



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Borrowers of microfinance institutions stage a protest in Kathmandu on Wednesday. The debtors, who walked to Kathmandu from various districts, had planned to picket the Baluwater-based Nepal Rastra Bank after a march from Sifal but were stopped at Bhatbhateni citing a no-go area. Their demands include scrapping microfinances, writing off their loans, removing loan defaulters from the black list, and freeing up their collaterals.

## Rift persists in Congress over electoral alliances

Party chief Deuba says the country's situation doesn't allow the largest force to embrace Hindu state agenda.

ANIL GIRI  
KATHMANDU, FEB 21

The Nepali Congress leadership came under a scathing attack from party ranks at the ongoing Mahasamiti meeting of the party in Lalitpur on Wednesday.

The members, who are attending the four-day mega meet from across the country, expressed dissatisfaction with the party leadership's handling of pressing issues including corruption control, service delivery, and growing frustration among the general public. They urged the leadership to take a proactive stance and play a leading role in implementing the constitution.

Leaders said they had received mixed reactions against party general secretary Gagan Thapa's idea against electoral alliances.

A leader close to Thapa said the party establishment had issued organised instruction to its loyalists to speak against Thapa's proposal, adding, "That's why the establishment faction gave maximum opportunity to its supporters to speak in favour of electoral alliances."

But the paper presented by the other general secretary, Bishwa Prakash Sharma, was criticised by Mahasamiti members, mainly from the Koshi Province.

Sharma, in his political paper, stated that the 'mutiny' in Koshi Province by the party's Kedar Karki was a wrong move.

Last October, Karki went against

the ruling alliance's decision to contest the chief ministerial position and got elected with the backing of the main opposition, CPN-UML.

Sharma criticised Karki saying that his move could destabilise the existing ruling alliance at the centre.

During the group discussions, representatives from Koshi and Sudurpaschim provinces staged a protest inside the Mahasamiti hall, citing inadequate time allotted for discussing and deliberating on the reports presented by party vice-president Purna Bahadur Khadka, general secretary duo Thapa and Sharma, and Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat.

Thapa supporters: Party establishment issued diktat to oppose general secretary's proposal.

On Wednesday, participants of the jamboree from across the country were divided into four groups and tasked with studying the four reports and providing feedback.

They staged protests, saying they were not given enough time for discussion and deliberation.

Some Mahasamiti members criticised Sharma's view on the recent political developments in the Koshi province.

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### TODAY

#### NATIONAL

The Rastriya Prajatantra Party on Wednesday announced a campaign to reinstate Nepal as a Hindu kingdom, submitting a 40-point charter of demands to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal at Singha Durbar. Pg 3

Four people were found dead at Bhairabtol in Sitapaila, Kathmandu on Wednesday. According to police, the bodies of a woman and two young girls were recovered from their residence earlier in the day. Pg 3

#### OPINION

Harnessing Nepal's demographic dividend is not a given but requires careful planning, policy coordination and long-term vision, writes Sabina Sitaula. Pg 4



#### MONEY

Once a thriving industry, employing hundreds of people, the demand for metal crafts has declined considerably in Nepal, putting at risk the designs, craftsmanship, and creations of centuries-old tradition. Pg 5

#### WORLD

Heavy fighting rocked the besieged territory of Gaza on Wednesday as aid agencies warned of looming famine and new talks were held in Cairo towards an Israel-Hamas ceasefire and hostage release deal. Pg 6

#### SPORTS

Nepal suffered back-to-back defeats against Namibia in Nepal Tri-series of the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 (2024-2027) after the Rhinos fell to a two-wicket loss at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Wednesday. Pg 7



## Different drugs, identical names. Nepal's regulatory body is clueless

The drug regulator often recalls drugs when they are sold out or are close to expiry.

ARJUN POUDEL  
KATHMANDU, FEB 21

An Indian pilgrim in his mid-40s, who came from South India to visit the Pashupatinath temple during the Mahashivaratri, reached the emergency department of Bir Hospital complaining of stomach ache.

Doctors at the hospital prescribed Diavol, a medicine that prevents stomach upset, and asked the patient to take it when he experiences a burning sensation. The pharmacist, however, gave the patient Daonil, an antidiabetic medication.

The patient took the tablet on an empty stomach and visited Patan's Krishna Mandir. When the pain did not subside, he took additional tablets within a short period. This lowered his blood sugar level.

"The patient was brought to the hospital in an unconscious state," said Dr Baburam Marasini, a retired health official.

"Due to the sheer negligence of the pharmacist, the patient died."

This incident occurred some 40 years ago when Marasini served at Bir Hospital. Public health experts say what concerns them is there has not been much improvement in the situation even after so long.

A few days ago, two medicines, manufactured by two companies, one by Torrent Pharmaceuticals Ltd India and the other by Grace Pharmaceuticals Pvt Ltd, Rupandehi were found to come

in the same brand name—"Rovor 20."

The medicine manufactured by the Indian company are Rivaroxaban tablets, an anticoagulant or blood thinner, while the medicine manufactured by the Nepali company is Rabeprazole, which is used in treating duodenal ulcers, gastroesophageal reflux diseases and the condition in which the stomach produces too much acid.

The Department of Drug Administration, the national regulatory body of the drug market, however, said that it is unaware of the availability of two entirely different drugs in the same brand name in the country.

Issuing a press statement on Tuesday, the department said that it has only registered the tablet Rovor-10 (Rivaroxaban-20mg) manufactured by Torrent Pharmaceuticals Ltd India. The department said it has annulled the said brand name and named it Tablet Rivitor-10, as per its December 10, 2023 decision.

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## Cheers as brain pacemaker helps woman with crippling depression

In normal brains, doctor says, electrical activity reverberates unimpeded in all areas, in a sort of dance.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
NEW YORK, FEB 21

Emily Hollenbeck lived with a deep, recurring depression she likened to a black hole, where gravity felt so strong and her limbs so heavy she could barely move. She knew the illness could kill her. Both of her parents had taken their lives.

She was willing to try something extreme: Having electrodes implanted in her brain as part of an experimental therapy.

Researchers say the treatment—called deep brain stimulation, or DBS—could eventually help many of the nearly 3 million Americans like her with depression that resists other treatments. It's approved for conditions such as Parkinson's disease and epilepsy, and many doctors and patients hope it will become more widely available for depression soon.

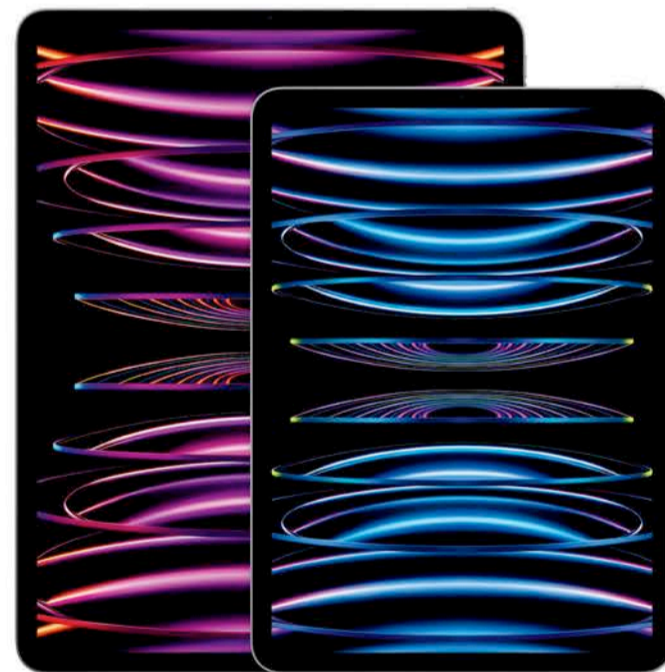
The treatment gives patients targeted electrical impulses, much like a pacemaker for the brain. A growing body of recent research is promising, with more underway—although two large studies that showed no advantage to using DBS for depression temporarily halted progress, and some scientists continue to raise concerns.

Meanwhile, the Food and Drug Administration has agreed to speed up its review of Abbott Laboratories' request to use its DBS devices for treatment-resistant depression.

"At first I was blown away because the concept of it seems so intense. Like, it's brain surgery. You have wires embedded in your brain," said Hollenbeck, who is part of ongoing research at Mount Sinai West.

"But I also felt like at that point I tried everything, and I was desperate for an answer."

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## NATIONAL

# Bicycle track construction around Rara Lake moving at a snail's pace

The project completion deadline is July 2026, and only 30 percent work has been completed so far.

RAJ BAHADUR SHAHI  
MUGU, FEB 21

Construction of a cycle track around Rara, the country's largest lake in Mugu district, is moving at a snail's pace.

With the objective to promote tourism, the Karnali provincial government in 2018 planned to construct the cycle track and released the budget. But the budget got frozen for two consecutive fiscal years since work on the project couldn't be initiated due to a delay in obtaining permissions from the Rara National Park and the provincial forest ministry.

The provincial Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment released a Rs452.9 million budget in the fiscal year of 2021-22 for infrastructure development in the Rara area. The division forest office in Mugu signed a project agreement with Khani Thodung Caravan JV to construct the cycle track around the lake the same fiscal year.

As per the agreement, the contractor has to complete the development project by July 2026. The company started the construction work a year and a half ago. The authorities concerned and the local people are worried about the timely completion of the project as the construction work is under way at a snail's pace with frequent disruption.

"The cycle track construction is underway, but very slowly. Less than



Gazebos on the shore of the Rara Lake in Mugu district in this recent photo.

30 percent work has been completed so far, casting doubt for the timely completion of the project," said Amar Shah, the chief of the Division Forest Office in Mugu.

The underconstruction cycle track is 14 kilometres long. As per the project agreement, the construction company should sole stones first of at least 15 cm thickness, add a plain cement concrete layer of 10 cm and then pave the track with stone slates.

According to the Division Forest Office, the construction company received Rs80 million as advance payment, but it could not complete the work worth that amount as well. "We urged the contractor time and again to expedite the work, but the construc-

tion company delayed work under various pretexts," said Shah.

The construction company is also accused of not coordinating with the Rara National Park while carrying out construction work in the park area. The national park office is unaware about the construction company, who are the workers, and the progress in the construction work. "The contractor has not coordinated with us. We don't know about the construction company and their work," said Jayahari Dhital, information officer at the Rara National Park.

The Karnali government touted the cycle track project as a pride project of the province. It is believed that the visitors, both domestic and foreign,

cycle around the Rara lake and enjoy the pristine beauty.

However, the local people and tourism entrepreneurs are worried over the delay in constructing the cycle track and other infrastructure to promote tourism in the area. "We were happy when the provincial government announced its plan to construct a cycle track around the lake. But it is uncertain when the development project will be completed," Devikrishna Rokaya, a tourism entrepreneur of Murma village, expressed his concern.

The contractor, however, promises to complete the cycle track on time. "The construction work has been disrupted due to the cold in winter. We will soon resume the work and complete it within the deadline," said Chandra Thakali, representative of Khani Thodung Caravan JV.

Situated at an altitude of 2,990 metres, and spread out across 10.8 square kilometres, Rara frequently tops the charts as one of the most beautiful tourist destinations to visit in Nepal. Many tourists visit the area despite the lack of tourism infrastructure. Rara has been a major attraction for domestic tourists over the past few years.

Around 11,000 domestic tourists visited the Rara area in the last fiscal year of 2022-23. Every visitor who has been to the lake comes back with a "once-in-a-lifetime" experience and numerous, tempting stories, mostly singing the glory of this magnificent lake.

# Seven killed, 12 injured in road accidents

Accidents occurred in Sindhupalchok, Bara, Dang, Salyan.

ANISH TIWARI IN SINDHUPALCHOK & LAXMI SAH IN BARA  
FEB 21

As many as seven people died and 12 others were injured in separate road accidents

in Sindhupalchok, Bara, Dang and Salyan districts on Wednesday.

A jeep swerved off the road and plunged into the Andheri stream some 200 metres below at Sakhupwari of Bahrabise Municipality in Sindhupalchok, killing two people and injuring four others.

According to Police Inspector Devendra Raj Joshi at Bahrabise Area Police Office, Dil Kumari Pradhan, 40, and Lal Kumari Pradhan, 42, of Ghumthang died in the incident. They died on the spot, said police.

Three passengers with serious injuries have been referred to the National Trauma Centre in Kathmandu while driver Bikram Thapa sustained minor injuries in the incident. The driver has been detained and is under investigation, said police.

All the injured hail from Ghumthang settlement in ward 7 of Bahrabise Municipality.

In Bara, a truck heading to Hetauda from Simara and a pickup truck collided head-on along the Simara-Hetauda road section killing two people, including an Indian national, and injuring three others.

The identity of the deceased is yet to be ascertained, said Deputy Superintendent of Police Pradip

Bahadur Chhetri. The injured are being treated at LS Neuro Hospital in Parwanipur, said Chhetri.

Similarly, two people died when a motorcycle collided with a jeep in ward 16 of Ghorahi Sub-metropolitan City in Dang district.

The deceased are a 24-year-old woman and a 21-year-old man from ward 5 of Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa district.

According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Janak Bahadur Malla, who is also an information officer at the Dang District Police Office, the duo succumbed to injuries while receiving treatment at the Ghorahi-based Rapti Institute of Health Sciences. Police have detained the jeep driver, Nirmal Budha, 29, from ward 2 of Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa district, said Malla.

In Salyan, a man died after a motorcycle and a tipper truck collided at Bagchaur Municipality in the district. The 46-year-old man of ward 12 of Bagchaur Municipality who was airlifted to the Kathmandu-based Grande Hospital by a helicopter, died, said

Police Inspector Bhawani Prasad Dhamala, spokesman for the District Police Office, Salyan.

