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Dipayal Jumla

Netanyahu rebuffs Joe Biden, rejects post-war Palestinian sovereignty

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JERUSALEM, JAN 20

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opposes any form of Palestinian sovereignty in post-war Gaza, his office said on Saturday, appearing to rebuff US President Joe Biden's suggestion that creative solutions could bridge wide gaps between the two leaders' views on Palestinian statehood.

In a sign of the pressures Netanyahu's government faces at home and abroad over the war, a protest outside the prime minister's home grew as more people joined a group representing families of the more than 100 remaining hostages held by Hamas and other militant groups.

The families are demanding the government take bold steps to free the hostages, fearing that Israel's military activity in Gaza further endangers their lives.

Netanyahu is also under heat to appease members of his right-wing ruling coalition by intensifying the war against Hamas, which governs Gaza, and must contend with calls for restraint from the United States, its closest ally.

A statement from the prime minister's office said Netanyahu made clear Friday in his first conversation with Biden in nearly a month that his position on a post-war Gaza hasn't changed. Netanyahu reiterated that Israel must retain security control over the territory after Hamas is destroyed—"a requirement that contradicts the demand for Palestinian sovereignty," the statement said.

Discussing his administration's position on the matter, Biden on Friday said "there are a number of types of two-state solutions. There are a number of countries that are members of the UN that are still, not have their own militaries."

Asked by a reporter if a two-state solution was impossible with Netanyahu in office, Biden replied, "No, it's not." Netanyahu has said Israel must fight until it achieves "complete victory" and Hamas no longer poses a threat, but has not outlined how this will be accomplished.

But a member of Israel's War Cabinet, former Israeli army chief Gadi Eisenkot, has called a cease-fire the only way to secure the hostages' release, a comment that implied criticism of Israel's current strategy.

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Devotees of Lord Krishna sing and dance at Bhaktapur Durbar Square on Tuesday.

POST PHOTO: SANJOG MANANDHAR

Russia to compensate families of those killed in war, says Foreign Minister Saud

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JAN 20

Foreign Minister NP Saud has said that Russia is ready to compensate the families of Nepalis killed while fighting in its war against Ukraine and necessary arrangements will soon be made to ensure the relief pay.

Talking to the Post from Kampala, Uganda, over the phone on Saturday, the foreign minister said some arrangements will be made between

Moscow official wants families to go to Russia to claim compensation. Nepal says not feasible.

the two sides to ensure compensation for the bereaved families as well as the youths who have been

injured in battles.

As of now, 13 Nepali nationals have been killed while fighting on Russia's behalf. The families of as many as 113 Nepali nationals have approached the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seeking the whereabouts of their family members recruited in the Russian army.

It is not known how many Nepali nationals have joined the Russian Army through an individual approach.

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Nabil fails to cash hydel project bond from Chinese bank

Himalayan Bank, Bank of Kathmandu, and Investment Bank faced similar issues in the past in China and Italy.

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU, JAN 20

Nabil Bank is struggling to get a counter-guarantee amount from a Chinese bank, causing a delay in releasing the bank guarantee amount equivalent to \$7.44 million (Rs991 million) to Trishuli Jal Vidyut Company.

After deciding to terminate the contract with Shuifa ANHE Group, the contractor hired to develop the 37MW Upper Trishuli 3B Hydropower Project, citing under-performance in December, the hydropower developer company, in early December, asked Nabil Bank to immediately release the Chinese contractor's performance guarantee and advance payment guarantee equivalent to the aforementioned amount.

But the Chinese contractor moved a local Chinese court in Sichuan, China and the Chinese court ordered not to release the counter guarantee amount to Nabil Bank. After not getting the counter guarantee amount from China, Nabil is hesitating to release the sum to the Trishuli Jal Vidyut Company (TJVC).

"We have received the claims [from Trishuli Jal Vidyut Company]," said Manoj Kumar Gyawali, deputy chief executive officer at Nabil Bank.

"We are discussing the matter following the Chinese court's order."

Nabil Bank has communicated the same to the TJVC, jointly estab-

lished by the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) and Nepal Telecom, which is developing the Upper Trishuli 3B project.

Bank guarantee is sought by a project to ensure that the contractor does not run away after receiving funds from the employer, such as a company, or does not carry out con-

A counter-guarantee is also sought from a foreign bank in case of a foreign contractor.

struction as detailed in the contract. In the case of a foreign contractor, the counter-guarantee is also sought from a foreign bank.

Ananda Dhungel, chief executive officer at the TJVC, said that Nabil has not refused to issue the amount but is delaying the release.

"As we have nothing to do with the Chinese bank, Nabil must release the bank guarantee amount immediately," said Dhungel. "We have also asked the Nepal Rastra Bank to intervene in this regard."

Citing Nabil Bank's notification, Dhungel said that China Everbright Bank had issued the counter-guarantee for the Chinese contractor.

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Pickles expanding from Nepali kitchens to global store shelves

In 2019-20, there was no record of pickles export, due to a negligible quantity. In three years, its exports jumped to 161 tonnes worth Rs109.84 million.

SARAHNA KHADKA
KATHMANDU, JAN 20

Shelves in most supermarkets, which were once covered with foreign pickles bottles, nowadays flash Nepali brand logos, thanks to growing local entrepreneurship.

Industry insiders say that housewives, foreign returnees and startups have taken up the seemingly overlooked homemade pickles business.

Ama ko Achar, a famous brand established in 2011, now rules the market. It is also one of the key exporters.

The enterprise sources its raw fruits and vegetables like mango and cucumber from Makwanpur and round red chillies from Panchkhal, Kavre.

Prakash Pandey, managing director of Ama ko Achar, said they export pickles to the US, the UK, Japan, Australia, South Korea and Denmark.

"The highest demand is in Australia."

The enterprise exports 90 percent of its production. "The export price is \$2 per 200 gm jar. Adding shipping costs and importers' commission, the price increases to \$10 in foreign stores," said Pandey.

In Nepali markets, the price begins at Rs140. However, meat pickles are more expensive, starting at Rs700 a packet.

Ama ko Achar has over 100 tonnes of cherry pepper, a variety of large, red, heart-shaped chilli called dalle khursani in its factory stock in Chandragiri.

Pickles are popular among Asians, and each country and region has its own traditions and methods of making them.

Studies show that pickles are a rich source of fundamental nutrients including iron, vitamins, calcium and potassium and have various anti-oxidant properties. They are prepared to preserve the fruits, vegetables or a mixture of both, or to extend shelf life, either through anaerobic



POST FILE PHOTO

Nepali pickle brands are shining after the pandemic.

fermentation in brine or soaking in vinegar.

Making pickles has been an essential part of the Nepali food culture for generations. However, it has been commercialised only over the past few years.

In a country with a short history of trading pickles, Nepal saw a surge in pickle sales, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Many Nepalis believe pickles are good for those with flu infections.

In 2019-20, the Department of Customs started keeping records of pickles as the trade started to increase significantly, both in quantity and value.

In the period when the Covid pandemic affected most of the world, Nepal imported 23 tonnes of pickles worth Rs2.91 million. There was no record of export, though.

Traders imported pickles mainly from Australia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates.

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NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Three-member team formed to hold discussion with agitating groups

BIRATNAGAR: The Koshi provincial government has formed a three-member team to hold talks with the protesting groups lobbying for the identity-based nomenclature of Koshi. The Cabinet meeting on Saturday formed the talks team under the leadership of Physical Infrastructure Development Minister Kamal Prasad Jabegu. Various ethnic organisations and the locals have been protesting after the provincial assembly named the province as Koshi last year. Chief Minister Kedar Karki said the government formed the team to address the demands of the agitating organisations.

Two workers injured in bridge collapse

PALPA: Two workers sustained injuries when an iron bridge collapsed over the Jhumsa stream in Tinau Rural Municipality, Palpa, on Saturday. The bridge, which was constructed for the pipeline of a local drinking water project, broke down while the workers were removing scaffolding poles. According to the District Police Office, Ran Bahadur Gaha of Tinau-4 in Palpa and Lakshu Majhi of Chandranigahapur in Rautahat district were injured in the incident. The injured workers were taken to Lumbini Provincial Hospital in Rupandehi for treatment. Detailed investigation is going on about the incident, said police.

Public transport operators clash in Surkhet

SURKHET: Two factions of transport entrepreneurs clashed in the buspark area of Birendranagar, Surkhet, on Saturday. Police said the entrepreneurs as well as workers of Visit Karnali Transportation and Samyukta Transportation clashed over the issue of booking bus tickets. Two people were injured in the clash. They are receiving treatment at the Karnali Provincial Hospital. Transportation was disrupted along the Ratna Highway for hours due to the violent protest.

Construction of basic hospitals left incomplete in Salyan district

The ambitious plan has faced construction delays triggered by budget crunch.

BIPLAB MAHARJAN
SALYAN, JAN 20

The construction of a basic hospital in several local units of Salyan, a hill district of Karnali Province, has been left incomplete. The delay of the federal project has deprived people in the district's rural areas of timely quality health services.

The federal government in the annual budget for the fiscal year 2019-20 had announced the construction of a basic hospital with 10 to 15 beds in each local unit across the nation. Eight of 10 local bodies in Salyan had commenced hospital construction from the same fiscal year but none of them has completed the work as of now.

The federal government had allocated a total of Rs180 million to eight local units of Salyan in the fiscal year 2019-20 to construct hospitals. Though it was planned as a multi-year project, the government significantly slashed the budget in the following fiscal years, leaving it in limbo.

The hospital construction has been halted in Darma, Kalimati and Siddhakumakh rural municipalities and Bangad Kupende Municipality for the past few months. The construction is moving at a snail's pace in Kumakha, Kapurkot and Chhatreshwari rural municipalities while Bagchaur Municipality has just initiated the process.

The project aims to provide good health facilities with doctor's service in the rural areas. However, the ambitious plan has been ineffective due to construction delays triggered by budget crunch.

"We had a dream of receiving good health service from the doctor near our village after the government started hospital construction some four years ago," said Sukabir Khatri, 50, of Kalimati-2. "Now the construction of the hospital has been halted for months. We don't know when the project will be completed." Khatri complained that the villagers had no alternative to go to Birendranagar of



The hospital construction has been halted in Darma, Kalimati and Siddhakumakh rural municipalities and Bangad Kupende Municipality.

Surkhet district or Tulsipur of Dang district for the treatment of even minor injuries and illness due to the lack of hospital in the local body.

Kalimati Rural Municipality borders Surkhet and Dang. It is easier for the local people to visit Surkhet and Dang than Khalanga, the district headquarters of Salyan.

"We have to go to Surkhet and Dang or visit the private clinics for treatment," Sukabir said. "So we have to spend a huge amount of money. Mainly the poor people are hugely affected due to the lack of hospitals in the area."

The hospital construction has been halted over the past one year in Kalimati, with authorities citing a shortage of budget. According to the rural municipality office, around 20 percent construction work has been completed so far.

"The construction company delayed the construction despite our repeated instructions," said Dan Bahadur Khatri, chairman of Kalimati Rural Municipality. "The rural municipality had no alternative to scrap the project agreement for the noncompliance of the contractor. The work has been stopped as the contractor filed a case against us in the district court."

As per the information provided by the local units, around 65 percent work of hospital construction has been completed in Kapurkot, 40 percent in Kumakha, 30 percent in Darma and Tribeni, 25 percent in Bangad Kupende, 20 percent in Chhatreshwari and just five percent in Siddhakumakh so far.

Resham Oli, chief administrative officer of Darma Rural Municipality, said that construction of the basic

hospital had been halted in the local unit over the past six months. "The contractor should be provided around Rs10 million for the work completed in the last fiscal year. The contractor stopped work stating that they could not initiate work unless the payment is made," said Oli. "We are unable to force the contractor for work due to lack of budget."

Kapurkot Rural Municipality, however, hopes to complete the construction of the hospital building by the end of the current fiscal year of 2023-24.

"The construction work, which was stopped last year, is going on smoothly now," said Durga Bahadur Pun, chairman of Kapurkot Rural Municipality. "We will run the hospital from the next fiscal year if the government manages the posts of required human resources."

Netanyahu, Biden continue to remain at odds over post-war plan

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Critics have accused Netanyahu of preventing a Cabinet-level debate about a post-war scenario for Gaza. They say he is stalling to prevent conflict within his coalition.

