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THE RISING NEPAL

ALL BE HAPPY, ALL BE WELL

PM tells youths not to lose hope

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has urged the youth not to lose hope, stating that the nation has recently transitioned from a dark era to a brighter one.

Speaking at the silver jubilee celebration of Nepal Medical College and Teaching Hospital in Jorpati on Tuesday, Prime Minister Oli said that the country is undergoing extraordinary development.

"It is incorrect to claim that nothing has been achieved or that the government has done nothing," he argued.

He emphasised that the government was working with careful planning rather than recklessly, and the people should support this journey.

"The government must look after those who lack food and clothing. It must provide education to those unable to afford it. However, scholarships should not be given to those who can pay," he said.

"Instead, both local and international students wishing to pursue higher education must be provided with proper infrastructure and increased quotas in both public and private institutions," he added.

Prime Minister Oli further said, "Private schools do not need to be brought under public ownership. Education should not be turned into a playground for exploitation. The system that results in 52 per cent of students failing the SEE examination must be abolished."

He also declared that the teachers whose students fail in the SEE cannot expect salary increments, adding that it is unfair to blame students for the shortcomings of teachers who fail to teach effectively.

Recalling his previous tenure as Prime Minister, he mentioned laying the foundation stone for 396 basic hospitals simultaneously. However, he acknowledged that progress had not been as effective as expected.

During the event, PM Oli also unveiled the silver jubilee souvenir of the hospital.



PHOTO: RSS

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli visiting the Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu on the eve of the Maha Shivaratri festival on Tuesday evening.

Families of persons missing in monsoon disaster to receive compensation as deceased

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

Families of individuals missing during monsoon-related disasters such as floods and landslides will now receive compensation equivalent to that of deceased persons.

The decision was made during a Cabinet meeting held on Monday, which resolved to provide such relief to families of those missing in monsoon-related disasters since April 14, 2023.

Speaking at a press conference organised to make the Cabinet decision public on Tuesday, Minister for Communication and Information Technology Prithvi Subba Gurung said if a person goes missing in such a disaster and remains untraceable for at least 10 days, their family will be provided with compensation through the respective District Disaster Management Fund.

Similarly, the Nepal government has permitted the Ministry of Finance to facilitate payments for completed projects and programmes from the last fiscal year.

Minister Gurung said that payments will be arranged for obligations created under projects and programmes included in the approved budget of the fiscal year 2080/81 (2023/24) but are yet to be settled.

Likewise, the meeting has also formed a negotiation team to finalise the agreement and documentation for a concessional loan of USD 150 million from the International Development Association of the World Bank Group for bridge maintenance.

Additionally, the Cabinet has decided to appoint Sharad Ojha of Kanchanpur as the Chairman of Nepal Insurance Authority.

The meeting also approved the promotion of one officer to the rank of Colonel and another to the rank of Brigadier General in the Nepali Army. Furthermore, it extended the tenure of one Colonel, two Brigadier Generals, and one Major General.

Minister Gurung said that the Cabinet has also approved the Minister of Water Supply Pradeep Yadav

» CABINET DECISIONS

to visit India from March 2 to 6 for the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) related to the development of the water supply and sanitation sector.

The Cabinet also endorsed the visit of the Vice-chairperson of the National Planning Commission Dr. Shiva Raj Adhikari to the United States to take part in the 2025 Harvard Ministerial Leadership Forum to be held in the University from April 27 to 30, and the visit of Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport Devendra Dahal to the Unites States to take part in the 22nd Annual Transforming Transportation Conference to be held from March 11 to 12, 2025.

'Once-only-principle' fundamental in e-Governance Blueprint draft

BY MODNATH DHAKAL
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

The e-Governance Board of Nepal has published the initial draft of the 'e-Governance Blueprint' with exclusive 'National Data Strategy' and 'once only principle'.

According to the draft of the Blueprint published on Monday evening with a one-week window to seek suggestions, legal and structural arrangements will be made for the implementation of the 'Once-Only Principle' so that personally identifiable data will not be collected repeatedly once it has been collected once.

"This principle aims to create an environment where individuals and companies do not have to provide their data again after providing it once to obtain various services from different agencies. This ensures the authenticity of the data source and establishes the basis for inter-agency data exchange," read the draft.

It said that since different agencies are responsible for storing different types of data, various types of personal identification data are not available through a single source, making them more secure from a cybersecurity perspective. For example, health service databases include health-related data such as prescriptions and operations, but not data such as the patient's name, date of birth and address.

This makes it very difficult for cybersecurity-targeted attackers to consolidate the necessary information which increases operational costs for potential cyber-attacks and reduces the likelihood of such attacks, according to the document.

The draft has also proposed formulation of the 'National Data Strategy' to make data storage, exchange, management and use more effective.

The strategy is expected to set common standards, rules and principles.

"This strategy will help to improve the quality and interoperability of data by aligning data sets across public bodies, streamline the development of new digital services and provide a framework for data management and use between the federal, provincial and local levels," read the draft.

According to the Board, there is a need for a national-level strategic document to transform the delivery of public services through digital means has been recognised. So, this Blueprint has been developed to meet the same objective by referencing international frameworks such as the Global Digital Compact, GovStack, Digital Public Infrastructure, and other established reference models.

The draft noted that while Nepal has made significant progress in ICT, with initiatives like the Digital Nepal Framework, challenges remain in fully implementing digital governance.

This Blueprint builds on existing policies such as the ICT Policy, 2072, the Government Enterprise Architecture Directives, 2076, and the Digital Nepal Framework, 2076. It aims to create a cohesive digital ecosystem, ensuring data security, interoperability, and citizen-centric services, said Dipesh Bista, CEO of the Board.

The draft of the Blueprint also mentioned that Nepal has made strides in digital governance, with policies like the ICT Policy, 2072, and the National Cyber Security Policy, 2080. However, challenges such as lack of coordination, insufficient infrastructure, and limited digital literacy persist. This Blueprint aims to address these gaps by establishing a robust digital governance framework.

It claimed that the e-Governance Blueprint provides a comprehensive roadmap for Nepal's digital transformation. By implementing the strategies outlined in this document, Nepal aims to enhance service delivery, promote transparency and foster innovation in governance.

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MAHA SHIVARATRI BEING OBSERVED TODAY

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

Maha Shivaratri, one of the biggest festivals of Hindus, is being marked by paying homage to Lord Shiva on Wednesday.

Pashupatinath Temple, one of the most revered Shiva temples, is decorated particularly for the auspicious day of Shivaratri. Over a million devotees from home and abroad visit Pashupatinath temple in Maha Shivaratri.

Raju Kumar Khatri, Coordinator of the Festival Market and Decoration Sub-Committee, said that they started installing electric lights on Friday and decorating the area with flowers on Tuesday. All the routes leading to the main temple are fully covered with garlands of marigolds and other flowers.

Khatri said that the Pashupati area is decorated with electric lights and flowers on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri spending about Rs 3.7 million received from donors. Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) has not invested to import flowers, he informed.

"The PADT has only coordinated and facilitated. Donors themselves moblised workers for the decoration. It is funding the painting and artwork of Lord Shiva and Parvati on the vacant walls of the Pashupatinath area," Khatri said.

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Over 500,000 Nepalis visit Maha Kumbha in India

BY DHIRENDRA PRASAD SAH
Janakpur, Feb. 25

People from various districts of Nepal, including the Madhes Province, have participated in the Maha Kumbha Mela currently being held in Uttar Pradesh, India, in large numbers.

The participation of Nepalis is significant, with the belief that bathing in various ways during the Maha Kumbh results in the purification of sins and attainment of salvation.

It is estimated that over 500,000 Nepalis have gone to bathe in the Maha Kumbha, based on observations of the transportation methods such as buses, jeeps, cars and trains.

It is believed that an average of Rs. 15,000 has been spent by each person attending the Maha Kumbha Mela. This amounts to an estimated total expenditure of Rs. 7.5 billion just from Nepal. Looking specifically at the Madhes Province, it seems that, on average, two people from each family attended the Mela.

According to the 2021 census, there are 1,156,383 households in Madhes, with 26,633 families living in rented houses and 1,117,188 in their houses. If



PHOTO: TRN

Nepalis participating in Maha Kumbha Mela of India.

two people from each family attended the Mela, the total expenditure per family would be around Rs. 30,000. Thus, it is estimated that Rs. 33.5 billion have been spent by people from Madhes alone during the Maha Kumbha.

The Maha Kumbha Mela is a month-long event held at the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers in Prayagraj (formerly known as Allahabad), India. It is claimed that the present Maha Kumbha is held once every 144 years, according to astrological dates. The Mela officially started on January 26, 2025, and is scheduled to end on February 25, 2025. However, the flow of people going there continues.

Normally, Maha Kumbha Mela takes place every 12 years, while the Kumbha Mela occurs every four years at different locations like Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik and Prayagraj, said Pandit Badrinarayan. Devotees believe that bathing at these sites during specific months results in salvation.

Millions of Nepali people from various districts including Kathmandu, Himalayas, his hills and the Tarai region have traveled to the Mela. Many Nepali devotees traveled by reserved buses, cars, jeeps and other vehicles with family members and relatives. Others traveled by train or plane.

However, several Nepali devotees have tragically lost their lives in accidents while attending the Mela. In one incident, a Scorpio vehicle from the district of Saptari met with an accident near Gorakhpur, leading to the deaths of four people, including three from Saptari. Another accident occurred when a jeep from Mahottari crashed in Bihar, India, killing five people, including four members from a single family.

There have also been reports of people missing in the Mela, with their photographs being shared on social media in an attempt to locate them, but there is no official confirmation on how many have been found or remain missing.

Moreover, many of the returning Nepali devotees are falling ill, with symptoms such as fever, cold, cough, diarrhea, and skin diseases. A 70-year-old devotee who returned from the Mela mentioned that these health issues have been affecting many.

Minister Rana seeks support for Nepal's UN bids

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

Foreign Minister Dr. Arzu Rana Deuba has held sideline discussions with her counterparts and ministers from various countries at the 58th High-Level Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council ongoing in Geneva of Switzerland.

During these meetings, Dr. Rana highlighted Nepal's candidacy for key UN positions, including membership in the Human Rights Council for the term 2027-2029, the Economic and Social Council for 2029-2031, and as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for 2037-2038.

She urged the international community to support Nepal's bids for these roles, informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA).

Dr. Rana also shared details about Nepal's upcoming 'Sagarmatha Sambaad' dialogue, scheduled for May this year, which will focus on climate change, the Himalayas, and the future of humanity. She invited global leaders and ministers to participate in this significant event.

Likewise, she emphasised Nepal's upcoming transition from a Least Developed Country (LDC) status in 2026 and sought continued international support for the country's development during this critical phase.

Earlier, on Monday, Dr. Rana had addressed the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council, announcing Nepal's candidacy for the Human Rights Council membership for 2027-2029. She highlighted Nepal's commitment to human rights protection and promotion, despite limited resources, and called for support from member states.

Dr. Rana underscored Nepal's constitutional guarantees for civil liberties, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. She also noted Nepal's progress in gender equality, with one-third representation of women in federal and provincial parliaments and 40 per cent in local governments, as well as its commitment to protecting minority rights.

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BULLION
(Rs. per tola)

Hallmark Gold	: Rs. 171,300/-
Worked Gold	: Rs. NA
Silver	: Rs. 1,970

STOCK

NEPSE	:	2,765.88
Total Amount	:	9,909,386,227.97
No. of Share	:	**17,865,703**

Nepal's agriculture imports exceed total export in first seven months

BY LAXMAN KAFLE
Kathmandu, Feb. 25



File Photo: TRN

Despite being an agricultural country, the imsport of agricultural goods is recorded higher than the total export.

Nepal's imports of agricultural goods continue to outpace its exports, with a significant gap of Rs. 78 billion recorded in the first seven months of the current fiscal year 2024/25.

According to the Department of Customs, Nepal imported agricultural products worth Rs. 205 billion during this period, far exceeding the total exports of Rs. 127 billion.

The data shows a remarkable rise in imports, with agricultural goods imported in the first seven months of the current fiscal year increasing by 36.6 per cent compared to the same period in the last fiscal year.

Nepal imported agricultural products worth Rs. 150 billion during the first seven months of the last fiscal year.

Despite the growth in imports, Nepal's export performance also saw a notable boost, rising by 46 per cent in the first seven months of the current fiscal year compared to the same period last fiscal year.

The country exported goods worth Rs. 86.83 billion during the first seven months of the last fiscal year.

However, the export value still lags significantly behind the imports, underscoring an ongoing imbalance in the trade of agricultural goods.

Agricultural goods worth Rs. 256.75 billion had been imported in the last fiscal year 2023/24 and Rs. 296.30 billion in the last fiscal year 2022/23.

Cereals worth Rs. 36.35 billion imported

Meanwhile, the country imported cereals worth around Rs. 36.35 billion during the first seven months of the current fiscal year 2024/25.

The import of cereals has increased by 32 per cent during the review period as compared to the same period last year.

The country imported cereals worth Rs. 28.20 billion during the first seven months of the last fiscal year 2023/24.

Among all cereals, the highest amount of paddy and rice has been imported during the review period.

The country imported rice and paddy worth Rs. 25.37 billion during the first seven months of the current fiscal year. Paddy and rice worth Rs. 13.10 billion imported during the same period last fiscal year.

During the review period, wheat worth Rs. 268 million and maize worth Rs. 10.07 billion were imported.

The millet worth Rs. 520 million, buckwheat worth Rs. 94 million and barley worth Rs. 18 million were imported during the review period.

Crude soybean, sunflower oil imports rise

Similarly, imports of crude soybean and sunflower oil have increased during the review period as compared to same period last fiscal year which led to significant increase in import of overall agricultural products.

The county has imported crude soybean oil worth Rs. 38.34 billion and sunflower oil worth Rs. 17.33 billion during the first seven months of the current fiscal year. During the first seven months of the last fiscal year, crude soybean oil worth Rs. 8.57 billion and sunflower oil worth Rs. 9.69 billion had been imported.