Likewise, five people were injured when a jeep heading for Jajarkot from Nepalgunj overturned at Bangad Kupunde Municipality.

With input from Durgalal KC in Dang and Biplab Maharjan in Salyan.

# Congress may toss general secretaries' proposals

>> Continued from page 1

"If the Congress is in charge of the province, there is no need for concern," Usha Gurung, a Congress leader from the province, said.

Some members from the Koshi province also raised the issue of identity and the ongoing opposition by a section of Janajatis groups and communities advocating for the province to be named based on the identity of indigenous communities of the region.

Dig Bahadur Limbu of Morang, Tejendra Khanal of Okhaldhunga, Gajendra Tumbhayak of Taplejung among others raised the issue of identity politics that has gripped local politics in Koshi province. Supporters of identity politics have been opposing the name 'Koshi' and demanded that it be given a new name based on identity.

The 16 district presidents of the party from Koshi Province submitted their 16-point proposal suggesting several changes to the party charter and the proposals presented by Vice-president Khadka, general secretary duo Thapa and Sharma.

The district presidents in their proposal have demanded that the country's President, Vice President, prime minister, and chief ministers from the party should not be allowed to serve more than two terms, and recommended three terms in maximum for deputy prime ministers, ministers, ministers of state, provincial ministers and provincial ministers of state, and four terms in maximum for federal and provincial lawmakers.

On electoral alliances, the Koshi presidents have said that such a decision can be taken at the appropriate time based on necessity and suitability. Leader Arjun Narsingh KC suggested that the government ban banknotes of Rs1000 and Rs500 denominations in order to control corruption.

"The general public feels that mafias, middlemen and people with a lot of black money are gaining control over the state and power," said KC during the Mahasamiti meeting, adding, "There is a need to demonetise the denominations to prevent them from becoming a conduit for black money." He also urged the party's leadership

to take the initiative to amend the constitution. He stressed the need for reforming the electoral system, abolishing the proportional representation system, which he said often leads to formation of coalitions, and amend the constitution to reduce the number of federal and state parliamentarians.

Meanwhile, as a group of Congress leaders led by lawmaker Shankar Bhandari has been calling for restoration of the Hindu state and is currently collecting signatures of party leaders in favour of the proposal, some Mahasamiti members have voiced their reservations regarding the demand. Over 150 Mahasamiti members have already put in their signatures supporting the demand for restoration of the Hindu state, according to the campaigners.

## Arjun Narsingh KC calls for banning Rs500 and Rs1000 banknotes to curb black money.

On Wednesday, a group of leaders led by Bhandari met party president Sher Bahadur Deuba and asked him to incorporate the agenda of Hindu state in the Mahasamiti meeting. "But Deuba rejected the idea," a leader close to Bhandari, said.

"The current situation in the country does not allow the party to adopt the agenda of restoration of the Hindu state," the leader quoted Deuba as telling the Bhandari-led delegation.

But Bhandari cautioned that there is a popular sentiment inside and outside the party in favour of restoring Nepal's Hindu identity. He also emphasised that if the Congress ignores such an important demand, it will have a devastating effect on the party.

Senior Congress leader and former general secretary Shashanka Koirala, among others, have signed the petition, and more members will do so Wednesday and Thursday, according to the Hindu state campaigners in the party.

According to a press statement issued by the party, during the meeting, Mahasamiti members have said Congress should take the lead in effectively implementing the constitution, respect the party charter, delegate power to the provincial governments in order to strengthen them, and take measures to mitigate risks against the republic. They also called for social movement for greater social justice and urged the party to participate in such movements. They also called for modernising the agriculture system, promoting tourism by preserving the ecology, infrastructure development, and pursuing a balanced foreign policy by giving top priority to national interest.

According to party leaders, representatives of the Mahasamiti meeting had expressed mixed views on electoral alliances with those close to the party establishment speaking in favour.

"The establishment faction arranged the event in such a way that only those who were in favour of such alliances were allowed to speak," leader Suyarmaraj Rai said, adding, "Those opposed to the idea were not allowed to voice their opinions."

At the end of the day, the Mahasamiti hall was empty, indicating that neither Thapa's nor Sharma's proposals would be endorsed in their existing forms.

Narayan Dutta Bhatta, party president of Kailali was non-committal regarding electoral alliances and any decisions should be made ahead of the elections based on the need. He views that the terms of the party's elected bodies should be extended in line with the party charter if the general convention is not held by December 2025.

The party charter gives an additional one year as grace period if the party fails to convene the general convention after completing its four-year term. And the country's constitution gives another six months, which means if the party fails to meet the December 2025 deadline, it can extend the term and mandate of all elected bodies until mid of 2027.

The 14th Mahasamiti meeting is expected to conclude on Thursday.

# A saga of medicine names mix-up

>> Continued from page 1

The department said tablet Rovor-20 has not been registered in the department and has recalled tablet Tovor-10 (Rivaroxaban-10 mg) from the market.

"Two entirely different medicines that are used for different purposes have identical brand names. Shouldn't the DDA be responsible in such a case? Can anyone do anything in Nepal?" Dr Ahamad Raza Miya wrote on his X account. "Sometimes it [the DDA] issues orders to recall drugs when they get close to expiry and sometimes it allows the production of two entirely different medicines in the same brand name."

DDA officials said they were unaware of the presence of the two medicines with the same brand name on the market.

"The medicines, which are not registered in Nepal, might have been smuggled into the country," said

Narayan Dhakal, director general at the department. "We have asked our inspectors to monitor illegally imported drugs."

However, officials at the department said that manpower shortage made it impossible to inspect more than 20,000 dispensaries in the country.

Dhakal concedes that the registration of entirely different medicines in the same brand name could be due to the lack of a proper database at the department.

"Computers too cannot differentiate the same medicine when the manufacturers use commas and other marks in their brands," said Dhakal.

The department keeps recalling the standard drugs from the market but most of the time when most of the stock sells out or is close to expiry.

The regulatory agency regularly collects drugs through random sampling from pharmacies across the

country and tests them for quality in its own laboratory.

The department reported that around 11 percent of the medicines sold in the last fiscal year across the country were found substandard in laboratory examinations. Officials had directed their manufacturers to recall those drugs from the market.

However, it is not known if all those substandard drugs were recalled or sold to patients, as the department has no capacity to follow through on that. DDA officials admit that due to understaffing, they cannot always monitor if all such drugs are recalled.

The department publishes a notice on its website asking respective companies to recall the drugs found to be substandard at the earliest. But most often, those substandard drugs get sold out by the time the notice is published, as the department takes months to perform laboratory tests.

# New pacemaker gives hopes to the depressed

>> Continued from page 1

"Nothing else was working"

Hollenbeck suffered from depression symptoms as a child growing up in poverty and occasional homelessness. But her first major bout happened in college, after her father's suicide in 2009. Another hit during a Teach for America stint, leaving her almost immobilised and worried she'd lose her classroom job and sink into poverty again. She landed in the hospital.

"I ended up having sort of an on-and-off pattern," she said. After responding to medication for a while, she'd relapse. She managed to earn a doctorate in psychology, even after losing her mom in her last year of grad school. But the black hole always returned to pull her in. At times, she said, she thought about ending her life.

She said she'd exhausted all options, including electroconvulsive therapy, when a doctor told her about DBS three years ago. "Nothing else was working," she said.

She became one of only a few hundred treated with DBS for depression. Hollenbeck had the brain surgery while sedated but awake. Dr Brian Kopell, who directs Mount Sinai's Center for Neuromodulation, placed thin metal electrodes in a region of her brain called the subcallosal cingulate cortex, which regulates emotional behaviour and is involved in feelings of sadness.

The electrodes are connected by an internal wire to a device placed under the skin in her chest, which controls the amount of electrical stimulation and delivers constant low-voltage pulses. Hollenbeck calls it "continuous Prozac".

Doctors say the stimulation helps because electricity speaks the brain's language. Neurons communicate using electrical and chemical signals.

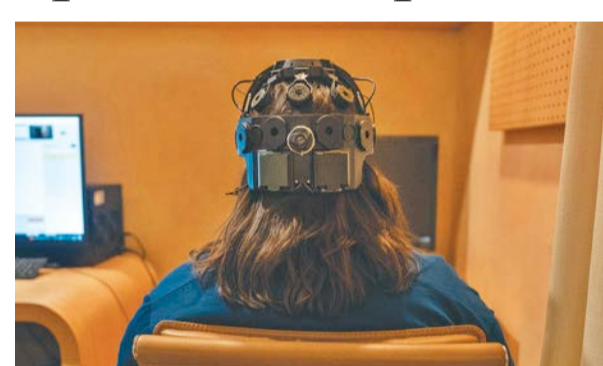
In normal brains, Kopell said, electrical activity reverberates unimpeded in all areas, in a sort of dance. In depression, the dancers get stuck within the brain's emotional circuitry. DBS seems to "unstick the circuit," he said, allowing the brain to do what it normally would.

Hollenbeck said the effect was almost immediate.

"The first day after surgery, she started feeling a lifting of that negative mood, of the heaviness," said her psychiatrist, Dr Martijn Egeij. "I remember her telling me that she was able to enjoy Vietnamese takeout for the first time in years and really taste the food. She started to decorate her home, which had been completely empty since she moved to New York." For Hollenbeck, the most profound change was finding pleasure in music again.

"When I was depressed, I couldn't listen to music. It sounded and felt like I was listening to radio static," she said. "Then on a sunny day in the summer, I was walking down the street listening to a song. I just felt this buoyancy, this, 'Oh, I want to walk more, I want to go and do things!' And I realised I'm getting better." She only wishes the therapy had been there for her parents.

The treatment's history The road to this treatment



Emily Hollenbeck, a deep brain stimulation therapy patient, demonstrates an EEG device that records brain activity as she reacts to short videos at Mount Sinai's 'Q-Lab' in New York last December.

stretches back two decades, when neurologist Dr Helen Mayberg led promising early research.

But setbacks followed. Large studies launched more than a dozen years ago showed no significant difference in response rates for treated and untreated groups. Dr Katherine Scangos, a psychiatrist at the University of California, San Francisco, also researching DBS and depression, cited a couple of reasons: The treatment wasn't personalised, and researchers looked at outcomes over a matter of weeks. Some later research showed depression patients had stable, long-term relief from DBS when observed over years. Overall, across different brain targets, DBS for depression is associated with average response rates of 60 percent, one 2022 study said.

Treatments being tested by various teams are much more tailored to individuals today. Mount Sinai's team is one of the most prominent researching DBS for depression in the US. There, a neuroimaging expert uses brain images to locate the exact spot for Kopell to place electrodes.

"We have a template, a blueprint of exactly where we're going to go," said Mayberg, a pioneer in DBS research and founding director of The Nash Family Center for Advanced Circuit Therapeutics at Mount Sinai. "Everybody's brain is a little different, just like people's eyes are a little further apart or a nose is a little bigger or smaller."

Other research teams also tailor treatment to patients, although their methods are slightly different. Scangos and her colleagues are studying various targets in the brain and delivering stimulation only when needed for severe symptoms. She said the best therapy may end up being a combination of approaches.

As teams keep working, Abbott is launching a big clinical trial this year, ahead of a potential FDA decision.

"The field is advancing quite quickly," Scangos said. "I'm hoping we will have approval within a short time." But some doctors are sceptical, pointing to potential complications such as bleeding, stroke or infection after surgery.

Dr Stanley Caroff, an emeritus professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, said scientists still don't know the exact pathways or mechanisms in the brain that produce depression, which is why it's hard to pick a site to stimulate. It's also tough to select the right patients for DBS, he said, and approved, successful treatments for depression are available.

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**जनजागरण सावजस**  
कमलामाई-१४ सिन्धुली

# KMC asks inhabitants to vacate Lalita Niwas area within 7 days

Issuing a notice on Wednesday, KMC asked those occupying the area to leave.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, FEB 21

The Kathmandu Metropolitan City has asked all the occupants of the encroached Lalita Niwas land to vacate the area within a week.

Issuing a notice on Wednesday, the metropolis asked all individuals, companies, and organisations currently occupying parts of the Lalita Niwas area in ward number 4 of the city to leave voluntarily.

Citing the Special Court's February 15 verdict, the KMC said that since the land had now been brought under the government's ownership from private possession, it was the city's responsibility to preserve, monitor, and make appropriate use of the land.

"The notice has been issued to preserve, monitor, and make appropriate use of the land, situated in ward number 4 of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City, confiscated by the government as per the Special Court's order," the notice reads.

Failure to abide by the order will result in eviction in accordance with the law, the City office warned.

The Special Court, last Thursday, convicted over 100 individuals, including former government secretaries, for illegally transferring the government land to the ownership of private individuals. The court also ordered the confiscation of land from 65 individuals.

The Lalita Niwas area covers around 300 ropanis [around 15 hectares] of land adjoining the prime minister's residence, Nepal Rastra Bank's central office and some VIP residences at Baluwatar.

# Four people found dead in Sitapaila

The bodies of a woman and two girls were recovered from a house earlier on Wednesday. Shortly afterwards, a man was found hanging from a tree nearby.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, FEB 21

Four people were found dead at Bhairabtol in Sitapaila, Kathmandu on Wednesday.

According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Purnima Chand, the bodies of a woman and two young girls were recovered from their residence earlier on Wednesday.

Shortly afterwards, the body of a man was also found hanging from a tree near the house, said Superintendent of Police Bhupendra Khatri.

Local residents had informed the authorities about

the incident. They subsequently found the man hanging near the house, said police.

Police suspect the man originally from Dudhkund of Solukhumbu district to have murdered his wife and the two girls before killing himself. One of the murdered girls is identified as an eight-year-old daughter and the other as a two-year-old granddaughter of the couple. They were living in a rented house.

