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THE RISING NEPAL

ALL BE HAPPY, ALL BE WELL

Stakeholders' meeting on polls

Everyone wants elections: PM Karki



PHOTO: SUJAN GURUNG/TRN

Representatives of various political parties, Election Commission officials and civil society leaders attending an all-party meeting called by Prime Minister Sushila Karki in Kathmandu on Monday to discuss election laws and management in view of the House of Representatives election scheduled for March 5.

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

Prime Minister Sushila Karki has said that the government is ready to face sustained criticism from both political parties and the younger generation to safeguard national interests.

Speaking at a multi-stakeholder discussion among the government, political parties, the Election Commission and civil society leaders at the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers Singha in Durbar on Monday, Prime Minister Karki said the interim government has become the target of attacks from all sides, but it is well prepared to endure them for the country's sake.

The Prime Minister stressed that the people are the ultimate authority in a democracy. She said parties exist solely to serve the public and must reform themselves if citizens demand changes.

Referring to the movement of September 8 and 9, which included killings and the deaths of youths, she said those events were the result of past political mistakes and weaknesses, and her government was bearing the public wrath arising from them. She said after the Gen-Z movement, the nation realised that there was a need for a change.

She warned political parties against venting their internal disagreements and power-sharing frustrations on the public, noting that such behaviours only harm the citizens. Emphasising the need to understand the sentiments of Gen-Z and the younger generation, she said ignoring their demands and clinging to rigid positions would not lead the country forward.

The Prime Minister clarified that her government had not come to power to enjoy privilege at the cost of young people's blood. She argued that if all political parties genuinely sought peace and unity, no individual or group would be able to create unrest.

She said that she found that almost all parties and stakeholders were in favour of elections. "No one spoke against the polls," she said.

Prime Minister Karki also said that merely praising political parties would not lead to national development, stressing that progress requires concrete action and patience, as change cannot happen overnight. Without mentioning anyone's name, she said that while the law allows suspects to be arrested for investigation, it does not permit extrajudicial killings.

She said that the government was proceeding strictly according to the rule of law. Since her administration took office, the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority has registered 40 cases, and the Crime Investigation Office is carrying out work that had never been done before. She urged all sides to participate peacefully in the electoral process and support stability and development.

In the meeting, eight civil society leaders, 14 representatives of the political parties, and two Gen-Z representatives expressed their views. Most of them expressed their views in favour of the elections, the PM said in her concluding remarks.

Participating in the meeting, former lawmaker Radheshyam Adhikari, who is also a legal expert, said that whether Nepalis living abroad would be allowed to vote, the provision for temporary voters to vote, and (No Vote) would be possible only by formulating new laws.

He said that laws are mandatory on all three issues and that the March 5 election should not be pushed back in the name of making laws.

He also said that making laws would increase further confusion about the March 5 election, and that it was not easy to make laws about it when the proportional list is to be submitted in a week.

Civil society leaders opined that moving forward on election-related issues without discussing them with the major political parties would lead to accidents.

Civil society leader and journalist Kunda Dixit stressed that there should be an investigation into the destruction of September 8 and 9 incidents.

He also said that it should be clear whether there were any discussions with foreign countries on whether Nepalis living abroad should be allowed to vote.

'Whether there is any other reason to postpone the election on March 5,' said Dixit, referring to the issue of restoring the parliament. 'If we go for restoring the parliament, Nepal will enter a path of further confusion.'

Another civil society leader and former minister Bidyadhar Mallik said that No Vote can be arranged and that this should be arranged in this election.

Acting Chief Election Commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari said that the Commission was fully prepared to conduct the elections on March 5, 2026, in line with the government's stated priorities.

"More than four and a half months have passed since the government announced the election date, and we now have only about two months remaining. Except for a few procedural tasks, the Commission has completed all necessary preparations," Bhandari assured.

Stating that failure to revise security policies immediately after the filing of nominations could create problems during the election period, he urged security agencies and the Ministry of Home Affairs to make timely preparations.

Bhandari informed that procedures, directives and the code of conduct required for the election have already been drafted. The code of conduct would be enforced in coordination with the government and with consensus among political parties, he added.

The Ministry of Home Affairs informed the stakeholders that it has initiated the process of amending four election related existing acts to grant voting rights to Nepali citizens living abroad and to make arrangements for inter-district voting.

Making presentation on the government's preparation for March 5 elections, Joint Secretary and Spokesperson for the Ministry of Home Affairs Ananda Kafle briefed that the election-related laws were being amended based on the Supreme Court's verdict and demands from various parties.

"After the formation of the current government, the government has initiated the process of amending four acts in collaboration with the Election Commission to grant voting rights to Nepali citizens living abroad, to allow direct or proportional voting from inter-constituency, and to include the option of not supporting any candidate," he said.

He also informed that a security plan for the upcoming House of Representatives member election has been prepared and is in the implementation phase.

Also, speaking in the discussion, Election Commission's Joint Secretary and Spokesperson Narayan Prasad Bhattarai said the final list of voter lists will be published on December 30. So far, the number of voters has increased by 5.65 per cent, he said.

According to him, the number of political parties registered with the Election Commission for the House of Representatives member election has reached 114. In 2079 election, 87 parties participated in the election. Nepali Congress Joint General Secretary Mahendra Yadav said that his party was moving forward to participate in the elections. Yadav said, "The Nepali Congress has officially decided to participate in the March 5 elections."

He reiterated that the country will not find a way out without elections. He added, "We also urge the government to hold elections on scheduled date without any ups and downs."

Also, CPN-UML Secretary Mahesh Basnet said that his party has, in principle agreed with the March 5 elections and the agreement reached between the Gen-Z government.

'In principle, we are in favour of the elections. But our conclusion is that there will be no elections because of today's environment and the fact that this government has gone to the Supreme Court to declare the restoration of parliament unconstitutional,' Basnet said.

Over 1 million new voters enrolled

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

The Election Commission (EC) has finalised the election code of conduct for the upcoming House of Representatives (HoR) election scheduled for March 5, 2026, incorporating suggestions from political parties and government ministries.

EC spokesperson Narayan Prasad Bhattarai said the draft has now been finalised, with only formal approval and implementation remaining. "Suggestions received from various political parties and ministries have been included in the final version," he added.

Bhattarai stated that the Commission has intensified preparations, including the development of an administrative framework and election schedule, with work progressing according to plan. He highlighted that comprehensive guidelines for voter education have been prepared to ensure effective awareness campaigns down to the field level.

The Commission has also finalised six directives and guidelines, and established the Election Information Dissemination and Coordination Centre (E-IDC) to facilitate voter education and communication.

Preparations for procurement of election materials are complete, with 51 types of materials identified for use, he added.

Bhattarai said to reduce costs, reusable materials from previous elections and locally produced items are being prioritised, while printing of new materials, including ballot papers, is underway.

The Chief Election Officer's office for the Proportional Representation (PR) system was established on 1 December, and preparations under this system are ongoing. The submission of the closed PR candidate list is scheduled for 28–29 December.

Key updates

- Submission of the PR closed list: December 28–29
- Publication of polling locations and centres: 30 December
- Printing of the voter list: from December 31
- Establishment of the FPTP Chief Election Officer office: January 16
- Publication of PR closed candidate list: January 18
- Registration of FPTP nominations: January 20
- Distribution of election symbols: January 23
- Final publication of closed lists: February 3
- Delivery of election materials to districts: before February 14

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Low export remains a perennial problem for Nepal

BY LAXMAN KAFLE
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

Despite a sharp increase in exports, Nepal's trade deficit continued to widen during the first five months of the current fiscal year 2025/26.

According to trade statistics released by the Department of Customs on Monday, the country's trade deficit rose by 10.52 per cent to Rs. 649.68 billion by mid-December 2025.

During the same period of the previous fiscal year 2024/25, the trade deficit stood at Rs. 587.82 billion.

Exports recorded notable growth of 58.17 per cent during the review period.

Goods worth Rs. 116.50 billion were exported by mid-December, marking an increase of 58.17 per cent from Rs. 73.65 billion in the corresponding period last fiscal year.

However, the pace of export growth has shown signs of slowing.

Exports had surged by 95 per cent in first month, 88 per cent during first two months, 89 per cent during the first three months and 77.51 per cent during the first four months of the current fiscal year, indicating a gradual decline in momentum in recent months.

The report showed that although exports are rising, their overall volume remains too low to significantly narrow the widening trade deficit.

Both imports and exports increased during the review period, contributing to a rise in overall foreign trade. Total foreign trade increased by 20.07 per cent to reach Rs. 882.69 billion by mid-December.

Imports increased by 15.83 per cent during the review period.

Goods worth Rs. 766.18 billion were imported in the review period. The country imported goods worth Rs. 661.48 billion in the previous fiscal year 2024/25.

Edible oil exports drive growth

The surge in exports has been largely driven by increased shipments of crude edible oils, particularly soybean oil and sunflower oil.

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Dense fog, crippling cold grip Tarai

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

As dense fog blanketed the sky, people across the country -- particularly in the Tarai -- have been facing crippling cold, disrupting daily life, affecting health and forcing many to stay indoors during the early morning and evening hours.

According to the Meteorological Forecasting Division, the dense fog caused by westerly winds is gradually dissipating, with visibility improving to around 4,000 to 5,000 metres.

"The Tarai remained covered with dense fog for the past two to three days, making mornings and evenings particularly cold. However, this condition cannot be termed a cold wave; it can be described as cold days," said Barun Paudel, a senior meteorologist at the Division under the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM).

He explained that a cold wave requires specific criteria, including the absence of sunlight for at least two consecutive days, a sharp drop in temperature and strong cold winds. "Such conditions have not been observed in the Tarai so far," he said.

Meanwhile, our Saptari correspondent Vinay Karn reported that prolonged cold weather over the past week has disrupted daily life in Saptari district.

Intense cold accompanied by chilly winds has affected residents across the district, including Rajbiraj, the district headquarters, and surrounding rural areas.

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Antique Dhaka Topis and uneven battle of handwoven heritage

BY SUSHMA MAHARJAN
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

A walk through Keltole, one of Kathmandu's most prominent hubs for Dhaka products, offers a vivid display of Nepal's textile heritage. Shops lined along the narrow streets showcase a wide range of Dhaka merchandise such as topis, daura suruwals, saris, shawls, baby outfits and more. Long recognised as a centre for Dhaka topis, Keltole continues to draw customers from Kathmandu and across the Valley.

At a glance, most Dhaka topis in the market appear affordable, generally priced between Rs. 150 and Rs. 2,000. Surprisingly, there are some Dhaka topis that cost as much as Rs. 20,000, equivalent to the monthly salary of an ordinary worker. Such antique topis priced between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 25,000 still exist in Keltole, treasured more as heritage artefacts than everyday headwear.

One such collection can be found at Grey Laxmi Dhaka Topi Store. The shop's owner, Rati Tandukar, possesses a rare assortment of antique Dhaka topis believed to be between 50 and 100 years old. These topis, she said, were not ordinary handwoven pieces from Nepal but were made using original Dhaka fabric imported from Dhaka, Bangladesh.



Antique Dhaka topis, estimated to be 50 to 100 years old, displayed at a shop in Keltole. Prices of the three caps displayed in Rati Tamrakar's store range from Rs. 6,000 to Rs. 12,000.

"During the Rana regime and the monarchy, royals and Ranas imported Dhaka fabric from Bangladesh to make topis and other garments," Tandukar said. "These items symbolised prestige and power and were considered premium goods."

According to her, the antique topis were often received as gifts by individuals connected to royal palaces. Made from extremely fine threads, the fabrics may appear delicate but are remarkably durable. Some of the topis also feature silver thread work, adding to their exclusivity.

"As these fabrics are no longer produced, their scarcity has increased their value," Tandukar said. "Only a few customers who truly appreciate Dhaka craftsmanship come looking for such pieces, usually through word-of-mouth."

While antique Dhaka remains a collector's item, most customers opt for Palpali and Tehrathum Dhaka topis (also known as Purbeli topis) priced between Rs. 250 and Rs. 2,000 and widely used for daily and ceremonial wear.

Handwoven Dhaka under threat

Once regarded as a luxury fabric that embodied generations of craftsmanship, original handwoven Dhaka today faces an uneven battle against mass-produced, machine-made replicas flooding the market.

Hari Neupane, owner of Shree Ajima Rastriya Daura Suruwal Tailors, said handwoven Dhaka fabric costs Rs. 2,000 or more per metre, while machine-printed Dhaka replicas are available for as little as Rs. 250 per metre.

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BULLION
(Rs. per tola)

Hallmark Gold	: Rs. 261,700/-
Worked Gold	: NA
Silver	: 4,235/-

STOCK

NEPSE	: 2,581.21
Total Amount	: 3,515,930,718.5
No. of Share	: 9,167,359

MCA-Nepal signs contracts for road maintenance

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

MCA-Nepal has announced the signing of two major contracts worth a total of USD 23.66 million to advance road maintenance under the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Nepal Compact, marking a significant step toward Nepal's long-term economic growth and development.

These contracts jointly represent a major step forward for the Compact's goal to advance Nepal's long-term economic growth and development.

MCA-Nepal on Monday signed a USD 20 million contract with Sharma – Kumar Joint Venture for the Road Upgrading Works using Full-Depth Reclamation & Superpave Technology on the Dhankhola to Lamahi section of the East-West Highway, as part of implementing the Road Maintenance Project under the MCC Nepal Compact.

Additionally, MCA-Nepal recently signed a supporting USD 3.66 million contract with Intercontinental Consultants and Technocrats Pvt. Ltd. (ICT) for Consulting Services for Supervision of upgrading works of this road section and Design and Construction Supervision for Periodic Maintenance of the Narayanghat to Mugling Road Section.

