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THE RISING NEPAL

ALL BE HAPPY, ALL BE WELL

Balen wins Jhapa-5 by huge margin

■ RSP secures 73 seats, leads in 50 as counting continues ■ Lamichhane wins, Gagan Thapa trailing behind

BY ARPANA ADHIKARI
Kathmandu, Mar. 7

Balendra Shah 'Balen', the senior leader of Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), has been elected to the House of Representatives (HoR) from Jhapa Constituency-5, defeating former Prime Minister and powerful CPN-UML chairman KP Sharma Oli by a huge margin of 49,614 votes.

According to the Election Commission, Shah garnered 68,348 votes, while Oli received 18,734 votes.

Balen, the former Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, contested the election against Oli with the determination to defeat the seasoned politician, who had been winning elections from Jhapa constituency since 1990.

Likewise, Samir Tamang of the Shram Sanskriti Party finished third with 9,233 votes, followed by Mandhara Chimariya of the Nepali Congress (NC) with 1,821 votes. Laxmi Prasad Sangraula of Rastriya Prajatantra Party with 1,536 votes.

Following the Gen-Z protests on September 8–9, Oli has faced widespread criticism and public backlash over the handling of the movement and the deaths of young protesters. He resigned and flew to a safe place on September 9 last year.

He looked helpless before Balen in the constituency that was his stronghold in the elections held six months after the fall of his government.

Oli served as prime minister thrice and led the UML for decades. His defeat by Shah, who is widely seen as representing an alternative political force, reflects growing public frustration over issues such as bad governance and corruption. His defeat is likely to mark the end of his political career.





PHOTO: TRN
Prime ministerial candidate of Rastriya Swatantra Party, Balendra Shah, and President of the same Party, Rabi Lamichhane, receiving their victory certificates, on Saturday.



Dor Pd. Aryal



Swarnim Wagle



Deepak Bohora



Jagdish Kharel

Likewise, RSP president Rabi Lamichhane has won the election from Chitwan, winning by a margin of 39,838 votes.

Lamichhane secured 54,402 votes, while his closest contender, Mina Kumari Kharel of NC, received 14,564 votes. Ashmin Kharel of the UML finished third with 6,992 votes.

Lamichhane was first elected to the HoR from Chitwan-2 in 2022, winning by a margin of 34,170 votes. However, he was later suspended over a dual citizenship case. In the April 2023 by-election, he returned with an even stronger mandate, garnering 54,175 votes and defeating his nearest rival by a margin of over 43,000 votes.

Meanwhile, as vote counting continues across the country on Saturday, the RSP has won 73 seats and is leading in 50 of the 165 constituencies under the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system as of 10:00 pm on Saturday.

The RSP, which has put forward Balendra Shah as its candidate for prime minister, has swept in Kathmandu, the southern plains, and major urban centres across the country.

The party is maintaining large margins against candidates from established parties such as the Nepali Congress (NC), CPN-UML, and the Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

At the time this report was prepared, the NC had won nine seats and was leading in 10 constituencies, while the CPN-UML had secured three seats and was leading in eight constituencies. The NCP had won three seats and was leading in four constituencies, and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) had won one seat.

Similarly, the RSP candidates are leading in several constituencies. The Shram Sanskriti Party, led by Harka Sampang, is leading in three constituencies.

Independent candidate Mahabir Pun has been elected in Myagdi with 22,850 votes, while his close contender of CPN-UML Hari Krishna Shrestha received 7,919 votes.

Meanwhile, several prominent leaders of the CPN-UML, Nepali Congress (NC) and Nepal Communist Party (NCP) have been defeated by RSP candidates by huge margins, while none of the Madhes-centric parties have secured any seats so far.

SP candidates who own the election

Likewise, Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) leader Swarnim Wagle has emerged victorious from Tanahun–1, securing 38,040 votes. His closest contender, Govinda Bhattarai of the Nepali Congress (NC), received 16,231 votes, followed by Bhagwati Neupane of the CPN-UML with 5,830 votes.

Similarly, Sobita Gautam has won the election from Chitwan–3, defeating former mayor of Chitwan Metropolitan City, Renu Dahal, by a huge margin. Gautam secured 59,277 votes, while Dahal received 20,615 votes, followed by Tek Prasad Gurung of the Nepali Congress with 8,344 votes.

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) secured a clean sweep in all 10 constituencies of Kathmandu and both constituencies of Bhaktapur, defeating several prominent leaders.

RSP's Sasmit Pokharel emerged victorious in Kathmandu–5, defeating heavyweight leaders from the Nepali Congress (NC) and CPN-UML. Pokharel secured 30,737 votes, while Pradip Paudel of the NC finished second with 9,159 votes, followed by Ishwar Pokharel, a senior UML leader and former deputy prime minister, who received 4,701 votes.

» SEE PAGE 6

PM KARKI TALKS TO UAE PRESIDENT

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 7

Prime Minister Sushila Karki held a telephone conversation with the President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, on Saturday afternoon.

During the conversation, Prime Minister Karki condemned the attacks targeting civilian infrastructure in the UAE's sovereign territory and expressed Nepal's solidarity with the UAE in these challenging times. She urged all parties involved to exercise maximum restraint, avoid escalating tensions, and ensure the safety of civilians, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

Stating that war can never be an alternative to peace, PM Karki emphasised that lasting peace can only be achieved through diplomacy and dialogue. She also expressed Nepal's hope that the situation would return to normal as soon as possible.

She expressed gratitude to the UAE government for ensuring public safety and for taking equal care of all residents, including Nepali citizens working and living there, as well as visitors and those in transit. She also expressed deep sorrow upon learning of the tragic loss of a Nepali citizen's life on duty at Zayed International Airport on March 1. Additionally, she conveyed concern upon hearing of two Nepali citizens being injured in the ICAD area of Abu Dhabi on March 5.

On the occasion, Prime Minister Karki also highly praised the UAE President's leadership in continuously contributing to regional and global diplomatic efforts to promote peace and development. She expressed confidence that, in the coming years, economic cooperation and the relationship between the peoples of the two countries would continue to strengthen, expanding and solidifying their bilateral ties.

» SEE PAGE 6

RSP LEADS WITH BIG MARGIN IN PR VOTE COUNTING

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 7

The Election Commission has been counting the votes under the proportional (PR) electoral system in the constituencies where the counting of the First-Past-The-Post system concluded. The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) is leading by a significant margin in the PR system as well, according to the Election Commission (EC).

As of 10:00 pm on Saturday, out of 1,039,330 votes counted, the RSP has secured 531,709 votes, placing it ahead of all other parties. The Nepali Congress (NC) is currently in second place with 175,368 votes, followed by the CPN-UML with 142,194 votes.

The Nepali Communist Party (NCP) is in fourth position with 72,451 votes, while the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) has garnered 38,464 votes.

Other parties include the Shram Sanskriti Party with 18,996 votes, Rastriya Parivartan Party with 14,388 votes, Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) with 4,505 votes, Janata Samajwadi Party with 3,391 votes, Nepal Workers and Peasants Party with 3,387 votes, and the Janamat Party with 2,926 votes.

Uncertainty looms over fate of Nepali migrant workers in war-torn Middle East

BY MODNATH DHAKAL
Kathmandu, Mar. 7

The tension that began in West Asia (or Middle East) with Israel and the USA attacking Iran has entered the eighth day on Saturday.

As the conflict has shown no sign of waning and no immediate solutions being offered by both the parties, concerns to the safety and security of more than 1.72 million Nepali migrant workers in 13 countries in the region have been troubling the stakeholders back home.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Nepalis in Iran, Israel, Egypt, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Lebanon, Iraq and Cyprus are or likely to be affected by the ongoing war that has affected about half a dozen countries in West Asia. Cyprus is a European country while Egypt is in northern Africa.

The largest number of Nepalis are in the UAE with a presence of 478,144, followed by Saudi Arabia at 383,865, Qatar at 357,000, Kuwait at 175,000, and Iraq at 30,000. There are only six Nepali citizens in Iran and 500 in Egypt. What is leaving the authorities at the MoFA, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security and other concerned departments like the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), Foreign Employment Board (FEB), and Department of Consular Services (DoCS) perplexed is no established mechanism for rescue and repatriation of Nepalis from West Asia.

In the past, the country had sought support from India and a couple of international agencies in rescuing and repatriating Nepalis from the conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan, Bahrain and Lebanon.

One Nepali, Diwas Shrestha from Gorkha, was killed in an attack in a residential area in the UAE. As the situation is critical, the government is waiting for a favourable time even to repatriate his body. In another incident, two Nepalis were injured but they are already discharged from hospital following treatment.

Nepal has less than a dozen aircraft including the flag-carrier Nepal Airlines Corporation, Himalaya Airlines and Buddha Air. It would take more than a year even if all those were deployed for the rescue operation.

Rescue plan in offing

Spokesperson of the MoLESS Pitambar Ghimire said that the government



File photo

TRN SPECIAL

doesn't have any plan yet to conduct rescue works and bring Nepalis back home. "The government is finalising the rescue plan. Until then, through a dedicated online system, details of Nepalis and applications for any support are being collected," he said.

Immediate response has also been restricted by the closed airspace in various Gulf countries including Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE.

Ghimire said that the MoLESS has conducted virtual meetings with the labour attaches deployed at the Nepali mission in West Asia.

The MoFA and MoLESS are coordinating with eight Nepali embassies and two consular offices in the region. The missions are issuing various notices, requests and travel advisories for Nepalis in those countries as well as abroad. The Ministry had also issued an advisory to remain indoors as far as possible, stay alert and take necessary precautions as suggested by the governments of the respective countries. It has also suggested to avoid unnecessary travel without prior approval from the relevant authorities, stay in regular contact with their families and Nepali missions.

The government has formed an Emergency Response Team (ERT) which is led by Foreign Secretary Amrit Bahadur Rai and includes representatives from the ministries of Home Affairs; Finance; Law; Tourism and Civil Aviation; Education; and Labour and Employment, and DoFE, DOCS, Department of Immigration and Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal.

Likewise, the Emergency Control Room (ECR) established at the MoFA has become fully operational.

It is providing round the clock hotline service, email response, necessary coordination and preparation of situational reports. The ECR can be reached via telephone numbers 9744441227, 9744441228, 9744441229 (including WhatsApp, Viber, and Botim) and email emergency@mofa.gov.np.

However, the DoFE is clueless about the entire process. A senior officer of the department said that they are just an executing agency and function under the directives of Foreign or Labour Ministry.

Similarly, President of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies, Bhuwan Singh Gurung, the employers don't take the responsibility for the rescue and repatriation.

» SEE PAGE 6

Indian PM congratulates Nepal on successful elections

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 7



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has congratulated the people and the Government of Nepal for the successful and peaceful conduct of the recent elections. In his post shared on X on Saturday, Modi said it was encouraging to see Nepali citizens actively exercising their democratic rights. He described the elections as a historic milestone in Nepal's democratic journey.

Modi stated that the enthusiastic participation of voters reflects the strength of Nepal's democratic process and the commitment of its people to democratic values. Extending his best wishes, the Indian Prime Minister said India remains committed to strengthening its close partnership with Nepal. He expressed hope that the two countries would continue to work together to achieve shared peace, progress and prosperity.

India and Nepal share long-standing cultural, economic and political ties, and leaders of both countries have repeatedly emphasised the importance of further enhancing bilateral cooperation in the years ahead.

Small Earth Nepal to install climate tracking system in Dolpa

BY INDIRA ARYAL
Kathmandu, Mar. 7

Until 10 to 20 years ago, Padma Dorje Lama, Principal of Namkha Khyung Monastery in Yalbang, Humla, used to witness up to 10 metres of snowfall during the winter season. However, he said the volume of snow has now decreased drastically to barely one metre in the area.

According to him, snowfall patterns have changed drastically over the past two decades.

"Snow and rainfall have become increasingly unpredictable. Sometimes there is a sudden snowfall after the winter season and at other times it occurs

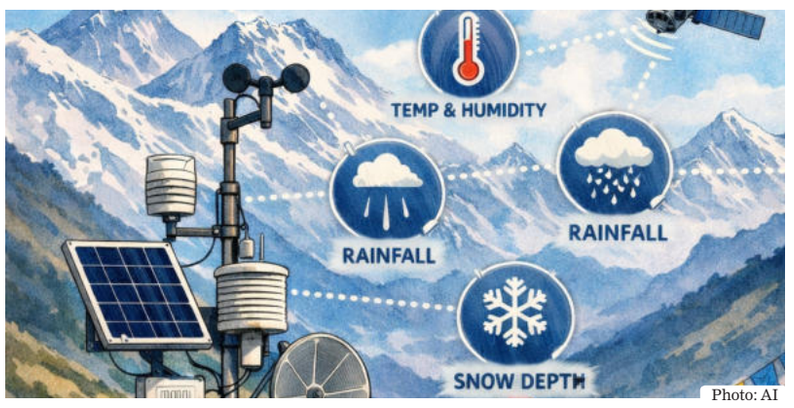


Photo: AI

even before the season begins. The pattern has become unbalanced," he said.

With rising temperatures, noticeable ecological changes have begun to emerge in the region.

Animals that were previously found in lower altitudes are now being spotted in higher areas. "Species like musk deer (locally known as dumshi), foxes, deer and monkeys are now seen around here," he said, adding that some wildlife has become less common in recent years.

Water sources have also been affected, he said. There are many small lakes in the area, but their water levels have declined significantly. "There used to be plenty of water in those lakes, but now only a small amount remains," Lama said.

However, there is no weather monitoring station in the area so far, and local people rely largely on their own observations to assess changing weather patterns.

» SEE PAGE 6

BULLION
(Rs. per tola)

Hallmark Gold	: Rs. 313,400 /-
Worked Gold	: NA
Silver	: Rs. 5,445 /-

STOCK

NEPSE	: 2,712.49
Total Amount	: 6,234,381,480.75
No. of Share	: 15,184,607

Gold, silver imports surge significantly, over Rs. 46 billion spent in seven months

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 7



Nepal's imports of gold and silver have surged significantly in the first seven months of the current fiscal year despite record-high prices in the domestic and international markets.

According to trade statistics from the Department of Customs, the country imported gold and silver worth Rs. 46.34 billion during the first seven months of the current fiscal year, compared to Rs. 16.33 billion during the corresponding period of the last fiscal year.

Gold imports increased moderately in terms of quantity but rose sharply in value due to soaring prices.

The country imported about 1,220 kilograms of gold during the first seven months (mid-July 2025 to mid-February 2026) of the current fiscal year 2025/26.

In terms of quantity, this is almost 16 per cent (168 kilograms) higher than the gold imported during the corresponding period of the last fiscal year.

About 1,052 kilograms of gold was imported during the first seven months of fiscal year 2024/25.

In terms of monetary value, the country spent almost double on the import of an additional 168 kilograms of gold during the first seven months of the current fiscal year compared to the same period last fiscal year.