Personnel from the Kathmandu Valley Crime Investigation, the Kathmandu Valley Police Office and the District Police Office reached the incident site for an investigation.



Farmers stage a sit-in on the road in front of District Administration Office, Dang demanding land rights on Wednesday.

# Rastriya Prajatantra Party submits demand for Hindu state reinstatement

Top leaders submit 40-point charter to Prime Minister Dahal, and announce protest programmes.



Rastriya Prajatantra Party chair Rajendra Lingden submits a 40-point demand to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal at Singha Durbar, Kathmandu, Wednesday.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, FEB 21

The Rastriya Prajatantra Party on Wednesday announced its campaign to reinstate Nepal as a Hindu kingdom, submitting a 40-point charter of demands to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

The top leadership of the right-wing party submitted the paper announcing a series of mass gatherings and protests to pressure the government to implement its concerns mainly over the political system. Hundreds of cadres and supporters had rallied in various parts of Kathmandu before a group of senior party workers led by its chair Rajendra Lingden submitted their demands to the prime minister.

In addition to reinstating constitutional monarchy as a "guardian of the state", the party has demanded scrapping the provincial structures and keeping only two tiers of government—central and local. The fifth-largest party in the House of Representatives claims that the three tiers of government are a burden to the nation. The party claims that a strong central government and an empowered local level are what the country needs.

Immediate control in religious conversion being done, what the party claims, by luring and deceiving the common people, directly elected executive head and a constitutional and legal cap of two terms in the executive positions are the other demands. The Lingden-led party has also forwarded a demand to investigate the properties of all the top leaders and bureaucrats since 1990, confiscate property, and take action against them if found guilty.

Right to franchise to those living abroad, strict adherence to non-aligned foreign policy and formulation of proper education policies are other demands. Controlling corruption, ensuring good governance, and expediting development have also found their place on the list.

Presenting the demand paper, Lingden said his party has already taken to the streets and will not rest until the demands are addressed. "The Rastriya Prajatantra Party will continue with peaceful demonstrations but if the government remains indifferent, it will opt for a strong revolution," said Lingden.

Receiving the demand paper, Dahal said the party was free to hold peaceful demonstrations, enjoying the right guaranteed by the Constitution of Nepal drafted by the people's representatives.

"Several of your demands are directly linked to the people's day-to-day lives. The government is combining its efforts to ease the lives of common people," said Dahal. He also remembered how Samyukta Janamorcha, an electoral front of his underground Maoist party, had launched an armed insurgency in February 1996 after the then Sher Bahadur Deuba government paid little attention to addressing their 40-point demand.

Exactly 28 years later, the right-wing party started the protests, submitting an equal number of demands. Now Dahal is in a position to implement them, similar to what Deuba was in 1996.

Mohan Shrestha, the party's publicity department chief, said it was a coincidence that they submitted the 40-point demands in February. "However, our party can take

any extreme measure to get them implemented," he said. Lingden has threatened to quit provincial assemblies and even the House of Representatives if its demands are not addressed.

The party has 14 lawmakers in the 275-strong House. The party also has representation in the provincial assemblies and holds the Speaker's position in Bagmati and Koshi. The party took the Speaker position in Koshi after announcing its plan of a nationwide demonstration.

After long discussions, the party decided in December last year to commence nationwide protests to reinstate Nepal as a Hindu kingdom and scrap the provincial structures. It opted for protests under pressure from a faction led by General Secretary Dhawal Shumsher Rana. The party has formed a main committee led by Lingden and a mobilisation panel led by Rana to spearhead the protest.

"We will start district-level awareness gatherings until mid-March to take our demands to the households," Shrestha told the Post. "The Kathmandu-centric mass demonstration will be held in the third week of March."

The party is also working to collaborate with various groups with a common Hindu statehood agenda. Starting last year, controversial businessman Durga Prasai has been staging mass gatherings around the country including in Kathmandu, championing a cause similar to that of the party. The party leadership is in regular dialogue with Prasai.

Of late, a section of Nepali Congress leaders too has raised its voice for reinstating Nepal as a Hindu state.

## INTERVIEW

# 'We believe Nepalis may want to go to Britain to enhance their skills and come back'

UK Minister for Development and Africa Andrew Mitchell visited Nepal on February 19-20. He met top government officials in Kathmandu including the prime minister, the finance minister, and the foreign minister. He also signed a new development portfolio of £400 million (\$505m) for Nepal. In this context, the Post's Anil Giri sat with Mitchell to discuss his Nepal visit.

**The world itself is in turmoil. Several conflicts are happening. What brings you to Nepal at this critical juncture?**

As the British development minister, I am in Nepal to announce two new programmes, but more importantly, to launch the next phase of our development programme. This entails spending approximately \$500 million before the end of the decade to further our bilateral work with Nepal.

We are also strong supporters of the investment conference, which is coming up on April 28 and 29. We believe that now is a critical moment where Nepal could attract significant private sector investment. The British Development Finance Institution, which is already investing substantially in Nepal, is taking a great interest in further investments. In my opinion, the double taxation treaty, which is expected to be presented to the Cabinet soon, is one of the main economic improvements that the government plans to implement.

**How can the UK help Nepal build the capacity to seek climate funding and climate justice?**

We also put money into the loss and damage fund. But we are very clear that for the loss and damage fund to work, they will need to find a much wider set of donors. That is why we're very keen that people should look at new mechanisms for financing that involve countries like Russia and China, as well as others, too. There are various suggestions, one of which is that maritime fuel could have a levy

imposed upon it, which would raise a great deal of additional money. But Britain believes that you need a different set of donors and a different source of finance if loss and damage are to work. Otherwise, you're merely reorienting existing streams of funding.

**What prompted the UK government to announce this aid to Nepal? What is the connection—Gurkhas?**

That's a different matter. We're continuing to talk on the issue of pensions, and I'm absolutely delighted that in the last few weeks, the latest group of 337 Gurkhas has left for training in Caterick, Britain. It has nothing to do with that; it is a reflection of the closeness of our relationship. Britain has had a bit of a dip in terms of its work internationally and development.

Over recent years, a white paper issued by the UK government is a very clear symbol that Britain is back and is trying to exercise a leadership position on driving forward, the attack on the egregious extent of poverty, which disfigures our world to work very closely with our partners on development, of which Nepal has always been a great partner.

**What is the anticipation of a result by 2030?**

I think the portfolio addresses some specific green and climate issues. I saw yesterday the work that we are doing together on irrigation, stopping gender-based violence, and a very broad set of aims that we all want to see achieved, placing girls and women at the centre of everything we do in development. So on a whole range of things where we work together, we want to drive them forward. If you asked me what we want to see by 2030, we want to see the role of the private sector in Nepal's economy—greater than it is at the moment because we think there's scope for that, given the end of conflict and the fact that BII is here as an investor. So we see a big role in terms of



UK Minister for Development and Africa Andrew Mitchell

employment, investment, jobs, and the alleviation of poverty.

**Will the new portfolio that you announced go through your own channel or the government's system?**

Yesterday I saw the work that we are doing through a hospital [in Butwal] on tackling gender-based violence. It's to focus on how we get more girls into school, how we enable more farmers to resist the change in weather, and how we grow two crops a year. It's about winning results and using our taxpayers' money to work in partnership with Nepal to deliver those

results. For example, the hospital is working very closely with the government on the whole. We don't do direct budget support, which is putting money into the country's budget. But there are examples where we work out what is the best way to achieve these results, and on gender-based violence, someone will work incredibly closely with the government and the hospital authorities to deliver those results.

**How do you ensure that each pound that comes to Nepal through UK Aid is spent in a transparent manner?**

We have zero tolerance for corruption. No programme suffers, fortunately,

because we have very good checks and balances. On rare occasions, when our programme is the subject of corruption allegations, we stop it and seek absolute accountability and transparency. And we believe that sunlight is the best disinfectant. We value transparency and focus on things, and we have checks and balances that ensure that our money is well used. Also, if we're not happy with the routes by which we are seeking to win those results and spend this money on delivering corruption-free services, then we don't use it.

**Nepali Gurkhas who served in the British Army before 1997 are crying for equal pay and pensions, similar to those recruited after 1997. Why do these rules not apply equally?**

There are three different groups. Gurkhas, I think, are affected by these issues. The first is the groups that the Gurkha welfare trust looks after, particularly the very elderly, to ensure that those here in Nepal have dignity in their old age. And they're getting very, very old nurses, with a diminishing number. The Gurkha Welfare Trust looks after that.

The second group are those who received the terms and conditions; they've gone to the UK; they get a standard UK pension because that is the arrangement, terms and conditions that they are. The third group are those who retired here on an agreed pension, a big pension in Nepal, who may now go to the UK, and who, of course, are eligible for UK benefits. That is the third group, the particular group that you're referring to. On all of those, I think we should keep talking. We have a tremendous debt to the Gurkhas, which we recognise; these are different categories. And they require different treatment, but we should just keep talking about this. We haven't reached a definitive conclusion.

**The Nepal government is talking about completing the transitional**

**justice process. Was there any indication that this process will now move smoothly?**

We didn't talk about that, but I did say that I thought the poor deserve great credit for having addressed the conflict. And I think the government of Nepal deserves great credit for having reached that very happy stage.

So you have to read the white paper. The white paper is 140 pages. It's one of the most exciting things I've read in the last year. Two things about development matter. One is that it is long-term. The other is that it is a partnership. It's one of our joint priorities. It's about working together, partnership, and localism to deliver joint objectives. And we have an extremely brilliant Head of Development here, who's steeped in this world and knows it inside out. And she makes sure that what we pursue is a joint endeavour. If you're setting priorities, we discuss and agree on the areas that will work together.

**There was an agreement to send Nepali nurses to the United Kingdom. How does this help build the capacity of the Nepali state?**

When I was not a minister, I introduced a bill into the British House of Commons to say that whenever a nurse or a clinician comes from a developing country to the UK, the UK's development programme should pay for nurses to be trained in that country. And it was an idea that was floated as a bill. We believe that people here may want to go to Britain to enhance their skills and come back. A lot of people who come to our country to work in our health service build up their skills and come back and use their skills here. Through the development programme, we are building capacity, including in the health areas I saw during my hospital visit. It was a tremendous government agreement; we don't recruit except through this government agreement. There are, I hope, benefits both ways.

## OPINION



## OUR VIEW

## Fragile sentiments

It is time for everyone to come together and celebrate cultural-religious vitality—not virulence.

The curfew in Ishhath Municipality of Rautahat District, imposed after violent clashes between two groups on the issue of immersing the idol of goddess Saraswati, has finally been lifted. It seems that peace has prevailed in the end. But has better sense prevailed, too? After all, it was none other than the goddess of knowledge who had been brought into controversy.

The controversy—and the clashes—should never have happened in the first place. Apparently, it all started with the locals of Ghirua Tole in the municipality's Ward-7, who were headed towards a nearby lake to immerse the idol and were obstructed by a group of people for allegedly playing loud music. This was followed by an exchange of insults, punches and stones. Attempts by the local unit to settle the issue with a talk did not come to fruition, and a curfew had to be imposed.

What is alarming about the latest clashes and the curfew is that these are the symptoms of a larger malaise in Nepali society today. We are a society filled with fragile sentiments and monumental egos. We have learnt to claim our space but not leave any space to others. We have learnt to showcase our religious-cultural affiliations through huge public displays of music, colours, and performances. But we do not tolerate it if someone else does the same. What ensues is a culture of intolerance and a false sense of victimhood.

Most importantly, we have not learnt the terms of engagement in a secular society: We can celebrate and profess our religion in public only up to the point where we do not create inconvenience for others who share the same space with us. Let alone religion, we have not learnt the basic tenets of democracy, where respect for other people's ideas, ideologies and lifestyles pays us back in equal proportions.

This is not to say that Nepal's religious communities, or social groups in general, are fundamentally intolerant of others. It's just that we have yet to exercise the praxis of secular, democratic ideals and ideologies in our public lives. This has largely to do with the state's failure to inculcate in us citizens and social beings a public spirit of celebrating diversities and differences. We are a plural society inasmuch as we remain oblivious of, even indifferent to, our pluralities. But that is not the ideal definition of pluralism.

In the past year alone, we have seen many instances of divergences resulting from a failure to respect differences and pluralities—in Dharan, Nepalgunj, Janakpur and Malangawa. We have come to a stage where the administration has to impose curfews in advance, as was the case in Nepalgunj in October last year, in anticipation of communal clashes. We, the people, in being intolerant to our differences, are subjecting ourselves to the state's oppressive apparatus. This is contrary to the constitutional definition of Nepal as a democratic, secular republic. It is time for everyone to come together and celebrate the country's cultural-religious vitality—not virulence.

## THEIR VIEW

## Silencing the public

The authorities of Pakistan decide to block access to X, curtailing citizens' digital rights.

The stench of desperation hangs heavy over Islamabad. The powerful have had a lot of trouble lately keeping the public under their thumb. Short of ideas, they have decided to block Pakistan's access to X (formerly Twitter), one of the most popular digital mediums for self-expression.

The authorities are seemingly so afraid of the public setting the narrative agenda that they have decided to simply pull the plug. Such repressive actions are a shame in this day and age: Millions of opinion-makers and citizens around the world converge virtually every day on the platform to exchange important news and views—why can Pakistanis not be among them? There has been no word from the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority or the IT ministry, which would previously issue at least a mealy-mouthed explanation when denying the citizenry access to mainstream internet services. Even they have not figured out how to justify what is being done.

One marvel at the hypocrisy of some of our caretaker ministers, who have ostensibly been using VPN services to continue posting on X even as their own people are being denied the same privilege. The IT minister's behaviour, in particular, is galling: During this latest blockage, he has celebrated the 'take-off' of Pakistan's IT industry and achieved 13 items on his agenda, while also announcing two new schemes for the industry—all while not saying a word about why Pakistani users suddenly cannot access one of the world's most popular social mediums.