Israel launched its war against Hamas following the militant group's unprecedented October 7 attack that killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in Israel and saw about 250 others taken hostage from the country's south. Health authorities in Hamas-ruled Gaza say Israel's offensive has killed nearly 25,000 Palestinians, most of them women and children.

The offensive, one of the most destructive military campaigns in recent history, has pulverized much of the territory and displaced more than 80% of its population of 2.3 million people. An Israeli blockade that allows only a trickle of aid into Gaza has led to widespread hunger and outbreaks of disease, United Nations officials have said.

Netanyahu has insisted that the only way to secure the hostages' return is by crushing Hamas through military means. More than 100 hostages, mostly women and children, were released during a brief November cease-fire in exchange for the release of Palestinian women and minors imprisoned by Israel. Israel has said that more than 130 hostages remain in Gaza, but only about 100 are believed to be alive.

The protest outside Netanyahu's home in the coastal town of Caesarea grew Saturday. "We can't take it anymore. We've been told to sit quiet, let the government do its job. Well, it's

not bringing us any result for the last two months," Yuval Bar On, whose father-in-law, Keith Siegel, is among the hostages, said.

The protest began on Friday when the father of a 28-year-old held by Hamas since October 7 began what he called a hunger strike. Eli Shtivi pledged to eat only a quarter of a pita

a day—the amount of food some hostages reportedly receive some days—until the prime minister agreed to meet with him.

Hundreds of anti-war protesters gathered in the Israeli city of Haifa to protest Israel's offensive, carrying signs reading "Stop genocide" and scuffling with police who tried to

confiscate the placards. Police made one arrest.

As part of its search for the hostages, Israel's military dropped leaflets on the territory's southernmost town of Rafah appealing for information. The leaflets, with photos of dozens of hostages, carried a message suggesting benefits for anyone who spoke up.

"You want to return home? Please report if you identified one of them," read the message, which also listed a phone number and a link to a website with images and names of the hostages in Arabic.

Al-Majd al-Amni, a media outlet linked to the Hamas internal security force, warned Palestinians against supplying any information about Israeli soldiers held hostage in Gaza. The warning came hours after the leaflets were dropped.

The war has rippled across the Middle East, with Iranian-backed groups attacking US and Israeli targets. Fighting between Israel and Hezbollah militants in Lebanon threatens to erupt into all-out war, and Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen are targeting international shipping in the Red Sea despite US-led airstrikes.

On Saturday, an Israeli strike on Syria's capital destroyed a building used by the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, killing at least four Iranians, Syrian and Iranian state media reported. Also Saturday, an Israeli drone strike on a car near the Lebanese port city of Tyre killed two people, the state-run National News Agency reported. It was not immediately clear who the target was.

In Gaza, residents reached by phone after a seven-day communications blackout reported heavy bombardment and fighting between militants and Israeli troops Saturday morning in and around the southern city of Khan Younis and the urban refugee camp of Jabaliya in the north.

Israeli warplanes and shelling hammered areas in and east of Khan Younis, with gun battles raging overnight into the early morning in Bani Suheila, a town on the city's outskirts, residents said.

Halima Abdel-Rahman, a woman displaced from northern Gaza who has sheltered in Bani Suheila since November, said that bombing was intense overnight into Saturday. The fighting has forced many families to leave their homes, many of which were reduced to rubble, and Bani Suheila is largely empty, she said.

In the Israeli-occupied West Bank, meanwhile, mourners gathered Saturday for the funeral of Tawfiq Ajaq, a 17-year-old American Palestinian shot and killed a day earlier near the city of Ramallah.

The circumstances of the shooting remained unclear Saturday, and police said the incident was under investigation. The teen's father, Hafez Ajaq, said his son was born and raised in the United States, and expressed anger at the US government, which has provided diplomatic and military support for Israel in its war against Hamas.

In recent months, the Biden administration has repeatedly expressed concern about growing volatility in the West Bank, including violence by settlers against Palestinians.



A Palestinian woman receives dialysis treatment at a hospital in Rafah, Gaza Strip, on Saturday.

Nabil Bank fails to cash hydel project bank guarantee from China

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The incident mirrors the troubles Himalayan Bank and the erstwhile Bank of Kathmandu went through to get the counter-guarantee amount released from the China Construction Bank in case of the Melamchi Water Supply Project.

Citing non-performance by the contractor (China Railway 15 Bureau Group), the Melamchi Water Supply Development Board had in 2012 terminated the contract with it.

When the board sought to seize its bank guarantee amount from the Himalayan Bank and the erstwhile Bank of Kathmandu, the Chinese contractor moved a local Chinese court, which prevented the China Construction Bank from releasing the amount.

These two banks had provided performance security of \$6.62 million and a guarantee for advance payment amounting to \$6.62 million and 1.4 million euros for the Chinese contractor. After the Chinese bank refused to release the counter-guarantee amount,

Himalayan Bank and the erstwhile Bank of Kathmandu also declined to give the equivalent amount to the Melamchi Board.

But the Patan Appellate Court, which has now become High Court, Patan, in January 2014 ordered the amount to be released to the Melamchi board.

The two Nepali banks then engaged in a decade-long legal battle in Chinese courts to secure the release of an equivalent amount from the China Construction Bank. The Chinese courts ruled in their favour in August 2022. The Bank of Kathmandu was acquired by the Global IME Bank last year.

The erstwhile Nepal Investment Bank Limited (NIBL) also engaged in a legal battle against Cooperativa Muratori e Cementisti di Ravenna (CMC), the former Italian contractor hired by the Tanahu Hydropower Company, in Italian courts to get a counter-guarantee equivalent to Rs1.6 billion released.

The Italian bank Intesa Sanpaolo,

which had provided a counter-guarantee for the CMC, had failed to release the amount after a lower court in Bologna issued an order against doing so. In March 2019, the Italian contractor registered a complaint at the local court in Bologna. A higher Italian court, in June 2020, had decided in favour of the NIBL, which has now become Nepal Investment Mega Bank Limited.

Nabil Bank faces a similar problem following the TJVC's demand that the bank guarantee of \$7.44 million be released immediately.

"We sent a letter to Nabil Bank on December 1 last year to release the amount," said Dhungel. "Fifty days into our request, the bank has yet to oblige, though it was supposed to do so within seven days."

With Nabil delaying the amount, the hydropower development company had written to the central bank about three weeks ago seeking its intervention. "We followed it up with the central bank about 10 days ago," said Dhungel.

In the past, after the Himalayan Bank and the Bank of Kathmandu refused to release a similar amount, the central bank had ordered them to keep equivalent amounts in provisioning, barring them from showing the sums as profit.

Himalayan Bank and Bank of Kathmandu initially hesitated for a legal fight in China.

On the other hand, the TJVC has already secured the release of another bank guarantee amount in local currency from Laxmi Sunrise Bank.

"We had sent the requests to both the banks the same day, asking for the release of the bank guarantee amount," said Dhungel. "We received the amount from Laxmi Sunrise Bank in early December last year."

He said the company got around 200 million from the Laxmi Sunrise Bank in Nepali rupees.

With the Nepali banks repeatedly facing such problems, those dealing with such issues suggest banks be more vigilant of the track record of foreign banks with regard to payments related to international contracts.

Gandhi Pandit, a corporate lawyer who engaged in legal fights on behalf of Nepali banks in China and Italy, said the banks need to check the track records of foreign banks that offer counter-guarantees.

"Our banks should also be fully prepared to face legal challenges in a foreign country by hiring competent local and foreign lawyers from the date a foreign bank refuses to release the counter-guarantee sum," he said. The initial hesitation of the Himalayan Bank and the erstwhile Bank of Kathmandu to engage in a legal fight in China led to the prolonging of the case in Chinese courts, Pandit added.

Russia informed about Nepali recruits

>> Continued from page 1

According to a decree signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin in early January, Russia provides citizenship to foreign nationals who fight for Russia in Ukraine and their families.

Another decree states that the Russian government would pay five million rubles (\$68,800) as compensation to the families of the Russian soldiers killed in the war with Ukraine and three million rubles (\$41,300) would be given to those injured during the war in compensation. But whether the same amount will be given to foreign recruits is unclear.

"So far as I was told, the compensation amount should be Rs7 million or so," said Saud. "Initially they had proposed sending family members to Russia to receive the compensation but I told them that would not be feasible." Not all family members are able to travel to Russia for various reasons, he reasoned. "So we requested them to provide the amount to the Nepali Embassy in Moscow."

They will soon find a solution through an understanding with the Russian side, Saud added. On the Russian citizenship offered to the families of those who served in the Russian army, the minister said it is up to the members concerned.

According to the foreign minister, five Nepali nationals have been held captive by the Ukrainian forces, and the government is making diplomatic efforts to secure their release.

The government, in the past, had sent two diplomatic notes to the government of Russia and asked it to stop recruiting Nepali nationals in its army, to repatriate those recruited, provide compensation for deceased recruits, and send their bodies home.

In Kathmandu and Moscow, Nepali authorities have told Russian officials that since Nepal and Russia have had cordial relations for decades, they should have informed Kathmandu about their plan to hire Nepalis to join their fight. There may be technical difficulties in bringing back the bodies, such as insurance claims, "but we have requested them to repatriate the bodies as soon as possible," Saud said.

In Kampala, the minister met with Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Vershinin Sergey Vasilievich on Friday on the sidelines of the 19th Non-Aligned Summit. The two leaders are said to have discussed several issues and concerns of Nepal.

Nepal repeated its request to the Russian side not to recruit Nepali nationals into its army and repatriate those who are currently serving.

"This is the first time we have voiced our concerns to the highest Russian authority," Saud said. "He [Russian deputy minister] has assured us of communicating our concerns to Sergey Lavrov in New York, where they are meeting on January 22."

The Russian foreign minister is reportedly travelling to New York on January 22. "I will put forth your concerns," Saud quoted Vasilievich as telling him. "During my conversation, I found them quite aware of our issues and concerns," Saud told the Post.

As they have not received dead bodies, family members have not been able to perform the last rite as per their tradition, said a statement issued by Saud's private secretariat after the meeting with the Russian deputy foreign minister.

In response, the Russian deputy minister told Saud that necessary arrangements would be made to provide compensation to the families of the dead as per Russian law, reads Nepali side's statement.

It is estimated that some 200 Nepali nationals have joined the Russian Army after Russia opened the door for foreigners to take part in its war against Ukraine. In February, it will be two years since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In a bid to stop Nepali nationals from joining Russian and Ukrainian armies, the government has stopped issuing no-objection letters to citizens seeking to take up jobs in the two countries. Nepal Police recently cracked down on some middlemen active in Nepal and some Gulf countries to send Nepali nationals to the neighbours at war.

Citing the underperformance of the Chinese contractor, the TJVC issued a notice of termination to the contractor, which became effective in mid-December.

The Shuifa ANHE Group was awarded the project contract in March 2018 for Rs6.14 billion (\$31.8 million plus Rs1.91 billion), requiring it to complete the work within three years.

But the completion deadline was extended by three years because of the Covid-19 pandemic and other problems.

"Since April last year, the contractor hardly used its equipment and workers at the project site despite our repeated warnings," said Dhungel. "That's why we had to terminate the contract."

According to him, 70 percent of the project work is over. Now the company is preparing to seek more compensation from the Chinese contractor while also planning, within a month, to issue fresh tender for the remaining works.



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OPINION

Living with diabetes

Linkage of sweets with diabetes introduces a challenge that sweets shops have decided to tackle.

ISHITA DEY



Sweets are a ubiquitous part of Bengali diet and culture, making the state the sweets capital of India. Sweets shops form an integral part of every neighbourhood, with their versatile range of breakfast and snack-related savouries and sweets, primarily made from milk, milk base, sugar and flour.

A 2023 national study charted the prevalence of overall diabetes and prediabetes across rural and urban areas of West Bengal, compounded with hypertension and abdominal obesity. Of the total number of diabetic patients in India, 101 million people were diagnosed with diabetes and 136 million were prediabetic.

An important consequence of greater diabetes awareness is the increasing demand for sugar-free products. Sweets shops across India, especially in West Bengal, are making efforts to meet this demand.