The import of crude soybean oil increased almost by 450 per cent and sunflower oil by 79 per cent during the review period as compared to same period last fiscal year.

The country imported crude palm oil worth Rs. 7.23 billion during the review period.

Vegetables, lentils worth Rs. 26 billion imported

The country has imported vegetables and lentils worth above Rs. 25.87 billion in the first seven months of the current fiscal year. According to the statistics, vegetables of the same value entered Nepal in the period from mid-July 2024 to mid-February 2025.

During the review period, the country imported potatoes worth Rs. 5.49 billion. Similarly, tomatoes worth Rs. 418 million and onions worth Rs. 2.14 billion have been imported during the review period of the current fiscal year.

The country has imported garlic worth Rs 6.26 billion, dried chickpeas worth Rs. 1.81 billion and dried beans worth Rs. 2.57 billion.Similarly, red lentils worth Rs. 3.97 billion were imported during the review period.

Fruits import amount Rs. 9.5 billion

During the review period of the current fiscal year, fruits worth Rs. 9.5 billion have been imported.

The country has imported fruits, including bananas, apples, guavas, mangoes, oranges, grapes, papayas and pomegranates, among others, worth Rs. 9.44 billion during the first seven months of the current fiscal year.

Among the fruits imported, apple imports were the highest during the review period.

According to the Department of Customs, about 46,660,558 kgs of apples worth Rs. 5 billion have been imported during the review period.

The country has imported orange worth Rs. 592 million, guavas and mangoes worth Rs. 491 million, lemons worth Rs. 278 million, grapes worth Rs. 501 million and pomegranates worth Rs. 509 million during the review period.

GOLD PRICE REACHES ALL-TIME HIGH, TRADING AT RS. 171,300 PER TOLA

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb 25

The price of gold hit a new all-time high in the country on Tuesday.

The price of precious yellow metal set a historic record Tuesday after the cost of a tola of gold reached Rs. 171,300 in the domestic bullion market. It is the highest price of gold ever recorded in Nepal.

It has broken its previous high of Rs. 171,000 on October 31, 2024.

The price of gold has increased by Rs. 500 per tola (11.66 grams) today and was traded at Rs. 171,300 per tola. Gold was traded at Rs. 170,800 per tola on Monday.

A significant increment in the gold price in the international market has contributed to the increase in its price in the local market for the last couple of weeks, said Tej Ratna Shakya, a gold trader.

The recent surge in prices of gold comes just months after a significant drop in November 2024, when the government reduced customs duties on gold imports by 50 per cent.

With the reduction of customs duty, the price of gold had dropped by Rs. 15,900 per tola to Rs. 151,300 from Rs. 167,200 per tola on November 25, 2024.

Following the decision, the price of gold dropped to Rs. 148,700 per tola on November 26, 2024.

However, the price of gold has been increasing in the domestic market due to the increase in its price in the international market, he said.

"The increase in gold price in the international market and devaluation of Nepali currency against the US dollar are the main reasons behind its high price in the local market," he said.

The price of gold increased to 2,939 USD per ounce in the international market today, he said, adding that present fluctuation of gold price in the international market shows that its price would further increase in the local market.

"Investors in international market are increasing their investment in gold instead of other commodities which led to soaring prices in international market," he said.

This continuous increase in gold price is expected to impact consumers and traders, he said.

Mustard production increases in Dang

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT
Ghorahi, Feb. 25:

Mustard production has increased in Dang this year. According to the Agricultural Knowledge Centre, Dang, the production has increassed as the area under mustard cultivation has increased along with the number of farmers in the district.

According to the Centre, mustard was cultivated on 16,615 hectares and 31,568 tonnes of mustard was produced in the district in the fiscal year 2024/25.

Senior Crop Protection Officer of Agriculture Knowledge Centre, Dang, Pitamber Basnet said that mustard production has almost doubled in the district this year compared to last year.

According to him, mustard has been cultivated in an area of 205 hectares more than last year, resulting in an increase of about 13,025 tonnes of mustard.

In the fiscal year 2023/24, when 16,410 hectares were cultivated, 18,543 tonnes of mustard was produced.

The use of improved mustard seeds, irrigation management and the use of sulphur have led to an increase in production, said Basnet. The use of sulphur is considered appropriate for mustard crops, he added. The commercial mustard cultivation is carried out in various areas of Deukhuri, Shantinagar, Dangisharan Rural Municipality and Babai Rural Municipality in West Dang along with the Ghorahi area in the district.

The number of farmers engaged in mustard cultivation has increased recently as the price of mustard oil used in daily cooking is good.

"Many farmers have started cultivating mustard, which provides good income in a short period of time and no problem in sales," he said. The mustard produced in Dang is being supplied outside the district as there is high demand of mustard oil. The government has been investing in mustard recently under the Super Zone programme.

Basnet said that under the Crop Product Special Intensive Commercial Production Area Development Programme, five quintals of improved mustard seed was distributed to farmers in the district this year for an area of 90 hectares.

Gulmi farmers produce oranges worth over Rs. 240 million

BY RAMESH BISHWOKARMA
Gulmi, Feb. 25

This year, Gulmi district has produced oranges worth over Rs. 240 million. According to the Agriculture Knowledge Centre, Gulmi, the total value of orange production this year amounts to Rs. 245 million.

Compared to the previous year, orange production has increased. Last year, the district produced oranges worth Rs. 230 million, of which Rs. 120 million worth were exported to other districts, said Naresh Dhital, chief of the centre. This year, exports have risen to Rs. 130 million, he added.

The increase in production is attributed to new trees beginning to bear fruit, timely application of fertiliser and irrigation by farmers, and prompt technical consultations and treatment of problems, said Ganga Pokharel, chief of the Prime Minister's Agriculture Modernisation Project Gulmi. Over 95 per cent of orange trees in the district consist of biju trees, which are known for bearing fruit for a long period.



Photo: TRN
Oranges grown in Gulmi.

Farmers in the region traditionally cultivate oranges, but some have reported issues such as root and stem rot.

The district has implemented the Citrus Fruit Zone Programme in 37 wards across 12 municipalities. Under the Prime Minister's Agriculture Modernisation Project, certain areas have been designated for organised orange farming, including Purkotdaha in Madane Rural Municipality, Pipal Dhara in Dhurkot Rural Municipality, and Limgha in Satyawati Rural Municipality.

To ensure the sustainable development of citrus fruits, the Agriculture Knowledge Centre has started identifying and commercialising different orange varieties.

Efforts are being made to increase productivity through orchard management. The Prime Minister's Agriculture Modernisation Project has been conducting initiatives such as orchard improvement, fertiliser management, irrigation, and tree pruning.

In Gulmi, the key pocket areas for orange production include Nayagaun and Pipal Dhara in Dhurkot Rural Municipality, Lumcha, Shringha in Chhatrakot, Bhadgaun in Resunga Municipality, Musidanda and Chautara in Rurukshetra, Arlangkot in Musikot Municipality, Gaudakot in Gulmi Durbar, Arbani and Jaykhani in Kaligandaki, Remi in Chandrakot, and Bhanbhane in Satyawati and Madane.

FARMERS OF MADHES TO GET RS 2 BILLION GRANTS

RSS
Mahottari, Feb. 25

Farmers involved in animal husbandry in Madhes province are to be provided with grants. According to Bardibas-based Economic Corridor Project Office of the Madhes Province Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, a process to provide Rs 2 billion grants to 179 farmer groups of Madhes province has reached final phase. The farmer groups are going to be provided with grants with an objective of encouraging them in agriculture and production-oriented activities, said Office Chief, Surendra Yadav. The programme is operated with financial support of the World Bank. The office has selected farmer groups in eight districts of Madhes province where more than 5,000 farmers are associated in the groups, shared Information Officer, Santosh Prakash.

The farmer groups would get grants as per the number of farmers and their proposal. Rautahat district would get the highest amount of grants (Rs 550 million), Saptari Rs 310 million, Mahottari Rs 260 million, Rs 230 million in Dhanusha, Rs 160 million in Sarlahi and Rs 140 million in Bara. Similarly, Parsa district would get lowest Rs 70 million grants.

Traditional profession of Majhis at risk

BY SIRAJ KHAN
Nepalgunj, Feb. 25

The Majhi community of Banke, who have been making a living by gold panning in the river for generations, are now facing a crisis in their traditional profession.

As water levels in the Rapti River continue to decline, the profession of gold panning has become increasingly difficult.

With their livelihood at risk, the community that has relied on extracting gold from river sand for generations is now in despair.

With their traditional occupation in crisis, the community has started seeking alternative sources of income.

Khadka Bahadur Khatri, who has been panning for gold in the Rapti River for the past 25 years, expressed his disappointment with the current situation.

He said that due to the declining water levels, the amount of gold found in the river has significantly decreased, making it difficult for them to sustain their livelihood.

"The river water has receded, and the gold content in the sand has also diminished. It has become challenging to make a living, and we are extremely worried," said Khatri.

Ram Bahadur, another Majhi who has been in the profession for three decades, is facing a similar struggle.



Photo : Siraj Khan/ TRN
A woman from the Majhi community panning for gold in the Rapti River, Banke.

He explained that the river's course has changed, and the reduced water volume has made gold extraction extremely difficult.

"In the past, when there was a lot of water, the strong current of water would carry heavy amount of sand, making it easier to find gold. But now, with little to no water, sifting through the sand yields nothing," he added.

With their livelihood at risk, many members of the Majhi community have started looking for alternative employment.

Tulsi Devi Majhi, 50, used to pan for gold along with her husband, but as the profession can no longer sustain their family, she has now turned to vegetable farming.

"As the water in the river receded, finding gold became nearly impossible. When it became difficult to support my family, I was forced to start vegetable farming," she said.

Various factors, including changes in the river's course and uncontrolled exploitation of river resources, have also impacted the availability of gold in Rapti River.

According to the Majhi community, the excessive extraction of river materials has changed the natural state of the river.

Although the government has regulated the excavation of river-based materials, it has not been able to provide suitable alternative employment opportunities for the Majhi community, said community leader Khadka Bahadur Khatri.

He pointed out that with limited alternatives, many Majhis are still struggling to sustain their livelihood.

Japan, UNDP ink deal to support quake-affected communities in Jajarkot

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

The Embassy of Japan and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Nepal have signed an agreement to support communities affected by the Jajarkot earthquake.

Under this agreement, the Government of Japan will provide grant assistance to the UNDP for implementing the Project for the Improvement of Livelihoods and Disaster Resilience Enhancement in the affected areas. The signing ceremony took place at the UN House in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

MAEDA Toru, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Nepal, and Kyoko Yokosuka, Resident Representative of UNDP Nepal signed the agreement.

This partnership underscores Japan's commitment to supporting Nepal's recovery efforts following the devastating earthquake in Jajarkot, ensuring affected communities can rebuild their lives with enhanced resilience to future disasters.

The project, funded by the Government of Japan with an allocation of 250 million Japanese yen (around USD 1.7 million/Rs. 231 million), will be implemented by UNDP Nepal.

It is designed to support communities in the areas affected by the November 3, 2023 earthquake, with a particular focus on restoring livelihoods, strengthening local governance and bolstering disaster preparedness.

Additionally, the initiative aims to create an enabling environment for long-term recovery and reconstruction, ensuring that public services disrupted by the disaster are effectively restored.



MAEDA Toru, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Nepal, and Kyoko Yokosuka, Resident Representative of UNDP Nepal, exchanging documents after signing agreement to support Jajarkot quake victims on Tuesday.

At the signing ceremony, Japanese Ambassador Toru reaffirmed Japan's commitment to helping Nepal build stronger, more resilient communities. He said, "I hope that the project will make the lives of the people of Jajarkot and West Rukum easier and more resilient to disasters."

He expressed hope that the project would improve the lives of people in Jajarkot and Rukum West making them more resilient to disasters. He also noted that its completion in 2026 would add to the celebrations marking 70 years of diplomatic ties between Japan and Nepal. He emphasized that this initiative would further strengthen the partnership between Japan, UNDP and Nepal.

Kyoko Yokosuka highlighted UNDP's dedication to working closely with all levels of government to support recovery and resilience-building efforts.

She said, "The 6.4 magnitude earthquake that struck Karnali Province on November 3, 2023, severely impacted Jajarkot and Rukum West, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and disrupting lives and livelihoods."

"In response, UNDP has been actively engaged with federal, provincial, and local authorities to facilitate immediate relief, early recovery and long-term rehabilitation efforts. While notable progress has been achieved, continued efforts are required to advance sustainable recovery and reconstruction in the affected regions," she said.

Multiple quakes jolt Myagdi's two rural municipalities

BY HARI KRISHNA SHARMA
Galeshwar (Myagdi), Feb. 25

Seven earthquake tremors were felt in Malika and Dhaulagiri rural municipalities in western Myagdi on Tuesday.

The first tremor, measuring 3.4 magnitude, was recorded at 5:52 am in Malika-3, Dandagaun, followed by another of the same magnitude at 6:13 am in Devisthan-5.

Similarly, a 3.4 magnitude earthquake was recorded at 9:18 am in Dhaulagiri Rural Municipality-3, Muna, and another of 3.6 magnitude at 9:26 am in Ward No. 4, Mudi, according to seismologist Bharat Koirala of the National Earthquake Monitoring and Research Centre.

"A total of seven earthquakes have been recorded in the surrounding areas. There is no need for panic at the community level, but precaution is necessary," said seismologist Koirala. He said that these were not aftershocks but separate earthquakes.

Frequent tremors are common in Myagdi and Baglung districts. According to data from the Centre, more than 20 earthquakes measuring between 4 to 5 on the Richter scale have been recorded in western Myagdi and neighbouring Baglung over the past two decades.

Dr. Shiva Subedi, who holds a PhD from the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, said that a fault line runs beneath the Dhaulagiri Himal, causing occasional seismic activity.

