fight climate change on behalf of the administration on the global stage.

Kerry's departure plans were first reported Saturday by Axios.

Kerry was one of the leading drafters of the 2015 Paris climate accords and came into the role with significant experience abroad, as secretary of state during the Obama administration and from nearly three decades as a member of the Senate Foreign **Relations** Committee.

Biden's decision to tap Kerry for the post was seen as one way the incoming president was making good on his campaign pledge to battle climate change in a more forceful and visible manner than in previous administrations

summits Kerry always kept a breakneck pace, going from one meeting to another, with world leaders, major business figures and scientists, all interspersed with one press conference after another-to share what he just learned, announce an initiative, or say a few words as civil groups announced their own plans to help combat climate change, thus lending his credibility and weight.

In the span of an hour, at one meeting Kerry would talk in detail about the need for oil companies to drastically reduce methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, then go to another gathering and detail his latest idea to help pay for green energy transition in developing countries and then, some minutes later, go into a long explanation of illegal fishing around the world while attending an event with leaders of Pacific Island nations.

Lin Fei-fan, a former DPP deputy secretary general who is now a senior member of a party think tank, told

Taiwan President-elect Lai Ching-te, of Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) and his running mate Hsiao Bi-khim attend a rally following the victory in the presidential elections, in Taipei on Saturday.

Reuters he's "fairly worried" that the new government will have a "very tough" four years especially on Chinarelated issues. He said opposition lawmakers, who together form a legislative majority, could step up exchanges

with China and ask to re-start a controversial service trade pact which Taiwan shelved a decade ago in the face of mass protests.

"That's what concerns us," he said. "Local governments and parliament

Denmark's King Frederik X takes throne ushering in new era

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

COPENHAGEN, JAN 14

Denmark's King Frederik X acceded to the throne on Sunday, ushering in a new era after his mother Queen Margrethe abdicated, with more than 100,000 Danes turning out for the unprecedented event.

After a final horse-drawn carriage procession through the streets of Copenhagen, the hugely popular 83-year-old queen signed a declaration of abdication at Christiansborg Palace, ending her 52-year reign and automatically making her son monarch

She then left the Council of State, also attended by the government, the new king, his wife and their 18-yearold eldest son, the new Crown Prince Christian. Margrethe left the room with tears in her eyes, saying: "God bless the king."

In front of a sea of Danes waving red-and-white flags, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen then proclaimed 55-year-old Frederik the new king on the balcony of Christiansborg Palace, the seat of parliament and govern-



King Frederik X of Denmark and Queen Mary of Denmark greet the crowd from the balcony of Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen, Denmark on Sunday.

ment. Wraped up against the cold, a visibly moved Frederik, clad in his gala admiral's uniform with gold epaulettes, blinked back tears and smiled as he waved to the crowd, estimated at more than 100,000 people by

media outlets. Like his mother, Frederik is hugely popular, enjoying the support of more than 80 percent of Danes

"My mother succeeded like few others in becoming one with her coun-

try," he told the crowd. "My hope is to become a unifying king for the future... It's a responsibility I assume with respect, pride and a lot of happiness," he said, repeatedly placing his hand on his heart as the crowd cheered.

"I think he's going to be a great king. I'm looking forward to seeing how he's going to do it and see him show more of himself," Rene Jensen, a Copenhagen resident fitted out for the day in a red velvet robe and crown, told AFP.

Frederik was then joined on the balcony by his Australian-born wife Mary, wearing a white dress with her dark hair swept back in a bun, and their four teenage children. Mary is the first commoner to become queen in Denmark.

The crowd erupted in loud cheers as the new king and queen kissed on the balcony. It is only the second time a Danish sovereign has stepped downthe last one was Erik III, almost nine centuries ago in 1146.

Aske Julius, a 27-year-old Copenhagen resident, called Margrethe "the embodiment of

Denmark... the soul of the nation." "More than half of the Danish population has never known anything else but the queen," he said.

Portraits and banners around the capital thanked the queen for her years of service, with cheeky signs in the metro declaring "Thanks for the Ride, Margrethe".

Others read "Long Live the King". No foreign dignitaries or royals were invited to Sunday's succession, in line with Danish tradition, and there was no coronation or throne for the new monarch.