Khadga Bahadur Bisht, Executive Director at MCA-Nepal, signed and exchanged the contract for the Dhankhola-Lamahi Road works with Saurav Sharma, the authorised representative of Sharma–Kumar Joint Venture on Monday in the presence of the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal Dean Thompson and Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Finance Dr. Dhani Ram Sharma.

Similarly, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport Sushil Babu Dhakal, Director General at the Department of Roads Bijaya Jaishi, MCA-Nepal Board Members, MCC Nepal Acting Country Director Sanjay Poudyal and MCC and MCA-Nepal officials were present at the signing ceremony.



PHOTO: TRN

Signing ceremony of MCA-Nepal road maintenance project.

The project includes the construction of a 7-metre carriage way and 2.5-metre shoulder on both sides of the road, making it 12 metre wide using Full-Depth Reclamation & Superpave technology for the upgradation of the 40km Dhankhola to Lamahi section of the East-West Highway and periodic maintenance of the Narayanghat to Mugling Road Section.

The upgrading and maintenance works will be conducted with new technologies --- Full Depth Reclamation and Superior Performing Asphalt Pavement (Superpave), for the first time in Nepal.

Addressing the event, the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal Dean Thompson said, "The upgrading of the Dhankhola - Lamahi Road project and the Narayanghat - Mungling Road Maintenance project represents much more than individual contracts. Together, they are another milestone reflecting the strength of the U.S.-Nepal partnership, the momentum of the Millennium Challenge Compact, and a shared commitment at all levels of government to delivering tangible results for the people of Nepal and American businesses working in Nepal."

He added, "As the Compact delivers essential road infrastructure across Nepal, these two contracts will introduce American excellence in road maintenance technology by using Full Depth Reclamation and Superpave."

Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Finance Sharma expressed his confidence that the latest technologies going to be used in Nepal for the first time will open the road to sustainable, effective and cost-effective road maintenance, and MCA-Nepal would complete the project within the timeline.

Sushil Babu Dhakal, Joint-Secretary at the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, said, "The progress reflects MCA-Nepal's continued efforts to implement the MCC Nepal Compact by introducing new technologies that improve the quality of Nepal's road system."

MCC Nepal Acting Country Director Sanjay Poudyal said that this project will contribute meaningfully to improving Nepal's road reliability and serve as a practical model that Nepal can replicate more broadly across its road network. He said well-built and well-maintained roads are not merely a consequence of economic growth; they are one of its essential drivers.

MCA-Nepal Executive Director Bisht said, "It is indeed a remarkable milestone to sign two contracts to move ahead with the Road Maintenance Project. The activities under the contracts will help in lowering trade and vehicle operation costs, increase road safety, decrease travel time, and improve travel quality. I would like to acknowledge the support of the Government of Nepal and our key stakeholders – the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, Department of Roads, the MCA-Nepal Board and MCC for their continued support."

The Road Maintenance Project is a component of the MCC Nepal Compact, aimed at reducing transportation costs and improving road conditions in Nepal.

The MCC Nepal Compact represents a total USD 747 million investment—USD 550 million in U.S. grant funding and USD 197 million from the government of Nepal—to expand Nepal's electricity transmission network, reduce transport costs, and create new opportunities for private sector growth.

NABIL BANK NAMED BEST TRANSACTION BANK IN NEPAL

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

Nabil Bank has been awarded the 'Best Transaction Bank in Nepal' under the Euromoney Transaction Banking Awards 2025. The award was presented in recognition of the bank's international-standard, technology-friendly, and customer-centric services in the transaction banking sector, it said in a statement on Sunday.

The award was given for the bank's effective digital payment services and facilities provided to individual, institutional, and SME customers in the field of transaction banking. "The bank has maximised the use of technology to make its services simple, secure, and efficient, thereby making daily business operations easier for its customers," read the statement.

"This recognition is the result of our continuous hard work, commitment to innovation, and the trust of our customers," said Manoj Kumar Gyawali CEO of the Bank.

The Euromoney Awards, which evaluate the global banking and financial sector, are considered a prestigious and respected recognition. This award honours institutions that lead in service excellence, innovation, strategic clarity, and customer experience.

Founded in 1992, this award is the first of its kind in the global banking sector, recognising banks' quality service, creativity, and expertise in customer relations. The award is operational in over 100 countries worldwide.

Nabil Bank serves more than 2.5 million customers through its 268 branches and 321 ATMs across the country.

NEPAL-CHINA FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY ELECTS NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT
Bhairahawa, Dec. 22

Manish Kumar Joshi has been elected as the president of Nepal-China Friendship Society, Lumbini.

The 8th convention of the society unanimously elected a new executive committee for a two-year term under the presidency of entrepreneur Joshi.

Dr. Rishiram Sharma has been elected as the senior vice-president of the society, Khim Bahadur Khatri as the vice-president, Janak Raj Panta as general secretary, Keshav Sharma as treasurer, Deepak Galami Magar as secretary and Achyut Raj Gautam as co-treasurer, said Election Officer Jagat Bahadur Rayamajhi.

Similarly, Indra Bahadur Thapa, Sanu Sapkota, Narayan Prasad Bhandari, Kulmani Gyawali, Govinda Prasad Regmi and Ganga Bhusal have been elected as members of the committee.

Founding President of the society, Narayan Prasad Sapkota, said the organisation was established in 2059 BS to expand people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, attract Chinese investment and tourists to Nepal, and promote tourism in Lumbini.

Newly elected President Joshi said initiatives would be taken to start direct air services from China to Gautam Buddha International Airport in collaboration with the Chinese Embassy to bring Chinese tourists to Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha, in significant numbers.

He added that although there are millions of Buddhists in China, the number of Chinese tourists visiting Lumbini remains negligible due to a lack of proper initiatives from government agencies.

Minister Ghising instructs stakeholders to speed up work on Siddhababa Tunnel



PHOTO: TRN

Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport Kul Man Ghising and others inspecting Siddhababa tunnel.

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

About 65 per cent work of the under-construction Siddhababa Tunnel at Dobhan, Tinau Rural Municipality–3, Palpa, along the Siddhartha Highway has been completed.

The financial progress of the project stands at 56 per cent.

The construction of the main tunnel, which is 1,126 metres long, has been completed so far. Similarly, the construction of three through tunnels measuring 151 metres, 161 metres and 130 metres in length has also been completed.

According to the project, construction of the access road leading to the tunnel route, cliff protection works, retaining walls and other structures is currently under way. In total, 2,398 metres of road needs to be upgraded.

To make the existing road safer from landslides and rockfalls, a rock shed measuring 780 metres in length, 3.43 metres in width and 4.4 metres in height is yet to be constructed.

The construction of the rock shed will begin only after vehicles start operating through the main tunnel.

Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport Kul Man Ghising inspected the tunnel construction site on Sunday and urged the authorities concerned to expedite the work and complete it within the stipulated time.

Minister Ghising, who visited the project site along with Secretary of the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport Keshav Kumar Sharma, directed that the pending issues between the project and the contractors be resolved immediately.

According to his secretariat, Ghising said that construction work should not be delayed under any circumstances due to failure to make timely decisions.

He said, "The construction contractor has requested a 19-month extension, citing circumstances beyond his control, including failure to provide the site on time, delays in deforestation and release of advance. The project, consultant and construction contractor should sit together and make an immediate decision on this issue. The project should not be affected under any circumstances owing to indecision."

A contract agreement was signed with China State Construction Engineering Corporation on March 19, 2022, for the construction of the tunnel under the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) model at a cost of Rs. 7.342 billion (including taxes).

As per the agreement, construction of the tunnel must be completed by mid-April 2026. After completion, the company will operate and maintain the tunnel for 1,825 days. The project is being constructed using the government's own resources.

Many accidents have occurred in the Siddhababa area during both the rainy and winter seasons due to rockfalls, mudflows and dry landslides, resulting in human casualties. The situation worsens during the rainy season, often causing traffic jams lasting for hours.

The Siddhababa Tunnel is being constructed to address these problems. Once completed, it is expected to provide safe and reliable travel for passengers using the Siddhartha Highway, reduce travel time and distance, and lower the number of accidents as well as vehicle operating costs.

Gold traded at record high of Rs. 261,700 per tola



BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

Prices of gold and silver hit fresh record highs in the local market on Monday, driven by a sharp surge in international prices.

The trading price of gold in the Nepali market reached Rs. 261,700 per tola, the highest level ever recorded domestically.

According to the Federation of Nepal Gold and Silver Dealers Association, the price of the precious yellow metal rose by Rs. 3,400 per tola compared to Sunday.

The previous gold price record set last Monday was broken within a week. Last Monday, gold was traded at Rs. 260,700 per tola, surpassing all previous records.

Similarly, the price of silver increased by Rs. 130 per tola to Rs. 4,235, also a record high in the local market.

Gold market expert Tej Ratna Shakya said that the significant rise in international gold prices has directly contributed to the continuous increase in domestic prices, setting one new record after another over the past few months.

He noted that gold prices in the international market climbed by USD 76 per ounce to USD 4,415 on Monday, the highest level so far.

"The current volatility in the international gold market indicates that prices may rise further in the local market as well," Shakya said.

He explained that the international market has become highly sensitive, with foreign investors and the general public increasingly turning to gold as a safe investment, leading to higher demand and prices.

Shakya added that there is speculation that gold prices could reach USD 5,000 per ounce by 2026, which has further fueled demand in the international market.

The continuous rise in gold prices has affected both trader and consumers, he said.

According to Shakya, if international gold prices reach USD 5,000 per ounce, the domestic price could surge to around Rs. 300,000 per tola.

India, New Zealand finalise free trade agreement

AP
New Delhi, Dec. 22

India and New Zealand announced Monday they have reached a free trade deal, seeking to deepen economic ties and shore up growth at a time of mounting global trade uncertainties.

The move comes as New Delhi accelerates efforts to diversify export destinations as part of a broader strategy to offset the impact of steep U.S. import tariffs.

A formal signing of the agreement between India and New Zealand is expected in the first quarter of next year after legal scrubbing of the negotiated text, India's chief negotiator Petal Dhillon told reporters.

The India-New Zealand trade agreement, negotiated over nine months, aims to lower tariffs, ease regulatory barriers and expand cooperation across goods, services and investments.

It underscores India's push to lock in trade partnerships beyond traditional markets as global commerce faces strains from unpredictable tariffs and geopolitical tensions, slowing growth and raising protectionism.

As part of the deal, India would get zero-duty-export access for all its goods to New Zealand while Wellington would get duty concessions and market access for about 70% of New Delhi's tariff lines, covering 95% of its exports in a phased manner, Indian officials said.

India's major sectors that will gain from tax free exports include textiles, apparel, engineering goods, leather and footwear, and marine products, while New Zealand's major gains will be in horticulture, wood exports, coal, and sheep wool and meat, among others.

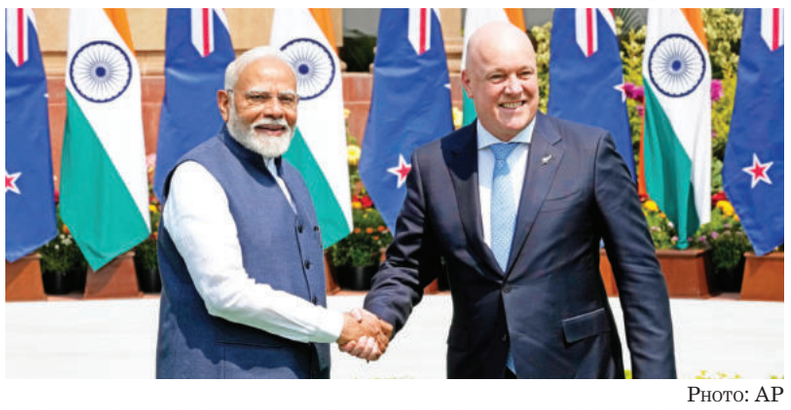


PHOTO: AP

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, left, greets visiting New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon before their meeting in New Delhi, India, Monday, March 17, 2025.

New Zealand has committed investments worth $20 billion in India over a period of 15 years as part of the agreement, India's Trade Ministry said.

New Delhi has excluded from the deal dairy imports such as milk, cream, whey, yoghurt, and cheese, along with animal and vegetable products, including goat meat, onions and almonds, citing "domestic sensitivities."

Bilateral trade between India and New Zealand remains modest compared with New Delhi's bigger partners, but officials said the deal has strong growth potential.

We cannot bar anyone from contesting polls



INTERVIEW

Nepal is holding elections to the House of Representatives on March 5, 2026 amid rising public frustration. Fed up with bad governance, the people, especially the youth, are demanding a change in the situation with greater participation of youth and women in politics, accountability, and political stability.

In this context, **Arpana Adhikari** of *The Rising Nepal*, together with a *Gorkhapatra* team, spoke with communist leader **Pampha Bhusal**, former chair of the Rastriya Janamorcha, ex-vice chair of the CPN (Maoist Centre), former minister, and current central committee member of the Nepali Communist Party. Bhusal shared her perspectives on the upcoming elections, youth and women's representation, leadership renewal, the party's Maoist legacy, and the future direction of the communist movement in Nepal. Excerpts:

How is your party preparing for the March 5 election amid splits and change of symbol ?
Unlike the past legacy of division, this time we are approaching the election with unity. We simplified the election symbol for public ease and are focused on maintaining the spirit of the movement, freedom, good governance, and political stability.

What makes this election different from previous ones?
This election is different. It comes after the sacrifice of 76 people in the Gen-Z movement and the dissolution of the House of Representatives. Unlike ordinary elections, this one is for a new public mandate following the formation of the interim government to hold elections in six months. It reflects the core goals of freedom of expression, corruption-free governance, and political stability.

What strategies and preparations have your party put in place to ensure meaningful representation of young people, women, Dalits, and marginalised communities in this election?
The constitution establishes Nepal as an inclusive federal democratic republic, guaranteeing representation for Dalits, women, indigenous nationalities, Madhesis, Muslims, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups. What the Gen-Z movement has highlighted more strongly is the need to promote young people into leadership roles.