He said that the primary cause of earthquakes is plate tectonics. The Myagdi and Baglung regions lie at the collision zone between the Nepal-Indian and the Tibetan plates. When the Indian plate pushes beneath the Tibetan plate, stress accumulates and releases energy in the form of earthquake tremors.

On October 16, 2017, a 4.2 magnitude earthquake struck with its epicentre at Muna, Dhaulagiri Rural Municipality-3.

Yajna begins at Chapakot's Manimukundeshwar Ashram

BY RADHA KRISHNA DUMRE
Waling, Feb. 25

Gurukul education has seen a steady rise in recent times, prompting efforts to ensure its long-term sustainability. These traditional schools, which focus on imparting both academic knowledge and moral values are drawing more students.

Considering the growing interest of youth in the Gurukul Education system, a grand Mahayagya has begun at the Manimukundeshwar Vedic Ashram Gurukul in Chapakot Municipality-8, Syangja on February 25.

The event which will continue till March 7 aims to preserve the Sanskrit language and culture, revive the historical legacy of King Manimukunda Sen and promote the religious significance of the northern Gandaki region globally. The organisers have announced that discourses on the Skanda Mahapurana will be a highlight of the event, following 17 previous successful scripture readings at the sacred site.

Swami Ishwarananda Maharaj, the founder of the Gurukul, shared plans to develop Manimukundeshwar Dham as a hub for religious tourism, noting its historical importance as the site where 16th-century King Mukunda Sen meditated for 12 years. The northward flow of the Kaligandaki River, an unusual phenomenon worldwide, adds to the area's spiritual significance.



The Mahayagya also aims to address financial sustainability for the Gurukul, with plans to establish a permanent endowment fund of Rs.10 million. Tirtharaj Baral, the coordinator of the main organising committee, emphasised the importance of generating awareness about the river's ecological and spiritual value while resisting any diversion efforts.

The event will feature prominent speakers, including Pandit Kuber Subedi as the chief orator and Pandit Punya Prasad Upadhyaya, who will deliver discourses on Shiva's greatness for the first four days.

Founded in 2008, the Gurukul currently provides education equivalent to Grade 10 to students from districts including Syangja, Kanchanpur, Bajura, Jumla and Mugu. At present, 32 students are enrolled, supported by a team of eight teachers. The event is expected to cost over Rs.2.5 million, according to Gopal Bhattarai, head of the fundraising committee.

246 MALNOURISHED CHILDREN FOUND IN A SINGLE RURAL MUNICIPALITY

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT
Nepalgunj, Feb.25

A total of 246 children, classified as severely and moderately malnourished, have been identified in Dudhuwa Rural Municipality, Banke, during a municipality-level nutrition assessment. Hemanta Kishor Sharma, head of the health department in Dudhuwa Rural Municipality, informed that the assessment identified 32 children with severe acute malnutrition and 214 with moderate acute malnutrition.

Following the discovery of many malnourished children in various wards of the municipality, Sharma said that a municipality-level nutrition assessment and review meeting were organised to discuss their treatment, provision of nutritional food and other necessary management measures. The session presented the nutritional status of children aged between six and 59 months in the municipality and held discussions on their management.

The meeting decided to record the data of severely and moderately malnourished children in the health management and information system and conduct regular monitoring of their condition, said Deputy Chairperson Shahida Bano of Dudhuwa Rural Municipality.

2,500 water birds recorded in Kailali



PHOTO : AVINASH CHAUDHARY

Waterbirds at Jakhor Lake

BY AVINASH CHAUDHARY
Dhangadhi, Feb. 24

More than 2,522 water birds belonging to 59 species have been recorded in the wetlands of Kailali this year.

These numbers were documented during a winter bird count in the wetlands and water bodies to identify the number, status and species of resident and migratory water birds.

The survey, conducted in January 2025, covered various lakes and wetlands. At Ghodaghodi Lake, Nepal's first bird sanctuary listed as a World Ramsar site, 1,497 water birds of 35 species were recorded.

Similarly, Jakhor Lake in Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City registered 458 water birds of 17 species. In the lower coastal region of the Karnali River, located at the border of Kailali and Bardiya, 554 water birds of 28 species were recorded.

Bird counts were also conducted in lakes within the Basanta forest area, including Rakhouna, Laukabhauka, Soniya Rupiyaa, Ghodatal and Raptaahi. However, ornithologist Hirulal Dangoura reported a significant decline in waterbird populations in these lakes, attributing the decrease to habitat destruction and human interference.

Every year, a bird count is conducted when various species of migratory water birds arrive at these wetlands from the northern hemisphere to escape the cold. Kailali's wetlands are known to host both resident and migratory species, including Greylag geese, Gadwall, Northern shoeler, Tufted duck, Common teal, Mallard, Common pochard, Great crested grebe, Little grebe and many others.

Three day 29th NELTA International Conference from tomorrow

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Lalitpur, Feb. 25

The 29th Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA) International Conference is going to begin at Little Angels' School, Hattiban, Lalitpur, on Thursday.

According to a statement issued by Prof. Laxman Gnawali, president of NELTA, the conference will continue till March 1. Deputy Minister and Minister for Urban Development Prakash Man Singh will inaugurate the conference which is being held with the theme 'Machine, Humanity and Language: Navigating the Uncharted Frontiers in ELT'. Delegates from more than 20 countries including the UK, the USA, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Thailand, Russia, Mongolia and Sri Lanka are participating in the three-day conference.

Established in 1992 as a voluntary, non-political, non-profit organisation with the primary objective of cultivating proficient human resources and providing support to English teachers, ELT professionals, researchers, and students for their continual professional advancement, NELTA is committed to enhancing the standard of education through English Language Teaching in Nepal, said Prof Gnawali Presently, NELTA works through its 60 branches alongside seven Provincial Committees. The Association has over 5,700 life members, in addition to its general and institutional members.

> Delegates from more than 20 countries including the UK, the USA, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Thailand, Russia, Mongolia and Sri Lanka are participating in the three-day conference.

"The main objective of the conference is the sharing of the updates, innovations and achievements made in and across the disciplines that have been a part of the professional culture of the organisations working for professionalism," read the statement.

Students prepare for SEE, Madhes Govt steps in to improve results

BY VIJAY KUMAR SAH,
Dhalkeber, Feb. 24

Thousands of students in Madhes Province are preparing for the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) 2025. Following the completion of their internal assessments, students are now focused on intense study, with the exams set to begin on March 20.

Recent statistics, however, reveal a declining educational standard in Madhes Province. In 2024 only 27,306 of 79,592 students passed the SEE in the province, highlighting a worrying trend, particularly in community schools.

In 2024, only 19 of 169 students from Mahendra Secondary School in Dhanusha's Mithila Municipality-5 passed the SEE. Headmaster Ram Kumar Mahato, said free coaching classes focusing on mathematics, science, English, and social studies have been launched, with teachers dedicating extra time to help students improve their SEE results this time.

In response, the Madhes government plans to deploy 132 volunteer teachers to help boost results in four key subjects. Chief Minister Satish Kumar Singh emphasised that a lack of subject-specific teachers and insufficient staffing has weakened the system. He said that the new initiative of deploying volunteers aims to address this issue.



Laxmi Secondary School, Bateshwar, Dhanusha.

Education expert Dr. Vinay Kusiyat highlighted the shortage of teachers, lack of resources and poor infrastructure as major factors affecting learning outcomes. He said that improvement in teaching methods and teacher capacity is imperative to secure better results.

Meanwhile, Meghnath Yadav of the Nepal Teachers' Union pointed out the imbalance in teacher-student ratios across schools, while Rajkishore Mahato from Bateshwar blamed declining educational standards on local government mismanagement and political interference.

Dr. Sohan Sah, Vice-Chair of the Provincial Policy and Planning Commission, stressed that only through coordinated efforts between students, teachers, parents, school management committees, local governments and the provincial government can the quality of education improve.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY

We don't stop playing because we grow old;
we grow old because we stop playing.
- George Bernard Shaw

EDITORIAL

Renovate Heritage Village

Nepal is a home to numerous historical settlements, with villages like Thehe in the remote hills of Simkot Rural Municipality, which hold architectural and cultural values. These sites offer invaluable insights into the past, which reflect unique traditional designs that have withstood the test of time. But it is concerning how can the country preserve its archaeological legacy without compromising the quality of life for its residents. The village, featuring closely located houses permitting movement between one roof and another, offers a view into Nepal's vast architectural legacies. The buildings made of stones, rubble, wood, and straws have shown resistance to earthquakes because of their wooden reinforcements. Archaeologically, these settlements are living museums that illustrate century-old construction methods demonstrating their ancestors' wisdom.

However, it appears costly for the locals to continue to live in these traditional houses. One of the major disadvantages of heritage conservation in such settings is the lack of modernisation. The residents, for example, are confronted with overcrowding as consecutive generations are forced to occupy, in one form or another, overlapping dwellings because of cultural and religious barriers to building new ones. The lack of space leads to privacy problems, making families need to split rooms among siblings. Dwellers, particularly cattle, have a hard time due to the gridded structure. Basic infrastructure is a serious concern in such places.

The settlement, as do most, does not have an adequate water supply and drainage system, so daily living is a forge of challenges. In the monsoon season, the narrow streets become mud tracks, generating various health hazards. In the absence of sanitation, inhabitants suffer an increasing threat from a lack of hygiene. Further, renovation or reconditioning of old houses is very cumbersome. For example, in Thehe, the homeowner must first apply for permission from the neighbours if they wish to make any change. Because this is a factor of architectural coherence, it is tough for families to become better off.

Beyond architectural challenges, cultural traditions also pose concerns. In Thehe and similar settlements, menstruating and postpartum women are still isolated in cowsheds, a practice that endangers their health and well-being. The people should not be subjected to unhealthy and crammed settlements just for the sake of heritage preservation. Of course, tradition is valuable, it should not be maintained at the cost of human rights and dignity. These historic settlements should be equipped with modern amenities. Reforming such harmful customs should be an integral part of modernising heritage villages. The important archaeological information plays a role in preserving national identity.

However, their management must incorporate sustainable solutions. Notably, authorities should implement measures that permit managed restoration, enhanced sanitisation, and environmentally friendly housing solutions by balancing heritage with human needs. Instead of forcing residents to choose between heritage and comfort, the concerned authorities must adopt a model that harmonises conservation with advancement. The challenges, faced by Thehe, can also be traced in similar settlements in many parts of the country. The government should adopt a balanced and holistic approach so that the modernity and anciently co-exists side by side.

Can US-Russia Talks End Ukraine War?



Dinesh Bhattarai

The Ukraine war is now three years old. On February 24, 2022, Russia crossed the international border in a violation of the Charter of the United Nations of which Russia was one of its architects. The Charter respects the territorial integrity and sovereign equality of all nations. When the war started, there was a widespread belief that Kyiv would fall in a matter of days. It is still standing.

As promised during the campaign last year, and following "lengthy and productive discussions," over the phone between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin on February 12, a high-profile meeting between the US and Russia at the foreign ministers' level took place in Saudi Arabia on February 18, to discuss the future of war in Ukraine and arrive at a ceasefire. President Trump hopes that "this effort will lead to a successful conclusion, hopefully soon." He has been saying that he wants "to stop the millions of deaths taking place in the war between Russia and Ukraine."

Rift

Though discussions were characterised as positive, constructive, and solution-oriented, details of talks have not been officially announced. However, reports indicate that the two delegations discussed a three-stage peace plan that would include a ceasefire, elections in Ukraine and a final peace agreement. Talks were reported to have gone well covering "serious conversations on all issues." In parallel, European leaders along with NATO Secretary General and Presidents of the European Council and European Commission had an emergency meeting in Paris to discuss the US government's decision to exclude Europe and representatives from Ukraine in the talks. Paris was reported not to have made much headway in crafting a common position. The rift in transatlantic relations was distinctly visible.

President Trump has been asking European leaders to increase their defense spending, and giving a message that the US is not going to be a prime guarantor of security for Europe. Vice-President JD Vance repeated the message at the Munich Security Conference. Whether it will galvanize Europe or disturb the balance of power will have to be seen. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said, "Our relationship will prioritize empowering Europe to own responsibility for its own security." Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that they would consult with Ukraine and European allies about important issues. There are larger questions involved in peace talks. Parties to the conflict including Ukraine, Russia, USA, have competing and conflicting interests, adding to the complexity of the situation on the ground.

After having suffered the devastation of three years of war and about 20 per cent of its territory lost, Ukraine is not in a position to drive away the Russian army from its soil. Ukraine wants to preserve and protect sovereignty and territorial integrity in peace. It would not recognise any annexation of its territory by Russia including Crimea annexed in 2014. For Ukraine to accept a ceasefire along the current front lines will be a severe blow. Ukrainian president wants Western security guarantees and to join NATO. It wants the continuation of Western support and supplies of artillery ammunition and explosive drones.

Russia wants to redraw the border and recognition of the annexation of Ukraine's provinces. It wants Kyiv to embrace permanent neutrality. It wants to install a government in Kyiv that is sympathetic to it. Russia wants all restrictive and punitive conditions imposed by Europe and America lifted before the proposed ceasefire. It wants to stop the expansion of NATO to the borders of the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact nations. Moscow has made it clear that any presence of NATO troops in Ukraine is unacceptable. Russia seeks a "long-term peace based on respect for the legitimate interests of all people, who live in the region."

> President Trump says Ukraine joining NATO is "impractical," his Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth calls the prospects of Ukraine returning to its pre-2014 border "an unrealistic" objective.

President Putin says, "Russia would fight for the interests of Russia and Russian people which is the objective of the special military operation," Russia is unlikely to agree to a peace deal until all Ukrainian forces have been expelled from the Russian-occupied regions. The United States has its own set of interests. It wants to immediately end the war with a ceasefire. It wants a peace deal that guarantees a sovereign Ukraine and free to join Europe. It does not want the Russian sphere of influence in Europe or elsewhere. President Trump says Ukraine joining NATO is "impractical," his Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth calls the prospects of Ukraine returning to its pre-2014 border "an unrealistic" objective. The US desires to have privileged access to Ukraine's mineral wealth - a large part of which is in disputed territories- in exchange for US financial and military aid.