This increase is attributed to the hike in gold prices in the international market.

The country spent Rs. 22.34 billion on the import of 1,220 kilograms of gold during the first seven months of the current fiscal year, while only about Rs. 12.33 billion was spent on importing 1,052 kilograms during the corresponding period last fiscal year.

The country imported just 1,622 kilograms of gold between mid-July 2024 and mid-July 2025 — a significant 45 per cent drop compared to the previous fiscal year 2023/24.

In fiscal year 2023/24, Nepal imported 2,909 kilograms of gold. The total value of gold imports also fell by 23.15 per cent, from Rs. 25.95 billion in 2023/24 to Rs. 19.94 billion in fiscal year 2024/25.

The increase in imports also contributed to government revenue.

The government collected Rs. 2.23 billion in revenue from gold imports during the review period.

According to gold market expert Tej Ratna Shakya, demand for gold and silver increased at the beginning of the fiscal year despite rising prices, as consumers anticipated further price hikes.

Gold prices reached a record high of Rs. 339,300 per tola in the domestic market at the end of January 2026. The price surged by more than Rs. 20,000 per tola in a single day. In the international market, gold prices climbed to USD 5,551 per ounce around the same time.

The surge in global prices has been linked to geopolitical tensions and new economic measures introduced by the President of the United States, Donald Trump.

Meanwhile, silver imports have surged significantly during the first seven months of the current fiscal year.

According to Customs data, about 82,407 kilograms of silver worth Rs. 24 billion was imported during the first seven months of the current fiscal year.

In terms of quantity, silver imports surged by 182 per cent during the review period compared to the same period last fiscal year.

Only about 29,159 kilograms worth Rs. 4 billion was imported during the first seven months of fiscal year 2024/25.

In terms of value, silver imports were six times higher during the review period.

In fiscal year 2024/25, about 50,000 kilograms of silver worth Rs. 7.02 billion was imported. In fiscal year 2023/24, around 31,889 kilograms of silver worth Rs. 3.28 billion had been imported.

Shakya said the sharp increase in silver demand is largely due to rising gold prices, which have pushed many consumers toward more affordable alternatives.

"The demand for silver increased as consumers turned to more affordable options amid soaring gold prices," he said, adding that silver prices have also been rising, though not as sharply as gold.

Silver prices in the domestic market recently reached a record high of Rs. 7,505 per tola.

HONG KONG FIRM SEEKS $2 BILLION FROM PANAMA

AP
Hong Kong, Mar. 7

A subsidiary of a Hong Kong-based company that has lost control of two critical ports on the Panama Canal said it is seeking $2 billion of compensation in damages from Panama over its "illegal" takeover of the ports.

Panama Ports Company, a unit of Hong Kong's CK Hutchison Holdings, said in a Friday statement that it is demanding the sum under international arbitration proceedings that it had already started.

Panama's government last week seized control of the Balboa and Cristobal ports on each end of the Panama Canal, a crucial waterway for maritime trade, after the country's Supreme Court declared earlier that a concession allowing the Panama Ports Company to run the pair of ports was unconstitutional.

Panama Ports Company operated the two ports since 1997 and had only renewed its concession in 2021 for another 25 years. Beijing and Hong Kong's governments had also hit back at Panama over the seizure of the two ports.

The two ports came into the spotlight after U.S. President Donald Trump, early last year, accused China of "running" the Panama Canal.

After CK Hutchison announced a deal in March last year that it would sell the bulk of their dozens of global ports, including the two Panama ports, to a consortium that involved U.S. investment firm BlackRock in a $23 billion deal, Beijing was quick to protest and the deal has been largely stalled over the past months.

CK Hutchison and the Panama Ports Company "will not relent and they are not coming for some token relief – they will assert all of their rights and damages they are due because of the radical breaches and anti-investor conduct of the Panamanian State," Friday's statement said.

In the statement, Panama Ports Company also said the Panamanian state had previously misstated the compensation figure sought in press comments. Panama Economy Minister Felipe Chapman had earlier said the company was seeking $1.5 billion in compensation.

In a separate statement on Friday, CK Hutchison accused Panama of occupying the two ports and taking the property and personnel of the Panama Ports Company "without transparency." The company also said it would continue to "pursue recourse to available national and international legal proceedings" on the matter.

Oil and gas prices rise as Iran war shows no signs of letting up

AP
New York, Mar. 7

The price of oil surged higher and showed no signs of halting its rapid climb a week after the U.S. and Israel launched major attacks on Iran that escalated into a war in the Middle East.

The conflict, in which nearly every country in the Middle East has sustained damage from missiles or drone strikes, has left ships that carry roughly 20 million barrels of oil a day stranded in the Persian Gulf, unable to safely pass through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Gulf that is bordered on its north side by Iran.

The disruption and damage to key oil and gas facilities in the Middle East has led to an interruption in the supply of oil and gas.

Oil prices surpassed $90 a barrel Friday, with American crude settling at $90.90, up 36% from a week ago, and Brent, the international standard, climbing 27% over the course of the week to land at $92.69.

The fallout is ratcheting up what consumers and business will pay for gasoline, diesel and jet fuel, with some drivers already feeling it at the pump.

"It's crazy. It's not needed, especially at a time when people are already struggling, but not unexpected from all this turmoil that's going on," said Mark Doran, who was pumping gas in Middlebury, Vermont Friday. "I don't think there's been an end in sight to any Middle East conflict that's been started by us, so the fact that they say that there's going to be an end that quickly is not believable, and the Middle East is, you know, a place that the U.S. is not going to solve."

On Monday, President Donald Trump said that the U.S. expected its military operations against Iran to last four to five weeks but has " the capability to go far longer." And on Friday, Trump appeared to rule out talks with Iran absent its "unconditional surrender."

"The more news we get, the more it seems like this is going to last a really long time," said Al Salazar, head of macro oil and gas research at Enverus.

In the U.S., a gallon of regular gasoline rose to $3.32 on Friday, up 11% from a week ago, according to AAA motor club. Diesel was selling for $4.33 a gallon Friday, up 15% from a week ago.

The price shocks were felt even more heavily in Europe and Asia, markets that rely more heavily on energy supplies from the Middle East. Diesel prices doubled in Europe, and jet fuel prices rose by close to 200% in Asia, according to Claudio Galimberti, chief economist at Rystad Energy.

Energy prices climbed throughout the week as Iran launched a series of retaliatory attacks, including a drone strike on the U.S. Embassy in Saudi Arabia, and the conflict widened. Iran also hit a major refinery in Saudi Arabia and a liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility in Qatar, halting flows of refined products and taking about 20% of the world's LNG supply offline. "We keep seeing news of vessels being hit or refineries or pipelines, so the list is very long," Galimberti said. As a result, roughly 9 million barrels of oil per day are off the market because of facilities being hit or producers taking precautionary measures, he said. "Right now, with all of this shut in, we are in a situation of extreme deficit."

The U.S. is a net exporter of oil, but that does not mean it is immune to increases in the price of oil or gasoline, or that its producers can just make up the difference.

Oil is traded on global markets, so even the oil produced in the U.S. has risen in price based on what's happening in the Middle East. And for many American oil producers, "if you put more wells in the ground, there's about a six-month lag before you get that production uplift," Salazar said.

In addition, the U.S. can't simply turn all of its crude oil into gasoline. That's because most of the oil produced in the U.S. is light, sweet crude, and refineries on the East and West coasts are primarily designed to process heavier, sour crude. As a result, the U.S. exports some of its crude oil and imports some refined products such as gasoline.

US loses a 92,000 jobs last month

AP
Washington, Mar. 7

American employers unexpectedly cut 92,000 jobs last month, a sign that the labor market remains under strain. The unemployment rate blipped up to 4.4%.

Hiring deteriorated from January, when companies, nonprofits and government agencies added a healthy 126,000 jobs, the Labor Department reported Friday. Economists had expected 60,000 new jobs in February. Revisions also cut 69,000 jobs from December and January payrolls.

The surprisingly weak employment picture in February adds to the economic uncertainty over the war with Iran, which has caused oil prices to surge and saddled business and consumers with unforeseen costs.

"The job market is struggling in the face of so many headwinds," said Heather Long, chief economist at Navy Federal Credit Union. "Companies are going to be even more reluctant to hire this spring until the war ends and they can see consumers still spending. It's a tense time for the U.S. economy."

The job market had been expected to rebound this year from a lackluster 2025 when it was buffeted by President Donald Trump's erratic tariff policies, his purge of the federal workforce and the lingering effects of high interest rates. In 2025, employers added just 15,000 jobs a month. Hopes for a 2026 rebound rose after January hiring came in above expectations.

"Just when it looked like the labor market was stabilizing, this report delivers a knockdown blow to that view," said Olu Sonola, head of U.S. economics at Fitch Ratings. "It's bad news whichever way you look at it."

Construction companies cut 11,000 jobs last month, which likely reflects frigid weather. And healthcare firms shed 28,000 jobs after a four-week strike by more than 30,000 nurses and other front-line workers at Kaiser Permanente in California and Hawaii. Health care has been one of the job market's strong points.

Factories cut 12,000 jobs and have now lost jobs for 14 of the last 15 months. Restaurants and bars lost nearly 30,000 jobs. Administrative and support services firms cut nearly 19,000 jobs and courier and messenger services almost 17,000.

Financial firms added 10,000 jobs, though job cuts continue to hit that sector as well this year. Average hourly wages rose 0.4% from January and 3.8% from a year earlier. The outlook for the job market – and the entire economy – is clouded by the war with Iran.

The combination of weak hiring and increasing inflationary pressures arising from the war creates a nightmare for the Federal Reserve, which must decide whether to cut interest rates to help the job market or hold off to help keep a lid on prices. "This is probably the worst scenario for monetary policy," said Eugenio Aleman, chief economist at Raymond James.

Sale of blossomed mango trees underway in Saptari

BY DHIRENDRA PRASAD SAH
Rajbiraj, Mar. 7



Although mango—the king of fruits—has not yet borne fruit, the buying and selling of mango blossoms has already increased in Saptari.

In Saptari and other districts of the Tarai, traders have started visiting mango orchards to purchase the blossoms.

In Saptari, which is well known for mango production, traders currently visit orchards, inspect the blossoms on the trees, and negotiate prices accordingly.

Instead of buying just one or two trees, many traders purchase entire orchards containing numerous trees.

Farmers said that the deals are usually made through verbal agreements, based on the amount of blossoms on the trees and the estimated potential production.

Mohammad Hanif, a resident of Rajbiraj Municipality–9 in Saptari, said that he purchased the blossoms of 20–25 mango trees in a large mango orchard near his house for about Rs. 90,000.

According to him, the trees currently have abundant blossoms, and if pesticides are applied on time and proper care is taken, a good harvest is likely.

According to traders, the price increases once the fruit begins to form (when the small mango buds appear).

Therefore, buying the orchard at the blossom stage is cheaper.

After purchasing the blossoms, the trader becomes responsible for taking care of the fruit—spraying pesticides and protecting the trees. If the fruit does not develop well, the trader bears the loss.

On the other hand, orchard owners said that they are forced to sell them in advance because they are unable to take proper care of them on time and there is a risk of the mango blooms falling or being damaged by insects and hailstorm.

Bhola Chaudhary, a farmer from Shambhunath Municipality, said that they sell the trees with blossoms because there is a shortage of manpower to maintain a large orchard.

He said that after purchasing the mango trees, the traders build a thatched hut in the orchard and live there. "They take care of the orchard until the fruit ripens. They stay in the orchard day and night to keep the fruit safe and get a good yield. We cannot do that work, so we are selling the orchard," he said.

According to Kisundev Raut, chief of the Agriculture Knowledge Centre in Saptari, about 75 per cent of mango trees in the district are of the Maldaha variety, around 10 per cent are Bombay, Kalkatiya, Dashari, and Mallika varieties, and the remaining 15 per cent consist of other varieties.

He said that mango farming is mainly practiced in the northern region of the district, including Dharampur, Rupnagar, Ghoghanpur, Jagatpur, Kanchanpur, Terahauta, Prasabani, Bakdhuwa, Kushaha, Kalyanpur, Kadarbona, and Kathauna, among other areas.

Mangoes produced in Saptari are supplied to various cities of the country, including Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Hetauda, Birgunj, and Pokhara. Around 40 to 50 per cent of the mangoes consumed in the capital go through Saptari.

Mangoes of Maldaha and Dashahari varieties produced here are exported to Kolkata and Siliguri in India and are also sent to Gulf countries, including Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Statistics show that about 25 per cent of the mangoes produced in the district are exported abroad, said retired Senior Agricultural Development Officer Anupalal Sah.

This year, farmers are enthusiastic because mango trees have produced abundant blossoms. Compared to last year, a significant increase in production is expected.

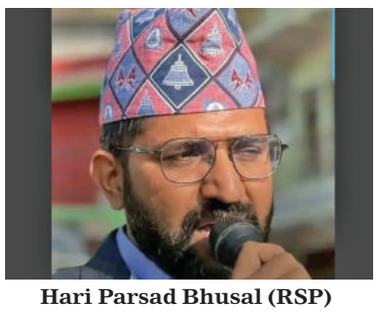
According to Raut, if the weather remains favourable and the storms that usually occur in the month of Chaitra do not damage the blossoms and fruits, production could be up to double that of last year

He said that there are mango trees in an area of about 9,000 hectares of land in the district.

RSP secures major wins across multiple constituencies


Badan Kumar Bhandari (RSP)


Sagar Dhakal (RSP)


Hari Parsad Bhusal (RSP)


Pramod Kumar Mahato (RSP)


Sitaram Sah (RSP)


Rajesh Kumar Chaudhary (RSP)


Ananda Bahadur Chand (RSP)


Suresh Chaudhary (RSP)


Bharat Kumar Swar (NC)


Bharat Bahadur Khadka (NC)


Ishtiyak Raee Emaly (UML)


Mahabir Pun

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 7

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) recorded significant victories in several constituencies in the House of Representatives elections held on Thursday, defeating powerful candidates from major political parties, including the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML.

The party won in key constituencies such as Kavrepalanchok-2, Gulmi-1, Arghakhanchi, Mahottari-1, Saptari-4, Rautahat-1, Kailali-5, and two constituencies in Banke district, indicating growing support for the relatively new political force.

In Kavrepalanchok-2, RSP candidate Badan Kumar Bhandari won by a wide margin, defeating Nepali Congress candidate Madhu Prasad Acharya by a big margin of 35,476 votes. Bhandari secured 53,344 votes while Acharya received 17,868 votes. CPN-UML candidate Ashok Kumar Byanju Shrestha obtained 13,940 votes, and Nepali Communist Party candidate Basundhara Humagai received 8,107 votes.