Recent research in West Bengal has shown how sweets shops have tried to address this health-related risk. A range of less sweet or *kom mishti* sweets made from chhana (a milk curd used as a base) and sucralose (a sugar substitute) have been introduced by sweets shops.

Sweets are costly and lacking in nutritional value, but they carry a sentimental, emotional and cultural value. As such, these modified sweets attempt to balance health and luxury.

Despite their popularity, sweets shops have a history of controversy—from being accused of diverting milk supplies essential for the nutrition of mothers and children in the 1960s to being a health risk among a population susceptible to diabetes. In 1965, West Bengal's Chief Minister introduced bans on chhana-based and milk-based

eners such as saccharin, aspartame, acesulfame-K and sucralose.

Sucralose is mostly preferred over other sweeteners. Sucralose is a synthetic organochlorine sweetener that is used across food products, but scientific studies have pointed to its adverse effects.

Research identifies two types of sweeteners, based on calorie count: Non-calorie sweeteners and low-calorie sweeteners. The three permissible artificial sweeteners are all non-calorie sweeteners. Irrespective of calorie content, a product's taste is judged on its comparison with a conventional sweet containing sucrose.

Most sweets shops rely on synthetic sweeteners and have switched to skimmed milk or lower-fat milk to prepare these products. An informal survey of sweets shop owners reveals that although they sell low-calorie sweets, they are unable to provide an exact calorie count for such sweets without standardised methods of production.

One salesman raised the question of introducing zero-calorie rosgolla, a sweet traditionally rich in sweetness and arguably the state's most popular export. And a sweets shop owner said: "New tags! Are we actually producing anything different? If you are not allowed to eat something because it will worsen your medical condition, stop eating that. But to hold an industry responsible for diabetes is insane."

Reiterating the advertisement of the north Kolkata sweets shop, he added: "If I am a diabetic patient, I will not indulge in sweets. Having sweets in moderation cannot be bad. What about chocolates?" The statements reflect the fraught sentiments on the connections between health risks and the sweets industry. Initiatives such as newly introduced herbal sweets from Hindustan Sweets point to newer, health-based avenues of expansion for the industry. Healthy products can move beyond the sugar content of sweets to the possibilities of exploring combinations of other ingredients.

In sweets shops with quality control laboratories, such as K.C. Das Private Limited, reproducing the taste of a low-calorie sweet remains the biggest concern. Dairy scientists warn that one must select sugar substitutes with caution.

The sweeteners available to the sweets industry are primarily of



SHUTTERSTOCK

sweets through the West Bengal Milk Products Control Order 1965.

The public debates that followed related to cultural heritage and loss of livelihood of sweets shop owners and artisans, showing that sweets were not perceived as essential commodities. Now the linkage of sweets with diabetes has introduced a new challenge that sweets shops have decided to tackle head-on.

A special issue of Loksanskriti Gabeshana, a research journal of folk culture, on Bengali sweets features an advertisement by a sweets shop in North Kolkata, challenging the associated risk of diabetes.

It reads, "Eating sweets does not lead to diabetes; diabetic patients should stay away from sweets." This spirit has led to the making of 'sugar free sweets' at many popular Kolkata sweets shops.

This new *kom mishti* or sugar-free nomenclature has taken over the glass showcases of West Bengal's sweets shops. Sandesh, made from a cooked paste of chhana and sugar, has emerged as a site of experimentation. Sweets shops have started selling bhapa (steamed) sandesh made with less sugar or other sweeteners.

The Indian government permits artificial sweeteners across 25 food items, including confectioneries and traditional sweets. A notification by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare amending the Prevention of Food Adulteration Rules 2003 permits artificial sweet-

two varieties: Relatively sweet and high-intensity sweeteners. According to dairy scientists, a combined use of sugar substitutes and bulking agents could yield better results, especially to maintain the texture and taste of the sweet. For sweets makers, the sensory aspect of their creations is as important as calorie content and not easy to get right when substituting ingredients. It remains to be seen how sweets shops will introduce sugar-free products beyond the sandesh and expand it to other sweet items.

While sweets shops are experimenting with low-calorie sweets made with sugar substitutes, the state could invest in quality-control laboratories for indigenous sweets industries across India, so artisans and owners of sweets shops receive appropriate training on synthetic sweeteners and their impact on glycemic health.

To echo the sentiment of the sweets shop advertisement, sweets cannot be viewed as the enemy of diabetic patients. Instead, there should be concerted efforts to bring sweets shops into conversation about refined sugar, jaggery and synthetic sweeteners for the future of the sweets industry and people's health.

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— 360info

Nepali poetry in translation

|| WORDS & ECHOES ||

The sphere of literary contacts and audience of Nepali writers is widening beyond South Asia.

ABHI SUBEDI



The subject of translating Nepali poetry into English struck me as a matter of interest among poets and writers when I received an invitation from the Yugendra-Laxmikanta International Translation Trust to attend a programme in Siliguri, India, on January 20, 2024. Translation is the most familiar practice I have been dealing with, both at the university and outside, but this invitation prompted me to reflect on our translation practices. This article addresses that topic cursorily.

The practice and lure of translating Nepali poetry into English covers about 70 years. It began in earnest with the initiative of the eminent poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota (1909-1959), who had a good command of the English language. An editor of the bilingual poetry magazine *Indreni*, Devkota said this in the editorial: "The present translations are in English, because of its extensive use in India, especially in the Deccan, and the different parts of Asia and the world" (1956: 174). Devkota introduced the concept of translating poetry into English in the mid-fifties of the last century. In several magazine issues, he translated some of the major poems of his contemporaries including Balakrishna Sama, Madhav Ghimire, Kedarnan Vyathit, and Siddhicharan Shrestha. Devkota was evoking the power of the English language that could be acquired by means of education in our part of the world.

One other instance of the power of poetry in English can be seen in the translation of the poems of King Mahendra (1920-72). A group of Indian scholars of the Nityananda Society



SHUTTERSTOCK

found the monarch's poetry compiled in his anthology *Usaiko Lagi* as an easy way to highlight the Hindu associations of the king whose poems "in sentiment, cadence paradox and symbol... are hooked into the core of Kashmiri Pandit School". The purpose of this statement in the preface of the book is clear. In the preface of the book titled *King Mahendra the Poet* (1963?), the writer of the book, YG Krishnamurti, writes, "King Mahendra shines as a traditional poet and a modern king." Krishnamurti has translated several poems of the king into English and included in this glossy tome printed expensively but produced carelessly without the date of publication and other details. This book was given to me in the early seventies by Gokulchandra Shastri, the late professor of Sanskrit at Trichandra College and a staunch monarchist.

The lure and power of the English translation of Nepali poetry that we see here is different from the power Devkota saw in his *Indreni* experiment. Dramatist and poet Balakrishna Sama translated his own long Nepali poem *Mrituyupachiko Abhiyanjana* as "Expression after death", published in 1972 by Sajha Prakashan. Nepal Academy published translations of representative Nepali poetry into

English by several hands under the title *Seven Poets* (1975). I do not have space here to discuss the history of the subject, but I want to mention one collection of translated poems written by poets of different generations with a little patriotic flavour: *The Voice of Nepal*.

My impression is that the craft of translating Nepali poetry into English never appears to be carefully planned or executed. The somewhat anarchist spirit of Devkota to bring Nepali poetry to the notice of the world appears to be the enduring spirit of the people of different generations. But we should remember that poet Devkota combined mission, spirit, skill and efficiency in his work, although it was a small attempt that did not continue much longer.

Translation of poetry into English has been a favourite practice in South Asia for three reasons. First, with English being the global language, translating your native poetry into English is thought to take you to a wide audience worldwide. Second, you would be able to evoke a sense of power—the English language continues to be equated with power. The third reason is related to making the best use of the contact zone, which is an interesting topic for discussion for academic and pragmatic reasons. I

Provinces versus Kathmandu

|| THE THIRD BRANCH ||

Attitude towards federalism in Nepal is still marked with scepticism.

SEMANTA DAHAL



Be it for the municipal executive, the provincial legislature or the federal parliament, candidates hitting the campaign trail along the mid-hills of Nepal had to woo the voters during the last elections on an unconventional agenda: Curbing the monkey menace. Strong commitments

phant—is it a federal or provincial responsibility?

The five lists

Three Cs used by the constitution to describe the characteristics of Nepal's federative nature are cooperation, co-existence and coordination. These terms, however, get reduced to mere ornate terminologies if the list of subjects enumerated per Article 57 of the constitution in the five annexed appendices dividing the power and functions between three orders of the government is overlooked. The five lists dividing the powers amongst the federal, provincial and local levels, therefore, lie at the heart of Nepal's federal design.

The list of 35 federal subjects is set out in Schedule 5, which encompasses national defense, international affairs, central taxes, banking, central universities, citizenship, mineral exploration, central infrastructure projects, and criminal and civil laws. The provinces are given control over 21 subjects in Schedule 6, including provin-

and 9 are concurrent lists containing shared subjects between federal and provincial, and federal, provincial and local levels, respectively. In these concurrent matters, the governments are required to work in collaboration with each other, and in case of any inconsistency, the federal framework takes precedence. Any residual issues rest with the federal level.

Provincial-federal disputes

Even though the constitution demarcates power and functions into three multifold levels, disputes invariably arise in exercising political power under these schedules. In case of such disputes, Part 10 of the constitution assigns disputes of a political nature to the Inter-Provincial Council headed by the Prime Minister, with an explicit caveat that the Supreme Court enjoys jurisdiction under Article 137(2)(a) over federal vs province, province vs province, province vs local and local vs local disputes. Article 137(2)(a) empowers the Supreme Court to determine the juris-

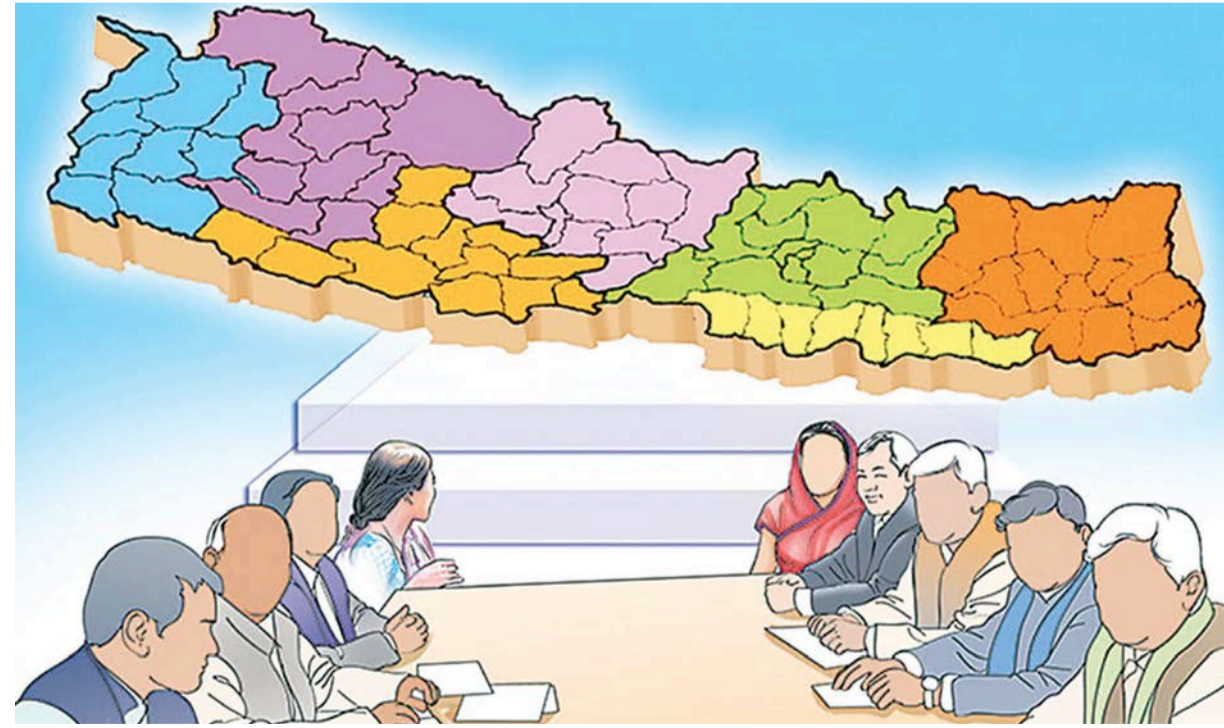
ranging from the mobilisation of civil servants, recruitment of police officials, and investigation of criminal offences to protests against bids called by the federal ministry for groundwater projects.