The US and some EU members are not enthusiastic about Ukraine's NATO membership. European leaders are also divided on sending troops to Ukraine if there is an agreement to end the war. France and Britain seem ready while Sweden and Denmark said they could consider sending troops. German Chancellor said it is "highly inappropriate" to discuss sending troops to Ukraine before a ceasefire deal. Poland and Spain say no. The US opposes boots on the ground. Without the US military, the European military would probably be unable to provide security guarantees. There is a widespread belief that US security guarantees are the only way to effectively deter Russia from attacking Ukraine again.

Peace plan

China floated a 12-point peace plan in 2023 that respects "the sovereignty of all countries." Indian Prime Minister has said, "This is not the era of war but of dialogue and diplomacy." Given the dialogue format, three possible scenarios could emerge from talks: First, the US and Russia reach a ceasefire deal without Ukrainian and European involvement. Second, the US-Russia talks collapse without achieving a ceasefire and third, if the peace deal is forced upon, it could lead to a collapse of the Zelensky government and the country on a path of implosion.

In either scenario, there will be far-reaching implications raising questions on the future of Ukraine, Europe's security, the post-World War order, transatlantic relations, survival of NATO and collective security. Deciding the fate of the Ukrainian people without their participation would grossly undermine the very foundations of long-standing international rules and norms. US-Russia talks without Europe and Ukraine are seen as a radical departure from the US policy of post-World War II paved to weaken the "no-limits" friendship between Russia and China, and also keep away Russia from North Korea and China. Some China watchers have viewed the US's pivot to Russia as a "reverse Nixon scenario."

(The author is a former ambassador.)

Lord Shiva: Symbol Of Nature Appreciation



Namrata Sharma

INSIGHT

Hindu devotees are all set to celebrate Mahashivaratri tomorrow (Wednesday). It falls in the Nepali month of Falgun. The Pashupatinath temple gets flooded with pilgrims both from Nepal and India who come to pay homage to Lord Shiva. Hindus from all over the world aspire to visit Pashupatinath once in their lifetime and especially during the Mahashivaratri festival.

Being a person born and raised in Kathmandu, I have observed the festival being celebrated during the last several decades. Observation takes me along memory lane where glimpses of the festival pass by. My earliest memories are of my cousins including me being taken to worship the lord by our grandmother who was a very pious woman. Early morning bath then a trip to Pashupatinath and meal only after the darshan. In our households, rice and daal or daal bhat the standard Nepali meal is not cooked on Shivratri. A fasting meal like roti, fried potato, peanuts and pangra or pangroti are the specialty with curd, sweets like jilebis, halwa and sabudana kheer are the specialties that we used to devour then.

Tradition

As time passed by, the tradition continues and Shivratri meals have been constant. Pangroti is specially a delicacy that gets cooked and savoured during festivals which require fasting in most Nepali household. Most Nepali, Hindu, households still have vegetarian food and at least a few members fast on Mahashivratri. The tradition of drawing sadhus from India still continues and the number has increased. Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) plans and prepares for the event several months before the festival. There are certain sects of Naga Sadhus and others who receive funds and lodging food while they are here.

As the years have passed by, the celebration has become more commercial-driven by the market-led economy. Business communities and vendors now make products that people might want to buy and the streets around the temple are flooded with goods and food to cater to the interests of the pilgrims. This auspicious festival is celebrated each year on the 6th night of the new moon during Krishna Paksha in the month of Falgun. According to the Hindu lunar calendar, Krishna Paksha is the Sanskrit term meaning the phase during the waning moon or the dark fortnight.

Shivratri is celebrated on a moonless night. Lord Shiva, or Mahadev as he is also known as, is worshipped by the Hindus as the power that combines creation, preservation and destruction among the trinity comprising of Brahma, Bishnu and Mahesh. Shiva is associated with love, protection of nature and earth, and those who are the outcasts like those who manage the cremation sites. Shiva and Parvati, his consorts' love stories transcendent through centuries and many Hindu youth still fast and pray to have spouses like the symbols of this couple. While Mahashivratri is also worshipped as the wedding of lord Shiva and Parvati, it is believed that that was the night when Lord Shiva performed the tandav nritya that is believed to be the dance of primordial creation, preservation and destruction.

> More important facts that are closely associated with him include the preservation of animals, water, forests and the earth should be promoted.

I remember that one of main issues that people were alerted to be vigilant about was to make sure that the wood in their households was safely guarded. There was a tradition of people coming to steal wood and logs to light fire during the cold evening and for people to huddle around while they worshipped Lord Shiva the whole night. The tradition of lighting fire on Shivratri evening continues.

Climate change

One important fact is that Shivratri days and nights are not as cold as they used to be when we were growing up. Climate change and global warming have had an impact. However, even today a few days before the Shivratri festival and on that day, it gets cloudy in Kathmandu with most of the time slight drizzling and rains. There is a cliché in Nepali that this sudden bout of cold and rain is usually to scare pilgrims coming from warmer areas of Nepal and India.

All Shiva temples in Nepal and India and elsewhere have celebrations before, during and after the Mahashivratri night. For the sadhus and the youth, this is also the time when they have puffs of Ganja and shots of bhang in the temples which is mostly allowed on that day. But it is important to stop using addictive drugs like these which are associated with Lord Shiva and his followers. More important facts that are closely associated with him include the preservation of animals, water, forests and the earth should be promoted. Shiva is clothed with a snake around his neck, Ganges flowing from his hair-jata and wrapped in tiger skin. There are several stories in Hindu Mythology which tell us episodes of how he has protected forests and nature. His befriending Nandi, the bull, and all animals including reptiles is a message the youth now need to adopt to make sure we preserve our earth.

(Sharma is a senior journalist and women's rights advocate. namrata1964@yahoo.com or on X @ NamrataSharmaP.)

Art Under AI Threat

DIXYA POUDEL

Paris AI Summit took place from February 10-11 with a focus on the emerging influence of AI (Artificial Intelligence) on the global sphere. Since OpenAI's release of ChatGPT in November 2022, AI has revolutionised the world. ChatGPT has been followed by AI apps such as Microsoft's Copilot, Google's Gemini and xAI's Grok. Now students can get virtual assistance in their education and learning, teachers can create lesson plans, writers can gain research tools, institutions can analyse large-scale data, businesses can use chatbots for consumer services, etc. through AI.

AI depends upon LLM (Large Language Model) which is trained on vast amounts of text data so it can understand and generate human-like text. With the help of transformer architecture, LLMs can process and understand the association between words and phrases in a sequence. With incredible versatility, LLMs can perform a wide range of tasks from answering queries, translating languages, reviewing and summarising documents to generating uniquely creative content. Here one has to mention generative AI which can create new content based on the input prompts useful in applications such as virtual assistance, chatbots and content creation.

However, along with the rise of AI, there has also been a surge in misinformation and disinformation due to fake content created with AI. Since it is low-cost and even lucrative, it isn't then surprising that the internet these days is flooded with AI-generated images and texts for the purpose of spreading lies, distorting truth and even profiteering. Some use AI to extort people of their money. There has thus been a rise in cybercrime with the increasing use of fake AI-generated images and content. AI has had implications in academics too as it can be used by students to write their papers. Even as educational institutes consider AI-written assignments and papers as plagiarism, it is still difficult to know if the work is original or AI-generated.

Then some artists feel the threat that technology presents to the traditional form of art. AI-generated images can be uncannily realistic which in turn can deceive the viewers. It has led major publishing companies and media outlets to ban such content, images, and illustrations. Given the buzz and the jaw-dropping amount of investment in AI, one has to wonder about the imminent repercussions. Currently, tech companies, governments and organisations throughout the world are eager to invest in the technology of AI. US President Donald Trump has pledged an investment of over 500 billion dollars towards AI backed by tech companies like OpenAI and Oracle.

Trump's slogan is Make America Great Again (MAGA) and he is looking towards enhancing the role and dominance of America in global technology, prominently AI. However, to the chagrin of the US, the Chinese AI app DeepSeek has threatened the American hegemony in AI as the race towards even faster and smarter technology has escalated in all major players in technology globally. As seen, there are both good and bad sides to AI. The main concern for those involved in the development of AI should be whether this technology can change the lives of people for the better. Technology is a human construct that has to serve well for those who pursue it.

50 YEARS AGO

THE RISING NEPAL

February 26, 1974

Foreign Newsmen Impressed

(By A Staff Reporter)

Kathmandu, Feb 25: Foreign journalists here in Kathmandu to cover the Coronation of His Majesty King have been impressed by the magnificent coronation function and the warm hospitality of the Nepali people.

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P.O. Box 23, Kathmandu, Nepal

READER'S MAIL

Preserve Archaeological Sites



I am writing regarding a news report titled, *'Thehe: Village of Nepal's rich archaeological heritage,'* published in this daily on February 25, 2025, According to the news report, Thehe is a living testament that reflects Nepal's architectural and cultural heritage.

It is situated in the remote hills of Simkot. People in this village have been living in homes built by their forefathers. In an age of concrete buildings, this village has traditional houses resembling ancient structures. As the nation moves towards skyscrapers and concrete buildings, such traditional houses represent Nepal's ancient archaeology which is why it is necessary to both preserve and promote them.

Such ancient heritages could also have the potential to boost tourism and put Nepal on the tourist map. It could influence both domestic and international tourism.

Nepal's government should thus work towards the preservation and promotion of such ancient structures as found in Thehe.

Raju Aryal
Jhapa

TAILPIECE

My mother says she never holds grudges but then will blindside you with something that happened years ago.

Last week she said, "You know, you really hurt me on your birthday."

And I was like, "Which birthday was that?"

So she replied, "The first one. You have a really big head, you know."

+++++

During a performance for the high school talent show at the local theater, a hole was cracked in the stage floor. Subsequent acts managed to avoid the damaged area until little Freddy, juggling bowling pins, accidentally stepped through the hole up to his knee.

He apologized to the audience for his clumsiness. But a heckler in the back of the theatre shouted:

"Don't worry, Freddy! It's just a stage you're going through!"

Ukraine marks 3rd anniversary of war

AP
Kyiv, Ukraine Feb. 25



PHOTO: AP

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky greeting European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen during a ceremony in Kyiv, Ukraine.

A dozen leaders from Europe and Canada are in Ukraine to mark the third anniversary of Russia's invasion and discuss support with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. They include European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

U.S. policies on Russia and Ukraine are shifting dramatically under President Donald Trump. Questions about possible peace talks and Ukraine's interest in European Union and NATO membership loom large.

Russian President Vladimir Putin says he has not discussed resolving the conflict in Ukraine in detail with Trump, and that Russian and U.S. negotiating teams didn't discuss it when they met in Saudi Arabia last week.

Putin also said Russia does not rule out European countries participating in a peace settlement. Earlier Monday, Trump said Putin would accept European peacekeepers in Ukraine as part of a potential peace deal. The Kremlin did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Putin has previously indicated Russia will not accept Western forces in Ukraine. Putin's latest comments were broadcast on state television, and it is unclear when they were filmed.

Trump says Russian President Vladimir Putin would accept European peacekeepers in Ukraine as part of a potential deal to end the war. "Yeah, he will accept it," Trump said. "I have asked him that question. Look, if we do this deal, he's not looking for world war."

Trump says he is hopeful the United States and Ukraine will soon come to terms on a rare earth minerals deal. "It looks like we're getting very close," Trump told reporters. He added that Zelenskyy could potentially visit Washington this week or next to sign the deal.

But Trump did not say whether the emerging deal would include U.S. security guarantees. "Europe is going to make sure nothing happens," he said.

The United States has failed to get the U.N. General Assembly to approve its resolution seeking to end the war without mentioning Russian aggression.

The assembly amended the U.S. draft resolution to add language making clear that Russia invaded its smaller neighbor in violation of the U.N. Charter.

The vote in the 193-member world body, whose resolutions are not legally binding, was 93-18 with 65 abstentions. That's lower than previous resolutions that saw over 140 nations condemn Russia's aggression and demand a reversal of its annexation of four Ukrainian regions.

Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere says the seven Nordic and Baltic countries will train and equip a brigade of the Ukrainian army of between 3,000 and 5,000 soldiers. And Norway will offer the equivalent of $11.2 million to strengthen Ukraine's and Moldova's energy systems.

The head of the European Union's executive branch, Ursula von der Leyen, has praised Ukraine's progress toward bloc membership and held out the possibility of entry before 2030.

She emphasized the process of EU accession is "merit-based" and candidates must comply with conditions and enact reforms. But she added, "Ukraine's merit-based process, if they continue at that speed and at that quality, perhaps they could be earlier than 2030."

Lithuanian Prime Minister Gitanas Nauseda says European countries will have to assess popular support for any European peacekeeping forces stationed in Ukraine to uphold any future peace agreement.

Nearly 40% of contracts canceled by DOGE expected to produce no savings

AP
Washington DC, Feb. 25

Nearly 40% of the federal contracts that the Trump administration claims to have canceled as part of its signature cost-cutting program aren't expected to save the government any money, the administration's own data shows.

The Department of Government Efficiency run by Elon Musk last week published an initial list of 1,125 contracts that it terminated in recent weeks across the federal government. Data published on DOGE's "Wall of Receipts" shows that more than one-third of the contract cancellations, 417 in all, are expected to yield no savings.

That's usually because the total value of the contracts has already been fully obligated, which means the government has a legal requirement to spend the funds for the goods or services it purchased and in many cases has already done so.

"It's like confiscating used ammunition after it's been shot when there's nothing left in it. It doesn't accomplish any policy objective," said Charles Tiefer, a retired University of Baltimore law professor and expert on government contracting law. "Their terminating so many contracts pointlessly obviously doesn't accomplish anything for saving money."