Margrethe chose to abdicate exactly 52 years to the day after she took over from her father, Frederik IX.

The queen stunned Danes when she announced her abdication in her annual televised New Year's Eve address, after having repeatedly insisted she would follow tradition and reign until her death. Even her own family was only informed three days prior. She attributed her decision to health issues after undergoing major back surgery last year.

Margrethe will retain her title of queen and may represent the royal family on occasion. Experts say that passing the baton to her son now will give him time to flourish in his role as monarch, after gradually taking on increasing responsibilities. "She thinks the crown prince is totally ready to take over.

And she wants to avoid a situation like in Great Britain where Prince Charles became King Charles after the age of 70," historian Lars Hovbakke Sorensen told AFP.

He is expected to bring his own style to the monarchy, which dates back to the 10th century Viking era.

"He understood that he could not copy (the queen) and has managed to define his own image, his own ties to the Danish people," another historian, Bo Lidegaard, told AFP.

While his mother is known for her love of the arts and is an accomplished writer and artist, Frederik is an avid sportsman who champions environmental causes.

In Denmark the monarch's role is largely ceremonial, but he or she does sign legislation, formally presides over the forming of a government and meets with the cabinet regularly.

New Zealand beat Pakistan by 21 runs in 2nd T20, lead 5-match series 2-0

The Black Caps scored 194-8 batting first after being 111-1 at the end of 10 overs.



New Zealand's Mark Chapman bats during the T20 cricket international against Pakistan at Eden Park in Auckland, New Zealand, Sunday.

ASSOCIATED PRESS HAMILTON, JAN 14

New Zealand overcame the loss of its captain in an innings that faltered late to beat Pakistan by 21 runs in the second Twenty20 international Sunday, taking a 2-0 lead in the five-match series

The Black Caps failed to build on the foundation of the first half of its innings, making 194-8 batting first after being 111-1 at the end of 10 overs. The batting slump followed captain Kane Williamson retiring hurt after 10 overs with a tight hamstring.

Pakistan also stumbled in the second half of its innings and was bowled out for 173 in the 20th over.

Williamson is making a managed return from a serious knee injury and New Zealand would fear any setback to his rehabilitation. But while he didn't field, Williamson was still padded up and apparently prepared to bat at the end of the New Zealand innings.

Finn Allen's 74 from 41 balls set a cracking pace early on in the New Zealand innings. Allen put on 59 in 5.1 overs with Devon Conway (20) for the first wicket and 52 in 4.9 overs with Williamson before the Kiwi captain

retired hurt on 26.

The innings began to falter at that point and New Zealand lost 3-35 between the 11th and 16th overs. Allen was out at 137-2, then Daryl Mitchell fell at 147 and Mark Chapman followed at 157 as the innings began to trend sharply downwards.

Mitchell Santner made a bright 25 before being wastefully run out as New Zealand lost its last seven wickets for 55 runs.

"It was a good surface which we've come to expect here at Sedden Park and the way Finn Allen and the boys at the top set it up was very pleasing,' New Zealand's stand-in captain Tim Southee said. "But Pakistan pulled it back well and the two innings were quite similar in a way.'

New Zealand was relieved Pakistan also produced an innings of two halves. It looked well on course to level the series when Babar Azam and Fakhar Zaman made half centuries in an 87-run partnership for the third wicket.

Fakhar reached his half century from 23 balls with three fours and five sixes and seemed likely to follow Allen in providing the impetus for a substantial innings. But he was out at that

score and the onus once again fell on Babar to guide Pakistan home.

He made 57 and was the anchor of Pakistan's innings in the first international at Auckland on Friday when the tourists fell 46 runs short in a demanding run chase.

Babar followed his 31st T20 international half century with his 32nd Sunday, again as the bulwark of the Pakistan batting.

But he fell for 66 to the first ball of the 18th over when Pakistan was 153-5, needing 42 from the last 18 balls.

He was out to the bowling of speedster Ben Sears as he was in the first match and his dismissal again heralded the beginning of the end for Pakistan.