In a few instances, individual petitions have been filed under Article 137(2)(a), questioning the decisions to declare provincial capitals and change administrative centres of municipalities. Most recently, Bagmati Province brought an action against Kathmandu seeking a determination that transport management is a provincial subject. Besides, Article 137(2)(a) of the constitution, meant to declare laws inconsistent with the constitution void, is also often invoked. Under this provision, around 19 cases are challenging the vires of provincial laws vis-à-vis the constitution and federal laws and roughly 46 other cases are contesting that the laws passed by local governments breach the constitution and federal legislation.

Umpire of the federation

While intergovernmental controversies increasingly occupy a fair share of constitutional litigations pending before the Supreme Court, it is unfortunate that the top court has not adjudicated even a single case filed under Article 137(2)(a) of the constitution. Apart from interpreting the most important question of the division of law-making powers, a couple of other preliminary issues merit deeper examination and will benefit from the Supreme Court's immediate clarifications. The first issue relates to the locus standi of parties other than the affected tier of government to invoke Article 137(2)(a), and the second one relates to whether the constitutionality of divisions of powers is a jurisdictional dispute under Article 137(2)(a) or a question of constitutional conflict under Article 133(1) of the constitution.

Attitude towards federalism in Nepal is still marked with scepticism, albeit the understanding of the public on how the federal form of government functions is increasing. The Supreme Court can play a pivotal role in quelling the concerns and overcoming the apprehensions of federalism failing by establishing a rich jurisprudence which defines the boundaries of law-making powers between federal, provincial and local levels. Novel legal principles can be developed, or doctrines of federalism such as pith and substance, inter-jurisdictional immunity, ancillary powers, principles of subsidiarity, and federal paramountcy can be applied with modifications to Nepal's federal context. Otherwise, even the Supreme Court will have to take the blame for handing federalism into the paws of monkeys!



POST ILLUSTRATION

were made, but after the elections, no government has done anything tangible to address this problem. What can exacerbate this problem even more and allow the elected office bearers to shy away from responsibility is the ambiguity that has come attached to federalism, especially about the purview of the federal, provincial and local governments over a range of subjects, including monkeys! As a matter of fact, there is also an old Canadian joke on federalism resembling this issue: The ele-

cial police administration, radio/FM/televisions, provincial taxes (land registration, tourism, entertainment, advertisement, agricultural income, vehicle, etc.), cooperatives, land management, provincial-level projects, and universities. Twenty-two subjects primarily associated with cooperatives, local level taxes (property taxes, rental taxes, entertainment, advertisement), agriculture, local roads, drinking water and disaster management fall under the authority of local government in Schedule 8. Schedules 7

dictional boundaries of the three strata of the government.

A recent trend suggests that Article 137(2)(a) of the constitution is increasingly resorted to call upon the Supreme Court to examine the inter-jurisdictional disputes between the three orders of the government. A cursory survey of the Supreme Court docket reveals approximately 11 such cases. The majority of these cases have been moved by the Madhesh Province against the Federal Government, challenging matters

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— Editors

House panel decision on nursing colleges lands in controversy

The committee directive, which allows nursing colleges without their own building to resume instruction, has divided committee members.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JAN 20

A House committee's directive to the government to allow nursing colleges without their own hospitals to resume their academic programmes has landed in controversy following objections from some lawmakers.

The Education, Health and Information Technology Committee of the House of Representatives on Wednesday directed the Medical Commission and the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to allow the operation of the nursing colleges that have remained closed for two years.

"It is impractical to shut the operation of the nursing colleges while the dental programme [in the colleges that don't have 100-bed hospitals] continues," reads the directive. As many as 64 nursing colleges will benefit from the decision.

The Medical Education Commission shuttered such colleges two years ago citing clause 11 of the Medical Education Act, which states that each college teaching nursing and dental courses must establish a 100-bed hospital. In 2018, the commission had given nursing colleges two years to build their own hospitals. But the colleges couldn't do so. As a result, the commission stopped them from admitting new students.

United under the umbrella of the Medical Education Concern and Struggle Committee, medical education providers have long been protesting against the commission's move. They have accused the commission of wrongly interpreting the law to force them to halt their services. They claim that the Act authorises the commission to oversee only university education, not the institutions affiliated with the CTEVT.

However, the commission sticks to its position that it is authorised to supervise all institutions providing medical education, no matter what board they are affiliated to. The closure of the nursing colleges has also deepened the jurisdiction row between the commission and the CTEVT. As a result, the House committee in September intervened in the matter.

It had also formed a sub-committee to study the matter and recommend the steps necessary to resolve it.

Badri Pandey, a Nepali Congress

member on the House committee who was also in the sub-panel, said the directive was issued after a thorough consultation among all members. However, lawmakers from the Rastriya Swatantra Party say there was no agreement to allow the closed nursing colleges to operate.

"We discussed the issue in the committee but no decision to this effect was made," Sumana Shrestha, a Rastriya Swatantra Party lawmaker, told the Post. "We had clearly said the House committee cannot issue any directive that contradicts the Act. This decision is illegal and unacceptable."

Pandey, however, claimed that there was no objection from the Rastriya Swatantra Party lawmakers to the decision. "Can they show their note of dissent if they had objected to it?" he said, adding that they would discuss the matter in the next meeting.

A meeting of the House committee has been called for Sunday.

Nursing college operators accuse the commission of overstepping its jurisdiction and forcing the colleges without their own hospitals to halt services. They say as many as 228 colleges—including 136 offering pre-diploma health education, 73 providing diploma-level staff nurse courses and 18 colleges teaching bachelor in nursing and nursing science courses—have ceased their operations due to the commission's decision. They claim this puts their investments worth Rs15 billion at risk.

As per a report of the Forum for Health and Technical Science, an umbrella body of the colleges providing nursing and medical education, around 4,000 students would have enrolled for nursing until 2021, but now only 1,200 seats are available. Though over 10,000 students sit for entrance exams, most are unable to study the courses of their choice in the country.

Until the commission's intervention, the institutions were partnering with hospitals, mainly government-run ones, to engage students in practice. The House committee has kept the door open for such partnership.

The education providers said they can't set up their own hospitals because doing so will cost them at least a billion rupees and operation costs are high. They argue that drawing a sufficient flow of patients will be a challenge even if they establish their own hospitals.

Risks of JN.1 sub-variant of Covid-19

Experts say even if the new sub-variant is not as lethal as previous variants, it could give a hard time for elderly people and those having underlying conditions.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, JAN 20

Authorities confirmed the spread of the JN.1 sub-variant of coronavirus in Nepal earlier this month when various communities were observing festivities. JN.1, which is considered a highly contagious variant of Omicron, has now spread to various parts of the country. The whole-genome sequencing carried out some two weeks ago at the National Public Health laboratory showed that the youngest sibling of the Omicron is responsible for infection in seven out of 16 infected people.

Infectious disease experts and virologists have said that the spread of the virus during the flu season in which a lot of people throughout the country are getting infected with various viruses is a matter of serious concern.

The spread began at the start of the marriage season and amid festivals of various ethnic communities involving huge crowds, which made for a conducive environment for the new virus variant to spread further, experts say. Apart from that, political parties are also convening huge rallies and jamborees. Public health measures are hard to enforce in political rallies, gatherings of festivals, weddings and other cultural events.

Experts, however, said that the new sub-variant doesn't seem as lethal as the previous ones, such as Delta, but it poses serious risks to elderly people and those having underlying conditions. They have asked authorities concerned to step up surveillance measures including increasing testing and enforcing public health measures such as mandatory masks, social distancing, and washing hands. They say the vaccine against the coronavirus should be administered to vulnerable populations—elderly people and those having underlying conditions.

Here is all you need to know about the status of JN.1 and the measures to safeguard oneself.

JN.1 sub-variant and its spread

Nepal confirmed the spread of the JN.1 sub-variant in the country on January 8. Of the 16 swab samples on which whole-genome sequencing was carried out at the National Public Health Laboratory, the JN.1 sub-variant was detected in seven samples, which is around 44 percent of the total.

The World Health Organisation classifies JN.1 as a separate 'variant of interest' given its rapid spread around the globe. The UN health body, however, said that based on available data, "the additional public health risk posed by JN.1 is currently evaluated as low".

Several countries, including China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia



Health experts suggest taking precautions when in a crowd to avoid Covid infection.

and Singapore, have reported upticks in new coronavirus cases. The JN.1 strain, first detected in September in the United States, is a descendant of BA.2.86, a highly mutated variant of the Omicron strain of the coronavirus.

Symptoms of JN.1 sub-variant

Most of the symptoms of the JN.1 sub-variant of the Omicron are similar to the symptoms of other variants of the coronavirus: cough, sore throat, runny nose, fatigue, headache, muscle ache, and smell and taste loss.

Who is at risk?

Doctors say all people are at risk of infection, as the virus doesn't differentiate people. But elderly people and those having suppressed immunity—pregnant women, patients related to heart, renal, cancer and others—are at high risk of getting severe.

"Though the hospitalisation rate due to coronavirus infection has not yet increased, the number of people seeking hospital care could rise if the infection rate rises," said Dr Janak Koirala, an infectious disease expert. "The number of patients with respiratory illnesses has already risen in the hospitals, and if the coronavirus also spreads, it will increase severity in the patients."

Risk of double infection

As flu season is at its peak, cases of coronavirus infection have started rising, which is not a good sign, according to experts. They say that one could be infected with multiple viruses at once, which increases severity and could even cause death.

"The number of patients suffering from pneumonia has increased of late in hospitals and if a patient suffering from other viruses is also infected with coronavirus, risk of severity increases," Koirala said.

Ways to avoid infection

Follow the basics, doctors say. Basics—to which most people are familiar with and which were also enforced during the first, second and third waves of the Covid-19 pandemic—are wearing face masks, washing hands regularly, and avoiding crowds, among others. Doctors ask people to stay at home if they have Covid-like symptoms.

As the public health measures have been lifted following the decline in the infection rate of the Omicron variant in 2021, people have stopped following the safety measures. Even the authorities concerned haven't shown seriousness about the risks and enforce the public health measures.

"If you've not received a booster shot yet, get it at the earliest," suggests Dr Rajiv Shrestha, an infectious disease expert at the Dhulikhel Hospital. "Those having underlying conditions should get inoculated with additional booster shots as well if they were inoculated with coronavirus vaccine six months ago."

Complacency could be costly

Experts as well as the Health Ministry officials concede that it is not easy to enforce public health measures now like in the initial stage of the coronavirus pandemic. People will not take the issue seriously until the infected patients start dying. Even the uptake of the coronavirus vaccine is very low in the country at present, which shows lack of seriousness on the part of the general public.

It seems that health authorities too have not taken the issue seriously. Most of the Covid-19 testing labs throughout the country lack testing kits, and health desks set up at the international land crossings lack antigen test kits. Infected people are freely roaming in the communities and no agency has been monitoring their movements.

"After all, life is your own. So stay safe and save family members," said Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, chief of the Clinical Research Unit at the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital.

Pun said that people are not getting severe now as the vaccine coverage rate is good in Nepal and a lot of people have been infected in every surge, meaning that most people in the country have natural immunity.

"But that should not be a reason to let go of safety measures," Pun said. "We should not forget that some people in our communities have underlying health conditions."

What the Health ministry has to say

The Ministry of Health and Population has said that positive cases of Covid-19 infection have started rising again and urged the general public to avoid crowds and follow public health measures. Officials claimed that the agencies under the ministry were alerted and surveillance measures stepped up following the confirmation of the JN.1 outbreak in the country.

"We have stepped up surveillance, decided to fast-track purchase of testing kits and asked provincial health authorities to manage the testing kits on their own," said Dr Hemanta Ojha, an official at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division. "Everyone should follow public health measures. And elderly people should take extra precautions."

Expatriate voting: Allowed, but left out

Expats say lack of awareness drives and non-cooperation by embassies bar Bangladeshis from exercising voting rights.

THE DAILY STAR
DHAKA, JAN 20

A Bangladeshi expat in Ireland, who is studying at Dublin City University, was highly enthusiastic about exercising his franchise in the national polls.

