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## TODAY

### NATIONAL

Speaker Dev Raj Ghimire and National Assembly chair Ganesh Prasad Timilsina have reminded President Ramchandra Paudel to appoint Padma Prasad Pandey general secretary of federal parliament. **Pg 2**

Studies show that nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, commonly used to treat pain and inflammation, can increase the risk of heart attack. Doctors say the risk is greater in those with a heart disease. **Pg 2**

### INTERVIEW

Each province has unique social realities, problems and prospects. The people, officials and police personnel deployed there can better understand ground realities, says *Jaya Mukunda Khanal*. **Pg 4**



### MONEY

India has imposed a ban on onion exports until March 31. Traders say the onion price in Nepal will become normal soon, as New Delhi may lift the ban in view of a sharp fall in prices in the Indian market. **Pg 5**

### SPORTS



Nepal made a disastrous start to their U-19 Cricket World Cup campaign as they suffered a 64-run defeat against New Zealand in their opening Group D match in South Africa on Sunday. **Pg 7**



Police seize placards from members of Nepal Students Union at Maitighar in Kathmandu on Sunday. The students were demonstrating against the district administration's November order to declare the Maitighar-Baneshwar stretch a no-go area for protesters.

POST PHOTO: SANJOG MANANDHAR

## Special Court convicts former lawmaker Ichchha Tamang of money laundering

A fraud case against the cooperative promoter is sub judice at District Court, Kathmandu.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, JAN 21

The Special Court on Sunday convicted former lawmaker and promoter of Civil Savings and Credit Cooperative Limited Ichchha Raj Tamang of money laundering.

In September 2022, the Department

of Money Laundering Investigation filed a case at the Special Court against six people including Tamang, his wife Srijana Shakya, two daughters, and two of his relatives (then chairperson of Cooperative, Keshav Lal Shrestha, and his wife Bina).

A joint bench of Special Court Chairman Tek Narayan Kunwar and

members Tej Narayan Singh Rai and Murari Babu Shrestha held three of the six guilty of money laundering.

"The court convicted Tamang, his wife Srijana Shakya and Keshav Lal Shrestha for money laundering," said Special Court spokesperson Dhan Bahadur Karki.

>> Continued on page 2

## Speaker alerts House panels against work duplication

Multiple committees probing the same issue and releasing clashing directives has become a pattern.

BINOD GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU, JAN 21

Duplication of work among parliamentary committees is common in Nepal. Two or even more such committees investigating a single incident and passing contradictory directives have been reported on multiple occasions.

Currently, four different House panels are probing the recent buyout of Ncell, a multinational telecom service provider. This has not just affected effective investigation of the issue, but also increased the likelihood of mutually conflicting directives coming from the committees. Amid the fear, Speaker Dev Raj Ghimire asked the chairpersons of the committees under the House of Representatives to ensure there is no such duplication in the days ahead.

During a meeting with the chairpersons of parliamentary committees on Sunday, Ghimire said, "You coordinate among yourselves and decide which committee oversees what issues. If you fail, I can intervene, but only at your request." He also said it would be a waste of time and money for multiple committees to investigate a single issue.

The House committees, also called mini-parliaments, have authority to keep the government agencies under surveillance. Parliamentary Regulations specify which committee can scrutinise what government agencies. However, there are also cross-cutting issues that multiple House com-

mittees can look into.

The chairpersons of the different House committees say they also are equally worried about the duplication of work among them. Ram Hari Khatiwada, chair of the State Affairs and Good Governance Committee, said he had raised the issue about the possibility of work duplication among committees. "Taking the case of Ncell as reference, I had said we need to find a way to address the overlapping of tasks," he said.

Committee chairpersons say they are as worried about their panels taking up same tasks.

On December 1, Axiata announced that it had entered into an unconditional sale and purchase agreement (SPA) with Spectrlite UK Limited to sell Reynolds Holding Limited, which owns approximately 80 percent equity stake in the Nepal-based Ncell Axiata Limited.

Spectrlite UK, registered in the United Kingdom in September this year, is under the ownership of Satish Lal Acharya, a man of Nepali origin currently based in Singapore. Sunivera Capital Venture, owned by his wife Bhavana Singh Shrestha, has another 20 percent stake in Ncell.

>> Continued on page 2

## A century after death, Lenin seems to be afterthought in modern Russia

Founder of Soviet Union died on January 21, 1924, at age 53, severely weakened by three strokes. A poet wrote: 'Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live.'

JIM HEINTZ/ASSOCIATED PRESS  
ESTONIA, JAN 21

Not long after the 1924 death of the founder of the Soviet Union, a popular poet soothed and thrilled the grieving country with these words: "Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live."

A century later, the once-omnipresent image of Vladimir Lenin is largely an afterthought in modern Russia, despite those famous lines by revolutionary writer Vladimir Mayakovsky.

The Red Square mausoleum where his embalmed corpse lies in an open sarcophagus is no longer a near-mandatory pilgrimage but a site of macabre kitsch, open only 15 hours a week. It draws far fewer visitors than the Moscow Zoo.

The goateed face that once seemed unavoidable still stares out from statues, but many of those have been the targets of pranksters and vandals. The one at St Petersburg's Finland Station commemorating his return from exile was hit by a bomb that left a huge hole in his posterior. Many streets and localities that bore his name have been rechristened.

The ideology that Lenin championed and spread over a vast territory is something of a sideshow in modern Russia. The Communist Party, although the largest opposition grouping in parliament, holds only 16 percent of the seats, overwhelmed by President Vladimir Putin's political power-base, United Russia.

Lenin "turned out to be completely superfluous and unnecessary in modern Russia," historian Konstantin



Statue of Vladimir Lenin, painted in the colours of Ukraine's flag, in Velyka Novosilka, in 2015.

Morozov of the Russian Academy of Sciences told the AP. Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov talks as if Lenin still was in charge: "100 years since the day his big and kind heart stopped, the second century of Lenin's immortality begins," he said.

Putin himself appears inclined to keep Lenin at arm's length, even aiming some darts at him.

In a speech three days before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Putin dismissed its sovereign status as an illegitimate holdover from Lenin's era, when it was a separate republic within the Soviet Union. "As a result of Bolshevik policy, Soviet Ukraine arose, which even today can with good reason be called 'Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's Ukraine.' He is the author and the architect," Putin said.

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## NATIONAL

## DISTRICT DIGEST

Arrest warrants against six including ANNISU-R chair



Pancha Singh

**BIRENDRANAGAR:** The Surkhet district court has issued arrest warrants against six persons including Pancha Singh, chair of the All Nepal National Independent Students' Union (Revolutionary), the student wing of the ruling CPN (Maoist Centre). Police Inspector Krishna Bahadur Khadka, who is also acting spokesman for the Surkhet District Police Office, said the court issued the warrants in a murder case on Friday. Raj Bahadur Malla, 17, of Kalikot was murdered in Surkhet on March 9, 2009. Nawaraj, the uncle of the deceased, had filed a complaint against Padam Bahadur Rawat alias Tiger for the murder. Raj Bahadur's father lodged a supplementary complaint on July 19, 2022. Then, the court issued arrest warrants against Singh, Rawat, Bal Krishna Singh alias Gurans, Tanka Bahadur Singh, Bir Bahadur Malla alias Subhash and Ali Karki alias Ashok.

## Man kills pregnant wife

**NAWALPARASI EAST:** A 33-year-old man murdered his wife at Birukharka in ward 6 of Hupsekot Rural Municipality on Saturday night. According to the District Police Office in Nawalparasi East, Sher Bahadur Lamka Magar murdered his 34-year-old wife Chanisara with a hoe and a sickle. The victim, who was eight months pregnant, died on the spot. An investigation is underway after taking the suspect into custody, said DSP Bed Bahadur Paudel.

## Tiger found dead in Kailali

**DHANGADHI:** A tiger was found dead in a community forest Janaki Rural Municipality-9 in Kailali on Sunday. According to the District Police Office, the Royal Bengal tiger was found dead inside the Amarawati Community Forest. The big cat was entangled in barbed wires used in fencing the forest area, said police.

## Dirt track opening work completed in Kanchanpur section of Mahakali Corridor

The corridor road aims to connect settlements along the Mahakali river from Kanchanpur to Darchula districts.

□ BHAWANI BHATTA  
KANCHANPUR, JAN 21

An 11-km dirt track from Bramhadev in ward 9 of Bhimdatta Municipality to the Dadeldhura border in Kanchanpur district has been opened to connect Kanchanpur with Dadeldhura through the Mahakali Corridor.

According to the Mahakali Corridor Road Project, the construction of the 11-km track was completed last month, but its opening was delayed due to a shortage of budget and failure to clear trees from the project site.

The road project had previously opened a 27-km dirt track from the Kanchanpur-Dadeldhura border to Jogbudha in Dadeldhura.

"The track opening in Kanchanpur has been delayed mostly because of delays in felling trees. We received permission to cut down trees 20 months after the signing of the project agreement," said Laxman Joshi, chief of the Mahakali Corridor Road Project.

A Cabinet decision on February 27, 2023, permitted the felling of trees for the project. However, the Division Forest Office withheld permission due to the failure of several ministries including the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport to deposit funds in the Forest Development Fund under the Ministry of Forests and Environment.

"Another hurdle the project is facing is the limited time frame allowed by the division forest offices to fell trees," Joshi said. "The division forest offices have given the project three months to cut down trees, but thousands of trees cannot be cleared within such a short period."

The Mahakali Corridor Road Project is a mega infrastructural and development project around 413 km long that aims to connect settlements along the Mahakali River from Kanchanpur in the south to Darchula in the north.

According to Joshi, the road project has been working to open dirt tracks and upgrade the already opened one in a 334-km section while the Nepal Army is working to open a track from Tusarpani to Tinkar in Darchula district. Around 92 km of dirt track—31



POST PHOTO: BHAWANI BHATTA

A dirt track in Chare on the northern part of Bramhadev pictured recently.

km in Dadeldhura, 34 km in Baitadi and 27 km in Darchula—is yet to be opened.

Road upgrade and blacktopping works are underway in the 37 km road in Dadeldhura and Darchula by dividing the road section into six different packages. The road project plans to complete the upgrade work along a 5 km section in the Sandani area of Dadeldhura district in the current fiscal year of 2023-24. Similarly, blacktopping work is ongoing along a 12-km section in Mahakali Municipality in Darchula and a 20-km stretch from Khalanga to Tusarpani in three different packages.

"The road project is committed to expediting the work," Joshi said. "However, any delay by the govern-

## The Mahakali Corridor Road Project started in 2008-2009 as Darchula-Tinkar road project.

ment in releasing additional budget can also hamper the project."

According to him, the government has allocated merely Rs296.5 million budget for the project in the current fiscal year. "So the project has demanded at least Rs250 million additional budget. The construction work along the corridor will be halted if the additional budget is not released,"

said Joshi.

The road project said it had asked the Department of Roads to ensure Rs1.18 billion for the project. "The road upgrade work will also be initiated in other sections once the department assures the budget," Joshi said. "The road project aims to complete the track-opening work along the corridor by the end of the upcoming fiscal year of 2024-24. Currently, track-opening and upgrade work are underway in several sections simultaneously."

The Mahakali Corridor Road Project started in the fiscal year of 2008-2009 as Darchula-Tinkar road project. The project is being executed as the Mahakali Corridor Road Project after it was renamed in the fiscal year 2020-21.

## Multiple parliamentary probes on the same issue waste of resources: Speaker



PHOTO: COURTESY OF PARLIAMENT SECRETARIAT

Speaker Dev Raj Ghimire (right) in a meeting with chairs of parliamentary committees.