Young people have always been part of political movements; I myself became an organised party member at 13 and was imprisoned during the anti-Panchayat movement as a teenager. As movements continued, leaders naturally grew older. What is new now is the stronger and clearer demand for youth leadership, which must be embraced.

Accordingly, the party aims to allocate around half of its candidacies to young people. Given the minimum candidacy age of 25, we plan to ensure that more than 50 per cent of our candidates fall within the 25–40, or even up to 50 age group.

Your party has proposed barring individuals who have repeatedly served as PM, Minister, or MP from contesting the next election. Will this be implemented?
We cannot adopt a policy that bars anyone from contesting elections, but I do believe the same individuals should not run repeatedly. While some colleagues have proposed this idea, it cannot be implemented as it stands. That said, more than 50 per cent of our candidates in this election will be new and young.

My own experience illustrates this approach. I have been active in politics since the age of 13 and have contested three elections—winning twice and losing once. When I ran for the third time, I made it clear that it would be my last direct contest from my provincial constituency. Accordingly, I will not contest the first-past-the-post lot in this election. Although I am eligible to seek a seat through the proportional representation system, I have chosen not to do so.

Instead, I have encouraged young and new colleagues to prepare and contest from my constituency, supporting them well before the election was announced. They have already begun campaigning, and I am fully committed to backing them so that a younger party leader can win from the constituency this time.

Some say "elders should be listened to," but this may hinder leadership renewal. How do you address this?
A movement is driven by ideas, political direction and clear agendas of good governance, freedom of expression, transparency, the fight against corruption and political stability. In the March election, our aim is to form a government, but Nepal's mixed electoral system makes it difficult for any single party to secure a majority. As a result, governments rarely complete a full five-year term, as seen in the short tenures of recent prime ministers.

This raises questions about repeated terms in office and the public's demand for change. While public opinion must be respected, leadership ultimately rests on ideas.

Leadership is about political vision, national agendas and direction. As communists, we believe in a one-to-three approach, a balanced mix of young, adult and mature leadership. Experienced leaders bring knowledge gained over time, while new leaders must learn gradually. Leadership cannot be created overnight; it requires the ability to shape policy and direction.

Politics is rooted in ideology, principles and laws, and leading a large organisation demands experience. Therefore, we must move forward by integrating new talent with experienced and seasoned leaders in a balanced way.

With the party having faced several splits and the departure of many young leaders, how does your party intend to restore its popular support while working with senior leaders?
As we move forward in unity, we are bringing 20 per cent young people aged 20 to 40 into the organisation. In our party, all members began their political journey at a similarly young age, around the Gen-Z stage, and even now, 60 per cent of our members are aged between 40 and 50 years old. By continuing to induct new members in this way, they will be allowed to learn through participation, without sidelining the older, experienced leaders.



Would dropping your party's Maoist identity or election symbol uphold or betray the movement it led?
We have done justice to the movement. Building on its foundation, we are now transforming the party into one that provides peaceful leadership to society. By means of the general convention, we will decide how Maoist ideology should be interpreted and applied politically. While the party's name reflects unity, this is only symbolic; in substance, today's Nepal, exists because of the People's War. Without it, Nepal would not have become a federal, inclusive, democratic republic, a transformation completed through the 12-point agreement and the 19-day People's Movement.

The People's War was a historic and unparalleled struggle. Its martyrs, the injured, the disabled, the disappeared and the people who supported it made today's Nepal possible. It cannot be erased or ignored.

However, society now demands a new direction. We will move forward on a socialist path, pursuing a socialist revolution through a new political strategy. Unlike the earlier rural-based, underground struggle, this phase will be centred in cities and will unite workers, farmers, women, Dalits, indigenous nationalities, the urban poor, marginalised communities and progressive intellectuals to achieve transformative change.

When do you think your party will have a woman chair, given its history of producing prominent women leaders?
We plan to hold a general convention after this election. By that time, women should have the opportunity to develop the leadership skills needed to take full command. In a communist party, or any political party, leadership is not about being male or female; it is about political, ideological, cultural, and practical competence.

Women entered politics later, but the Maoist movement has nurtured many female leaders. From the grassroots to the top, the People's War created a leadership chain, giving women the chance to learn, develop their skills, and participate in peaceful political processes. In the near future, women can assume key leadership positions, and even if not at the very top, they can lead important teams within the party.

Nepal has committed to ensuring 40 per cent women's representation in the federal parliament. Do you think this is achievable?
I don't think 40 per cent is sufficient; realistically, even an additional 10 per cent could be achieved. There should be 50 per cent women. Half of the population is women, half of the voters are women, so why shouldn't half of the candidates be women? Currently, with 17–40 per cent, only about 10 per cent of women are ensured to compete. Women should not just be nominated because they are women, there should be 50 per cent representation. The agenda of the current women's movement, or of any progressive revolutionary political movement, must ensure 50 per cent representation of women at all levels of the state and in all legislatures.

- Being young is not an agenda, it is just an age.
- True leadership requires vision, ideas, polices and strategies.
- More than 50 per cent of the party's candidates will be young.
- Successful election requires full cooperation between government and parties.

Under the current proportional representation system, critics say only leaders' associates reach leadership positions. Could a fully proportional system worsen this problem?
Currently, about 33 per cent of representatives are women, with Dalits and Madhesis also represented. The Nepalese Parliament is structured as a model House of Representatives, but some people are dissatisfied, some dislike women representatives, some dislike Dalits, some dislike the poor, and some dislike those from marginalized regions. Despite these criticisms, the representation is appropriate.

A fully proportional system with population-based party lists would improve effectiveness. Nepotism exists but is limited, and parties can set clear rules on how many times a candidate may contest to ensure fairness and transparency.

After the Gen-Z movement, many new parties have emerged. How should your party, and older parties in general, move forward while engaging young people?
Our party moves forward with policies and agendas rooted in the interests of the people and the nation, not merely in historical legacy. Through the People's War and subsequent movements, we helped build Nepal as an inclusive, federal democratic republic, and we continue to lead change with a clear progressive agenda. Anyone may join, but commitment to that agenda is essential, because stable politics cannot exist without clarity of purpose. My 50 years in active politics have shown this clearly.

Politics belongs to the working class and to those who serve the people. Representation requires all age groups, not just youth. Being young is not an agenda, it is just an age. True leadership requires ideas, direction, programmes, policies, and strategies.

Power gained without struggle often leads to corruption. Genuine leadership grows from sacrifice, hard work, and respect for the value of labour and resources.

You were a female leader during the armed movement and faced significant challenges at the time. How do you compare those experiences with the challenges women face in politics today?
I am proud of the past because I joined the movement with the aim of transformation, fully committed to either death or liberation. Our goal was to establish a republic in Nepal, even in the face of life-threatening dangers every minute and second. We succeeded in advancing the agendas of republicanism, inclusivity and federalism. Seeing these principles put into practice has made the struggle meaningful.

Change, however, is a continuous process. Progress from the grassroots brings major achievements but also new challenges, each stage demanding further advance. While some new elements have emerged, decisive action is still required. Only by taking the movement to new heights can past aspirations be fulfilled; remaining stagnant amid conflict yields nothing.

After 10 years since its promulgation, does the constitution need major amendments, or is it largely sufficient as it stands?
From the outset, we viewed the constitution as one based on compromise, which is why we registered a note of dissent despite supporting its promulgation. Our main concern was the electoral system, which has become costly and exclusionary. The mixed system favours wealth, limiting representation for women, workers, farmers and long-time activists.

We therefore advocated a fully proportional, affordable electoral system and a directly elected executive to ensure inclusion and political stability. We also believed governments should include subject experts, not only elected politicians. As these issues remain unresolved, we continue to call for constitutional amendment to reduce money's influence and ensure fair representation for all.

In a small but geopolitically significant country like Nepal, situated between India and China, is a directly elected executive a safe and viable option?
We do need a directly elected executive but establish other mechanisms to uphold it. We must create laws and procedures that respect the people's mandate and protect national interests. Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multicultural country, so no single caste or community should dominate. The executive carries forward the agenda, not personal interests. The law should grant the executive authority to act, but significant public and political decisions should only be made by someone competent, maintaining balance through proper legal and procedural mechanisms.

How can provincial governments be made more efficient and stable under federalism?
There are two main reasons for inefficiency. First, provincial governments have a budget but lack their own employees to implement it. Sometimes, the federal government sends staff who only mark attendance and do not perform real work. Provinces should have their own civil servants, as provided by the constitution. However, since the federal system has not fully allowed provinces to establish their own civil service laws, they have been unable to recruit their own staff. Without full staffing, provinces cannot deliver public services effectively.

Second, while the constitution provides for provincial administration, the federal government still controls the deployment and allocation of personnel, leaving provinces without proper authority. As a result, provincial governments face difficulties in security, execution, and administration, preventing them from functioning at full capacity.

Several Gen-Z leaders have called for constitutional amendments after the movement. Do you think it is feasible to make changes before the upcoming elections?
That is not possible. They have formed the government and announced the election date. It cannot happen based on mere hopes. During the elections, they will carry their agenda, and all political parties' manifestos will be considered. If agendas align, constitutional amendments can only be made after the House of Representatives is formed following the elections on March 5.

With the Election Commission preparing the electoral schedule, how do you assess its role and the challenges of ensuring sensitive security arrangements?
The Election Commission is fully prepared, but the government must ensure full cooperation with political parties, as successful elections depend on their participation. These parties, often called "old," are actually transformative forces, having led historic movements and boasting grassroots reach. Anyone thinking they can be sidelined misunderstands their role.

Building trust with these parties is essential for a secure, impartial, and transparent election. The primary responsibility lies with the government, supported by political parties and the Election Commission. From the start, we have backed a participatory approach, and our support remains for the government to focus solely on conducting the election, without long-term strategic distractions or populist agendas.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY

Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.
- Buddha

EDITORIAL

Meditation For Peace

Having roots in Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism, the oriental culture has internalised meditation as a source for emotional balance and inner peace. Modern life is stressful, filled with academic and career pressures and social media overload. The people lack enough time to pause, reflect, and enjoy the bliss of nature that has the power to reduce mental exhaustion, stress and anxiety. From a small age, children are expected to excel in academics, and adults are expected to shine in their careers. We are always in a rush and hardly have any time to nurture our mental health and emotional well-being. In such situations, meditation can play an important role in maintaining a balance between body and mind and bringing mental peace.

Meditation helps slow down our racing thoughts and reconnect with ourselves. Mental health well-being is the need of the hour when almost five per cent of the global adult population suffers from depression and mental health issues. We should take mental health issues as seriously as physical health, as depression and anxiety affect work, social life, studies, and relationships. Stress negatively impacts our immune system and gives rise to many diseases. To raise awareness about the benefits of meditation, the UN General Assembly proclaimed December 21 as World Meditation Day last year. We should take this day as an opportunity to promote meditation, which has proven beneficial in reducing stress and improving the overall well-being of people.

Nepal is the land of the supreme God Shiva, the apostle of peace Buddha and scores of sages and seers. The famous sages meditated and performed intense penance deep in the Himalayas for the attainment of enlightenment and wisdom. Lord Buddha meditated for the attainment of enlightenment and his teachings today guide our lives. We have been practicing the art of meditation for centuries and it is an integral part of our culture and lifestyle. Of late, Western society, too, has adopted the philosophy of yoga and meditation.

With mighty Himalayas, winding rivers, calm lakes, dense forests and a spiritual heritage, Nepal holds an immense potential of being the global centre for meditation and yoga. This requires promoting yoga and meditation as a means of physical and mental happiness. We need national policies prioritising this art of living at various layers of government. Yoga and meditation have been incorporated in the plans and policies for the fiscal year 2024-25, as health promotion strategies, which shows the government is working for their promotion. Meditation and yoga should also be incorporated in the school curriculum from early grades.

If we can establish more meditation centres and let the world know about them, we can emerge as a leading destination for meditation to promote global well-being. It will lead to cultural and spiritual revival, while giving a distinct identity to the Himalayan nation. The peace seekers from around the world visit the country to breathe in the midst of nature and achieve ultimate knowledge. The wellness tourism would significantly boost our economy, creating more jobs in the tourism and hospitality sector, especially in the Himalayan region. We have instances of many influential people visiting Nepal for meditation. But, we should keep its purity intact. With its over-commercialisation, it may lose its spiritual values and the people will be deprived of its inherent benefits.

Promising Sports Sector

PALLAV BHUSAL

A decade ago, Dasarath Stadium would be filled with spectators cheering the Nepali team, both clubs, and the country whenever there was a match. However, that crowd has recently shifted to TU International Cricket Stadium. Why? One may ask. The simplest explanation is leadership and the rise of sporting heroes.

Every Nepali knew the names of national football players and cheered them wholeheartedly. However, most of those famous faces were accused of match fixing. Nepal's special Court later acquitted these former players of criminal charges due to a lack of sufficient evidence in 2018. But the damage had already been done. People stopped believing in football. And the downfall started.

Now, addressing the issue of leadership, ANFA (All Nepal Football Association), which is the governing body of Nepali football, fell into politicisation, leading to a halt in work. Most importantly, being unable to hold national level Sahid Smarak A-Division football league became their biggest failure. The league loved by many Nepalis, which saw packed stadiums during the match day, was gradually forgotten.

On the flip side, cricket, which was barely recognised, was suddenly in the limelight. The emergence of cricketing heroes like Paras Khadka, Shakti Gauchan, and Sarad Veswakar, among many, gave hope to Nepali people. Nepal even qualified and played their first-ever Cricket World Cup match in 2014. Even though the format was the T20 World Cup, this glimmer of hope and heroes representing Nepal in the field shifted the mood of Nepali from football to cricket.