As he could not figure out how to vote himself, the 29-year-old student contacted the nearest Bangladesh embassy—the Bangladesh High Commission in the UK—through emails. However, the embassy didn't respond. Ultimately, he couldn't vote in the 12th parliamentary elections.

Like him, who wished to stay anonymous, many other Bangladeshi expatriates across the globe said they missed the opportunity to exercise their voting rights due to a lack of information and awareness initiatives by their respective embassies.

Most of them said they didn't know about the postal ballot system and those who knew said they had no clue about how to send those or the deadline of sending those. Bangladeshi expatriates, who make up around 7.5 percent of the country's population and 10 percent of its voters, are allowed to vote in the polls. According to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, more than 1.26 crore Bangladeshis have gone abroad since 1976, while the International Organization for Migration's report published in 2021 estimates that about 2.4 million Bangladeshis diaspora are living mostly in developed countries.

Since 2010, Bangladesh has introduced a postal ballot system to preserve the constitutional rights of this huge segment of citizens.

However, the expats say, even after more than a decade, there is hardly any government initiative to involve them in the democratic process.

The Daily Star reached out to over a dozen expatriates across the globe and they said lack of awareness drives by embassies to inform the expats about the procedure or timeline of polls are depriving them of their rights.

Navid Sharif, 25, a student of law at the University of South Wales in the UK, said he was aware of the postal



Bangladeshi polling officials count votes after the voting earlier this month.

ballot system but didn't know exactly how to complete the procedure from there. "Given the chance, I would have exercised my right to vote. But I was not sure how to do so. As far as I know, the Bangladesh High Commission here didn't do much to create awareness among expatriates regarding the procedure and the deadline. At least I failed to notice any such thing," said Navid.

"We, Bangladeshi students at USW, talked about the polls. Most of us would have voted if we knew what to do," he added. This is not only true for the UK, which hosts around 8 lakh

exercise their franchise based on Article 27 of the Representation of the People Order.

For this, they were directed to apply for a postal ballot paper within 15 days of the announcement of the election schedule to the returning officer of their respective constituency by providing the necessary information, and then the ROs were supposed to send a ballot paper to the expatriate voters.

The deadline ended on December 1. The EC said Bangladesh missions abroad would extend the necessary cooperation in this regard. However, the respective embassies or high commissions did not seem to be very cooperative in this regard, claimed expatriates. Aashna Chowdhury, 28, a student at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg in Germany, said she would have exercised her voting rights if she had received instructions.

"However, I had no idea and the Bangladeshi embassy here didn't do anything to notify us or enlighten us, and then when I got to know, we were well past the deadline," Aashna told The Daily Star.

"Before the polls, I visited the embassy to work on some of my documents and tried to talk about the election with the officials then, but they showed no

interest," she said.

In the southern hemisphere, Shelly Naz, a former deputy director at the Department of Social Services of social welfare ministry and a PhD aspirant at Australia's Swinburne University of Technology, faced a similar situation. "It would have been great if I could cast my vote from Australia. I was trying to figure out how to do so, but I couldn't find any information on this when I surfed through the site of the Bangladesh High Commission in Canberra," Shelly, 51, said.

Meanwhile, the government marked National Expatriates Day for the first time last year on December 30, intending to involve them more in the country's development.

Abu Taher, 63, an expatriate in Qatar for the last 37 years, could not manage to exercise his voting right once in his life. Needless to say, he failed this time too. "I almost forgot about the election as there were almost no discussions regarding it among Bangladeshis this time, which was not the case in previous elections. I don't think the Bangladesh embassy in Qatar has taken any initiative to involve us in this democratic process and educate us regarding exercising our franchise. Otherwise, I would have known about it," said Taher.

When this correspondent told him about the existing postal ballot system for expatriates and its procedure, he said he was willing to through the complicated process. Many others, particularly those living in the Middle East, echoed Taher, as they were disappointed to miss out on voting in the election yet again. However, the Bangladesh High Commission in London claimed to have done its best to involve expatriates in the 12th parliamentary polls.

The high commission said the EC provided them with directives regarding the postal ballot procedure for expatriate voters and their eligibility.

It said, over the last five years, it has stayed connected with the British-Bangladeshi community and arranged various events to raise awareness about diaspora voting procedures, and deadlines.

Prime Minister Dahal, Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe meet

The two leaders discuss issues of bilateral interests, including connectivity, tourism and regional cooperation.



Prime Minister Dahal meets Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe in Uganda on Saturday.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JAN 20

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who is in Uganda to attend the 19th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), held talks with Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Saturday.

During the meeting held on the sidelines of the summit, Prime Minister Dahal emphasised that the two South Asian nations must stand together in matters relating to regional cooperation and interests as they stand for non-aligned foreign policies.

"Discussions on the issues of bilateral interests, including connectivity, tourism and regional cooperation were held," said the Prime Minister's Office.

The prime minister underscored the need to make the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

(SAARC) more active, adding that Nepal and Sri Lanka must play a common role towards the same, the prime minister's secretariat said.

Dahal also emphasised that issues of common interest and regional cooperation should be addressed through the intergovernmental organisation.

President Wickremesinghe attested Sri Lanka's support to make SAARC functional, while also stressing the need for Nepal and Sri Lanka to cooperate in matters of regional and economic interests.

Minister for Foreign Affairs NP Saud, Foreign Secretary Sewa Lamsal, and other senior government officials were also present during the meeting.

Prime Minister Dahal left for Uganda on Thursday morning, leading a Nepali delegation. He will return home on January 21.

MONEY



FOREX

US Dollar	133.21
Euro	145.05
Pound Sterling	168.98
Swiss Franc	153.32
Australian Dollar	87.85
Canadian Dollar	98.87
Singapore Dollar	99.37
Japanese Yen (10)	9.00
Chinese Yuan	18.52
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.52
Qatari Riyal	36.54
Thai Bhat	3.76
UAE Dhiram	36.27
Malaysian Ringgit	28.24
Korean Won (100)	9.99

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION

PRICE PER TOLA

 Fine Gold	Rs 118,000
 Silver	Rs 1,395

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Himalayan Re allowed to do reinsurance from India

KATHMANDU: Himalayan Re-Insurance has been allowed to do reinsurance business from India. The privately owned reinsurance company has been granted a reference number by the regulatory body of the insurance sector in India, opening the way for the company to do reinsurance business from India. Himalayan Re-Insurance Limited was approved by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India on January 16. Within a short period of its establishment, Himalayan Re-Insurance has expanded its business to 31 countries. Himalayan Re-Insurance has completed the process of issuing shares to the general public.

Musk denies report his AI company secures \$500 million toward \$1 billion funding goal

Bengaluru: Elon Musk has said a report that his artificial intelligence (AI) company, xAI, has secured \$500 million in commitments from investors toward a \$1 billion goal is inaccurate. "This is simply not accurate," he said in a reply to a user post about the Bloomberg article on social media platform X. The artificial intelligence (AI) startup xAI is discussing a valuation of \$15 billion to \$20 billion, though terms could still change in the coming weeks, Bloomberg reported, citing people familiar with the matter. xAI could not immediately be reached for comment. Musk and investors are expected to finalize terms in the next couple of weeks, and some parties are evaluating whether they can get computing power in addition to, or in some cases instead of, xAI equity shares, Bloomberg reported. (REUTERS)

US, China officials conclude meeting on financial issues

BANGKOK: US and Chinese officials have completed the third meeting of a working group established to cooperate on financial issues, in a step that continues the trend set by the two powers last November to ease tensions. Officials from the US Department of the Treasury met with counterparts in the People's Bank of China to discuss issues ranging from financial stability to countering money laundering. The delegation also met with Vice Premier He Lifeng while they were in China, according to a statement from the Treasury Department Friday. The group also indicated that Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen would return to China for a visit at some point in the future. She was previously there in July. In November, Yellen met with He in San Francisco. Their two-day meeting was seen as paving the way for the later meeting between US President Joe Biden and China's President Xi Jinping. (AP)

Poland's Allegro agrees lower price hike for deliveries by InPost for 2024

WARSAW: Allegro, opens new tab has signed an agreement with parcel locker firm InPost, opens new tab for a smaller level of price indexation for packages delivered in 2024, Poland's biggest e-commerce platform said on Saturday. Previously agreed indexation of 12.8 percent will be binding only for packages delivered in November and December 2023, while for 2024 it will depend on the growth of the volume of deliveries and will decrease from 12.8 percent to 6 percent based on the growth. Allegro said in a statement. InPost will be allowed to terminate the agreed annex with a two-month notice period, while Allegro will be entitled to discounts until the contract is terminated, according to the statement. (REUTERS)

Nepal exported pickles worth Rs109.84 million last year

>> Continued from page 1

According to the department, in 2020-21, Nepal exported 11.04 tonnes of pickles worth Rs3.92 million. Pickles are exported mainly to Australia, Belgium, Canada, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Import and export of pickles started to grow amid the pandemic. Trade record shows that pickle imports in 2021-22 jumped a staggering 16-fold to 367.55 tonnes worth Rs76.46 million. At the same time, exports jumped over five-fold to 59.98 tonnes and fetched Rs38.66 million worth of foreign currency.

In 2022-23, imports and exports of pickles crossed the Rs100 million mark each.

Pickle producers say that with the rise in the number of Nepalis living abroad, the demand for pickles has jumped and the sales are expected to grow in the future too.

The department statistics show that Nepal imported 371.11 tonnes of pickles worth Rs100.21 million in the last fiscal year. Exports were 161 tonnes worth Rs109.84 million.

Pickle producers say that apart from veg pickles, demand for non-veg pickles is also high nationally and globally.

Ama ko Achar has started production of spice mixes of chicken masala and meat masala.

Rohan Shrestha, owner of Ghar ko Achar, started the venture in 2018 and started taking orders online.



Nepali pickles are seen in the selves at a grocery shop in Sydney, Australia.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF AMA KO ACHAR

Microsoft says Russian hackers accessed emails of senior leadership members

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON, JAN 20

State-backed Russian hackers broke into Microsoft's corporate email system and accessed the accounts of members of the company's leadership team, as well as those of employees on its cybersecurity and legal teams, the company said on Friday.

In a blog post, Microsoft said the intrusion began in late November and was discovered on January 12. It said the same highly skilled Russian hacking team behind the SolarWinds breach was responsible. "A very small percentage" of Microsoft corporate accounts were accessed, the company said, and some emails and attached documents were stolen.

The threat actor uses a single common password to try to log into multiple accounts.

A company spokesperson said Microsoft had no immediate comment on which or how many members of its senior leadership had their email accounts breached. In a regulatory filing Friday, Microsoft said it was able to remove the hackers' access from the compromised accounts on or about January 13.

"We are in the process of notifying employees whose email was accessed," Microsoft said, adding that its investigation indicates the hackers were initially targeting email accounts for information related to their activities.

The Microsoft disclosure comes a month after a new US Securities and Exchange Commission rule took effect that compels publicly traded compa-

nies to disclose breaches that could negatively impact their business. It gives them four days to do so unless they obtain a national-security waiver.

In Friday's SEC regulatory filing, Microsoft said that "as of the date of this filing, the incident has not had a material impact" on its operations. It added that it has not, however, "determined whether the incident is reasonably likely to materially impact" its finances. Microsoft, which is based in Redmond, Washington, said the hackers from Russia's SVR foreign intelligence agency were able to gain access by compromising credentials on a "legacy" test account, suggesting it had outdated code.

After gaining a foothold, they used the account's permissions to access the accounts of the senior leadership team and others. The brute-force attack technique used by the hackers is called "password spraying."

The threat actor uses a single common password to try to log into multiple accounts. In an August blog post, Microsoft described how its threat-intelligence team discovered that the same Russian hacking team had used the technique to try to steal credentials from at least 40 different global organizations through Microsoft Teams chats.

"The attack was not the result of a vulnerability in Microsoft products or services," the company said in the blog. "To date, there is no evidence that the threat actor had any access to customer environments, production systems, source code, or AI systems. We will notify customers if any action is required."

Microsoft calls the hacking unit Midnight Blizzard. Prior to revamping its threat-actor nomenclature last year, it called the group Nobelium. The cybersecurity firm Mandiant, owned by Google, calls the group Cozy Bear.

