

THE RISING NEPAL

ALL BE HAPPY, ALL BE WELL

NRNA global conference ends with 12-point Kathmandu declaration

PM calls for Diaspora unity

BY LAXMAN KAFLE
Kathmandu, Mar 16

The 12th Global Conference and International General Assembly of the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) concluded here on Monday with a 12-point declaration.

The declaration has emphasised unity among the global Nepali community and greater investment in Nepal's development.

Held under the theme "Our Unity, Base for Prosperity", the three-day conference brought together Nepali diaspora representatives from around the world. The declaration outlines several commitments to strengthening the role of non-resident Nepalis in Nepal's development.

It urged the government of Nepal to create a more favourable legal and policy environment to facilitate diaspora investment, including amendments to laws governing citizenship, foreign investment, income tax, and property transactions.

The conference also called for establishing a dedicated mechanism to manage investment by non-resident



Prime Minister Sushila Karki and ministers attending the 12th NRN Global Conference and NRNA International General Assembly organised in Kathmandu on Monday.

Nepalis, including provisions for opening bank accounts and enabling the repatriation of investments. It demanded that the limit of securities issued by the NRN Nepal Development Fund be fixed at 85 per cent.

The NRNA pledged to mobilise the knowledge and expertise of Nepali professionals, scientists and researchers worldwide to support Nepal's development through technology transfer,

innovation, and collaboration.

The declaration emphasised diaspora investment in job creation, entrepreneurship, infrastructure development, and improvement in the living standards of Nepalis.

It has identified hydropower, agriculture, tourism, information technology and innovation-based industries as priority sectors for investment and cooperation between the diaspora and

the government of Nepal.

"We are deeply concerned and serious about the latest situation in the Middle East. We express our commitment to strengthening cooperation with the government of Nepal and international agencies to provide relief, rescue and rehabilitation assistance to Nepalis in various parts of the Middle East in times of crisis," it said.

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RSP to push economic diplomacy

BY PALLAV BHUSAL
Kathmandu, Mar. 16

Nepal's political scene has changed beyond expectation after the clear election victory of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) on March 5, 2026. With a strong majority in Parliament, senior leader Balendra Shah is deemed to be the next Prime Minister of the country.

Former Education Minister and newly elected MP Shishir Khanal, who won from Kathmandu-6 and represents the Rastriya Swatantra Party that is set to form the new government, has said the administration will prioritise good governance and economic diplomacy in its foreign policy.

"The Constitution of Nepal has already laid out the framework and policies which define how Nepal engages with its international partners. The RSP, which is all set to form the government, will acknowledge those policies and work to strengthen them," said Khanal. "The government will focus primarily on economic diplomacy and reform with international partners in order to develop infrastructure in the country, attract

foreign investment and boost tourism," he added.

Khanal added that the new government must work while safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and conduct foreign policy in accordance with the Constitution. "We will pursue foreign policies that deliver tangible benefits for the country," he said.

However, experts say that after the historic win, the new government faces a tough and immediate challenge. It must handle complex international relations while also improving professionalism of Nepal's diplomatic service, which has often been criticised as weak and overly focused on paperwork.

Foreign policy expert Professor Dr. Mohan Lohani said Nepal's foreign policy has stayed mostly the same across different constitutions, but its execution needs to improve. He believes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must become more professional and organised. "Nepali diplomats should be clear, confident, and skilled enough to negotiate strongly on the global stage, just like those from our neighbouring countries," he said.

Another key issue for the new government is maintaining balanced

relations with its international partners, specially, India, China and the United States. Former Nepali Ambassador to Australia Mahesh Dahal warned that Nepal must not favour one country over the other. Doing so could damage important relationships. "The new leadership might face pressing bilateral challenges concerning border security and need for infrastructure development," he said. Dahal suggested Nepal could use economic cooperation with both neighbours and other global partners to improve infrastructure, especially by connecting the Tarai plains with the Himalayan regions.

On the global stage, experts say Nepal should take a more active role rather than just being present. Dr. Lohani pointed to Nepal's recent firm stance at the United Nations on global conflicts as an example of protecting national sovereignty. "Nepal's traditional non-aligned position still matters today, as it helps avoid being seen as too close to any major power," he said.

Dahal agreed with Lohani, saying Nepal must show that it has an independent voice when dealing with foreign partners.

Economic diplomacy has been discussed in Nepali politics for more

than three decades, but results have been limited. Dr. Lohani noted that a number of task forces have been formed since 1990, yet their recommendations are rarely put into practice. "The new government should not create more institutions but strengthen those that already exist," he said. Dr. Lohani suggested forming a high-level coordination committee led by the Prime Minister to ensure better cooperation between ministries and the private sector.

As the RSP moves from being a rising political force to leading the government with almost a two-thirds majority, attention is now turning to its promises. Dr. Lohani warned that the party could lose public trust if its election commitments are not turned into clear and effective policies. Therefore, the new government has a huge challenge forward in diplomatic front. To handle sensitive foreign relations, Dahal recommended setting up a Diplomatic Expert Group to guide the young leadership.

With strong public support, the government to be led by Shah must prove it can protect Nepal's sovereignty while building a more capable and professional foreign service

HIB provides health services based on NID

HIB-NID Agreement eases health insurance service, eliminating complexities

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 16

The National Health Insurance Board has begun providing healthcare services based on the National Identity Card to expand the health insurance programme.

The board has reached an agreement with the National Identity Card and Registration Department and is preparing to gradually base health insurance on the National Identity Card (NID) number.

Dr. Krishna Prasad Poudel, Executive Director of the Health Insurance Board, and Namaraj Ghimire, Director General of the National Identity Card, have signed an agreement to integrate NID's data with the insurance system.

According to Dr. Krishna Prasad Poudel, ED of HIB, preparations are underway to gradually make the registration and renewal process of health insurance online after the agreement between HIB and NID.

Speaking with The Rising Nepal, Dr. Poudel stated that those who want to join the health insurance programme can register their name and details through the NID number.

"This agreement will prevent the same person from receiving services from two sources. It will also make it easier for citizens to receive health insurance services. In addition, we will now eliminate the complexities in the insurance services in hospitals through biometrics," Dr. Krishna Prasad Poudel said.

Either new or those who have been receiving services through the traditional method would receive health insurance services through the NID registration, Dr. Poudel said.

He stated that many issues and barriers would be resolved within a year. Dr. Poudel mentioned that new registration will be integrated online within a month. With this initiative, service recipients will receive health insurance services using their NID number instead of relying solely on the insurance card.

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Snowfall recorded in mid-March, farmers happy

BY HARIKRISHNA SHARMA
Muktinath (Mustang), Mar. 16

Mustang has witnessed snowfall for the fourth time this year. Although heavy snowfall earlier affected daily life in Upper Mustang, the recent snowfall accompanied by a slight rise in temperature has been welcomed by locals.

Light snowfall was recorded in all five rural municipalities of Mustang, bringing relief and excitement to farmers engaged in agriculture and livestock farming. Angyal Gurung, a herder from Chhoser in Lomanthang Rural Municipality-1 of Upper Mustang, said the snowfall during the warmer season will help the grass to grow in grazing areas and make livestock rearing easier.

Since December, sub-zero temperatures and heavy snowfall had resulted in a shortage of grass in high-altitude pastures, forcing farmers to keep their yaks and mountain goats near settlements. Gurung said the recent snowfall will make it easier to move livestock back to grazing areas in the coming season.

"The snowfall in the second week of March, which has covered the pastures completely, has brought relief,"



PHOTO: TRN

Snow glistens like silver in Mustang after snowfall.

Gurung said. "If we can keep our goats in the grazing areas for a longer time, it will greatly help farmers."

In previous years, lack of snowfall had caused grass shortage in pastures, forcing farmers in Upper Mustang to carry imported feed to grazing areas at altitudes of up to 4,700 metres above sea level.

Dr. Lalmani Aryal, chief of the Agriculture and Livestock Development Office in Mustang, said farmers involved in agriculture and livestock farming had been worried about

declining snowfall. However, this year's snowfall has brought some relief.

"This snowfall has proved to be a blessing for agriculture and livestock farming. Snow accumulation in the high mountains will be very beneficial in winter," he said.

He added that snowfall was recorded in higher regions on March 15. Snowfall also helps maintain suitable temperatures for yaks and mountain goats in grazing areas.

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EC publishes final list of PR HoR members

Set to submit report to President Thursday

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 16

The Election Commission (EC) has published the final list of 110 candidates elected to the House of Representatives (HoR) under the proportional representation (PR) category on Monday, 11 days after the election.

The list includes twenty-eight men and eighty-two women, one of whom is from the LGBTIQ community. Bhumika Shrestha, a transgender woman, was elected to the HoR from the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP).

The RSP secured the highest number of seats, winning 57 in total, followed by the Nepali Congress (NC) with 20, CPN-UML with 16, Nepali Communist Party (NCP) with nine, and both Shram Sanskriti Party and Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), with four seats each.

The election results show the distribution of seats across community categories. Among the total, 29 members (nine men and 20 women) were elected from Indigenous Nationalities, 34 members including eight men and 26 women from the Khas/Arya category, 16 members (four men and 12 women) from the Madhesi community, 16 members (two men and 14 women) from the Dalit category, five women from the Muslim community, and seven members (three men and four women) from the Tharu category.

Additionally, two men and two women from the disabled community were elected. Of them, two were elected under the Indigenous Nationalities and two were from Khas/Arya category.

RSP's 57 elected candidates include nine men and forty-eight women, representing various communities. Among them, 17 are from Khas/Arya, 16 from Indigenous Nationalities, three from the Muslim community, eight from Dalit, nine from Madhesi, and four from Tharu communities.

From the Nepali Congress, five men and 15 women were elected. This includes six from Indigenous Nationalities, six from Khas/Arya, three from Dalit, three from Madhesi, and one each from Tharu and Muslim communities.

Among UML's 16 elected candidates, six were men and ten women. They represent a variety of communities, including four from Indigenous Nationalities, five from Khas/Arya, three from Madhesi, two from Dalit, and one each from Muslim and Tharu communities.

Similarly, of the nine elected candidates of NCP, five were men and four were women. Among them three were from Khas/Arya category, two each from Indigenous



Nationalities and Dalit category and one each from Tharu and Madhesi category.

The Shram Sanskriti Party's four elected candidates include one man and three women. Of them, one each represented Indigenous Nationalities, Khas/Arya, Dalit, and Madhesi communities.

RPP's four elected members consisted of two men and two women. Among them, two were represented from the Khas/Arya and one each from Indigenous Nationalities and Muslim communities.

With the final PR list now published, the EC will submit the official results to President Ramchandra Paudel on Thursday, said EC Joint-Spokesperson Kul Bahadur GC. This will expedite the process of forming the new government.

The HoR consists of 275 members, 165 elected through the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system and 110 through the PR system.

With 125 seats won under the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, the RSP will have a total of 182 lawmakers in the House of Representatives.

A two-thirds majority requires 184 seats, meaning the party falls two seats short of that mark. Likewise, the second-largest party, NC, won 18 seats under the FPTP system, bringing its total representation in the House to 38 seats.

CPN-UML won nine seats through direct election, taking its total number of lawmakers to 25.

Similarly, the NCP will have 17 lawmakers in total, including eight elected through the FPTP system.

The Shram Sanskriti Party, led by Harka Sampang, the ex-mayor of Dharan, won three FPTP seats and will now have seven lawmakers in total, entering the House of Representatives as a new political force.