It seems he is more interested in self-promotion while the state is busy broadcasting its abject disregard for the digital economy. He should be asked: Why would any entrepreneur bother investing in Pakistan, especially when the country's internet access and telecom policies always seem subject to change without notice?

As for the PTA, the less said the better. Suspending mobile phone services without any prior warning throughout election day and well after had already wreaked immeasurable damage on Pakistan this month. Many citizens were left unable to exercise their constitutional rights due to the communications blackout, which also contributed towards worsening the political instability by providing a convenient cover for the alleged irregularities that occurred later that night. And yet, the authority refuses to learn. Acting as if it is unaccountable, it is now curtailing citizens' digital rights without even bothering to come up with a justification.

It seems that the PTA has quietly become just another tool in the hands of our habitually oppressive state, to be used against the people of Pakistan whenever they start inconveniencing the powers that be. It is important that it be checked immediately. With precedents available thanks to prior court rulings on internet bans, it should be sued for its actions.

—Dawn(Pakistan)/ANN

## Nepal's demographics: Then and now

|| AS I LIKE ||

We now know for the first time how the different provinces have been doing.

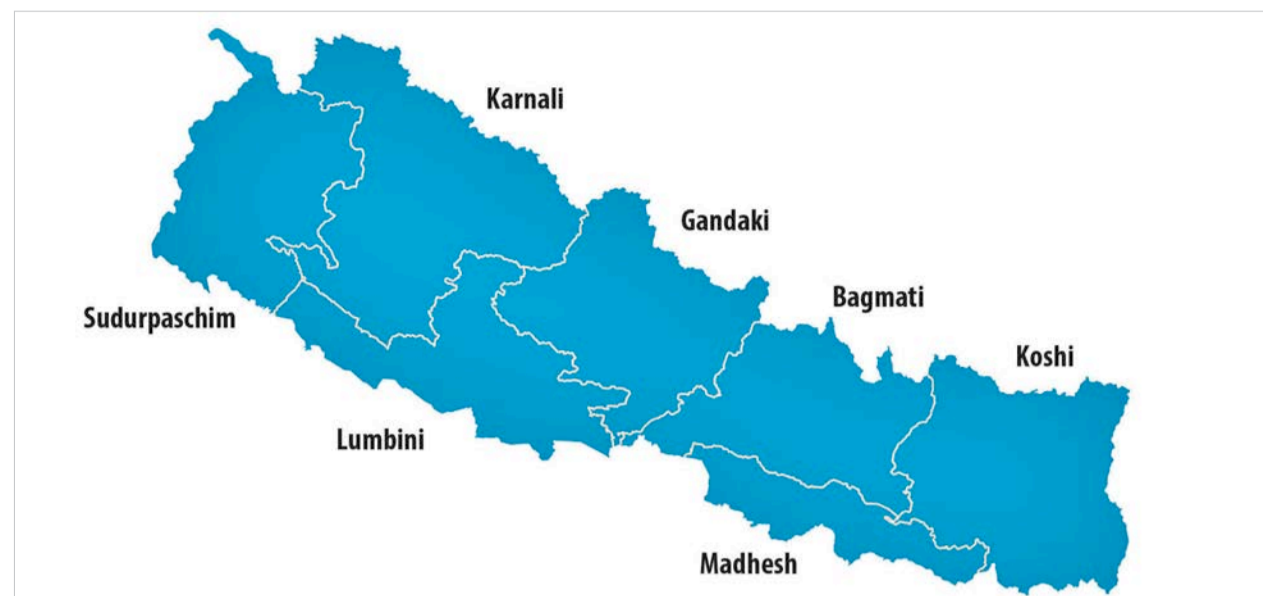
DEEPAK THAPA



Anyone scanning the news would be aware that the summary results of the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) 2022-23 have now been published. Unlike during previous iterations when ordinary folks with an appetite for learning more had no immediate access and the only resort was reliance on news stories, the report was also simultaneously made available online. Which is rather fortuitous since it not only gives everyone a peek into statistical facts from this round of the NLSS not picked up by the media but in this column and the next one also for indulging in a bit of contextual detour as well.

First, the big takeaway regarding how we are doing in terms of lifting people out of poverty based on what they eat and spend on. Starting with NLSS I (1995-96) through NLSS II (2003-04) and NLSS III (2010-11) and now NLSS IV, the proportion of people living in poverty has gone down consistently: 42 percent, 31 percent, 25 percent and 20 percent, respectively. Of course, nothing matches the dramatic improvement seen between NLSS I and NLSS II, when more than a quarter of the poor were found to have moved above the national poverty line, and that, too, during a period coinciding with the devastating Maoist insurgency.

The NLSS IV report did state that had the parameters from NLSS III been used, the poverty rate would have gone down to 4 percent. But because the state of poverty (or wealth) is always relative, the poverty line has been raised to keep up with people's consumption patterns. In simple terms, and this is only by way of example, if being able to afford meat only once a week designated one as not poor in 2010-11, in order to retain that status a decade later, one would have had to have meat on the menu twice or thrice a week. Or, as the National Planning Commission noted: "Some of what



POST ILLUSTRATION

used to be luxury items became necessities."

Perhaps because the only reference to it was in a note in the summary report, news articles did not mention that there had been a similar adjustment in NLSS III, making allowances for people's higher spending habits compared to NLSS I and II. Otherwise, based on the same "basket", as the categories of food and non-food items are known as when measuring poverty indices, necessary to meet basic needs as in the previous two survey rounds, the poverty rate would have been 13 percent in 2010-11 (instead of 25 percent)—and perhaps even been completely eliminated by now. This also partly explains the massive decrease in poverty rates between NLSS I and II since both used the same basket while adjusting only for inflation.

Given that this round of NLSS takes into account Nepal as a federal state, we now know for the first time how the different provinces have been doing. Sudurpaschim fares the worst with nearly a third of the population under the poverty line. Next come Karnali and Lumbini, with 27 and 24 per cent, respectively. Likewise, 23 percent of the Madhesh population is poor but because of its relatively large share of the national population, the actual number of the poor is the highest in Madhesh, accounting for 25 percent of the country's poor. Gandaki has come out on top with the lowest proportion of people in poverty (12 percent) but also the lowest share of the actual poor, at just 5 percent of the total.

The "analytical domains" considered by NLSS IV consist of 15 in total—the rural and urban areas of the seven

provinces, with the Kathmandu Valley taken separately. It is also no surprise that the Valley does best among these 15, with only 7 percent of the population below the poverty line. At the other end of the spectrum is rural Sudurpaschim, with a poverty rate of 40 percent. Next come urban Sudurpaschim and rural Karnali, at 31 percent each. The big surprise is that rural Bagmati, with a poverty rate of 25 percent, is above all the rest, even urban Karnali. Of course, we all know that the urban-rural divide is quite artificial, and there are large parts of what are classified as urban are nowhere near like that, at least not yet. Which is why the performance of rural Bagmati is all the more striking.

It is worth looking at how NLSS IV compares with another measure of poverty, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). The latter looks at a set of 10 variables within the three main dimensions of education, health and living standard to calculate poverty. The one and only national MPI report so far, from 2018, is based on another government survey from 2014, and hence, not comparable. But there is no harm pointing out that, according to the MPI, Karnali was the worst off, with 51 percent of the population "multidimensionally poor" followed closely by Madhesh with 48 percent. Bagmati (12 percent) did the best with Gandaki (14 percent) and Koshi (20 percent) close behind. It does make me wonder if the somewhat divergent NLSS IV results reflect only methodological differences or if people's well-being has progressed at variable rates in different provinces.

Another interesting fact from NLSS IV is that the number of those living

below the official poverty line in Nepal in absolute terms has gone down over the preceding decade. Calculated on the basis of the 2011 and 2021 censuses, and so not wholly accurate, the total number of the poor is now 6.7 million compared to 5.9 million when NLSS III was conducted. Considering the many setbacks the country has experienced over all these years—from the 2015 earthquake and the subsequent Indian blockade followed by the chaotic and still-incomplete transition to federalism and the Covid-19 pandemic, not to mention a succession of feckless governments—it should still be viewed as a significant achievement.

We will have to wait for analytical reports of the NLSS IV data to get a better understanding of the cause of this decline in poverty rates. Since the national economy has not grown enough to account for it, the only answer has been external remittances, both in 2003-04 and 2010-11. However, remittance appears to be but one factor. As a World Bank paper reported, remittances can be attributed for only 27 percent of reduction in poverty between 1995-96 (NLSS I) and 2010-11 (NLSS III). A lion's share (52 percent) was due to rising labour income within households which could itself have been affected positively by the migration of a large body of the workforce from all over the country.

We will also have to wait to see how conditions have changed for different caste and ethnic groups. The portents are not that encouraging as is evident in the case of rural Bagmati with its majority Tamang population. The imperative for such an analysis will be dealt with two weeks hence.

## Strengthening social security

Family support is vital in promoting happiness and satisfaction of the elderly.

SABINA SITAULA



Nepal is experiencing a swift demographic transition characterised by an increasing elderly population. The Senior Citizens Act of 2063 in Nepal defines senior citizens as individuals who have reached the age of 60 years or older. There are 2.97 million senior citizens in Nepal—a 38.2 percent increase compared to 2011.

According to UNICEF's (2017) report, an "ageing society" is one in which the percentage of individuals aged 65 years and above (known as old-age dependents) accounts for 7 percent or more of the total population. When this number doubles to 14 percent or more, it is classified as an "aged society." Nepal will become an ageing society around 2028, approximately four years from 2024. Additionally, it is predicted that Nepal will become an aged society around 2054.

## Demographic dividend

A demographic dividend can be understood as a period when the share of the working-age population is larger than that of the non-working-age population. The 2021 census has identified 62 percent of Nepal's working-age population, i.e., aged 15-59 years. However, as per international practice, the 15-64 age group is considered working age, which is 65 percent of the total population in Nepal. A large share of the working-age population is regarded as a demographic window of opportunity, during which nations can accelerate economic and social development by taking advantage of the rising share of the population in the working ages. This demographic dividend is characterised by a shift from high to low levels of mortality and fertility.

A 2023 study, "Ageing Trend and Situation in Nepal", shows that from 1952 to 2021, the crude birth rate declined from 45 percent to 20 percent, the total fertility rate fell to 1.8 percent,

and the crude death rate decreased from 36.7 percent to 6.3 percent. The infant mortality rate also declined from as high as 250 to approximately 23 per thousand live births in a year. However, if we look at the growth rate of the older population in Nepal, the percentage of the older population is 10.21 percent—the highest in the history of Nepal. New entrants in the labour market have been peaking. Simultaneously, the total absentee population (defined as those absent from households and gone abroad for more than six months before the census date) has also increased to 2.2 million in 2021—over 3 times the total number in 1991.

The shift from a period of the demographic dividend to an ageing population affects the quality of life (QOL) for the elderly. The significant factors associated with a decrease in the QOL of elderly people are mainly: Reduced physical and mental functions, loneli-

## Is social protection strong enough?

Nepal has taken steps to ensure the rights of senior citizens. The Senior Citizens Act was enacted in 2006 to provide protection and social security to senior citizens. The 2015 Constitution of Nepal states in Article 41 that "Senior citizens shall have the right to special protection and social security from the State". According to an ILO (2023) report, 80.2 percent of the population that is 60 years of age and above have access to social protection through a mix of contributory and non-contributory schemes.

Additionally, benefits have reached almost 100 percent of individuals above 70, with women's coverage being higher than men's. This reflects how old age allowances have been effective in reaching those in need. However, the ILO report has further highlighted the need to establish smooth coordination between Social Security Fund (SSF) and Social

contributory pensions, which can be further complemented by provident funds and saving schemes.

**What this means for our economy?** With an increasing ageing population, the demographic dividend may not last longer in Nepal if we don't focus on enabling policies and, at the same time, increasing funding to support the growing older population. The government can engage the working-age population in the productive sector, thereby increasing tax revenues that support these schemes.

However, analysing our absentee population, nearly all migrant workers from Nepal are young adults and from the most productive economic age group of 18 to 44, with half between the ages of 25 and 34 years. Another important yet less prioritised sector is utilising the diaspora communities of our out-migrants in different parts of the world. For this, coordinating with the governments of destination countries of our out-migrants to systematically record a centralised database can go a long way.

Nepal has already initiated building a robust and centralised database, the Foreign Employment Information Management System (FEIMS), which is exemplary. However, more effort is critical in leveraging the database for trend analysis and other policy priority tasks. The integration of FEIMS with the information management system of the destination country could be desirable for tracking and utilising the skills of our outmigrants for our country's development. This could change the notion of brain drain to brain gain. If not taken action on time, Nepal could face repercussions due to its inability to channel the youth to prosper economically.

It is important to note that harnessing this demographic dividend is not automatic but requires careful planning, policy coordination and long-term vision. The nation can reap the maximum benefits of this golden period if it invests more in education, health, and infrastructure, where a large portion of the labour force works in the productive sector. At the same time, implementing models such as the ILO multi-pillar pension model can strengthen the social security system, offering good support for the elderly.

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POST FILE PHOTO

ness, impaired sexual activity, and chronic metabolic disorders, which further lead to emotional disturbances. A study titled "Senior Citizens in Nepal: Policy Gaps and Recommendations" revealed that older populations in Nepal have been facing various challenges, including social isolation, limited healthcare accessibility and financial difficulties. It also suggested that family support, especially from children, is more significant in promoting happiness and satisfaction among the older population.