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The State Affairs Committee took up the issue first. Then joined the Public Accounts Committee. The Finance Committee became the third panel to jump in followed by the Education, Health and the Information Technology Committee.

The Regulations allow two or more House committees to hold joint meetings and conduct joint investigation in cases of common concern. Though there had been such practice in the past, of late such joint meetings have not been held.

## In the past, two or more parliamentary committees have issued conflicting directives.

Shekhar Adhikari, a press advisor to Ghimire, said the Speaker emphasised the idea of each committee focussing on a single issue rather than holding joint meetings. "The Speaker wants to see the House committees working effectively. Two or more committees dealing with one issue will only complicate things," he said.

On several instances in the past, two or more House panels have intervened in the same case of public concern. The conclusions of their studies are not uniform and often contradictory.

In early 2017, there was a major dispute over whether Ncell should get a licence to start 4G internet. The Public

Accounts Committee had directed the Ministry of Information and Communications and the Nepal Telecommunications Authority not to allow the telecom company to introduce 4G and other services until it pays the capital gains tax (CGT).

The Development Committee and the Finance Committee of the House too intervened in the matter. While the Finance Committee didn't have a clear position on the issue, the Development Committee cleared the way for the licence, contrary to the directives from the Public Accounts Committee.

A meeting of the Development Committee on April 16, 2017 had directed the government not to bar Ncell from rolling out 4G, stating that it is against the right of consumers to get to use the new technology.

Based on this directive, Nepal Telecommunications Authority cleared the way for Ncell to launch the new internet service. As the telecom authority's decision to allow Ncell to roll out the service was based on a House committee's directives, other committees and agencies couldn't stop it.

Experts on parliamentary affairs say it is a responsibility as well as the prerogative of the Speaker to ensure that the House committees function effectively. "Duplication of work among the House committees has been a problem. If the Speaker wants, he can resolve it," Som Bahadur Thapa, a former secretary at the Parliament Secretariat, told the Post. "Ghimire has taken the right initiative. Let's see whether it works."

## Don't delay Pandey appointment: Speaker and upper house chair ask President Paudel

□ POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, JAN 21

Speaker Dev Raj Ghimire and National Assembly Chairman Ganesh Prasad Timilsina have reminded President Ramchandra Paudel to appoint Padma Prasad Pandey as general secretary of the federal Parliament.

The Speaker and the chair sent a reminder letter to the President saying that the delay in appointment has affected the functioning of the federal legislature. Pandey has been leading the administration of the federal parliament for over a month as the acting chief.

Shekhar Adhikari, press advisor to Speaker Ghimire, confirmed that the letter was sent to the President on Wednesday.

"We request you to make the appointment to keep the functioning of the Parliament smooth and orderly," the Speaker and the upper house chair said in the letter to the President.

The Parliament and President's Office are at odds over the appointment.

Bharat Raj Gautam, the outgoing general secretary at the secretariat, submitted his resignation to President Paudel on December 10. The next day, Speaker Ghimire, in consultation with Ganesh Prasad Timilsina, chair of the National Assembly, recommended Pandey as his replacement.

However, the President didn't appoint Pandey saying that his nomination didn't follow the due process. His aides said that Pandey was recommended for the position before Gautam's resignation was even approved.

Paudel accepted Gautam's resignation on December 13, two days after Pandey was recommended for the position. His refusal to appoint the general secretary even led to a public dispute between the two state bodies.

However, after a month-long hiatus, the two sides are coming together to resolve the matter.

Following a refusal from the President to appoint Pandey, the Speaker on December 13 assigned him the duty of acting general secretary arguing the lack of administrative leadership had hampered the functioning of the Parliament Secretariat.

## Does a common painkiller increase the risk of heart attack?

Doctors warn against taking nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs without a prescription.

□ POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, JAN 21

Last week, a 60-year-old man visited the outpatient department of the National Cardiac Centre, for a health checkup. He told the doctor that he had been regularly taking aspirin and statins for around a decade due to a blockage in the left coronary artery and had taken Indomethacin, a painkiller to relieve the back pain.

"Initial assessments, including electrocardiogram and echocardiogram indicated normal findings," said Dr Om Murti Anil, an interventional cardiologist, who attended the patient. "However, a significantly elevated level of high-sensitivity Cardiac Troponin indicated a heart attack."

This was a common refrain among many patients, who use nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs to relieve pain but these increase the risk of stroke and heart attack. Experts say nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or common painkillers change levels of substances in the blood that make clots more likely. And the blood clot can block a narrow artery in the heart, which triggers a heart attack.

Anil said that the patient underwent an immediate coronary angiogram, which revealed a 95 percent blockage in the right coronary artery.

"We placed a stent for normal blood circulation," said Anil. "We are familiar with these types of incidents, as such patients come to our hospital for treatment."

Studies show that nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, commonly used to treat pain and inflammation can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Doctors say the risk is greater in those who already have a heart disease.

In the aforementioned case, the patient had used the painkiller (Indomethacin) as advised by his doctor.

"Painkillers of several brands and companies are available in the market, which can be purchased over the counter," said Anil. "Patients should not take any without the prescription of doctors. If one is a heart patient or is at risk of heart ailments, he/she should tell their physician about their health conditions."

Cardiologists say the risk of experiencing a heart attack is heightened

## Ex-lawmaker, wife convicted of money laundering

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"The court acquitted Tamang's two daughters while Bina Shrestha was made a defendant only for the confiscation of property and the bench was silent on her."

He said the court would announce the penalty to be imposed on the convicted people after a hearing scheduled for February 4. The court will also decide Bina Shrestha's case the same day.

The court determines the penalty in cases where the convicted persons are subject to jail terms of over three years.

## Ichchha Raj Tamang also faces a fraud case at the District Court.

The anti-money laundering department had sought Rs3.32 billion in claims from Tamang for money laundering and confiscation of the plots of lands and shares in several companies stating that the source of his income could not be established.

Tamang also faces a fraud case at the District Court, Kathmandu as he has been accused of misappropriating billions of rupees of general public's money from Civil Cooperatives that he ran.

In December 2021, the District Attorney Office, Kathmandu had registered a fraud case at the District Court, Kathmandu against 42 persons including Tamang with a claim of Rs5.59 billion.

Over 1,500 people had lodged complaints against Tamang stating that they had fallen victim to fraudulent activities of Tamang and his associates at the cooperative.



PHOTO: ICHCHHA RAJ TAMANG'S KACCOUNT



An elderly couple displaced by the November 3 earthquake in Sanibheri of Rukum West pictured cooking meal outside their tin hut, last week.

POST PHOTO: MAHESH KC



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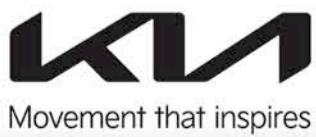


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OPINION



OUR VIEW

Let people protest

Trying to maintain public order by banning peaceful demonstrations is a fool's errand.

On November 20, citing possible clashes between two competing groups of protestors, the District Administration Office in Kathmandu imposed a month-long prohibitory order, barring protests in the Maitighar area, plus the vicinity of the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of the President. The DAO Lalitpur went a step farther, as it declared all forms of protests in the area around the UN House and the Ministers' Quarters in Pulchowk illegal for six whole-months. When the deadline of prohibitory order in Kathmandu was ending on December 21, the DAO inexplicably extended the ban by two months. Kathmandu DAO, while declaring the protest-ban, designated Santivatika in Ratnapark as an alternative protest site. But then the authorities started intervening in peaceful protests even there. Whatever gloss the government puts on it, banning protests at a place that has come to capture the spirit of peaceful resistance in the country cannot be justified. If there was credible information on impending violence at Maitighar, as seems to have been the case back in November, perhaps protests there could have been banned for a day or two. Yet even in that case, a ban on peaceful protests should have been the last resort. This, in turn, suggests an ulterior motive.

Peaceful protests are the bedrock of democracy. They allow people who are aggrieved by the state for various reasons to air their grievances. Shutting down this avenue will make more violent expressions of discontent inevitable. Just like its immediate predecessors, the Pushpa Kamal Dahal government also appears to be missing the public touch. In his 13 months in office, Dahal, by his own admission, could not deliver much. Despite repeatedly promising not to do so, he continues to spend much of his time cutting ribbons. His government cannot give business to the national parliament. Corruption is deepening its roots in state machinery. Yet when the people want to protest against these irregularities, the state appears intent on stifling their voice. The DAO's argument that Maitighar is a sensitive place is also dubious, as hundreds upon hundreds of protests have taken place there over the years, with only rare cases of violence. Moreover, if public protests are to take place away from the eyes of the intended targets, they become meaningless.

But perhaps that is the intent. The representatives of the government, for various reasons, cannot solve the problems of the public, and so they also don't want to be reminded of the inconvenient truth. If the protestors are uprooted to a less visible place, and away from the regular commute routes of the VVIPs, they can be ignored. This is a typical bourgeois mindset, as the communists would put it. In Dahal's case, a radical revolutionary who was once at home fighting in the darkest jungle for people's rights has, it seems, himself turned into an urban bourgeois he once so loathed. But Dahal and co. are fooling themselves if they think blocking out protestors makes them safe. That bubble of safety will one day burst.

In Ayodhya, the fall of Indian secularism

Narendra Modi's project of desecularising India has reached a point of no return.

DINESH KAFLE



Seventy-five years after the idols of Lord Ram appeared out of nowhere in the sanctorium of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, and 32 years after the mosque was razed to the ground by a mob of Hindutva apologists, a grand consecration ceremony is being organised on Monday, January 22, to mark a so-called homecoming of the lord of the Treta Yuga. Thousands of invitations have been sent to the mighty and famous of cricket, cinema, business, and politics to attend the ceremony, hundreds of private jets have been booked by the wealthy and powerful to reach Ayodhya, and shops in Ayodhya and various cities of the country have run out of gold-plated idols of Lord Ram. And there is just one person hogging the limelight more than Lord Ram himself, and that is Narendra Damodardas Modi, the Prime Minister of the secular democratic republic of India.

As Prime Minister Modi presides over the consecration ceremony, India will shed the garb of secularism once and for all, finally fulfilling the 99-year-old dream of KB Hedgewar, the physician from Nagpur who established the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in 1925 with the aim of, among other things, consolidating Indian Hindus under the political umbrella of Hindutva. One will have to wait until Modi secures enough parliamentary seats to change the constitution to name the country a *Hindu Rashtra*, which doesn't seem to be too distant a dream anymore anyway. But the project of unifying people in line with the "idea of fascism"—as envisioned by the Sangh co-founder BS Moonje in 1927—is all but complete.

One must acknowledge Modi's prowess to organise the gargantuan political machinery of the Sangh Parivar and manipulate millions of Indians towards the desecularisation of India. What until 10 years ago sounded like a pipe-dream of a small minority of radical-



ised Hindutva organisers today stands on the verge of turning into reality, with Modi reshaping the very foundations of India. Looking back, even Modi must be surprised by how far he has come since he took the helm in 2014—he had set out to dislodge Sonia and Rahul Gandhi of the Indian National Congress from national politics, but he ended up banishing Mahatma Gandhi from the Indian public discourse today.

Not that the Mahatma was ever a venerated figure for the Sangh Parivar—after all, a member of the Sangh, Nathuram Godse, had killed the father of the nation in 1948. But Godse's killing of Gandhi was a corporeal crime at best, for the Gandhian ideas would continue to thrive in post-Independence India as the nation, having suffered from a deadly partition, batted for the unity of all religious communities. Gandhi's vision of interfaith harmony found space in the Indian constitution written by none other than Gandhi's staunch critic, BR Ambedkar, just as Nehruvian secularism formed the bedrock of the newly independent India. The idea of India—an amalgamation of the secular patriotism of Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar—is all

but dead as Modi's Hindutva nationalism rules the mood of the nation today.