Sears, Adam Milne and Southee helped New Zealand put the brakes on Pakistan at the end of its innings. Milne took 4-33, Sears 2-28, Southee 2-31 and Ish Sodhi took 2-33 after conceding 19 runs from his first over.

"Milne was outstanding with the ball and Sears is a young guy who shows a lot of character at this level,' Southee said. "I think Ish Sodhi shouldn't be overlooked in his effort to come back and get two vital wickets for us.'

Defending champion Djokovic fends off first-timer Prizmic in 4 hours to advance in Australia

Djokovic has developed a record at the Australian Open that no man can match, with 10 titles among his unprecedented career haul.

ASSOCIATED PRESS MELBOURNE, JAN 14

Until he took on defending champion Novak Djokovic at Rod Laver Arena on opening Sunday in Australia, Dino Prizmic had never played a Grand Slam match.

The 18-year-old Croatian qualifier, who was born seven months after Djokovic made his Grand Slam debut in 2005, made it last as long as he could. He unsettled the 24-time major winner before Djokovic finished off the match 6-2, 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-4.

Djokovic has developed a record at the Australian Open that no man can match, with 10 titles here among his unprecedented career haul. He later said he'd been feeling "under the weather" for four or five days but credited Primzic's talent.

The first set played out just about as expected. From there, it became quite a ride.

Prizmic took the second set off Djokovic and went up a break in the third, stunning a capacity crowd, before the world's No. 1-ranked player broke back and took the set.

Prizmic didn't give up when he trailed 4-0 in the fourth, either, saving a breakpoint before getting a service break back. He saved three match points at 5-3 down and made Djokovic serve it out. He then saved a further two match points before it ended in 4 hours and 1 minute.

"He deserved every applause, every credit he got tonight," Djokovic said. "Amazing performance for someone that is 18 years old and never had the experience of playing on a big stage. Kudos to him.

The first of three Sundays - an extra day was introduced at Melbourne Park to try to reduce the number of post-midnight finishes — didn't have quite the desired outcome.

Fifth-seeded Andrey Rublev needed four hours to beat Thiago Seyboth Wild 7-5, 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 7-6 (6). He later admitted fears his first-round match against Seyboth Wild would end like his friend Daniil Medvedev's did at last year's French Open: in an upset.

No. 12 Taylor Fritz needed a medical timeout to get his left ankle taped in the second set before he recovered to beat Facundo Diaz Acosta 4-6, 6-3, 3-6, 6-2, 6-4 in a seesawing four-hour match.

Frances Tiafoe, the 17th seed, beat Borna Coric 6-3, 7-6 (7), 2-6, 6-3 in 3 1/2 hours and Daniel Elahi Galan needed almost five hours to beat Australia's Jason Kubler 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (3), 4-6, 7-6 (8).



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning the third set against Croatia's Dino Prizmic during their first round match at the Australian Open at Melbourne Park on Sunday.

Djokovic's late finish meant defending women's champion Aryna Sabalenka didn't start until 11:41 p.m. local time. The No. 2 seed didn't waste much time until right near the end, ousting 18-year-old Ella Seidel 6-0, 6-1 in 53 minutes on her seventh match point.

The first match on Rod Laver was also over quickly, with Italy's Davis Cup star Jannik Sinner advancing after a 6-4, 7-5, 6-3 first-round win over No. 59-ranked Botic van de Zandschulp in 2 1/2 hours. It was his first match since a memorable November when he twice beat Djokovic and won the Davis Cup.

"Means a lot to me to start off with a win," fourth-seeded Sinner said in a post-match TV interview as a half-dozen fans dressed in carrot costumes cheered from the stands. "Physically, I feel good. I'm here in good shape. I think I can be happy for today."

Women's eighth seed Maria Sakkari admitted her relief after she beat Nao Hibino of Japan 6-4, 6-1, her first Grand Slam win since last year's Australian Open.

"I lost three first rounds in my last three Grand Slams," she said. "For me, it was a very difficult match today emotionally. I'm happy I managed to do the job right and play a good second set."

Also advancing were 2021 U.S. Open finalist Leylah Fernandez, who beat 17-year-old Sara Bejlek 7-6 (5), 6-2 and No. 9 Barbora Krejcikova, who rallied from a set and a break down to beat Mai Hontama 2-6, 6-4, 6-3.