In Gulmi-1, RSP candidate Sagar Dhakal defeated CPN-UML central committee member and former minister Pradeep Gyawali by 15,120 votes. Dhakal received 30,448 votes while Gyawali secured 15,328 votes. Nepali Congress leader Chandrakant Bhandari obtained 13,731 votes.

Similarly, in Arghakhanchi, RSP candidate Hari Prasad Bhusal won the election with 35,023 votes, defeating CPN-UML candidate Pitambar Bhusal who received 22,649 votes. Nepali Congress candidate Bishnu Prasad Khanal secured 18,983 votes.

In Mahottari-1, RSP candidate Pramod Kumar Mahato was elected with 34,636 votes. He defeated Nepali Communist Party candidate Giriraj Mani Pokhrel by a margin of 22,012 votes. Pokhrel secured 12,624 votes while CPN-UML candidate Laxmi Mahato Koiri received 6,591 votes, and Nepali Congress candidate Mukesh Kafle got 6,213 votes.

In Saptari-4, RSP candidate Sitaram Sah won the seat with 36,412 votes. His nearest rival, Nepali Congress candidate Tejulal Chaudhary, secured 13,103 votes.

In Rautahat-1, RSP candidate Rajesh Kumar Chaudhary was elected after defeating CPN-UML candidate Ajay Kumar Gupta by 18,253 votes. Chaudhary received 28,946 votes while Gupta secured 10,693 votes.

In Kailali-5, RSP candidate Ananda Bahadur Chand won the election with 31,953 votes. Out of 110,539 registered voters in the constituency, 65,963 votes were cast.

In Banke district, RSP candidates Suresh Kumar Chaudhary and Khagendra Sunar were elected from constituencies 1 and 3, respectively, while CPN-UML candidate Mohammad Ishtiyaq Rai won from constituency 2.

In Banke-1, Suresh Kumar Chaudhary defeated Nepali Congress candidate Narayan Prasad Gaudel by 17,491 votes, securing 32,792 votes compared to Gaudel's 15,301 votes. CPN-UML candidate Surya Prasad Dhakal received 11,095 votes in the same constituency.

After the win, Rai said that he would work with the nation and the people as his top priority. He said that even during the strong wave of the RSP, the people's decision to elect him represents a victory for the overall development and harmony of the constituency.

He stated that the people of Banke-2 showed him great support and affection even in such circumstances because of the many developments and construction works he had carried out in the past. He also said that he would never allow the people's expectations and trust in him to weaken.

Meanwhile, independent candidate Mahabir Pun won the election in Myagdi with 22,850 votes, defeating CPN-UML candidate Hari Krishna Shrestha, who secured 7,919 votes. The margin of victory was 14,931 votes, while nine other candidates in the district failed to secure enough votes to retain their deposits.

In Achham-1, Nepali Congress candidate Bharat Kumar Swarn won by a narrow margin of 528 votes against Nepali Communist Party candidate Bhim Bahadur Rawal. Swarn secured 10,758 votes while Rawal received 10,230 votes.

Similarly, in Doti, Nepali Congress candidate Bharat Bahadur Khadka was elected with 14,897 votes, defeating CPN-UML candidate Dipak Bahadur Dhami, who secured 14,110 votes.

Budha ends Shakti's reign in Jajarkot

BY BASUDEV SHARMA
Khalanga, Jajarkot, Mar. 7

Nepali Congress candidate Khadga Bahadur Budha defeated CPN candidate Shakti Bahadur Basnet in the House of Representatives elections held on Thursday, ending Basnet's long-held political stronghold in Jajarkot.

According to Chief Election Officer Durga Prasad Khanal, Budha defeated Basnet by a margin of 2,635 votes. Budha secured 20,142 votes, while his closest rival Basnet received 17,507 votes.

CPN-UML candidate Dambar Bahadur Singh obtained 16,883 votes and Rastriya Swatantra Party candidate Raghav Karki secured 2,471 votes, Khanal said.

Vote counting began at 1 pm on Friday and the final results were announced at 1 pm on Saturday. Following the announcement, supporters and well-wishers of Budha began celebrating with victory rallies.

After winning the parliamentary seat, Budha said he would become the voice of the people of Jajarkot.

Basnet, who had won the parliamentary elections in 2013, 2017 and 2022 and served as Home Minister, Minister for Forests, Minister for Health and Minister for Energy, suffered a defeat this time.

Chief Election Officer Khanal handed Budha the certificate of victory.

Out of 107,191 registered voters in Jajarkot, 61,657 cast their votes. Among them, 31,065 were men and 30,565 were women.

In Bheri Municipality, 12,941 out of 22,930 voters cast their ballots. In Chhedagad Municipality, 11,954 out of 21,356 voters voted. In Nalgad Municipality, 10,843 out of 17,021 voters participated in the election, while 7,632 out of 11,792 voters cast their ballots in Barekot Rural Municipality.

Similarly, 7,163 of 12,593 voters voted in Kushe Rural Municipality, 6,366 out of 12,280 voters in Junichande Rural Municipality, and 4,535 out of 9,191 voters in Shivalaya Rural Municipality. A total of 11 candidates were in the fray in the district.

Fear of forest fires high as dry season begins

BY JANARJAN KHATRI
Sarlahi, Mar. 7

With the onset of dry season, residents living in the Chure region of Sarlahi and neighbouring districts have started fearing forest fires.

During the dry and windy months, massive forest fires frequently break out in the Chure forests of Madhes districts such as Sarlahi, Mahottari, Rautahat, Bara and Parsa.

According to locals, fires also occur every year in government and community forests along the East-West Highway as well as in the forests under the Sagarnath Forest Development Project.

Rajan Pokharel of Lalbandi Municipality-6 said that small forest fires have already begun to appear in nearby forests in recent days. Fires usually break out in the forests during the period when dry leaves from trees and plants accumulate on the ground, he added.

While travelling along the Naya Road-Barahathwa road section and the East-West Highway, forest fires can be seen in the Sagarnath Forest Development Project area and in several partnership forests.

As in previous years, the season of forest fires has begun this year as well, but authority has not taken any initiative for prevention so far, said Ashta Bahadur Lama of Hirapur in Lalbandi Municipality-11.

The Division Forest Office in Sarlahi, however, said local residents also need to be more aware to prevent forest fires in local forests.

Santosh Jha, Chief of the Division Forest Office, Sarlahi, said that setting fires in forests could also put nearby human settlements at risk, and urged people to remain alert.

He said the office deploys fire control personnel every year and provides orientation training to members of forest user committees to protect forests and wildlife from fires.

Jha added that preparations and awareness activities for controlling forest fires have already begun this year as well.



116th Women's Day being marked today

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 7

Nepal is celebrating the 116th International Women's Day on Sunday, highlighting women's rights, equality, and empowerment.

The global theme for this year's celebration is "Rights, Equality and Empowerment for All Women and Girls," while the national slogan is "Rights, Justice and Opportunities for All Women and Girls."

Observed annually on March 8, International Women's Day honours the economic, political, and social contributions of women worldwide while advocating for gender equality, women's empowerment, and the eradication of gender-based violence.

Nepal's Constitution has enshrined women's rights as fundamental rights, ensuring proportional representation of women in political and administrative sectors.

Addressing the programme organised on Saturday, the National Women Commission (NWC) informed that it has prepared a digital profile of around 100 pioneering women of Nepal.

At the programme organised on the occasion of the 24th establishment day of the commission and the 116th International Women's Day, Kamala Kumari Parajuli, Chairperson of the commission, said that women are still struggling for gender equality, empowerment and the eradication of gender-based violence even after more than a century of advocacy.

She noted that due to the lack of full constitutional authority and budget, the commission cannot directly provide justice to women victims who file complaints at the commission.

"Daily, around 15 to 20 complaints related to violence against women are filed at the commission. Sharing the bitter reality of violence against women, the number of such cases has been increasing year after year," she said.

Similarly, Top Bahadur Magar, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (Nepal), said the two commissions have collaborated several times in preparing various reports related to women's rights.

The United Nations has officially observed International Women's Day since 1975. The day traces its origins to March 8, 1908, when more than 15,000 women in the United States staged a demonstration demanding better pay, shorter working hours, and voting rights as an important milestone in the global struggle for women's rights and welfare.

VOTE COUNT BEGINS IN MUGU

BY HARI KRISHNA AIDI
Mugu, Mar. 7

Ballot boxes from two polling centres in Mugum Karmarong Rural Municipality, located in the northern part of Mugu district, arrived at the Office of the Chief Election Officer after midday on Saturday.

The vote counting began three days later because the ballot boxes from those polling centres could not be transported by helicopter on time.

According to Min Bahadur Kunwar, an officer at the Office of the Chief Election Officer, Mugum Karmarong Rural Municipality is not connected to the road network and is geographically remote. Due to this difficulty, the Election Commission had arranged for ballot boxes from two polling centres -- Janajagriti Basic School and Kajhirova Basic School -- to be transported by helicopter to ensure timely vote counting.

However, as the polling centres in the area were not given priority for helicopter transport, the election team had to carry the ballot boxes on foot. As a result, the ballot boxes reached the district's Office of the Chief Election Officer at 12 pm on Saturday.

He said that according to an all-party meeting held at the Office of the Chief Election Officer at 1 pm on Saturday, vote counting began at 4 pm the same day.

Deposits of 22 candidates forfeited in Mahottari-1

BY MAHESH KUMAR DAS
Jaleshwar, Mar. 7

In the election for a member of the House of Representatives (HoR) held in Mahottari Constituency-1, the security deposits of 22 candidates, including the candidate from the Nepali Congress (NC), have been forfeited.

According to the legal provision, only those candidates who secure at least 10 per cent of the total valid votes cast are entitled to retain their deposit.

As per the vote count results completed on Saturday morning, 22 candidates, including NC candidate Mukesh Raj Kafle, failed to secure the required number of votes to retain their deposit, said the Election Officer, Gagan Dev Mahato.

A total of 25 candidates, 13 representing political parties and 12 independent candidates, contested the election in the constituency.

Except for the winning candidate Pramod Kumar Mahato of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), his closest rival Giriraj Mani Pokharel of the Nepali Communist Party and Laxmi Mahato Koiri of the CPN-UML, the deposits of the remaining 22 candidates were forfeited.

In the voting held on Thursday, a total of 67,197 votes were cast in Mahottari-1. Of these, 63,243 were valid votes, while 3,954 votes were invalid.

Accordingly, candidates were required to secure at least 10 per cent of the valid votes, that is, a minimum of 6,324 votes, to retain their deposit.

Election Officer Mahato said, "Out of the total valid votes Pramod Kumar Mahato received 34,633 votes.

His closest rival Giriraj Mani Pokharel secured 12,624 votes, while CPN-UML candidate Laxmi Mahato Koiri obtained 6,591 votes."

NC candidate Kafle received 6,213 votes but still failed to retain his deposit, the election officer added.

Had he secured an additional 112 votes, his deposit would have been saved.

The remaining candidates whose deposits were forfeited failed to secure even 1,000 votes, according to the Office of the Election Officer.

According to the data provided by the office, Hom Prasad Pokharel of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party received 475 votes, Yog Narayan Mahato of the Janata Samajwadi Party secured 319 votes, Birendra Mahato of the Janamat Party got 560 votes, Krishna Shobari Manandhar of the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party obtained 16 votes, Ramesh Kumar Singh of the Mongol National Organisation received 94 votes, Mani Raj Niraula of the Nepal Communist Party (Unified) secured 54 votes, Lila Diyali of the Shram Sanskriti Party obtained 867 votes, Manoj Kumar Gupta of the Ujyalo Nepal Party received 176 votes and Mukesh Sah of the Aam Janata Party secured 36 votes.

Similarly, among the independent candidates, Jeevan Kumar Magar received 36 votes, Niru Kumari 18 votes, Parmeshwar Paswan 14 votes, Prem Bahadur Rana Magar 47 votes, Baubelal Mahato 11 votes, Shiv Narayan Mahato 185 votes, Sachin Mahato 9 votes, Sabita Kasumari Devi 3 votes, Sunil Kumar Singh 22 votes, Sunaina Devi Koiri 190 votes, Surendra Mahato 34 votes, and Somindra Sarki 13 votes.

According to the statistics provided by the Office of the Election Officer, 14 candidates, including those from the Aam Janata Party, Nepal Communist Party (Unified), Mongol National Organisation, Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, and 10 independent candidates, failed to secure even 100 votes.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY

If we don't end war, war will end us.
- H. G. Wells

EDITORIAL

A Vote For Stability

The elections to the House of Representatives held on Thursday are expected to mark the beginning of stability in the country. Since the epoch-making democratic movement of 1951, no government has completed a full five-year term, either due to the absence of a clear majority for a single party, disputes within ruling parties enjoying a majority, or other unforeseen political developments. The latest election held, six months after the Gen-Z movement, is, as indicated by the ongoing vote counting, certain to give an absolute majority to the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) to form a stable government.

Of the nine parliamentary elections held after the 1951 revolution, the latest one resembles the first parliamentary elections in 1959, in which the Nepali Congress won a two-thirds majority, defying the expectations of Kathmandu elites. The RSP appears to have repeated the feat by sweeping the Tarai and the Kathmandu Valley constituencies. The party has won almost all seats in the southern plains, all 15 seats in the Kathmandu Valley, and all seats in Jhapa and Morang districts.

Now, Balendra Shah, the senior RSP leader who spearheaded the party's election campaign across the country, is set to become the new Prime Minister with the strength of the people's mandate. Although the powerful government led by BP Koirala after the 1959 elections survived only about one and a half years before being toppled by a royal coup, the new government will be free from such unwanted political accidents. The people have given the RSP an absolute majority in the hope of a stable government that will complete its full term, while maintaining good governance and accelerating the pace of development in the country.

Although the people also gave majorities to the Nepali Congress in 1990 and 1999, those governments collapsed midway due to internal feuds within the party. People now expect the RSP to avoid such disputes, at least for the next five years, so that their aspirations to see a stable government completing a full term will not be thwarted. Above all, the election appears to have freed national politics from the generation of the politicians who have dominated it since 1990. Almost all leaders who rose from the People's Movement of 1990 either lost the election or chose not to contest it.

CPN-UML chair KP Sharma Oli lost the election to RSP leader Shah in his home constituency in Jhapa, while Nepali Congress former president Sher Bahadur Deuba did not contest. Former UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal lost the election in Rautahat, while Jhalanath Khanal remained out of the fray. However, Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who has remained a dominant political figure since the April Uprising of 2006, managed to win the elections in Rukum East. Other seasoned leaders such as Nepali Congress's Shekhar Koirala and Bijay Gachchhadar, CPN_UML's Ishwar Pokharel, Bishnu Paudel, Shankar Pokharel and Dev Raj Ghimire also lost the election to RSP candidates. This means the new parliament could be without many experienced lawmakers. It will be dominated by young leaders, as demanded by the Gen-Z movement of September last year.