Dozens of them were for already-paid subscriptions to The Associated Press, Politico and other media services that the administration said it would discontinue. Others were for research studies that have been awarded, training that has taken place, software that has been purchased and interns that have come and gone.

An administration official said it made sense to cancel contracts that are seen as potential dead weight, even if the moves do not yield any savings. The official was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

In all, DOGE data says the 417 contracts in question had a total value of $478 million. Dozens of other canceled contracts are expected to yield little if any savings.

"It's too late for the government to change its mind on many of these contracts and walk away from its payment obligation," said Tiefer, who served on the Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Tiefer said DOGE appeared to be taking a "slash and burn" approach to cutting contracts, which he said could damage the performance of government agencies. He said savings could be made instead by working with agency contracting officers and inspectors general to find efficiencies, an approach the administration has not taken.

DOGE says the overall contract cancellations are expected to save more than $7 billion so far, an amount that has been questioned as inflated by independent experts.

The canceled contracts were to purchase a wide range of goods and services.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded a contract in September to purchase and install office furniture at various branches. While the contract does not expire until later this year, federal records show the agency had already agreed to spend the maximum $567,809 with a furniture company.

The U.S. Agency for International Development negotiated a $145,549 contract last year to clean the carpet at its headquarters in Washington. But the full amount had already been obligated to a firm that is owned by a Native American tribe based in Michigan.

Palestine struggles to restart lives in ruins of Gaza

AP
Beit Lahiya, Gaza Feb. 25

When night falls over northern Gaza, much of the cityscape of collapsed buildings and piled wreckage turns pitch black. Living inside the ruins of their home, Rawia Tambora's young sons get afraid of the dark, so she turns on a flashlight and her phone's light to comfort them, for as long as the batteries last.

Displaced for most of the 16-month-long war, Tambora is back in her house. But it is still a frustrating shell of a life, she says: There is no running water, electricity, heat or services, and no tools to clear the rubble around them.

Nearly 600,000 Palestinians flooded back into northern Gaza under the now month-old ceasefire in Gaza, according to the United Nations. After initial relief and joy at being back at their homes — even if damaged or destroyed — they now face the reality of living in the wreckage for the foreseeable future.

"Some people wish the war had never ended, feeling it would have been better to be killed," Tambora said. "I don't know what we'll do long-term. My brain stopped planning for the future."

The six-week ceasefire is due to end Saturday, and it's uncertain what will happen next. There are efforts to extend the calm as the next phase is negotiated. If fighting erupts again, those who returned to the north could find themselves once again in the middle of it.

A massive rebuilding job has no way to start

A report last week by the World Bank, U.N. and European Union estimated it will cost some $53 billion to rebuild Gaza after entire neighborhoods were decimated by Israel's bombardment and offensives against Hamas militants. At the moment, there is almost no capacity or funding to start significant rebuilding.

A priority is making Gaza immediately livable. Earlier in February, Hamas threatened to hold up hostage releases unless more tents and temporary shelters were allowed into Gaza. It then reversed and accelerated hostage releases after Israel agreed to let in mobile homes and construction equipment.

Humanitarian agencies have stepped up services, setting up free kitchens and water delivery stations, and distributing tents and tarps to hundreds of thousands across Gaza, according to the U.N.

President Donald Trump turned up the pressure by calling for the entire population of Gaza to be removed permanently so the U.S. can take over the territory and redevelop it for others. Rejecting the proposal, Palestinians say they want help to rebuild for themselves.

Gaza City's municipality started fixing some water lines and clearing rubble from streets, said a spokesperson, Asem Alnabih. But it lacks heavy equipment. Only a few of its 40 bulldozers and five dump trucks still work, he said. Gaza is filled with over 50 million tons of rubble that would take 100 trucks working at full capacity over 15 years to clear away, the U.N. estimates.

Trump hopeful of ending Russia, Ukraine war after he met Macron

AP
Washington, Feb. 25

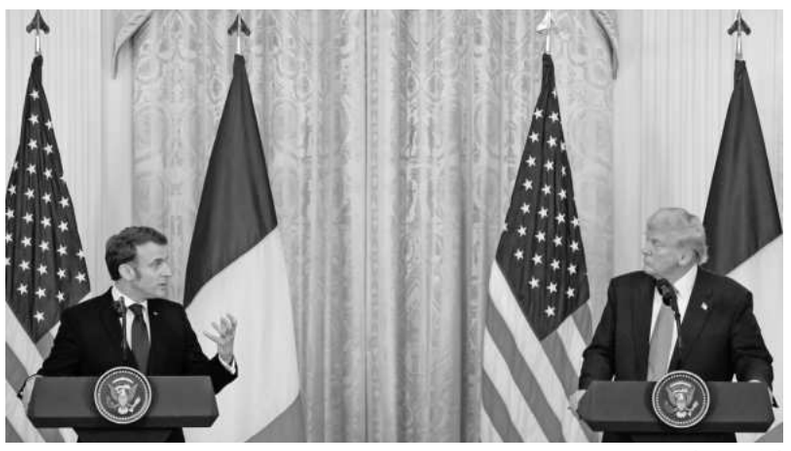


PHOTO: AP

President Donald Trump listens as France's President Emmanuel Macron during a joint press conference in the East Room of the White House in Washington.

President Donald Trump expressed hope that Russia's war in Ukraine is nearing an endgame as he met Monday with French President Emmanuel Macron on the third anniversary of the invasion. But France's leader cautioned that it's crucial that any potential agreement with Moscow does not amount to surrender for Ukraine.

Their talks come at a moment of deep uncertainty about the future of transatlantic relations, with Trump transforming American foreign policy and effectively tuning out European leadership as he looks to quickly end the war in Ukraine.

While Macron and Trump made nice at the White House, their countries were at loggerheads at the United Nations over resolutions describing Russia as the aggressor in the war.

In broad comments on the state of the conflict, Trump said he believed Russian President Vladimir Putin would accept European peacekeepers in Ukraine.

"Yeah, he will accept it," Trump told reporters. "I have asked him that question. Look, if we do this deal, he's not looking for more war."

And Trump said he hoped that the war could end within weeks and that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy would soon come to the U.S. to sign a deal giving America access to Ukraine's critical minerals, which are used in key technology. Trump is pressing the economic deal to help repay some of the $180 billion in American aid for Kyiv since the start of the war — tens of billions of which is being spent in the U.S. to replenish older weapons sent to Ukraine.

"It looks like we're getting very close," Trump told reporters of the minerals deal before his meeting with Macron. He said Zelenskyy could potentially visit Washington this week or next to sign it.

Ukraine also is looking for future security guarantees as part of any agreement. Trump, however, did not say whether the emerging deal would include such assurances from the United States: "Europe is going to make sure nothing happens."

A French official with knowledge of Macron's meeting with Trump said the U.S. president didn't object to the need for U.S. security guarantees in a possible peace deal but details were still being worked out. The official wasn't authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

At a joint press conference, Macron acknowledged that European nations must do more to bolster defense on the continent. But he also warned against capitulating to Russia.

PRISM

Police rescue deer entangled in dangling rope

Michigan: Police in Michigan came to the rescue of a deer that wound up with its antlers tethered to a tree branch as a result of an encounter with a dangling rope.

The Livonia Police Department said on social media that a resident contacted authorities to report a deer "entangled in a rope hanging from a tree in her yard."

Livonia Animal Control personnel were unavailable, so police officers set about the process of freeing the trapped animal.

"Thinking outside the box, the officers used a pole saw to safely free the deer," the department said.

Goat rescued from fifth floor window ledge

Madrid: Firefighters in Madrid came to the rescue of a goat that somehow ended up stranded on a ledge on the fifth floor of an apartment building.

Firefighters responded to the building and discovered the goat was on the ledge outside of a closed window leading to a vacant apartment.

The goat's origins, and how it came to be stranded on the ledge, were a mystery.

Firefighters used treats including carrots and lettuce to lure the goat to a nearby balcony, where they were able to get control of the animal. The goat was turned over to the Madrid Emergency Veterinary Service for care while authorities try to locate the animal's owner.

(Agencies)

Biodiversity protection talk resumes with money-topping

AP
Bogota, Colombia Feb. 25



FILE PHOTO: AP

People carrying bananas and fish from the port, in Leticia, Colombia.

An annual United Nations conference on biodiversity that ran out of time last year will resume its work Tuesday in Rome with money at the top of the agenda.

That is, how to spend what's been pledged so far — and how to raise a lot more to help preserve plant and animal life on Earth.

The talks in Colombia known as COP16 yielded some significant outcomes before they broke up in November, including an agreement that requires companies that benefit from genetic resources in nature — say, by developing medicines from rainforest plants — to share the benefits. And steps were taken to give Indigenous peoples and local communities a stronger voice in conservation matters.

But two weeks turned out to be not enough time to get everything done.

The Cali talks followed the historic 2022 COP15 accord in Montreal, which included 23 measures aimed at protecting biodiversity. Those included putting 30% of the planet and 30% of degraded ecosystems under protection by 2030, known as the Global Biodiversity Framework.

"Montreal was about the 'what' — what are we all working towards together?" said Georgina Chandler, head of policy and campaigns for the Zoological Society London. "Cali was supposed to focus on the 'how' — putting the plans and the financing in place to ensure we can actually implement this framework."

"They eventually lost a quorum because people simply went home," said Linda Krueger of The Nature Conservancy, who is in Rome for the two days of talks "And so now we're having to finish these last critical decisions, which are some of the the nitty gritty decisions on financing, on resource mobilization and on the planning and monitoring and reporting requirements under the Global Biodiversity Framework."

The overall financial aim was to achieve $20 billion a year in the fund by 2025, and then $30 billion by 2030. So far, only $383 million had been pledged as of November, from 12 nations or sub-nations: Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Province of Québec, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

Participants will discuss establishing a "global financing instrument for biodiversity" intended to effectively distribute the money raised. And a big part of the talks will be about raising more money.

'Completely off track' on larger financial goal

Chandler and Kruger both said the finance points at Colombia's talks were particularly contentious.

"It's really about how do we collect the money and how do we get it distributed fairly, get it to the ground where it's needed most, so that that's really the core issue," said Kruger.

Oscar Soria, chief executive of The Common Initiative, a think tank specializing in global economic and environmental policy, was pessimistic about raising a great deal more money.

TODAY IN HISTORY

1705 – George Frideric Handel's opera Nero premiered in Hamburg.[3]
1836 – Samuel Colt is granted a United States patent for his revolver firearm.
1843 – Lord George Paulet occupies the Kingdom of Hawaii in the name of Great Britain in the Paulet affair.
1875 – Guangxu Emperor of Qing dynasty China begins his reign, under Empress Dowager Cixi's regency.
1918 – World War I: German forces capture Tallinn to virtually complete the occupation of Estonia.
1933 – Launch of the USS Ranger at Newport News, Virginia. It is the first purpose-built aircraft carrier to be commissioned by the US Navy.
1941 – The outlawed Communist Party of the Netherlands organises a general strike in German-occupied Amsterdam to protest against Nazi persecution of Dutch Jews.
1947 – The formal abolition of Prussia is proclaimed by the Allied Control Council, the Prussian government having already been abolished by the Preußenschlag of 1932.

MAHA SHIVARATRI MESSAGES

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb. 26

President Ramchandra Paudel has extended his best wishes to all Nepali sisters and brothers residing both in Nepal and abroad on the occasion of the Maha Shivaratri.

In his message issued on Wednesday, the President emphasised the importance of preserving and promoting the cultural and religious heritage found throughout the country, including the Pashupati area. He stated that it is our responsibility to pass on the heritage we have received to future generations in its original form, while also ensuring that landmarks like the Bagmati River remain clean and pure.

He said, "The relationship between Lord Shiva and the land of Nepal is described in various Vedic scriptures. The sacred Pashupati area in Nepal is a matter of pride, not only for us but for all Hindus around the world. Therefore, I believe that Nepal has always remained the centre of spiritual contemplation for devotees worldwide who consider Lord Pashupatinath and Kirateshwar Mahadev as the embodiment of Lord Shiva."

Meanwhile, Vice President Ramsahay Yadav also extended his heartfelt wishes for happiness, peace, prosperity and good health to all Nepali sisters and brothers both at home and abroad. He said that the sacred festival inspires everyone to renounce desires, anger, greed, attachment and ego and establish peace, purity and love in Nepal and across the world and provide an opportunity for spiritual advancement.

He said that Maha Shivaratri offers an opportunity for self-purification, meditation and spiritual growth. Fasting and meditation during this time help improve both physical and mental health. Through the worship and devotion to Lord Shiva, it strengthens religious faith and belief, while aiding in the purification of one's mind, speech and actions.

He also extended congratulations and best wishes to the Chief of Army Staff and all ranks of the Nepali Army on the occasion of Army Day, celebrated on the same day as Maha Shivaratri as the day provides an opportunity to remember the courage, dedication and sacrifices of the armed forces.

'I WAS REMOVED FROM POWER THROUGH DECEIT'

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT
Urlabari, Feb. 25

Chairman of the CPN (Maoist Centre) and former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' has said that he will no longer rely on anyone's support to attain power. While inaugurating the second day of the Tarai-Madhes Public Awareness Campaign in Kanepokhari of Morang district on Tuesday, Prachanda said that he was removed from power through deceit.

"Now, with the strength of the people, I plan to form a majority government, similar to the one in 2007 and take control of the government," he said. He said that whenever they tried to form alliances with the Nepali Congress or CPN-UML, it benefited them, while their party suffered losses.

Referring to the recent by-election in which the Maoist Centre won the most votes and seats in the Koshi province, he stressed the importance of all leaders focusing on connecting with the people and building relationships.

Bandipur's beauty delights poets



PHOTO: TRN

Participants of literary conference organised in Bandipur of Tanahun district on Tuesday.