Two 16-year-old players advanced to the second round: Brenda Fruhvirtova recorded her first Grand Slam win, overcoming Anna Bogdan 2-6, 6-4, 6-3, and Alina Korneeva — the Australian Open junior champion last year who rallied to beat Sara Sorribes Tormo 4-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Another Russian qualifier, Maria Timofeeva had a 6-2, 6-4 win over Alize Cornet, who was appearing in a women's record 68th consecutive Grand Slam event.

Timofeeva will next face 2018 champion Caroline Wozniacki, who in her first Australian Open since becoming a mom advanced when 20th-seeded Magda Linette retired while trailing 6-2, 2-0.

Amanda Anisimova continued her comeback from a career break with a 6-3, 6-4 win over No. 13-seeded Liudmila Samsonova.

Rublev did it tough, wasting four match points in the fifth set. He then fell behind 5-2 in the match tiebreaker before winning eight of the next nine points to clinch it against a player on his Australian Open debut.

Seyboth Wild upset major winner Medvedev in the first round at Roland Garros last year and Rublev admitted he felt the momentum going the same way before he decided to relax and go for broke.

"For sure, I will not forget this one," said Rublev, who opened the year with a title in Hong Kong. "Thiago is a super dangerous player. Super talented. He's hitting so hard, so clean."

HOROSCOPE

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

CANCER (June 22-July 22) Prioritise wellness as the day begins, even if doing



burst of activity could throw off your balance Pace yourself when navigating these vibes, finding time for solitude this afternoon. You'll have a chance to knock down barriers tonight, though you'll want to prepare for what comes next.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)



Watch out for dramatic or manipulative characters today. Your social media feeds may seem particularly toxic, making it a good time to pull away from screens. The ambience elevates as afternoon settles in, helping you reclaim a sense of community

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

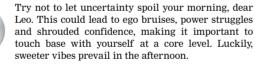


Strange dreams could lead to psychological breakthroughs this morning. Unfortunately, it may be difficult to sleep off slumber, though prioritising harmony can help you reclaim control. Good vibes flow as the afternoon settles in

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LEO (July 23-August 22)



VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Harmonious yet electrifying vibes flow this morning, dearest Virgo, paving the way for enlightening dreams. Just be sure to check in with your heart once you've awakened, understanding that you must nurture yourself before focusing on loved one

Your mind may feel slightly out of sorts as the day begins. Do yourself a favour by staying quiet, avoiding arguments or distractions and focusing on to-do lists. Sweetness finds you later in the day, asking you to embrace love.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Be mindful of your surroundings and the people who fill them, dear Scorpio. This vibe threatens a decreased self-awareness, while moody companions could cause you to disconnect. Luckily, clarity will be restored once afternoon settles in



SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) Emotions strain this morning, dear Sagittarius, making it important that you check in with your mood before dealing with others. Luckily, you'll feel more grounded and compassionate as the afternoon settles

in, especially when you seek healing amongst nature.



You won't be in the mood to play nice or fake plea antries. Consider keeping a low profile if you feel agitated or blue, avoiding further conflict by nurturing your mind in private. Opportunities to say what you arise tonight.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)



Take a break from the news, your screen and social media feeds. Take time to hone in on minor details that add up to beautiful pictures this afternoon, bringing a soothing and surreal energy to the table.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)



The morning brings forth strange and enlightening messages while you dream. Unfortunately, it may be hard to reclaim focus in the afternoon, making it important that you seize control of your thoughts by honing in on your responsibilities

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THE KATHMANDU POST CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

The accidental champion of biodiversity

Nanda Lal Majhi has dedicated 35 years to biodiversity conservation in Nepal. His efforts underscore the role of local communities in conservation.



Majhi (right) talking with the locals of Srilanka Tapu, Barahchhetra Municipality, Sunsari, about the conservation of Bengal Florican, a species of local birds.

🗆 AARATI RAY KATHMANDU

anda Lal Majhi is one of the biggest names in the field of biodiversity conservation in Nepal. Currently the executive director at the **Biodiversity Conservation Center Nepal** (BCCN), he has spent 35 years working in the field. His journey starts from humble beginnings in Sunsari, Koshi Province, where the pursuit of education in forestry, chosen out of necessity, became the catalyst for a lifelong commitment to conservation.