The elections concluded peacefully without any violent incidents or the need for re-polling, which had been a common occurrence in past elections. The weather also remained clear. When the interim government led by Sushila Karki announced elections within six months immediately after the violent Gen-Z movement in which 76 people were killed, many believed that it would be impossible to hold them under such circumstances. However, the government succeeded in conducting the elections on the stipulated date. Prime Minister Karki, her ministers, and all political parties deserve credit for the successful conclusion of the elections. The neighbouring and friendly countries have congratulated Nepal on holding the elections. The RSP, which emerged victorious, should now leave no stone unturned to meet the people's expectations.

Aftermath Of Election

SUJAN SILWAL

The much-awaited general election of 2026 has also been done and dusted in Nepal. In the run-up to the poll, the atmosphere was very noteworthy, with election campaigns in full swing and some political leaders travelling across the country, pressing voters to vote for their candidates, while others limited their campaigns to their own constituencies, owing to a closed, door-to-door approach that used to be highly unlikely in the past.

Furthermore, the deployed election security police, along with the national security force, made firm efforts in facilitating the conduction of timely elections without mayhem and uproar, which is praiseworthy on their part. Moreover, an equally commendable role was played by the Sushila Karki-led government in enabling the creation of a conducive environment required for the election's success. In the absence of an action-oriented government, it would have been a herculean task for only the state machinery to conduct the election, so they deserve a heap of praise.

It goes without saying that the tried and tested political forces that used to rule the roost in the Nepali political landscape were seemingly perturbed in the lead-up to the election with the emergence of relatively new political parties that have claimed themselves to be an alternative force. Be it Balendra Saha or Ravi Lamichhane, there was an unsettling fear on the faces of octogenarian leaders hoping to dissuade the public from supporting newer political forces.

Irrespective of the ultimate outcomes, political leaders, both new and old, cannot throw caution to the wind. Because of the lackadaisical nature of the previous Oli-led government, the country saw unprecedented catastrophic damage to its properties led by furious youth. In order to avoid falling off the wagon, politicians this time should be on their toes to help give impetus to the development and prosperity of the country.

Many statespersons, before the election, brazenly announced their respective political manifestos, assuring the public that the mentioned agendas would be their topmost priority. These ranged from free health insurance schemes to massive employment opportunities. Such selected significant areas are undoubtedly of great value; however, invariably, they have been merely lip service for a long time—a tactic employed by politicians to manoeuvre and earn votes.

But come the post-election, such agendas are rarely looked at or talked about. It is one of the primary reasons behind people's attenuating trust towards established political forces. Come what may, such political agendas upon which votes were received should be timely and effectively implemented.

In addition, the lack of meaningful employment opportunities back home has pushed many overseas, wasting talent and perpetuating the long-standing brain drain situation. If resources available within the periphery of the nation are diligently utilised, with a focus on modernising the agricultural sector through government intervention, many youths will be drawn into this evergreen industry, which will ultimately help them sustain their livelihood.

The quality of education and the curriculum have also been topics of discussion. Likewise, manufacturing industries are awaiting budgets and necessary infrastructure. Thus, the to-be government must create an investment-friendly climate for established industries to continue functioning and for additional ones to thrive.

To sum it up, all things said and done, the soon-to-be Prime Minister has to take the bull by the horns, as the elephant in the room is the erosion of public trust in government. There is no room for corruption and misgovernance this time.

RSP's Tsunami Routs Old Parties



Ritu Raj Subedi

The elections to the House of Representatives (HoR) have delivered a strong message to the political parties: the people mercilessly punish those that play flippancy with their mandate. Based on the initial results of the elections, Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) is heading to secure a two-thirds majority in the Lower House. This will be an unprecedented gain for the RSP in the country's electoral history. This can be compared to the Nepali Congress's similar success in the first general elections held in 1959. Then, the NC had bagged 74 seats out of a 109-member HoR.

The RSP's outstanding performance in the election has been credited to Balendra Shah's soaring popularity among the people of all age groups. As he took a plunge into national politics by joining the RSP, the people began to see their icon in him, as they were disappointed with the traditional parties. Now he has already defeated former prime minister and CPN-UML chair KP Sharma Oli in Jhapa-5 by a huge margin. This will be a big blow to the UML, which has suffered the worst drubbing in its life. The present disaster is worse than the trouncing it faced in the first Constituent Assembly election in 2008.

Spectacular win

Though the RSP's spectacular win has surprised many, it is consistent with the voting trend if one minutely analyses the past elections. The people have given a large mandate to the parties that led the democratic movements. The NC, UML and erstwhile Maoist Centre rose to the national scene because of their role in the revolution and nationalist stance. The current elections were held in the wake of the Gen Z movement in September last year. Unlike the previous movements, this took place on the plank of good governance. The then government of NC and UML had created ground for thousands of youths to take to the streets by banning the social media sites, which have become a lifeline of digital communication. It was a spontaneous outburst against the misrule, corruption, syndicate and crony capitalism that thrived under the governments of left and democratic parties. They even went to the extent of 'selling' their own citizens for their pecuniary interest.

Over 76 people, mostly the youths, were killed in the two-day protest on September 8 and 9. Public and private property worth billions of rupees were gutted and vandalised. The Oli-led government collapsed and the HoR was dissolved. Instead of expressing an apology for the death of innocent people, Oli and his coterie went on to denounce the youth movement, calling the young protesters 'terrorists' and 'foreign agents.' This is too much for most Nepalis, who converted their anger into ballots in the elections.

They handed a humiliating defeat to the then ruling parties – NC and UML, that had overnight entered into an unnatural alliance to foil an investigation into the Bhutanese refugee scam in which Oli's aides and former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his spouse were allegedly involved. The RSP has owned up to the Gen Z movement and won the sympathy of the overwhelming number of the masses. Most of the youths, who were part of the Gen Z revolt, are now with the RSP. Some of them have contested the elections with their tickets.

Balen, 35, a rapper-turned politician, has already become a model for youths. His stance against corruption and call for clean government has been well received by the people who have been frequently dismayed and betrayed by the same bunch of leaders. He was elected to the post of mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City as an independent candidate in the 2022 local elections. He mopped the floor with parties' heavyweight candidates. But, upon his election as the mayor of the metropolis, he did not receive cooperation from the deputy mayor and ward chairs who got elected from the major parties. Even the federal government under Oli left no stone unturned to fail him. But what he did in the capacity of mayor has won the hearts of the people. They had also noticed non-cooperation of party-affiliated elected representatives and penalised them in the polls.

> Balen, 35, a rapper-turned politician, has already become a model for youths. His stance against corruption and call for clean government has been well received by the people who have been frequently dismayed and betrayed by the same bunch of leaders.

The RSP's landslide has virtually sunk the Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and Nepali Communist Party. For decades, these parties turned politics into their private fiefdom, elevated themselves as contractors and people as mere spectators. But they miserably failed to notice that the citizens have been closely noticing their words and actions. The people have exercised their sovereign right to seal the fate of the parties. The poll outcomes bear far-reaching implications for the parties and national politics as well.

Death knell

The elections have tolled the death knell for Nepal's communist movement, thanks to the arrogance and egoism of Oli, who dissolved a communist majority parliament twice and kicked out his own influential comrades from the party for their critical approach to the leadership. Like the communists of West Bengal, Nepali communist parties risk being consigned to the dustbin of history. Once the largest communist parties, the UML and the NCP are now ironically struggling to become the national party. Known for their cantankerous nature, they have often indulged in futile ideological disputes and remained out of common touch. They have even beaten the so-called capitalist parties in committing corruption and siphoning off the state resources.

In 2019, when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Nepal, he had a candid conversation with Nepali communist leaders. Xi noted that the Chinese Communist Party has governed the country not solely because it once led the revolution but because it continuously served the people. He suggested that leading a single revolution does not guarantee perpetual public support; the party must unremittingly dedicate itself to the service of the citizenry. But Nepal's communist leaders only sought to cash in on their past revolutionary acts and played little role in bringing transformative changes to the life ordinary people. The elections have given them a hard lesson. As you sow, so shall you reap.

(The author is Deputy Executive Editor of this daily.)

Prevent Misuse Of Multivitamin Supplements



Dr. Shyam P Lohani

With the modernisation, the use of multivitamins has become more common than it is necessary. They are often presented in colourful bottles in all pharmacies as well as small town grocery stores with a promise of providing energy, boosting immunity, sharpening memory, and even longevity. People often mistakenly shallow a daily multivitamin in belief of maintaining good health. In doing so, they are ignoring the issue of misuse of multivitamins.

Multivitamins were developed basically to treat nutritional deficiencies. In societies suffering from malnutrition, poverty, chronic illness, or special physiological conditions such as pregnancy, supplementation can be life-saving. Iron and folic acid supplementation during pregnancy significantly reduces maternal anaemia and defects in the newborn baby. Calcium and vitamin D prevent rickets and osteoporosis. Hence, in such particular situations, vitamins can be useful for preventing ailments and are powerful tools of preventive medicine.

Problem

It is important to note that the problem arises when supplementation shifts from need-based to habit-based. People often take multivitamin supplements without any medical condition. Individuals self-medicate supplements even when there is no need for it, such as in cases of a slight feeling of tiredness, hair fall, or even minor illnesses. Aggressive advertising and nowadays social media amplify the belief that vitamins help maintain good health. This trend has boosted the supplement industry, and many people consume multivitamins that may offer little benefit but can sometimes cause harm.

There is a myth that vitamins are free of harm, as they are natural, which is misleading. Vitamins, in fact, are essential in small amounts, but excessive intake can cause toxicity. Fat-soluble vitamins, such as A, D, E, and K, can accumulate in the body and cause harmful effects. For example, high doses of vitamin A can cause liver damage, bone pain, and, in severe cases, birth defects. Similarly, excessive amounts of vitamin D produce high levels of calcium and can cause kidney stones and organ damage. There are evidences that even water-soluble vitamins such as vitamin C and B-complex can cause gastrointestinal disturbances and nerve damage when consumed in very high doses over time.

Aggressive advertising gives a false sense of security that is misleading. People who consume supplements often neglect balanced diets. Fiber, antioxidants, phytonutrients, and healthy fats found in whole foods can not be replaced by a tablet. A balanced amounts of fruits, vegetables, whole gains, pulses, nuts, and dairy products provide vitamins as well as other substances that protect us from chronic diseases. Therefore, supplements containing multivitamins alone can pose a risk of long-term health complications if dietary habit become poor.

In developing economies such as Nepal, where nutritional challenges coexist with rapid urbanisation, the misuse of multivitamins reflects a paradox. People in rural and from marginalised communities still suffer from iron deficiency, anemia, and vitamin A deficiency, whereas urban populations consume supplements indiscriminately.

> Multivitamins can save lives and prevent disease, but we should be cautious while using them and should not replace good nutrition.

On the one hand, people can buy multivitamins from a grocery store as well as from pharmacies over the counter; on the other hand, many healthcare providers prescribe them routinely even when laboratory evidence of deficiency is absent.

This practice raises both ethical and economic concerns. For people from low- and middle-income families, spending money on unnecessary supplements strains household budgets. This leads to families allocating less funds to nutritious foods, clean water, and preventive healthcare. The elderly population is more vulnerable to this practice, as many of them take multiple medications for chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart conditions. The risk of drug-drug interactions increases when multivitamins are added without medical supervision.

There are many instances when drug-drug interactions can even be life-threatening, such as when vitamin K can interfere with blood thinners like warfarin. Polypharmacy is a great concern among elderly populations, and adding supplements without medical supervision creates more complexity. For children suffering from nutritional deficiencies, supplements may be necessary, but routine use in healthy children is rarely necessary.

The misuse of vitamin supplements was more intense during the COVID-19 pandemic. In hopes of boosting immunity, many people consumed high doses of Vitamin C, zinc, and vitamin D. It is to be noted that high doses of supplementation do not further support immune function in the general population. Several steps are necessary to address this issue. The first and most important is to conduct large scale public awareness campaign. People should be made aware that vitamins are not magic pills and cannot replace balanced diets. The risk of over-supplementation should also be emphasised in health campaigns.

Evidence-based prescribing

Another important aspect is to encourage healthcare providers to adopt evidence-based prescribing practices. Routine and indiscriminate prescribing of multivitamins should be discouraged by respective councils. Counselling patients on dietary improvements over supplementation should be prioritised.

The regulatory authorities should strengthen monitoring of supplement marketing. Misleading and false claims of boosting immunity and enhancing intelligence should strictly be scrutinised. There should be mandatory labelling about recommended daily allowances and potential risks of excessive intake.

Lastly, we should take personal responsibility. It is necessary to consult a qualified healthcare professional before taking any supplements. It is important to note that a simple blood test can detect whether deficiencies exist. In many cases, improving diets, sleep, and physical activity can be sufficient to resolve symptoms that are often attributed to a vitamin deficiency. Multivitamins can save lives and prevent disease, but we should be cautious while using them and should not replace good nutrition.

(Dr. Lohani is the clinical director at the Nepal Poison Information Centre. lohanis@gmail.com)

50 YEARS AGO

THE RISING NEPAL

March 8, 1976

Nepal, Brazil Set Up Ties

Kathmandu, March 7: His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the Federative Government of the Republic of Brazil have established diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level, reports RSS.

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READER'S MAIL

End Senseless Wars

The world today feels frighteningly fragile. Every time we open the news, we are confronted with images of missiles in the sky, cities reduced to rubble, and civilians running for their lives. War is no longer a distant event happening "somewhere else." It feels close, constant, and deeply unsettling. This has led many to ask a question that once seemed unthinkable: Is this the beginning of World War III?

Armed conflicts are erupting or intensifying across regions. From Eastern Europe to the Middle East, violence has become a daily reality for millions. The war between Russia and Ukraine remains one of the clearest examples of how modern wars refuse to end neatly. Similarly, the war in Gaza continues to claim hundreds of lives every day. Homes, hospitals, and schools have been reduced to dust. Behind every statistic is a human being, a parent searching for a child, a child mourning a family, an entire population living with trauma that may last generations.

The Middle East, long marked by historical rivalries and unresolved tensions, is once again at the centre of global concern. History teaches us that world wars rarely begin with a single dramatic declaration. They grow slowly, fed by alliances, retaliations, and the normalisation of violence. Amid all this, one truth is painfully clear: citizens are always the greatest victims. Ordinary people lose their families, homes, livelihoods, and mental peace for decisions made in distant halls of power. The mental health toll of constant fear, displacement, and grief is unimaginable.

While leaders negotiate influence and territory, common citizens pay the price with their lives. The world stands at a crossroads, between continued escalation and a collective effort toward peace. If global leaders fail to prioritise humanity and accountability, the question may no longer be "Is this the beginning?" but "Why did we allow it to happen?"