The desecularisation of India has moved so far ahead that there seems to be no point trying to stop it anymore. If there is one community that has internalised it best, it is the Muslim minority. If anyone has any doubt about how the Muslims would react to the Ram Mandir consecration ceremony or the final leg of the desecularisation of the nation, they will be indifferent to it, if not terrified. (Although the Sangh Parivar can be trusted to come up with ever more imaginative ways to tear the last remnants of secularism, which we will come to shortly.)

But if there is one community that is more enraged by the hastily organised consecration in an unfinished temple, with Modi as the *jajman*, it is the Hindus. These Hindus are of two kinds: The secular Hindus who see the consecration as a politico-religious version of Pulwama, which will garner a landslide victory for Modi in the parliamentary elections expected to be held in the next few months; and the devout Hindu who loathe the misuse of their faith to bolster Modi's image as the *Hindu hriday samrat*. The exception taken by the four Shankaracharyas, the

most revered spiritual gurus of Hinduism, for consecrating an incomplete temple and politicising the consecration, shows how it is the Hindus whose sentiments have been hurt in Lord Ram's name. But we won't get to hear these differing voices, as much of the Indian media today is more Hindu than the devoutest of Hindus.

As for other minorities, they have been pushed to the corner enough for them to remain silent. The harassment of three Muslim teenagers from Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, tells the larger story of the cornering of Muslims through "bulldozer justice" in several Indian states ruled by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party. In July last year, a video claiming that boys spat on the procession of Hindu devotees during the ride of Baba Mahakal in the city on the second Monday of Shrawan made the rounds on social media, after which a case was registered against the accused.

Of the three boys, the elder one, an adult, was sent to jail while the other two, minors, were sent to juvenile custody. After 151 days, the court released the accused on bail after it found no evidence to prove the accusation, and the complainant and the witnesses said the police had fabricated the accusation. But the Kafkaesque legal process is not the only punishment in India today—in July itself, the Ujjain Municipal Corporation demolished the ancestral house of one of the accused with the use of a bulldozer; drumbeats of *dhol* and *nagada* accompanying the demolition drive.

The cracking of the secular foundations of India continues to be deafened by the drumbeats of nationalism and Hindutva, and the consecration of the unfinished Ram Temple in Ayodhya is a testimony of the same. Even more deafening is the cacophony of the news media that have been running *akhanda* live reporting of preparations for the consecration. Had the media not offered its ethics at the altar of Hindutva while singing the hymns of *Modi-Modi*, the desecularisation of India wouldn't have been so blatant and smooth. Had the opposition parties not been so clueless even after 10 years of Modi rule, India would continue to retain the paraphernalia of secularism, if not more. And finally, had the Hindus not been so complacent when their compatriots were being bullied, cornered, incarcerated and lynched for belonging to and practising a different religion, the fabric of Indian secularism would still remain intact. India, that is Bharat, as a secular republic, is today a lost cause.

MONDAY INTERVIEW JAYA MUKUNDA KHANAL

Centre should have a reserve force for contingencies

There is a need to handle the police adjustment process with caution as police personnel work with arms and ammunition.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal on January 17 directed the home minister and other officials concerned to complete the police adjustment process within two weeks. Dahal set the deadline after chief ministers from all seven provinces continuously pressed him to quickly work towards adjusting the police forces in the provinces. *Post's* Thira Lal Bhusal talked to former government secretary **Jaya Mukunda Khanal**, who for long also worked as chief of the security and coordination division of the home ministry.

offered promotion or salary increment to encourage them to go to the provinces. Similar modality can be applied while sending police personnel to the provinces. But the police adjustment process should be handled more cautiously as police personnel work with arms and ammunition. Botched mobilisation of the force can be counter-productive. The decision makers should be careful while deciding on the force commanders, the agencies that monitor the commanders and the leadership that mobilises the commanders. The other concern is maintaining the quality and competence of the force in the provinces. If promising police officers, who aspire to be top officials and even lead the force at the central level, don't want to go to provinces and if less competent personnel are sent, the efficiency of the provincial forces will be compromised.

**A large number of police officials are reportedly reluctant to join provincial forces as police personnel working in a province can be promoted only up to the rank of Superintendent of Police (SP). Their reluctance has emerged as a big challenge in initiating this process. How should it be addressed?**

The government should encourage even outstanding officials to join provincial forces by giving a message that their climb up the ladder will be faster in that case. Likewise, there should be a provision ensuring that police personnel recruited by the provinces will be allowed to reach top positions in the federal police force. If that provision is included while forming provincial police forces, promising youths will be attracted to the provinces as well.

**Should there be quotas in each province to enter the federal police force?**

There must be a provision to ensure that a certain number of police personnel will be allowed to enter the federal police force. Otherwise, there will be no attraction in the provincial forces. Certain quotas should be allocated for each province and specific criteria must be defined for promotion. And these provisions should be clearly stated in the Police Act. There shouldn't be provisions like, "it shall be as stated in the regulations". Such

provisions will give space for certain leaders or officials to misuse them for their interest. The Act should clearly define the criteria on recruitment, promotion and transfer.

The Public Service Commission should have a greater role in the process. Otherwise, the police personnel will be compelled to appease leaders and that will eventually ruin the organisation. Reservations of quotas for provinces will encourage promising youths to join provincial forces as they can dream of reaching top positions of the federal police as well. Otherwise, the provincial forces will be inefficient and invite problems.

There is a concern that the provisions of the 2019 Act may invite duplication of command as the centre deposes a deputy inspector general (DIG) of Police as chief of the force to each province to work under the federal home ministry, while the provincial forces have to work under



Jaya Mukunda Khanal, former government secretary

**under the home ministry but have to mobilise security personnel there.**

The CDOs should have good working relations with the provincial government while constantly receiving policy directions from the federal home ministry. This will be crucial in the future because there will be lots of civil servants recruited by provinces. Therefore, CDOs and DIGs to be deployed in the provinces should be efficient in coordination between the home ministry, provinces and districts. Coordination role of these officials is going to be more crucial.

**What kind of differences in policing will we see when the provinces have their own police forces?**

The provinces should have their own police forces. This is a basic feature of federalism. Each province has unique social realities, problems and prospects. The people, officials and police personnel deployed there can better understand ground realities. So, crime investigation and dispute resolution can be more effective. Language and even costumes used by officials can create a positive impression. But, at the same time, some serious criminal cases may not be properly handled locally. Such cases should be handled by the centre. For that, there should be a strong back up force at the centre. For instance, if a provincial force cannot investigate and control a serious case and violence flares up in the province, who will handle the fallout? Centre should be prepared to take the situation under control, not other provinces. There should be a reserve force for contingencies. They should be competent in special purposes such as crime investigation, riot control and disaster management.

**Won't that further increase the size of our police force?**

It will definitely increase the total size as well as expenses. The presence of a reserve force at the centre, however, will build pressure on provincial forces as the central force will intervene in their affairs if they fail to handle a situation or resolve a case.

**What if a province claims that they are competent to handle a certain case when the centre wants to intervene?**

Such is also the case of the Chief District Officers (CDOs), who are

For that, the police adjustment Act has envisioned a police coordination committee chaired by the federal home minister. Interior affairs ministers of all the provinces, among other officials, are ex-officio members of the body. They will assess the situation and make decisions.

**We often see tussles between federal and provincial levels on various issues. What if there are similar tussles on police mobilisation?**

That will be more serious as the police is a force that holds arms and ammunition. If a political leader or a senior official tried to use that force for certain vested interest, that may invite grave consequences. So, this issue should be dealt with extra caution.

**You also served as a secretary at the Ministry of Defence. Will police adjustment make any difference in terms of the country's defence and national security?**

Police are the front force in crime investigation and maintaining law and order. They are in direct contact with the public. If the police force works effectively, defence becomes easier. We don't deploy the army along the border. If the provincial police forces give information and inputs about border activities to the Nepal Army and Armed Police Force, it becomes easier for the latter. Some of our national security policies and strategies are formulated based on information given by Nepal Police and National Investigation Department. In the future, the information and cooperation of the provincial forces will be vital in this connection.

**Some see more chances of politicisation in police forces after the adjustment. What do you think?**

The Police Act, 1955 helped politicisation with vague provisions like promotions and transfers will be "as stated in the regulations". The APF is less politicised as the APF Act itself has clear provisions. Therefore, this occasion should be used to stop politicisation in provincial forces by making everything clear in the act itself. And, it should state that the promotions and transfers shall be done strictly as per the act. Then the police will stop appeasing politicians.

FOREX

US Dollar	133.21
Euro	145.17
Pound Sterling	169.2
Swiss Franc	153.34
Australian Dollar	87.89
Canadian Dollar	99.19
Singapore Dollar	99.37
Japanese Yen (10)	8.99
Chinese Yuan	18.52
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.52
Qatari Riyal	36.54
Thai Bhat	3.75
UAE Dhiram	36.27
Malaysian Ringgit	28.24
Korean Won (100)	9.98

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES

Nepse (in percent) **2,130.18** pts  
-1.18%

HIGHEST LOSERS					
CHDC	MHCL	BHPL	KBLD89	ADBLD83	VLBS
-8.27	-7.26	-6.25	-5.49	-5.42	-5.14
MODERATE LOSERS					
FOWAD	SMFBS	NYADI	SWBBL	SLBSL	MHNL
-0.17	-0.11	-0.1	-0.09	-0.05	-0.04
MODERATE GAINERS					
PCBL	NESDO	NIJCL	ANLB	NBSF2	KDBY
0.28	0.18	0.16	0.16	0.13	0.12
HIGHEST GAINERS					
AKJCL	SAMAJ	HLBSL	MSHL	SSHL	GLBSL
9.97	9.97	9.94	9.78	7.42	7.26

BULLION

PRICE PER TOLA	
Fine Gold	Rs 118,400
Silver	Rs 1,390

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Nepali businessman takes climate issue in Davos

**KATHMANDU:** Nirvana Chaudhary, managing director of Chaudhary Group, participated in the 54th World Economic Forum (WEF) held in Davos, Switzerland, on January 15-19. Chaudhary, who became the first private sector representative to speak at the WEF, raised the climate change issues in the Himalayas and urged support for its mitigation. Annually, international business and political leaders gather at the WEF's annual meeting to discuss global politics, economics, and social issues.

Addressing a panel on climate change action in Alpine Economies at the WEF, Chaudhary emphasised Nepal's vital role as a source of Himalaya's water, which plays a crucial role in supplying water to millions of people, also called the "water towers" of Asia. He said that the negative impact of climate change is becoming a challenge, and countries around the world need to join hands to mitigate its impacts. He said that developed countries should play a key role in minimising the impact of climate change. For this, a common agenda and coordination is needed, he said. "We are facing the impact of climate change daily. Growing up in Kathmandu, I used to see snow all over the northern part of the Valley till a few years ago. The snow that I have seen in my childhood has been declining. It makes me anxious," he said. (PR)

ArcelorMittal wants 'amicable' deal on Italy steelworks

**ROME:** ArcelorMittal has offered to sell its stake or become a minority shareholder in an Italian steelworks after Rome moved to put the plant under state supervision, the chief executive said in a letter seen by AFP Saturday. Aditya Mittal wrote to Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni to press for an "amicable solution" to the crisis over the struggling ex-Ilva plant, one of Europe's largest steelworks. The letter was dated Thursday, the day Meloni's hard right government announced it had taken the first step towards putting the plant under state supervision. Talks with ArcelorMittal, which owns a 62-percent stake, had broken down over how to keep production going and secure thousands of jobs at the plant in the southern city of Taranto. (AFP)

TSMC to launch chipmaking plant in Japan, US to face delays

**TAIPEI:** Taiwan's TSMC will open its latest chipmaking foundry on Japan's Kyushu island on February 24, but a plant in the United States will face further delays, the company said Thursday. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company—which counts Apple and Nvidia as clients—controls more than half the world's output of silicon wafers, used in everything from smartphones to cars and missiles. In recent years, the company has had to navigate geopolitical tussles between the United States and China as the two face off over technology import restrictions, trade and Taiwan—the primary manufacturing base for TSMC. On Thursday, Chairman Mark Liu announced the official date of the long-awaited Japan foundry's opening ceremony would be February 24. (AFP)

# Onion price drops on hassle-free imports despite India's export ban

As Indian farmers worry about plummeting onion prices in Indian markets, New Delhi is planning to review its export ban.