Security Allowance (SSA) funds to ensure benefit adequacy and long-term fiscal sustainability of non-contributory schemes. Furthermore, the report suggests that Nepal should explore a more predictable and equitable pension system because the existing defined contribution pensions and lump sum payments do not offer predictable income security to workers. The ILO multi-pillar pension model is advisable as it effectively combines elements of non-contributory pensions and predictable and adequate

FOREX	
US Dollar	133.06
Euro	143.65
Pound Sterling	167.78
Swiss Franc	151.08
Australian Dollar	87.17
Canadian Dollar	98.35
Singapore Dollar	98.98
Japanese Yen (10)	8.87
Chinese Yuan	18.51
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.48
Qatari Riyal	36.49
Thai Bhat	3.71
UAE Dhiram	36.23
Malaysian Ringgit	27.76
Korean Won (100)	9.97

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES	
Nepse (in percent)	2,026.59pts -0.31%
HIGHEST LOSERS	
PHCL	-7.84
HHL	-4.26
TVCL	-4.23
H8020	-4.11
MKJC	-4.05
PSF	-3.77
MODERATE LOSERS	
MEHL	-0.06
JIBBL	-0.03
PBLD87	-0.03
SABSL	-0.03
AVYAN	-0.02
JALPA	-0.01
MODERATE GAINERS	
GMFIL	0.08
RIDI	0.05
KKHC	0.04
MFIL	0.04
NBL	0.04
HLSL	0.03
HIGHEST GAINERS	
BNL	10
HURJA	10
SAMAJ	10
BNT	9.99
ANLB	8.5
MHCL	8.11

BULLION		PRICE PER TOLA
 Fine Gold		Rs 118,400
 Silver		Rs 1,415

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

## BIZLINE

### China stocks jump after rate cut

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong and Shanghai stocks jumped Wednesday after Beijing's latest measures to boost the stuttering economy, but declines on Wall Street weighed on other Asian markets. China's central bank rate cut on Tuesday is among measures intended to rally dwindling growth as the world's second-largest economy battles a prolonged property-sector crisis and a global slowdown. The People's Bank of China said it was lowering the five-year loan prime rate, used to price mortgages, from 4.2 to 3.95 percent—the largest reduction since the key rate was revamped in 2019. Hong Kong climbed 1.6 percent, peaking at 3.0 percent at the afternoon break, while Shanghai was up 1.0 percent at the close. (AFP)

### French farmers resume protests ahead of key agriculture show

**PARIS:** French farmers resumed protests on Wednesday, days ahead of the national agriculture show, the start of which has become a de facto deadline for the government to meet their demands. On Wednesday, they blocked a stretch of around 70 kilometres (43 miles) on a motorway in the south of the country. Already Tuesday, farmers had blocked a milk transport in protest against wholesale prices they say are too low. The FNSEA and the Young Farmers (JA) union have also announced they will lead a column of tractors to the agriculture show in Paris on Friday in anticipation of French President Emmanuel Macron's visit. (AFP)

### Boeing says ready for competition with China-made plane

**SINGAPORE:** Boeing said on Wednesday it was preparing to compete with China's first domestically produced passenger plane, which was showcased for the first time to international buyers at Asia's biggest airshow. The single-aisle C919 aircraft made its international debut this week at the Singapore Airshow, featuring in both flying and on-the-ground displays in a bid to woo international buyers. The state-owned Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC), is seeking to position the C919 as a potential competitor to the market-leading A320, made by Europe's Airbus, and the 737 MAX from US-based Boeing. (AFP)

### Indian farmers resume Delhi protest push after talks fail

**PATIALA:** Thousands of Indian farmers riding tractors prepared to resume their push towards New Delhi on Wednesday after failing to reach a deal with the government on their demands for higher crop prices. The protest hopes to successfully replicate the yearlong siege of highways into the capital that pressured Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government into abandoning its agricultural reform plans in 2021. Police have kept a miles-long column of farmers atop agricultural machinery at bay since last week near the small village of Shambhu, several hours' drive north of their intended destination. (AFP)

# Traditional metalcraft fading in the face of modernity

Metal artists say modern customers overlook the fact that crafts, apart from being the cultural grace of society, also sustain the livelihoods of artisans.

□ SARAHNA KHADKA  
KATHMANDU, FEB 21

Laxman Dahal, a metal artisan, is much worried about the future of centuries-old traditional handmade crafts.

Dahal, who has been running Agni Hastakala Udyog, a prominent name in the metal handicraft, at Setopul in Kathmandu, for the past 25 years, feels modern metal craftsmanship is killing the traditional artistry.

Handicraft artisans are constantly competing against machine-made products and struggling to sustain their centuries-old industry. The traditional brass and metal sector of Kathmandu Valley is going through a similar fate.

Once a thriving industry, employing hundreds of people, the demand for metal crafts has declined considerably, putting at risk the designs, craftsmanship, and creations of centuries-old tradition.

"Demand has dried up significantly. We, however, are compelled to continue this profession because it is a part of our culture. It's my passion too," said Dahal.

He specialises in making essentials like cutlery and decorative items, offering a diverse range of objects like glasses, jugs, and water vessels.

He also manufactures idols of Hindu gods and various worship paraphernalia including worship plates, lamps, and other equipment.

While sales of other metal crafts have dwindled, demand for copper utensils, however, has seen a modest uptick. Normally, copper vessel prices start from Rs1,320 per kg. Dahal sells a packet of 5 copper water bottles for Rs1,600 per piece.

The surge in the demand for copper, according to Dahal, is due to the growing awareness of health. He said that using other metals like aluminium is associated with health risks.

"We encourage consumers to use copper," said Dahal.

Post-Covid, Agni Hastakala has ventured into online sales.

Metal artists say that modern customers have forgotten that crafts,



Handicraft artisans are constantly competing against machine-made products and struggling to sustain their centuries-old industry.

apart from being the cultural grace of society, are also an income source for the artisan community.

There is an influx of imported metal items creating stiff competition for the indigenous sector.

Many beautiful pieces have faded into oblivion and are no longer produced. Artisans are also giving in to the demands of modern customers by compromising their traditions.

Barahi Crafts, a stalwart in the metalcraft business for over three decades, has carved a niche for itself.

Now, Barahi is planning to import machines.

"With machines that we are trying to import, the task that takes us two months may be completed in a month,

lessening the work burden by half," said Sudip Bajagain, proprietor of Barahi Crafts.

However, transitioning to machines includes exorbitant costs and it is challenging, he says.

According to Bajagain, to conduct the full process, a dice machine, mechanical furnace and their parts and tools are required. They will also need skilled technicians to install and operate them.

"Our estimates show that the initial cost of the machine could go well above Rs10 million," he said.

The company's elaborate brass and copper arts have even found their place in the prime minister's residence at Baluwatar, and homes of for-

mer prime ministers and even in army badges.

"Our speciality is that we can craft any kind of design according to customer's demand based on just a simple photograph," said. "We have installed statues of lions in the prime minister's residence and even created statues of King Prithvi Narayan Shah for various organisations."

For Bajagain, metalcraft is a family legacy. His father laid the foundation and he is now driving it.

"My father is a metalcraft artist. He still creates all of the original designs for us to manufacture," said Bajagain.

The designs are then copied and carved by four other artisans and their teams.

## German economy faces headwinds

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BERLIN, FEB 21

Weaker exports, costly energy and a stuttering green transition have combined to form a "perfect storm" for the German economy, leaving Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition bickering over how to change course.

The government will unveil its latest economic forecasts for 2024 on Wednesday, with media reports suggesting a sharp downgrade to a mere 0.2 percent growth.

In its autumn projections, the government was still expecting output to expand by 1.3 percent.

The country ended 2023 in recession, shrinking by 0.3 percent, and the latest data suggest the first quarter of 2024 will see another contraction.

Germany also risks facing anaemic growth up to 2028 if no action is taken, German media said.

The German economy, Europe's largest and traditionally a driver of eurozone growth, is being buffeted by "a perfect storm", Economy Minister Robert Habeck said earlier this month.

The situation was "dramatically bad", he added.

Germany's once-mighty industrial sector has been hit particularly hard by multiple headwinds.

Having previously relied on cheap Russian gas imports, the sector is still reeling from the energy price surge triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The European Central Bank's streak of interest rate hikes to tame inflation has added to the pain, dampening demand and investments.

Exports have slumped on weaker trading with key markets such as China, which increasingly produces its own goods. Geopolitical tensions including shipping disruptions in the Red Sea have added to trading woes.

Germany's once-mighty industrial sector has been hit particularly hard by multiple problems.

The long-promised shift to a greener economy meanwhile, requiring major public and private investment, has run into fresh hurdles after a shock legal ruling last year forced the government to rethink some of its climate spending plans.

Attractive green subsidies in the United States have already lured away some German firms, who complain of a lack of incentives offered by Scholz's government.

German chemical giants BASF and Bayer were among some 60 companies this week issuing a joint appeal to European Union leaders to adopt a "European industrial deal" to help pull the sector out of the doldrums.

"Without a targeted industrial poli-

cy, Europe risks becoming dependent even on basic goods and chemicals. Europe cannot afford this to happen," the statement read.

In an open letter at the weekend, 18 federations representing the "Mittelstand" of small- and medium-sized companies seen as the backbone of the German economy, urged politicians to take action.

"It's one minute to midnight. What's at stake is nothing less than the rescue of the German Mittelstand," it said.

But the three parties that make up Scholz's coalition of the Social Democrats, the Greens and the liberal FDP, are at odds over how to respond.

Finance Minister Christian Lindner from the pro-business FDP wants to ease the tax burden and cut red tape for businesses.

"If we do nothing, Germany will become poorer," he has warned.

A draft law that would reduce taxes on corporations by around seven billion euros (\$7.5 billion) a year is due to be approved by lawmakers on Wednesday, after months of squabbling. But Economy Minister Habeck, from the ecologist Greens, wants to go further.

He has called for a relaxation of the government's constitutionally enshrined "debt brake", a self-imposed cap on annual borrowing that critics say has hampered much-needed spending on modernising infrastructure and financing environmentally-friendly projects.

## HSBC reports 'record profit' of \$30.3 billion in 2023

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
HONG KONG, FEB 21

HSBC said Wednesday it achieved "record profit" in 2023 as pre-tax gains soared by nearly 80 percent, with the banking giant also announcing further share buybacks.

The Asia-focused lender and its peers have been buoyed by rising interest rates for more than a year, but are bracing for greater economic uncertainties in 2024.

The bank generates most of its revenue in Asia and has spent several years pivoting to the region, vowing to develop its wealth business and target fast-growing markets.

Despite bumper profits, HSBC noted the effects of China's slower-than-expected economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic as well as heightened geopolitical tensions.

The firm reported pre-tax profits of \$30.3 billion, up from \$17.1 billion the year before, in a statement to the Hong Kong stock exchange.

Profit after tax increased by \$8.3 billion, to \$24.6 billion, while revenue rose by 30 percent to \$66.1 billion.

"Our record profit performance in 2023 enabled us to reward our shareholders with our highest full-year dividend since 2008," said chief executive Noel Quinn.

"This reflected four years of hard

work and the strength of our balance sheet in a higher interest rate environment."

The bank said Wednesday that it would initiate a share buyback of up to \$2 billion, following the announcement last year of three share buybacks totalling \$7 billion.

It also announced a fourth quarterly dividend of \$0.31 per share, bringing the total dividend for 2023 to \$0.61 per share.

HSBC said the profits included a "favourable year-on-year impact" of \$2.5 billion due to the sale of its French retail banking operations, as well as a \$1.6 billion provisional gain recognised on its acquisition of Silicon Valley Bank UK.

The profits were partly offset by a \$3 billion impairment charge related to its holding in China's Bank of Communications—which helped tank HSBC's fourth-quarter profits by 80 percent to \$1 billion.

HSBC said it maintains a 19 percent interest in the Bank of Communications, adding that the Shanghai-based lender "remains a strong partner in China, and we remain focused on maximising the mutual value of our partnership".

Quinn told Bloomberg the impairment charge was a "technical accounting issue" and had no impact on HSBC's capital position.

## Livestock insurance offers hope to drought-hit Somalis

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MOGADISHU, FEB 21

A record drought wiped out nearly half of Iido Abdikarin Abdille's herd in northern Somalia, but a livestock insurance programme is helping to ease the financial burden on pastoralists like her.

Since her father's death in 2010, the 34-year-old has taken on the responsibility of looking after her unwell mother as well as her own two children in Somalia's Puntland state.

The Horn of Africa nation is only just beginning to emerge from the worst drought in four decades that left millions of people hungry across East Africa.

"We rely on livestock and if the animal becomes weak as happens during the droughts... you cannot even milk the animal because it has nothing to feed on," Abdille told AFP, recalling how she lost dozens of goats since 2020.

The drought pushed thousands of Somalis to the brink of famine and left pastoralists especially vulnerable to economic ruin.

It swallowed up their key livestock assets, forcing families to give up their way of life and migrate to urban

centres. But a recently launched World Bank-backed project, the Index-Based Livestock Insurance (IBLI), aims to protect the community against drought shocks by offering payouts when herders lose animals to climate disasters.

Participants receive compensation in exchange for a contribution that is proportionate to the size of their herd.

Abdille is among 40,000 Somalis who have registered for the scheme since August 2022, and has already received a \$50 payout.

"This money will be useful for sustaining our lives and that of the animals because we will manage to buy foliage and water during droughts to save our animals," she said.

"This is the first time a programme like this which benefits Somali pastoralists has been implemented in the country," said Muusa Ali Mahamad, communications director at Salaam Somali Bank, one of the project's backers.

Abdifatah Jama Hassan, another pastoralist based in Puntland, said many of his compatriots were being compelled to migrate to cities in search of work because of failed rainy seasons.

"There are recurring droughts in



A woman and a boy walk past a flock of dead goats in a dry land close to Dhahar in Puntland, northeastern Somalia, in December 2016.

our country and the climate is unpredictable, so the traditional way of pastoralist life is no longer sustainable," he told AFP.