Nitika Rajbhandari
Maitighar, Kathmandu

TAILPIECE

A new business was opening and one of the owner's friends wanted to send him flowers for the occasion. They arrived at the new business site and the owner read the card, which said: 'Rest in Peace.'
The owner was angry and called the florist to complain. After he had told the florist of the obvious mistake and how angry he was, the florist replied:
'Sir, I'm really sorry for the mistake, but rather than getting angry, you should imagine this - somewhere, there is a funeral taking place today, and they have flowers with a note saying: 'Congratulations on your new location!"

23 killed, flights upset in Kenya floods

AP
nairobi, Mar. 7

Twenty-three people died, flights were disrupted and the military was deployed as motorists in the Kenyan capital were stranded for hours on Saturday after roads were flooded following heavy rains overnight.

George Seda, the police boss in Nairobi, said Saturday that some of the people drowned and others were electrocuted, warning that the death toll may rise as search and rescue operations continue. Seda also said that more than 100 vehicles were damaged, with some overturning on the roadside and in parking bays.

Kenya Airways Saturday said flights were disrupted, with some diverted to the coastal city of Mombasa, and that disruptions would continue for hours.

The military was deployed to assist emergency rescue services, and the local toll road operator waived fees for an elevated road.

Heavy rain began on Friday and continued overnight, submerging vehicles and forcing motorists in some areas to wade through hip-high water to reach higher ground.

Videos of flooded homes and overturned vehicles were shared on social media.

A military rescue unit was deployed overnight to support emergency services as Kenya Red Cross response units struggled to reach people in need.

Kenya Red Cross Secretary-General Ahmed Idris said search and rescue teams were working tirelessly to assist those stranded.

"We are severely limited by the traffic and the situation on what used to be roads. We are doing our best to reach those in need," he wrote on X.



PHOTO: AP

People walk through floodwaters after heavy rains in Nairobi, Kenya, on Saturday.

Kenya's Public Service Minister Geoffrey Ruku said Saturday that he was coordinating national disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. He urged Kenyans to be cautious and prioritize their safety.

Some residents blamed the flooding on clogged drainage systems, stating that city authorities ought to have prepared by ensuring there was functional drainage infrastructure ahead of the rainy season.

One resident, Aisha Bajaber, wrote on X, "The whole city is flooded yet again. How long will officials keep ignoring the lack of drainage?"

Rains have been pounding the country since late February, which marks the start of the long-rains season.

Previous rain seasons have seen flooding, landslides and mudslides that have left hundreds of people dead and seen thousands of others displaced.

Russian missile kills 7 in Kharkiv

AP
Kyiv, Mar. 7

At least seven people were killed and 10 others, including three children, were wounded on Saturday by a Russian missile that hit a five-story residential building in Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, officials said.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy condemned the attack and called for an international response. He said that Russia struck Ukraine overnight with 29 missiles and 480 drones, targeting energy facilities in Kyiv and other central regions and with damage reported in at least seven other locations across the country.

According to preliminary data, air defense systems downed 19 missiles and 453 drones with hits from 9 missiles and 26 strike drones recorded at 22 locations.

In Kharkiv, in Ukraine's northeast, emergency workers were combing the rubble, looking for survivors. The regional Prosecutors's Office said the building was hit by a new Russian cruise missile known as Izdeliye-30.

Ukrainian reports said that the new subsonic air-launched weapon that Russia has recently started to use against Ukraine has a range of 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) and is equipped with a new satellite navigation system more resistant to jamming.

In the Kyiv region, damage from debris was reported in three districts, according to local authorities. In the southern Odesa region, 80 firefighters were called in to help battle massive fires at infrastructure facilities following an attack with multiple drones.

Ukraine's state rail operator Ukrzaliznytsia said damage to the rail infrastructure forced changes to a number of routes in the center-west of the country.

In Moscow, the Russian Defense Ministry said the overnight strike targeted Ukrainian military factories, energy facilities and air bases.

"There must be a response from partners to these savage strikes against life," Zelenskyy said in a post on X. "Russia has not abandoned its attempts to destroy Ukraine's residential and critical infrastructure, and therefore support must continue.

We count on active work with the European Union to guarantee greater protection for our people. I am grateful to everyone who helps strengthen our protection."

Russia has fired tens of thousands of Iranian-designed drones at Ukraine since it invaded its neighbor just over four years. It has launched a large-scale domestic production of them and battered Ukraine with hundreds of drones in a single night — more than were used during some entire months in 2024.

Iran has responded to joint U.S.-Israeli strikes by launching the same type of Shahed drones at countries in the Middle East.

Zelenskyy said he had received a U.S. request for support to defend against the Iranian drones in the Middle East and had given the order for equipment to be provided along with Ukrainian experts.

The war in the Middle East has drawn international attention away from Europe's biggest conflict since World War II, and forced the postponement of a new round of U. S.-brokered talks between Russia and Ukraine planned for this week.

Trump shifts focus to America

AP
Doral, Fla. Mar. 7

President Donald Trump is set to gather with Latin American leaders on Saturday at his Miami-area golf club as his administration looks to demonstrate it's still committed to sharpening U.S. foreign policy focus on the Western Hemisphere even as it deals with five-alarm crises around the globe.

The gathering, which the White House is calling the "Shield of the Americas" summit, comes just two months after Trump ordered an audacious U.S. military operation to capture Venezuela's then-president, Nicolás Maduro, and whisk him and his wife to the United States to face drug conspiracy charges.

Looming even larger is Trump's decision to join with Israel to launch a war on Iran one week ago, a conflict that has left hundreds dead, convulsed global markets and unsettled the broader Middle East.

He started Saturday with a social media post warning that more Iranian officials would become targets in the war and that strikes on the country will intensify. "Today Iran will be hit very hard!" Trump said.

Trump's time with the Latin American leaders will be limited: He is set to fly to Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, to be on hand for the dignified transfer of the six U.S. troops killed in a drone strike on a command center in Kuwait, one day after the U.S. and Israel launched their military campaign against Iran.

But with the summit, Trump will look to turn attention to the Western Hemisphere, at least for a moment. He has pledged to reassert U.S. dominance in the region and push back on what he sees as years of Chinese economic encroachment in America's backyard.

"Under previous leaders, we grew obsessed with every other theater and every other border in the world except our own," Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told regional leaders and defense ministers who gathered in Florida this week for talks on countering drug cartels. "These elites reduced our power and presence in this hemisphere, opting for a benign neglect that was anything but benign."

Michigan storm kills four

AP
Michigan, Mar. 7

Four people were killed in southern Michigan as powerful storms that produced at least one tornado reduced homes to rubble, sent parts of roofs flying into the air and left a trail of debris hanging from power lines.

In the Union Lake area, near Union City, three people were killed and 12 injured after an apparent tornado hit, according to the Branch County Sheriff's Office.

About 50 miles (80.5 kilometers) southwest, Cass County officials reported one death and several injuries, after a tornado touched down.

Lisa Piper stood on her back deck and videoed a terrifying scene that played out on the other side of frozen Union Lake as a funnel cloud formed and then dropped toward the ground.

Trees were torn from their roots and debris flew into the air. "It's lifting houses!" she said. As the devastation continued, she exclaimed: "Oh my heart is pounding. Oh, I hope they're OK."

Powerful storms formed Friday from Michigan all the way to Oklahoma, with reports of heavy rain and threats of severe thunderstorms. Tornado watches stretched from Iowa to Oklahoma, along with Michigan.



PHOTO: AP

Damage seen after a severe storm in Three Rivers, Mich.

At least one tornado has been confirmed in southern Michigan, near Union City, on Friday, according to the National Weather Service, and there were reports of possible others.

Part of the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Union City was damaged, although its nearly 150-year-old grand piano was spared, it said in a post on Facebook.

The combination of a weather system that pulled moisture out of the Gulf of Mexico and a warm front that moved north created the right conditions for a tornado in a state where they're relatively rare, according to David Roth, a meteorologist at the weather service's Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

The system encountered much cooler air in the Great Lakes area. Michigan gets an average of 15 tornadoes a year, which is much less than the 155 for Texas and 96 for Kansas, he said.

Israel raids Beirut, Tehran; Iran apologises

AP
Dubai, Mar. 7

Iran's president rejected a demand by the United States for an unconditional surrender on Saturday and apologized for Iran's attacks on regional countries, as Israel and the United States kept up their airstrikes targeting the Islamic Republic.

Gulf countries say they have intercepted more ballistic missiles and drones launched from Iran. Saudi Arabia said it stopped four drones attacking the country's massive Shaybah oil field, the second attack within hours.

Flights in and out of Dubai International Airport were interrupted after passengers were ushered down into train tunnels as several blasts were heard and the alert sounded.

Meanwhile, Israeli warplanes hammered Beirut and Tehran. Death toll continued to rise Saturday with at least 1,230 people killed in Iran, more than 200 in Lebanon and around a dozen in Israel, according to officials. Six U.S. troops were reported killed.

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration approved a new $151 million arms sale to Israel after Trump said he would not negotiate with Iran without its "unconditional surrender."

A prominent cleric in Iran, Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi, urged the country's Assembly of Experts to act quickly and name a new supreme leader, likely in response to the ongoing political confusion.

Buildings associated with the 88-cleric panel have been hit by airstrikes in the war, likely slowing any meeting of the group. "The timely realization of this important matter will lead to national authority and the best possible organization of affairs," Shirazi said in a statement.



PHOTO: AP

Smoke rises following an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut's southern suburbs.

Qatar Airways says it will operate six flights into Doha on Sunday through a "safe corridor," as the country's airspace remains closed. The state-owned airline said the flights will come from five European cities as well as Bangkok.

The latest wave of Israeli airstrikes included targets in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley, the Israeli military said. The Lebanese Health Ministry said earlier that overnight airstrikes in that area killed at least 16 people and wounded 35.

The Iranian-backed militant group Hezbollah said its fighters clashed with an Israeli force that landed there late Friday. Israel hasn't commented on the fighting in the Bekaa Valley.

The military also said its Saturday strikes hit rocket launchers, weapons storage facilities and two command centers of Hezbollah's Radwan Force in southern Lebanon.

Bahrain's military intercepted two missiles and a drone on Saturday, the Defense Ministry said. That brought to 86 missiles and 148 drones that have been intercepted over Bahrain since the U.S. and Israel launched war against Iran last weekend.

India's foreign minister said Saturday that an Iranian naval vessel has docked in India, after a U.S. submarine sank an Iranian warship and another vessel sought assistance from Sri Lanka.

Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said the IRIS Lavan is docked in southern Kochi city, after India granted permission when the vessel reported "having problems" on March 1. "I think it was the humane thing to do," Jaishankar said.

A U.S. submarine sank the Iranian warship IRIS Dena off the coast of Sri Lanka on Wednesday. Another vessel, the IRIS Bushehr, requested assistance from Sri Lanka and more than 200 sailors were brought ashore.

Both ships had previously taken part in naval exercises hosted by India, but Jaishankar said they got "caught on the wrong side of events" once the war began.

Dubai and its long-haul carrier Emirates said Saturday the airline would resume operations after temporarily halting them following an Iranian attack on the city-state.

An Israeli airstrike flattened a residential building in southern Lebanon, killing at least six people early Saturday, the country's state-run news agency reported.

The dead from the strike in Jibchit town included four from the same family, the National News Agency said. The Lebanese Health Ministry earlier reported at least 16 killed and 35 wounded in overnight Israeli airstrikes in the mountain town of Nabi Chit.

Sirens sounded in Bahrain ahead of a potential attack for the fifth time Saturday, the interior ministry said, urging people to head to the nearest safe location.

The Lebanese Health Ministry said Saturday that Israeli airstrikes killed at least 16 people and wounded 35 others in overnight Israeli airstrikes in the mountain town of Nabi Chit.

The Iranian-backed militant group Hezbollah said its fighters clashed with an Israeli force that landed late Friday in the mountains of eastern Lebanon.

The Dubai Media Office issued a statement on behalf of the city-state, saying: "For the safety of passengers, airport staff, and airline crew, operations at Dubai International (DXB) have been temporarily suspended."

Masoud Pezeshkian said the country's three-man leadership council had been in touch with the armed forces over the attacks. "I should apologize to the neighboring countries that were attacked by Iran, on my own behalf," the president said. "From now on, they should not attack neighboring countries or fire missiles at them, unless we are attacked by those countries. I think we should solve this through diplomacy."

He also suggested miscommunication in the ranks caused it. However, his statement aired after repeated attacks Saturday morning on Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which has been at the forefront of the war, answers only to the country's supreme leader. However, an Israeli airstrike killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 86, at the start of the war on Feb. 28.

PRISM

NY governor saves 'PB4WEGO' plate

New York: New York Gov. Kathy Hochul stepped in to help a Long Island grandfather win his battle over a customized license plate reading "PB4WEGO."

Seth Bykofsky shared a photo of a letter he received from the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles in January telling him his "PB4WEGO" plate -- which he admits stands for "pee before we go" -- had been found to be in violation of the department's regulations.

The DMV's rules prohibit vanity plates bearing messages that could be construed as "derogatory, contemptuous, degrading, disrespectful or inflammatory."

Oldest pool player thrives at 98

Las Vegas: A Florida woman who became the world's oldest competitive pool player at the age of 94 is still going strong at 98 and is headed to a tournament in Las Vegas.

Jensen Beach resident Maggie Kennedy was dubbed the world's oldest competitive pool player by Guinness World Records in 2021, and five years later she and her team, Sunday Funday, are headed to the BCA Nationals Pool League Tournament in Las Vegas.

"We'll be playing every day from Wednesday through Sunday, and then, of course, the slot machines will be right handy," Kennedy told WPTV. "That's fun." Kennedy said her opponents are often surprised by her.

"I fell in love with the game," Kennedy said. "I think it's because I'm old, I think that surprises people." The local pool-playing community came together at Raxx Billiards in Stuart on Sunday to donate $2,000 for Kennedy to fly to Vegas first-class.

Agencies

TODAY IN HISTORY

1917– The United States Senate votes to limit filibusters by adopting the cloture rule.
1921 – Spanish Prime Minister Eduardo Dato Iradier is assassinated while on his way home from the parliament building in Madrid.
1924 – A mine disaster kills 172 coal miners near Castle Gate, Utah.
1936– Daytona Beach and Road Course holds its first oval stock car race.
1937– Spanish Civil War: The Battle of Guadalajara begins.
1942– World War II: The Dutch East Indies surrender Java to the Imperial Japanese Army.
1942 – World War II: Imperial Japanese Army forces captured Rangoon, Burma from British.
1950– The iconic Volkswagen Type 2 "Bus" begins production.
1962– A Turkish Airlines Fokker F27 Friendship crashes into Mount Medetsiz in the Taurus Mountains of Turkey, killing all 11 people on board.
1963 – The Ba'ath Party comes to power in Syria in a coup d'état.
1965 – Vietnam War: US Marines arrive at Da Nang.



PHOTO: RSS

Vote counting for the proportional representation (PR) system begins after the completion of first-past-the-post (direct election) vote counting in Dang-2, on Saturday afternoon.