POST FILE PHOTO

The ban on onion exports by India, the world's largest onion exporter, has created a ripple effect across Asia.

POST REPORT

KATHMANDU, JAN 21

With the sharp fall of onion prices in the Indian markets, the Indian government is planning to review its export ban.

In Nepal too, prices have dropped after supply became normal despite the ban.

Nepali authorities are, however, clueless about how Indian onions are being imported to Nepal.

Some traders whom the Post spoke to said that many traders are importing onions through their contacts and Indian authorities are allowing them to enter Nepal without any restriction.

The onion was traded at Rs80 per kg wholesale at the Kalimati Fruits and Vegetables Market on Sunday.

In retail, it costs Rs100 per kg. The price had reached Rs200 per kg soon after the onion export ban by India on December 8.

The ban on onion exports by India, the world's largest onion exporter, has created a ripple effect across Asia,

causing a surge in prices and forcing countries to seek alternative sources.

The export ban has been enforced until March 31.

Traders said that the onion price will come to normal in Nepal soon, as India is considering lifting the ban.

According to Indian media reports, the government is assessing the situation and is likely to reconsider the decision to stem the sharp fall in the prices of the vegetables.

"The government may allow exports of onions through cooperatives," according to the reports.

Media reports say onion prices in Maharashtra, the state that produces the most onions in India, fell to IRs1,500 per quintal two weeks ago, from IRs3,700 per quintal before the imposition of the shipment ban.

Indian farmers and traders have been demanding the lifting of the ban so that prices do not plummet further.

In Nepal, after India's export ban, the price has increased but supply has been normal.

The Kalimati market received 75

tonnes of onion soon after the export ban.

On Friday, the market received 82 tonnes of onion.

Traders said that the decline in the price of onion in India coupled with a normal supply has reduced prices in Nepal.

"Onion harvesting season has started in India and hopefully prices will drop in the coming days," said Binay Shrestha, information officer at Kalimati Fruits and Vegetables Market Development Board.

Nepal depends on India for its onion fulfillment.

Since last year, prices of food commodities—rice, wheat flour, sugar and onions have increased heavily in Nepal due to the changing Indian policy, experts say.

In August, last year, the Indian government imposed a 40 percent export duty on onions.

In the first week of November, ahead of the Tihar festival, onion again became pricier after India slapped a minimum export price to

# Africa in debt spiral as restructuring efforts drag on

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

PARIS, JAN 21

While the explosion of debt is throwing a shadow over global economic growth, experts warn that sub-Saharan Africa, where several countries are already in default, is experiencing its worst-ever crisis.

The rise in interest rates and over-indebtedness is already crimping the ability of countries to finance their development, as a number of African leaders emphasised at appearances at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Following the 2007-2009 global economic crisis central banks in industrialised countries have generally kept interest rates low and countries from the Global South, which had mostly been borrowing bilaterally or from international financial institutions, gained unprecedented access to financial markets.

"Many developing countries in a desperate need for cash injection in their economies rushed to these low-cost loans, in markets with no rules or regulation," said Kenyan economist Attiya Waris, who also serves as an independent expert for the United Nations. She added that the

International Monetary Fund had encouraged them to do so.

The money helped provide a much-needed boost to many African economies, but countries dependent upon the export of raw materials such as oil, minerals and wood came under intense pressure when commodity prices began falling in 2015.

**The fall in commodity prices squeezed the foreign currency revenues they needed to service their loans.**

The Covid pandemic further aggravated the situation.

The fall in commodity prices squeezed the foreign currency revenues they needed to service their loans.

Several countries took out new loans to repay their existing debt, creating a debt spiral that is preventing investment in vital infrastructure, health systems and education.

The World Bank last year estimated that 22 countries are a heightened risk of over-indebtedness, including Ghana and Zambia, which has defaulted on its foreign debt.

Also on the list were Malawi and Chad, which has an IMF assistance programme.

Ethiopia, which Fitch Ratings put on partial default in December, is also negotiating a rescue package.

In 2022, African public debt stood at \$1.8 trillion, a 183 percent jump from 2010, having grown at around four times as fast as economic output, according to UN figures.

Gathering under the aegis of the G20, Western public creditors and several partners including China—which has often been accused of laying debt traps with easy loans for infrastructure projects—have been trying to work out a debt restructuring for 40 African countries.

These debt deals are built on the principle of equal treatment—all the creditors must participate. But the deals for African nations have been tough to conclude as private lenders are often balking at the terms.

Private investors—including investment funds and pension funds—have in recent years risen to become the top

check shipments and ensure adequate supplies for its domestic consumers.

After the minimum export price was slapped, the wholesale price of onion jumped to Rs125 per kg from Rs75 per kg previously.

In mid-November, the price reached Rs150 per kg.

Nepal gets nearly all its onion, a major kitchen staple, from the southern neighbour.

While China is another source of onions for Nepal, the Chinese product is mostly used for making salads, mainly in hotels and restaurants due to which its demand is low.

According to the Kalimati market, the average wholesale price of Chinese onion also declined by 24.29 percent to Rs62.33 per kg last week.

Three weeks ago, Chinese onions were traded at Rs82.33 per kg.

After India's sweeping ban on onion exports, there has been rampant smuggling of the vegetable, traders said. The district police in bordering areas are seizing hundreds of sacks of onion daily.

The customs officials said that onion smuggling has increased sharply in many of the Nepal-India border points. The Indian media reported that the smuggler racket has been smuggling onions.

With the export ban on onion, the price of onion has declined in India, but it has fueled smuggling due to the price differences in Nepal.

The wholesale price of onion has been hovering at around Rs80 per kg in Nepal, while the wholesale price in India's Uttar Pradesh is IRs27 per kg.

The import of onion fell by 38.47 percent in the first six months of the current fiscal year that ended in mid-January.

According to the Department of Customs, Nepal imported 46,592 tonnes of onion for Rs1.93 billion in the first six months of the current fiscal year compared to 86,386 tonnes for Rs3.15 billion in the same period last fiscal year.

Imports from China were 594 tonnes worth Rs40.82 million.

Nepal imported 180,190 tonnes of onions worth Rs6.75 billion from India in the last fiscal year.

# Mongolia on brink of mega mining deal with French multinational

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

DAVOS (SWITZERLAND), JAN 21

Mongolia is close to reaching an agreement with French multinational nuclear company Orano to exploit a vast uranium mine, Prime Minister Luvsannamsrai Oyun-Erdene told AFP in Davos.

French President Emmanuel Macron and his Mongolian counterpart Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh signed a memorandum of understanding in October to allow Orano to exploit the Zuuvch-Ovoo mine in southwest Mongolia.

An investment agreement was initially expected by the end of this year, but it may be reached sooner.

"At the moment, our governmental working group is working on environmental and technological evaluations on the project to reach a final agreement with the French side," Oyun-Erdene told AFP on the margins of the annual World Economic Forum summit in Switzerland.

Oyun-Erdene said he had spoken at the Davos luxury ski resort with the owners of both Orano and British-Australian mining group Rio Tinto, with whom Mongolia has signed an agreement on the Oyu Tolgoi copper and gold mining mega-project.

"It is crucial for us to share the knowledge and good practices that we had with Rio Tinto, with Orano too, so that we can reach a good quality agreement in a short period of time," Oyun-Erdene said through an interpreter.

**Mongolia remains largely dependent on coal and country is focusing on renewable energy.**

Speaking to AFP in Paris, Orano confirmed negotiations were ongoing with the Asian landlocked country sandwiched between giants China and Russia.

"Orano is committed to collaborating with the Mongolia government in order to reach a mutually beneficial agreement," said the company based southwest of the French capital.

Mongolia's mining sector is "really important", stressed Oyun-Erdene. "It's the main sector of our export".

But it is not the only one, and at Davos the premier met with tourism agencies, think tanks and representatives of the energy sector, including Chinese renewable energy multinational Envision.

"So in the future we are trying to develop other sectors of (the) economy as well as find innovative solutions," said Oyun-Erdene.

Mongolia remains largely dependent on coal but the country is "making efforts to develop our renewable energy sector."

In an attempt to diversify the economy, something Oyun-Erdene insists is "crucial for developing countries like Mongolia", the country is "working on the possibilities to produce hydrogen from coking coal".

Mongolia is one of the world's largest coal exporters and the capital Ulaanbaatar is often one of the most polluted on the planet.

Oyun-Erdene addressed another issue blighting Mongolia: corruption.

The country stands 116th out of 180 on the Transparency International corruption perception index.

Pope Francis even discussed the issue during a visit there last year.

# France's politicians woo the country's angry farmers

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

VIERZON (FRANCE), JAN 21

France's new Prime Minister Gabriel Attal paid tribute to the country's agriculture sector this weekend, responding to the growing discontent of farm workers angry at red tape and high costs.

Another rising political star, Jordan Bardella of the far-right National Rally was also declaring his sympathy for the farmers, who he said were sick of the strictures imposed by "Macron's Europe".

Attal, speaking at a public meeting in the central town of Saint-Laurent-d'Agnay Saturday, insisted that agriculture was "an absolutely major subject... that I take very seriously".

Praising the nation's farmers, he promised to work to make life easier for them by reducing unnecessary red tape.

At virtually the same time, Bardella was visiting a dairy farm at Queyrac, in the southwest, denouncing the policies of President Emmanuel Macron.

There is growing anger against "the European Union and the Europe of Macron", who wanted "the death of our agriculture", said Bardella, a member of the EU parliament.

French farmers are exposed to unfair competition from products from around the world that do not respect the strict standards they have to observe, he added.

Bardella will lead the National Rally into the European elections in June, where some political observers think it could pose a major challenge



AFP/RSS

This aerial photograph taken on January 20 shows farmers blocking the highway A64, to protest against taxation and declining income, near Carbonne, south of Toulouse.

to France's mainstream parties.

Across the country, France's farmers have been voicing their anger in recent weeks—and

they have a long list of grievances.

They are unhappy about rising costs, bans on pesticides cleared for use in other parts of the

world, a sense of being crushed by the strict standards imposed on them, and what they see as unfair competition from Ukrainian imports.

The price of diesel is another sore point, an issue that helped sparked the yellow vest protests that caused Macron so many problems during his first presidential term.

In the southern Occitanie region, one group of farm workers started a blockade of the A64 motorway late on Thursday at Carbonne, some 45 kilometres (28 miles) southwest of Toulouse.

On Saturday, dozens of tractors were still blocking access, with about a hundred protesters gathered around braziers at their makeshift camp. "You get to a point when you can't take any more," said Benoit Fourcade, a 50-year-old cereal farmer.

If France ever banned the controversial weed-killer glyphosate, he would leave his fields fallow and sign up at the nearest factory, he vowed.