Ford cuts output of F-150 Lightning pickup on weak electric vehicle sales

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MICHIGAN, JAN 20

Ford is cutting production of the F-150 Lightning electric pickup after weaker-than-expected electric vehicle sales growth.

While EV sales are growing in the US, the pace is falling well short of the industry's ambitious timetable and many consumers are turning to hybrid vehicles instead.

Ford sold just over 24,000 Lightnings last year, up 55 percent from 2022. But dealers are reporting slower sales and rising inventories on the electric truck, which starts at just under \$50,000.

Electric vehicle sales overall grew 47 percent to a record 1.19 million last year, according to Motorintelligence.com. The EV market share grew from 5.8 percent in 2022 to 7.6 percent last year. But EV sales growth slowed toward the end of the year. In December, they rose 34 percent.

Ford said that about 1,400 workers will be affected by the move to lower F-150 Lightning production, with the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center transitioning to one shift, effective April 1. Approximately 700 employees will transfer to Ford's Michigan Assembly Plant while other workers will be placed in roles at the Rouge Complex or other facilities in Southeast Michigan. Some employees are expected to take advantage of the Special Retirement Incentive Program agreed to in the 2023 Ford-UAW contract.

"We are taking advantage of our manufacturing flexibility to offer customers choices while balancing our growth and profitability," Ford CEO Jim Farley said in a statement Friday. Ford said a few dozen employees could be affected at component plants supporting F-150 Lightning production, depending on how many workers apply for the retirement programme.

The venture opened its shop in January. It now has over 50,000 customers. Shrestha began the business as a part of his Bachelor's project assignment to prepare a business plan. He continued the business after graduation.

Ghar ko Achar produces about 100 kgs of pickles a week.

"People order in bulk to take with themselves while travelling abroad. They purchase sufficient quantities for themselves and buy on behalf of other relatives and friends," said Shrestha.

Shrestha said that the appeal of homemade Nepali pickles is higher as they do not use artificial preservatives. The enterprise exports pickles to the UAE, Malaysia and Japan.

According to him, pickles of chicken, mutton and buffalo meat are also becoming popular choices.

Popular varieties of vegetable pickles in Nepal are mango, cucumber, lapsi, red cherry pepper, lemon and radish.

Shrestha said that the monthly sales hover at Rs700,000 and the gross margin is around 30-35 percent.

In the past few years, competition has grown in the Nepali market. There are dozens of pickle enterprises, many of which have now turned into small-scale factories.

While Nepali pickles are finding a good market abroad, foreign pickles are also gaining popularity within the country.

Arun Giri, a cook at a Korean restaurant in Kathmandu, started preparing 'kimchi' as a side hustle, almost two years ago. Today, he runs the Kimchi House Kathmandu besides his job.

Kimchi is a traditional Korean banchan consisting of salted and fermented vegetables, most commonly using napa cabbage or Korean radish.

According to Giri, his business flourishes, especially in the trekking season when foreigners take preserved foods with them to camps.

On normal days, he produces about 10 kgs of kimchi a week. A kg of kimchi costs Rs500.

He hopes that with the increase in Korean tourists, the cuisine demand will also grow and so will his revenue.

Deepesh Chaudhary, a former restaurant employee, quit his work and established Kimchi House Nepal two years ago.

His enterprise produces in batches of 50 kgs, especially for sale to Korean restaurants in Kathmandu Valley.

He buys the special cabbages used in Kimchi from farms in Bhaktapur.

Currently, his family handmakes all production.

According to Chaudhary, profit margins have dropped in recent times due to increasing competition.

"Many people are using their free time to produce smaller quantities of Kimchi and Korean pickles to sell for little money. So competition is tough," said Chaudhary.

China's 2023 coal imports from Australia rise, but below pre-ban era

REUTERS

BEIJING, JAN 20

China's coal imports from Australia picked up in 2023 after a ban of nearly two years was lifted, but they remained below pre-ban levels as the supplier tries to regain market share from cheaper competitors Mongolia and Russia.

China imported 52.47 million metric tons of Australian coal in 2023, customs data showed on Saturday, up from 2.86 million tons in 2022. China had imported 77.51 million tons of Australia coal in 2020, the last full year before the ban went into place.

China lifted the restrictions in January 2023, the first of a series of overtures from China following the election of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. Beijing also agreed last year to lift tariffs on Australian barley and review duties on its wine.

December's coal shipments from Australia totalled 6.71 million tons, up 6.4 percent from November's 6.31 million tons, the data showed.

With the recovery in Australian

imports, China's overall coal imports rose to a record high of 474.42 million tons in the year, up 61.8 percent from 2022, separate data showed last week.

December's imports were also at an all-time high of 47.3 million tons, as buyers rushed to import coal before Beijing reinstated some import tariffs this month, that data showed.

Indonesia, which sells much of its coal to China under annual supply contracts, remained China's biggest supplier. It exported 220.25 million tons to China in 2023, up 29 percent from 2022. Imports from Mongolia, primarily coking coal, more than doubled in 2023 from a year ago, reaching 69.97 million tons, the customs data showed.

Russian coal arrivals continued to jump in 2023, up 50 percent and hitting 102.13 million tons. China's coal imports from Russia had surged in 2022 as western nations cut off trade with Moscow, allowing China to buy at a discounted price. But a new export duty on coal and other commodities, which began in October last year, has made Russian imports less attractive.



A worker shovels coal at a freight yard in Hefei, Anhui province in January 2013.

REUTERS

India's Kashmir ski industry melts as temperatures rise

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

GULMARG, INDIA, JAN 20

Winter in the Himalayas should mean blanketing snow, and for Gulmarg in Indian-administered Kashmir, one of the highest ski resorts in the world, that usually means thousands of tourists.

This year, the deep powder once taken for granted is gone. The slopes are brown and bare, a stark example of the impact of the extreme weather caused by the rapidly heating planet, experts say.

The lack of snow is not only hampering the ski industry but has a worrying impact on agriculture, the mainstay of Kashmir's economy. "Seeing this snowless Gulmarg, I feel like crying every day," said adventure tour operator Mubashir Khan, who has put wedding plans on hold with his business teetering near collapse.

"In the 20 years of my working here, this is the first time I see no snow in Gulmarg in January," said Majeed Bakshi, whose heliskiing service for high-spending tourists stands idle.

A lone helicopter waits for the few tourists who have still come, offering flights over higher peaks that have a dusting of snow.

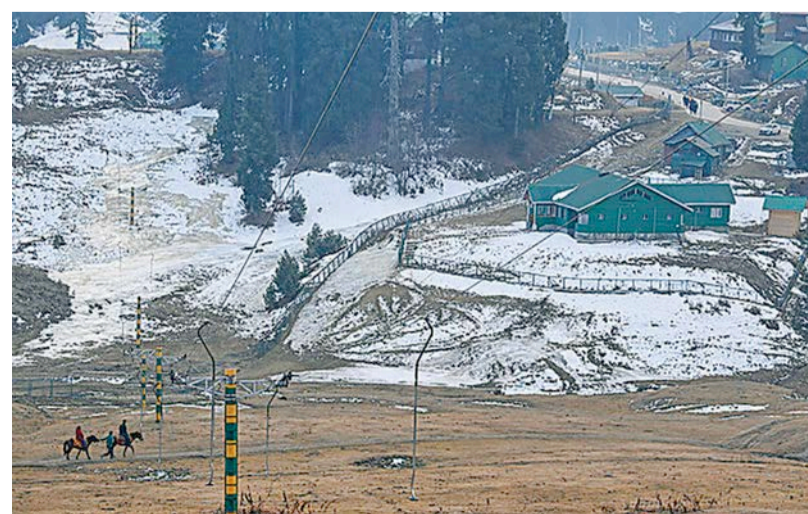
"Our guests are mainly skiers, and they have all cancelled their book-

ings," said hotel manager Hamid Masoodi. "Those who come despite no snow are also disappointed."

Ski lifts are closed, rental shops are shut and a newly constructed ice rink is a pool of dank water. "The current dry spell is an extreme weather event—which are predicted to become more intense and frequent in the

future," said climate scientist Shakil Romshoo, from Kashmir's Islamic University of Science and Technology.

For decades, an insurgency seeking independence or a merger with Pakistan—and military operations to crush that movement—has seen tens of thousands of civilians, soldiers and rebels killed in Kashmir.



In this photograph taken on January 17, a guide leads visitors during a horse ride past ski slopes usually covered in snow at this time of the year at a ski station in Gulmarg, some 55 km from Indian-administered Kashmir's capital Srinagar.

AFP/SSS

Nepal eyeing Super 6 at U-19 World Cup

Dev Khanal's side open their World Cup campaign against New Zealand at Buffalo Park, East London today.



Captains of participating teams of the 2024 U-19 Cricket World Cup pose for a group photo prior to the tournament in South Africa.

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, JAN 20

Nepal national U-19 cricket team is all set to open their World Cup campaign against New Zealand at the Buffalo Park, East London in a 'decisive' match on Sunday.

Coach Jagat Tamata's Nepal are looking to progress into the Super 6 stage but they face a strong challenge in their Group D, which also consists of full members Pakistan and Afghanistan.

"Our players are well-prepared and aiming to progress beyond the group stage," Tamata had said before heading to South Africa.

"We face New Zealand in our opening match. It will be a decisive match because if we find our rhythm right from the first match, we will have chances of qualifying for the next round."

The top three teams from each group will advance to the Super six stage, where the advancing 12 teams (three from each group) will be divided into two groups of six—meaning only one win could be enough to send Nepal to the next stage.

The young Rhinos are appearing at the World Cup for the first time in

eight years. In their previous appearance in the 2016 edition in Bangladesh, Nepal had defeated New Zealand by 32 runs and Ireland by eight wickets to qualify for the quarter-finals alongside India from Group B. Nepal also defeated New Zealand in the plate final in the 2006 World Cup.

U-19 CRICKET WORLD CUP	
GROUP A	GROUP B
Ireland	England
United States	South Africa
Bangladesh	West Indies
India	Scotland
GROUP C	GROUP D
Australia	Nepal
Namibia	New Zealand
Sri Lanka	Pakistan
Zimbabwe	Afghanistan
NEPAL'S FIXTURES	
Nepal vs Zealand Sunday, 13:45 NST	
Nepal vs Pakistan Wednesday, 13:45 NST	
Nepal vs Afghanistan Friday, 13:45 NST	
Top three teams from each group progress to Super 6 stage.	

Nepal had locked horns with the test playing nation Pakistan in the 2002 World Cup in Australia, where Nepal defeated Pakistan by 30 runs but could not progress from the group stage due to net run rate despite winning two games.

The two sides last met in the 2023 ACC U-19 Asia Cup in December last year in the United Arab Emirates. Nepal lost to Pakistan by seven wickets. Captain Dev Khanal's men also lost to Afghanistan (by 73 runs) and India (by ten wickets) to exit the group stage of the Asia Cup winless.

Nepal play Pakistan on Wednesday before wrapping up their group stage against the other South Asian team Afghanistan on Friday.

Skipper Khanal is hopeful they can avenge the Asia Cup loss against Afghanistan.

"We should have fought for victory against Afghanistan that day because Arjun Kumal had led the batting line-up scoring 91. Sadly, we lost."

"But we have the confidence that we can defeat a team like Afghanistan," Khanal added.

Nepal's performance at the U-19 World Cup has so far been satisfactory, except for the 2012 edition in Australia where they failed to win a single

match. This was the only time Nepal returned home from a U-19 World Cup winless.

Gulsan Jha will be the another key strength of Nepal U-19 team in South Africa.

Jha has already established himself as one of the key players in the senior cricket team, playing 24 one-day internationals and 14 T20Is. He has scored 740 runs and taken 21 wickets in ODIs. He was also part of the Nepal's senior team squad that retained their ODI status and qualified for the T20 World Cup.

Although Jha failed to make his presence felt at the Asia Cup—he took four wickets though—he has shown signs of rejuvenation in South Africa. Jha picked three wickets in both Nepal's warm-up victories against Scotland U-19 and Namibia U-19. He also took a wicket against the West Indies before rain washed out the warm-up game.

Tilak Bhandari, Aakash Chand and Kumal are the other breakout stars in the Nepal squad.

Bhandari and Chand also took three wickets each during the warm-up matches. Kumal has marshalled several knocks across warm-up play and Asia Cup.