RPP, which won one seat under the FPTP system, will have five lawmakers in the House.

» SEE NAME LIST ON PAGE 6

RAIN CLEARS KATHMANDU'S POLLUTION

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 16

Moderate rainfall in Kathmandu on Monday evening helped further cleanse the city's polluted air. Several districts across the country also received rainfall accompanied by hailstorms and lightning.

Monday's rainfall was caused by the influence of a westerly low-pressure system, which is common during the pre-monsoon season, said Barun Paudel, a senior meteorologist at the Meteorological Forecasting Division under the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM).

Moderate rainfall was recorded in various parts of Bagmati, Gandaki and Koshi provinces on Monday evening.

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BULLION
(Rs. per tola)

Hallmark Gold

: Rs. 309,500 /-

Worked Gold

: NA

Silver

: Rs. 5,265 /-



STOCK

NEPSE

: 2,798.83

Total Amount

: 11,974,696,088.01

No. of Share

: 30,790,211

MANGO PRODUCTION
LIKELY TO INCREASE
THIS YEAR

RSS
Janakpurdham, Mar. 16

Mango production is likely to increase this year in Madhes Province. Mango farms and orchards across all eight districts of the province have witnessed significant blossoming this season.

If the fruit trees brave strong winds, hailstorms, and the Madhuwa disease, production is expected to rise considerably. According to Senior Crops Officer Pradeep Kumar Yadav of the Agricultural Development Directorate, Madhes Province, initial assessments suggest that mango production could increase by around 60 percent this year compared to last year.

Poland is now among the world's 20 largest economies

AP
Poland, Mar. 16

A generation ago, Poland rationed sugar and flour while its citizens were paid one-tenth what West Germans earned. Today its economy has edged past Switzerland to become the world's 20th largest with over \$1 trillion in annual output.

It's a historic leap from the post-Communist ruins of 1989-90 to today's European growth champion that economists say has lessons on how to bring prosperity to ordinary people — and that the Trump administration says should be recognized by Poland's presence at a summit of the Group of 20 leading economies later this year.

The transformation is reflected in people like Joanna Kowalska, an engineer from Poznan, a town of half a million people midway between Berlin and Warsaw. She returned home after five years in the U.S.

"I get asked often if I'm missing something by coming back to Poland, and, to be honest, I feel it's the other way around," Kowalska said. "We are ahead of the United States in so many areas."

Kowalska works at the Poznan Supercomputing and Networking Center, which is developing the first artificial intelligence factory in Poland and integrating it with a quantum computer, one of 10 on the continent financed by a European Union program.

Kowalska worked for Microsoft in the U.S. after graduating from the Poznan University of Technology in a job she saw as a "dream come true."

But she missed having a "sense of mission," she said.

"Especially when it comes to

FM Khanal meets heads of financial sector regulators



Finance Minister Rameshore Prasad Khanal after a meeting with the heads of major financial sector regulatory bodies on Monday.

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 16

Finance Minister Rameshore Prasad Khanal held a meeting with the heads of major financial sector regulatory bodies on Monday to discuss issues related to the country's banking and financial system.

The meeting took place at the Ministry of Finance in the presence of Revenue Secretary Bhupal Baral.

Representatives from key regulatory

institutions participated in the discussion, including Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank Dr. Biswo Nath Paudel, Chairperson of Nepal Insurance Authority Chandrakala Paudel, and Chairperson of Securities Board of Nepal Santosh Narayan Shrestha.

During the meeting, Finance Minister Khanal expressed his gratitude to the regulatory bodies for their role in maintaining macroeconomic stability, fostering an investment-friendly environment, ensuring transparency in the capital market, and strengthening economic governance.

On the occasion, the heads of the regulatory agencies recalled their productive cooperation with the Finance Minister and appreciated the policies and guidance provided by the Ministry of Finance in promoting the development of Nepal's banking and financial sector and maintaining financial discipline.

The meeting highlighted the importance of continued coordination between the Ministry of Finance and financial sector regulators to strengthen the country's financial system and support sustainable economic development.

NEPSE dips 26 points

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 16

With the fluctuation, the benchmark of share market index, NEPSE, has posted a double-digit fall on Monday.

The NEPSE decreased by 26.07 (0.92 per cent) points and closed at 2,798.83 points today.

The index increased by 4.45 points on Sunday, while it increased by 23.87 points on Thursday last week. The sensitive index which measures the performance of group 'A' companies also decreased by 6.38 points (1.31 per cent) to close at 480.41 points.

Along with the decline of NEPSE index, the daily turnover has also decreased on Monday.

A total of 30,790,211 shares worth Rs. 11.97 billion of 345 companies were bought and sold in 102,759 transactions today.

On Sunday, a total of 36,211,659 shares worth Rs. 13.89 billion had been bought and sold.

According to NEPSE, the sub-indices of all groups, except manufacturing and processing group, have decreased in today's transaction.

Sub-index of life insurance group posted the highest fall of 127.68 points followed by non-life insurance group and development bank whose indices decreased by 52.65 points and 51.46 points respectively.

Similarly, sub-index of micro-finance group dropped by 38.16 points, others by 23.33 points, hydro-power by 23.33 points, banking by



23.96 points, and hotels by 19.39 points.

The sub-index of finance decreased by 18.70 points, trading by 8.17 points, investment by 1.69 points and mutual fund by 0.09 points. However, the sub-index of manufacturing and processing group increased by 24.76 points.

The share price of 249 companies decreased while the share price of 79 companies increased in today's transaction.

Share price of Siddhartha Equity Fund decreased by 4.39 per cent, Narayani Development Bank by 4.18 per cent and Green Life Hydro-power by 3.98 per cent.

However, the share prices of four companies, including Salapa Bikas Bank, Reliance Spinning Mills and Upper Hewakhola Hydro-power Company and Solu Hydro-power increased by 10 per cent each.

Likewise, the share price of Hotel Forest Inn increased by 9.93 per cent, Peoples Hydropower Company by 6.53 per cent and Sindhu Bikash Bank by 6.33 per cent.

Gas shortage prompts market monitoring

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT
Tanahun, Mar. 16

Local authorities have intensified market monitoring across Tanahun district, including the district headquarters Damauli, following a severe shortage of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG).

The move comes after consumers complained about possible artificial shortages and black-marketing activities.

Monitoring teams from Vyas and Shuklagandaki municipalities have begun surprise monitoring of gas depots to assess the situation.

The teams, led by Vyas Municipality Deputy Mayor Indira Darai and Shuklagandaki Municipality Revenue Section Chief Ramchandra Subedi, include elected representatives and police personnel.

They have been collecting data on the number of cylinders in stock at various depots. During the inspections, depot operators were instructed to maintain clear records of consumers receiving gas cylinders and to avoid unnecessary stockpiling.

However, gas distributors said that heavy cuts in supply have made it difficult to meet the demand.

Amid the shortage, social activists in Damauli staged a symbolic protest at the Administration Chowk by displaying empty gas cylinders.

Activists Mohammad Ghaffar Sudip and Sundar Prajapati handed over an empty cylinder to Administrative Officer of District Administration Office Bikash Shrestha to draw attention to the issue.

They claimed that although the Nepal Oil Corporation has stated there is no shortage, consumers are still returning home empty-handed.

Mayor of Shuklagandaki Municipality Krishna Raj Pandit also issued



Local authorities have been monitoring gas depots in the district headquarters, Damauli.

a statement on Sunday urging both traders and consumers to help manage the distribution of gas properly.

He warned that strict legal action would be taken against anyone found hoarding gas cylinders or charging higher prices.

Mayor Pandit also encouraged residents to increase the use of electricity as an alternative to cooking gas.

Dinesh Kumar Shrestha, Vice President of the Tanahun Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the supply is insufficient compared to demand, posing management challenges.

Chief District Officer of Tanahun Shiva Lal Tiwari stated that the administration has taken the issue seriously and is working to improve supply, while also instructing traders not to hoard gas.

Earlier, the NOC decided to supply only half-filled cooking gas cylinders to the market starting Friday in an

effort to address the ongoing panic among consumers.

The price of a half-filled cylinder will also be set at half the current price of a full cylinder. A half-filled cooking gas cylinder will cost Rs. 955 per cylinder.

"First come, first served" system

Meanwhile, according to our Lamjung correspondent, a meeting among concerned stakeholders in Lamjung has made decisions to organize the sale and distribution of cooking gas and other essential goods, aiming to prevent any artificial shortage.

The joint meeting, chaired by Chief District Officer Krishna Prasad Khanal, decided to implement a "first come, first served" system for gas distribution.

According to the decision, gas dealers, depots, and retailers will provide only one cylinder per family and must maintain records of

customers—including their name, address, phone number, and citizenship number or other identification documents.

The meeting also decided that gas depots will keep the details of the cylinders they have purchased and provided to retailers safe and provide them to the District Administration Office and District Police Office.

In addition, arrangements will be made for the depots and retailers to inform the District Administration Office, District Police Office and the concerned ward office in advance about the arrival of gas.

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Fears of global energy crisis grow due to Iran war

AP
Lebanon, Mar. 16

Fears of a global energy crisis rose Monday as the war in the Middle East raged on, with more U.S.-Israeli strikes on the Iranian capital and Israel's bombardment of Lebanon. An Iranian drone strike temporarily shut Dubai's airport, a crucial global travel hub, underscoring the threats to the world economy.

Since the United States and Israel attacked Iran more than two weeks ago, Tehran has regularly fired on Israel, American bases in the region, and Gulf Arab countries' energy infrastructure with drones and missiles.

It has also effectively stopped shipping traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported, dramatically increasing the price of oil and putting pressure on Washington to do something to ease the pain consumers are feeling.

Brent crude, the international

standard, remained stubbornly over \$100 a barrel on Monday. It was at \$104 in early trading, up nearly 45% since the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28. It has spiked as high as about \$120 during the conflict.

U.S. President Donald Trump said he has demanded that about seven countries to send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open, but his appeals have brought no commitments.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called claims that his country may be seeking a negotiated end to the war "delusional," saying in a social media post early Monday that Iran was seeking neither "truce nor talks."

Iran hits Dubai airport, forcing temporary closure

As morning broke Monday, a drone hit a fuel tank near Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international passenger traffic, causing a large fire.

Firefighters contained the blaze and there were no injuries reported, but the airport suspended all flights before resuming them a few hours later.



Later, a person was killed in the capital of the United Arab Emirates when an Iranian missile hit a vehicle, the Abu Dhabi media office said. Fire also broke out at an oil facility in Fujairah, one of the UAE's seven emirates, following a drone attack.

Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, said it intercepted a wave of 35 Iranian drones sent to its eastern region, home to major oil installations.

Iran has fired hundreds of missiles and drones toward countries in the region hosting U.S. military assets

since the war began. Emirati authorities say most have been intercepted by air defenses, though debris and some drones have fallen inside the country.

Israel's military said early Monday that Iran launched missiles toward Israel as well.

The conflict is battering the world economy, driving up energy and fertilizer prices; threatening food shortages in poor countries; destabilizing fragile states; and complicating efforts by central banks to drive down prices for consumers. Much of the difficulty stems from the virtual shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump said Sunday he wants to police the strait to make it safe for shipping, with his party increasingly concerned that rising prices for American consumers will hurt the Republicans in elections this fall.

He did not identify the countries he said he asked to help with those efforts, but he said he won't forget the countries that decline. He has previously appealed to China, France, Japan, South Korea and Britain.