"We are not happy putting people out like this," said Nicolas Suspense, a 44-year-old farmer who is also the mayor of a nearby village. "But how else do we make ourselves heard?"

President Macron's office instructed prefects across France to get out and meet farmers this weekend. And on Monday, Attal will meet leaders of the main farming unions.

Later this week, the government is due to present its latest plans on how to help the next generation of farmers—their average age at the moment is 51.4 years.

But the plans have already been criticised by the sector as too timid.

## WORLD

# A Hindu temple built atop a razed mosque is helping Modi boost his political standing

Modi's supporters credit him with restoring Hindu pride in India, where Muslims make up 14 percent of population.

□ ASSOCIATED PRESS  
NEW DELHI, JAN 21

Three decades after Hindu mobs tore down a historical mosque, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend the consecration of a grand Hindu temple at the same site on Monday in a political move to boost his party ahead of a crucial national vote.

Experts say the temple, dedicated to Hinduism's most revered deity Lord Ram, will cement Modi's legacy—enduring but also contentious—as one of India's most consequential leaders, who has sought to transform the country from a secular democracy into an avowedly Hindu nation.

"Right from the beginning, Modi was driven by marking his permanency in history. He has ensured this with the Ram Temple," said Nilanjana Mukhopadhyay, an expert in Hindu nationalism and author of a book on Modi.

Many see the temple's opening as the beginning of the election campaign for Modi, an avowed nationalist who has been widely accused of espousing Hindu supremacy in an officially secular India. Modi's Hindu nationalist party is expected to once again exploit religion for political gain in the upcoming national elections in April or May and secure power for a third consecutive term.

Made into a national event by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, the temple's opening in Ayodhya—a small city in northern India that has been a historical flashpoint—is expected to resonate deeply with Hindu voters.

Many of Modi's supporters see him as responsible for restoring Hindu pride in India, where Muslims make up a little more than 14 percent of the population.

"What is being done in Ayodhya, the kind of scale at which it is being built at the moment, is actually going to make it look like the Hindu Vatican, and that is what is going to be publicised," Mukhopadhyay said. "Modi is not going to lose a single opportunity to try to sell the accomplishment of having built a temple."

Built at an estimated cost of \$217 million, Ram Temple is central to Hindus who believe Lord Ram was born at the exact spot where Mughal Muslims built Babri Mosque in the 16th century on top of temple ruins. The mosque was demolished by Hindu mobs in December 1992, sparking nationwide riots that killed more than 2,000 people, mostly Muslims. It set in motion events that redefined the politics of social identity in India and catapulted Modi's BJP from two parliamentary seats in the 1980s to its current political dominance.



A construction crew works on the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, India, on January 16.

In the early 1990s, then a little-known local leader in his native Gujarat state, Modi also helped organise public agitation that aimed to shore up support for the construction of what is now Ram Temple at the former Babri Mosque site.

Muslim groups waged a decade-long court battle for the restoration of Babri Mosque. The dispute ended in 2019 when, in a controversial decision, India's Supreme Court called the mosque's destruction "an egregious violation of the rule of law," but granted the site to Hindus. The court granted Muslims a different plot of land in an isolated area.

That fraught history is still an open wound for many Muslims, and some say the temple is the biggest political testament yet to Hindu supremacy.

"There is a fear that this government and all the affiliates, they want to wipe out all traces of Muslim or Islamic civilisation from the country," said Ziya Us Salam, author of the book "Being Muslim in Hindu India."

Indian Muslims have increasingly come under attack in recent years by Hindu nationalist groups, and at least three historical mosques in northern India are embroiled in court disputes due to claims made by Hindu nationalists who say they were built over temple ruins. Hindu nationalists have also filed numerous cases in Indian courts seeking ownership of hundreds of historic mosques.

"On the one side, they want to change names of all cities which have a Muslim-sounding name. On the other side, they want to get rid of virtually every mosque, and the courts are happy to accept petitions on whatever pretext," Salam said.

Rebuilding the temple at the disputed site has been part of BJP's election strategy for decades, but it was Modi—rising to power in 2014 on a wave of Hindu revivalism—who finally oversaw that promise after attending its groundbreaking ceremony in 2020.

In the lead-up to its opening, Modi asked people to celebrate across the country by lighting lamps at homes and in local shrines, saying the temple will be a symbol of "cultural, spiritual, and social unity."

His government has also announced a half-day closure of all its offices Monday to allow employees participate in the celebrations.

Modi has released postage stamps on Ram Temple, and live screenings of the ceremony are planned across the country.

In many cities and towns, saffron-coloured flags, a symbol of Hindu nationalism, have become ubiquitous. A number of other politicians, high profile movie stars, and industrialists are also expected to attend.

# Palestinian death toll surpasses 25,000 while the prolonged war divides Israelis

The US has had limited success in persuading Israel to put civilians at less risk and to facilitate the delivery of more aid.

□ ASSOCIATED PRESS  
RAFAH, GAZA STRIP, JAN 21

The Palestinian death toll from the war between Israel and Hamas has soared past 25,000, the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip said on Sunday, while the Israeli government appeared far from achieving its goals of crushing the militant group and freeing more than 100 hostages.

The level of death, destruction and displacement from the war is without precedent in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israeli officials say the fighting is likely to continue for several more months.

The conflict and the plight of hostages held in Gaza have divided ordinary Israelis and their leaders while the offensive threatens to ignite a wider war involving Iran-backed groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen that support the Palestinians. In Lebanon, Hezbollah forces have engaged in near-daily clashes with Israeli troops along the border.

An Israeli airstrike on Sunday hit a car near a Lebanese army checkpoint in the southern town of Kafra, killing at least one person and injuring several others, Lebanese state media reported. The identities of those killed and injured were not immediately clear. Israel's military said it doesn't comment on reports in foreign media.

The United States, which has provided essential diplomatic and military support for Israel's offensive, has had limited success in persuading Israel to put civilians at less risk and to facilitate the delivery of more humanitarian aid.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected US and international calls for postwar plans that would include a path to Palestinian statehood. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the refusal to accept a two-state solution "totally unacceptable."

"The Middle East is a tinderbox. We must do all we can to prevent conflict



Displaced Palestinian youths carry food rations they received at a makeshift tent camp in Rafah near the border with Egypt in the southern Gaza Strip on Sunday.

igniting across the region," Guterres added Sunday. "And that starts with an immediate humanitarian cease-fire to relieve the suffering in Gaza."

The war began with Hamas' surprise attack in southern Israel on October 7. Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages back to Gaza.

Israel responded with a bombing campaign and ground invasion that laid waste to entire neighbourhoods in northern Gaza and spread south from there.

Ground operations are now focused on the southern city of Khan Younis and built-up refugee camps in central Gaza dating back to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

Israel continues to carry out airstrikes throughout the besieged territory, including areas in the south

where it told civilians to seek refuge. Many Palestinians have ignored evacuation orders, saying nowhere feels safe.

Since the war started, 25,105 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, while another 62,681 have been wounded, the Health Ministry said. The toll included the 178 bodies brought to Gaza's hospitals since Saturday, Health Ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qidra said. Another 300 people were wounded in the past day, he said.

The overall toll is thought to be higher because many casualties remain buried under the rubble from Israeli strikes or in areas where medics cannot reach them, Al-Qidra said.

The Health Ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its figures but says around two-thirds of the people killed in Gaza were women and minors. The minis-

try is part of the Hamas-run government, but its casualty figures from previous wars were largely consistent with those of UN agencies and even the Israeli military.

The Israeli military says it has killed around 9,000 militants, without providing evidence, and blames the high civilian death toll on Hamas because it positions fighters, tunnels and other militant infrastructure in dense neighbourhoods, often near homes, schools or mosques.

The death, destruction and displacement from the war in Gaza is without precedent.

The military says 195 soldiers have been killed since the start of the Gaza offensive.

The war has displaced some 85 percent of Gaza's residents from their homes, with hundreds of thousands packing into UN-run shelters and tent camps in the southern part of the tiny coastal enclave.

UN officials say a quarter of the population of 2.3 million is starving as a trickle of humanitarian aid reaches them because of the fighting and Israeli restrictions.

"Bread does not suffice for one hour," said Ahmad Al-Nashawi, who accepted donated food at a damp of plastic tents in the southern city of Rafah. "You can see how many children we have other than women and men. What matters most for a child is to eat."

Netanyahu has vowed to keep up the offensive until Israel achieves "complete victory" over Hamas and returns all remaining hostages. But even some top Israeli officials have begun to acknowledge that those goals might be mutually exclusive.

# North Korea stresses alignment with Russia against US and says Putin could visit at an early date

Kim has been actively boosting the visibility of his ties with Russia in an attempt to break out of diplomatic isolation.

□ ASSOCIATED PRESS  
SEOUL, JAN 21

North Korea said on Sunday that Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his willingness to visit the North at an unspecified "early date" as the countries continue to align in the face of their separate, intensifying confrontations with the United States.

The North Korean foreign ministry highlighted Putin's intent for a visit following North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui's meetings with Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow last week. The ministry said in a statement published by state media that the two countries agreed to further strategic and tactical cooperation with Russia to establish a "new multi-polarised international order," a reference to their efforts to build a united front against Washington.

Putin had already confirmed his willingness to visit the capital, Pyongyang, at a convenient time during his meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Russia's Far East in September. One of the few world leaders openly supporting Putin's war on Ukraine, Kim has been actively boosting the visibility of his ties with Russia in an attempt to break

out of diplomatic isolation and strengthen his footing, as he navigates a deepening nuclear standoff with Washington, Seoul and Tokyo.

In a separate statement on Sunday, the North's foreign ministry condemned the UN Security Council for calling an emergency meeting over the country's latest ballistic test, which state media described as a new intermediate-range solid-fuel missile tipped with a hypersonic warhead. The ministry said the test-firing on January 14 was among the country's regular activities to improve its defence capabilities and that it didn't pose a threat to its neighbours.

South Korea on Thursday urged the Security Council "to break the silence" over North Korea's escalating missile tests and threats. Russia and China, both permanent members of the council, have blocked US-led efforts to increase sanctions on North Korea over its recent weapons tests, underscoring a divide deepened over Russia's war on Ukraine.

The alignment between Pyongyang and Moscow has raised international concerns about alleged arms cooperation, in which the North provides Russia with munitions to help prolong its fighting in Ukraine, possibly in exchange for badly needed economic

aid and military assistance to help upgrade Kim's forces. Both Pyongyang and Russia have denied accusations by Washington and Seoul about North Korean arms transfers to Russia.

North Korea's foreign ministry, in comments published by state media, said Choe and the Russian officials in their meetings expressed a "strong will to further strengthen strategic and tactical cooperation in defending the core interests of the two countries."

Russia expressed "deep thanks" to North Korea for its "full support" over its war on Ukraine, the North Korean ministry said. It said Choe and the Russian officials expressed "serious concern" over the United States' expanding military cooperation with its Asian allies that they blamed for worsening tensions in the region and threatening North Korea's sovereignty and security interests.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest point in years, after Kim in recent months used Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a distraction to ramp up his weapons tests and military demonstrations. The United States, South Korea and Japan have responded by strengthening their combined military exercises, which Kim portrays as invasion

rehearsals, and sharpening their deterrence plans built around nuclear-capable US assets.

In the latest tit-for-tat, North Korea on Friday said it conducted a test of a purported nuclear-capable underwater attack drone in response to a combined naval exercise by the United States, South Korea and Japan last week, as it continued to blame its rivals for tensions in the region.

Choe's visit to Moscow came as Kim continues to use domestic political events to issue provocative threats of nuclear conflict.

At Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament last week, Kim declared that North Korea is abandoning its long-standing goal of a peaceful unification with war-divided rival South Korea and ordered the rewriting of the North's constitution to cement the South as its most hostile foreign adversary. He accused South Korea of acting as "top-class stooges" of the Americans and repeated a threat that he would use his nukes to annihilate the South if provoked.

Analysts say North Korea could be aiming to diminish South Korea's voice in the regional nuclear standoff and eventually force direct dealings with Washington as it looks to cement its status as a nuclear weapons state.

# Josef Stalin told a Politburo meeting of a proposal by 'some comrades' to preserve Lenin's body for centuries

>> Continued from page 1

In a speech a year earlier, Putin said that allowing Ukraine and other republics the nominal right to secede had planted "the most dangerous time bomb".

Whatever objections to those policies, Putin also is clearly aware of the emotional hold that Lenin retains for many Russians, and he does not support initiatives that arise periodically to remove the body from the mausoleum.

"I believe it should be left as it is, at least for as long as there are those, and there are quite a few people, who link their lives, their fates as well as certain achievements ... of the Soviet era with that," he said in 2019.

Such links may persist for decades. A 2022 opinion survey by state-run polling agency VTsIOM found that 29 percent of Russians believed Lenin's influence would fade so much that in 50 years he would be remembered only by historians.

But that response was only 10 percentage points lower than one to the same question a decade earlier, sug-

gesting Lenin remains important.

Lenin's hold on Russia's heart is still strong enough that three years ago, the Union of Russian Architects succumbed to a public outcry and cancelled a competition soliciting suggestions for how the Red Square mausoleum could be repurposed. That competition did not even specifically call for the removal of Lenin's body.

Lenin died on January 21, 1924, at age 53, severely weakened by three strokes. His widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, wanted him to be buried in a conventional grave.

Lenin's close associates had feared his death for months. Artist Yuri Annenkov, summoned to do his portrait at the dacha where he was convalescing, said he had "the helpless, twisted, infantile smile of a man who had fallen into childhood."

Amid those concerns, Josef Stalin told a Politburo meeting of a proposal by "some comrades" to preserve Lenin's body for centuries, according to a history by Russian news agency Tass. The idea offended Leon Trotsky, Lenin's closest lieutenant, who lik-

ened it to the holy relics displayed by the Russian Orthodox Church—a staunch opponent of the Bolsheviks—that had "nothing in common with the science of Marxism".

But Stalin, once a divinity school student, understood the value of the secular analogue to a saint.

The weather may have tipped the scales. Temperatures were reportedly as low as minus 30 C [minus 22 F] when Lenin's body was displayed during a wake in Moscow, stalling decomposition and inspiring authorities to hastily build a small wooden mausoleum in Red Square and make further efforts to preserve the body.

A later version, a more modernist take on ancient stepped pyramids clad in sombre deep red stone, opened in 1930. By that time, Trotsky had been forced into exile and Stalin was in full control, bolstered by a determination to portray himself as absolutely loyal to Lenin's ideals.

In the end, the cult of "Lenin After Lenin" may have worked against the Soviet Union rather than strengthening it by enforcing a rigid mindset, in

the view of some historians.

"In many ways the tragedy of the USSR lay in the fact that all subsequent generations of leaders tried to rely on certain 'testaments of Lenin,'" Vladimir Rudakov, editor of the journal Istorik, wrote in this month's issue.

The Mayakovskiy poem that proclaimed Lenin's immortality was "a parting word, or a spell, or a curse," Rudakov said.

About 450,000 people file past Lenin's corpse per year, according to Tass, about a third of the number of Moscow Zoo visitors and a sharp contrast from the Soviet era when seemingly endless lines shuffled across Red Square.

The honour guards whose goose-stepping rotations fascinated visitors were removed from outside the mausoleum three decades ago. At the annual military parade through Red Square, the structure is blocked from view by a tribune where dignitaries watch the festivities.

Lenin is still there—just harder to see.

# Strike on busy market kills 25 in Russian-held Donetsk

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MOSCOW, JAN 21

A strike on a crowded market in the Russian-occupied city of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine left at least 25 people dead and 20 wounded on Sunday, Moscow-backed officials said.

Both Russia and Ukraine have accused each other of a sharp escalation in attacks on civilian areas over the past two months.

Shattered storefronts and broken glass could be seen in videos shared by Russian state media, along with what appeared to be bodies lying on the ground nearby.

"At the moment, information about 25 dead has been confirmed. At least 20 more people have been injured," said Denis Pushilin, head of the region's Russian-controlled administration.

He blamed Ukraine for the strike, calling it a "horrific" artillery attack on a civilian area.

Ukraine did not immediately comment, and AFP was not able to immediately verify the circumstances

of the attack.

Officials said the strike hit a southwestern suburb of the city, less than 15 kilometres from Ukraine's eastern front.

Donetsk resident Tatiana said she heard an incoming projectile overhead, and hid under her market stall. "I saw smoke, people screamed, a woman was crying," she told a local media outlet.

"Where is there anything military here? It's just a market," another resident named Tatiana told the same outlet. "This is one of the strongest blows in recent times," she said.

The toll marks one of the deadliest on the city since Moscow launched full-scale hostilities against Ukraine in February 2022.

Donetsk, occupied by Russia and its proxy forces since 2014, has been repeatedly targeted by what Moscow has called indiscriminate Ukrainian shelling.

Moscow called Sunday's attack a "barbaric terrorist attack" that showed the need for its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

# South Korea avoid upset

## The Koreans play a 2-2 draw with Jordan at the Asian Cup.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
DOHA, JAN 21

South Korea avoided a major Asian Cup upset with a last-gasp 2-2 draw against Jordan on Saturday as Bahrain also left it late to blow open Group E.

One day after Iraq beat tournament favourites Japan, the Koreans needed an injury-time own goal to salvage a point after Jordan had roared back from an early Son Heung-min penalty.

In the later match in Qatar, Bahrain scored in the 95th minute to beat Malaysia 1-0.

"We expected a difficult game and we got a difficult game," said South Korean coach Jurgen Klinsmann, whose side need a draw in their last group game on Thursday against bottom side Malaysia to guarantee they reach the last 16.

"After the leading goal we took the tempo out of the game, which was not very good, and we lost a lot of one-on-one battles," said Klinsmann, a World Cup winner with Germany as a player.

"Those are the games that you learn a lot from."

South Korea are trying to win the Asian Cup for the first time in 64 years and Son fired them in front from the spot in the ninth minute.

But a Park Yong-woo own goal and a Yazan Al-Naimat strike put Jordan ahead at half-time.

South Korea did not look like scoring for much of the second half but grabbed an equaliser when Yazan Al-Arab deflected Hwang In-beom's shot into his own net in the first minute of injury time.

Skipper Son dismissed the idea that the pressure of trying to win the title after so long had got to him and his team-mates.

"There's always pressure when you play for Spurs or the national team because everybody's watching you," the Tottenham attacker told beIN Sports.

"I always deal well with the pressure, I love the pressure."

Jordan, who beat Malaysia 4-0 and face Bahrain on Thursday, are still also in a strong position to reach the knockouts.

Klinsmann was forced into one change from their 3-1 victory over Bahrain, bringing in goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-woo for Kim Seung-gyu.

Kim suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee during a training session and has been ruled out of the rest of the tournament.

Son tucked away his penalty after a VAR check ruled he had been fouled in the area and celebrated by holding up a goalkeeper's shirt with Kim's name on it.

Jordan began to threaten and equalised in the 37th minute when Park bundled the ball into his own net under pressure from Arab at the back post.

Naimat then lashed Jordan into a shock lead in the sixth minute of first-half injury time, drilling a shot into the bottom corner from the edge of the box.

Bahrain are third in the group after beating Malaysia for their first points of the tournament, Ali Madan thumping the winner deep in stoppage time to stay alive in the competition.

# Nepal open U-19 World Cup with a loss

## Dev Khanal's side lose against New Zealand by 64 runs in their Group D match. Nepal next play Pakistan on Wednesday.



Nepal's Subash Bhandari bowls during the 2024 U-19 Cricket World Cup Group D match against New Zealand at the Buffalo Park in East London, South Africa on Sunday. (Right) Arjun Kumal raises his bat after scoring a half-century.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ICC

SPORTS BUREAU  
KATHMANDU, JAN 21

### 2024 U-19 CRICKET WORLD CUP

EAST LONDON/TOSS: NEW ZEALAND, BAT FIRST.

**New Zealand 302-8** (50/50 overs)  
Snehit Reddy 147\* (125), Oscar Jackson 75 (81);  
Subash Bhandari 10-0-60-3, Gulsan Jha 10-0-61-2

**Nepal 238-9** (50/50 overs)  
Arjun Kumal 90 (104), Dev Khanal 36 (34);  
Mason Clarke 8-1-25-3, Oscar Jackson 7-0-25-2

*New Zealand win by 64 runs.*

**Player of the match:** Snehit Reddy

Nepal made a disastrous start to their U-19 Cricket World Cup campaign as they suffered a 64-run defeat against New Zealand in their opening match of the Group D at the Buffalo Park in East London, South Africa on Sunday.

Chasing a massive 303-run target, Nepal could only manage 238-9 in 50 overs and succumbed to a first World Cup defeat against a New Zealand U-19 side. Nepal had defeated New Zealand in their previous two World Cup meetings (by 32 runs in the group stage at the 2016 World Cup in Bangladesh and by one wicket in the 2006 World Cup plate final in Sri Lanka).

Opener Arjun Kumal was the only stand-out batter for Nepal, scoring 90 runs in his 104-ball knock that featured 12 boundaries.

Captain Dev Khanal provided the second highest score for Nepal with 36 runs off 34 balls.

The duo also shared a 59-run stand for the third wicket to lift Nepal's innings following a terrible start that saw Kumal's opening partner Deepak Bohara (0) and Aakash Tripathi (2) departing cheaply.

After Khanal was dismissed in the 16th over—caught by Mason Clarke off Oscar Jackson—Nepal's middle order collapsed, with Uttam Magar (0), Gulsan Jha (2), Dipak Bohara (15) and Dipesh Kandel (0) all failing to cope with New Zealand's pace.

Kumal, who was dropped three times, fought alone but fell short of reaching a century for a second successive international competition when he hopped to upper-cup and holed out—caught by sub fielder Robbie Foulkes off Ewald Schreuder in the 37.2 overs.

Kumal had scored 91 runs against Afghanistan

during the ACC U-19 Asia Cup in Dubai in December last year.

Kumal became the joint second highest individual scorer for Nepal alongside Kanishka Chaugai in the U-19 World Cup. Chaugai had scored 90 not out off 124 balls against Papua New Guinea during the plate competition of the 2004 World Cup in Bangladesh.

Pradeep Singh Airee holds the record for highest individual score for Nepal in the U-19 World Cup. He had scored 98 not out off 76 balls during the 13th place playoff semi-final against Namibia at the 2012 World Cup in Australia.

Kumal's dismissal put Nepal out of competition at 176-8 but the tailenders Subash Bhandari (33 not out) and Tilak Bhandari (17) withstood the New Zealand bowling attack to play full 50 overs.

Clarke was the pick of New Zealand bowling with the figures of 3-25 but he also received support from Schreuder (2-54), Jackson (2-25).

Earlier, New Zealand opted to bat first and posted 302-8 in the allotted 50 overs with help from a blister-

ing unbeaten century from Snehit Reddy and a fifty from Jackson.

New Zealand made a good start to their innings after openers Tom Jones (33) and Luke Watson (14) added 53 runs for the first wicket.