Shah, Mayan inspire Madhesh to victory

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, JAN 20

Harishankar Shah and Mayan Yadav scored half-centuries as Madhesh Province defeated Karnali Province by 61 runs to stay in contention for top two spot at the Prime Minister Cup Men's National Cricket Tournament in Kirtipur on Saturday.

Madhesh's innings was by and large built in the 85-run opening partnership between Shah and Anil Sah, who was another top performer for Madhesh with 44 runs off 44 balls. Shah scored 50 runs off 61 balls and Mayan made 50 off 88 balls.

Their opening stand was broken by Karnali's stand-out bowler Dipendra Rawat, who took 4-39 that also included the wickets of Shah and Sah.

Rawat struck again removing Pawan Sarraf (11) and Niraj Yadav (0) before Rahul Mandal (10) and Rupesh Singh (3) were also sent back.

But Mayan led the battle putting on a 41-run stand with Abhishek Tiwari for the seventh wicket to guide Madhesh to 231-9 in the allotted 50 overs.

Tiwari made 34 runs off 37 balls. Both Mayan and Tiwari were dismissed by Anju Chanara (2-30).

In the run chase, Karnali were sent in field first. Opener Rabindra Shahi (1) and Himanshu Shahi (2) of the team departed cheaply, credit to early strike by Rajesh Yadav.

Rabindra's opening partner Bipin Shahi (31) and half-centurion Arjun Gharti (58 off 108 balls) steadied the ship with a 44-run stand for the third wicket.

After Bipin fell to Ranjit Kumar in the 13th over, Karnali lost their wickets at regular intervals, losing Nischal Rawal (4), Rawat (5), Prakash Jaishi (14), Unish Singh (0).

PM CUP MEN'S CRICKET

KIRTI PUR/TOSS: MADHESH, BAT FIRST.
Madhesh 231-9 (50/50 overs)
Harishankar Shah 50 (61),
Mayan Yadav 50 (88), Anil Sah 44 (44);
Dipendra Rawat 10-1-39-4
Karnali 170-10 (41.1/50 overs)
Arjun Gharti 58 (105), Dinesh Adhikari 33 (33);
Rajesh Yadav 6-0-27-3
Madhesh win by 61 runs.
Player of the match: Harishankar Shah

PLAYING SUNDAY

Police vs Army: Siddharthanagar @ 9:00 NST
Gandaki vs Koshi: Mulpani @ 9:15 NST

TABLE					
TEAM	P	W	L	PT	NRR
Sudurpaschim	3	3	0	6	2.292
Bagmati	5	3	2	6	0.356
Madhesh	5	3	2	6	-0.064
Police	2	2	0	4	2.364
Army	3	2	1	4	1.798
APF	3	2	1	4	1.545
Karnali	4	2	2	4	-0.475
Lumbini	3	1	2	2	-0.694
Gandaki	3	0	3	0	-1.561
Koshi	5	0	5	0	-3.596

A late fightback from Gharti and Dinesh Adhikari (33) gave Karnali some hopes of a successful chase, with the pair putting on a 61-run stand for the eighth wicket.

But Rajesh got rid of Adhikari in the 40th over and Tiwari dismissed Gharti next over to restrict Karnali to 170 all out.

The win helped Madhesh climb to third position in the standings, level on six points with leaders Sudurpaschim Province and second-placed Bagmati Province. But the rival Sudurpaschim have two games in hand.



Madhesh Province's Harishankar Shah and Anil Sah (left) react during their Prime Minister Cup Men's National Cricket Tournament match against Karnali Province on Saturday.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Try not to feel discouraged if your day gets off to a rocky start, dear Aries. This cosmic climate could lead to confusion and roadblocks, though your natural intellect will help you resolve problems as the hours pass.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Don't rely on others to create a sense of security, dear Taurus. Flighty behaviours may cause you to feel uncertain, making it important that you focus on your own agenda and how to move through life at a pace that is comfortable.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
Try not to put any pressure on your relationships, dearest Gemini, and be sure to avoid power struggles or conflict. Luckily, the vibe will feel more communal, though you should be mindful of reaching out to friends and family if you're in need of support.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
Don't expect mind-reading compassion from your loved ones this morning, dearest Cancer. Agitation may occur if you feel unseen or overlooked, though speaking out can help resolve underlying issues within yourself and your most treasured dynamics.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
Try not to fight against disorganisation or chaos this morning. Frustrations may brew if others are messy or can't play on a team, though demonstrating patience will go a long way in solidifying bonds. Philosophical conversations could put you in touch with new friends.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
Minor roadblocks could cause your confidence to waiver this morning, dear Virgo. When in doubt, take a breather to collect your thoughts, reestablishing productive structures without putting immense pressure on yourself or others. Luckily, you'll have a chance to shed heavier vibes.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
Try not to put too much pressure on your home life this morning, dear Libra. You should also be mindful to acknowledge the emotions of your family or housemates, even if they're uncomfortable or unpleasant. Sweeter vibes flow, helping you reclaim harmony within yourself.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
Try not to let awkward exchanges impact you too deeply this morning, dear Scorpio. Now may also be a good time to remember that words can hurt, reciting sentiments before conveying them if you start to feel spicy.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
Try not to place too much value on money this morning, dear Archer. Instead, try to find gratitude for the beauty and people who fill your life with brightness each day, even if you're still pursuing more. Blow off steam with friends.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
Try not to let your inner perfectionist take the lead this morning, dear Capricorn. Disorganisation, lacklustre teammates, and low energy levels could bring forth temporary setbacks, but stirring frustrations won't bring you closer to where you want to be.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
Watch your attitude and internal dialogue, and try not to act on impulse this morning, dear Aquarius. This cosmic climate could bring a restless and cagey energy to the table, and grounding can help you combat reckless decisions. Luckily, you'll feel more confident.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Avoid the temptation to zone out with your screens, dear Pisces, even if a lazy Sunday is what you crave. This could cause you to waste precious hours scrolling feeds when you should be taking time to nurture yourself and your familiar connections. *Astrology.com*

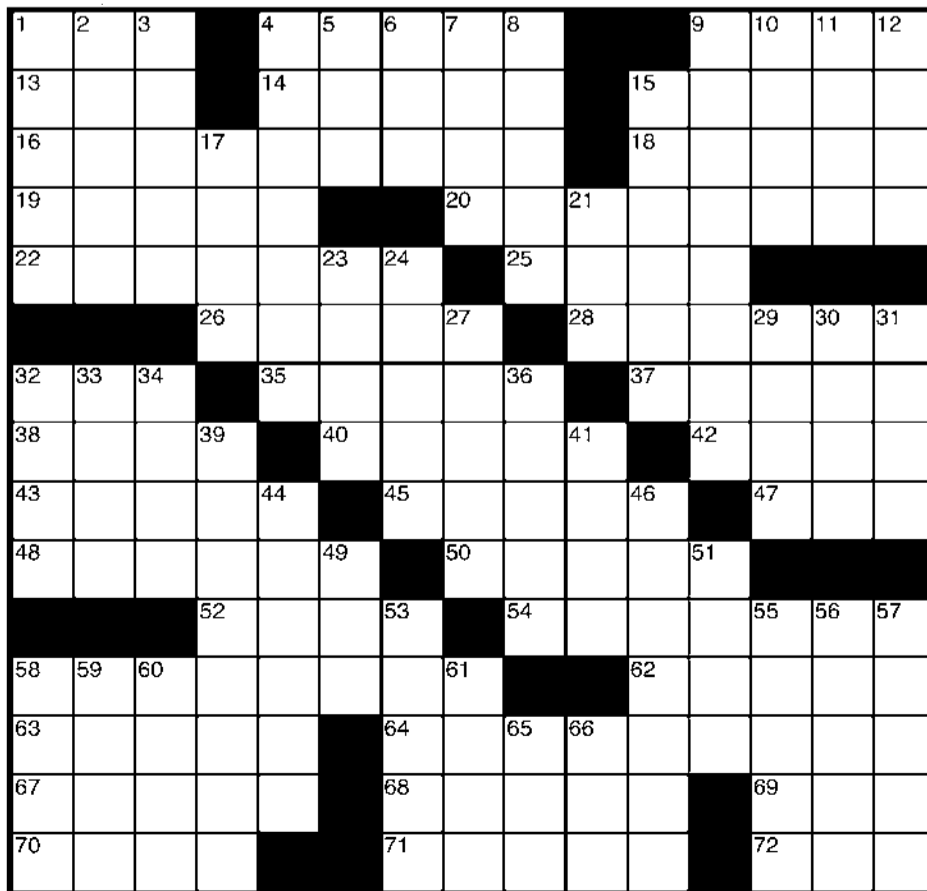
CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- Dessert favorite
 - Seismic event
 - Youngster
 - ER staffers
 - Encourages strongly
 - Fern part
 - Attacker
 - Not flexible
 - Pine
 - Determination
 - Chic
 - Magazine stand
 - rings
 - Used a parachute
 - Remote button
 - Space, poetically
 - Wrinkled
 - Toledo locale
 - Excellent
 - Chariot race locale
 - Brings in the hay
 - Taj —
 - Melanchoy
 - Liquefied
 - Jeans
 - for keeps
 - Ways
 - Bordered on
 - Seer's card
 - Chopin's instrument
 - Act up
- DOWN**
- Implores
 - Map feature
 - Term paper
 - Malaria medicine
 - Search engine find
 - Famous Khan
 - Superman, incognito
 - Fragrant compound
 - Foxier
 - Barra of baseball
 - Make socks
 - Whirlpool
 - Melee
 - Woody's son
 - Snatch
 - Warms a bench
 - Dull (hyph.)
 - India neighbor
 - Thailand
 - neighbor
 - The avenging Mrs. Peel

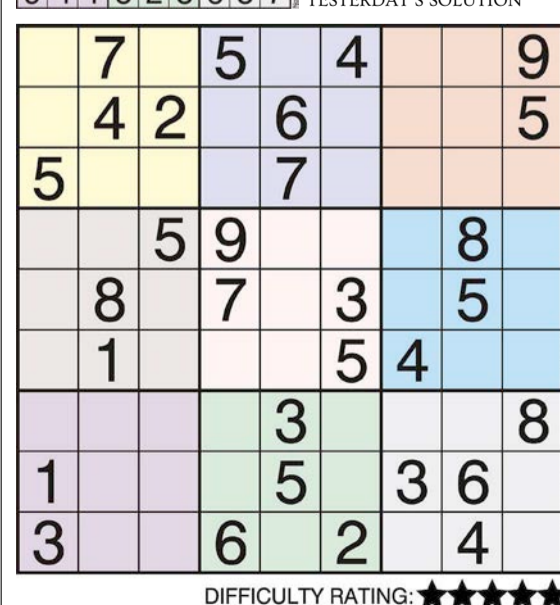
PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



- Did a salon job
- 1040 or W-2
- Roller coaster cry
- Dashboard item
- Shorten a skirt, maybe
- Bought rights to
- Utter deliriously
- Next year's alumnus
- Pup groups
- Tumult
- Persian monarch
- Entice
- Take the dais
- Cote dwellers
- Mountainous
- Hairy animals
- Kind of pickle
- Sate
- Desperate
- MNO on a phone
- Elegant accessory



SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

FICTION PARK

A daughter's wish for a Barbie doll

Despite their frequent communication on social media, Sumna was shocked to see Meena at the party as the latter didn't live in the country.

LB THAPA

A party is going on in full swing, and everyone seems to be busy and engaged. The music is played on a high crescendo, and children are enraptured by the music. They are dancing to the tune of every Nepali and Bollywood song. Young girls are taking photos from every possible angle. A few others are desperately looking for an ideal place to shoot a possible viral video to upload to their social media accounts.

I stood in a corner with my daughter, Aashi, who was busy eating her favourite ice cream. But I didn't know where my husband was. Possibly chatting with his friends.

In the meantime, I came across my college friend, Meena. Some 10 years ago, we studied together at college. Despite their frequent communication via social media, Sumna was taken aback to see Meena at the party because the latter didn't live in the country.

"Hi, Meena. What a pleasant surprise! When did you come from America?"

"I am sorry, Sumna, I could not inform you about my arrival in Nepal. Actually, I came alone to meet my mother. She is sick, and I have to take her to Kathmandu for treatment", said Meena with an apology.