"Whether we get support or not, but I can say this, and I said to them: We will remember," Trump said.

Ahead of a meeting in Brussels, the European Union's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said the bloc's foreign ministers would discuss possibly extending a naval mission that protects ships in the Red Sea to the Strait of Hormuz, without giving any details.

Europeans have been critical of the U.S. and Israel for failing to provide clarity on their objectives in the war, and German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul on Sunday questioned EU involvement, saying security for the strait can only come "if there is a negotiated solution."

"Europe always gives constructive support when it comes to securing sea routes, but I see neither an immediate necessity nor above all Germany participating," he said on ARD television.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi told parliament Monday that her government "has not heard anything" from Washington about Trump's call for help protecting the strait.

146 disaster-damaged houses rebuilt in Jumla, owners to receive payments

BY NETRA SHAHI
Jumla, Mar. 16

A total of 146 houses damaged by different disasters in Sinja Rural Municipality, Tatopani Rural Municipality and Guthichaur Rural Municipality have been reconstructed, and a decision has been made to release payments for the completed homes.

The houses had been completely destroyed by continuous rainfall between October 5 and 12, 2022.

According to Chief District Officer Deepak Paudel, payments will now be made for 102 houses in Sinja, 34 in Tatopani and 10 in Guthichaur after the completion of construction.

Although local governments had ensured Rs. 50,000 per house for reconstruction, delays in the provincial government’s process had been causing difficulties in releasing the remaining funds. Paudel said that after he assumed office, the matter was prioritised and houses that had completed procedural requirements but had not yet been evaluated were monitored. Following this, a meeting of the District Disaster Management Committee decided that the provincial government would provide Rs. 150,000 per house.

According to reconstruction guidelines, a total of Rs. 500,000 should be provided for rebuilding houses damaged by disasters. Of this amount, the federal



The reconstructed house of Adhiraj Acharya, a resident of Sinja Rural Municipality–2.

PHOTO: NETRA SHAHI

government is responsible for 60 per cent, the provincial government 30 per cent and the local government 10 per cent. In line with this arrangement, the local and provincial shares for the 146 houses will now be disbursed, while the federal government has been formally requested to release its portion

after the required procedures are completed.

Chairperson of Sinja Rural Municipality, Purna Prasad Dhital, said residents had been facing serious difficulties after their homes were destroyed.

He said that the work was completed after a long struggle, adding

that although several chief district officers had been transferred over the past three years, the reconstruction payments had not progressed until now. Dhital thanked the local administration and all concerned stakeholders for facilitating the process.

According to Bishnu Mahat, chief

of the disaster branch at the District Administration Office in Jumla, a survey conducted after the severe floods and landslides triggered by the 2022 monsoon recorded damage to 1,451 houses across eight local levels of the district.

The survey recorded damage to 10 houses in Patarasi Rural Municipality, 23 in Chandannath Municipality, 318 in Sinja, 21 in Guthichaur, 65 in Tatopani, 241 in Tila Rural Municipality, 411 in Hima Rural Municipality and 363 in Kanakasundari Rural Municipality.

However, only 146 houses in Sinja, Tatopani and Guthichaur that have completed all required procedures will receive payments for now. Monitoring of around 60 houses in Tila Rural Municipality is still pending.

Local authorities said that under provisions of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority, evidence related to damaged houses must be uploaded through a designated application and approved by local governments before funds can be released.

Mahat said that, under his leadership, a monitoring team including technical staff from the Urban Development and Building Division Office and employees from the rural municipalities inspected the houses, after which the decision was taken to release payments for the 146 completed homes. He added that delays in other local levels were mainly due to their failure to complete the required procedures.

NEWS BRIEF

FORMER CHAIR OF NEPAL SHARE MARKETS HELD

Kathmandu: The absconding defendant, former Executive Chairman of Nepal Share Markets and Finance Limited, Yogendra Prasad Shrestha, 69, has been arrested. Shrestha, who was on the run, was taken into custody on Sunday evening.

He was found guilty of banking crimes, by acting irregularly and illegally against the interests of depositors and the institution while working with Nepal Share Markets and Finance Limited.

On August 21, 2024, the Supreme Court had sentenced Shrestha with a fine of Rs. 194.6 million, three years in imprisonment in one case and Rs 32.1 million fine and three years in prison in another case. Police from the Central Investigation Bureau, Lazimpat, arrested Shrestha in Nagarjuna Municipality-5, Sitapaila. He has been produced before the Kathmandu District Court for the execution of the verdict.

LIGHTNING KILLS FOUR LIVESTOCK IN BAITADI

Baitadi: A lightning strike killed four livestock in Baitadi.

According to a local, Keshavdatt Bhatta, the lightning struck the houses of Dharmanand Bhatta and Narayan Duatta Bhatta in Bantad of Patan Municipality-10 at around 10:00 pm. Two goats belonging to Dharmanand Bhatta and one cow and one ox owned by Narayan Dutta Bhatta were killed in the incident.

The loss of livestock due to the lightning strike has left local residents concerned. The District Police Office Baitadi said it had received information about the incident and further investigation is under way.

TRN

Suryabinayak-Dhulikhel road to be completed in time



PHOTO: KEDAR TIMALSINA

Blacktopping work underway in the Dhulikhel Bansghari area as part of the Araniko Highway expansion.

BY KEDAR TIMALSINA
Banepa, Mar. 16

The expansion of the Suryabinayak-Dhulikhel section of the Araniko Highway has been accelerated.

To ensure that the road expansion project is completed in time, construction work in both Kavrepalanchok and Bhaktapur districts has been intensified.

Bijaya Kumar Mahatto, Chief Superintendent Engineer (SEI) of the Suryabinayak-Dhulikhel Road Project, said that the pace of work has been increased in both districts to complete the project within the scheduled time. He said that expansion work is being carried out on about 16 kilometres of road from Suryabinayak to Dhulikhel under two separate contracts. According to him, 68 per cent physical progress has been achieved so far on the road section from Sanga to Dhulikhel in Kavrepalanchok.

“The contractor responsible for the Kavrepalanchok section has moved ahead with work in all areas. So far, the first layer of Dense Bituminous Macadam (DBM) has been blacktopped on three kilometres of the road in this section. Cement base is being laid in other areas, while sub-base work is underway in some places,” said Mahatto.

He said that disputes in the Banepa market area of Kavrepalanchok have been resolved and construction work is currently underway

in the market section. He added that about 85 per cent of the work in the Kavrepalanchok section will be completed by mid-July, and the first layer of blacktop will be finished on the 8.5-kilometre road section by the time.

Mahatto said that major construction work will not be possible for about two months during the monsoon, beginning mid-June. However, contractors are expected to complete all remaining work by the project deadline in December.

Similarly, under the project, 46 per cent physical progress has been achieved so far on the road section from Suryabinayak to Sanga in Bhaktapur district. He said that about 95 per cent of infrastructure work, including drains and retaining walls, has already been completed in the Bhaktapur section. Mahatto said that an underpass of about one kilometre is being constructed in the Sanga area, and around 50 per cent of the work has been completed so far.

“A one-kilometre underpass is being constructed in Sanga. Due to the steep slope of the road from Kathmandu towards Kavrepalanchok, we have excavated about five metres of the road to construct the underpass. The underpass construction is progressing rapidly and is expected to come into operation within the next two months,” he said.

The budget allocated by the government for the Suryabinayak-Dhulikhel road project for the current fiscal year has already been exhausted. However, Project Chief Mahatto said that the expansion work will not be halted due to the budget shortage.

Salt Trading Corporation Limited International Competitive Bidding (ICB) Invitation for bids for the supply of Chemical Fertilizer

Bid Identification No: **STC/TN/U/2082/083/0007**

1. Salt Trading Corporation Limited (STCL) invites sealed bids (hereinafter called the “Bid”) from eligible bidders, for the procurement of the following chemical fertilizer (hereinafter called the “Goods”):

Chemical Fertilizer	N:P:K	Quantity in Metric Tons	Shipping tolerance
Urea	46:00:00	30,000	+/- 2 percent

2. The following are the various timeline associated with the bid:

Tender details	Date	Time
First date of publication	17th March, 2026	-
Purchase of documents	All working days within 10th April, 2026	Within 1200 hours
Last date of submission of technical documents	All working days within 10th April, 2026	Within 1300 hours
Opening of technical bid documents	10th April, 2026	At 1400 hours
Publication of technically qualified bidders	13th April, 2026	Within 1700 hours
Submission of financial bids	Within 17th April, 2026	Within 1300 hours
Opening of financial bids	17th April, 2026	At 1400 hours

3. The bid documents will comprise of two documents: (i) the technical bid document, and (ii) the financial bid documents. Disclosure of the price offer in the technical document will render the bidder as disqualified and the entire submission will be treated as non-responsive.
4. The technical and financial bids shall be opened at the time as specified in clause 2 on this notice at the office of STCL, Kalimati, Kathmandu, Nepal. The Financial bids must be valid for a period of 21 days counting from the day of the financial bid opening.
5. Bidder must quote the price in United States Dollars for the supply and delivery of above-mentioned **Chemical Fertilizer** on CIP warehouses delivery price on all of the following delivery points that are STCL Biratnagar, Birgunj and Bhairahawa warehouse. In case the bidder is an entity of Nepal, they must quote as per the prevailing law of Nepal and the directive(s) of Central Bank of Nepal (Nepal Rastra Bank). For evaluation purposes only, the rate of exchange will be the selling rates officially prescribed by Nepal Rastra Bank and prevailing on the date of opening of the tender. Payments will be done in United States Dollars.
6. Bid applicant must have prior experience of having supplied a minimum of the bid quantity of any chemical fertilizer to Nepal or any other countries during the last three years. The experience eligibility criteria are mentioned in clause 14, section B of the technical bid document.
7. The tender document can be obtained upon payment of a non-refundable fee of NRs 10,000.00 (Nepali Rupees ten thousand only) in cash or in form of bank receipt (bank account available upon request) for fee in favor of Salt Trading Corporation Limited, Kathmandu, Nepal.
8. Eligible bidders (principal) or their authorized representative can purchase the two signed and endorsed tender document on or before the time specified in clause 2 of this notice from STCL, Central Office, Kalimati, Kathmandu, Tel: +977-1-5371014, 5371208 and 5382022, e-mail: stcnepal1963@gmail.com by submitting a written application. In case of foreign bidder, the application letter must be in the local representative letterhead along with notarized copies of the following documents: (i) company/firm registration certificate of local representative, (ii) VAT/PAN certificate of local representative, (iii) recent tax clearance certificate of local representative, and (iv) authority letter issued by the eligible foreign bidder stating their intention to participate in the tender and also authorizing the said local representative company and name of assigned person to purchase the set of tender documents on their behalf. In case the bid is by a Nepali company, then the application letter must be issued by the said company duly stating that they themselves are the eligible bidders. In such a case, the Nepali bidder must submit notarized copies of their (i) company registration certificate, (ii) PAN/VAT registration certificate, and (iii) recent tax clearance certificate. In case foreign companies register a joint venture (JV) with Nepali company for the purpose of bidding in this contract, the said JV Company will have to submit all documents as applicable for Nepali bidders as well as a copy of the JV agreement. Eligible Bidders may be a private entity, government owned entity or any combination of them with a formal intent to enter into a contract.
9. After evaluation of the technical bids, a list of the qualified bidders name will be published in the company’s website www.stcnepal.com and the bulletin board of STCL head office within the time as specified in clause 2 on this notice.
10. All interested bidders can attend the pre-bid meeting organized by STCL at its Kalimati, Kathmandu premises at 1400 hours of 7th April, 2026 to discuss confusions in the tender documents, if any. In case corrections are to be made as a result of the discussion at the said pre-bid meeting, the same will be incorporated in an amended tender document. The bidders are expected to examine all instructions, forms, terms and specifications in the bidding document. Failure to furnish all information required by the bidding documents or submission of a bid not substantially responsive to the bidding document in every respect shall be at the bidder’s risk and will result in the rejection of its bid.
11. If the last date of purchasing, submission and opening of the bids (both technical and financial bid) falls on a Nepal Government holiday or a last minute holiday declaration by the Nepal Government, then the next working day for each subsequent phase of the tender bid shall be considered. In such a case, the bid validity and bid security validity shall be recognized with effect from the original bid submission deadline.
12. Purchased bid documents will be valid only for specified principal supplier.
13. Any supplier holding three contracts who has not completed shipment within the given timelines shall be ineligible to participate in bidding.
14. The Purchaser (STCL) reserves the right to accept or reject the bid and to annul the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to the award of the contract without assigning any reason whatsoever.