BY AMAR RAJ NAHARKI
Tanahun, Feb. 25

Gorkhapatra Corporation and Padma Library jointly organised a literary conference in Bandipur, also known as the 'Queen of Hills,' on Tuesday.

At the conference, most of the writers were impressed by the beauty of Bandipur and immediately composed poems about the beauty of the place and recited them. While inaugurating the event, senior poet Dwarika Shrestha said that the conference would contribute to the development and promotion of Bandipur.

Bandipur Social Development Committee President Chij Kumar Akela, Dr. Madan Piya, tourism entrepreneur Santa Kumar Shrestha and writer Namaste Lal Bhumi among others shared their views, emphasising that one could develop their community, as they themselves had helped promote Bandipur as a tourism destination.

Bandipur Rural Municipality Chairman, Surendra Bahadur Thapa, said that the conference would elevate Bandipur's tourism industry to new heights.

Executive Chairman of Gorkhapatra Corporation Bishnu Prasad Subedi reminisced about the Gorkhapatra's significant contribution to the development of Nepali journalism and literature. He referred to Gorkhapatra Daily as the 'library of Nepali journalism' and expressed pride in knowing that writers realised they were writers after publishing their articles in Madhuparka, a sister publication of Gorakhapatra.

Gorakhapatra Corporation's General Manager, Lal Bahadur Airi, stated that the conference aimed at connecting the creator and the publishers to raise societal awareness. Senior Ghazal writer Gyanuwakar Paudel said that his literary journey began when his works were published in Madhupuraka.

Editor of Madhuparka, Tribhuvan Chandra Wagle, said that through literature, Bandipur could gain recognition both nationally and internationally. He also said that literature and tourism complement each other, which is why the event was held in Bandipur.

Acting Chief Editor of Gorkhpatra Daily Shiva Kumar Bhattarai said that the conference would inspire poets and writers to create better works.

The coordinator of the literary conference and President of Padma Library in Bandipur, Surdashan Pradhan, shared that the conference was organised to encourage writers from across the country to write about the beauty of Bandipur. Pradhan expressed the hope that the writers' contributions would attract more tourists to Bandipur.

Additionally, Madhupuraka is going to publish a special edition titled 'Eyes on Madhupuraka, Mind on Bandipur' to promote Bandipur tourism, said the organisers of the conference.

Nepali Army celebrating 262nd Army Day today

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

The Nepali Army is marking the 262nd Army Day on Wednesday with various military drills and performances across the country.

President Ramchandra Paudel is scheduled to attend a special ceremony to be organised by the Nepali Army at the Army Pavilion, Tundikhel, as the chief guest on the occasion of Shivaratri and Army Day. President Paudel is the Supreme Commander of the Nepali Army.

The event will feature a military parade, artillery display, drills, and various cultural programmes.

The Nepali Army has been observing Army Day on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri for the past two decades.

According to Nepali Army spokesperson and Brigadier General Gaurav Kumar KC, the Army Day and Maha Shivaratri, which hold cultural and traditional significance, will be celebrated at the Army Pavilion, Tundikhel, as well as at military divisions, battalions, units, and other departments.

On the occasion, military bands from Nepal, India, the United Kingdom, and the United States will perform at the ceremony. Leading up to the establishment day celebrations, events such as the principal staff officers (PSOs) of Brigadier level, the Chief of Army Staff Open Marathon, the publication of the Unity Journal, and a photo exhibition have already taken place.

> The event will feature a military parade, artillery display, drills, and various cultural programmes. The Nepali Army has been observing Army Day on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri for the past two decades.

Furthermore, on the occasion of Army Day, a team of foreign national cadet corps from various countries have been participating in study visits and interactions about Nepal. Some former military officials from India are also expected to visit Nepal to attend the main ceremony, the Army Day.

The current organisational structure of the Nepali Army dates back to 1762 AD. With patriotism, dedication, and a focus on the welfare of the people, the army has positioned itself as a trusted institution among the citizens.

The foundation of Nepal as a nation was built on the unwavering courage, bravery, and sacrifices of its valiant ancestors. Maintaining national unity remains a constitutional duty of the army. Discipline, chain of command, political neutrality, and a strong sense of unity are considered fundamental values within the army.

Beyond national borders, the Nepali Army has successfully built a reputation as a reliable and trustworthy force in the international arena.

The army embraces an inclusive structure, representing the diversity of Nepal's various ethnic groups and communities. In recent years, the participation of women in the army and the international UN missions has also seen significant growth. As of June 2024, there are about 7,000 women soldiers in the army, which is roughly 10 per cent of the total troops. The NA has been enrolling women since 1961 for the technical service and since 2004 for general service (infantry).

Bills to disintegrate Civil Aviation Authority tabled in House

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

Minister for Communications and Information Technology, Prithvi Subba Gurung, presented a motion to consider the 'Mass Media Council Bill, 2024' in the House of Representatives on Tuesday.

The bill, which originated in the National Assembly, aims to establish an independent body to regulate and promote responsible journalism. Tabling the biil, Minister Gurung stressed that the proposed council would strengthen the existing Press Council by improving the effectiveness of its work. He acknowledged the importance of lawmakers' feedback during the discussion, assuring that necessary amendments would be made to address concerns raised in the House.

The bill seeks to establish a more systematic and powerful body than the current Press Council. Minister Gurung highlighted that the growing influence of electronic media in Nepal necessitated a new council to maintain the integrity and independence of the journalism sector, ensuring that it remains relevant in the digital age.

Participating in the discussion, several lawmakers argued for a more robust and autonomous council. They stressed the need for an impartial body that could regulate the media without government interference. Lawmakers highlighted the importance of clear provisions regarding the rights of journalists and their professional security. While some felt that the bill could contribute to making the media more professional, others were wary of its potential for misuse, particularly in stifling critical journalism.

Likewise, the House also considered two bills concerning the disintegration of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal. Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Badri Prasad Pandey, presented the 'Nepal Air Services Authority Bill, 2024' and the 'Nepal Civil Aviation Authority Bill, 2024'.

The bills aim to restructure Nepal's aviation sector, addressing long-standing issues and enhancing international credibility. Despite prolonged discussions, the bills have not yet progressed due to ongoing concerns about their implications.

The lawmakers called for immediate action on road safety and infrastructure. MP Ramhari Khatiwada demanded free treatment for road accident victims, referring to a recent bus accident in Kavrebhanjyang. Other MPs raised concerns over delays in road construction projects, including the reconstruction of the BP Highway, which has been damaged by by floods and landslides in September last year

> The bill, which originated in the National Assembly, aims to establish an independent body to regulate and promote responsible journalism.

The issue of Nepal's inclusion on the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list was also raised. Lawmakers questioned the government on the steps being taken to improve the regulation of cooperatives, which is one of the key factors behind Nepal's inclusion on the list. MP Udaya Shumsher Rana emphasised the need for the government to provide clear plans for exiting the grey list, urging a swift response to avoid further economic repercussions.

MP Ramesh Kumar Sharma raised concerns about the deteriorating quality of education in the country, calling for urgent reforms in the sector to ensure that students are better prepared for the job market.

The next session of the House is scheduled for March 5.

NC-UML alliance is to ensure political stability: DPM Singh

BY SIRAJ KHAN
Nepalgunj, Feb. 25

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Urban Development, Prakash Man Singh has said that the coalition government of the Nepali Congress-UML has been formed to ensure political stability and address the country's challenges.

Speaking at a meeting organised by the Nepali Congress Banke in Nepalgunj on Tuesday, DPM Singh said that the government is working in line with its objectives and that the Nepali Congress-UML alliance would continue until the upcoming general elections.

He assured that the 2027 elections would be held under a government led by the Nepali Congress president, as agreed, and urged everyone to support the government in their respective capacities to ensure its success.

Clarifying that the current government is maintaining not only political stability but also safeguarding the achievements made through various movements, DPM Singh reaffirmed that the government was tirelessly working for the progress of the country and the betterment of its people.

"Despite the opposition's ongoing criticism since the formation of the Congress-UML coalition, seven months have passed, and the government is growing stronger," he said. DPM Singh further asserted that no external noise or disruption would impact the government's stability and the coalition would remain intact until the next election.

"If the Nepali Congress remains united, no force could prevent the party from securing a majority," DPM Singh said. He called on all party leaders and cadres to resolve local-level disputes and present themselves as a united front moving forward.

He also reminded the gathering that the Nepali Congress had led all major movements and development projects in the country and it continues to work with the UML for economic and physical development while maintaining national stability.

During the event, Nepali Congress Joint General Secretary and Federal MP from Banke Constituency No. 3, Kishore Singh Rathore, dismissed claims that nothing had been achieved in the country. He urged leaders and cadres to reject such false narratives.

The programme also featured remarks from Nepali Congress central member Dila Sangraula, Constituent Assembly member Badshah Kurmi, Nepali Congress Banke President Narayan Prasad Gaudel, Vice President Gopal Adhikari and other leaders and cadres.

'Once-only-principle'...

The draft of the blueprint aims at developing necessary digital infrastructure, establishing policy and institutional frameworks for digital service delivery, building institutional capacity for digital transformation, and promoting innovation, monitoring, and development in digital governance.

It has covered various areas including digital transformation of government processes, simplification of public and private sector services, establishment of digital government and digital society, coordination among federal, provincial, and local governments, development of digital literacy and skills, and promotion of regional and international cooperation in digital governance.

Likewise, the Blueprint mentions various strategic pillars of the e-governance development and implementation. They include establishing a high-level institutional framework for digital governance, developing policies and regulations for digital transformation and strengthening coordination among government agencies.

Likewise, formulating policy and regulatory framework, setting digital enablers and service development, enhancing digital literacy and skills, setting digital standards and guidelines and forging better regional and international coordination, innovation, monitoring, and development are also the strategic pillars of the proposed policy.

It has accorded priority to the development of a national data policy to ensure data security and interoperability, expansion of affordable and accessible internet services, development of a unified digital communication platform, and establishment of a secure data exchange platform.

Similarly, developing standards for data cataloguing and service indexing, creating guidelines for digital service delivery and cybersecurity, and establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) for digital governance are also highlighted in the draft.

Maha Shivaratri...

On the eve of Shivaratri, workers were busy decorating the area with flowers on Tuesday. Some were giving the final touch while others were hanging the flowers on the walls and by the steel supports erected above the routes leading to the main temple.

The number of saints and sadhus in the Pashupati area is expected to increase significantly on Maha Shivaratri this year due to the influence of the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, India.

Sadhus in large numbers from various places, including neighbouring India, have arrived for the Maha Shivaratri festival.

Shivaratri preparations complete in Sarlahi temples

BY JANARJAN KHATRI
Sarlahi, Feb. 25

Preparations have been completed for the Maha Shivaratri puja to be held at various Mahadev temples in Sarlahi district on Wednesday.

Rajendra Dhami, Chairman of Laxminath Mahadev Development Committee, informed that preparations had been completed for Shivaratri on the premises of Laxminath Mahadev Temple at Chitain of Haripur Municipality-7.

FM Rana seeks...

According to the MoFA, global leaders and ministers at the session praised Nepal's role in human rights protection and its exemplary peace process model. Nepal's National Human Rights Commission, which has maintained in 'A Grade' status since its establishment, was also commended by international representatives.

Dr. Rana reiterated Nepal's unwavering commitment to safeguarding and promoting human rights, emphasising the country's democratic values, rule of law, and independent judiciary. She also highlighted Nepal's efforts to address transitional justice and complete the remaining tasks of the peace process.

Similarly, earlier on Monday, Dr. Rana met with Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister, Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik. On the occasion, she expressed gratitude for Norway's support in Nepal's peace process and socio-economic development. She also sought Norway's assistance in addressing climate change impacts and advocating for climate justice on international platforms.

Dr. Rana also held talks with Deputy Prime Minister of Kyrgyz Republic, Edil Baisalov, which focused on shared agenda like climate change and mountain-related issues. She also met with Philippines' Deputy Foreign Minister, Charles Jose, discussing bilateral relations and mutual interests, particularly in climate change initiatives.

Nepal Airlines

Nepal Airlines Corporation
General Services & Property Management Department
IT & Communication Division
Kantipath, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Notice for Re-Invitation for ICB

Date of Publication: **26 February, 2025**

Nepal Airlines invites **International Competitive Bidding (ICB)** for the purpose of selection of the eligible, qualified and experienced Local and International Software Development firms/vendors/solution providers to submit bid proposals for **"The Procurement of Utility Software to Support Airlines Operations & Airworthiness"**.

The interested Software Development firms/vendors/solution providers are required to visit the "Published Bids" section of the eGP system at https://www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp, register in the site and submit the bid via the eGP system.

For further information, please contact at the following email addresses:

Email: abhash.it@nac.com.np, , dydir.itc@nac.com.np, dydir.pni@nac.com.np, purchase@nac.com.np
Ph. No.: 01-4220757, Ext: 2141, 2140, 2212
Website : http://www.nepalairlines.com.np (Notice / Announcement Page)

Chaulagain's 'Rudane' mirrors Rupchandra Bista's life

BY AVAYA SHRESTHA
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

Rupchandra Bista was elected to the Rastriya Panchayat twice from Makawanpur during the Panchayat era. As the creator of the 'Thaha' movement, the role of the legendary leader in advocating for truth, justice, and high moral values remains unforgettable. Even today, elderly intellectuals across the country and the older generation of Makwanpur share numerous interesting stories about Bista.

Theatre director and novelist Tanka Chaulagain has captured these intriguing anecdotes and Bista's biography in his latest novel 'Rudane'. Readers who have heard about Rupchandra will find this novel engaging, as it provides insights into the time and society in which he lived.

Numerous fascinating incidents reflecting Bista's impartiality and sense of justice are included in the book. His nephew, Ranasangram Bista, served as his bodyguard and was also a national player in martial arts. Once, an opportunity came for training in Japan, and Ranasangram requested Rupchandra for a recommendation letter. Rupchandra immediately wrote, which read: "If this man is qualified, I recommend him. If someone more qualified than him is available, I recommend that person instead."