But they found themselves in deep trouble at 67-3 when Nepal spinners took quick wickets.

But Reddy played an unbeaten 147-ball knock and put on a 157-run partnership with captain Jackson, who made 75 runs off 81 balls, for the fourth wicket to change the momentum of the game.

Reddy and Jackson's 157-run stand was the New Zealand U-19's highest for the fourth wicket in the Youth one-day internationals.

Reddy cracked 11 fours and six maximums, while Jackson hit three boundaries and five sixes.

Subash took three wickets for Nepal. Jha picked two wickets, while Tilak, Tripathi and Kandel picked one wicket apiece.

Nepal next play Pakistan on Wednesday.

### PM CUP MEN'S CRICKET

MULPANI/TOSS: KOSHI, FIELD FIRST.  
**Gandaki 167-10** (48.2/50 overs)  
Muskan Thapa 67 (122), Bipin Khatri 42 (71);  
Avyash Timishina 9.2-2-23-6  
**Koshi 25-10** (15.2/50 overs)  
Ankit Subedi 8 (6); Bipin Khatri 7-3-4-6;  
Sandeep Parajuli 3.2-1-8-3  
*Gandaki win by 142 runs.*  
**Player of the match:** Bipin Khatri



Gandaki Province's Muskan Thapa celebrates his half-century against Koshi Province during the Prime Minister Cup in Mulpani on Sunday.

SIDDHARTHANAGAR/TOSS: ARMY, FIELD FIRST.  
**Police 140-10** (31.4/33 overs)  
Sunil Dhamala 52 (80); Sompal Kami 6-3-12-4  
**Army 127** (32.2/33 overs)  
Bhim Sharki 52 (76); Sagar Dhakal 7-2-14-3,  
Lalit Rajbanshi 7-2-25-3  
*Police win by 13 runs.*  
**Player of the match:** Sagar Dhakal

**PLAYING MONDAY**  
**APF vs Police**  
Venue: Siddharthanagar, Time: 9:00  
**Madhesh vs Sudurpashchim**  
Venue: Kirtipur, Time: 9:15  
**Bagmati vs Karnali**  
Venue: Mupani, Time: 9:15

## HOROSCOPE

### ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Move slowly and watch your thoughts this morning, dear Aries. This cosmic climate could make it difficult to shake off slumber, while fixating on low energy levels may perpetuate the issue further. Give yourself the freedom to daydream.

### CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Sweet dreams and cozy blankets may tempt you to linger in bed longer than you'd planned, dearest Cancer. However, try not to fall too behind schedule, lest you enter a cerebral or anxious state fixated on the tasks that lie ahead.

### LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

You may be reminded that even the best-laid plans often go awry, dear Libra. While disorganisation or disappointments can lead to frustrations and a loss of motivation, try to have faith that the shifts you're experiencing now are part of a greater path.

### CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

You may have trouble getting your point across this morning, dearest Capricorn. Issues could also arise with incompetent colleagues, and you'll want to pay extra attention to the work you produce as well. Take a breather this afternoon.

### TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Consider taking a break from your usual routine of checking messages, reading the news, or posting online, dearest Bull. Now is the time to acknowledge if you need a mental refresher, reconnecting with the material realms in lieu of your screens.

### LEO (July 23-August 22)

Don't waste your time with petty squabbles, superficial competition, or social spheres you're not that invested in. This cosmic climate brings disillusionment your way, helping you make peace with the fact that you've outgrown certain situations.

### SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Consider releasing your problems, unwanted commitments, and what does not serve you, dear Scorpio. Ask the universe for support as you relinquish control, making space for change and transformation. You'll be in the mood to demonstrate deep feelings.

### AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

You may be forced to battle certain insecurities this morning, dear Aquarius. Try to remember that most fears exist solely in our minds, looking for ways to elevate your ego while grounding. Skip your lunch-time social media scrolling.

### GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

While your creative mind will flourish under these cosmic conditions, it may be difficult to outline a solid strategy on how to manifest these visions. Don't push yourself as afternoon settles in, choosing instead to prioritize personal harmony.

### VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

If you've been experiencing low energy levels or mental haze, now may be a good time to examine why you've felt so depleted and whether or not your current path is sustainable. Emotions will be difficult to stifle.

### SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

A dreamy and ultra-romantic energy surrounds you, dear Sagittarius, softening your heart dramatically. Unfortunately, it would be easy to fall for a fantasy under this cosmic climate, making it important to watch for red flags, maintain logic, and protect your emotions.

### PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Your family or friends may have a hard time picking up on your social cues, making it important that you're forthcoming about your needs rather than hoping someone else will anticipate them.

Astrology.com

## CROSSWORD

### ACROSS

- 1 Plow
- 5 Meat-stock jelly
- 10 Caramel-topped custard
- 14 Chills and fever
- 15 Flower goddess
- 16 Cleanse
- 17 Albright or Montez
- 18 Lost cause
- 19 DOS alternative
- 20 Chewed noisily
- 22 Detain
- 24 Londoner's brew
- 25 Say it's so
- 26 Pupa's protection
- 29 Ancient document
- 33 Accumulate
- 34 Antler
- 36 Detective's cry
- 37 Et, for Hans
- 38 Cheese sellers
- 39 Bark or yelp
- 40 Perjure
- 41 Film spool
- 42 Bunch
- 44 Grasshopper
- 47 Chiefly
- 48 Bad day for Caesar
- 49 Slightly gamy
- 50 Net worth
- 53 Mixed it up
- 58 Gona

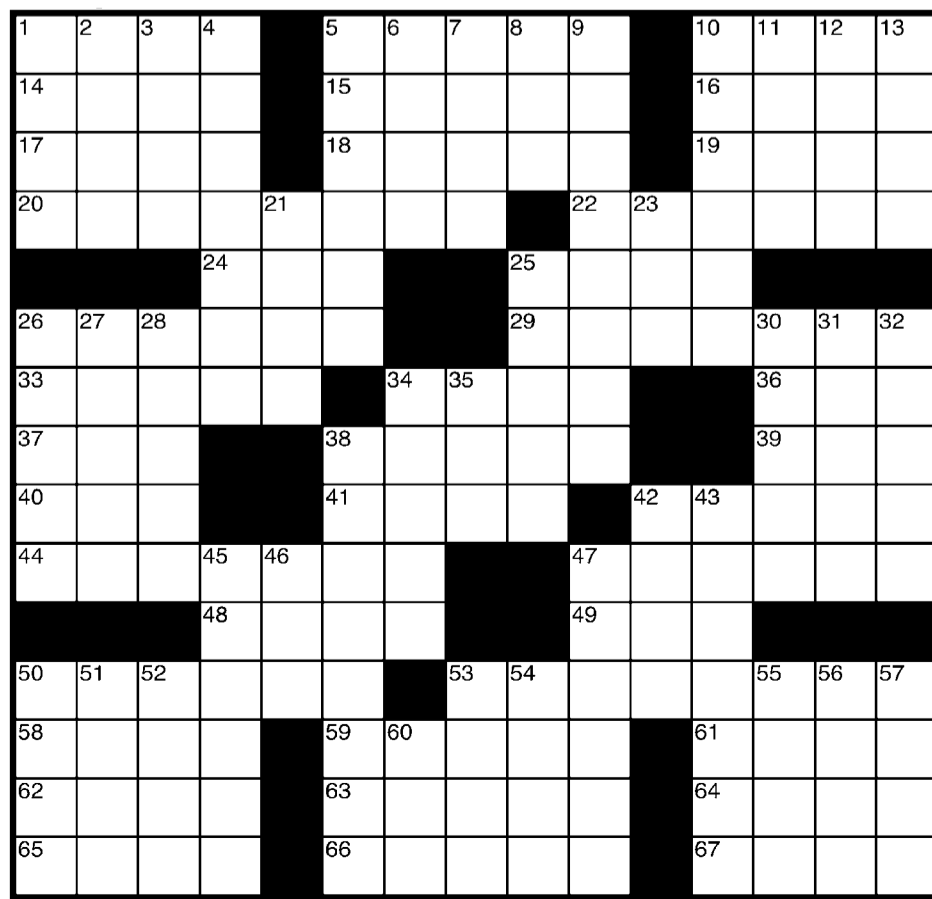
### DOWN

- 1 Soft mineral
- 2 Borodin prince
- 3 Corker
- 4 Sheds (hyph.)
- 5 Crochet project
- 6 Gin-fizz flavor
- 7 Ducks' haunt
- 8 Spleen
- 9 Large covered vehicles
- 10 Light snow
- 11 Narrow street
- 12 Hertz competitor
- 13 Adjoining
- 21 Company VIPs
- 23 Standing, slangily
- 25 Showery time
- 26 Seal a tub
- 27 "— vincit amor"
- 28 Officer wannabe
- 30 Polyester
- 31 Self-mover's rental (hyph.)

### PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



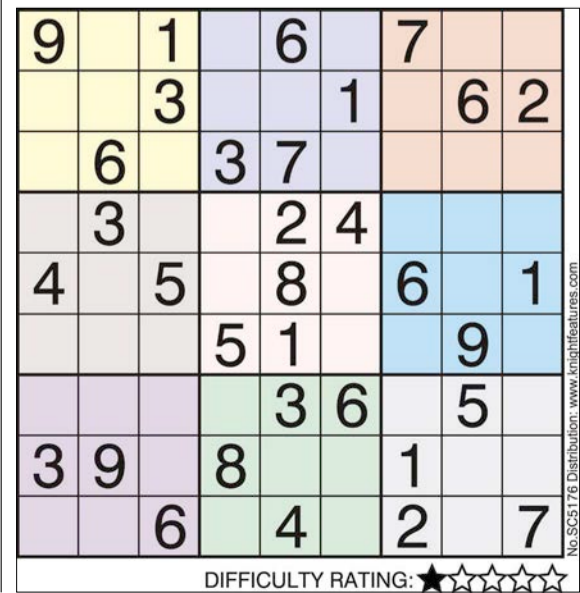
5-6-23 © 2023 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS



## SUDOKU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

# Through the thick and thin

Former national team captain Gyanendra Malla discusses his early days in cricket, the taste of the grim and glory days, and the bright prospects for Nepali cricket.

ANISH GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU

A beloved figure in Nepali cricket, Gyanendra Malla, grew up playing cricket with a homemade ball. "Money was scarce," says the former national team captain, sipping tea to battle a cold evening in Solitmode, Kathmandu. "So, I learned to make my own cricket ball with the help of a friend."



WHY DO IT

To make the ball, Malla and his friend bought a newspaper, crushed it into a ball-like shape, and soaked it in water. Once the paper got hard enough, they covered it with cotton, which was only the first layer. Then, the second layer they added was rubber, which made a newspaper into an almost perfect cricket ball. "Even though we didn't get a proper bounce, it seemed good enough for us at the time," Malla remembers fondly.

This is how he was first introduced into cricket. In the narrow alleys and chowks of his birthplace, Bhimsensthan, Gyanendra Malla and his fellow cricket enthusiasts played gully cricket. "We used to play wherever we found a little space, and it didn't matter whether it was night or day," he recalls. Whether it was broad daylight or a little glow coming from the

street lamp, the game went on.

As he watched cricket legends on television, Malla admired their skills and abilities. Eager to emulate them, he began mimicking the actions of international players he saw on the screen. He attempted to replicate shots like the South African legend Jacques Kallis, imitate Sachin Tendulkar's batting style, and mimic the pull shot of the Australian Ricky Ponting, among others. When it came to bowling, he expressed, "I wanted to experiment with everything. I tried leg-spin, off-spin, and even bowled a few fast-medium deliveries."