When he was 19, Nanda Lal Majhi chose to study forestry in his Intermediate in Science (ISc) as a last straw of hope. He would have never known that it would hold on to him forever and open the doors to the world of conservation-from working as a community forest assistant and agro forester to the executive director.

Majhi was born to a middle-class family of farmers. After completing his SLC (now, SEE), it was clear his parents couldn't afford to support his further education because of the difficult economic situation. So, Majhi, who was dedicated to studying and supporting his family, chose whatever came his way. Luckily, he applied for the forestry programme and

forester and project manager at the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Nepal, he spent three years in Namche Bazaar, from 1997 to 2000. He worked in the management and establishment of three community forestry nurseries there. One nursery had a hundred thousand plants, and he had to protect and preserve them with community mobilisation in Namche. The small saplings he planted and looked after 24 years ago have grown into big trees. He helped turn the barren hills of Namche green, which tourists worldwide admire when they visit Sagarmatha. Recognising his work, the Dudhkunda Buffer Zone Community Forest Users Group of Khumbu, Solukhumbu, honoured him with a token of appreciation on World

Environment Day (June 5) in 2022. He remarks, "When I visited Namche, for the event by Dudhkunda, I was amazed to see those tall trees standing strong. It felt as if I was looking at my grown-up children." Locals, officials and conservationists there thanked him for his efforts



ness of human-wildlife conflict, promotion of eco-tourism, livelihood and climate change adaptation. Their primary focus is community mobilisation of local people of the buffer zone for conservation, and they have been facilitating and promoting biodiversity-based livelihood adaptive technologies and nature-friendly initiatives

Majhi highlights the oversight of locals in conservation discussions, emphasising the crucial role of local communities as the primary pillars of biodiversity conservation. He states, "In our attempts to safeguard the Bengal Florican, a critically endangered bird, we've recognised the vital importance of engaging locals. Unfortunately, some locals unintentionally harm these birds for meat.

Majhi acknowledges that hunters are also local residents and asserts that through raising awareness, hunters can transition into conservationists. He underscores the significance of informing and involving locals, including hunt-

One nursery had a hundred thousand plants, and Majhi had to protect and preserve them with community mobilisation in Namche.

ers, as essential for successful conservation efforts.

Majhi is also the homestay trainer for IDS, conducting training programmes in various areas in eastern Nepal. He actively promotes homestays through BCCN, not only for eco-tourism but also to boost the income of locals. Majhi emphasises the significance of empowering locals for conservation by creating income opportunities. He states, "If someone lacks the means to eat twice a day, they won't have the capacity to care for the conservation and life of other species; that's a fundamental instinct for all social beings. Therefore, empowering locals and generating income for conservation is crucial."

He disapproves of the recent trend of high-budget conservation programmes in large hotels. He advocates for the success of environmental and biodiversity programmes through implementation in affected communities involving local people. He encourages conservationists to conduct such programmes in homestays, promoting both eco-tourism and conservation education.

Majhi's 35 years in conservation have been challenging, especially during the early days when awareness and respect for the field were limited. He encountered questions like, "Why are you always roaming in the forest?" The challenges were diverse, from enduring extreme cold in Namche for 22 days and surviving on only potatoes. Adapting to such conditions was ugn for some like him, but he coped. Yet, living far from his family for over half of his career posed the most significant challenge.



Tharu women preparing Maghi specials

Delicacies and rituals of Maghi

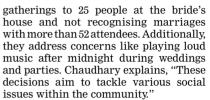
The Tharu community, especially those residing in the western regions, celebrate the festival with diverse food and activities.

🗆 SANJU POUDEL LIMBIN

he Tharu community, especially those residing in the western regions of the country, celebrate Maghi with diverse cultural festivities. The festival has become even more special not just because of the rituals but also because of the culinary varieties prepared during this period. Maghi is also widely celebrated in the other western Tarai districts, including Bardiya, Nepalgunj, Kapilvastu, Rupandehi and western Nawalparasi. While the Tharu people in these districts observe Maghi in different ways, they all share a common love for this auspicious occasion.