"Where is your daughter, Aashi?" Meena asked. Aashi arrived shortly after Meena inquired about her.

"I feel bored, Mom. Why don't we go home now?" Asked Aashi eagerly.

"Wow! Your daughter has grown much taller than I imagined. I only saw you on Facebook, but today is the first time I've seen you," Meena said, hugging Aashi tightly. Then Meena opened her bag and handed Aashi a milky bar.

About that time, Sumna's husband arrived. "Did you and Aashi take dinner?" asked Dr Abhisekh.

"We are waiting for you. Where have you been?" asked Sumna.

"By the way, meet my husband, Dr Abhisekh." Sumna introduced her husband to Meena. Meena was freaked out when Sumna introduced Dr Abhisekh as her husband.

"She is Meena and lives in the US with her family. I used to talk about my college best friend. She is here now", said Sumna.

"Oh, yes. Sumna would always talk about you. I am glad to see you two friends together. Please carry on. I don't want to disturb you. I will be back after some time", said Dr Abhisekh, and he walked away.

"I don't understand anything, Sumna. Your husband is Akash. Where is Akash? Or did you get separated?" Meena charged a barrage of questions at Sumna.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Sumna's bright face suddenly turned melancholic. Seeing this, Meena took Sumna to a corner and sat on two chairs face-to-face.

"You were in love with Akash, and he loved you just as much. In fact, Akash was so attractive that many girls in college, including myself, admired him greatly. What caused your breakup? Please tell me everything, Sumna," Meena asked.

Sumna flashed back and began talking about her former husband, Akash.

After getting married, we settled in Pokhara. Akash wanted to take me to his hometown, Biratnagar, but his parents refused to accept our marriage. As you know, Akash belongs to a Brahmin family, and I am a Dalit. Akash tried his best to convince his parents but to no avail. They were adamant and not ready to accept our marriage. I even requested that he leave me and stay with his family, but he refused.

Akash had already finished his master's degree in business studies and intended to pursue a PhD in America. He finished all of his paperwork and presented it to the US Embassy. After a week, Akash received an email informing him that the US Embassy had contacted him for an interview. Akash awoke early in the morning and

began organising all of his documents. I made tea, and we both enjoyed it together. Meanwhile, our daughter Aashi awoke, sat in her father's lap, and implored him not to travel to Kathmandu.

His plane was supposed to land at 10 O'clock in the morning, but it was already 2 pm, and Akash had not reached home.

"Whenever you go to Kathmandu, you don't return for several days. I don't want you to go to Kathmandu once again", said Aashi annoyingly. Aashi eventually consented to let her father go to Kathmandu when Akash promised to bring her favourite Barbie doll.

Akash took a microbus from Pokhara bus park to Kathmandu. The following day, he had an interview at 3 pm at the US embassy. He called me after checking into a hotel in Sundhara. We talked over the phone for some time.

I prayed to God for his success, and God accepted my prayer: Akash got a study visa to the US. His happiness knew no bounds. He was excited and was going to buy a Barbie doll for Aashi.

I asked him to return home by taking a night bus, but Akash said that the journey by microbus from Pokhara to Kathmandu was so uncomfortable that his whole body was aching badly. He decided not to punish his body anymore and took a morning flight to Pokhara the next day. I did not oppose it.

Here in Pokhara, Aashi was extremely excited and had many questions, and I was tired of answering them. Finally, I gave in and told her that her dad would answer all her questions. Aashi agreed.

After some while, I spotted Aashi on the roof. I went to the terrace and implored her to come down, but she insisted on seeing the plane that would bring her father home. It took a lot of convincing, and she eventually consented.

Before boarding the plane, Akash called and told me he had already bought a lovely Barbie doll for his princess. That was the last time we spoke with each other.

His plane was supposed to land at 10 o'clock in the morning, but it was already

2 pm, and Akash had not reached home. Aashi was desperate to see her Barbie doll. I made several calls, but his mobile was still switched off. Sumna couldn't go further as her throat choked, and tears began rolling down her cheeks.

"After then, what happened, Sumna?" asked Meena anxiously.

After a little pause, Sumna said, "The ill-fated plane that Akash boarded crashed near the Pokhara Regional Airport."

"Oh, my god," Meena whispered in complete shock.

Even after two days of diligent searching, Akash's body could not be located. However, his severely damaged brown suitcase was discovered. When the suitcase was opened, there was nothing inside but the Barbie doll. I had to lie to my daughter, telling her that her father had to go to America and would return shortly to take us. To persuade Aashi, I gave her the same Barbie doll that was discovered in Akash's luggage.

No one came to assist me during such a difficult time. My existence revolved around Akash, and his death devastated my world to bits. I had a terrible time. I didn't get a job and didn't have enough money to start a business. I am living only because of my daughter; otherwise, I would have died long ago.

To add to my misery, Akash's parents declared me an unfortunate woman. They even accused me of being the reason for their son's death. I was absolutely devastated, broken, and fell into depression. I realised I was dying slowly, but I put up no resistance. I rather welcomed death. Then, one day, I consumed several sleeping pills and tried to have an eternal sleep.

When my eyes opened, I found myself on a hospital bed. It was a coincidence that the doctor who was treating me was an old friend of mine. Later, we grew close, and he confessed that he had an affection for me back then. But I was completely unaware of this.

Abhisekh was unmarried. He told me he was waiting for a girl like me, but never found one. Later, when he approached me, I explained my condition to him, and he agreed to accept Aashi as his own daughter.

Dr Abhisekh arrived and broke the tension between them. Meena wiped her tears with her handkerchief, smiled at him, and promised to visit them soon. Abhisekh reciprocated with a smile on his face.

He lifted Aashi in his arms and said, "Sumna, let's go have dinner."



Thapa is a Pokhara-based freelance writer.

First-of-its-kind dog show in Nepal

The Kennel Club of Nepal organised 'All Breed Championship Dog Show 2024' at Satdobato Swimming Pool on Saturday.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ALINA BASKOTA

Alina Baskota with her dog Michael, a Neapolitan Mastiff breed, at the show.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU

The Kennel Club of Nepal, affiliated with the World Kennel Union, organised the event 'All Breed Championship Dog Show 2024' on Saturday at Satdobato Swimming Pool in Lalitpur.

According to Prabin Chandra Bajracharya, president of the Kennel Club of Nepal, "This is the first dog championship show happening in Nepal with all international protocols met." Bajracharya has been serving as a canine professional for the past twenty-six years and, since 2005, has been organising such dog shows all over Nepal.

Ujjwal Koju, a member of the Kennel Club of Nepal, said there were around two hundred dogs participating in the show. "Dogs were judged on the basis of their health, breed and how obedient they are," said Koju. The owners brought their dogs inside the ring and made them walk with a leash tied to them.

The judges then observed the activities of the dogs and decided whether to reward the dogs or not. As dogs circled the perimeter of the rings, the audience clapped to encourage them further.

Two judges checked which dogs met all the criteria. One of them, Dr VS Ravi from Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, India, who is the founder member and president of Anaimalai's Kennel Club, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu and also a member of Native Dog Breeds Speciality Club, Coimbatore. His career began 25 years ago when he exhibited his boxers at the Kodaikanal Dog Show in 1994. "It was my passion for animals that led me to complete my bachelor of science in zoology from Madras University," he said. He fosters and displays dogs under the name 'Topslip Kennels'.

The other judge, D Vinod Kumar from Bangalore, India, started participating in dog shows at the early age of 17, along with his brother. He fosters and displays dogs under the

name of 'Sanland Kennels'. Currently, he is the secretary of the Bangalore Canine Association.

Residing in Ekantakuna, Nareesh BK and Alina Baskota, who jointly own a unique breed of dog named Neapolitan Mastiff, expressed their happiness at being a part of the show. "Our Michael won the best-of-breed dog award. We are truly happy," they shared. They also expressed the vitality of such shows, which bring together many dog owners who share similar interests.

There were two rings, and five groups were in each of the rings. Two judges looked at their respective rings. In Ring 1, breeds such as German Shepherd (Long Haired), Neapolitan Mastiff, Rottweiler, Siberian Husky, St Bernard, Tibetan Mastiff, Labrador and more participated. Likewise, in Ring 2, breeds such as French Bulldog, Chow Chow, Pomeranian, Japanese Spitz, English Bulldog, Beagle, Labrador, American Cocker Spaniel, Golden Retriever, Dachshund and others were featured.

The dogs who won an award in their particular category were seen walking around with a medal hanging around their neck, and their owners were walking alongside them, proudly carrying a token of love. There were also stalls around the complex displaying dog foods and other dog accessories.

Another proud dog owner, Raj Shrestha, residing in Lazimpat, brought two breeds of dogs, and both were awarded the 'Best-of-breed' award. "Coming from such a distance proved worthwhile as my buddies got an award," he expressed. Out of happiness, he was feeding his two dogs, one of the boxer breed and the other Chihuahua, much-deserved tasty treats.

"We are pretty happy with the turnout, and we wish to do more such shows in the coming days," said Koju.

Ruth Wilson stirs up trauma in 'The Woman in the Wall'

In the series, Lorna awakens to discover a dead body in her home and has no idea why.

ALICIA RANCILIO

In her latest role in Showtime's "The Woman in the Wall," Ruth Wilson plays Lorna, a woman prone to sleepwalking and night terrors.

Waking up to the repercussions of her "night behavior" can be a nightmare in itself. In the first episode, Lorna awakens to discover a dead body in her home and has no idea why.

Lorna's sleep issues are a manifestation of trauma she experienced as a pregnant teen forced to live in a church-run facility—sometimes called Catholic laundries or Magdalene laundries for unmarried and pregnant women and girls and others deemed to be trouble. In Lorna's case, she was forced to work throughout her pregnancy, and her baby was taken immediately after birth.

Lorna's life intersects with a detective named Colman (played by Daryl McCormack), who is investigating the murder of a local priest. Initially leery of one another, Lorna and Colman find they each have a history with these institutions.

"The Woman in the Wall" premieres Saturday on Paramount+ before its broadcast debut on Showtime on January 21.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Wilson spoke about learning of these Magdalene laundries, her complex thoughts on religion and how Sinéad O'Connor left her mark on the project. Answers have been edited for clarity and brevity.

How familiar were you with the Magdalene laundries prior to taking this role?

There's been a few dramas like 'Phylomena' with Judi Dench. Then there was 'The Magdalene Sisters,' which was made a number of years ago by Peter Mullan. There hasn't been a great deal of information about it or dramatisation stories. The last laundry closed in 1996, so, actually, it's incredibly recent history. I think culturally, Ireland is still in the process of reconciling and acknowledging that this happened. When the pilot script came through, I thought, "This is a really important story that needs to get out there. We need to keep making dramas or stories about this subject matter."

Your mother has been quoted as saying you've always had to have something to fight for and I'm wondering if this project is an example of that.

I've always had a sort of thing about injustice. Even as a little kid, if something felt wrong or unjust to me, I would stand up and say something about it or get angry. I think that in my work, I have a responsibility. I'm lucky enough to have a platform to put work out there which might educate people or change people's minds about things or challenge people, as well as move them or entertain them. I think if I've got that responsibility, I should take it seriously and use it as I can.

Before her death, Sinéad O'Connor granted permission for one of her songs, called 'The Magdalene Song,' to be used in the final episode of the series. She also was sent to a Magdalene laundry as a teen.

She was sent to a laundry or an equivalent of a laundry. She was a bit of a naughty kid. Girls were put into these places for tiny little misdemeanors or for just being sort of outspoken or louder than they should be as girls. She spoke about it a lot. David Holmes, the composer of all the music on the show, had been working with Sinéad producing her last album. He knew about (the song) and asked Sinéad and she gave her blessing for us to put it on the end of the show. When he played it to me, I got goosebumps.

Did this series make you look at religion differently since these laundries were Catholic institutions?

I'm a Catholic. I grew up a Catholic. I don't practice anymore, but I'm fascinated by it and the impact on me. I find going to church quite hard these days. I still go with my dad. My dad goes every week and I understand why he likes it; I understand the ritual and the community. There's a lot to be said for having a community like that. Any religion or any sort of institution can be corrupted. It's run by people and people aren't always clear-minded. As long as things are run by humans, they've always got the potential to be corrupted.

-Associated Press