Salt Trading Corporation Limited

Central Office, Business Department, Kalimati Kathmandu, Nepal

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Government Of Nepal
Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport
Department of Roads, Chakupat, Lalitpur
Date of first publication: March 17, 2026 (2082-12-03)

Notice regarding Issuance of Letter of Intent
(Regarding Approval of Bid):

The **Letter of Intent** (regarding Intention of Approval of Bid) has been issued for the IFBs mentioned below in favour of following bidders having lowest evaluated substantially responsive bid price.

S. N.	Contract Identification No./IFB	Bidder’s Name & Address	Bid Price (NRs.)
1	IFB No. DORMEB/337310113 /082-83/01 Supply and Delivery of Mini Tipper Truck - 6 units	M/S Sipradi Trading Pvt. Ltd., Kathmandu, Nepal	1,82,88,000.00 (Including VAT)

EDITORIAL

Justice For Inisha

The brutal gang rape and murder of Inisha BK, a minor, has once again startled the nation. BK, 16, was found unconscious in Janagaran Community forest in Surkhet on the morning of Saturday, March 7. She was rushed to the provincial hospital and declared dead on arrival. Once again, the dreams, aspirations and life of a 16-year-old girl were cut short by a bunch of teenage rapists. Four boys have been arrested on charges of their involvement in the rape and murder of her. Now, there has been a growing call to hand down severe punishment to the culprits and justice to the deceased and her family.

Nirmala Panta, 13, from Kanchanpur, Samjhana Kami, 12, from Bhajang, Bhagarathi Bhatta, a teen from Baitadi and Rinku Kumari Sada, 17, from Siraha, had also lost their lives after being raped. The family of Panta is waiting for justice. Cases of extreme violence against women are on the rise, with perpetrators showing little fear of consequences. This shows that the existing legal punishment does not match the gravity of the crime committed by them. Murdering a girl after a gang-rape is a heinous crime, but girls and women continue to be victims of such atrocities in Nepal, despite stringent laws and mechanisms. They are subject to sexual abuse, which has badly affected their emotional health and social and professional life. According to the Nepal police, an average of seven to eight rape cases are reported each day in the country. Likewise, in the last eight years, from 2073/74 to 2080/81, a total of 16,960 rape cases and 5,105 attempted rape cases were registered. The actual cases might be even higher, as many cases of rape and sexual assault go unreported due to the stigma attached to them and the victim-blaming culture.

The tendency to normalise violence against women has deprived them of a dignified life. Many cases of rape and sexual assault are settled without informing the police, which undermines the pain and suffering of victims and their right to seek justice. In many cases, the perpetrators are close acquaintances or members of the family. It's a tragedy that women are neither safe at home nor in the public space. Dalit women, who are the victims of caste, gender and class-based discrimination, are more vulnerable to systemic violence and exploitation. The gang rape of Rinku Kumari Sada and her suicide in suspicious circumstances show how difficult it is for Dalit women to seek justice.

It is high time to do away with the victim-blaming tendency that encourages rapists to commit crimes. When a woman is raped, society considers that the honour of women and the family is lost. It is this mindset that, instead of punishing the perpetrators, punishes the victims. Although we don't have the provision of capital punishment in Nepal, many have voiced for such punishment for the perpetrators of gang rape and murder. The government should enact stricter laws on rape and also work on the rehabilitation of the victims, so that the victims can lead a life without stigma and fear. And to a certain extent, the deeply-rooted patriarchal mindset also needs to be changed.

Nepal's Silent Emergency

ANGELA GHISING

As the dust settles on the March 5 general elections, the air in Kathmandu is anything but festive. Behind closed doors, our politicians are busy negotiating a new alliance government. But the people who put them there are being choked to death by a familiar, gray foe. In the short time since Election Day, a thick, toxic haze has hung over the valley like a spectre, putting Kathmandu back into the top tier of the world's most polluted cities. According to data from IQAir, Kathmandu's Air Quality Index climbed to 210 on March 10, placing it in the 'very unhealthy' category." And yet the institutions responsible for environmental protection have offered little urgency or visible action on this escalating crisis. There is an ever-increasing mountain of evidence demonstrating that air pollution is the single largest threat to the world's prosperity. The World Bank report "Towards Clean Air in Nepal," released in 2025, officially declares air pollution to be the number one risk factor for death and disability in our nation. It is no longer simply a nuisance during the seasons; it is a systemic drain on our nation's future, resulting in 35,000 premature deaths every year. As we argue over our national deficit and budget allocations, we continue to overlook that air pollution is siphoning off 6 per cent of our GDP every year. We are losing billions of dollars in national income because our citizens are quite literally too sick to work, and we are losing billions of hours of labour due to environmental factors. The tragedy, therefore, resides in the chasm between these scientific truths and the campaign rhetoric. A cursory glance at the manifestos of the elections indicates that the environment has been relegated

to the status of a ghost. The Nepali Congress, for instance, has continued to promise a net-zero target for 2045, while the CPN-UML has been obsessed with the idea of mega-infrastructure development, which considers environmental protection to be "anti-development" barriers. Not even the Rastriya Swatantra Party, which capitalised on the energy of the frustrated young, could manage to include the issue of pollution at the end of their list of priorities. This, however, stems from the fact that the party, like many others, has a poor understanding of what development means. A new highway, for instance, would be meaningless if the children growing up alongside the highway are developing stunted lung and heart capabilities before they reach adulthood. The ironies of this political moment are such that the movement for change, the Gen Z movement, which asked for a move away from the old ways, is the very group most threatened by this crisis. Our political class is debating who shall sit in the Prime Minister's chair while they sit in an environment where the AQI is 25 times higher than the WHO-recommended safe level of PM 2.5, which enters the bloodstream directly, leading to long-term damage, damage for which economic growth is not an easy solution. This new government has but a brief window of opportunity to change this narrative. Unless the newly elected cabinet makes it a point to prioritise the radical electrification of transport modes, industrial filtration, and transboundary diplomacy in its first 100 days in office, its electoral victory would be for naught. A leader who is incapable of providing his people with something as basic as clean air is not a leader at all. It is high time for the newly elected government to prove that its vision for Nepal is clear enough to see through the haze.

THE RISING NEPAL

OP-ED

Strategies For Curbing Pollution

Uttam Maharjan



Pollution is one of the most discussed hazards worldwide because it directly affects human health. Pollution not only spoils the landscape of a city but also affects human health. Air pollution is the progenitor of various diseases, especially respiratory diseases or disorders such as bronchitis, emphysema and asthma. Colds, sneezing, rhinitis and sinusitis are also respiratory disorders. Air pollution also gives rise to heart diseases, brain diseases, diabetes, hypertension, cancer and the like. Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, frequently features on the list of the most polluted cities in the world. The other day, the Ministry of Health and Population issued a notice warning the denizens of the capital city to take precautions against adverse weather conditions such as haze and smog. In fact, Kathmandu is a dirty city despite claims that it has been much cleaner than in the past. The public places, roads and rivers are still dirty. There are several factors responsible for this. Urban sprawl is taking place at an accelerated pace. The flow of people migrating to the Kathmandu Valley from outside has not come to a halt. More people mean more strains on the Valley in terms of cleaning, sanitation and other facilities.

Appropriate strategies

Moreover, it has not dawned on the people that they should keep the city clean. Throwing refuse and scraps into the rivers and streams has yet to be

controlled. Once, those who dirty the rivers and streams by throwing refuse and scrap were punished. Such a punitive action is nowhere to be seen now. Besides, there is air pollution plaguing the Kathmandu Valley. The main sources of air pollution are exhaust fumes from vehicles, smoke from factories and brick kilns and open burning. The government should adopt appropriate strategies for curbing pollution. A multi-pronged approach to curbing pollution by adopting various measures is more than necessary now.

Nepal is trying to introduce more and more electric vehicles as replacements for petrol or diesel vehicles, which is a good idea. But the government has failed to offer attractive incentives for the purchase of electric vehicles. When the prices of electric vehicles and petrol or diesel vehicles are similar, people go for the latter. That is why it is imperative to incentivise electric vehicles by reducing taxes. Import taxes on vehicles are huge in Nepal. Such taxes can be reduced to some extent to encourage the purchase of electric vehicles.

With a constant rise in the number of vehicles, emissions of noxious gases such as carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide are also on the increase. The particulate matter in the city is far above the guidelines recommended by the World Health Organisation. The government should discourage private transport by introducing a mass transit system. But it seems the government will not take this step because it is earning big revenue from the transport sector by way of import taxes, annual taxes and other taxes. Introduction of a mass transport system means an increase in public transport and a decrease in private transport.

The government should strictly implement the National Air Quality Management Plan by electrifying transport,

The government should strictly implement the National Air Quality Management Plan by electrifying transport, reducing industrial emissions, discouraging open burning and expanding green spaces.

reducing industrial emissions, discouraging open burning and expanding green spaces. As far as controlling exhaust fumes from vehicles is concerned, vehicles should be serviced and maintained regularly. Just having green stickers is not enough; one can see vehicles with green stickers spewing forth black smoke. On the other hand, the quality of petrol or diesel also matters. There should be a robust mechanism for ensuring that fuels are not adulterated anywhere.

Factories produce not only effluents that pollute the environment but also smoke. Factories should be located in places far away from human settlements. They should adopt a mechanism for disposing of effluents in a safe way. So they should be encouraged to adopt new technology and industrial standards should be enforced. Brick kilns should shift to cleaner technology to reduce smoke. Open burning is another source of pollution. The Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) has banned such a practice. However, the local government should take steps towards halting open burning through a better waste management system, such as recycling and composting.

The KMC has such a strategy in place but it has not been implemented. Municipal waste can be used to generate electricity and produce compost. The KMC has brooms. They are sometimes used

in the city. Broomers are used to remove very fine dust particles. When the roads are already dirty, the use of brooms cannot make the city roads clean. To check the level of air pollution, it is necessary to have in place real-time air quality monitoring stations in various places. As a city undergoing rapid urbanisation, Kathmandu has construction works and repairs going on all the while.