The emerging cricket idols like Rohit Paudel, Dipendra Singh Airee, Sompal Kami, among others, in the national team, who have continuously lived up to the expectations of the crowd has kept cricket relevant to date.

Talking about the leadership in the cricketing world, the investment in the players, their tours, matches, and the recent construction of TU International Cricket Stadium, with the floodlights, has given a boost to Nepali cricket and its fans.

The continuous qualification at the T-20 cricket world cup has shown that Nepali cricket, both players and management, are serious about taking bigger steps in that sport. And of course, this discussion cannot ignore the Nepal Premier League franchise, which has gained support at the international level and boosted the image of Nepali cricket worldwide.

Here, we must also look closely at our women's cricket team and equally praise them. They have represented Nepal in World Cups and made a name for themselves and Nepali cricket globally. Then, the question arises, what should be done to uplift the once-loved footballing world of Nepal? The answer is simple: good management and development of Champions.

On the parallel side, women's football has seen credible improvement. They have produced champions like Sabitra Bhandari, aka Sambha, Anjila Tumbapo Subba, and Preeti Rai, among others, who are representing Nepal in foreign countries, including New Zealand, Jordan, and India. The women's team has improved its ranking rapidly in recent days, and they are the ones who are attracting crowds back to Dasarath Stadium in recent years.

The rise of cricket, along with the progress in women's football, shows that there is potential for other sports to thrive when supported by strong leadership, strategic investments, and passionate sportspersons.

The recent success of cricket, both for men and women, and women's football, offers a glimpse into the power of collective ambition and the need for a unified approach for building promises on sporting sector in Nepal.

Invest In Villagers To End Poverty

Uttam Maharjan



Poverty is a multidimensional challenge. Poverty is determined by the availability of basic needs such as safe drinking water, sanitation, nutrition, healthcare, education, transport and social services. Poverty can emerge from various factors such as economic factors, social norms and traditions, natural disasters and climate change.

Although the Constitution of Nepal guarantees living with dignity, the incidence of poverty among people violates this right. However, what is written in the Constitution is not always fulfilled. However, Nepal has achieved some progress in poverty alleviation. The rate of poverty in Nepal stands at 20.27 per cent (Fourth Nepal Living Standards Survey 2022-23). The rate was as high as 60 per cent during the 1990s. After the restoration of multi-party democracy, poverty began declining, with major reductions recorded during the 2000s.

Remittances

Remittances are one of the major factors contributing to poverty reduction. A large number of people are going abroad for foreign employment daily due to a lack of job opportunities and a poor working environment. Most of these people are from rural areas, where agriculture and small-scale business form the backbone of the economy. But most of them prefer foreign employment to agriculture or small-scale business. This has resulted in arable land lying fallow. Migration, together with government apathy towards the agriculture sector, has boosted non-farming activities. Once a predominantly agrarian country, Nepal has now given way to the service sector.

The other factor that has contributed to poverty reduction is programmes such as the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF). The PAF was established in 2003, when the Maoist insurgency was raging on and there were no local governments in place, making it difficult for people's representatives to engage with local communities. The core objectives of the PAF were to reach out to the rural poor and improve their living conditions through income-generating activities and community development projects, such as through agriculture and small-scale business. The other strategies included empowering marginalised groups (women, children and ethnic minorities), improving access to services (sanitation, drinking water, healthcare, education and public service delivery), boosting domestic production and creating employment opportunities to stop migration, among others.

With the election of local bodies in 2017, the role of the PAF diminished, with its functions transferred to local governments. There was also talk of corruption and financial irregularities in the PAF. However, the PAF had played a vital role in reducing poverty. Current strategies for poverty alleviation include rural development with a focus on empowering rural people, improving the agriculture sector and promoting local entrepreneurship; social inclusion with heed paid to marginalised groups based on caste, ethnicity and gender; youth employment through skill building or upgrading and job creation; and economic diversification through boosting domestic production and promoting agro-based industries.

Boosting domestic production and promoting agro-based industries would create job opportunities on the one hand, while on the other, the gaping trade deficit can be reduced. It would be relevant to mention that the government introduced directives for the use of domestic products in public institutions in 2014.

> Experts working in the poverty alleviation field opine that even the 20 per cent figure of poverty is alarming, which needs to be reduced further.

But the directives have miserably failed as public institutions, including government offices, keep on purchasing goods and services from foreign countries. This is a serious setback in the promotion of domestic products. Such a trend must come to an end. Local products should be promoted as far as possible.

There are several factors that have complicated efforts at extirpating poverty. Political instability, natural disasters such as earthquakes, landslides and floods, poor infrastructure in rural areas, poor access to sanitation, drinking water, healthcare, transport and education, caste-based discrimination, gender inequalities and suchlike factors have hampered poverty alleviation efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic hit Nepal hard. The effects of the pandemic are still seen now. Since then, the economy has taken a knock.

Although some improvements have been made, the economy is still far from its pre-pandemic form. Banks are struggling with liquidity. Individuals and business houses are not willing to borrow even at reduced rates of interest. In fact, the pandemic has exacerbated the poverty situation. The pandemic pushed an additional 97 million people below the extreme poverty line in 2020 alone worldwide. Vulnerable people were disproportionately affected. There were job losses, reductions in incomes and disruptions of public life.

Nepal is a country of opportunities. The country is rich in natural resources, including arable land. There is much untapped potential, which is responsible for low production, low productivity and stagnant sectors. Such potential needs to be unlocked. As a matter of fact, there is a vast scope for economic growth and development. However, government apathy has made such opportunities go down the plug-hole. It may be noted that children born to the poor are vulnerable to a lack of basic amenities such as nutrition, healthcare, education and safety. Such children may even be caught in the cycle of poverty.

Best strategies

Poverty passes down from generation to generation, leading to deprivation, inequalities and marginalisation. While crafting strategies for poverty alleviation, the government should take into account the condition of such people. One of the best strategies for alleviating poverty is to empower deprived or excluded communities to solve problems relating to poverty themselves. But for this to happen, the government should make economic opportunities available to them. The government should develop adequate infrastructure, such as factories and roads and prioritise agriculture by providing for agricultural inputs such as improved seeds and fertilisers.

The government should also open new vistas of tourism by exploring new tourism destinations. Nepal abounds in such destinations. What is needed is exploring and developing them with adequate infrastructure. The government should, therefore, come up with new strategies for reducing poverty in tandem with rural communities and other stakeholders. Experts working in the poverty alleviation field opine that even the 20 per cent figure of poverty is alarming, which needs to be reduced further.

(Maharjan has been regularly writing on contemporary issues for this daily since 2000.)

Embrace New Development Model

Sahadev Dhamala



Nepal today stands at a historic turning point. The country is in the middle of important debates about social transformation, political restructuring and economic progress. In the past seven decades, Nepal has experienced major changes from the end of the Rana regime, the beginning of multi-party democracy, the fall of the monarchy, the establishment of the republic to the federal system.

But now the debate has entered a new stage: Who should play the main role in making these changes permanent? The answer is clear: the youth. Sociology considers change as a continuous process shaped by generational shifts, changing values, political awareness, economic structures and cultural transformation. Youth potential and their ability to take risks are the foundation of political stability and development.

Power of youth

Human capital, especially the power of youth, is seen as the main driver of economic dynamism. In this context, the condition of Nepal's youth, their social and political engagement and their role in development can be understood as the intellectual rise of the young generation. From Marxist to modern theories, all social thinkers agree that society is not a fixed structure, but an ever-changing process. Transformation is directly connected with rising social awareness, value shifts, political influence, economic opportunities and cultural change.

Especially, today's generation, aged 16 to 45, has grown up in a very different environment. Fast digital information, rapid technological growth, global study and work opportunities and social media have shaped new values, new perspectives and new aspirations. This is why Nepali youths question traditional social behaviour, political culture and slow development. The recent Gen Z movement signifies this shift.

During this change, the younger generation has begun challenging corruption, inequality, unaccountable politics and unequal opportunities. Youth have always been a major force in Nepal's political movements, but the tragedy is that even though they helped make the movements successful, they were never allowed the leadership role.

Today, Nepal faces a crisis of political trust (people losing faith in parties), a leadership crisis (monopoly of the old generation) and a crisis of long-term vision (unclear national direction). Without stable leadership, clear policies and meaningful youth participation, long-term development is impossible. The absence of these elements has slowed down Nepal's progress.

A country cannot change only through protest. Youth participation must be institutionalised in leadership, administration, policy-making, local governance and the private sector. If young people are given responsibility in local planning, federal policy-making and party leadership, the speed of change can increase.

The energy, skills and organisational ability of youth can become the main foundation for implementing political transformation. Nepal's youth population is above 37 per cent, which is both an opportunity and challenge. If their potential is unlocked, the country will see desired prosperity. Failure to address their aspirations will lead to the societal unrest. The major problems facing youth today are unemployment, dependence on foreign employment, lack of adequate skills, low investment in research and innovation and weak domestic industry and market expansion.

> Nepal now needs to move beyond traditional development models and adopt innovation-driven, entrepreneurship-based development.

Nepal now needs to move beyond traditional development models and adopt innovation-driven, entrepreneurship-based development. Tourism, agriculture, IT, hydro- power, renewable energy, services and cultural industries all hold immense potential. If the government effectively implements policies such as startup grants, investment protection, tax incentives, skill training and market access, Nepal's economic engine can be revitalised.

Nepal's education system remains theory-heavy, exam-focused, and disconnected from the world of employment. If technical training, digital skills, tech-based learning and research centres are expanded, youth capacity will rapidly grow. If local governments give youth a leading role in planning, budget monitoring, project management and community initiatives, development will move successfully "from the bottom up."

Building the character of youths is more important than engaging them in politics. Honesty, hard work and responsibility must be the foundation of youth values. Young people should adopt a culture of finding solutions, not blaming; creativity, not frustration; and a long-term vision, not a short-term one.

The world today is being transformed by digital technology. Gen Z is a digital generation empowered by technology, networking and global knowledge. If the state integrates technology effectively into education, health, agriculture, tourism, administration and entrepreneurship, Nepal can achieve decades of development in a short time through "digital transformation."

Transition

In conclusion, Nepal is still undergoing political, social and economic transition. For stability and development, the country needs not only traditional leadership but also the intellectual energy, practical ability, ethics and national vision of the youth. Our generation must decide: Do we change the country or languish in disappointment? Will we create opportunities or lose them?

The responsibility for national transformation is now on our shoulders. We must be a generation that understands, transforms and leads not just one that suffers. If Nepali youths show unity, vision, skills and integrity, Nepal will not only be a country of possibilities, but a country of success. In the hands of youth lies the wind of change, the speed of development and the map of the future.

(Dhamala is a tourism entrepreneur and vice-president of Thamel Tourism Development Council.)

50 YEARS AGO

THE RISING NEPAL

December 23, 1975

Indian Navy Tests Missiles

New Delhi, Dec.22: The Indian Navy has successfully tested missiles mounted on a navy frigate, the Press Trust of India news agency reported today, reports AFP.

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READER'S MAIL

Disaster Anticipatory Actions Save Lives



This is about the news report titled, *"Govt committed to reinforcing disaster anticipatory actions: Home Minister Aryal,"* published in the digital edition of this daily on December 22.

The reaffirmation of the commitment to reinforcing, institutionalising, and expanding anticipatory actions based on disaster preparedness, early warning systems and forecasting is good, but to make a real difference, it is important to fulfil the commitment in the truest sense.

Nepal is a fragile country – geographically, seismically, and now, climatically. Given the increasing climate change-induced natural disaster in intensity, duration, and frequency, it has become imperative to invest in and implement disaster anticipatory actions, which are proactive measures enacted before disasters actually happen.

Such precautionary steps are a must if we are to save untold lives and properties. Since they are the steps taken before a predicted disaster using early warning and often involve pre-arranged funding and actions triggered by forecasts, they have been proven effective in mitigating the impacts of calamities.

Nikeesa Neupane Dang

TAILPIECE

The owner of an aircraft manufacturing company stopped by the aircraft testing airfield to check on the newest test pilot. He asked the supervisor how the new guy was doing. "Terrible! He has already crashed four planes this week!"

The owner replied, "How is this possible? Where did he work before coming here?" The supervisor said, "He designed Windows software for Microsoft."

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The children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Catholic elementary school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The nun made a note, and posted on the apple tray: "Take only ONE. God is watching."

Moving further along the lunch line, at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. A child had written a note, "Take all you want. God is watching the apples.

Thailand, Cambodia to resume ceasefire talks

AP
Kuala Lumpur, Dec. 22



PHOTO: AP

Cambodia's Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn is seen during the 58th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' meeting and related meetings at the Convention Centre in Kuala Lumpur, July 10, 2025.

Thailand and Cambodia will resume talks later this week to work toward a more durable ceasefire along their border, Thailand's foreign minister said Monday, stressing that progress depends on detailed bilateral negotiations rather than public declarations that internationalize the dispute.

A ceasefire agreement in October was rushed to ensure it could be witnessed by U.S. President Donald Trump and lacked sufficient details to ensure the deal to end the armed conflict would hold, Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said Monday after an Association of Southeast Asian Nations foreign ministers' meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

While Cambodia has publicy said it is ready for an unconditional ceasefire, Bangkok never received any direct proposal and Thailand believed such statements were aimed at increasing international pressure rather than resolving the issue, Sihasak said following the meeting that was arranged to seek ways to end the crisis.

The general border committee involving both nations will meet Wednesday to iron out detailed measures toward a lasting ceasefire, he said.

"This time, let's thrash out the details and make sure the ceasefire reflect the situation on the ground and the ceasefire is one that really holds, and both sides are going to fully respect the ceasefire," Sihasak told a news conference.

The border conflict escalated into deadly combat two weeks ago and derailed the agreement promoted by Trump, which ended five days of fighting in July. The agreement was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through under pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. The ceasefire was formalized with more detail at an October regional summit in Malaysia attended by Trump.