Whenever alone, he curled up a ball inside a sock, hung it on the ceiling and kept hitting it. "My father used to scold me for such desperation to be better at cricket," he says with a smile.

Slowly, Malla moved away from playing cricket in his chowk and began to play in school and Tundikhel, following in the footsteps of his seniors who used to play in his locality. Despite having his passion, his intention didn't lean towards playing for a club or trying for the national team. "At the time, I had no idea about selections. All I knew was that I had to play cricket. The situation or scenario of playing didn't matter," he says.

In his school days, when former national team captain and current secretary of the Cricket Association of Nepal, Paras Khadka and others went to try out for the under-15 category for Kathmandu district, Malla says, he had no idea about professionally pursuing the sport. He reveals, "It was only later, when I began playing for Yangal club, that I discovered players like me could be chosen to compete at domestic and international levels."

While representing Yangal Club, Malla gained significant exposure by progressing through club selections, moving on to district selections, and ultimately making it to the national team camp. When he was playing for the district levels, he was selected as a batting all-rounder, as he rolled his arms for an occasional leg-spin as well. "But as I transitioned into the senior team, I focused more on my batting," says the former captain. He stepped in as a wicketkeeper whenever required by the team.

Malla's impact has been indisputable at every level since joining the Under-15 team. In the U-19 2006 World Cup in Colombo, he struck an undefeated 46 in the Plate semi-final against a South Africa captained by Dean Elgar, as his team shocked the Proteas by two runs. In the Plate final, Nepal would surpass New Zealand with a side that included future stars like Tim Southee, Colin Munro, Martin Guptill and others.

Reflecting on playing at Lord's Cricket Ground, which is called the 'Mecca of cricket', Malla says he felt like he was in a cricket museum.

Even though the future looked bright and the passion was there, the other side of things, like career prospects and earnings, didn't look all that promising. "While we were in the camp, back in 2005-06, we used to get an allowance of Rs25," recalls Malla. When the team went on international tours and played games there, the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) and International Cricket Council (ICC) gave them 25 dollars per day. He said, "With that amount, except breakfast, we had to cover all our expenses. If there was any money left, we brought it home."

Despite this, Malla and his colleagues persevered, hoping for a brighter future. However, as they matured, family responsibilities began to pile up, and the feeling of being "underpaid" set in. "We didn't have many matches back then. In a year, we used to play two to three games, and also, we had no sponsors, so money was tough," says Malla. CAN had a few bats, and players shared the bats with one another while playing.

The recently added facilities at the TU International Cricket Ground in Kirtipur have proven beneficial for players. However, Malla remembers, "In our days, there was a ground and a pitch—that's all. There weren't even sufficient balls for us

to train." Despite the limited resources, players dedicated themselves, fueled by passion and a sense of pride, to representing Nepal at the international level. Malla also shared, "At lunchtime on the ground, we were given a few pieces of meat, that too, with the portion carefully measured."

Looking back at it, Malla said they weren't "struggles" but were "duties" for the national team.

With little improvement in sight, increasing family responsibilities and his career going nowhere, Malla applied for a visa to work in Australia, but fate had other plans, and the visa got rejected.

Looking back at his many memorable personal highs, one standout for Malla is his record-breaking fastest half-century for Nepal in One-Day matches—achieved against Saudi Arabia in the 2012 ACC Trophy Elite—in just 17 deliveries. He also holds the record for hitting six boundaries in a single over. Malla also had crucial knocks in clutch situations, which included his 86 runs against Canada in the 2015 Cricket World Cup Qualifier, although it came in a losing cause as Canada snatched the game by twelve runs. Also, his 66 runs with a strike rate of 101.53 came at the right time against the United States in the Division Four final of 2012, which resulted in a win for Nepal.

Then came the 2014 WT20, which was Nepal's debut entry in the world cup and in the first game against Hong Kong, Malla was the top scorer with 48 runs and formed a crucial partnership with captain Khadka, who also made 41 runs.

"The feeling of playing in a World Cup, singing the national anthem in a big stadium, and seeing the Nepali supporters on the stands was definitely one of the greatest memories of my career," says Malla.

The heroics of the bowlers grabbed Nepal a win in their first WT20 appearance. Even though Nepal couldn't proceed further, they fought well in the group stages. Malla amassed 83 runs in three innings with an average of 27.66 in the tournament.

When asked about the pressure he felt during that time, he responds, "Like most batters, I was in a zone of focus. While batting, your focus should be on putting the bat on the ball. I didn't let any other

thoughts come to me."

Other memorable instances, according to Malla, were receiving the One Day International (ODI) status in 2018 and playing at the Home of Cricket, Lord's, for the first time in 2016. "After the World Cup, receiving ODI status is another great memory to look back on for me," Malla says. "Receiving ODI status is one of the steps in being a full-member cricket nation. So it was a big moment for us," he adds.

Reflecting on playing at Lord's Cricket Ground in London, UK, which is called the 'Mecca of cricket', Malla says he felt like he was in a cricket museum. The atmosphere was something else there. Playing in front of Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) members and receiving the chance to tour Lord's was dream-like." On July 19, 2016, Nepal made its cricketing debut at Lord's, defeating MCC by 41 runs in a 50-over match.

As captain and vice-captain, Khadka and Malla saw Nepal through many years of hardships. For as long as one can remember, Malla served as Khadka's deputy before taking over as captain in 2019. Under his leadership, Nepal won bronze at the 2019 Asian Games.

Now retired and having handed the responsibility to the young bunch who have been showing great promise, Malla remains committed to contributing to Nepal cricket in any way he can. He is actively engaged in the Cricket Excellence Center, where he mentors and trains young cricket enthusiasts.

"Nepal cricket is gradually reaching new heights, and to continue this progress, we need all the support we can get. Cricket is now a promising sector for investment, offering great returns," says Malla, who, we can all agree, left Nepal cricket a bit better than when he found it.



Malla in action against UAE on November 18, 2022, at TU International Cricket Ground, Kirtipur.

## Studying in the happiest country in the world

A Finnish university is looking to attract Nepali students and offers online courses as a career boost—for free.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU

Have you ever considered studying in Finland? If not, maybe you should. Finland is a country in the very north of Europe with about 5.5 million inhabitants and a lot of nature. Around 75 percent of its land is covered with forest, and the northern region is famous for romantic, snowy landscapes in winter. According to the World Happiness Report, Finland's population is the happiest on Earth. Studies assume that happiness also stems from satisfaction with the educational system, which ranks among the best globally. Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (UAS), Finland's biggest university of applied sciences, has now launched a programme to attract Nepali students.

"We are happy that the entrance examinations are finally taking place in Kathmandu," says Pekko Lindblom, a senior lecturer and project manager at Metropolia. Pekko has travelled to Nepal to see how prospective students are tested and to interview future Information and Communication Technology (ICT) students himself.

Metropolia has around 17,000 students, of whom 1,500 are international students. Its campuses are located in the capital, Helsinki, and in two other nearby cities. The educational institution offers various study programmes in business, culture, health care and social services, as well as technology. For two of their degrees, a

bachelor's in Information and Communication Technology and a bachelor's in International Business and Logistics, Metropolia is looking to recruit Nepali students.

In November, the Finnish university held examinations for these study programmes in Kathmandu for the first time. Interested individuals could apply via local educational consultancy firms for the assessment process that involved questions of knowledge like maths and tests of problem-solving skills, as well as personal interviews. People who pass the exams and are being selected will have the chance to study in Finland from next year. In ICT, Lindblom reveals that forty of the best applicants will get that chance.

One key feature distinguishing universities of applied sciences from conventional universities is their proximity to the labour market. This is also the case for Metropolia, confirms Pekko Lindblom. Since its inception, the university has been closely associated with the Finnish company Nokia, which, from the late 90s onwards, used to be the global market leader in the mobile phone sector for many years. Nowadays, the ICT campus is located on Nokia's premises.

The curricula of both degrees involve gaining work experience. "Some projects are done quite closely together with company partners," explains Lindblom. These co-operations involve companies presenting real problems and students having to develop solutions. Gaining this kind of experience and networking during

studies can be advantageous when looking for a job later in life.

The market is also why precisely these two degree programmes are being promoted. Information and Communication Technology, being focused primarily on software knowledge and development, as well as International Business and Logistics, being more business-oriented, are both sectors where there is a high demand for labour force in many countries. Apart from that, it was also business logic for Metropolia. "There is clearly a need for ICT education and our programmes in Nepal. We were delighted by the great demand for organising entrance exams in Kathmandu," Lindblom explains.

But what is the Finnish university's incentive to look for students in Nepal? The answer is simple: International students are a business model for Metropolia and many other universities. "Education export is a way of financing the university while the public funding is decreasing," Lindblom states. While studying is free for locals, international students from outside the European Union, like Nepal, pay around 10,000 Euros per year.

But money is not everything, assures Lindblom. "Education export also means sharing something with the world that Finland is really good at." To make their educational products accessible to a broader range of people, Lindblom created an online learning platform.

The platform, Digital Career Boost, offers various online courses directed towards people already in the labour market. Lindblom explains that many people have been working for years, and a long time has passed since they were studying as students, but technology is developing rapidly.

With the Digital Career Boost, they can take courses to further their education in a specific area of digitalisation. The course topics range from understanding the basics of Artificial Intelligence over 3-D animation to using tiktok as a marketing tool. People can book several courses or only one specific they are interested in. They are all on bachelor levels; participants receive a certificate when completing a course. And the best part: It is free—at least for now—and you can study from anywhere, anytime. "The courses are filling up quickly, but we still have a certain amount of free places," Lindblom informs. After this first phase, the courses will be subject to a fee.

Those who do not belong to the target group of the Digital Career Boost or missed this year's admission test but still would like to study in Finland are likely to get another chance. If everything goes as planned, the examinations of Metropolia UAS will be held regularly in the future, assures Lindblom.



The entrance examinations for the university took place at the Everest Hotel in Kathmandu.

## Reba McEntire to sing during Super Bowl pregame



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
LOS ANGELES, US

Country music star Reba McEntire will grace next month's Super Bowl stage to sing the national anthem while Post Malone will perform 'America the Beautiful.'

The performances will take place on February 11 at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas before the championship matchup and halftime show featuring Usher.

Andra Day will also perform 'Lift Every Voice and Sing' as part of the pregame performances that will air on CBS.

Actor Daniel Durant will perform the national anthem in American sign language. He'll follow his 'CODA' film castmate and Oscar winner Troy Kotsur, who took on the role last year. Model-dancer Anjel Piñero will sing 'America the Beautiful' and 'Lift Every Voice and Sing' will be signed by actor-dancer Shaheem Sanchez.

Emmy winner Adam Blackstone will produce and arrange the national anthem and 'Lift Every Voice and Sing.'

Jay-Z's Roc Nation company and Emmy-winning producer Jesse Collins will serve as co-executive producers of the halftime show.

McEntire, a three-time Grammy winner, has become a country music icon with more than 30 studio albums that include a variety of hits such as 'Fancy', 'Consider Me Gone' and 'Does He Love You.' The highly decorated performer was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2011 and received a Kennedy Center honor in 2018. She starred in the Broadway musical 'Annie Get Your Gun' and earned a Golden Globe nomination for her lead role on television series 'Reba.' She also released her latest album 'Not That Fancy' and new book last year.

Post Malone, a 10-time Grammy nominee, has recorded multiple hits including 'Congratulations' with Quavo, 'rockstar' with 21 Savage and 'Sunflower' featuring Swae Lee from the 2018 animated film 'Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse.' The singer-rapper-songwriter released his fifth studio album 'Austin' last year.