Lack of coordination

But there seems to be a lack of coordination between government agencies. One agency repairs a road and another digs it. Moreover, once roads are dug, backfilling does not take place in time, which gives rise to dust pollution. There should be proper coordination between government agencies to eliminate, or at least reduce, dust pollution. It is also necessary to control dust pollution at construction sites by properly covering them. As far as household pollution is concerned, people should be encouraged to use cleaner technology, such as electricity.

The government has been instructing the people to use electric appliances. But the supply of electricity is still erratic, although there is no load-shedding. As long as there is no uninterrupted supply of electricity, people cannot depend solely on electricity for cooking and other purposes. It may be pertinent to note that the new government under the leadership of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) is in the offing. Being a party that has won the hearts of the people through the just-concluded general election, the relatively new party can take drastic measures to reduce pollution not only in the Kathmandu Valley but also elsewhere.

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

Health Diplomacy For Universal Coverage



Jhabindra Bhandari

South Asia faces numerous shared health challenges, including high maternal, infant and child mortality rates, malnutrition, and the burden of infectious diseases. Rapid urbanisation, limited water and sanitation services, air pollution, poor health infrastructure, natural disasters, conflicts and climate change are growing concerns for sustainable human development. Despite noted progress, there are still visible disparities in health, education, income and living standards within and across South Asian nations. Additionally, the increasing trend of non-communicable diseases, degrading environmental health, and pandemics is alarming. The socio-economic, cultural and political inequalities are profoundly affecting health outcomes within and across social groups. In particular, the inequalities based on gender, caste, ethnicity, income, education, human resources, health infrastructure and place of residence have profound impacts on the ability of underserved populations to access health care.

Health trajectories

Undoubtedly, the emerging economies are shaping rapid transformations in socio-economic development, communications and digital technologies, which are instrumental in shifting health trajectories at large. The struggles to achieve universal health coverage are intensifying within and across countries. According to the 2024 report in the Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health, in 2021, South Asia had the second lowest level

of universal health coverage and the highest level of catastrophic health spending compared to other regions globally.

While many countries have implemented a range of policy and strategic interventions to address persistent health inequalities between poor and rich in both rural and remote areas, desired progress is minimal so far. More worryingly, these efforts have largely failed to address the unmet health care needs of poor, socially marginalised communities. Consequently, ensuring a more just, healthy and sustainable future for all is easier said than done. Although questions about resilient and sustainable health systems have raised significant policy attention over the years, there are limited interventions to consider social and political determinants of health. Such a lack of progressive interventions is a frustrating scenario because it cannot adequately address social inclusion, equity and diversity in health care delivery. Indigenously practices and knowledge ecosystems in health care are often ignored in the world of biomedicine. With an interdisciplinary analysis, it is crucial to identify socio-political, cultural, economic and historical contexts that shape how health, people, and infrastructures are appropriated in support of pro-poor and inclusive health systems. From an anthropological perspective, culture plays an important role in how people experience health and illness, and how they access and experience health care. Unfortunately, health policies and plans most often do not take into account people's choices and local perspectives in health care. Health infrastructure alone is not sufficient. Ensuring access to health care constitutes a diverse set of forces that underpin various forms of health care delivery, thereby appreciating historical, political, economic and cultural aspects of social groups in different contexts. So far, no cutting-edge research exists to further explore the structural barriers and struggles in

A lack of progressive interventions is a frustrating scenario because it cannot adequately address social inclusion, equity and diversity in health care delivery.

accessing health care. Moreover, there is little evidence and clarity on how health care systems have evolved, and what futures they envision. Political horizons to ensure equitable health services are still messy. In light of contemporary political, economic, cultural and demographic transitions in the region, the political manifestos offer opportunities to take stock of how health inequalities are impacting on social vulnerabilities and community resilience in diverse ways. The discourses on culture and practices of inclusive health governance need to be debated and redefined in the changed socio-political context for seeking innovative solutions. Because health services largely remain fragmented, under-financed and over-burdened in the region. In this scenario, regional efforts to promote health equity clearly demand meaningful community engagement and collaboration beyond health sector. Health in all policies is merely a popular political slogan as no concrete progress is achieved yet. Therefore, reorienting health systems towards primary health care must be a high priority agenda for actions. Across the region, child marriage, early pregnancy and human trafficking are significant social challenges causing different health risks. On the other hand, cross-border migration can have differential health threats

spreading the diseases while people are on the move. Moreover, climate-induced disaster and health risks are not adequately addressed in national health policies, strategic plans and interventions. Therefore, regional cooperation strategy is instrumental in tackling diverse and yet challenging public health issues in a holistic approach. Even though SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) is playing a vital role in combatting TB and HIV, more collaborative efforts are needed in the area of capacity building among member states, strengthening multi-sector responses, advancing cross-border disease surveillance, sharing resources and good practices for evidence based strategic interventions. Such sharing among SAARC countries enhances trust, common understanding, and willingness for locally adapted solutions to emerging health challenges.

Health diplomacy

Other regional initiatives in the area of non-communicable diseases, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, antimicrobial resistance, air pollution, health security and few others need to be further strengthened in terms of political leadership, ownership, financing and accountability. In doing so, nurturing health diplomacy is crucial to address the shared health challenges in the face of the region's geo-politics and transnational health issues. Given the region's shared geography, transboundary health risks, and climate vulnerabilities, harvesting health demands political stability, common framework for increased investments in social protection, health security, pandemic preparedness and responses. Besides, a bold regional roadmap is urgently required to address structural inequalities in health care. Further, health diplomacy as a pathway can foster cooperation and collaboration for fulfilling international commitments and declarations in health.

(Bhandari is a health policy analyst interested in anthropology.)

50 YEARS AGO

THE RISING NEPAL

March 17, 1976

Jordan Proposes Peace Treaty With Israel

Tel Aviv, March 16: Jordan has proposed a peace treaty with Israel on condition that the Israelis hand back the West Bank of the river Jordan, which they have held since 1967, the daily Haaretz said today, quoting well-informed sources in Washington, reports AFP.

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READER'S MAIL

Sensible Logic Behind Half-filled Cylinder

The recent decision by the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) to supply half-filled cooking gas cylinders in the market has drawn significant public attention. According to the corporation, the measure aims to address the growing fear among consumers regarding possible shortages of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). While the idea of distributing half-filled cylinders may seem unusual at first, it can be understood as a temporary strategy to ensure that a larger number of households have access to cooking gas during this period of uncertainty. In recent months, reports of global supply disruptions caused by conflicts in the Middle East have left the public anxious. As a result, many people have started purchasing and storing more gas cylinders than they actually need. This unnecessary hoarding has increased pressure on supply, particularly in the Kathmandu Valley, where demand for LPG has risen significantly. In such a situation, the decision to distribute half-filled cylinders could help reduce panic buying and make gas available to more families. The logic behind the policy is quite clear. If

cylinders contain half the amount of gas, the same supply can serve almost double the number of consumers. This may help ensure that even those households that normally struggle to obtain gas during shortages will have a chance to purchase it. In addition, people may be less likely to hoard smaller quantities, which could help stabilise the market. However, while this step may provide short-term relief, it should not become a long-term solution. Authorities must also focus on improving supply management, monitoring distribution more strictly, and ensuring that commercial establishments do not misuse domestic gas cylinders. Transparency and clear communication from the corporation are also important so that consumers remain informed and do not panic. Overall, the initiative taken by the NOC can be seen as an attempt to manage a difficult situation. With cooperation from the public and effective monitoring from the authorities, this measure may help maintain fair distribution and prevent unnecessary shortages.

Aarya Yonjan Maitighar, Kathmandu

TAILPIECE

An elderly man lay dying in his bed. In death's agony, he suddenly smelled the aroma of his favorite chocolate chip cookies wafting up the stairs. He gathered his remaining strength and lifted himself from the bed. Leaning against the wall, he slowly made his way out of the bedroom and, with even greater effort, forced himself down the stairs, gripping the railing with both hands. He crawled down the stairs. With labored breath, he leaned against the doorframe, gazing into the kitchen. Were it not for death's agony, he would have thought himself already in heaven: there spread out upon waxed paper on the kitchen table, were literally hundreds of his favorite chocolate chip cookies. Was it heaven? Or was it one final act of heroic love from his devoted wife, seeing to it that he left this world a happy man? Mustering one great final effort, he threw himself toward the table, landing on his knees in a rumpled posture. His parched lips parted: the wondrous taste of the cookie was already in his mouth, seemingly bringing him back to life. The aged and withered hand trembled on its way to a cookie at the edge of the table when it was suddenly smacked with a spatula by his wife. "Stay out of those," she said, "they're for the funeral."

Iran war weakens Trump politically

AP
New York, Mar. 16

In the two weeks since the U.S. and Israel launched strikes on Iran, President Donald Trump increasingly has been knocked on his political heels.

He's grown more agitated with news coverage and has failed to find a way to explain why he started the war — or how he will end it — that resonates with a public concerned by American deaths in the conflict, surging oil prices and dropping financial markets. Even some of his supporters are questioning his plan and his overall poll numbers are declining.

Meanwhile, Moscow is getting a boost from the war's early days after Trump eased sanctions on some Russian oil shipments. That, combined with rising oil prices, undercut the yearslong push to crimp President Vladimir Putin's ability to wage war in Ukraine.

Then there are Democrats, who were left reeling after Trump won the 2024 election. With control of Congress at stake in November's midterms, the party has come together to oppose Trump's Iran policy and point to the economic turmoil as proof that Republicans haven't kept their promises to bring down everyday costs.

"I think Democrats are well-positioned for this November and the mid-terms," said Kelly Dietrich, CEO of the National Democratic Training Committee, which trains party backers to run for office and staff campaigns.

Dietrich said the past two weeks show the Trump administration has failed at long-term planning. "They're flying by the seat of their pants, and the rest of us are paying the price," he said.

Trump let some of his frustrations show on Air Force One as he flew back from a weekend at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, lashing out at allies and other countries dependent on Middle Eastern oil for not doing more to counter Iran and specifically name-checking British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who he



PHOTO: AP
President Donald Trump speaks to reporters aboard Air Force One, Sunday, March 15, 2026, en route from West Palm Beach, Fla. to Joint Base Andrews, Md.

said initially declined to put British aircraft carriers "into harm's way."

"Whether we get support or not," Trump said, "I can say this, and I said to them: We will remember."

Trump seeks help securing the Strait of Hormuz

The president spent much of his weekend at his golf club in West Palm Beach, Florida. He also attended a closed-door fundraiser for his MAGA Inc. super PAC at Mar-a-Lago on Saturday night.

Last weekend, Trump played golf at another of his South Florida properties a day after witnessing the dignified transfer for six U.S. soldiers killed in the Iran war. A political action committee used a photo of the solemn event in a fundraising email, but Trump brushed off a question about whether it was appropriate, saying "there's nobody that's better to the military than me."

Trump and his White House have increasingly complained about media coverage of the conflict. On Saturday, he cheered on his broadcast regulator for threatening to pull broadcast licenses

unless they "correct course."

He angrily told reporters flying with him on Air Force One that coverage of the war had been influenced by Iranian propaganda, which exaggerated the military and political strength of Iran's leaders and their support among the country's people.

The president — who kept allies other than Israel in the dark about his war plans for Iran — this weekend began suggesting the U.S. would need to lean on the international community to help oil tankers move through the Strait of Hormuz, where transportation has been severely disrupted, throwing global energy markets into a tailspin.

Iran has said it plans to keep up attacks on energy infrastructure and use its effective closure of the strait as leverage against the United States and Israel. A fifth of the world's traded oil flows through the waterway.