President Paudel extends women's day message

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 7



President Ramchandra Paudel has extended his best wishes to all Nepali women at home and aborad on the occasion of International Women's Day for peace, prosperity and happiness.

The 112th Women's Day is being observed across the country by organising several progragarmmes. Every year, March 8 is observed as International Women's Day to promote the full realisation of women's rights and gender equality.

Delivering a message on this occasion, President Paudel called upon everyone concerned to contribute from their respective fields to end all forms of violence, discrimination and opression against women.

He highlighted the need to organise more effective and creative programmes to eliminate harmful practices that persist in society in the name of tradition, which have contributed to rising incidents of physical and psychological violence against adolescent girls and women.

"As women make up half of the population, empowering them will lead the entire family, society and the nation towards prosperity. Therefore, special attention must be given to this matter," he added.

Stating the International Women's Day is celebrated to honour the economic, political and social achievements of women working in various sectors around the world.

It also aims to expand women's access to technology, strengthen women's empowerment, eliminate gender inequality and violence, educate women and make them self-reliant, and ensure they receive the respect they deserve, he added.

"The principle of proportional inclusion adopted by the Constitution has proved to be a milestone in establishing meaningful representation and leadership of women in political, social, economic, cultural and educational sectors," the President said.

To achieve the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment, women must be ensured equal access to education, health services, employment, policy-making and decision-making processes, as well as politics and all other sectors of the state, he added.

He hoped that this day will inspire all of us to become more sensitive towards women's rights, equality, empowerment and dignity, and provide renewed energy, enthusiasm and motivation to work in this direction.

Likewise, Vice President Ram Sahay Prasad Yadav has extended his best wishes to all Nepali women at home and abroad on the occasion of International Women's Day, wishing them happiness, peace, prosperity, good health and continued progress.

In a message issued on Saturday, the Vice President said the day serves as an important platform to advocate for women's empowerment, equality, education, health and dignified participation in society. He stressed the need to end discrimination, violence and unjust practices against women.

Pointing out the achievements of Nepali women in education, politics, social service and the economy, he said women's empowerment was essential for social justice, economic equality and sustainable national development.

Ukraine's low-cost Shahed killers draw US and Gulf interest

AP
Kyiv, Mar. 7

As the war in the Middle East strains U.S. missile stocks, Ukraine is hoping it can turn a wartime innovation — low-cost interceptors designed to shoot down Russian attack drones — into geopolitical leverage. Now one of the world's leading producers of interceptors, Ukraine is offering that expertise to the United States and its Gulf partners for the war in the Middle East, hoping to receive in return the high-end weaponry it can't manufacture at home.

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion four years ago, Ukraine's domestic arms industry was poor. Forced to innovate to survive, it has since built a fast-growing defense sector centered on low-cost drones — some designed specifically to counter Iranian-style Shahed drones of the kind that Russia now launches by the hundreds.

The U.S. recently requested "specific support" against Iranian-designed Shaheds in the Middle East, prompting Zelenskyy to order the deployment of Ukrainian equipment and experts, though details remain classified.

When the war in Ukraine began in 2022, Kyiv banned weapons exports. But now Ukrainian manufacturers of low-cost interceptor drones say they are receiving interest from the United States and Gulf states.

While other countries can build interceptor drones, Ukraine has the only mass-produced system already tested in war, Oleh Katkov, editor-in-chief of Defense Express said. "There is a huge difference between a mass-produced system proven to work in real combat and something others only promise to develop ... It's like selling the house, not just the bricks," he said.

If cooperation with partners succeeds, Ukraine could emerge as a new player in modern warfare, though it remains unclear whether its industry can scale up to meet that ambition or expand into global markets without compromising its own defense.

The surge in interest from the Middle East comes as Gulf states burn through their stocks of expensive Patriot missiles, which they have been using to shoot down significantly cheaper Shaheds from Iran.

An Iranian-designed Shahed drone costs from roughly $30,000, while a single interceptor missile for the U.S.-made Patriot air defense system costs millions.

Lockheed Martin in a statement said it produced a record 600 PAC-3 MSE interceptors for Patriot batteries in all of 2025.

PM Karki talks...

Likewise, Prime Minister Karki conveyed heartfelt wishes for peace, justice, and harmony on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan.

"During the telephone conversation, she mentioned that while Nepal is not directly involved in the current tensions, it is bearing the consequences. She also highlighted the immediate concerns about the safety of Nepali citizens, as well as long-term economic pressures such as rising fuel prices, a contraction in investment flows, and increasing inflation," read the statement.

Prime Minister Karki expressed confidence that transit passengers would gradually be able to depart safely to Nepal or third countries once the situation becomes more manageable. The President of the UAE Al Nahyan thanked Prime Minister Karki on behalf of the UAE for Nepal's solidarity and sympathy, as demonstrated by its response as a true friend in these difficult circumstances. He expressed deep sorrow over the tragic death of a Nepali citizen.

According to the PMO, he expressed satisfaction with the long-standing cordial and friendly relations between Nepal and the UAE, and commended the hardworking nature and good conduct of Nepali people. President Al Nahyan mentioned that both countries' ambassadors are making every effort to ensure the safety and welfare of Nepali citizens. He assured that he is ready to take all necessary steps to guarantee the security of Nepali citizens.

He also mentioned that he was aware that some Nepalis wish to return to Nepal and assured that once the situation eases, all possible assistance will be provided to facilitate their return.

Uncertainty looms over fate of...

He also said that the Nepalis in critical situation and their families contact the manpower agencies seeking help, following which the latter reach out to the Nepali missions abroad and seek help from the DoFE, MoFA, MoLESS and FEB. But Gurung said that Nepal has an experience of rescuing its citizens from various regions including West Asia, Libya and Afghanistan which can be useful in formulating a new mechanism as well as plan to support Nepalis in the conflict-hit areas.

Earlier on Thursday, Prime Minister Sushila Karki held a telephone conversation with Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani to discuss the safety and welfare of Nepali citizens residing in Qatar.

On the same day, Foreign Minister Balananda Sharma also held a telephone conversation with his Bahraini counterpart Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani and discussed the security situation of the region, the security strategies adopted by the Government of Bahrain, and the safety of Nepalis, among other things.

Labour permits suspended

The DoFE has suspended the labour permits for the West Asian nations since March 1.

"All concerned parties are hereby informed that the issuance of labour permits for employment in the aforementioned countries by this Department and its subordinate agencies has been suspended until the publication of a subsequent notice," read a notice issued by the Department's Foreign Labour Permit Branch in Tahachal, Kathmandu.

A ministerial-level decision of the MoLESS has decided to suspend individual and institutional labour permits for foreign employment in the West Asian countries—specifically Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Israel—until further notice.

However, the conflict has impacted Nepalis who have already obtained the labour permit to go to these countries for employment and those who are in the process to obtain the permit.

It also has a repercussion on the business of the manpower agencies. In the last Fiscal Year 2081/82, Nepalis obtained work permit to work in about 151 countries while about 959 manpower agencies sent Nepali migrant workers abroad. With some exceptions like Israel and South Korea where workers are sent through the government-to-government contract and some individual work permits, most of the workers go abroad through the agencies.

According to the statistics of the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), in the month of 2082 Magh (mid-January to mid-February), 15,137 Nepalis obtained labour permit to work in the UAE, 11,592 for Saudi Arabia, 11,580 for Qatar, 5,443 for Kuwait, 148 for Cyprus, and 813 for Bahrain. The numbers are including the re-entry permit.

Two months earlier in Mangsir (mid-November to mid-December), 14,191 obtained work permits for Saudi Arabia, 11,943 for Qatar, 7,707 for the UAE, 3,395 for Kuwait, 1,050 for Oman and 771 for Bahrain.

Feeling is intense for family

Nepalis in the UAE and Israel have said that they are safe and less worried. "We also got a notice from the embassy to update our details to the portal if we need to be rescued. It's good that the government has contacted us," said Tikaram Dhakal, who works as a manager in a multinational company in Dubai.

The Embassy of Nepal in Abu Dhabi has notified Nepalis in the UAE and requested them to fill their personal details in the portal created by the DoCS.

Likewise, talking to The Rising Nepal, six Nepalis in Israel and Saudi Arabia said that although there is a feeling of risk, they don't feel the need to be repatriated.

However, their relatives in Nepal are more affected psychologically by the conflict and are worried about the safety of their relatives. Ajay Sunar, a taxi-driver in Kathmandu, is one among them. His wife is working in Kuwait. Although she has assured the family about her safety there, the family members in Nepal are less assured.

A senior journalist's son is working in a hotel operated by an international-chain in Dubai. He also expressed his worries that being at risk away from home is more worrisome.

However, a Nepali youth in Israel said that the information and security system there is at an advanced level and people are informed to move to safe bunkers before any bomb-strike. "I am never worried about my safety here, but my family in Nepal is."

Balen wins Jhapa-5...

Likewise, Ranju Darshana has been elected from Kathmandu-1, Sunil KC from Kathmandu-2, Raju Nath Pandey from Kathmandu-3, Pukar Bam from Kathmandu-4, Sasmit Pokharel from Kathmandu-5, Sishir Khanal from Kathmandu-6, Ganesh Parajuli from Kathmandu-7, Biraj Bhakta from Kathmandu-8, Dol Prasad Aryal from Kathmandu-9 and Pradip from Kathmandu-10.

Likewise, Rukesh Ranjit emerged victorious from Bhaktapur-1 and Rajib Khatri from Bhaktapur-2.

Likewise, former Minister and RSP candidate Jagdish Kharel has been elected from Lalitpur-2. The RSP has recorded a remarkable rise in Morang district. Out of the six constituencies in the district, the RSP has already secured victory in three and is leading in the remaining three.

Rubina Acharya of RSP won the election in Morang-6 with a landslide vote against NC's prominent leader Dr. Shekhar Koirala. Acharya received 55,513 votes, while Koirala received 12850 votes. Asha Jha has won from Morang-5, securing 30,434 votes. Her closest rival Phul Kumar Lalwani of NC received 9,415 votes. while Raj Kumar Yadav of the Janata Samajwadi Party obtained 8,747 votes.

In Morang–4, Santosh Rajbanshi of the RSP also emerged victorious with 40,833 votes. Nepali Congress General Secretary Gururaj Ghimire secured 12,818 votes, while former minister Aman Lal Modi of the Nepal Communist Party received 10,762 votes. All popular candidates from RSP, including vice chairs Dol Prasad Aryal and Swarnim Wagle, and leader Deepak Bohora, have been elected with big margins.

Nepali Congress

At the time this news was prepared, the Nepali Congress has own nine seats in the HoR. Santosh Subba of Nepali Congress has own election from Tehrathum-1, Tek Bahadur Gurung from Manag-1, Yogesh GauchanThakali from Mustang-1, Abhishek Pratap Sah from Kapilvastu-3, Khadga Bahadur Buda from Jajarkot-1, Basana Thapa from Dailekh-1, Bishnu Bahadur Khadka from Surkhet-1, Bharat Kumar Swar from Achham-1, Bharat Bahadur Khadka from Doti, and Sandip Rana from Palpa-1. However, NC president Gagan Thapa is trailing behind RSP candidate Amaresh Kumar Singh in Sarlahi-4.

CPN-UML

Likewise, the CPN-UML candidates Mohhamad Ishtiyak Rai won the election from Banke-2, Laxmi Prasad Pokharel from Dailekh-2, Ain Bahadur Mahar from Bajhang-1 and Chhitiz Thebe from Taplejung emerged victorious.

Nepali Communist Party (NCP)

Similarly, NCP party coordinator Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' has own the election from Rukum East and Barsha Man Pun from Rolpa-1. Prachanda won the election with 10,240 votes, and his closest contender of CPN-UML received 3,462 votes. Likewise, Pun won the election with 27,460 votes, while his closest contender, Sudan Kumar Oli received 10,894 votes.

Similarly, Gyan Bahadur Shahi, a candidate of Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), own the election from Jumla-1. He garnered 14,816 votes, while his closest contender of UML, Naresh Bhandari, received 11,635 votes. He is the only candidate of RPP to win the election. None of the candidate of his party is leading the vote counting.

Small Earth Nepal to install climate tracking...

There is strong recognition that Himalayan communities possess detailed indigenous environmental knowledge. In the absence of scientific instruments, monks conduct rituals to pray for rain during droughts and interpret climatic patterns through traditional calendars, which guide pastoral activities and agricultural practices.

Pemma Wangchen Gurung, Vice-Chairman of Shey-Phoksundo Rural Municipality in Dolpa, said rising temperatures are having a major impact on high-mountain regions like Dolpa. "We do not have the luxury to cultivate crops whenever it rains. For good production, there should be three seasonal rainfalls or snowfalls," he said.

Dolpa is famous in the country for the Himalayan gold, called Yarsagumba, and its production depends on snowfall. "This year we had good snowfall, so we expect a good harvest of Yarsagumba. The snowfall we received in October/November, 2025, is the best in the last 10 years," he added.

He said that water sources are also changing in the area. "Places that had no visible water are now seeing water again, while some areas that used to have water have gone dry," he said.

Gurung also highlighted changes in agriculture. "We never used to get good vegetables grown like in the lowlands, but now we can cultivate cauliflower, cabbage and tomatoes in greenhouses. Still, the situation is very different from the last few decades," he said.

He also said that traditional weather predictions based on lunar calendars are becoming unreliable. "There used to be rituals according to the lunar calendar, but now we cannot predict the rainy season or the start of winter because snowfall is no longer regular. Climate patterns are shifting dramatically," Gurung said.

Amid the growing need to obtain reliable scientific meteorological data, The Small Earth Nepal has initiated the installation of HiM-DATA (High-altitude Monasteries for Data Acquisition, Tracking and Awareness) systems in high-altitude areas.

HiM-DATA is a collaborative initiative aimed at strengthening climate data collection, raising awareness, and promoting community-led climate action in high mountain regions through meaningful engagement with monastic institutions, said Dr. Dhiraj Pradhananga, UNESCO Chair in Mountain Cryosphere and Water.

The monastery in Namkha Rural Municipality-2 of Humla, which hosts around 500 residential students, has been identified as a suitable site for the installation of HiM DATA at an altitude of 3,190 metres high.

High mountainous areas are more vulnerable to the possible impact of climate change and glaciers are melting rapidly and the weather stations in such areas are not more than 11, so the automatic meteorological weather station would be very beneficial for the monitoring of rainfall and snowfall which will help to monitor the impact in the changing weather conditions in the high mountainous areas said Dr. Pradhananga, who is also Associate Professor of Hydrometeorology, Tribhuvan University.

According to Principal Lama, the monastery lies between two streams, and local residents depend on stream water for drinking. "We drink water directly from the streams," he said.