The 43-year-old was initially reluctant to sign up to the scheme because he struggled to understand it.

"This is a completely new thing to Somali pastoralists, but we can already feel the benefits we get in return outweigh the small amount of money we pay for the policy," he said.

The financial coverage has boosted his confidence in the face of the constant threat posed by drought, he added.

In the southwestern district of Dolow, which was devastated by floods last November after years of drought, pastoralists told AFP they hoped that access to insurance would secure their livelihoods and preserve their centuries-old way of life.

"I believe this initiative will encourage people not to quit keeping animals (because) even in the worst drought there will still be a way to save the animals," said Abdirizak Hussein Mohamed, 39.

"This is indeed a blessing," he added.

## WORLD

# Gaza, Ukraine loom large as G20 foreign ministers meet

Prospects for major advances via the group are dim in a year when elections will be held in some 50 countries.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
RIO DE JANEIRO, FEB 21

Foreign ministers of the G20 group of nations open a two-day meeting Wednesday in Brazil, with a bleak outlook for progress on a thorny agenda of conflicts and crises, from the Gaza and Ukraine wars to growing polarization.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov both headed to Rio de Janeiro for the first high-level G20 meeting of the year.

China's top diplomat Wang Yi has opted not to attend, sending Executive Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Ma Zhaoxun instead.

In a world torn by conflicts and divisions, Brazil, which took over the rotating G20 presidency from India in December, has voiced hopes for what President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva calls the "forum with the greatest capacity to positively influence the international agenda."

But Lula's bid to make the G20 a space for finding common ground likely took a hit Sunday when the veteran leftist ignited a diplomatic firestorm by accusing Israel of "genocide," comparing its military campaign in the Gaza Strip to the Holocaust.

The comments drew outrage in Israel, which declared him "persona non grata," and could overshadow any bid to de-escalate the conflict via the G20.

"If Lula imagined he was going to propose peace resolutions on Israel or Ukraine, that just got swept off the table," international relations specialist Igor Lucena told AFP.

More than four months after the Gaza war started with Hamas fighters' unprecedented October 7 attack on Israel, which vows to wipe out the Islamist group in retaliation, there is little sign of progress toward peace.

A new UN Security Council resolution on a ceasefire was vetoed Tuesday by the United States.

The outlook is similarly grim on Russia's war in Ukraine, which also has G20 members divided.

Despite a push by Western countries to condemn President Vladimir Putin's invasion, the G20's last sum-

mit ended with a watered-down statement denouncing the use of force but not explicitly naming Russia, which maintains friendly ties with India and Brazil, among other members.

Britain announced Wednesday it was imposing sanctions on six Russian officials over opposition leader Alexei Navalny's death in prison last week, and Foreign Secretary David Cameron said he planned to use the Rio meeting to "call out Russia's aggression" directly to Lavrov.

"No one should doubt the oppressive nature of the Russian system," Cameron said in a statement.

Underlining the G20 stalemate, the G7 group of top economies—Ukrainian allies Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States—will hold its own virtual meeting on the war Saturday, the second anniversary of Russia's invasion.

The G20 meeting will open with a session on "addressing international tensions."

The ministers will discuss global governance reform Thursday—a favorite issue for Brazil, which wants a greater voice for the global south at institutions such as the UN, IMF and World Bank.

"The number and gravity of conflicts has returned to the level of the Cold War," said Brazil's top diplomat for G20 political negotiations, Mauricio Lyrio.

"We need to adapt the international system to prevent new conflicts," he told journalists Tuesday. "Now, we're just putting out fires."

Brazil also wants to use its G20 presidency to push the fights against poverty and climate change.

There will also be space for bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the gathering—though a Blinken-Lavrov encounter looks unlikely, given soaring tensions.

The pair last met in person at a G20 gathering in India in March 2023.

Blinken held what he called a "very good meeting" with Lula Wednesday morning in Brasilia before flying to Rio. Founded in 1999, the Group of 20 brings together most of the world's biggest economies.

Originally an economic forum, it has grown increasingly involved in international politics.

# Hunger grips war-torn Gaza as truce talks resume in Cairo

The White House sends Middle East envoy Brett McGurk for renewed talks involving mediators and Hamas, a day after a UN Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire was blocked by the US.



Relatives mourn over the body of a loved one killed during overnight Israeli strikes before his burial at a cemetery in Rafah on Wednesday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
GAZA STRIP, FEB 21

Heavy fighting rocked besieged Gaza on Wednesday as aid agencies warned of looming famine and new talks were held in Cairo towards an Israel-Hamas ceasefire and hostage release deal.

The White House sent Middle East envoy Brett McGurk for renewed talks involving mediators and Hamas, a day after a United Nations Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire was blocked by the US.

Global concern has spiralled over the high civilian death toll and dire humanitarian crisis in the war sparked by Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack against Israel.

Combat and chaos again stalled the sporadic aid deliveries for desperate

civilians in Gaza, where the UN has warned the population of 2.4 million is on the brink of famine and could face an "explosion" of child deaths.

The UN World Food Programme said it was forced to halt aid deliveries in north Gaza because of "complete chaos and violence" after a truck convoy encountered gunfire and was ransacked by looters.

Hamas called the move a "death sentence".

More Israeli strikes continued to pound Gaza, leaving 103 people dead during the night, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, which put the overall death toll at 29,313.

Air strikes were ongoing into Wednesday evening in southern Rafah and Khan Yunis, according to an AFP

correspondent.

Abdel Rahman Mohamed Jumaa said he lost his family in strikes on Gaza's far-southern Rafah area.

"I found my wife lying in the street," he told AFP. "Then I saw a man carrying a girl and I ran towards him and... picked her up, realising she was really my daughter."

He was holding a small shrouded corpse in his arms.

Particular concern has centred on the packed city of Rafah, where 1.4 million people now live in crowded shelters and makeshift tents, fearing attack by nearby Israeli ground troops.

Aid groups warn a ground offensive could turn Rafah into a "graveyard" and the United States has said the vast numbers of displaced civilians must

# Lawyers for US urge British court to reject Julian Assange appeal bid

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LONDON, FEB 21

Lawyers for the United States on Wednesday urged a UK court to block a last-ditch bid by Julian Assange to appeal his extradition to the country to face espionage charges.

Washington indicted the WikiLeaks founder multiple times between 2018 and 2020 over its publication of hundreds of thousands of secret military and diplomatic files on the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The long-running legal saga in Britain's courts is now nearing a conclusion after Assange lost successive rulings in recent years. If he fails with this latest appeal bid, he could be extradited within weeks.

On the second of two days of evidence before two High Court judges, Clair Dobbin, a lawyer for the US government, summarised its various arguments for blocking another appeal.

She argued that Assange had "solicited" secret US military and diplomatic files and, in publishing them "indiscriminately" without redactions, that his actions were "unprecedented" and not journalism.

"It's these facts that distinguish him—not his political opinions," she said. "The evidence shows that from the time the appellant started WikiLeaks... he sought to recruit indi-



A placard is displayed outside of the Royal Courts of Justice, in London on Wednesday.

viduals with access to classified information," Dobbin added. "He worked with hackers." Assange was absent from the court for the two-day session, and did not follow the proceedings via video due to illness, his lawyer told the judges Tuesday.

Dozens of his supporters massed outside on both days, demanding that the judges halt his extradition.

The Australian's lawyers had argued Tuesday that previous UK

legal decisions against him contained "errors of law".

"They said the US charges were "political" and he was being prosecuted "for engaging in ordinary journalistic practice of obtaining and publishing classified information".

Assange's lawyers also argued that the decades-long prison sentence he faces was "disproportionate", accusing Washington of acting in "bad faith" and contravening the extradi-

tion treaty with Britain.

"Mr Assange was exposing serious state criminality," his lawyer Edward Fitzgerald told the court.

US President Joe Biden has faced domestic and international pressure to drop the 18-count indictment against Assange in a Virginia federal court filed under his predecessor Donald Trump.

Major media organisations, press freedom advocates and the Australian parliament have all denounced the prosecution under the 1917 Espionage Act, which has never been used over the publishing of classified information. But Dobbin, the lawyer for the US, noted that the prosecution had continued under two different presidential administrations because "it is based on law and evidence, not political inspiration". "This wasn't a slip or an error; this was the publication of a vast amount of material unredacted," she said, adding it had "profound consequences" for both the US and those whose names were disclosed.

The hearing is likely Assange's last chance to fight extradition in Britain's courts after a years-long battle.

The judges will deliver their decision on whether to grant him another full appeal trial at a date yet to be announced.

If they rule against him, he will have exhausted his UK legal options.

# China says Taiwan seeking to 'hide the truth' about deadly boat incident

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BEIJING, FEB 21

China on Wednesday accused Taiwanese authorities of "seeking to evade their responsibilities and hide the truth" after two Chinese nationals died in a boat incident last week.

The Chinese boat carrying four people capsized on February 14 near Taiwan's Kinmen islands while being pursued by the Taiwanese coast guard, throwing all onboard into the water.

Two of the crew died and two others were rescued and temporarily detained in Kinmen—a territory administered by Taipei but located just five kilometres (three miles) from China's city of Xiamen.

A survivor has reportedly claimed the boat was "rammed", while Taiwan insists the coast guard was following legitimate procedures.

"We solemnly demand relevant parties in Taiwan to release the truth as soon as possible," spokeswoman for Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office Zhu Fenglian said in a statement published online.

The incident occurred against a backdrop of heightened tensions between China and Taiwan, a self-ruled island that Beijing claims as part of its territory.

first be moved out of harm's way.

Palestinians in Rafah were digging new graves in the sand on Wednesday near a makeshift camp, with shrouded bodies carried on donkey-led carts.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted the army will keep fighting until it has destroyed Hamas and freed the remaining 130 hostages, around 30 of whom are believed to be dead.

The war started when Hamas launched its unprecedented attack on October 7, which resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official Israeli figures.

Hamas also took about 250 hostages, many of whom were released during a week-long truce in late November.

Israel has heavily bombed Gaza since and launched a ground invasion that has seen troops and tanks push through from the north towards the south, leaving vast swathes entirely destroyed and many people struggling to find basic supplies.

One sewing workshop in Rafah said it has started to use medical cotton, gauze and lab coats to sew makeshift diapers, each made by hand—but warned their capacity is far from enough to meet the demand.

"I don't have money to provide food, so how can I provide diapers for her?" said mother Hanan al-Bahtiti, adding that her baby daughter gets painful skin rashes.

"She screams in pain and I cry when I see her like this," she told AFP.

Concern also remained high around Nasser Hospital in the heavily-bombarded southern city of Khan Yunis, where the World Health Organization has called the devastation "incredible".

The UN agency managed to evacuate some 32 patients from the besieged hospital, which was raided by Israeli troops last week.

It called the situation in Gaza "inhumane", saying the territory had become "a death zone".

McGurk, the White House coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, was in Egypt as part of efforts to advance a hostage deal, before heading to Israel Thursday.

# Criminal case over handwritten lyrics to 'Hotel California' goes to trial

The trial concerns about 100 pages of drafts of the words to songs from the 1976 release "Hotel California," which is the third-biggest selling album ever in the U.S.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
NEW YORK, FEB 21

A criminal case involving handwritten lyrics to the classic rock megahit "Hotel California" and other Eagles favorites went to trial Wednesday in New York, with three men accused of scheming to thwart band co-founder Don Henley's efforts to reclaim the allegedly ill-gotten documents.

The trial concerns about 100 pages of drafts of the words to songs from the 1976 release "Hotel California," which is the third-biggest selling album ever in the U.S.

Rare-books dealer Glenn Horowitz, former Rock & Roll Hall of Fame curator Craig Inciardi, and memorabilia seller Edward Kosinski face charges including conspiracy to possess stolen property.

"The defendants were not businessmen acting in good faith, but criminal actors," Manhattan District Attorney Nicholas Penfold said in his opening. He said they "deceived and

manipulated to try to frustrate" Henley's efforts to recover manuscripts that were rightfully his.

The men, all well established in the collectibles world, have pleaded not guilty. Their lawyers have said the case "alleges criminality where none exists and unfairly tarnishes the reputations of well-respected professionals."

The documents include lyrics-in-development for the songs "Life in the Fast Lane," "New Kid in Town" and, of course, "Hotel California," the more than six-minute-long, somewhat mysterious musical tale of the goings-on at an inviting, decadent but ultimately dark place where "you can check out any time you like, but you can never leave."

If scorned by some as an overexposed artifact of the '70s, the Grammy-winning song is still a touchstone on classic rock radio and many personal playlists. The entertainment data company Luminate counted more than 220 million streams and 136,000 radio plays of "Hotel California" in the U.S. last year.

The case was brought in 2022, a decade after some of the pages began popping up for auction and Henley took notice — and took umbrage. He bought back a bit of the material for \$8,500 but also reported the documents stolen, according to court filings.

**The case was brought in 2022, a decade after some pages began popping up for auction and Henley took notice.**

At the time, the lyrics sheets were in the hands of Kosinski and Inciardi, who had bought them from Horowitz. He had purchased them in 2005 from Ed Sanders, a writer and 1960s counterculture figure who worked with the Eagles on a band biography that was

shelved in the early '80s.

Sanders, who also co-founded the avant-garde rock group the Fugs, isn't charged in the case and hasn't responded to a phone message seeking comment about it.

Sanders told Horowitz in 2005 that Henley's assistant had mailed along any documents he wanted for the biography, though the writer worried that Henley "might conceivably be upset" if they were sold, according to emails recounted in the indictment.