Trump said the U.S. was talking to "about seven" countries about providing military support to help reopen the strait. But he wouldn't say which ones

Hospital officials say Israeli strikes killed 12 in Gaza

AP
Cairo, Mar. 16

At least 12 Palestinians, including two boys, a pregnant woman and eight police officers, were killed Sunday by Israeli airstrikes in the war-torn Gaza Strip, hospital authorities said.

A strike Sunday morning hit a house in the urban refugee camp of Nuseirat in central Gaza and killed four people, including a couple in their 30s and their 10-year son, according to the nearby Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. The woman had been pregnant with twins, the hospital said.

The fourth fatality, a 15-year-old neighbor, was taken to the Awda hospital in Nuseirat.

"We were sleeping and got up to the strike of a missile. The strike was strong," said Mahmoud al-Muhtaseb, a neighbor. "There was no prior warning."

Another strike Sunday afternoon hit a police vehicle on the south-north Salah al-Din route at the entrance of the central town of Zawaida, the Hamas-run Interior Ministry said.

The strike killed eight police officers, including Col. Iyad Ab Yousef, a senior police official in central Gaza, the ministry said.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies, confirmed the toll. It said 14 others were wounded.

The Israeli military said it struck a Hamas militant Sunday in response to an earlier incident in which a militant opened fire at troops. It didn't provide further details.

Hamas oversees a police force that maintained a high degree of public security after the militants seized power in

Gaza in 2007, while also cracking down on dissent.

The police largely melted away during the war as Israeli forces seized large areas of Gaza and targeted Hamas security forces with airstrikes.

But following an October ceasefire, they have reappeared in Gaza streets and reasserted control in areas not controlled by the Israeli military.

Sunday's deaths were the latest fatalities among Palestinians in the coastal enclave since the ceasefire deal attempted to halt a more than two-year war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

While the heaviest fighting has subsided, the ceasefire has still seen almost daily Israeli fire. Israeli forces have carried out repeated airstrikes and frequently fire on Palestinians near military-held zones, killing more than 650 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials.

Israel says it has responded to violations of the ceasefire or targeted wanted militants. But about half of those killed have been women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

They were among more than 72,200 Palestinians killed in the war, which was triggered when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. The militant attack killed over 1,200 people and took over 250 others hostage.

The health ministry, which is part of the Hamas-led government, maintains detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts. But it does not give a breakdown of civilians and militants.

Militants have carried out shooting attacks on troops, and Israel says its strikes are in response to that and other violations. Four Israeli soldiers have been killed since the ceasefire.

Four Afghanis killed by Pakistan shelling

AFP
Afghanistan, Mar. 16

Three children and a woman were killed by Pakistani shelling in eastern Afghanistan overnight between Sunday and Monday, Afghan officials said.

In total, 18 civilians have been killed in Afghanistan in the past week as a result of cross-border clashes between the two sides, according to the Afghan authorities.

"At 12:00 am last night (1930 GMT Sunday), the Pakistani forces fired mortar shells on the Nari village of Gurbuz district, killing a woman and a child", Mustaghfir Gurbuz, the governor's spokesman in eastern Khost province, told AFP.

Shells were also fired on a market, a health clinic and on another village, wounding four people, including a woman. Two of the wounded were in a critical condition, he added.

Pakistani mortar shelling killed two children on Sunday night in the Afghan Dubai area of Khost, the governor's office said in a statement. One person was also killed in eastern Nuristan province when shelling hit a "civilian home" on Sunday, the government's deputy spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat said on X.

Immediate independent verification of deaths and injuries is difficult to obtain in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, given the hard-to-reach locations.

Both sides maintain they do not target civilians.

But on Friday, the United Nations mission in Afghanistan confirmed the deaths of at least 75 civilians in the country since clashes with Pakistan intensified on February 26. The neighbours have had strained relationships for months. Islamabad accuses Afghanistan of harbouring militants from the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), who have claimed responsibility for a series of deadly attacks in Pakistan, as well as from the Islamic State Khorasan Province.

The Afghan Taliban authorities deny the charge. Dozens of people were killed in fighting between the two countries in October last year, which led to the near-total closure of the border. Clashes decreased after mediation but the conflict flared again on February 26 when Afghanistan launched a border offensive in retaliation for earlier Pakistani air strikes said by Islamabad to be targeting the TTP.

Pakistan then declared "open war" against the Taliban authorities, bombing the capital Kabul on February 27. Repeated border clashes in recent weeks have hit trade and about 115,000 people have been forced to leave their homes, according to the UN refugee agency.

The World Food Programme said on Sunday that it has started delivering "life-saving food" to over 20,000 displaced Afghan families and warned that "further instability will push millions into hunger".

EU weighs action to keep Strait of Hormuz open

AP
Brussels, Mar.16

The European Union is seeking more strategic clarity about the U.S. and Israel's plans for Iran and when the conflict might end as the bloc weighs whether to send ships to help shore up security in the Persian Gulf.

"It is in our interest to keep the Strait of Hormuz open, and that's why we are also discussing what we can do in this regard from the European side," Kaja Kallas, the EU's foreign policy chief, said Monday ahead of a meeting of the 27-nation bloc's foreign ministers in Brussels.

U.S. President Donald Trump has asked allies — including France, China, Japan, South Korea and Britain — to help secure the strait for global shipping.

Kallas said the EU could expand its Operation Aspides naval mission to protect shipping in the Red Sea up into the Persian Gulf, or it could form a "coalition of the willing" with member nations contributing military capacity on an ad hoc basis.

The war in Iran, sparked on Feb. 28 airstrikes by Israel and the U.S., has driven up energy prices worldwide, with Brent crude up more than 40%. But the conflict has also disrupted the wider global supply chain beyond oil, affecting everything from pharmaceuticals from India, semiconductors from Asia and oil-derived products like fertilizers that come from



PHOTO: AP
European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas speaks with the media as she arrives for a meeting of EU foreign ministers at the European Council building in Brussels, Monday, March 16, 2026.

the Middle East.

Cargo ships are stuck in the Gulf or making a much longer detour around the southern tip of Africa. Planes carrying air cargo out of the Middle East are grounded. And the longer the war drags on, the more likely that there will be shortages and price increases on a wide range of goods.

France has said it is working with countries — President Emmanuel Macron mentioned partners in Europe, India and Asia — on a possible international mission to escort ships through the strait but has stressed it must be when "the circumstances permit," when fighting has subsided.

French senior officials, speaking anonymously on ongoing talks, said The Netherlands, Italy, and Greece had shown interest and that Spain might be involved in some way.

Outside the EU, the U.K. may also be part of it if they have some capabilities available, the officials said. They mentioned the Red Sea-focused Operation Aspides as a possible model for a naval mission to the Persian Gulf.

German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul said it will be important for the U.S. and Israel to define "when they consider the military aims of their deployment to have been reached."

Myanmar's parliament meets for first time in 5 years

AP
Naypyitaw, Myanmar, Mar. 16

Myanmar opened its first parliamentary session in more than five years on Monday following an election that did not include major opposition parties, ensuring that the ruling military is set to retain a firm grasp on power.

The military blocked Myanmar's last parliament from convening when it seized power from the last legitimately elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021, and has governed without a legislature since then. It touted elections held in late December and January as a step toward the return of democracy.

But the military and its allies hold nearly 90% of the seats in the two-chamber parliament, while Myanmar's former ruling National League for Democracy and other major opposition parties were either blocked from running or refused to compete under conditions they deemed unfair.

Delegates wearing traditional attire arrived in the capital, Naypyitaw, on



PHOTO: AP
Myanmar's military representatives take oath during a parliament session at Lower House in Naypyitaw, Myanmar, Monday, March 16, 2026.

Monday for the opening session of the 373-seat lower house, which convened in the tightly guarded parliamentary complex, newly renovated after being badly

damaged by last year's earthquake. Security forces sealed roads leading to the parliament, and vehicles were searched for explosives before entering.

PRISM

Escaped bull in school

Kansas: Police and firefighters responded to a Kansas high school where an escaped bull decided to take advantage of an open field and get some exercise.

The Eudora Police Department and Eudora City Fire Department responded to Eudora High School on Thursday when a bull was spotted wandering loose in an open field.

"While 'livestock wrangling' isn't in the police academy curriculum, teamwork prevailed! With help from Eudora City Fire Department, the bull was safely escorted back into its trailer -- no injuries, no tickets, and thankfully, no one got bullied in the process," police wrote on social media.

Police joked the bull was slapped with a "moo-ving violation."

Goldfish drives car

Netherlands: A Netherlands engineer built a car for his pet goldfish, Blub, who drove the vehicle a distance of 40 feet in one minute to break a world record.

Thomas de Wolf constructed a four-wheeled vehicle with a water tank for a driver's seat. The vehicle is steered by analyzing the movements of the goldfish inside the tank.

"Normally my job is quite monotonous, so I wanted to create something that would entertain people, turning my 'serious' job into something fun," de Wolf said on Guinness World Records' Italian TV series Lo Show dei Record.

De Wolf said that while a car driven by a goldfish might not be particularly practical, the motion-sensing technology that it runs on could prove to be very useful to people with disabilities. (Agencies)

TODAY IN HISTORY

- 1400 – Turko-Mongol emperor Timur sacks Damascus.
- 1824 – The Anglo-Dutch Treaty is signed in London, dividing the Malay archipelago.
- 1842 – The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo is formally organized with Emma Smith as president.
- 1861 – The Kingdom of Italy is proclaimed.
- 1921 – The Second Polish Republic adopts the March Constitution.
- 1945 – The Ludendorff Bridge in Remagen, Germany, collapses, ten days after its capture.
- 1957 – A plane crash in Cebu, Philippines kills Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay and 24 others.
- 1969 – Golda Meir becomes the first female Prime Minister of Israel.
- 2004 – Unrest in Kosovo: More than 22 are killed and 200 wounded.

BP Highway repair picks pace to beat monsoon deadline

BY KEDAR TIMALSINA
Banepa, Mar. 16

Reconstruction of the BP Highway, damaged by last year’s flooding in the Roshi River, has been accelerated, with authorities aiming to restore vehicle movement along the highway before the upcoming monsoon season.

The Road Division Office in Bhaktapur stated that construction has been intensified with the goal of allowing vehicles to operate along the highway itself during the upcoming monsoon season, rather than having to travel through the riverbed where the road was damaged.

A team comprising district security agencies and officials from the Road Division inspected the latest progress of the BP Highway reconstruction on Sunday. Chief District Officer of Kavrepalanchok, Gopal Kumar Adhikari, said the monitoring visit was conducted to assess the progress of reconstruction so that road upgrades and repairs at high-risk sections can be completed before the next monsoon, allowing vehicles to operate along the highway.

During the inspection, CDO Adhikari stated that the reconstruction work along the Kavrepalanchok section of the BP Highway, which was damaged



PHOTO: TRN

Officials monitoring the reconstruction of BP Highway on Sunday.

by floods, was progressing satisfactorily. He expressed confidence that contractors would complete the minimum required infrastructure before the next rainy season, enabling vehicles to travel along the highway instead of passing through the river.

During the monitoring visit, Senior Divisional Engineer Suman Yogesh, chief of the Road Division Office Bhaktapur, said the reconstruction of the flood-damaged BP Highway has been divided into four sections. Although work has begun in three sections, construction in the section to be rebuilt with support from JICA has not yet

started. According to him, the ongoing sections have achieved an average of about 25 per cent progress.