While building Jankalyan Secondary School in Makawanpur, Bista, then Pradhan Pancha of Palung, even made his wife Uma Shah, who was from an aristocratic family, carry stones just like him. His habit of working hard himself and making his wife do the same led to the heartbreaking tragedy of his marriage.

Bista believed that children speak the truth and that their words reveal the character of their guardians. A fascinating anecdote in the novel illustrates this belief. He once asked a group of children, "What do you like the most?" Some answered fruits, some sweets, some biscuits, and others clothes. He then asked, "If someone offers you what you like the most but asks you to cut your friend's hand in return, would you do it?"

Most of the children replied, "Yes, we do."

However, one child objected, saying, "Hush! I wouldn't do that. I'd rather not take what I like." Bista then told his colleagues,

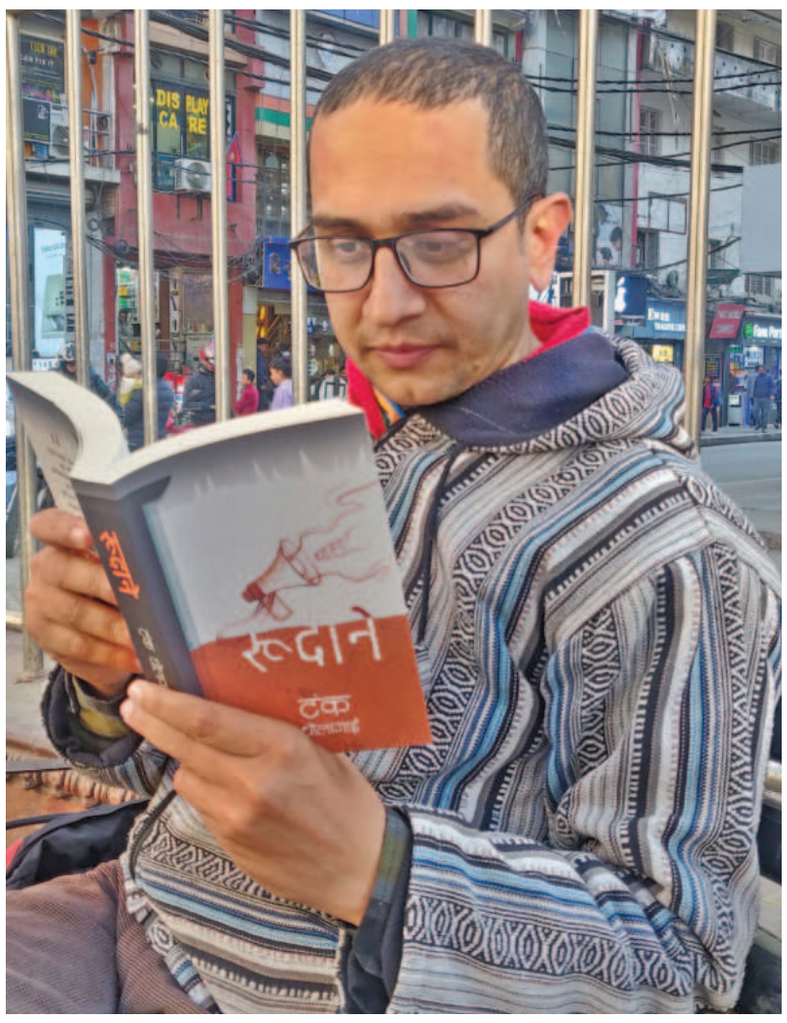


PHOTO : TRN

Tanka Chaulagain with his novel.

"What we learn from this is that most people are selfish around here. The child who refused to harm his friend must have honest parents. We should associate with such families."

In the early 1970s, he launched the 'Thaha' movement. He believed that farmers should lead farmers' politics, women should do their own, and only by awakening themselves could the oppressed overthrow their oppressors. He called the system where hardworking people remained poor while lazy and deceitful people became rich a 'dacoit system'.

He argued that in such a system, a man could remain the master even if he spent his time drinking and gambling, whereas a woman, no matter how much she worked or how much wealth she generated, would remain a servant. To dismantle such a system, he urged everyone to gain awareness.

Bista considered moral corruption, which was often overlooked, to be extremely dangerous. Once, while travelling through a remote hilly village in Makwanpur, he saw someone picking out the best pieces of roasted corn. He immediately remarked, "If you cheat just to get better corns, imagine what you would do if you got hold of the entire country!"

Throughout his political career, Bista consistently hammered the Panchayat system, its loyalists, and feudalism. However, after the restoration of democracy, some parties spread nationwide propaganda, claiming that Bista sold out himself to the Panchayat regime during the people's movement. He was unable to counter the misleading narratives propagated by a party with a nationwide organisation. As a result, even those he had tried to awaken developed misconceptions about him. However, the fact that Bista was actively involved in the movement was well known to the current Prime Minister, KP Sharma Oli, who had once delivered speeches alongside Rupchandra in Daman of Makwanpur.

In the final phase of his life, he was utterly alone, distressed, disoriented and deeply disheartened. His main sorrow was that those he had attempted to awaken had remained indifferent. Overwhelmed by despair and almost entirely without support, he passed away tragically at Bir Hospital in 1999.

Published by Sangri-La Books, this book could serve as a valuable document on the 'Thaha' movement and Bista's activities. However, despite dealing with such a powerful subject, the novel's language and presentation resemble a simple diary. Given that Chaulagain gained fame by successfully directing the renowned play 'Madhavi', the book might have been more engaging had he presented it as a biography rather than a novel. While the novel includes some fictional characters to drive the narrative forward, its chronology remains unclear despite being based on historical events.

In this 408-page novel, there is an instance where Bista is portrayed as referring to himself as a "Pancha since the year 2010 BS." This could tarnish his character, as he had opposed the Panchayat system throughout his life and advocated for a people-centric communist system. There is always room for improvement in any creative work, and this novel is not an exception.

Nepathya's 'Himal Chuchure' rereleased in new version

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

The song 'Jau Bhane Jau Ta Ni, Duichar Mahina Ghumera Aau Ta Ni, Himal Chuchure, Dai Ko Man Kasto Bani Nishthure' helped the Nepathya Band gain popularity in its early days.

Now the same song has been re-released after three decades.

According to a press release issued by Nepalaya, the old folk-inspired song was originally arranged in a 'pop' style by the band. Now, it has been reintroduced in a 'folk rock' version and will be featured in a new video.

The band and a new generation of video creators collaborated to re-create the old song in a fresh style.

Dipit Raj, a videographer who has been working with Nepathya for the past few years, has compiled visuals from Nepathya's concerts held in Nepal and the United States last year to create this four-minute-and-fifteen-second video.

The band itself has been performing the song in its new form at concerts for some time now.

Nepathya's second album, Himal Chuchure, was released in 1994.

"We initially wanted to record the song as 'Himal Chuchure Kyasto' to match the mispronunciation we had heard in school," said founder and vocalist Amrit Gurung. "But since our team couldn't agree on it, we eventually recorded it in a more refined form."

Amrit expressed his happiness at seeing how the song, which influenced their school days, has evolved.

"Nepathya has always introduced new songs according to the tastes of the younger generation," said Kiran Krishna Shrestha, the team leader of Nepalaya, which manages the band.



Nepathya's lead singer Amrit Gurung

Int'l Mother Tongue Day marked

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

On the occasion of the 25th International Mother Tongue Day, the Nepalbhasha Parisad recently organised a mother tongue poetry recitation programme at the residence of Nepalbhasha poet Shiromani Chittadhar Hridaya.

Hridaya dedicated his life to the upliftment of the mother language, and his efforts led to the establishment of what is now known as the Nepalbhasha Parisad.

A total of 23 poets from the Tamang, Maithili, Bhojpuri and Nepalbhasha languages, including Kabindra Lal Pradhan, Amir Maiya Ranjit, and Dibya Tamrakar recited poems in their respective mother tongues.

Vice Chancellor of the Department of Mother Language at Nepal Academy, Bimal Nibha, said that the academy would



collaborate with all local language communities to promote mother languages.

Emphasising the need to respect all languages spoken in the country, academician of Nepal Academy Trailokyaman Banepali stressed the importance of promoting local languages to uphold linguistic rights.

Similarly, senior writer Pushpa Chitrakar discussed the essential elements of poetry and provided commentary on the poems recited during the event.

Judge tosses part of a lawsuit against UK band The 1975

AP
London, Feb. 25

Members of the British band The 1975 cannot be held personally liable for losses of a Malaysian music festival that was shut down by authorities after lead singer Matty Healy kissed a male bandmate on stage, a London judge ruled Monday.

The organizer of the Good Vibes Festival is seeking 1.9 million pounds ($2.4 million) in losses after Healy criticized the country's anti-homosexuality laws and then kissed bassist Ross MacDonald at the Kuala Lumpur show in July 2023.

Footage of the kiss sparked a backlash in the predominantly Muslim country, where homosexuality is a crime punishable by up to 20 years in prison and caning. Some LGBTQ+ groups also criticized the band for endangering its community and disrupting the work of activists pushing for change. Future Sound Asia sued The 1975 Productions LLP in the High Court over breach of contract and said its four members owed a duty of care. But the band's lawyer argued that the suit should only target the company — not the musicians.

Judge William Hansen said the claims against the band members were "bad as a matter of law and that there is no good reason why the matter should go to trial." He allowed the case to proceed against the company but ordered FSA to pay 100,000 pounds ($126,000) in legal costs. Band attorney Edmund Cullen had argued the claim was an "illegitimate, artificial and incoherent" attempt "to pin liability on individuals" because FSA only had a contract with the band's company.

FSA's attorney Andrew Burns said authorities had initially refused to let the band perform because of reports about Healy's drug addiction and subsequent recovery. They relented after the band promised he would follow guidelines and regulations, he said.



PHOTO : AP

Matty Healy of the 1975 performs at the Reading Music Festival, England.

HOROSCOPE

tarot.com

ARIES: Your friends might inspire you to explore something new, fostering personal growth. However, the Moon-Mars clash highlights a contrast between your path and your upbringing.

TAURUS: A casual conversation could unexpectedly go public, exposing a secret you might secretly want revealed. With the Moon in your reputation sector clashing with Mars in communication.

GEMINI: Exploring a forbidden or mysterious subject intrigues you now. With the Moon in your intellectual sector aligning with healing Chiron, the real reward may be realizing others share similar struggles.

CANCER: You may want to get closer to someone on an emotional level. However, you could come to feel like these efforts are limiting your freedom to assert yourself. Your expectation that a friendship or relationship.

LEO: Goading from someone else could stir up your insecurities all day long. While the impulsive Moon in your relationship zone provokes pathbreaking Uranus in your 10th House of Ambition.

VIRGO: An invitation to do something social could set off a fight. It's probably not just about this specific offer -- there's likely a bigger sense that you're too weighed down with responsibilities.

LIBRA: Balancing work and play is about to present all sorts of challenges. It doesn't help that you're probably reading the conflict in a very literal way. The best path to your goals might not be the most obvious one!

SCORPIO: You may feel blocked from the sort of adventure you actively crave. Remind yourself that staying home might not be the end of the world. You're in an ideal position to achieve meaningful improvement.

SAGITTARIUS: Be mindful—your words could unintentionally make a conversation uncomfortable. As the expressive Moon in your communication zone clashes with assertive Mars in intimacy.

CAPRICORN: Facing a rival can ignite your motivation—if it stays fun, why not embrace the challenge? However, with the Moon clashing with Mars in your conflict sector.

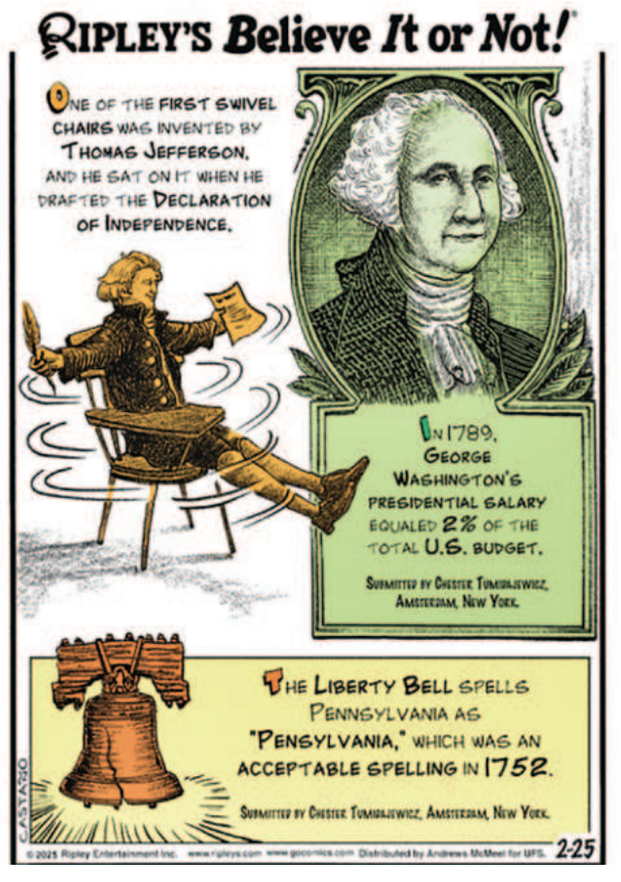
AQUARIUS: You might now be working hard to achieve some particular outcome. Once the candid Moon in your sign checks in on driven Mars in your productive 6th house, however.

PISCES: Revealing a secret is possible. You've reached a point where dancing around the issue is more awkward than just telling people what's going on. While some people in your audience might already suspect it.

CARTOON

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Can Nepal handle pressure against Myanmar's calm?

BY NAYAK PAUDEL
Kathmandu, Feb. 25



PHOTO: TRN

Coaches and captains of Nepal and Myanmar team with the winners's trophy of the International Women's Championship 2025 in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

The Myanmar national women's football team is enjoying its time in Nepal. Their joy results from the good football they have played in the last three games of the four-nation International Women's Championship.