The fighting has drawn international concern. The U.S. Department of State on Sunday released a statement calling for Thailand and Cambodia to "end hostilities, withdraw heavy weapons, cease emplacement of landmines, and fully implement the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accords, which include mechanisms to accelerate humanitarian demining and address border issues."

The fighting is a result of a dispute over patches of territory claimed by both nations along their shared border.

The latest round of fighting began Dec. 8, a day after a border skirmish wounded two Thai soldiers. Since then combat has broken out on several fronts, with Thailand carrying out airstrikes in Cambodia with F-16 fighter jets and Cambodia firing thousands of medium-range BM-21 rockets from truck-mounted launchers that can launch up to 40 rockets simultaneously.

More than three dozen people on both sides of the border have officially been reported killed in the past week of fighting, while more than half a million have been displaced, according to officials.

Under the October truce Thailand was to to release 18 Cambodian soldiers held prisoner and both sides were to begin removing heavy weapons and land mines along the border. But the two countries have carried on a bitter propaganda war with minor cross-border violence.

Land mine explosions have been a particularly sensitive issue for Thailand, which has lodged several protests after alleging Cambodia laid new mines that wounded soldiers patrolling the frontier. Cambodia insists the mines were remnants of its decades-long civil war, which ended in 1999.

"These were clearly newly planted landmines, and this was confirmed by the ASEAN observer team," Sihasak said Monday, calling it a "clear violation" of the October agreement.

The Thai navy said Sunday one of its marines on the front line sustained serious injuries to his right leg from stepping on a land mine.

The navy also claimed to have discovered a large number of abandoned weapons and explosive ordnance while securing an area described as a Cambodian stronghold, which showed "deliberate planning and intentional use of anti-personnel landmines" against Thai troops.

The Thai Foreign Ministry said it would send letters of protest to Cambodia and Zambia, the current chair of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, also known as the Ottawa Convention, to pursue further action under the convention's mechanisms.

Cambodia did not immediately respond to the Thai claims.

Russian general killed by bomb under his car



PHOTO: AP

This image shows the scene where Lt. Gen. Fanil Sarvarov, head of the Operational Training Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces General Staff, was killed by an explosive device placed under his car in Moscow.

AP
Moscow, Dec. 22

A Russian general was killed Monday morning after an explosive device detonated underneath his car in Moscow, and investigators said Ukraine could be behind the attack, the third such killing of a senior military officer in a year.

Lt. Gen. Fanil Sarvarov, head of the Operational Training Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces' General Staff, died from his injuries, said Svetlana Petrenko, the spokesperson for Russia's Investigative Committee, the nation's top criminal investigation agency.

"Investigators are pursuing numerous lines of inquiry regarding the murder. One of these is that the crime was orchestrated by Ukrainian intelligence services," Petrenko said. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that President Vladimir Putin had been immediately informed about Sarvarov's killing.

The Defense Ministry said that Sarvarov had previously fought in Chechnya and taken part in Moscow's military campaign in Syria.

Just over a year ago, on Dec. 17, 2024, Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the chief of the military's nuclear, biological and chemical protection forces, was killed by a bomb hidden on an electric scooter outside his apartment building. Kirillov's assistant also died. Ukraine's security service claimed responsibility for the attack.

An Uzbek man was quickly arrested and charged with killing Kirillov on behalf of the Ukrainian security service. Russian President Vladimir Putin described Kirillov's killing as a "major blunder" by Russia's security agencies, noting they should learn from it and improve their efficiency.

But in April, another senior Russian military officer, Lt. Gen. Yaroslav Moskalik, a deputy head of the main operational department in the General Staff, was killed by an explosive device placed in his car parked near to his apartment building just outside Moscow. A suspected perpetrator was quickly arrested.

Moscow also has blamed Ukraine for several bombings and other attacks in Russia.

11 Afghan nationals dead in Nokundi road accident

AFP
Afghanistan, Dec. 22

At least 11 Afghan nationals were killed and nine others injured after a pick-up vehicle collided with an oil tanker near the Nokundi area of Chagai district in Pakistan's Balochistan province, Dawn reported.

According to officials, the Afghan nationals were travelling in a pick-up while attempting to illegally migrate to Europe via Iran with the assistance of an organised human smuggling network. The vehicle, identified as an Iran-made Zamyad pick-up, was carrying 21 Afghan nationals who had crossed into Pakistan through a route commonly used by smugglers.

Police said the accident occurred late at night when the pick-up reached a remote Katcha area around 35 kilometres from Nokundi and collided head-on with an oil tanker travelling in the opposite direction. Eleven passengers died on the spot, while nine others sustained injuries.

Local residents and rescue teams rushed to the scene after being alerted in the early hours and recovered bodies from the wreckage. The injured and deceased were shifted to a nearby medical facility, Dawn reported.

"We received 11 bodies and nine injured in the district hospital of Nokundi," Medical Officer Dr Nadir Khan of Nokundi hospital confirmed, adding that the injured were provided treatment in the hospital.

He further said the condition of all the injured was now stable.

Police officials said that all those killed and injured in the accident, except the driver, were Afghan nationals. After completing legal formalities and initial medical procedures, the injured and the bodies of the deceased were sent to Afghanistan through the Afghan border authorities.

Superintendent of Police of Chagai Mohammad Sharif confirmed the deaths and said the driver of the pick-up, identified as Khudanazar, son of Abdullah, was a resident of Taftan and died on the spot.

"After necessary legal procedures, the body of the driver has been sent to Taftan, while the remaining deceased and injured, all Afghan nationals, have been repatriated to Afghanistan," he said.

Sharif added that investigations into the cause of the accident are underway, with preliminary findings indicating that speeding may have led to the collision. Police are examining all aspects to determine responsibility, Dawn reported.

The accident has once again drawn attention to the dangers of high-speed travel and heavy vehicular movement on highways in the border areas of Chagai, where fatal accidents have been reported with increasing frequency.

Meanwhile, two other people were killed in separate road accidents in Bolan and Sibi. Police said that in the Bolan Pass area, a truck struck a motorbike, killing both riders on the spot. Their bodies were later shifted to a nearby health facility.

Fake news floods Christmas markets

AFP
Berlin, Dec. 22



PHOTO: AFP

Visitors throng the Gendarmenmarkt in Berlin.

Security has been tightened at German Christmas markets after recent deadly attacks. But if some online videos were to be believed, they've become barbed-wire fortresses guarded by armoured personnel carriers.

A flood of disinformation has circulated on social media, with some doctored clips also giving the wrong impression that an Islamic cleric called for prayers at one of the festive events, and that markets have been stormed by Muslim men.

AFP Factcheck has taken a closer look at false claims circulating online which amplify far-right narratives about immigration and the "Islamisation" of society.

Recent images and videos showed what were claimed to be Muslim men or "Islamist immigrants" massing at Christmas markets in the cities of Hamburg and Stuttgart.

But AFP research showed that the footage was from other events: an October 2024 rally by the activist group Muslim Interaktiv, which has since been banned, and Syrians celebrating the fall of president Bashar al-Assad late last year.

Several AI-generated pictures have also shown Christmas markets with exaggerated security measures such as metre-high barbed wire fences or military-style vehicles parked around them.

German Christmas markets, a centuries-old tradition, are hosted by nearly every town and city and consist of stalls with merchants selling gifts and decorations as well as sweets, sausages and hot mulled wine.

But the cosy family atmosphere of the markets has been tarnished by the shock of recent attacks.

Last year six people were killed and over 300 wounded in a car-ramming attack on the Christmas market in the eastern city of Magdeburg.

The man now on trial is a Saudi psychiatrist who adhered to conspiracy theories, held strongly anti-Islam views and repeatedly expressed his fury at German authorities. That attack recalled a 2016 truck rampage through Berlin's Christmas market by a Tunisian man with jihadist motives that killed 13 people.

In mid-December German authorities said they had arrested five men -- an Egyptian, a Syrian and three Moroccans -- on suspicion they were involved in an Islamist plot to plough a vehicle into a Christmas market in Bavaria.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has seized on such attacks and plots as it calls for the "remigration" of foreigners, especially to Muslim majority countries.

PRISM

Lottery wins sparked by dreams, pets, birthdays

North Carolina: Some lottery winners say their lucky numbers have found them after having dreams about winning big. Others have landed large prizes after using numbers that are significant to them.

Here are eight times players have found success after receiving guidance from their intuition in one way or another. Robert Hoban might have bought a Quick Pick ticket for a Cash 5 drawing, but his dreams still seemed to predict the outcome.

He said that the night before he learned the good news, he dreamed he was going to win. "It's strange because I even dreamed the exact amount I won," he said. His family didn't believe that his dreams predicted his $110,000 prize, but he insists they did.

Polar bear adopts orphaned cub

Canada: A team of Canadian researchers have documented a rare case of a female polar bear adopting an unrelated cub who was apparently orphaned.

The nonprofit group Polar Bears International said researchers placed a tracking collar on a female polar bear with a single cub in the spring, and she was spotted again in the fall -- this time with two cubs of approximately the same age. The mother bear, identified as X33991, is part of the Western Hudson Bay polar bear sub-population. Researchers said that in over 4,600 bears from the sub-population that have been studied over the course of the last half century, this is only the 13th documented case of a mother adopting an orphaned cub.

-Agencies

TODAY IN HISTORY

558 – Chlothar I is crowned King of the Franks.

583 – Maya queen Yohl Ik'nal is crowned ruler of Palenque.

1815 – The novel Emma by Jane Austen is first published.

1893 – The opera Hansel and Gretel by Engelbert Humperdinck is first performed.

1914 – World War I: Australian and New Zealand troops arrive in Cairo, Egypt.

1947 – The transistor is first demonstrated at Bell Laboratories.

1954 – First successful kidney transplant is performed by J. Hartwell Harrison and Joseph Murray.

1979 – Soviet–Afghan War: Soviet Union forces occupy Kabul, the Afghan capital.

Global nuclear arms control under strain in 2026

AFP
Paris, Dec. 22



PHOTO: AFP

The Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons takes place every four or five years.

The fragile global legal framework for nuclear weapons control faces further setbacks in 2026, eroding guardrails to avoid a nuclear crisis.

The first half of the year will see two key events: the US-Russia bilateral treaty, New START, expires on February 5, and in April, New York hosts the Review Conference (RevCon) of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) -- the cornerstone of global nuclear security frameworks.

The RevCon, held every four to five years, is meant to keep the NPT alive. But during the last two sessions, the 191 signatory states failed to agree on a final document, and experts expect the same outcome in April.

"I think this is going to be a difficult RevCon," said Alexandra Bell, head of US-based global security nonprofit the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, at a UN-hosted online conference in early December. "In terms of the current state and near future prospects of nuclear arms control architecture, things are bleak," she added.

Anton Khlopkov, director of Russian think-tank the Center for Energy and Security Studies (CENESS), took an even starker point of view, saying at the same event that "we are at the point of almost complete dismantlement of arms control architecture".

"We should be realistic in the current circumstances. At best, I think we should try to preserve what we have," he said. From US strikes on Iranian nuclear sites to Russia's test of the new Burevestnik nuclear-powered cruise missile and US President Donald Trump's remarks about possibly resuming nuclear tests -- the international nuclear landscape darkened in 2025. At the same time, "the arms control architecture is crumbling", Emmanuelle Maitre of France's Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS) told AFP.

Nuclear control had been built over decades around a Moscow-Washington axis, but China's growing power and rapid technological advances have shifted the international playing field, which is simultaneously increasingly strained.

"The growing interlinkage between nuclear and conventional forces and the emergence of disruptive technologies (such as the US Golden Dome defence system and new hypersonic weapons) have transformed traditional nuclear deterrence into a multi-domain concept, especially in a multipolar world," said Peking University's Hua Han.

"This trilateral configuration introduces complexities far beyond the Cold War-era bilateral model. Increasing China-Russia cooperation further complicates deterrence calculations, particularly in the two main theatres of concern: Europe and the Asia-Pacific," she added, according to the minutes of an April event held by Pakistan's Center for International Strategic Studies.

A likely result of the changing landscape is the lapse of New START, which sets weapon limits and includes inspection systems.

"The entire inspection component is no longer functioning, the notifications when a missile is moved, etc, all of that has vanished. What remains is only the voluntary commitment to stay within the limits," said Maitre.

'Collective solutions'

But allowing New START to lapse is "in American interest", according to Robert Peters of the influential Heritage Foundation, reflecting the stance of much of the US strategic community to avoid tying Washington's hands to Moscow alone.

Beijing, which currently has fewer weapons, has so far refused to engage in trilateral disarmament talks.



PHOTO: SUJAN GURUNG/TRN

Chief Justice Prakash Man Singh Raut attending a programme organised in Lalitpur on Monday to mark the 70th anniversary of the Nepal Bar Association, the umbrella organization of legal professionals.

Govt team to inspect damaged party offices

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

The government has announced that it will inspect the political party offices damaged during the Gen-Z movement.

Minister for Communication and Information Technology Jagdish Kharel informed that a government team would inspect the offices of major political parties, including the Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, and the Maoist Centre, on Tuesday.

According to the schedule, a delegation comprising Minister for Industry, Commerce, and Supplies Anil Kumar Sinha, Minister Kharel, and the Prime Minister's political adviser, Ajay Bhadra Khanal, will conduct the inspection.

The team will start its inspection from the Nepali Congress central office at 11:00 am, before proceeding to the offices of the CPN-UML, the CPN (Maoist Centre), and other parties.

The government has stated that it is intensifying dialogue and consultations with concerned stakeholders as the political environment is built ahead of the House of Representatives election scheduled for March 5, 2026.

Our roles are reduced to formalities, say Karnali women representatives

BY KAMAL SHARMA
Dailekh, Dec. 22



Women representatives elected in the local levels have complained that their roles have been reduced to mere formalities, with little real influence on decision-making. They said they are often limited to signing documents or endorsing the legality of decisions taken by others, without meaningful participation.