But Manhattan prosecutors say that once Henley's lawyers began asking questions, Horowitz, Inciardi and Kosinski started maneuvering to gin up and disseminate a legally viable ownership history for the manuscripts. According to the indictment, Inciardi and Horowitz floated evolving accounts of how Sanders obtained the documents. The explanations ranged over the next five years from Sanders finding them abandoned in a backstage dressing room to the writer getting them from Eagles co-founder Glenn Frey, who

died in 2016.

Emails show some input and assent from Sanders, but he also apparently objected at least to the backstage-salvage story. In messages that didn't include him, Horowitz wrote about getting Sanders' "explanation" shaped into a communication" and giving him "gentle handling" and assurances "that he's not going to the can," the indictment says.

The indictment doesn't show Kosinski participating in the back-and-forth with Sanders. But Kosinski forwarded one of the various explanations to Henley's lawyer, then told an auction house that the rocker had "no claim" to the manuscripts, the indictment says. He also asked the auctioneers not to tell potential bidders about the ownership dispute.

The defendants' lawyers have said that Sanders had legal possession of the documents, and so did the men who subsequently bought them. "The evidence will show that no theft occurred," Horowitz' lawyer, Jonathan Bach, said in an opening statement.

# Late Arnautovic strike gives Inter Milan 1-0 win

REUTERS  
MILAN, FEB 21

A late goal from substitute Marko Arnautovic gave Inter Milan a 1-0 home victory after a tough battle with Atletico Madrid in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Tuesday.

The Austria striker, who had replaced the injured Marcus Thuram at halftime, redeemed himself following several missed chances by squeezing the ball home after Lautaro Martinez's shot was saved by goalkeeper Jan Oblak in the 79th minute.

It was only the second time the teams had played each other, with Atletico winning 2-0 in the UEFA Super Cup back in 2010.

The return fixture is on March 13 in the Spanish capital.

Inter dominated the match and although Atletico had their chances the home side's solid defence prevented the visitors from getting any attempts on target.

Samuel Lino had Atletico's first opportunity but his right-footed curler went just wide of the far post.

Ahead of the interval Martinez and Thuram had openings to break the deadlock for Inter but also came up against a resilient defence, with attempts blocked or saved by Oblak.

Inter started the second half on the attack as Federico Dimarco supplied a cross to Arnautovic, who slid in slightly late and ballooned the ball over from close range.

Just after the hour the home fans again expressed their frustration as Arnautovic, having found himself free in front of goal, sent another effort over the crossbar before the villain became the hero of the night with his late winning goal.

## PSV draw with Dortmund

Donyell Malen scored a superb goal against his former side but a second-half penalty from Luuk de Jong earned a 1-1 draw for PSV Eindhoven in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie against Borussia Dortmund at the Philips Stadion on Tuesday.

Dutch international Malen rifled in a thunderous shot from a tight angle after 24 minutes but the home side created the better chances and finally took one when De Jong scored from a spot-kick, awarded for a foul by Dortmund defender Mats Hummels.

That goal stretches PSV's unbeaten home run to 31 games in all competitions and leaves the tie evenly poised with the return leg in Dortmund to come on March 13.

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE		
ROUND OF 16, LEG 1 OF 2		
PSV	1-1	Dortmund
Inter Milan	1-0	Atletico Madrid

# Nepal suffer consecutive loss to Namibia

Rohit Paudel's Rhinos succumb to a two-wicket defeat at the TU Cricket Ground—their second loss against Gerhard Erasmus's men in the Nepal Tri-series of the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 (2024-2027).



Nepal players return to the pavilion after losing against Namibia during the Nepal Tri-series of the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Wednesday.

SPORTS BUREAU  
KATHMANDU, FEB 21

Nepal suffered back-to-back defeat against Namibia in Nepal Tri-series of the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 (2024-2027) after the Rhinos fell to a two-wicket loss at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Wednesday.

It was the Rohit Paudel-led side's second defeat in the second match of the League 2 which forms a part of the qualification process to the 2027 Cricket World Cup. The top four teams at the end of the League 2 automatically qualify for the 2027 Cricket World Cup Qualifier. The Nepal Tri-series is the first of the 24 tri-series under the League 2 cycle.

Nepal had succumbed to a surprise four-wicket defeat to Gerhard Erasmus's men last week, which had ended Nepal's 15-match winning streak at home in the one-day internationals that stretched back to November 2022.

Nepal had bounced back to demolish tournament favourites Netherlands by nine wickets.

But another batting failure saw Nepal wrapped up for a paltry 168 in 37.1 overs. Nepal had managed only 132 total against Namibia in their first

match—their lowest ever total at TU Ground on Thursday.

On Wednesday, Namibia completed the chase in 40 overs, losing eight wickets.

Aasif Sheikh was the only stand-out batter with a half-century score. Sheikh scored 58 runs off 64 balls for his 12th one-day international century. He cracked eight boundaries and one six.

## Kushal Bhurtel was the pick of Nepal bowling again. He took 3-28 against Namibia.

Opens Sheik and Kushal Bhurtel added 38 runs but Nepal batters soon crumbled under the pressure of deadly Namibia spinners Bernard Scholtz (4-31) and Jan Nicol Loftie-Eatons (4-34).

Nepal lost wickets in quick successions after Scholtz trapped Bhurtel leg in front in 6.2 overs and dismissed Anil Sah for a duck two balls later. Dev Khanal departed in the next over after

playing six-ball duck.

Sheikh and Kushal Malla put on a 57-run stand for the fourth wicket to build Nepal innings but Scholtz checked the progress getting rid of Sheikh in the 20th over.

Nepal then lost wickets at regular intervals.

Caught by Scholtz off Loftie-Eaton, skipper Paudel walked back without adding a score.

Malla, who provided the second highest score with 36 runs off 52 balls, fell to Erasmus in the 27th over.

Loftie-Eaton then removed Dipendra Singh Airee and Sompal Kami in the space of three balls before Scholtz bowled Bhim Sharki, who added 26 runs.

Loftie-Eaton next got Karan KC (12) to sum up Nepal's resurfacing batting headache.

In the chase, Namibia lost two early wickets when opener Jean-Pierre Kotze (3) and Nikolaas Davin (8) departed cheaply.

But Captain Erasmus scored 52 runs off 56 balls and Michael van Lingen added 31 runs off 34 balls to rebuild the innings.

Johannes Jonathan Smit then played 34 not out to guide Namibia to 172-8.

Bhurtel, who took 4-20 against the Netherlands, was the pick of Nepal bowling again. Bhurtel returned the match figures of 3-28 in his five-over bowling spell.

Aerie, Paudel, Lalit Rajbanshi and Malla pocketed one wicket apiece.

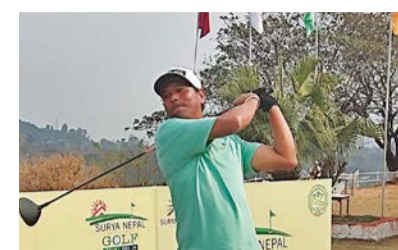
Nepal next play the Netherlands on Sunday in their last match of the tri-series.

## ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP LEAGUE 2

SCOREBOARD	
<b>NEPAL TRI-SERIES</b>	
TU CRICKET GROUND, KIRTIPUR	
TOSS: Namibia, field first.	
<b>Nepal 168-10</b> (37.1/50 overs)	
Aasif Sheikh 58 (64), Kushal Malla 36 (52);	
Jan Nicol Loftie-Eaton 6.1-0-34-4,	
Bernard Scholtz 10-2-31-4	
<b>Namibia 172-8</b> (40/50 overs)	
Gerhard Erasmus 52 (56), Johannes Jonathan	
Smit 34* (66); Kushal Bhurtel 5-0-28-3	
Namibia win by two wickets.	
Player of the match: Bernard Scholtz	

NEPAL'S NEXT LEAGUE 2 FIXTURE		
Feb 25	Nepal vs Netherlands	Kirtipur

# Nagarkoti takes lead after Day 1 at Western Open golf



Bhuvan Nagarkoti cards 3-under 66 to take a one-stroke lead over Sadbhav Acharya.

SPORTS BUREAU  
KATHMANDU, FEB 21

Bhuvan Nagarkoti took a one-stroke lead over amateur golfer Sadbhav Acharya after the first round of Surya Nepal Western Open, the fourth event under Surya Nepal Golf Tour 2023-24, at the par-69 Himalayan Golf Course in Pokhara on Wednesday.

Former Nepal number one pro Nagarkoti carded 3-under 66 to stay at the top of the leaderboard. Amateur Acharya, winner of the season-opening Surya Nepal Central Open, carded 2-under 67.

Rabi Khadka and Niraj Tamang were tied for third at even-par 69. Dhana Bahadur Thapa was fifth at one-over 70, while Deepak Acharya and Tanka Bahadur Karki shared the sixth position at 2-over 71. Four pros, Bal Bhadra Rai, Bhuvan Kumar Rokka, Deepak Magar and Dinesh Prajapati, were tied for eighth place with amateur Sundar Rai at 3-over 72.

Leader Nagarkoti carded a birdie on the second hole in his bogey-free 1-under 36 on front nine. He carded 2-under 35 after the turn before facing the lone bogey of the day on the 12th hole against birdies on the 11th, 15th and 18th holes.

Amateur Acharya played bogey-free 1-under 33 on the front nine with a help of a birdie on the third hole. He carded 1-under 34 on the back nine. Acharya dropped a shot on the 12th hole and carded birdies on the 13th and 15th holes.

Former top pro Khadka faced a double bogey on the sixth hole against birdies on the fourth and eighth holes. After the turn, he carded a birdie on the 10th hole and dropped a shot on the final hole.

Tamang carded a bogey-free 1-under 33 on the front nine with the help of a birdie on the third hole. He then played 1-over 36 on the back nine after he carded a birdie on the 14th hole against bogeys on the 13th and 15th holes.

A total of 50 golfers—35 pros and 15 amateurs—are taking part in the 54-hole tournament. Cut will be applied after the second round. Top 21 pros and ties will make it to the final round. Amateurs making the pro cut will progress to the final round.

The tournament will conclude with a Pro-Am event on Saturday.

# HOROSCOPE

## ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Embrace your extroverted nature. Fated encounters can help you find healing midafternoon, boosting your confidence as you let go of anything creating imbalances within your life. This energy also supports creative endeavours, so be sure to embrace the arts.

## TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

A desire to hold loved ones close comes into play today, dearest Taurus. Focus on your home life and how it can be improved to promote health, wellness and happiness midafternoon. This comic climate opens the door toward healing.

## GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Intuitive dreams could provide answers to any questions you've been mulling over recently, dear Gemini. Look for community as a way to seek healing midafternoon, emphasising the importance of understanding that you're not alone. Keep tabs on your internal dialogue.

## CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Actively seek beauty while finding gratitude in your surroundings. Themes around self-worth come into play this afternoon, cultivating an environment that's ideal for requesting a raise, promotion, or title change. Take a break from your screens this evening.

## LEO (July 23-August 22)

Emphasise the qualities that make you an individual. Now is the time to impress others with your unique perspective, allowing your star to rise by simply being your most authentic self. Consider asking higher power for guidance.

## VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Spiritually charged dreams could manifest early this morning, dear Virgo. Allow your perspective to shift if enlightenment finds you, finding new connections within the depths of your psyche. Meditate on the ways you wish to evolve midafternoon.

## LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Find ways to connect with causes that are important to you. You'll have the power to make significant differences within society and your closest relationships as afternoon settles in. Use this energy to focus on network expansion.

## SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Some may accuse you of being stoic today, dearest Scorpio. A strong desire for composure and control will cause you to set boundaries but try not to shut loved ones out. Work on elevating your credentials midafternoon.

## SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Your dreams may be encoded with sensible advice from the other side. Continue to search for meaning once you've awakened, taking a few moments to connect with your spirituality before tackling the day. Your enthusiasm will inspire others.

## CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Don't be afraid to burn down that which no longer serves you, dearest Capricorn. You'll have a chance to rise from the ashes midafternoon, though you should focus on nurturing yourself as a way to recover from any upsets.

## AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Lead from a place of love, proudly wearing your heart on your sleeve. Hold steady in your desires, contemplating how you can maintain balance as you build upon what you already have. This can be helpful when establishing romantic connections.

## PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Organisation will be your best friend today, strengthening your work ethic and multitasking. Ride these vibrations by handling tasks that have been looming over your head, but don't hesitate to ask for help if you need it.

# CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- Dennis or Randy
  - Shipping hazard
  - Fervent wish
  - Very short time
  - Bloodhound's clue
  - Verdi number
  - Dot in a river
  - Blue ox of legend
  - Inch fractions
  - Pulled ahead of
  - Board game
  - Close kin
  - Remembrances
  - Sage, in India
  - Winery cry
  - Complies
  - Teddy bear look-alike
  - Handy abbr.
  - Had been
  - Entertainer Della —
  - Good old days
  - Sault — Marie
  - Scottish accents
  - Zellweger
  - JFK lander
  - Rap sheet info
  - Instruct
  - Wool
  - Toe of the "boot" of Italy
  - Awards for valor
- DOWN**
- Medicine chest item (hypn.)
  - Minor
  - Runs a fever
  - Applies frosting
  - Loathes
  - Float like a cork
  - Gouda cousin
  - Asimov topic, often
  - 1968 Winter Olympics site
  - Picnic basket
  - Hunter of myth
  - Tablets
  - No sweat
  - Cloudy
  - Cajun veggie
  - Senate vote
  - Splash of color
  - Matured, as fruit
  - Army duds
  - Flee

## PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

KOAN	AFAR	ESPA
IDLE	LIVES	SPAT
LIES	LEECH	EIRE
NECTAR	CORSICAN	
HIP	SMOG	NUTS
ETA	KNOTS	BILGE
LAGS	DUETS	COLT
PLEAS	PERON	COO
SYRUPS	DALI	SON
ORDINARY	TSHIRT	
WOOL	MOOLA	ASEA
LADY	SLYER	CLAM
SRO	LOGY	KELP

- This place
- Sailor's word
- Poet's contraction
- Test, as ore
- Many centuries
- Ash or maple
- So-so grades
- Spreading unverified info
- Senate vote
- Splash of color
- Matured, as fruit
- Army duds
- Flee
- Fiji neighbor
- Low, dull sound of impact
- Steamship
- Roman historian
- Debate side
- Urgent
- Cutting tools
- Enjoy a lollipop
- Salon jobs
- Tax form ID

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66									67			68	

# SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

# I am committed to writing about women's empowerment

Writer and journalist Niru Tripathi discusses her favourite reads and striking a balance between journalism and fiction.