Myanmar defeated Lebanon and Kyrgyzstan with 3-1 and 5-0 scores, respectively before playing a 2-2 draw with Nepal on February 23. However, Myanmar did not seem bothered by the draw and expected that the result would not be repeated in the final today (February 26).

"We are thankful to the host for having us in the tournament. We are already in the final, so we are satisfied so far," said Tetsuro Uki, head coach of the Myanmar side, in the pre-final conference on Tuesday.

Uki, a Japanese national who played in the J League and other levels in the Japanese football pyramid, has been involved in coaching since 2007. He has been with the Myanmar side since 2023.

"The last encounter showed how good of a team Nepal is and we are happy to face them again in the final," Uki added.

The way Uki fielded his Starting XI against Nepal on Sunday raised questions that Myanmar did not use its best players. However, Uki, in the post-match conference after the draw with Nepal, had assured that he had not taken the game lightly despite guaranteeing a spot in the final.

Nevertheless, the Myanmar side is most likely to have a different approach when they face Nepal again, this time for the trophy.

"We had a chance to beat two teams, so we are happy. It was a great game against Nepal. We are looking forward to facing them again fair and square in the final match," Win Theingi Tun, Myanmar's skipper.

Nepal and Myanmar are meeting after almost six years. Their last encounter was on April 3, 2019, at Mandalar Thiri Stadium, Myanmar, during the second round of the Women's Asian Qualifiers for the 2020 Olympics. Nepal lost it 1-3. Nepal had drawn 1-1 with Myanmar in the first round on November 11, 2018, at Thuwunna Stadium, Myanmar.

Similarly, Nepal also faced Myanmar two more times in 2019 as the two nations visited Bhubaneshwar, India, alongside Iran for the Hero Gold Cup between the four countries. Nepal lost to Myanmar by 3-0 in the league stage and by 1-3 in the final.

"We found Kyrgyzstan a far better team than how it was six years ago. Lebanon was also better than the WAFF. Myanmar is also doing great in the tournament," Nepal's head coach Rajendra Tamang said, adding, "We changed our formation against Myanmar because we needed to high press. This playstyle requires youngsters because players need to run up and down. We cannot win with walking football."

Tamang and Nepali skipper and wall Anjila Tumbapo Subba also shared that the duo wanted to win an international trophy for the country. "We lost two finals – 8th WAFF and 7th SAFF – in the past year so we want to win this one," the duo echoed.

"We have a good set of players. Our bench strength is also high. The team that will play good football and follow the plan will win in the final and we want to be that team," said Subba.

As Nepal often loses composure in the finals, it will not be easy for the Rajendra Tamang-led side to win their first international trophy against a more composed and calm side, Myanmar.

Extra time, penalties, substitutions

Sanjeev Mishra, Tournament Director at the All Nepal Football Association, informed that the final will be extended to extra time if there is a draw during the 90 minutes regulation time.

"There will be penalties if the extra time is insufficient to separate the winner," said Mishra.

Similarly, the teams will be allowed an extra substitute in the extra time after five subs throughout 90 minutes. "There is a provision for concussion substitute as well, but it cannot be used willingly," he added.

'Ticket price raised to intensify security in stadium'

The ticket rates for the final of the International Women's Championship were doubled. The general and VIP tickets that cost Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 have been increased to Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 2,000 respectively.

"The agreement with the ticketing partner had a clause to increase the ticket price if Nepal reached the final. The extra money will be utilised to intensify security in the stadium," said Suresh Shah, ANFA's spokesperson.

Dasharath Rangasala has a capacity of 15,000 spectators and is expected to be packed for the final.

"The final is on the day of Shivaratri due to which security forces will be mostly deployed in the Pashupatinath Temple region. Still, 300 police officers will be in the stadium while 150 security guards have been managed for in-stadium security," Shah added.

Likewise, the ANFA also suggested parents secure a seat for their children aged below eight years in the final. "There was not much crowd in the league stage due to which children did not suffer. So, securing a seat for children in the final will be easier and safer," said Shah.

The ANFA also requested ministers, lawmakers, local-level chiefs and political leaders to not reach the stadium and seek a seat without any prior invitation.

"If the VVIP has not been invited, we request him/her to not trouble us as the seatings are managed after proper preparation," said Mishra.

Nevertheless, the ANFA also clarified that individuals under high influence of alcohol and other narcotics during the Shivaratri festival will not be granted entry to the game despite having tickets.

SEMI-FINALISTS FOR KP OLI CUP FINALISED



BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Feb. 25

The four semi-finalists for the KP Oli Cup have been finalized after Sankata FC and Machhindra FC won their respective quarter-final matches on Tuesday.

Sankata defeated Armed Police Force (APF) Club, while Machhindra bested FC Transport United at the ANFA Complex in Lalitpur.

In the knockout tournament, which involves nine teams and began with three quarter-final matches, Tribhuvan Army Club (TAC) defeated Nepal Police Club (NPC), and the organizer, KP Oli Football Club (KPFC), triumphed over New Road Team (NRT) on Monday.

APF Club secured their place in the quarter-finals by defeating Uzbekistan's Black Bulls FC, while the other teams made a direct entry into the last eight.

Now, the semi-finals will see the Army face Sankata, and KPFC match up against Machhindra, with the games scheduled to take place two days apart at Dasharath Rangasala. The Army vs. Sankata match is set for February 28, while KPFC vs. Machhindra will be on February 29.

The quarter-final between Sankata and APF ended in a goalless draw after 90 minutes, leading to a penalty shootout, where Sankata emerged victorious with a 5-3 score.

Meanwhile, defending champions Machhindra defeated Bhutan's FC Transport United 1-0, with Stephane Zamaha Zali scoring the only goal in the 81st minute, sending Machhindra into the semi-finals.

Machhindra is now two wins away from securing their third consecutive title at the KP Oli Cup.

SNIPPETS

Date of 14th SAG fixed

Kathmandu (TRN): The South Asian Olympic Council (SAOC) has announced the dates for the 14th South Asian Games (SAG), which will be held in Pakistan. In a meeting on Tuesday, the SAOC confirmed that the games are scheduled to take place from January 23 to January 31, 2026, as reported by the Nepal Olympic Committee (NOC). The SAG will be hosted in three cities: Lahore, Islamabad, and Faisalabad. A total of 29 sports will be included, with 27 already confirmed. The host country can choose to add two additional sports. If any sport has fewer than four participating countries, it will be excluded from the games. The final list of sports for the 14th SAG will be determined in a SAOC meeting scheduled for March.

Toran takes 4-stroke lead on Day-1

Kathmandu (TRN): Toran Bikram Shahi took lead after first round of the Surya Nepal NPGA Tour Championship at the Gokarna Golf Club on Tuesday. Toran carded an impressive 7-under 65 on the opening day of the tournament and he is four strokes ahead of Niraj Tamang and Sanjay Lama. Niraj and Sanjay carded 3-under 69 each. Three pros, Dinesh Prajapati, Jayram Shrestha and Tanka Bahadur Karki are tied for fourth at 2-under 70. Rabi Khadka is seventh at 1-under 71, whereas three pros Bhu Bahadur Gurung, Bal Bhadra Rai and Ramesh Adhikari are tied for eighth at even-par 72 along with defending champion and Nepal No 1 amateur golfer Sadbhav Acharya.

Samjhana Cup Int'l TT

Kathmandu (TRN): The Lalitpur Table Tennis Club and Global Table Tennis Academy each won gold medals in the team event at the 7th Samjhana Cup International Table Tennis Tournament held on Tuesday. In the men's final, held at the National Table Tennis Training Centre in Lainchaur, Lalitpur defeated Pacific Centre 3-0 to win the title. The third place was secured by the Nepal Police Club and Global. In the women's final, Global triumphed over Pacific Centre 'A' with a score of 3-1. The Darjeeling TT Association and Lalitpur Table Tennis Club finished in third place. The top three teams in both the men's and women's categories will each receive cash prizes of NPR 50,000 for first place, NPR 25,000 for second place, and NPR 10,000 for third place..

Kiwi match-winner Ravindra relishes return after freak accident

AFP
Rawalpindi, Feb. 25



New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra on Monday thanked his support staff and well-wishers for the care after a freak on-field accident as he returned to action with a match-winning century that booked his side's passage to the semi-finals of the Champions Trophy.

Ravindra hit 112 as New Zealand marched into the semis, taking India along with them, after his team's win over Bangladesh in Rawalpindi.

The result meant that Bangladesh and hosts Pakistan both crash out of contention for a place in the semis in the 50-over tournament of the International Cricket Council (ICC).

Ravindra's fourth ODI ton, on his Champions Trophy debut, sealed New Zealand's chase of 237 with 23 balls and five wickets to spare.

The left-hander missed New Zealand's opening victory over Pakistan after being hit by the ball on his forehead when fielding in a recent tri-series match against the same opponents.

"Yeah, definitely a freak accident," Ravindra told reporters on Monday. "I think things like that don't really happen too often."

He said: "I'm very grateful to have a great support crew around me in terms of Black Caps set up, coaches and doc and physio that have been able to come out of it reasonably well and I'm extremely grateful for the love and support of everyone."

Ravindra walked into bat with New Zealand in trouble at 15-2 and put on key stands including a 129-run fourth wicket partnership with Tom Latham, who hit 55.

The knock came after Michael Bracewell returned figures of 4-26 with off-spin to restrict Bangladesh to 236-9.

"It's obviously been interesting dealing with the return to play protocols and stuff," said Ravindra.

"But having the support around me has been great and being able to come here and contribute to a win for the Black Caps, an environment that I hold dearly and I enjoy so much playing for... it was cool to come back and really enjoy my cricket again after that weird moment."

Ravindra's latest knock re-affirmed his love for ICC events - he struck a ton on his ODI World Cup debut in 2023 and added another later in the tournament against Pakistan.

"He's doing Rachin things I guess," said skipper Mitchell Santner who was full of praise for the 25-year-old who struck 12 fours and a six.

"He loves ICC events. Looks like he never left the game. He wasn't as fluid as he'd have liked but when he gets going he's tough to stop. His partnerships were good too."

New Zealand play their final group match against India in Dubai on Sunday.

Rain washes out game between South Africa and Australia

AP
Rawalpindi, Feb. 25



Rain washed out the Champions Trophy game between South Africa and two-time winner Australia on Tuesday without a ball being bowled.

The pitch remained under covers at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium throughout the day because of a persistent light drizzle before umpires called off the game shortly after 5 p.m. local time.

Both unbeaten teams go into their last Group B game with a chance to qualify for the semi-finals with three points already secured. Australia plays against Afghanistan at Lahore on Friday while South Africa meets England at Karachi on Saturday.

South Africa and Australia began their campaigns by posting 300-plus scores against Afghanistan and England, respectively.

Australia, coming into the Champions Trophy without three frontline fast bowlers, made the tournament's highest-ever chase of 352 on the back of Josh Inglis' century against England at Lahore.

South Africa registered an emphatic 107-run win over Afghanistan at Karachi after Ryan Rickelton made his maiden ODI hundred in a strong total of 315-6.

New Zealand and India have already qualified for the semifinals after winning both their Group A games against Pakistan and Afghanistan.

England will take on Afghanistan in a must-win game for both teams to stay in semifinal contention in Lahore on Wednesday.

Pakistan bemoans 'death of cricket' after Champions Trophy flop

AFP
Karachi, Feb. 25

Gloom and demands for wholesale change engulfed cricket-crazy Pakistan on Tuesday after the hosts crashed out of the Champions Trophy in the group stage, barely a week into celebrating the return of a major tournament.

The title-holders lost their opening game to New Zealand by 60 runs in Karachi last week before Sunday's six-wicket defeat to arch-rivals India pushed them to the brink of an early exit.

Pakistan needed Bangladesh to beat New Zealand on Monday to keep their slim hopes of a place in the semi-finals alive, but the result went the other way.

Thursday's match with Bangladesh in Rawalpindi has been reduced to a dead-rubber.

"We have been backing these players for the last few years but they are not learning nor improving," former captain Wasim Akram told AFP.

"It is time for a major shake-up. We need to improve our system of domestic cricket so that we can produce quality cricketers, not ordinary ones."

A lack of competitiveness in domestic cricket and low-quality pitches have been blamed for not preparing players for the international stage.

The sport in Pakistan is also held back by frequent changes to the cricket board, coaching teams and selection panels, critics say.

Such changes are driven by politics and not merit, according to observers.

"I feel very despondent with the state of Pakistan cricket," former captain Rashid Latif told AFP.

"We have to follow merit and bring in professionals in the administration of the game and not people on a political basis.

"Frequent changes in the Pakistan Cricket Board, selection committee and captains have failed us in forming a proper set-up and team."

'No fight'

The early elimination stings for a country that had relished hosting its first major cricket tournament in 29 years, after significant improvements in security.

"We were thrilled that an international event had finally returned to our country, but the joy was short-lived," said 26-year-old Umar Siraj, a pharmacist in Rawalpindi.

"The hardest part of being a Pakistan fan is that you end up praying for other teams to lose," he chuckled. "It's painful. I'm gutted."

Pakistan's Champions Trophy flop is nothing new. They also crashed out of the 2023 ODI World Cup in the first round in India.

It was followed by their exit at the same stage in the Twenty20 World Cup in the United States and West Indies last year -- a tournament won by neighbours India.

Pakistan last month finished ninth and last in the World Test Championship after drawing a home series with the West Indies.

The latest debacle, and on home soil, represents a new low.

"It is disappointing that they didn't even put up a fight," said Naseem Satti, a 46-year-old government servant.

"We have no quality bowlers, no reliable batters and it seems cricket is dead in Pakistan."

Asma Batool, a 52-year-old housewife, underlined just what cricket means to people in Pakistan.

"Cricket is the only source of entertainment for our youth," she said.

"Our nation finds solace in this game."

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