Galsara BK, an executive council member of Bhagwatimai Rural Municipality, said the issues raised by women representatives in executive council meetings are rarely implemented. "We are not provided with detailed information in village assembly or executive council meetings. Our role is reduced to applauding," she said. "Even when we raise our points in executive meetings, they are not heard. While preparing the ward budget, plans received from the Tols are discussed, but male representatives dominate the final decisions," she added.

Similarly, rural municipality member Ranjana Kumari Bhandari said the behaviour of male representatives towards women is discriminatory. "Male representatives dominate the various committees formed in rural municipalities. Women are told, 'you were elected because of us, so do not speak too much,'" she said. She added that even when women representatives seek information on plans and budgets, they are compelled to rely on the deputy mayor. "This limits our freedom in decision-making and reduces women representatives to mere legitimisers of decisions," she said.

Yanjumaya Tamang, a member of the executive committee of Chandannath Municipality in Jumla, said the municipality allocates Rs. 500,000 to each executive committee member, based on which programmes are prepared. However, she said that decisions are finalised only after discussions within political parties and approval by the majority, after which women representatives are asked merely to sign. "Even when executive committee meetings are held, the agendas are sometimes sent to us by text message during the meeting itself," she said.

Most women representatives speaking at the Karnali Women's Conference, organised by the women's organisation in Surkhet and focused on the issues of marginalised women on Monday, said they were being used by male representatives to legitimise decisions. Women representatives, social activists and members of various organisations from ten districts of Karnali Province pointed out that inequality, patriarchal attitudes and power imbalances within local decision-making structures have silenced women's voices.

They said they are often forced to applaud and pass proposals they do not understand.

Bhim Kumari Pun, an executive member of Bheri Municipality in Jajarkot, said the plans proposed by women are never approved. "After the decision-making process is completed, we are only called to sign," she said. Such practices, she added, have reduced women representatives to "official witnesses" in the decision-making process.

Mudhurani Dhakal, executive director of the Women's Organisation for Marginalised Women (BAM), said the conference was organised not only to exchange experiences among women representatives and social activists from all 10 districts of Karnali Province, but also to develop a common agenda.

CHINESE AMBASSADOR CHEN WRAPS UP NEPAL TERM

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

Chinese Ambassador to Nepal, Chen Song, is returning to China on Wednesday after completing his three-year term in Kathmandu.

To bid him farewell, a ceremony was organised on the premises of the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu on Sunday.

Speaking at the event, he said that the relations between China and Nepal are unique and pledged support to Nepal from any position he holds.

Stating that he will always remember Nepal and Nepalis, the Chinese Ambassador extended gratitude to the government of Nepal, government employees, colleagues from the diplomatic mission, media persons and the Nepali society for their support.

Ministers, lawmakers, chiefs and office-bearers of diplomatic missions in Kathmandu, former prime minister, ministers, industrialists, media persons and artists were present on the occasion.

Earlier on Sunday, Ambassador Chen paid separate farewell calls on Speaker of the House of Representatives, Devraj Ghimire, and National Assembly Chairman Narayan Prasad Dahal at their offices in Singha Durbar.

NC president Deuba, UML chairman Oli hold meeting



BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli met Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba on Monday.

Oli reached Deuba's residence in Maharajgunj with UML General Secretary Shankar Pokharel.

It was the second meeting between the two leaders after the Gen-Z movement of September 8 and 9, which dethroned the Oli-led coalition government of Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML.

The meeting was believed to have focused on ongoing political issues, including the restoration of the House of Representatives.

The meeting took place after the filing of a writ petition in the Supreme Court by both UML and Nepali Congress lawmakers, seeking the reinstatement of the dissolved House of Representatives.

Oli's visit to Deuba's residence follows his re-election as UML Chairman for the third term during the party's 11th General Convention. The discussions between the two parties are seen important as both parties opt for legal action regarding the political transition.

Dense fog, crippling...

Despite the cold persisting for nearly a week, local governments have yet to provide firewood and other essential relief materials.

With the drop in temperature, schoolchildren and elderly people have been particularly affected. In rural areas, locals have been seen gathering around bonfires early in the morning to keep warm.

Shiva Narayan Yadav, headmaster of Chhapki Bhathaula Basic School, said student attendance has declined due to changing weather conditions and continuous cold winds. He added that attendance has further fallen as children from poor families lack adequate warm clothing during extreme cold.

Chairperson of Rupani Rural Municipality Dinesh Kumar Yadav said the local government is working to manage firewood to help residents cope with the cold. He informed that firewood is being distributed at various locations across wards, along with blankets for the poor, marginalised and people with disabilities.

Following the worsening cold, preparations are underway to convene a meeting of the District Disaster Management Committee, said Yugesh Kumar Yadav, administrative officer at the District Administration Office, Saptari.

He added that discussions are ongoing with all 18 local-level chiefs in the district, and a meeting will soon be held to take necessary decisions, including the supply of firewood and distribution of warm clothes.

Low export remains...

However, experts caution that the growth remains heavily dependent on exports of processed oils made from imported crude, rather than domestically produced goods.

Soybean oil exports alone amounted to Rs. 46.55 billion during the review period, while sunflower oil and palm oil exports stood at Rs. 3.73 billion and Rs. 2.82 billion respectively.

The edible oils accounted for 46 per cent of total exports, with soybean oil alone making up 40 per cent.

The oils are processed domestically from crude oil imported mainly from countries such as Argentina, Ukraine, Brazil, Paraguay, Thailand, United States, and then re-exported to neighbouring markets, particularly India.

In addition to edible oils, increased exports of garments, carpets, cardamom, yarn and tea and coffee also supported export growth.

During the first five months of the current fiscal year, Nepal exported tea and coffee worth Rs. 2.06 billion, cardamom worth Rs. 5.5 billion, carpets worth Rs. 4.5 billion, garments worth around Rs. 5 billion, and yarn worth Rs. 5.5 billion.

Meanwhile, imports of crude edible oils remained high among the goods imported during the review period.

The country imported crude soybean oil worth Rs. 46.97 billion, crude palm oil worth Rs. 5 billion, and sunflower oil worth Rs. 7.15 billion during the review period.

Petroleum products also continued to account for a significant share of imports.

Petroleum imports totalled Rs. 104 billion, including diesel worth Rs. 45.60 billion, petrol worth Rs. 27.33 billion, aviation fuel worth Rs. 8.34 billion, kerosene worth Rs. 289 million, and liquefied petroleum gas worth Rs. 22.39 billion.

Likewise, the country imported cereals, including maize, paddy and rice and wheat worth Rs. 23 billion during the review period.

Gold and silver worth Rs. 15 billion have been imported during the review period of the current fiscal year.

Resunga fire causes Rs. 6 million loss

BY TOPLAL ARYAL
Resunga, Dec. 22

A fire that broke out at Sujata Auto Workshop in Bus Park, Resunga Municipality-8, Gulmi, has caused an estimated loss of over Rs. 6 million.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Ganga Bahadur Saru, spokesperson for the District Police Office, Gulmi, said the fire was caused by an electrical short circuit in the workshop of 40-year-old Bikram Sunar, a resident of Nayagaun, Dhurkot Rural Municipality-1, who has been running the business at the bus park.

According to Saru, the workshop was completely destroyed. Sunar sustained minor burns on his face and left hand, as well as a minor injury to his left leg while escaping. He was treated at Gulmi Hospital, Tamghas.

The fire was brought under control with the help of the Resunga Municipality fire brigade and the Nepal Police.

Saru also reported that there have been ten fire incidents in the past month. One person died, and two were injured. Additionally, three livestock were killed, and four were injured in fires that broke out in four different sheds.

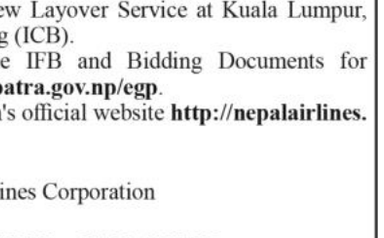


PHOTO: TOPLAL ARYAL

Fire at Sujata Auto Workshop in Resunga Municipality-8.

Over 1 million new...

Bhattarai added that voter lists have been updated, removing duplicate entries and citizens who have renounced citizenship. "The final voter list will be ready by 30 December, with 1,016,754 additional voters compared to the 2022 election, a 5.65 per cent increase," he said.

Political participation has also risen, with 114 parties registered for the 2026 election, up from 87 in 2022.

Regarding election observation, the Commission has granted permission to 27 domestic and four foreign organisations to monitor the polls, compared to 21 and two respectively in 2022. Invitations have also been sent to overseas election commissions.

To facilitate voting, 75 additional polling stations and 966 new polling centres have been planned, said Bhattarai, adding, "The Commission has been in continuous coordination with government ministries, political parties, former election officials, and media regulators, remaining open to suggestions and complaints."

Bhattarai assured that election security is being coordinated with relevant ministries and agencies to ensure the safety of candidates, political parties, campaign activities, polling centres, ballot transportation, counting centres, and post-election events.

Antique Dhaka Topis...

"A groom's daura suruwal made from handwoven Dhaka costs around Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 20,000," Neupane said. "The same set made from factory-produced Dhaka costs about Rs. 7,000 to Rs. 8,000."

He said only a small number of customers who value authenticity choose handwoven fabric, while most prefer cheaper alternatives. Handwoven Dhaka is mainly produced in districts such as Tehrathum and Palpa, whereas machine-made Dhaka is widely available in markets.

Neupane added that changing consumer preferences have forced traditional Dhaka businesses to adapt. His shop, which once sold only Dhaka, now also offers fabrics such as Banarasi, silk, polyester and wool blends to survive.

Pointing to his shop, Neupane said, "As people show less interest in Dhaka and look for reasonably priced and stylish fabrics, we had to diversify for sustainability."

He also noted a visible shift in wedding attire trends. "In the past, 80 out of 100 grooms wore Dhaka daura suruwal during marriage ceremonies. Now the trend has reversed. Grooms increasingly prefer suits and other fashionable fabrics."

According to Neupane, Dhaka topis remain the most consistently purchased Dhaka item, as they are considered auspicious in Nepali culture. During Tihar and other cultural events, topis are gifted and worn as symbols of goodwill and tradition.

"Even during these auspicious occasions, people now choose machine-made Dhaka," he said. "This threatens the identity and survival of original handwoven Dhaka."

Echoing this sentiment, three college students purchasing suits in the area said Dhaka daura suruwal feels outdated. One of them, Sushant Prasai, said suits offer greater versatility.

"Suits can be worn at weddings, corporate events or college functions," he said. "Investing in Dhaka feels costly and often limited to a single occasion."

Meanwhile, the future of handwoven Dhaka remains uncertain, caught between heritage and modern consumer preference, struggling to survive in a market dominated by speed, replicas and affordability.

Nepal Airlines **NEPAL AIRLINES CORPORATION**
OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT
Kantipath, Kathmandu, Nepal

NOTICE OF INVITATION FOR BIDS
RE-TENDER (IFB)

Date of re-publication : 23/12/2025 (2082/09/08)

"Procurement of Crew Layover Service at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia"

(IFB No. : OD208182T2ICB2R6)

1. Operations Department, Nepal Airlines Corporation, Kathmandu, Nepal Reinvites electronic bids from the eligible bidders for Crew Layover Service at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia under International Competitive Bidding (ICB).
2. Interested eligible Bidders may download the IFB and Bidding Documents for e-submission from PPMO's web portal **www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp**.
3. This notice can also be viewed at the Corporation's official website **http://nepalairlines.com.np/home/notices**

Refer bid documents for detail information.

Employer Name: Operations Department, Nepal Airlines Corporation
Location: Kantipath, Kathmandu, Nepal
Attention: Director-OPS Department **Tel:** +977-1-4113076; +977-1-4113209
Email: dir.od@nac.com.np: dydir.operation@nac.com.np;nac_kul@nac.com;mahesh.bhattarai@nac.com.np
Nepal Airlines Corporation OPS Department at Kantipath, Kathmandu, Nepal

25 best stories announced

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22



A total of 25 best stories out of the stories submitted for the seventh edition of the Dish Home Bakhari Short Story Writing Competition–2082, have been selected.

A press statement released by Bahrakhari Media states that the selection was made by the main jury panel of the competition, coordinated by noted litterateur Ashesh Malla, with fiction writers Manju Kanchuli and Avaya Shrestha as members.

The writers whose stories have been selected for top 25 are Chetanath Acharya, Umesh Shrestha, Shekhar Dahit, Shivraj Shahi, Krishnaraj Sarbahari, Ritesh Gurung, Pragya Niraula, Sita Pandey, Bhogendra Lingden, Haribol Kafle, Basanta Bayung Rai (Namdocha), Laxman Sitaula, Indraprasad Gotame (Jagatjang), Jamuna Bhattarai, Anita Panthi, Avinash Bhattarai, Mandira Madhushree, and Amit Ghimire.

Similarly, stories by Tikaram Pokharel, Uma Sharma, Anita Koirala, Bishnu S Rai, Damodar Dhungel, Prakash Kumar Sharma, and Dr. Himalal Shrestha have also been selected.

For the seventh edition of the Dish Home Bakhari Short Story Writing Competition, a call for submissions was announced on October 17 (Asoj 31), following which 1,168 stories were received from Nepal and abroad. From these submissions, an internal jury panel shortlisted 59 stories, which were then forwarded to the main jury panel formed under the coordination of Malla for the final selection of the top 25 stories.