He said reconstruction is currently underway on the 2.3-kilometre stretch from Piple to Dalabesi, the 8.5-kilometre section from Dalabesi to Charsayabesi, and the 11-kilometre section from Charsayabesi to Bhakundebsi. “So far, reconstruction progress stands at 20 per cent from Piple to Dalabesi, 26 per cent from Dalabesi to Charsayabesi, and 25 per cent from Charsayabesi to Bhakundebsi,” he said.

He added that work currently includes widening the road to two lanes

and constructing support structures such as retaining walls, RCC walls, stone masonry walls, gabion walls, and plumb walls.

According to him, under the highway reconstruction project, a total of 6.3 kilometres of RCC retaining walls ranging from six to eleven metres in height will be constructed across three sections. The Road Division Office Bhaktapur has identified several locations as high-risk areas for reconstruction, including Chaukidanda, Charsayabesi, Ghumauneghat, Boksikuna, Chiuribas, Kaladhunga, and the Piple-Barkhekola area.

Yogesh stated that efforts were underway to complete structural infrastructure in these high-risk areas before the upcoming monsoon so that vehicles could continue to use the highway instead of traveling through the river during the rainy season. He also said the 28-kilometre stretch of highway from Bhakundebsi to Nepalthok, which was damaged by flooding, would be expanded into a two-lane road.

He further stated that the contract agreement for the 3.2-kilometre section from Barkhekola to Piple, planned to be reconstructed with support from JICA, is expected to be signed within this month. According to the contractors’ work schedule, the entire reconstruction project is expected to be completed within two years.

CK RAUT ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT FROM PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS



BY OUR CORRESPONDENT
Saptari, Mar. 16

Dr. Chandrakant Raut (CK Raut), chairperson of the Janamat Party, has announced his retirement from parliamentary politics.

In a statement shared on social media on Sunday, he said that he will now stay away from positions and parliamentary competition, but will continue the politics of struggle for the rights, identity and agendas of the people.

Raut stated that, against his personal wishes, he contested parliamentary elections twice. He was elected to the House of Representatives in the 2022 but was defeated in the recent election.

He explained that around 2018, the government did not allow the Free Madhes Alliance to function properly and even obstructed efforts to reach out to the public.

As a result, it became necessary to form a new political party. At that time, as other leaders were unwilling to assume leadership, he had to take responsibility for leading the party himself.

Raut also shared via social media that although he had no plans to contest in the 2022 general election, he had to do so in response to strong requests from within the party.

In that election, the Janamat Party won one seat under the first-past-the-post system and five seats under the proportional representation system, thereby gaining recognition as a national party.

Snowfall recorded in

In Upper Mustang, where farmers harvest crops in October/November (Kartik) and move to lower areas during the cold season, snowfall supports the production of single annual crop.

Although crops are not grown regularly in winter, moisture in the fields helps improve the yield of summer crops and apple farming. Snowfall also benefits the production of apples, sour fruits, potatoes and other agricultural products.

According to the Agriculture and Livestock Development Office, rainfall and snowfall have been recorded in Thasang, Gharaphjong and Muktkishetra areas of the district. In Lo-Ghekar Damodarkunda and Lomanthang rural municipalities, snowfall also helps reduce the spread of various diseases.

The office said that while the lack of sufficient irrigation has often reduced agricultural production, heavy snow and rainfall this year are expected to improve yields.

Meanwhile, our Bajura correspondent Sher Bahadur Sharki reported that snowfall accompanied by rainfall has been recorded in the high-altitude areas of Bajura. The snowfall occurred on Sunday evening along with rain.

NRNA global conference...

The declaration further stressed the importance of protecting the rights and safety of Nepali migrant workers, strengthening cooperation with host countries and international institutions to ensure dignified employment conditions.

The newly elected leadership of the organisation expressed its willingness to work closely with the next government of Nepal to further strengthen collaboration.

A 10-point agreement reached on November 30, 2025, in the presence of Prime Minister Sushila Karki, laid a new foundation for unity in NRNA, which split, electing two separate chairs.

NRNAs are goodwill ambassadors: PM

Addressing the closing ceremony, Prime Minister Sushila Karki called on non-resident Nepalis across the globe to strengthen unity and actively contribute to Nepal’s development through investment, knowledge sharing and cooperation.

She said the government alone cannot achieve the country’s development goals and emphasised the need for collective efforts from Nepalis both at home and abroad.

“Development and prosperity of Nepal cannot be achieved by the government alone. Cooperation, investment, knowledge and innovation of all

Nepalis—both in Nepal and abroad—are equally essential,” she said, urging the diaspora to remain connected with their motherland and participate actively in the nation’s development journey.

PM Karki expressed confidence that renewed unity within the NRNA would provide new direction for Nepal’s prosperity and development.

She also encouraged non-resident Nepalis to make use of Nepal’s investment opportunities and contribute to economic growth, environmental protection and sustainable development.

The Prime Minister also extended her best wishes to the newly elected executive committee of NRNA under the chairmanship of Hemraj Sharma and the entire executive committee for a successful tenure.

She said the conference played an important role in bringing Nepalis from across the world onto a single platform and sending a strong message of unity.

“Nepal has entered a new phase of transformation,” she said, noting that the recent political developments and new mandate have raised hopes for stability, development and prosperity in the country.

She said non-resident Nepalis are goodwill ambassadors of Nepal.

The Prime Minister highlighted that Nepal’s Constitution provides non-resident Nepalis with citizenship that guarantees economic, social and cultural

rights, which she described as a bridge strengthening ties between the diaspora and the homeland.

She also praised the NRNA for overcoming internal divisions and electing a consensus leadership, expressing hope that the organisation would continue to serve as a platform for emotional unity among Nepalis worldwide.

Diaspora’s role stressed Speaking at the closing ceremony, NRNA founding president Upendra Mahato said that Nepal must ultimately be built by Nepalis themselves and expressed readiness to work with the government for economic prosperity based on strong values and culture.

Former NRNA president Jiba Lam-ichhane said that despite living abroad, non-resident Nepalis have a strong desire to contribute to the country’s development and are committed to working together for a prosperous Nepal.

Meanwhile, outgoing NRNA president Badri K.C. urged the upcoming government to ensure voting rights for Nepalis living abroad.

The conference was inaugurated by Minister for Foreign Affairs Bala Nanda Sharma and attended by several prominent leaders, including former Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal, ministers, former ministers, senior government officials, NRNA founders and former presidents, as well as representatives of the global Nepali diaspora.

HoR members elected under PR system

RSP	Nepali Congress
Ram Lama	Bhisma Raj Sangdebe
Khusbu Sarkar Shrestha	Madan Krishna Shrestha
Mingma Gyabu Shrepa	Gita Kumari Sendang
Basu Maya Tamang	Ganga Laxmi Awal
Ganga Chantyal	Gita Gurung
Sumnima Udas	Renuka Kaucha
Anushka Shrestha	Arjun Narshinga KC
Ojaswi Sherchan	Kali Bahadur Sahakari
Shrijana Shrestha	Sushila Dhakal Acharya
Rajani Shrestha	Rukmini Devi Koirala
Kusum Maharjan	Rina Upreti
Bhumika Shrestha	Sita Thapaliya
Pramila Kuluju	Pramila Kumari Gachhadhar
Sujata Tamang	Harina Devi Kumari
Kripa Maharjan	Pabitra B.K
Alija Gurung	Manamaya B.K
Ramesh Prasain	Chandra Mohan Yadav
Pratibha Rawal	Ninu Kumari Karna
Rachana Khatiwada Khatri	Rekha Kumari Yadav
Lima Adhikari Acharya	Sahajan Khatun
Bidhusi Rana	CPN-UML
Samiksha Baskota	Bhumika Limbu Subba
Shradhha Kunwar Chhetri	Ganga Devi Shrestha
Tika Sangraula	Ram Bahadur Thapa Magar
Kranti Sikha Dhital	Kul Bhakta Shakya
Akriti Awasthi	Padma Kumari Aryal
Shristi Bhattarai	Tuka Bhadra Hamal
Manju Bhusal	Yasodha Kumari Baral
Prabha Karki	Guru Prasad Baral
Sobha Khanal	Pushparaj Kandel
Ratna Kumar Thapa	Kripa Ram Rana
Gyanu Poudel	Bishnu Maya B.K
Prabha Dhakal	Nita Ghatani
Prakash Chandra Darji	Ringala Yadav
Rima Bishwokarma	Yasodha Kumari
Amrita B.K	Chandeshwor Mandal
Sita Badi	Sajida Khatun Siddique
Smriti Century	NCP
Sushma Swornakar (Dimple)	Balawati Sharma
Tara Biswokarma	Pramesh Kumar Hamal
Khima B.K	Prem Bahadur Bayak
Surendra Chaudhary	Bhim Kumari Buda Magar
Prem Lama Chaudhary	Parshuram Tamang
Gita Chaudhary	Parbati B.K
Karishma Kadariya	Ganesh Bahadur Biswokarma
Purushottam Suprabhat Yadav	Jog Kumar Barbariya Yadav
Khagendra Karna	Nirasha Chaudhary (Dagaura)
Punam Kumari Agrawal	Shram Sanskriti Yadav
Nisha Mehta	Purna Prasad Limbu
Lalita Kumari	Ambika Devi Sangraula
Ankita Thakur	Radhika Ramtel
Sarita Mahato	Ruby Kumari
Kamini Kumari	RPP
Sunita Kumari Chaudhary	Saraswoti Lama
Samina Niya	Bharat Giri
Afsana Banu	Khusboo Oli
Gajala Samim Mikarani	Tahir Ali Bhat

Israel steps up campaign in Lebanon

AP
Beirut, Lebanon, Mar. 16

The war in the Middle East raged on multiple fronts on Monday, as the U.S. and Israel pummeled military targets in Iran’s capital, Israel stepped up its campaign against Iran-backed militants in Lebanon and Iran retaliated with a drone strike that temporarily shut Dubai’s airport, a crucial hub for travelers.

Fears of a global energy crisis persisted, even as a small number of ships passed through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital waterway through which a fifth of the world’s oil is usually transported.

Iranian strikes on commercial ships in and around the strait, and even just the threat of those attacks, have slowed shipping there to a trickle. That has dramatically increased the price of oil and put pressure on Washington to do something to ease the pain for consumers and the global economy.

HIB provides health...

ED Dr. Krishna Prasad Poudel also said that linking the health insurance programme to the national identity card database currently collected across the country will facilitate data verification, reduce double registration, and reduce card misuse.

Currently, about 10 million citizens have been enrolled in the health

insurance programme. However, due to the manual system, there are problems such as duplication of details of the same person, mismatch of age or details, and misuse, officials at the HIB said.

Despite the new initiation, many challenges have remained in the HIB, as it has to clear more than 12 billion in

dues amount to the several hospitals.

Many hospitals have been issuing ultimatums to the Health Insurance Board (HIB) to clear the dues.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health and Population has been asking for further budget from the Ministry of Finance to pay the loan.



Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal

Aerodrome Engineering Department

Sinamangal, Kathmandu

Invitation for Bids (IFB)

(First date of Publication: 17-03-2026; 2082/12/03)

Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN), Aerodrome Engineering Department (AED) invites electronic bids from all Nepalese eligible bidders for the construction of the following works under National Competitive Bidding procedures. Bids shall be submitted online within 12:00 hours NST, 3rd of Baisakh, 2083 using the online portal of www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp. Bids shall be opened in the presence of Bidder's representatives who choose to attend at 14:00 hours NST, 3rd of Baisakh, 2083 at the office of the Director, AED, CAAN, Sinamangal, Kathmandu.