In Bardiya of Lumbini Province, one can see relatives meeting each other and the return of faraway family members to their hometowns. The residents of this district gather to prepare a delicacy called jaad (alcohol), by cooking rice mixed with larva (jungle herb) and keeping it in an earthen pot. After a few days, the rice is stored in a clay pot. When covered outside with mud, this concoction becomes a drinkable syrup and can be consumed for months. According to Ekraj Chaudhary, a resident of Bardiya and worker in the Barghar organisation, "This syrup is one of the many essentials for the festivities of Maghi." He mentions that, apart from this, people also eat traditional items like roti and dhikari, potatoes and pork meat on this day.

Tharu community of the region has celebrated the festival this way for centuries. On Poush 28 (this year, January 13), there is a regional tradition to gather



In Kapilvastu district, Maghe Sankranti is celebrated differently. Umashankar Tharu, a central council member of Tharu Kalyankari Sabha, explains that in the eastern part of the district, Maghi is observed for one day, in the western region for two days, and in the interior areas for up to three days. On Poush 29, people in the district take an early morning bath, receive tika and start feasting on delicacies like himali dhikari, fish and traditional roti. They also invite their married daughters to celebrate these feasts, discussing the joys and sorrows of life.

In Rupandehi, the celebration of Maghi, also known as the Khichadi festival, has brought about some differences, as explained by Sarita Chaudhari, the secretary of Tharu Kalyankari Sabha in Rupandehi. She mentions that traditionally, in every village of the district, they

The festival has become even more special not iust because of the rituals but also because of the culinary varieties.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF BCCM

cnolarsnip to continue his educa tion in Hetauda.

He recalls, "To be honest, it was not out of passion that I studied forestry. At that time, there was little awareness of conservation and environmental protection. But, I am happy that conservation made its way into my life." He adds, "I think it was my destiny. Many things have happened in life, but conservation has not let go of me, and I have been unable to let go of it either."

His father had a great love for trees and birds. Majhi remembers his father used to sit watching the birds that came to eat fruits from the Papaya tree in their backyard. "Whenever someone came to kill the birds, he used to sit in protection and tell them not to harm them. I think that's where the trait of love for nature came in me," he says. Continuing his father's lesson, he has planted many Papaya trees, mainly reserved for the birds around his home.

After completing his ISC, Nanda Lal Majhi spent three years working at Baitadi's agroforest nursery. In this role, his responsibilities included preserving plants, afforestation, and safeguarding animals and birds. This experience deepened his connection with nature, prompting him to pursue a BSc in forestry with a stronger commitment to protecting innocent lives.

In 1986, he secured a position as a community forest assistant (ranger) at the Department of Forest and Soil Conservation, where he dedicated six years of service. During this time, he made significant contributions to the Chisapani Community Forest in Ramechhap district, renowned as one of Nepal's exemplary community forests. Majhi's involvement with community forests has been exceptional; he played a role in developing numerous community forests across Nepal. Regardless of the organisation's focus, be it conservation or otherwise, he consistently initiated and supported community forest projects.

"The community forest programme and I are like twins. We always find a way to each other," says Majhi. During his four-year tenure as a natural resource manager at Women Acting Together for Change (WATCH), he worked towards establishing the Women Community Forest in Dakshinkali, Kathmandu.

Most importantly, his efforts in commencing and developing community forests in Namche and Sagarmatha periphery cannot be forgotten. As an agro WHY DO H

From his time at WATCH and WWF to being a government ranger, he contributed to community forests in Rupandehi, Okhaldhunga, Dolpa and Pokhara. He is thrilled to see these forests thriving with plants and animals. He further emphasises that community forests in Nepal hold profound emotional significance as they represent a harmonious coexistence with nature and a collective spirit of resilience and unity. He was also honoured by WWF for his work ten months ago.