Speaking about the weather station to be installed at the monastery, Lama said monks reside there throughout the year and are ready to take responsibility for maintaining the equipment. "If the device gives reliable results, we will better understand where the climate is heading. It will make it easier to know the weather patterns," he said. "We will take responsibility for maintaining and properly utilising the equipment."

According to Lama, they have been informed that an automatic weather station for meteorological data will be installed at the monastery premises, which has been identified as a suitable location. As per the received information, only a 10-by-10 metre area of land will be required for the installation, he said.

Lama reiterated that global warming has significantly affected the region. "Climate change has had a clear impact here, and a lot of research is necessary," he said.

"There have already been a lot of research conducted in regard to the HiM DATA installation. Despite the region's vulnerability, climate monitoring remains limited, with past efforts to install automated weather stations often failing due to maintenance challenges," Dr. Pradhananga said.

According to him, the proposed approach uses monasteries in remote, high-altitude areas, many of which are occupied year-round, as secure sites for the stations. By training monks, nuns and lamas to maintain the equipment, the project aims to fill critical data gaps and strengthen local adaptation strategies.

Lanthimos takes pause in Athens before Oscars

AP
Athens, Greece, Mar. 7



PHOTO: AP

Visitors view photographs at an exhibition of images by Oscar nominated director Yorgos Lanthimos at Onassis Stegi in Athens, Greece, on Friday, March 6, 2026.

Oscar-nominated filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos paused his filmmaking and promotion schedule this week to celebrate a quieter creative pursuit: photography.

The 52-year-old Greek director on Friday inaugurated an exhibition of his photographs in his hometown of Athens, presenting images he has taken over the past five years — many captured while making his films, wandering through movie sets and nearby neighborhoods, or on trips back to Greece.

The exhibition gathers 182 still photographs, in color and in black and white, from the filmmaker known for his distinctive — and often disturbing — cinematic style. It opens days before Lanthimos returns to Hollywood for the March 15 Academy Awards ceremony. In his latest film, "Bugonia," a pair of conspiracy-obsessed men kidnap a powerful female executive they accuse of being an alien.

The movie received four Oscar nominations, including best picture and best actress for Emma Stone, along with nods for adapted screenplay and original score. The photos, all shot with a film camera, features several portraits of Stone, a frequent star in his films.

Lanthimos on Friday said he was happy to dive into something different. Photography, he said, began for him as a technical foundation for filmmaking but gradually became something more personal.

"In film school you learn that cinema is basically 24 photographs per second," he said. "So photography is where it all begins." Over time, working with still images opened a creative outlet separate from the complex machinery of movie production, he added.

"You can be alone with a camera, walking without having something specific in mind," Lanthimos said. "A photograph can have value on its own, but many photographs together can create another kind of value."

For Lanthimos, photography also offers something cinema rarely can: immediacy.

"You create something and almost immediately it exists," he said, describing the process of shooting and developing film in a darkroom. "You can take a photograph, print it and hold it in your hands. That satisfaction is very direct."

While Lanthimos remains one of contemporary cinema's most distinctive filmmakers, he said photography will play a growing role in his creative life. Unlike movies, he said, photographs are free to evolve long after they are taken.

"You can present them in a book, in an exhibition, combine them in different ways," Lanthimos said. "There's a freedom in photography that is very exciting."

The exhibition at the Onassis Foundation runs through May 17.

Kennedy centre loses Jean Davidson to the Wallis

AP
New York, Mar. 7

The executive director of the National Symphony Orchestra, a mainstay at the Kennedy Center, is leaving to head the Los Angeles-based Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts. It's the latest departure from the Kennedy Center since President Donald Trump began asserting control over the storied performing arts venue in Washington.

The Wallis announced Friday that Jean Davidson had been appointed executive director and CEO. Before joining the Kennedy Center in 2023, Davidson had served for eight years as executive director and CEO of the Los Angeles Master Chorale at The Music Center.

"The arts are where a community sees itself, and where it imagines what's possible next," Davidson said in a statement. "I'm honored to join the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Arts at this pivotal moment."

Kennedy Center President Richard Grenell said in a statement to The Associated Press that she was among those who deserved "enormous credit" for their efforts.

"I have enjoyed working with Jean to cultivate new donors and patrons while cleaning up the financial mess at the (center)," he said.

In a statement to The Associated Press, Davidson said: "It has been a great honor to serve the NSO and to work alongside Gianandrea Noseda, Steven Reineke, the extraordinary musicians, and the dedicated staff and board. I'm deeply proud of everything we've accomplished together."

Davidson told the Los Angeles Times that she had found it "more and more difficult" to remain at the Kennedy Center, "given the external forces that are at work that are just so far beyond my control."

After mostly ignoring the center during his first term, Trump has made it a focal point in his war against "woke" culture." He ousted the Kennedy Center's previous leadership and replaced it with a handpicked board of trustees who voted to rename the facility the Trump Kennedy Center, a change scholars and lawmakers say must be initiated by Congress.

Renée Fleming, Philip Glass and Bela Fleck are among numerous artists who have called off performances, and the Washington National Opera ended its decades-long residency. Last month, Trump said he would move to close the center this summer for construction he expects to last two years.

At the Wallis, Davidson succeeds Robert van Leer, who recently left to join the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation as performing arts program director.

Andris Nelsons out as music director of Boston Symphony

AP
New York, Mar. 7

Andris Nelsons is being forced out as music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the summer of 2027 after 13 seasons.

The orchestra made an unusually blunt announcement Friday.

"The decision to not renew his contract was made by the BSO's board of trustees because, beyond our shared desire to ensure our orchestra continues to perform at the highest levels, the BSO and Andris Nelsons were not aligned on future vision," the BSO said in a statement from its trustees and CEO Chad Smith.

A five-time Grammy award winner, the 47-year-old Nelsons is currently leading the Vienna Philharmonic on a U.S. tour and was to conduct the orchestra in Naples, Florida, on Friday night.

"While this is not the decision I anticipated or wanted, I am unwaveringly committed to you and to our work together," Nelson wrote in a letter to BSO musicians and staff that was released by his management agency. "I understand the decision was not related to artistic standards, performances, or achievements during my tenure, and, therefore, my focus is straightforward: to protect the music, support the orchestra's stability, and continue to perform with the musicians of the BSO at the highest artistic level."

Nelsons made his BSO debut in March 2011 at New York's Carnegie Hall as a replacement for James Levine, who announced 10 days earlier he was stepping down as BSO music director at the end of the 2010-11 season because of poor health.

Nelson was announced as music director in May 2013 and given a five-year contract starting with the 2014-15 season. The orchestra announced contract extensions in 2015 and 2020, then in January 2024 said he was given an evergreen rolling contract. He was bestowed an added title of head of conducting at Tanglewood, the music and educational center that is the orchestra's summer home.

The last extension was announced a few months after Smith, who had been with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, started as the BSO's chief executive.

Nelsons was music director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in Britain from 2008-09 and has been chief conductor of Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in Germany since the 2017-18 season. He married soprano Kristine Opolais in 2011, and in 2018 they announced their divorce.

Priyanka recalls piercing her belly button

AGENCY
New Delhi, Mar. 7

Long before she became a global star, Priyanka Chopra began her journey in the spotlight through beauty pageants. The actor first competed in the Miss India pageant as a teenager and went on to win the Miss World 2000 title at just 18, a moment that changed the course of her life.

In a recent conversation on the Going Rogue podcast, Priyanka looked back at those early years, recalling how overwhelming the experience was for a small-town teenager who had never modelled before. She also shared how she was not a "fashion girl" in that era but really enjoyed her belly button piercing, to the point that she once re-pierced herself in the back of a cab.

The host also brought up a moment from Priyanka's Miss World 2000 journey, when she used a "namaste" gesture to discreetly hold her gown in place on stage. Asked if she had other such quick fixes for fashion emergencies, Priyanka shared a few of her go-to hacks. "Chewing gum to hold my shirt together just for a quick photo moment," she said. "Once when I was getting out of my car and going in, my shirt was separating, so I just put gum on it and it held together."

She added that even a simple band-aid can work as a substitute for fashion tape. "If you don't have double-sided tape, take a band-aid and make it into a circle."

Despite being known for her red carpet appearances today, Priyanka said she did not grow up with a strong connection to fashion. "I wasn't really a fashion girl. I didn't grow up knowing or having any relationship with fashion, but I did have a relationship with style," she said.



"I loved dressing myself and I knew what silhouettes worked for me." She also recalled her teenage style in the 1990s. "In the '90s in high school, I was that quintessential '90s girl — flared jeans, a pierced belly button and crop tops."

Priyanka even revealed the unconventional way she once re-pierced her belly button. "I re-pierced my belly button in the back of a cab," she said. "That's what we used to do back then."

"When I went for the Miss India pageant, I had never modelled before. It was the first time I was modelling, walking the runway and going toe-to-toe with all these models who had so much experience," she said. Priyanka explained that she was barely 17 or 18 at the time and suddenly found herself navigating a completely unfamiliar world.

"I was a teenager from a small town, so it was a massive transformational change for a young girl who didn't know what the industry was like and suddenly found herself in the limelight," she said. According to the actor, the pressure of competing in a pageant meant she had to grow up very quickly. "I learned fast.

I had to grow up quickly because in a pageant you're not supposed to make any mistakes. You're expected to do everything perfectly, to be eloquent and well-spoken. So I immediately tried to become the best version of myself. Everyone around me was so polished."

She also spoke about competing at the Miss World pageant in the UK and how different the cultural environment felt compared to what she had known before. "The Miss World pageant I attended was in the UK, and it was very different from how America views its pageants.

It was culturally different too. I grew up really fast and learned how to 'fake it till you make it' sometimes. That was the only way to not look like I was dying inside in front of millions of people."

Priyanka explained the mindset by describing what it feels like to walk into a room where you feel out of place. "Sometimes when you walk into a room and it feels tough, you have to give yourself a talk and say: you either belong in this room and people will see you, or you will be invisible. And both are fine — but you have to decide which side of the room you want to be on."

HOROSCOPE

tarot.com

ARIES: You may find it difficult to take action on any practical matter today, Aries. If you find this is the case, don't bother pressuring yourself into making it happen.

TAURUS: Take action on well-laid plans today, Taurus. Stay levelheaded, and seek pleasure by taking things steadily one step at a time.

GEMINI: Action is the key word for you today, Gemini, so put on some comfortable shoes and have a good time. Infuse a bit of non sequitur playfulness in your dealings with others.

CANCER: Live your creative fantasies today, Cancer, but watch out for the reality police at the border. You may experience a bit of conflict with a stubborn person or in a situation that isn't very well planned.

LEO: Today is one of those days in which you might be kicking yourself for not telling the truth on an earlier occasion, Leo. The words that seemed so harmless then may come back to haunt you now. Today is a very action-oriented day.

VIRGO: Today is a very high-energy day in which you have the physical stamina to accomplish quite a bit, Virgo. Take care, however, that you have all the necessary facts before you venture out for your day's activities.

LIBRA: Plan your moves carefully today, Libra, and have patience with the people around you. If you're working with others, be sure they're on the same page with your goals and aims and that they aren't somehow working counter to your purposes.

SCORPIO: Your actions may be touched by a very fanciful frame of mind today, Scorpio. Be careful about indulging in recreational substances that take you out of reality for a while.

SAGITTARIUS: You're being called upon to take action in many areas today, Sagittarius. People may be tugging at you to be with them and participate in their world of fun and excitement.

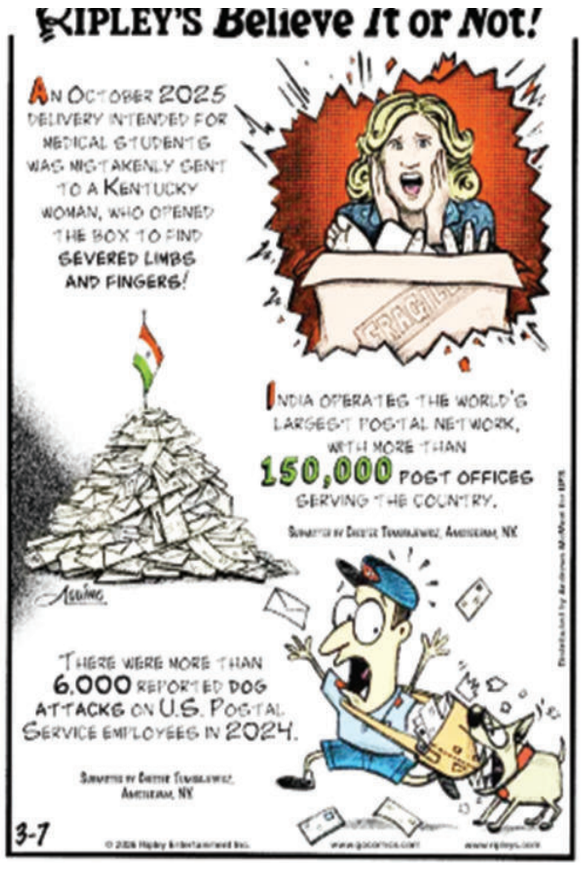
CAPRICORN: Take action to create a fanciful dream world today, Capricorn. Indeed, many of the activities of the day will be touched with an air of otherworldliness.

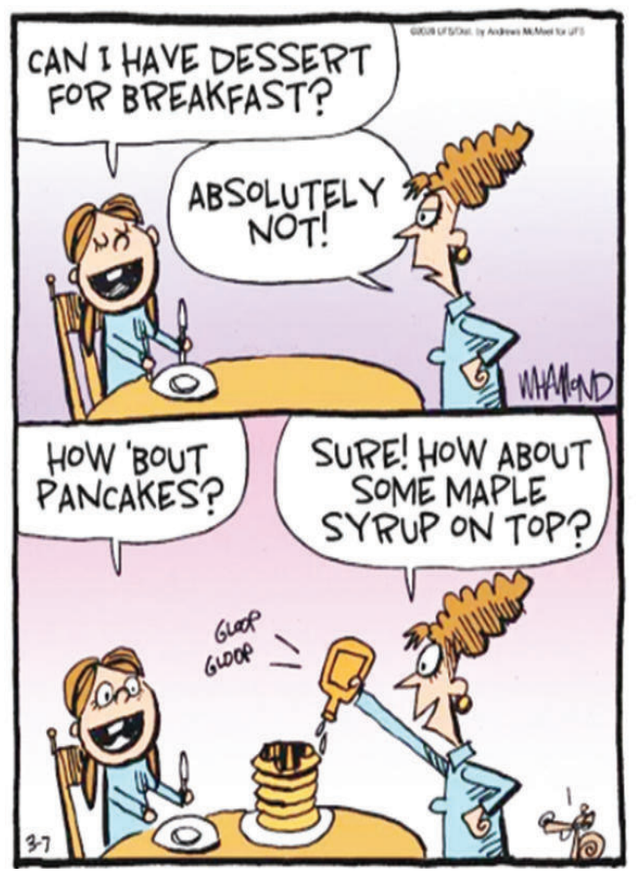
AQUARIUS: A strong desire to bring more of the fantasy realm into your own reality spurs your actions today, Aquarius. You could discover that there is an intense desire to bring a sense of the obscure to the normal, everyday realm.