**N**iru Tripathi is the editor-in-chief of a digital magazine, 'Cald Voices', a public relations officer and executive assistant to the consulate general of Nepal to Victoria. She did her master's in professional and organisational communication (journalism) from Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia and published a novel titled 'Parisscano' in 2020. She is currently based in Melbourne, Australia.



BOOK TALK

In this interview with the *Post's* Anish Ghimire, she discusses her favourite reads and merging journalism with fiction writing.

Could you tell us about your background in literature and how you first got into journalism and writing?

For me, writing is more than just a passion; it's a natural calling. Words, to me, are like companions in a dance of expression. Back when I was waiting for my SLC results, while others went to Kathmandu for bridge courses, I found solace in the novels of BP Koirala. His words inspired me, sparking a dream to one day write a fiction book with characters born from my imagination.

I still remember my first book, 'Patachara', which I read at the age of ten. Stories from my mother during meals and before bedtime further fueled my love for crafting narratives and developing characters. As I delved into newspapers like *Wisdom*, *Muna*, and *Madhuparka*, I dreamed of seeing my work in print.

My school principal, Purusottam Lohani, suggested pursuing journalism or law after SLC. After earning a bachelor's in journalism in Nepal, I went on to pur-

sue a master's in media/journalism in Melbourne. My dreams of running a digital news outlet and publishing novels have now become a reality.

As someone involved in both journalism and creative writing, how do you balance the objective reporting required in journalism with the creative expression found in writing fiction or other forms?

Being involved in both journalism and creative writing requires a delicate balance between the objective reporting demanded in journalism and the imaginative expression found in fiction.

In journalism, I stick to hard facts and follow ethical codes, ensuring objective reporting. When it comes to fiction, I embrace the freedom to express myself creatively, akin to a free bird soaring in the sky.

To what degree are you influenced by other authors?

My writing is deeply influenced by BP Koirala and it incorporates elements of love, romance, tragedy, irony and a strong commitment to women's empowerment. My debut novel, 'Parisscano', reflects my passion for breaking societal norms and challenging stereotypes surrounding female empowerment. Exposure to Western writing styles, particularly Virginia Woolf's British modernist "stream-of-consciousness" style, has left a lasting impact on my work.

Drawing inspiration from literary giants like Simone de Beauvoir, especially her seminal work 'The Second Sex', made me understand women's condition in a patriarchal world. This awareness seeps into my writing and I often comment on the societal position of women.

My academic journey has further enriched my creative reservoir, involving the study of important English works, criticism theories, 'Oedipus Rex', Shakespeare's poetry, Robert Frost's verses and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic thoughts.

Is it crucial that literature, in any form, questions preconceptions?

The role of literature in shaping public perceptions is big. It serves as a mirror

reflecting society's intricacies, fostering empathy and understanding. Literature has the power to challenge, question and provoke thoughts, ultimately influencing how people perceive the world around

them. In an effort to be as free and transparent as possible, literature should aim to lead society on issues that pique our curiosity about our existence. I also think that it has the ability to shape public opinion and question assumptions that they hold.

What advice would you give to journalists and writers in finding their unique voice?

For budding writers and journalists, my advice is straightforward: persist in pursuing your dreams, embrace your individuality and avoid mimicking others. While inspiration is valuable, the key is to discover and establish your own voice and style. Be authentic and present that to the world. The world appreciates your originality, not a duplicate. So, carve your own path, aim for excellence, and don't be disheartened by setbacks.

How can literature and reading be promoted to a wider audience, especially in the fast-paced digital age?

In the fast-paced digital age, promoting literature to a wider audience necessitates embracing technology and adapting to changing preferences. Leveraging social media, streaming platforms and interactive online forums can make literature more accessible and appealing. Creating visually engaging content such as book trailers, author interviews and immersive online experiences can capture the attention of digital-savvy audiences.

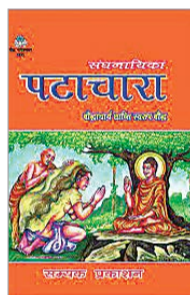
Collaborating with influencers and utilising book-related hashtags can amplify the reach of literary content. Additionally, fostering virtual book clubs, discussion forums, and interactive events can build a sense of community among readers.

Integrating literature into multimedia formats, such as podcasts and interactive e-books, can cater to diverse learning styles. By combining the timeless appeal of literature with the dynamic tools of the digital age, we can ensure that reading remains a vibrant and integral part of our ever-evolving cultural landscape.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF NIRU TRIPATHI

## Niru Tripathi's book recommendations



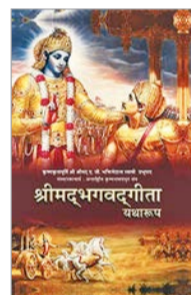
**Patachara**  
Author: Basudev Dhesar, Kondanya  
Year: 2009  
Publisher: Dots Printing House

This book explores the universal reality of trauma and the choice we have in how we relate to suffering. It taught me that amid life's challenges, atonement and responsiveness can lead to awakening. This was the first non-course book I read in my childhood.



**Sumnima**  
Author: BP Koirala  
Year: 1969  
Publisher: Sajha Prakashan

'Sumnima' prompts readers to reflect on their values, beliefs, emotions and thoughts. It is a compelling read that captures the clash between materialism and spiritualism, emphasising how the former can overshadow spiritual quests, confining emotions and desires.



**Bhagavad Gita**  
Author: Ved Vyas

'Bhagavad Gita' is a timeless masterpiece that transcends religious boundaries, offering great insights into the complexities of life, duty and spirituality. Its themes of selfless action, ethical conduct and the pursuit of knowledge offer invaluable guidance for us all. It promotes inner resilience, ethical decision-making, and a deeper understanding of the self.



**Pagal Basti**  
Author: Saru Bhakta  
Year: 1991  
Publisher: Sajha Prakashan

'Pagal Basti' by Saru Bhakta is an engaging tale about Prashant and Martha, who are both dealing with immense dissatisfaction and guilt over their lives. It is a thought-provoking read and strikes a good balance between storytelling and philosophy.



**Oedipus Rex**  
Author: Sophocles  
Year: 430-426 BCE

This play explores the intricate web of fate, destiny and the consequences of one's actions. 'Oedipus Rex' challenges conventional notions and showcases how life's twists can lead to unexpected, and sometimes, tragic outcomes. It's a timeless piece that continues to resonate with the questions it raises about the human experience.

# How meditation rewires your brain for health and happiness

The practice offers cognitive, emotional and physical health benefits. It improves mood, boosts energy and reduces stress.

□ BADRI PRAKASH OJHA

**J**ust 13 minutes a day of regular meditation can make a significant impact on your life. It has the potential to change your fate, lifting you from stress to happiness.

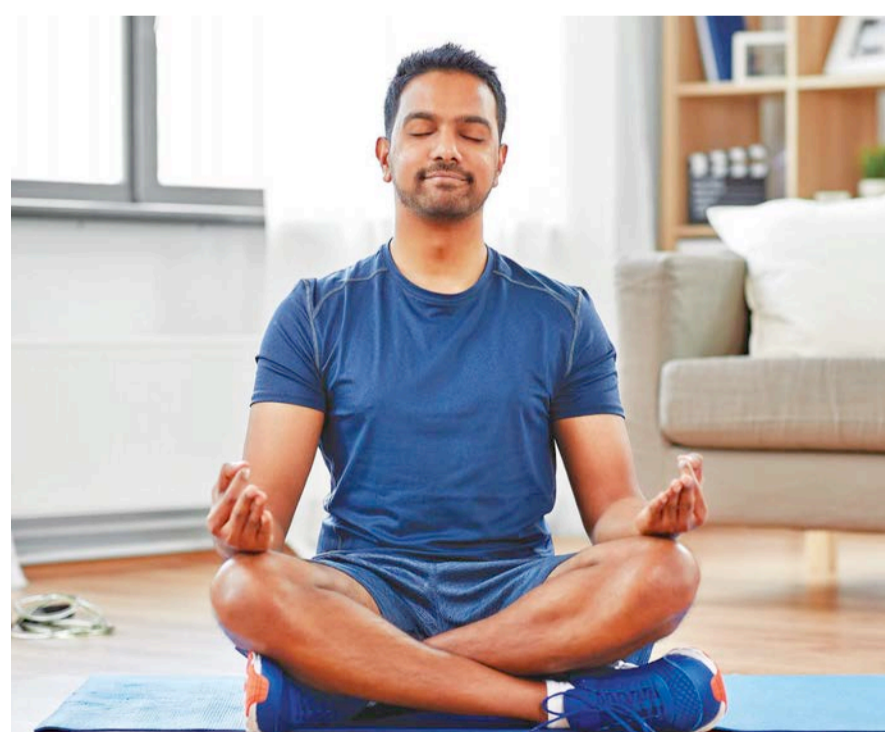
Dr Sara Lazar, a neuroscientist from the Mass General Research Institute of Massachusetts Medical School, conducted studies revealing that consistent meditation thickens specific brain areas. This thickening enhances your ability to cope with life's challenges and stressful situations. The happiness set point theory suggests that meditation can calm overactive brain areas, fostering joy and pleasure.

Meditation induces positive changes in the amygdala, a cluster of neurons responsible for processing life-threatening information. Through regular practice, the amygdala doesn't grow larger; instead, it shrinks. This part of the brain, linked to anxiety, fear and stress, becomes physically smaller in meditators. Dr Shaheen Lakhani, a neurologist, describes the amygdala as a tiny almond-shaped structure influencing emotions like fear, anger, pleasure and anxiety.

While the amygdala's responses are crucial for detecting danger or managing stress, they can become overactive in trauma survivors, contributing to conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder. Research also connects the amygdala to mood disorders, including major depressive disorder.

On a neurological level, consistent meditation leads to the shrinking of the brain's fight-or-flight region, known as the amygdala. Meditation practices also create connections between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala, releasing tension.

Meditation is not an exact science, but a



SHUTTERSTOCK

general consensus suggests aiming for at least 10 minutes a day to experience its benefits. However, individuals respond differently to it, so you can also experiment with longer sessions.

Meditation offers cognitive, emotional and physical health benefits. Recent neuroscientific discoveries reveal that this practice can literally rewire brain circuits, enhancing both mind and body health. These advantages align with the understanding that the brain is adaptable, a concept known as neuroplasticity. The remarkable aspect of meditation is its ability to bring about short-term and

long-term benefits for both the brain and the body. It improves mood, boosts energy and reduces stress.

A Harvard study revealed that triggering the body's relaxation response, even for a few minutes, can impact our genes. Meditating, even once, can downregulate genes linked to inflammation and upregulate those associated with DNA stability. Other immediate benefits include stress reduction, lower blood pressure, and improved attention. It might even enhance decision-making.

Meditation is for everyone, including those who believe they can't sit still. All

you need is a bit of guidance on how to train your brain, and soon you'll harness the power of your mind, improving your life.

Here are 10 simple tips to start meditating right now and establish a daily practice:

**Get comfortable**  
Meditation doesn't need to be complicated. Start by sitting comfortably. If you're flexible, sit cross-legged on the floor; using a cushion, bolster, or blanket. If not, sit in a chair with your feet on the floor.

**Make it a ritual**  
Designate a specific space for meditation, even if it's just a candle, picture, or crystal. Practice at the same time daily and follow the same routine for each session.

**Sit tall**  
Maintain an upright posture by straightening your spine. If needed, sit in a chair or lean against a wall. Keeping your spine straight boosts circulation and helps you stay alert.

**Start small**  
Begin where you are. If 10 minutes feels too much, start with five. Gradually add a minute each week until you reach 30 minutes or more for each session.

**Be kind to yourself**  
According to meditation teacher Sally Kempton, meditation is all about your relationship with yourself. Practice radical acceptance, compassion and unconditional love. Embrace your complex mind, surrender to who you are, and be present in the moment. And don't forget to smile!

**Note your excuses**  
Meditation involves self-inquiry. Pay attention to the excuses you make—feel-

ing too tired or lacking time. Observe how your mind rationalises when you break your commitment. Understand without judgment, then recommit to your practice without making excuses.

**Find a meditation buddy**  
To overcome excuses, accountability is key. Partner with someone to meditate with, whether it's a friend starting meditation or joining a Facebook group or online course. The struggle is normal, but it will become easier.

**Practice makes perfect**  
Following Ashtanga guru Patthabi Jois's advice, see meditation as a mental exercise. Train your brain to focus, concentrate, and let go. With consistent practice, it will become easier over time.

**Just breathe**  
While our minds often dwell on the past or future, the breath anchors us in the present. Focus on your breath to keep your mind in the here and now.

**Start a meditation journal**  
After each meditation session, reflect on your feelings. Take note of what's happening in your body and your emotional state. Record any changes so that they become apparent in both your body and conscious mind. When you encounter resistance to meditation, refer to the notes in your journal to remind yourself of its benefits. This will keep you motivated and committed.



Ojha is a meditation teacher with a PhD in communication. He can be reached at badrio@gmail.com