When Majhi came to Saptari in 2017 as a biodiversity conservation expert of the Integrated Development Society (IDS), he realised how much work needed to be done for human-wildlife conflict management in the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve area and Saptakoshi Landscape to keep local people at the centre. So, after completing the IDS project, Majhi and his friends established the Biodiversity Conservation Center Nepal (BCCN) in Saptari in 2018. For the last five years, he has been an executive director for BCCN, an NGO dedicated to biodiversity conservation in Sunsari, Saptari and Udayapur districts. He and his team have been working with various communities in partnership with rural municipalities, Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, National Trust For Nature Conservation (NTNC) and community groups to address the issues of species conservation, aware-

Additionally, conducting door-to-door awareness campaigns was a tough nut to crack when he started BCCN. Majhi states, "People held different beliefs and perspectives. Initially resistant, they didn't want to listen. However, we persevered, attempting to make them understand from their viewpoint. If someone was religious, we spoke about how nature is akin to a god, providing us with everything we need, emphasising the significance of animals and birds in religious scriptures." According to Majhi, no one is inherently bad; resolving an issue requires patience and understanding from both sides. Thus, he remains resilient, always moving forward, believing that the earth could be an excellent place for humans and all species if everyone collaborated.

"I know I am old," he admits, "but my energy and determination for conservation will never grow old. As long as life exists, I will continue working." Majhi actively engages with youth in the conservation field, advocating for the importance of the new generation. He urges them not only to pursue careers as engineers and doctors, building cement homes and saving humans, but also to consider conservation. Saving the forests and trees, the natural homes of animals and birds, should be a shared responsibility.



Majhi (second from right) with his team during a household awareness programme at Sunsari.

Women in traditional Tharu attire.

around a waterbody and fish. On the following day, Poush 29 (this year, January 14), wild boars are hunted similarly. On the evening of Poush 29, at the barghar's house (traditional Tharu leader), many men gather. Seated around a fire at the centre, they play the damphu (a kind of traditional drum) and sing dhumaru or damar and dance until around 4 in the morning. Afterwards, they head to the nearby pond, bathe, apply a white tika, seek blessings from the elders and return home. Then, they pack rice, lentils, and salt in three containers for their sisters in the house.

On Magh 1 (this year, January 15), the festival is observed by men, and on the 2nd, women take part. Men handle household chores on this day, while women visit their relatives and enjoy a festive meal.

In Bardiya, during Maghi celebrations, the first day is dedicated to men discussing various household matters. These discussions range from upcoming marriages and dividing the family's wealth among brothers to planning agricultural activities for the coming year. According to Chaudhary, the tradition of making plans on the first day of Maghi covers a wide range of topics, from marriage discussions to assigning responsibilities for various tasks throughout the year.

As the month of Magh approaches, the village gathers for a meeting where representatives who have various roles in the community, such as the barghar, chaukidar (caretaker of the crops), lohar (blacksmith), chirkiya (temple caretaker responsible for lighting lamps) and guruwa (main priest), come together and discuss issues in the village.

According to Chaudhary, this year's talks in Bardiya focus on initiatives against child marriage and polygamy. They also include measures like limiting POST FILE PHOTO

used to play the manara-madal (traditional drums) and perform traditional dances. "However, now, these traditional dances are rarely seen outside special festivals," she says.

Chaudhary further mentions that a week before Maghi's arrival, people in Rupandehi begin preparations. For 13 days, every family member prepares and enjoys devouring special items like bhuja, tilko laddu, ghongi, fish and dhikari together.

The Tharu community in Dang has been busy for the past month, engaging in various activities like jungle hunts, making traditional plates from gathered leaves, crafting homemade liquors, enjoying fresh potatoes and more. In the evenings over the last five days, they've gathered around a fire in the courtyard, performing traditional Jhumaru dances. On the last day of Poush, just before Magh arrives, they prepare a feast with wild boar meat.

On Magh 1, men head to the water reservoirs for an early morning bath, while women prepare traditional dishes at home. Mangala Tharu, manager of Mukta Kamlahari Vikas Manch, explained that on Maghi, brothers pack rice, lentils and salt for their sisters, as a sign of their love, before enjoying food around the fire throughout the day.

"Even if we haven't been able to adopt the traditional practices ourselves, it is important to pass on the culture that has been followed through generations to our descendants," says Tharu, adding, "The current generation, involved in education and work, might find it challenging to fully engage in the cultural aspects of our family and dance traditions.' Therefore, it becomes imperative that the community teaches these customs to the younger generation.