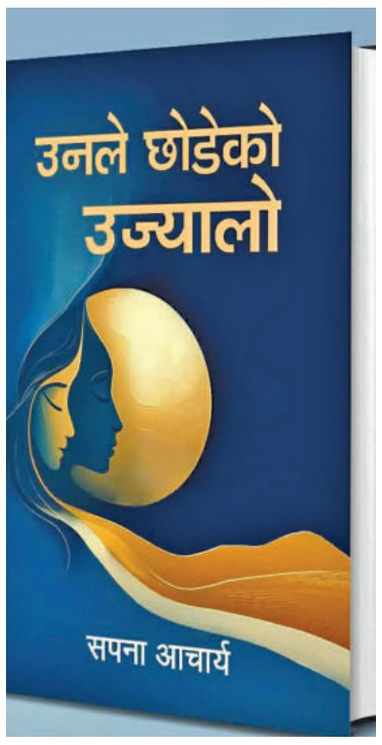
From this year onward, the competition will award cash prizes of Rs. 200,000, Rs. 100,000, and Rs. 60,000 respectively to the writers of the first, second, and third best stories, along with trophies and certificates.

A book featuring the 25 selected stories will be published, and the remaining 22 writers will each receive Rs. 7,000 as an honorarium.

The anthology titled 'Utkrista 25 Katha- 2082', along with the announcement of the first, second, and third prize winners, will be officially launched amid a special ceremony to be held in Kathmandu on Thursday, December 26 (Push 10).

Sapana Acharya's Unale Chhodeko Ujyaalo released

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22



Writer Sapana Acharya's second book, 'Unale Chhodeko Ujyaalo', was released on Monday, marking the annual death anniversary of her mother.

The book was unveiled at a programme held in Butwal, with the release carried out by the author's father, Krishna Lal Acharya.

The book was made public by serving meals to senior citizens residing at the Manavsewa Ashram in Butwal.

Earlier, Acharya's first novel 'Malilo Mato' was published in 2021.

After a novel based on social reality and human sensitivity, Acharya has given literary form to more personal and introspective themes through the latest book.

The book is essentially a memoir based on grief, emptiness, and memory following the mother's death. The work presents not only the author's personal pain but also the relationship between mother and daughter, the deep impact of motherhood, and the eternal truth of life and death in an emotional yet restrained language.

Even though the mother is no longer physically present, the book centers on how the values, affection, and moral grounding she left behind continue to shine as a guiding light in her child's life.

Presenting a mother's memory not merely as past sorrow but as a source of strength and inspiration to move forward in life can be considered one of the book's most notable aspects.

Releasing the book by serving meals to elderly parents at the Manavsewa Ashram symbolically aligns with the emotional foundation of the work itself.

The book is now available in the market, priced at Rs. 533.

LACHHI TO RECEIVE SUDARSHAN-KAPILA SIRAPA

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22

Jhi Pucha (Nepalbhasa and Cultural Association, Biratnagar) has announced that it would honour culture expert and Nepalbhasa writer, Ganesh Ram Lacchi, with the Sudarshan-Kapila Sirapa (Award).

The award carries a purse of Rs. 2 lakhs. A meeting of the Association held recently in Biratnagar had decided to honour Lachhi for his outstanding contribution to the conservation and promotion of Nepalbhasa and Newar culture.

Releasing a press statement, the chairman of the Association, Sharad Shrestha, stated that the award would be conferred on Lacchi amid a grand event scheduled for February 20 in Biratnagar.

Lachhi has been teaching Nepalbhasa and introducing typical Newa culture to Newars across the country and abroad who have long been unfamiliar with it.

Culture expert Lachhi expressed utmost happiness to be honoured by the Association. "Conserving my mother tongue and culture is my Karmayog," Lachhi said. "The award has put pressure on me to do more in this field."

Prior to this, culture expert late Satya Mohan Joshi, Sikkim Newa: Guthi, Sikkim of India and Newa: Khala Kaski were conferred with the award.

Nicki Minaj surprises conservatives with praise for Trump, Vance

AP
Los Angeles, Dec. 22



Rapper Nicki Minaj on Sunday made a surprise appearance at a gathering of conservatives in Arizona that was memorializing late activist Charlie Kirk, and used her time on stage to praise President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance, calling them "role models" for young men.

The rap star was interviewed at Turning Point USA's AmericaFest convention by Erika Kirk, the widow of Charlie Kirk, about her newly found support for Trump — someone she had condemned in the past — and about her actions denouncing violence against Christians in Nigeria.

The Grammy-nominated rapper's recent alignment with the Make America Great Again movement has caught some interest because of her past criticism of Trump even when the artist's own political ideology had been difficult to pin down. But her appearance Sunday at the flagship event for the powerful conservative youth organization may shore up her status as a MAGA acolyte.

Minaj mocked California Gov. Gavin Newsom, referring to him as New-scum, a nickname Trump gave him. Newsom, a Democrat, has 2028 prospects. Minaj expressed admiration for the Republican president and Vance, who received an endorsement from Erika Kirk despite the fact he has not said whether he will run for president. Kirk took over as leader of Turning Point.

"This administration is full of people with heart and soul, and they make me proud of them. Our vice president, he makes me ... well, I love both of them," Minaj said. "Both of them have a very uncanny ability to be someone that you relate to."

Book on Dalit arts, indigenous knowledge launched

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 22



A comprehensive book documenting the artistic, technological and cultural contributions of Nepal's Dalit community was launched at the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) Hall in Kathmandu on Friday.

Titled Dalits' (Shilpees') Glorious Arts and Artefacts Under Socio-cultural Shackles, the book is jointly authored by scholar Dr. Govinda Sarki Nepali and social activist Indira Ghale, with editing by Fraid Kalantari. The publication is the outcome of more than three decades of extensive field research and documentation.

Speaking at the programme, Dr. Nepali said the book challenges conventional narratives that have historically marginalised Dalits and the book presents them as pioneers of indigenous knowledge, craftsmanship and technology. He stated that the Dalit community has played a foundational role in shaping Nepal's civilisation through skills in metalwork, leather craft, music and ritual practices, yet their contributions have remained largely unrecognised.

"The irony of our social structure is that while many cultural rituals depend on Dalit skills, there is no proper mechanism to acknowledge their value in national heritage," Dr. Nepali said, adding that the book seeks to establish Dalit artistry as an integral part of Nepal's cultural identity and future.

Co-author Ghale said the publication aims to contribute to social transformation by recognising Dalit artisans as knowledge holders rather than passive subjects of study. She noted that the erosion of traditional skills has accelerated due to the lack of documentation and preservation, a gap the book attempts to address.

Offering remarks, educationist Prof. Bidya Nath Koirala criticised long-standing political and academic portrayals of Dalits as merely disadvantaged communities. He said the book repositions Dalits as "Bishwakarma", the creators and architects of society, and restores their historical and cultural standing.

Researcher Dr. Sunita Sharma highlighted the scientific relevance of the indigenous technologies documented in the book, stating that many traditional techniques developed by Dalit artisans surpass the understanding of modern science. She credited Dr. Nepali for creating a vital archive of tangible and intangible heritage.

The book is divided into ten sections covering household utensils, ornaments, musical instruments, ritual objects, production systems and indigenous technologies. Based on research conducted across the Himalayas, Hills and Tarai, the study draws on information from 237 key informants and includes archaeological assessments.

The publication also features extensive visual documentation, with hundreds of photographs of rare arts and artefacts collected and preserved by Dr. Nepali in a dedicated museum, offering a rare insight into Nepal's indigenous craftsmanship.

HOROSCOPE

tarot.com

ARIES: Trust your gut! While values-driven Venus in your 9th House of Growth fusses over radical Uranus in your 2nd House of Manifestation, plans might change midstream, or a viewpoint could be challenged.

TAURUS: Today's mantra is Keep moving forward. The missteps of Venus and Uranus may destabilize you, particularly with rebellious Uranus in your sign. An agreement could have grown lopsided, prompting a private talk about boundaries.

GEMINI: Conversations may take plenty of detours. A relationship adjustment will probably demand some room in your 7th House of Partnerships and your 12th House of Silence as sweet Venus and unconventional Uranus struggle to align across them.

CANCER: Pieces move across the board today as your well-being and social sectors align. A surprise schedule snag may force duty swaps or deadline extensions, urging flexibility, cooperation, and calm communication with friends or colleagues gracefully.

LEO: Being a little silly isn't a crime. Quite the opposite! With affectionate Venus in your jazzy 5th house and abrupt Uranus in your public 10th house, being freely creative would be the best way to spend your day.

VIRGO: Peace returns after you adjust home plans. Your 4th House of Family could use a few tweaks as sweet Venus quincunxes innovative Uranus, as a domestic detail potentially demands rearranging.

LIBRA: It's time to speak up, Libra, and communication flows easily now. With supportive Venus and unpredictable Uranus, your voice carries impact—just double-check messages before sending to ensure clarity, confidence, and being heard loud and clear.

SCORPIO: Money talk feels edgy yet strangely clarifying. Venus reaches from your 2nd House of Budgets to nudge quirky Uranus within your alliance zone, which could get numbers involved in your personal relationships.

SAGITTARIUS: Sagittarius, your choices lead the story now. A small identity tweak unlocks smoother first impressions as free-loving Venus quincunxes reactive Uranus, spotlighting how you present yourself and how you enter rooms.

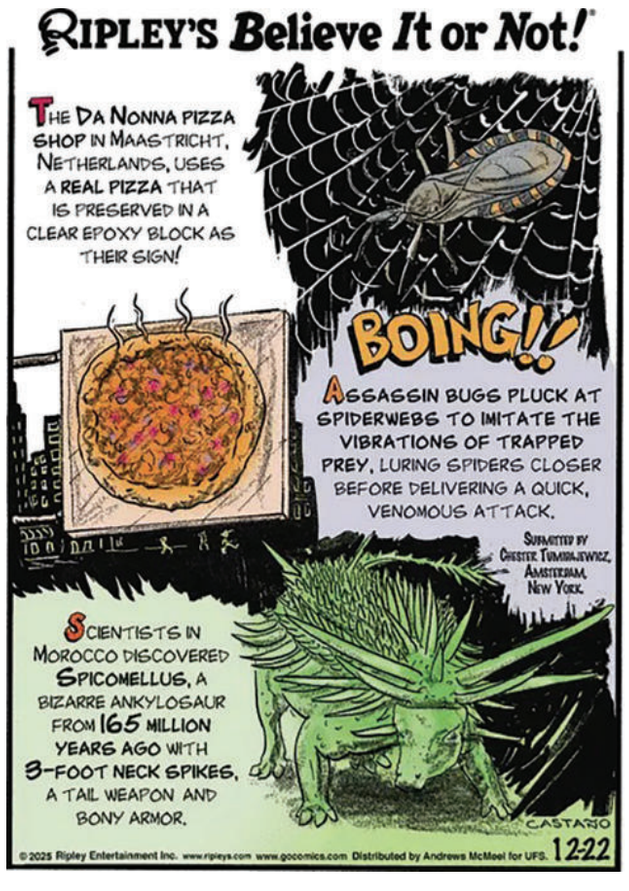
CAPRICORN: Take time to listen. Quiet moments can mend frayed edges in your solemn 12th house and your more energetic 5th house. The quincunx between focused Venus and surprising Uranus strengthens your efforts to settle down.

AQUARIUS: Collaboration is key to unlocking the best possible day. When sweet Venus jars unruly Uranus, look to your friends, peers, and loved ones to work together and reshuffle a schedule that no longer works.

PISCES: You may need to slow down without warning as sudden shifts arise. With Venus and Uranus stirring career and communication zones, rushing ahead invites trouble—treat today like a winding road and adjust speed carefully.

CARTOON

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Barca strengthen Liga lead

AFP
Barcelona, Dec. 22

Barcelona wingers Raphinha and Lamine Yamal guided the Catalan giants four points clear at the top of La Liga with a 2-0 win at 10-man Villarreal on Sunday.

Brazil international Raphinha won and converted an early penalty before Villarreal's Renato Veiga was sent off before half-time for a late lunge on teenager Yamal.

The 18-year-old slotted home Barca's second midway through the second half, as Hansi Flick's side restored their advantage on Real Madrid and won an eighth consecutive league game.

Villarreal are fourth after Atletico Madrid moved ahead of them with a comfortable 3-0 win at Girona earlier on.

"The attitude and mentality of the team is great, we're playing as one unit and that is great to see," Flick told reporters.

"It was great to win here, a huge opponent, I like this team, how they play... now we are four points ahead and this is a really good thing, also to celebrate (at) Christmas."

Flick launched into an impassioned defence of Raphinha on Saturday after he was not included in FIFA's 'The Best' team of the year earlier in the week, and the winger quickly repaid his coach.

Raphinha produced an all-action display at Villarreal's Estadio de la Ceramica, where the match was played instead of in Miami, after La Liga's plans to take this game to the United States were scrapped in October.

Barca were poor defensively and struggled in their build-up play, but the quality of wingers Raphinha and Yamal and their goalkeeper Joan Garcia's outstanding performance decided an entertaining encounter.

Raphinha drew a foul from Santi Comesana to win a penalty and dispatched it confidently in the 12th minute to send Barca ahead, and then crashed a shot off the bar from distance.



PHOTO: AP

Barcelona's Raphinha, back, celebrates with his teammate Lamine Yamal after scoring the opening goal from a penalty kick during the Spanish La Liga soccer match against Villarreal in Spain.

Jules Kounde deflected a cross into his own net as Villarreal fought back, but the goal was disallowed for offside in the build-up.

Barca stopper Garcia saved from Tajon Buchanan after an Alejandro Balde mistake as Villarreal almost levelled.

The visitors' job was made easier by Veiga's needless red card for an ugly lunge on Yamal before the interval.

The champions got their second goal after a scramble in the box, with Frenkie de Jong teeing up Yamal to fire home after 63 minutes.

Garcia made stunning saves to deny Rafa Marin and Georges Mikautadze to help Barca end 2026 with three points and a third clean sheet in their last three games across all competitions.

"He helped us with his saves to have this clean sheet, he's an important player for us," admitted Flick.

Kounde went off hurt before the end but the coach said he believes the defender will be fine and it was mainly cramp.