PISCES: This is an intense day for you during which the disharmony in different realms of your life crops up and spurs you on to action, Pisces.

CARTOON

gocomics.com





Valverde gives Real Madrid 2-1 victory at Celta Vigo

AP
Madrid, Mar. 7

Real Madrid scored with a deflected shot in the 94th minute to win 2-1 at Celta Vigo and close the gap on La Liga leader Barcelona to one point.

Madrid was seeking to avoid a run of three successive losses for the first time since 2018 and needed a massive dose of luck to secure all three points.

It went ahead after 11 minutes when Aurélien Tchouaméni's shot from just inside the penalty box left the Celta keeper flatfooted.

Celta's experienced striker Borja Iglesias equalized for the home side with his third goal in four games after 25 minutes, and strike partner Iago Aspas was unfortunate to see his shot come back off the post with two minutes remaining as both sides pushed for a winner. But a massive stroke of luck in the dying seconds gave Madrid victory.

Federico Valverde's shot from outside the box took a wicked deflection that left keeper Ionut Radu with no chance.

"It hurts because it was right at the death," Iglesias said. "It's a bit frustrating."

Barcelona plays its game in hand against Athletic Bilbao on Saturday. Madrid has 63 points while Barcelona has 64.

Celta remains sixth with 40.

Meanwhile, Napoli beat Torino 2-1 to close the gap on second-place AC Milan to one point and maintain its record as the only team still unbeaten at home in Serie A this season. Torino hasn't beaten Napoli in the top tier since the 2008-09 season and it fell behind after six minutes.

Alisson Santos created a meter of space on the edge of the Torino penalty area and fired a low shot past the outstretched arm of Alberto Paleari.



PHOTO:AP

Real Madrid's Arda Guler, left, duels for the balls with Celta's Williot Swedberg during a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Celta Vigo and Real Madrid in Vigo, Spain.

Third-place Napoli dominated throughout and Eljif Elmas spun to volley home Matteo Politano's knock down and make it 2-0 midway through the second half. Napoli coach Antonio Conte introduced playmaker Kevin De Bruyne for his first appearance since an October injury, but his team was forced to sweat in the final seconds after Cesare Casadei pulled back a late consolation goal for Torino.

Napoli, though, held on to open a five-point gap on fourth-place Roma. It now has 56 points, one behind Milan and 11 behind champions-elect Inter.Inter and Milan face off in the Milan derby on Sunday.

Torino is 14th with 30 points. Likewise, Paris Saint-Germain dropped points in the Ligue 1 title race after losing 3-1 at home to a slick Monaco side.

Leader PSG's fourth league defeat of the campaign could have been even heavier and rival Lens can move within one point at the top by beating rock-bottom Metz on Sunday.

Livewire winger Maghnes Aklioucheopened the scoring for Monaco and American forward Folarin Balogun sealed the win with a deflected strike in the 73rd minute.

Monaco beat PSG 1-0 in the league in September and has taken the lead in all four games this season, including two in the Champions League. PSG hosts Chelsea in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 game on Wednesday.

Aklioucheh pounced in the 27th minute after terrible defending from Warren Zaïre-Emery, who tried to dribble out of his penalty area and lost the ball.

Balogun reacted quickly to combine with Aklioucheh to his right, and he slammed the ball in off the post.

Aklioucheh scored at the same end at Parc des Princes in the return leg of the Champions League playoff. PSG advanced 5-4 on aggregate to set up the clash with Chelsea.

Fifth-place Monaco grabbed a second goal 10 minutes into the second half when midfielder Aleksandr Golovin, who had just come on, slid the ball into the bottom corner after latching onto a cross from the right. He almost scored again moments later with a superb dipping strike from 25 meters.

Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembélé came on for PSG on the hour mark, having missed the last three games with a calf injury, but lacked sharpness.

Forward Bradley Barcola pulled a goal back in the 71st with a deflected low shot, but Balogun restored the two-goal lead from the edge of the penalty area when his shot sailed over goalkeeper Matvei Safonov's head.

Safonov was beaten again near the end although Simon Adingra's shot hit the crossbar.

Aklioucheh makes World Cup case

Aklioucheh has made five appearances for France since breaking into the national team at the start of the season, and is pushing his case to be included in coach Didier Deschamps' World Cup squad later this year.

Aklioucheh caused problems throughout with his runs from deep and midfielder Vitinha intervened just in time to stop him shooting again late in the first half.

Venus Williams' comeback hits another snag

AP
Indian Wells, Mar. 7

Venus Williams lost again in her return to the BNP Paribas Open, falling in the first round Thursday, 6-3, 6-7 (4), 6-1 to Diane Parry of France.

The 45-year-old Williams, who has dropped her last eight WTA singles matches, received a wild card into the singles and doubles draws for the tournament in the Southern California desert. It came 30 years after she made her Indian Wells debut in 1996 when she was 15.

After Williams rallied in the second set to tie it, the 23-year-old Parry, ranked 111th in the world, took control and cruised in the third.

It was Williams' 10th career appearance in the tournament and first since 2024, when she also lost in the first round as a wild card. The seven-time major winner was given a wild card last year, but didn't accept it.

"Of course losing isn't fun, but it's great to play in front of a home crowd," the Southern California native said. "They were behind me the whole way, and that was really fun for that.

"I have amazing fans that believe in me and it's fun to play for them, or even in practice when they come out. It's very thrilling. Yeah, today was a tough one, but that's sport and that's life, and I'll take what I need from it."

The 45-year-old Williams, who has dropped her last eight WTA singles matches, received a wild card into the singles and doubles draws for the tournament in the Southern California desert.

Parry will face 15th-ranked American Madison Keys in the second round Saturday.

Williams entered the BNP Paribas Open having lost her last seven matches, with the only win in her comeback to the tour coming in her return at Washington last year.

She competed in the Australian Open in January and lost in the first round in both singles and doubles. Williams was the oldest woman to compete in an Australian Open singles main draw, surpassing the mark set by Japan's Kimiko Date, who was 44 when she lost in the first round in 2015.

Williams most recently participated in the ATX Open in Austin, Texas, last month as a wild-card entry and lost in the first round of singles to Ajla Tomljanovic.

Liverpool hits back to beat Wolves

AP
Wolver Hampton, Mar. 7

Andy Robertson scored for only the second time this season and set up Mohamed Salah for another goal as Liverpool beat Wolverhampton 3-1 to move into the quarterfinals of the FA Cup.

Scotland captain Robertson rifled in a low shot from outside the penalty box 10 minutes into the second half to put Liverpool ahead and then Salah crashed home his enticing cross two minutes later.

Curtis Jones added a third for the visitor 16 minutes from time before Hwang Hee-Chan scored a stoppage-time consolation for Wolves.

Defender Robertson's only other goal this season came in September when Liverpool beat Atletico Madrid in the Champions League. His leading role in Friday's win was a welcome one after Wolves had humbled Arne Slot's team 2-1 in the Premier League three days ago.

"(That was a) bit more like it," Robertson told the BBC. "We know we let ourselves down on Tuesday … it was up to us to go and put it right. The FA Cup is do or die."

The quarterfinals take place on the first weekend in April. The other seven contenders will be decided in matches to be held over the next few days.



PHOTO:AP

Liverpool's Mohamed Salah celebrates scoring their second goal of the game during an English FA Cup fifth round match against Wolverhampton Wanderers in Wolverhampton, England.

"We are trying to fight on all fronts," Robertson said. "We are still in two cup competitions. If we play like we did tonight, then nobody wants to play against us. We have to start showing that consistency. It is one step forward and two steps back."

Red Bull welcomes Hadjar to hot seat with Verstappen

AP
Melbourne, Mar. 7

Isack Hadjar has no lack of confidence going into his debut season at Red Bull Racing, despite having arguably the most difficult ride in Formula 1.

On the eve of the season-opening Australian Grand Prix, the 21-year-old French driver said he expects to win a race in his first season with the team while squaring up against teammate and four-time world champion Max Verstappen.

It seems incongruous for him to say it, given Hadjar is only going into his second season of F1 and Red Bull doesn't appear to have a major pace advantage heading into Sunday's race at Albert Park in Melbourne. But Hadjar showed his and the team's overall strength by qualifying third for Sunday's race.

To add to Hadjar's challenge is that Verstappen has gone through four teammates in about 15 months.

One of them, Sergio Pérez, said in January that being Verstappen's teammate was "the worst job there is in Formula 1." Pérez was beside Verstappen for four years at Red Bull before being dropped at the end of 2024 with two years left in his contract. Pérez is returning to F1 this year with new team Cadillac.



PHOTO:AP

Mechanics work on Red Bull driver Isack Hadjar of France's car during the first practice session for the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park, in Melbourne, Australia.

Still, Hadjar is putting the off-track talk aside, saying the team is set to surprise everyone with the pace of the RB22 car.

"I would say I'm confident in our race car, what we can do in the race, a bit less probably on one lap pace," Hadjar told The Associated Press in an exclusive interview. "But if we're going to surprise people it's definitely in a good way."

Hadjar said he was stunned by the competitiveness of Red Bull's new power unit, an endlessly complex technical project.

"I was very happily surprised with the reliability and driveability of the engine," Hadjar said. "I know that I can't make engines, but I know what it requires to make something smooth to drive. And to do it in 3 1-2 years, start the project so late and (then) make it so well is so impressive."

Also impressive is Hadjar himself, who came back from an embarrassing formation lap crash on debut during last year's Australian GP to score points at 10 of 24 races, including a third place at the Dutch Grand Prix, the fifth-youngest podium finisher in F1 history.

Hadjar will also benefit from having the same team boss, Laurent Mekies, who also made the step from Racing Bulls to replace Christian Horner at Red Bull last year in the aftermath of Horner's exit in the days following the British Grand Prix last July.

"Yeah, it's good, not much change for me," Hadjar said. "I know him (Mekies) quite well, made my debut in F1 with him, we had some very good moments. So, it's good not to step into unknown territory, so it's good to keep going on the way I started F1."

One change Hadjar has made is important — a geographical one. He moved from Faenza, Italy where he was close to Racing Bulls to London to be closer to Red Bull Racing's Milton Keyes operation. He'll need all the help he can get to take on Verstappen in the same team.

Blanchet leads in Puerto Rico Open

AP
Rio Grande, Mar. 7

Chandler Blanchet did more than make his first cut of the year on the PGA Tour. His 5-under 67 on Friday gave him a four-shot lead in the Puerto Rico Open with a pair of teenager and John Daly's son around for the weekend.

Blanchet made birdies on all the par 5s at Grand Reserve and matched the tournament record for largest lead through 36 holes.

Gordon Sargent, one shot off the lead when the day began, shot 70 to fall four back.

Blanchet was at 13-under 131.

"The first part of the season, it's been difficult, for sure," Blanchet said. "It's no fun practicing on Saturday and Sunday and not playing and waiting five days. So will be very happy to play some golf on a Saturday and Sunday this weekend."

Blades Brown, the 18-year-old who turned pro before graduating high school in January, gets another crack at becoming the youngest PGA Tour winner in 95 years. Brown shot 67 and was tied for third, hoping to build off the experience of playing in the final group with Scottie Scheffler at The American Express last month.

Brown was at 8-under 136 along with Ricky Castillo (68), Jesper Svensson of Sweden (69) and Jeremy Paul of Germany (67).

"Yeah, we're halfway there," Brown said. "A lot can happen in two days, so I'm excited for the weekend."

Daly played bogey-free and was six shots out of the lead in a tie for seventh. The Arkansas alum is making his PGA Tour debut.

His father, the two-time major champion, played the Puerto Rico Open six times, making the cut four times with his best finish at tie for 10th in 2015, when his son was 11.

"It's awesome. This place has always been one of my favorites to come watch my dad play back in the day, so it's pretty cool to make it to the weekend," Daly said.

Brown wasn't the only teenager to make the weekend. Miles Russell, the 17-year-old who already has committed to play at Florida State, make his first cut in his fifth PGA Tour start by making birdie from the bunker on his final hole at the par-5 ninth.

The winner gets a spot in The Players Championship next week and the PGA Championship, but not the Masters because it is held opposite the Arnold Palmer Invitational.

John Daly authored one of the more amazing wins when he was the ninth alternate for the 1991 PGA Championship, got in when Nick Price withdrew, and then overwhelmed Crooked Stick with his power to win.

Could another surprise be in the works with his son?

"Honestly, go out there and try to go a low as I can," Daly said. "I got nothing to lose, so just go out there and have fun and just keep doing what I'm doing."

RONALDO'S INJURY SERIOUS

AP
Riyadh, Mar. 7

Cristiano Ronaldo's hamstring injury is more serious than first thought, Al-Nassr coach Jorge Jesus said Friday.

Ronaldo, 41, limped out of Al-Nassr's 3-1 Saudi Pro League victory over Al-Fayha last weekend.

"In the last game, Cristiano left with a muscle injury," Jesus told journalists. "After the tests he underwent, it became clear that it is a more serious injury than we were expecting.

"He will need rest and recovery. Cristiano will travel to Spain for treatment, as will other players who were injured. He will need treatment from his personal physiotherapist. We hope he will return soon to help the team."

Former Real Madrid star Ronaldo's availability for Portugal's friendlies later this month, as it ramps up preparations for the World Cup, may now be in doubt.

Lingard signs for Brazil's Corinthians

AP
Sao Paulo, Mar. 7

Brazilian soccer club Corinthians completed the signing of former England and Manchester United forward Jesse Lingard.

Lingard joined on a free transfer from South Korea's FC Seoul, where he has played since 2024.

"From the (United) Kingdom to the favela," Corinthians posted on Instagram, with a picture of the 33-year-old player holding the club's No. 77 shirt.

Lingard started his career at Manchester United and played 232 matches for the Red Devils, scoring 35 goals.

He also had brief spells at Brighton, Leicester, West Ham, Derby and Nottingham Forest.

"My first impression is being very happy, and I can't wait to get going," Lingard said. "It is a magical feeling. I've only seen (the Corinthians fans) online, but to actually be there is amazing."

Lingard featured in 67 matches for FC Seoul, scoring 19 goals. He netted six times in 32 appearances for England.

Corinthians officials are hoping he will be eligible for the home Brazilian league match against Coritiba on Wednesday.

Lingard will again team up with former United colleague Memphis Depay at Corinthians. The Dutch forward has played for the Sao Paulo-based club since 2024.

Corinthians is the defending Brazilian Cup champion and is also contender for this year's Copa Libertadores title.

It is third in the Brazilian league with seven points from four matches, three behind co-leaders Palmeiras and Sao Paulo.

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