Barca finish the year in better shape than rivals Real Madrid, who beat Sevilla 2-0 on Saturday, but still with plenty of their own concerns to worry about.

"Now's not the time they're giving out the trophies, but we're doing well, on a good path, we're leaders, we're alive in (the other competitions), so we're happy," said De Jong.

Atletico rise

A brilliant strike from distance from Koke, Conor Gallagher's deflected effort and a late third from Antoine Griezmann pulled Atletico within six points of Barca.

Atletico secured a fourth consecutive win across all competitions on a relatively simple afternoon at Girona's modest Montilivi stadium.

"To reach where we want to be, (giving) 100 percent is not enough," said coach Diego Simeone, calling for more from his team in the new year.

"Every time we see Real Madrid and Barcelona, I think about it... we have to give 110 percent or 120 percent."

Marcos Llorente was a welcome return to the Atletico starting line-up after injury, and Simeone's team never looked likely to slip up against the team in 18th.

Koke opened the scoring with a vicious strike into the top corner when the ball fell for him outside the area, for his 50th Atletico goal.

"I don't shoot much, I'm more of an assist provider," admitted Koke.

"However when it sits up like that, I only thought about shooting and luckily it went in."

Girona almost equalised but for a spectacular save by Atletico's Slovenian goalkeeper Jan Oblak, who managed to claw out an Axel Witsel effort.

Former Chelsea midfielder Gallagher netted the second and Griezmann, on a now-frequent substitute appearance, wrapped up the win by stroking home late on for his second goal in his last two games.

Five-wicket Duffy prompts WIndies collapse as NZ win series



PHOTO: AFP

New Zealand's Jacob Duffy celebrates victory after day five of the 3rd international Test cricket match against West Indies at Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui, Tauranga.

AFP
Mount Maunganui, Dec. 22

New Zealand crushed West Indies by 323 runs on Monday to win the third Test at Mount Maunganui and seal a 2-0 series victory, with Jacob Duffy's five-wicket haul proving crucial.

The hosts set a target of 462 and bowled out the tourists for 138, wrapping up the innings four overs after tea following a dramatic collapse either side of lunch.

Duffy finished with 5-42 and was backed up by Ajaz Patel, who claimed 3-23, while opener Brandon King top-scored for West Indies with 67.

New Zealand's Devon Conway scored 227 and 100 in two innings, while captain Tom Latham scored 137 and 101 -- the first opening pair in first-class cricket history to score twin centuries in the same match -- to set up the win.

The series began with a draw in Christchurch, before New Zealand won the second Test in Wellington.

"It was a pretty clinical performance," Latham said. "Winning the toss, batting first, being able to get close to 600, the perfect blueprint.

"And then obviously doing what we did with the ball... guys sort of playing the way that they did was obviously really pleasing," he said.

Seamer Duffy and spinner Patel posed constant danger to both edges of the bat on a cracked surface that offered uneven movement and bounce.

West Indies collapsed from 87-0 to 112-8 either side of lunch after starting the day on 43-0.

King dominated early, hitting a flurry of cuts and drives and scoring 53 of his team's first 59 runs.

New Zealand captain Latham's field placements had lacked aggression but that changed after the drinks break when Duffy broke the opening stand, with King gloving a rising delivery to Glenn Phillips at gully.

'Below par'

Patel struck in the next over, removing John Campbell for 16 after a rash attempt to slog down the ground. Phillips took another good catch in the deep.

Patel soon claimed another, with first-innings centurion Kavem Hodge falling for a duck.

Duffy then dismissed Alick Athanaze for two and Justin Greaves for nought in successive overs, leaving the West Indies reeling.

He struck again two overs later, with Alick Athanaze edging to keeper Tom Blundell for 2, before removing Justin Greaves for nought with an edge to Daryl Mitchell at slip.

Duffy then had Roston Chase caught off the gloves by Latham at slip for five, capping a miserable series for the West Indies captain.

Chase scored just 42 runs at an average of seven in three matches, the second-worst figures for a captain dismissed six or more times in a Test series.

"I think I had a tough series, very below par for my standards," Chase said. "I didn't really lead from the front on the field.

"Leading in terms of words and encouraging and inspiring the team, that was all good and well, but in terms of going out there and producing for the team, I thought that I let myself down and the team down as well."

Patel claimed Shai Hope's wicket for three from 78 balls after a controversial lbw review. Hope did not offer a shot but the ball was deemed to be hitting his foot on the full and going on to hit the stumps.

Phillips then took his first wicket of the match by bowling Kemar Roach, who was nursing a hamstring strain.

Rachin Ravindra was introduced in the final session and snared Anderson Phillip's wicket with an lbw, before Duffy wrapped up the innings by bowling Jayden Seales.

SNIPPETS

Nepal begin training for T20 World Cup 2026

Kathmandu (TRN): The Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) has stepped up preparations for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 by starting closed training from Monday. On Sunday, the association announced a 24-man squad for the initial training camp. The players called up include Rohit Kumar Paudel, Kushal Bhurtel, Sundeep Jora, Dipendra Singh Airee, Nandan Yadav, Sandeep Lamichhane, Aarif Sheikh, Aadil Ansari, Sher Malla, Bhim Sharki, Binod Bhandari, Abinash Bohora, Aasif Sheikh, Kushal Malla, Gulshan Jha, Sompal Kami, Lalit Rajbanshi, Lokesh Bam, Karan KC, Sahab Alam, Ishan Pandey, Basir Ahmed, Pratish GC and Rupesh Kumar Singh. Players who shone in the recently concluded Nepal Premier League (NPL) have been given priority. Among them are Sher Malla, Binod Bhandari, Abinash Bohora, Pratish GC, Ishan Pandey and Basir Ahmed, all of whom impressed with strong performances. The World Cup, jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka, begins on 7 February. Nepal have been drawn in Group C alongside England, the West Indies, Bangladesh, Italy and the Netherlands. This will be Nepal's third appearance in the T20 World Cup, having previously featured in 2014 and 2024. In total, 20 teams will compete in the tournament, divided into four groups.

Morocco off to winning start



Rabat (AFP): Brahim Diaz and Ayoub El Kaabi scored second-half goals as hosts Morocco got their Africa Cup of Nations bid off to a winning start by beating minnows Comoros 2-0 in the tournament's opening game on Sunday. Soufiane Rahimi had a penalty saved in a frustrating first half for much-fancied Morocco, but Diaz fired home from inside the area 10 minutes after the interval at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in the capital Rabat. Substitute El Kaabi then got the second with a stunning overhead kick, and the victory on a wet and cold night sets the Atlas Lions up for the potentially tougher tests to come in Group A against Mali and Zambia. The result also allowed Morocco, Africa's best team in the FIFA rankings in 11th place, to extend their world-record winning run to 19 consecutive matches.

Liverpool fear Isak has broken leg: reports

Liverpool (AFP): Liverpool are awaiting scan results they fear will confirm record signing Alexander Isak has suffered a broken leg after he was injured in their win against Tottenham, reports said Monday. The Sweden forward was hurt in the act of scoring the opening goal in Saturday's 2-1 victory in London after a sliding challenge from Spurs defender Micky van der Ven. Isak, 26, who had come on as a second-half substitute, was unable to celebrate with his teammates and left the pitch in considerable distress. Immediately after the game Liverpool boss Arne Slot admitted the injury was "not a good thing". "If a player doesn't even try to come back, that is usually not a good thing but I cannot say anything more than that," he said. "That is just gut feeling and nothing medical... let's not be too negative yet. We don't know yet. Let's hope he is back with us soon."

Bayern go nine clear

AFP
Heidenheim, Dec. 22

An understrength Bayern Munich coasted to a 4-0 away win over lowly Heidenheim on Sunday, restoring their nine-point lead atop the table in Harry Kane's first match as captain.

Borussia Dortmund had closed the gap to the leaders to six points on Friday but Bayern were in complete control in the last Bundesliga match before the winter break, winning thanks to goals from Josip Stanisic, Michael Olise, Luis Diaz and Kane.

Kane toasted an "amazing year" in 2025 where he won his first league title, telling DAZN: "We started to build a spirit and a team energy that is hard to break and we took that into this season.

"We know there's a long way to go until the end of the season but we're doing all the right things."

Bayern arrived in Heidenheim missing almost a full starting XI, with Manuel Neuer, Joshua Kimmich, Konrad Laimer, Nicolas Jackson, Kim Minjae and Aleksandar Pavlovic among those missing through injury, suspension or Africa Cup of Nations duty.

Only two outfield players on Bayern's bench had ever started a Bundesliga match. Bayern coach Vincent Kompany said it "felt like a Covid week", adding: "The guys were dropping out one after another.

"I'm proud of the team because it's not a given to come here and put in such a performance."

The absentees meant England skipper Kane was handed the captain's armband for the first time in his 121st competitive match for Bayern.

Olise had eye surgery on Monday but had no trouble guiding Bayern to an opener, curling in a corner for Stanisic to score in the 15th minute via a Jonathan Tah pass.

Olise doubled up for Bayern just after the half-hour mark in similar fashion, with a free-kick finding Hiroki Ito who laid it off for the France winger to tap home.

Looking fresh after missing Bayern's last three matches with suspension, Diaz headed in the match-sealing goal with four minutes remaining.

Kane had missed a clear chance just after half-time but got on the scoresheet in stoppage time, sidestepping two defenders before driving a low shot inside the right post for his 30th goal of the season in all competitions.

The result leaves Heidenheim second last and stranded in the relegation spots, one point from safety. Coach Frank Schmidt, a one-time Heidenheim player who took the club from the fifth division to the Bundesliga and the UEFA Conference League, put the focus on himself.

"I'm not satisfied. Not with myself, not with us, or with the coaching team, because we've allowed too many chances," the 51-year-old said.

"It's my responsibility to take care to make the team more stable than it is -- that's the first task."

No jacket required for Emery as Villa dream of title glory

AFP
Birmingham, Dec. 22

Unai Emery insists Aston Villa will not win the Premier League, but the Spaniard's ecstatic celebration of Morgan Rogers' decisive strike against Manchester United revealed his true feelings about their surprise title charge.

Usually a composed figure on the touchline, Emery put his emotions on display for all to see after Rogers produced his second fine finish of the afternoon to clinch a pulsating 2-1 win at Villa Park on Sunday.

The England midfielder's 57th-minute goal prompted Emery to roar in delight before ripping off his jacket and hurling it into the air. It was a fascinating insight into Emery's mindset in the midst of Villa's remarkable 10-match winning run in all competitions.

Villa sit third in the Premier League, just three points adrift of leaders Arsenal and one behind second-placed Manchester City as they chase a first English title since 1981.

As he has in the past when Villa have flirted with title contention, Emery preferred to play the underdog, claiming his team cannot overhaul clubs of Arsenal and City's experience and quality despite beating them both at home already this season.

"We are not contender," Emery said. "Of course we beat Arsenal and Manchester City here, but they have massive things tactically with players on a high level. We have as well but to be a contender in front of them is not our reality."

But Emery's coy approach to Villa's growing title momentum can't obscure the facts.

Villa are on their best winning run in all competitions since 1914, when they secured 11 successive victories. They have won seven consecutive top-flight matches for the first time since finishing second under Graham Taylor in 1989-90.

Emery has turned Villa Park into a fortress, with just one home league defeat in 2025, fewer than any other team. Villa's rise into the title race is even more impressive as it comes after their worst start to a league campaign for 28 years, featuring just two points and one goal scored in their opening five matches.

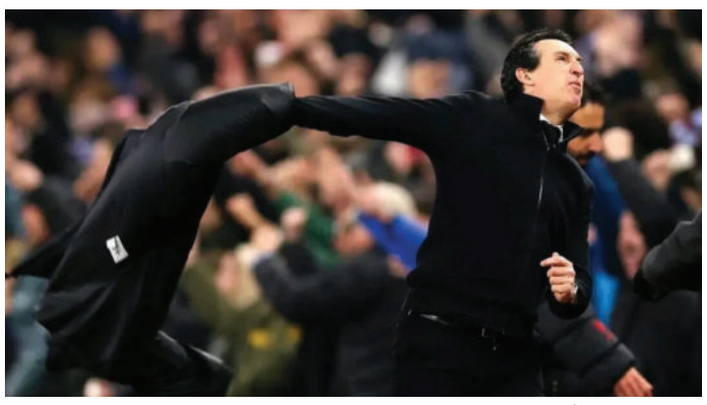


PHOTO: SCREENSHOTS X

A thrilled Unai Emery throws his jacket into the air after Morgan Rogers scores his second to clinch a pulsating 2-1 win at Villa Park.

"Of course we are being consistent in more or less three years, and getting into European positions, but we must continue to be humble," Emery said. "Understanding how we can get points like we did. We want to keep the same level by being intelligent, competitive, consistent and demanding."

'A perfect combination'

When Villa return to action after Christmas Day, they face two trips to London that will serve as defining moments in their season.

They meet fourth-placed Chelsea at Stamford Bridge on December 27 before a seismic clash with Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium three days later.

If Villa are to maintain their title bid, Emery will have to coax more eye-catching performances from Rogers, whose first-half opener was a sublime curler into the top corner from just inside the area.

"The manager's a genius. He knows what he is doing and knows how to get out of situations," Rogers said.

"The enthusiasm and the way he is gets through to us, then we have that belief and that buzz to our performances. That is what he tries to do and we try and take it on board. It's a perfect combination."

Emery returned the compliment, saying: "He's a fantastic guy. A fantastic player. Because he loves football. He loves work."

But Emery revealed he had given Rogers a reality check at the interval in a bid to raise his game to even greater heights.

"At half-time I was not happy with him because I am ambitious myself. He scored a good goal but he was not performing very well," he said. "We spoke about individually increasing our focus to get better and in the second half we did much better."

As Rogers knows better than most, Emery's relentless quest for perfection is the driving force behind Villa's bid for an incredible title triumph.

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