S. N.	Location of the Project	Name of the Work	Contract Identification Number	Procurement Method	Price of Bid Document including VAT (NRs.)	Bid Security Amount Required (NRs.)	Estimated Amount (Including VAT & PS)
1.	Nepalgunj Airport, Banke	Construction of Chainlink Fencing and Other Associated Works at Nepalgunj Airport.	CAAN/AED/KEP/CW/Fencing/082-83/02	NCB: Single Stage Single Envelope	3,390.00	2,75,000.00	1,06,53,726.61
2.	Bhojpur Airport, Bhojpur	Construction of Access road, Landscaping and other associated works at Bhojpur Airport, Bhojpur.	CAAN/AED/BHP/CW/Landscaping/082-83/03	NCB: Single Stage Single Envelope	3,390.00	1,40,000.00	52,93,413.76
3.	Simara Airport, Bara	Construction of Approach Road at Simara Airport, Bara.	CAAN/AED/SIF/CW/Approach Road/082-83/04	NCB: Single Stage Single Envelope	3,390.00	1,40,000.00	56,49,507.07
4.	Simikot Airport, Humla	Construction of staff quarter, fence and other associated works at Simikot Airport, Humla.	CAAN/AED/SIM/CW/Staff Quarter/082-83/05	NCB: Single Stage Single Envelope	3,390.00	2,75,000.00	1,09,10,783.26
5	CAAN Head Office, Sinamangal, Kathmandu	Furnishing Works of Library in CAAN Head Office, Sinamangal.	CAAN/AED/Library Head Office/CW/082-83/06	NCB: Single Stage Single Envelope	3,390.00	2,75,000.00	1,12,76,248.35

Interested bidders can download the bidding documents from www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp. Bidders are required to follow the electronic bid submission procedure as specified in e-GP system operating Guidelines 2074 and user manuals issued by PPMO related to e-GP system from the website.



'One Battle After Another' triumphs at 98th Academy Awards

AP
Los Angeles, Mar. 16

Paul Thomas Anderson's "One Battle After Another" was crowned best picture at the 98th Academy Awards, handing Hollywood's top honor to a comic, multi-generational American saga of political resistance.

The ceremony Sunday, which also saw Michael B. Jordan win best actor and "Sinners" cinematographer Autumn Durald Arkapaw make Oscar history as the first female director of photography to win the award, was a long-incoming coronation for Anderson, a San Fernando Valley native who made his first short at age 18 and has been one of America's most lionized filmmakers for decades. Before Sunday, Anderson had never won an Oscar.

But "One Battle After Another," the favorite coming in, won six Oscars, including best director and best adapted screenplay for Anderson, the Oscars' first trophy for best casting and best supporting actor for an absent Sean Penn.

"I wrote this movie for my kids to say sorry for the housekeeping mess that we left in this world — we're handing off to them," said Anderson while accepting the screenplay trophy. "But also with the encouragement that they will be the generation that hopefully brings us some common sense and decency."

Ryan Coogler's Jim Crow-set, blues-soaked vampire tale "Sinners," which came in with a record 16 nominations, also landed some big and even historic wins. Coogler, the widely loved filmmaker, won the first Oscar in an unblemished career that started out with Jordan in 2013's "Fruitvale Station."

Arkapaw was also the first Black person to win for best cinematography. Only the fourth female cinematographer ever nominated, her win was a long-incoming triumph for women behind the camera.

"I really want all the women in room to stand up," said Arkapaw. "Because I don't feel like I get here without you guys."

And Jordan, one of Hollywood's most liked leading men, won best actor in one of the night's closest races. The Dolby Theatre rose to its feet in the most thunderous applause of the night.

"Yo, momma, what's up?" said Jordan



Paul Thomas Anderson, left center, Sara Murphy, right center, and the team from "One Battle After Another" accept the award for best picture during the Oscars on Sunday.

after staggering to the stage.

The Oscar night belonged to Warner Bros., the studio of "One Battle After Another" and "Sinners," which scored a record-tying 11 wins. It was an oddly poignant note of triumph for the fabled studio, which weeks earlier agreed to a sale to Paramount Skydance, David Ellison's rapidly assembled media monolith. The \$11 billion deal, which awaits regulatory approval, has Hollywood bracing for more layoffs.

But "Sinners" and "One Battle After Another" — the much-acclaimed heavyweights of the season — were

each Hollywood anomalies: big-budget originals born from a personal vision. In a year where anxiety over studio contraction and the rise of artificial intelligence often consumed the industry, both films gave Hollywood fresh hope.

Jessie Buckley won best actress for her performance as Agnes Shakespeare in "Hamnet," making her the first Irish performer to ever win in the category. At an Oscars where no other acting award seemed a sure thing, Buckley cruised into Sunday's Oscars at the Dolby Theatre as the overwhelming favorite.

"It's Mother's Day in the U.K.," said

Buckley on the stage. "I would like to dedicated this to the beautiful chaos of a mother's heart."

From the start, when host Conan O'Brien sprinted through the year's nominees as Amy Madigan's character in the horror thriller "Weapons" in a pre-taped bit, Sunday's ceremony was quirky, a little clunky and preoccupied with the shifting place of movies in culture. There was, of all things, a tie for best live-action short film.

As expected, the Netflix sensation "KPop Demon Hunters," 2025's most-watched film, won best animated feature, as well as best song for "Golden." It was a big win for Netflix but a more qualified victory for the movie's producer, Sony Pictures. Though it developed and produced the film, Sony sold "KPop Demon Hunters" to the streaming giant instead of giving it a theatrical release.

On Netflix, "KPop Demon Hunters" became a cultural phenomenon and the streaming platform's biggest hit. It has more than 325 million views and counting.

"This is for Korea and Koreans everywhere," said co-director Maggie Kang.

Another Netflix release, Guillermo del Toro's "Frankenstein" picked up three awards for its lavish craft, for costume design, makeup and hairstyling and for production design.

Amy Madigan won best supporting actress for her performance in the horror thriller "Weapons," a win that came 40 years after the 75-year-old actor was first nominated, in 1986, for "Twice in a Lifetime." Letting out a giant laugh as she hit the stage, Madigan exclaimed, "This is great!"



Michael B. Jordan, winner of the award for actor in a leading role for "Sinners"



Jessie Buckley, winner of the award for actress in a leading role for "Hamnet"

Tanahun to host Fifth Shuklagandaki Festival

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT
Tanahun, Mar. 16

The 'Fifth Shuklagandaki Festival' to be held in Tanahun will feature traditional houses of various ethnic communities as major attractions.

According to the organisers, houses of the Gurung, Kumal, Magar, Bhujel, Tamang and Newar Communities have been constructed at the festival site so that visitors can observe their lifestyles, customs and cultures in one place.

The festival, organised by the

Shuklagandaki Municipal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, will be held from March 20 to 31 at the playground of Bhanubhakta Multiple Campus in Belchautara, Shuklagandaki Municipality-5.

The organisers state that the objective is to provide information about the traditional lifestyles, food habits, dress and cultural practices of different ethnic communities through these houses.

Preparations for the festival are currently being intensified. Along with the construction of the stage, stalls and the fairground, the ethnic houses are also being built in traditional styles.

Preparation completed for Seto Machhindranath chariot festival

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 16

The Seto Machhindranath Rathayatra Management Committee (SMRMC) has completed all the preparation works for this year's Seto Machhindranath chariot procession.

Nilkaji Shakya, coordinator of the committee and priest of the Seto Machhindranath Temple, said that the painting of the Seto Machhindranath idol has been completed.

The Guthi Sansthan of Kathmandu will begin the construction of the Seto Machhindranath chariot at Tindhara Pathshala in Jamal from March 19. He further said that representatives of the



SMRMC invited the President to inaugurate the festival on Monday, March 16. This year, the festival falls on March 26.

The committee coordinator, Shakya, said that preparations for the chariot procession have already begun.

The chariot will be designed in a triangular shape following the traditional method.

Intergenerational poetry session held



BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Mar. 16

On a tranquil morning at the historic Rato Ghar in Ravibhawan, Kathmandu, the 'Bartaman Kabita Samuha' gathered for an intimate literary session titled 'Agraj sanga Bartaman Kabita' (Contemporary poetry with senior creators). The group was hosted by the distinguished literary couple, Poet Sneh Sayami and Poet Laxmi Mali.

During the programme, Bishwa Sigdel of the 'Bartaman Kabita Samuha' emphasised that dialogues between generations in programmes like this hold profound significance.

Sneh Sayami, a pivotal figure in Nepali poetry since the 1970s, opened the session by sharing his early struggles during the Panchayat era, his encounters with the legendary Bhupi Sherchan, and his close association with the iconic writer Parijat. Sayami recited several poems, including 'Shankhadharko Nuga: Khwa,' which explores the cultural evolution of Thimi, and 'Rajmarg,' a satirical take on the country's unstable political and physical infrastructure. His final poem, 'Jhola,' left a deep impact, poignantly contrasting the revolutionary zeal and simple tools of his youth.

The session took an emotional turn as poet Laxmi Mali shared her life journey. From being driven to a poetry meet in Bal Krishna Sama's car as a child to caring for her paralysed father for years, her life has been a testament to resilience. As a pioneering headmaster, she transformed a school by prioritising girls' education and fighting against child marriage. Her poetry, deeply influenced by Parijat's social-realist philosophy, reflected these experiences. She recited 'Nachhe Galli,' a nostalgic look at her childhood neighbourhood, 'Samarpnan,' dedicated to

her supportive brother, and her signature poem 'Aama Timro Naam Ke Ho' (Mother, What is Your Name?), which questions the erasure of a mother's identity in society.

The programme featured a diverse array of voices from the contemporary poetry scene. Dhir Kumar Shrestha recited 'Badal Mathi Mathi,' reflecting on the importance of staying grounded despite reaching great heights. Bishma Upreti shared 'Kamal,' symbolising resilience in the face of adversity, along with 'Guraansko Bot' and 'Malai China,' exploring identity and nature. Bidhan Acharya brought historical depth with 'Thimi to Thimi.'

Prahlad Sindhuliya presented a biting political satire titled 'Janmajat Krantikari ko Biggapti,' lamenting the forgotten dreams of martyrs, and 'Simana ko Huliya.'

The plight and strength of women were central themes in the recitals of Avaya Shrestha, who read 'Akhil Strijanko Dukhanta Prem Katha,' and Rima K.C., who presented the fierce 'Sristiko Prayogshala ma,' a bold protest against rape and violence. Rita Balami offered a touching ghazal-style poem, while Anita Lama's 'Ghar' explored the hollowness of modern urban life, where large houses lack the warmth of culture and maternal love.

Basudev Adhikari's 'Gen Z' examined the tech-driven lives of the new generation, alongside his reflective 'Maunata ko Geet.' Rami Priya's 'Rahar' touched upon the universal nature of human desire and struggle. Environmental and existential concerns were voiced by Chandra Bahadur Lama in 'Kharanika Sapana Ra Maatoko Gandha' and 'Hami Hariyo Birsirakeha Chhau,' which critiqued the global trend of war and displacement. Finally, Bishwa Sigdel offered a sharp critique of global power dynamics and the master-slave relationship in international politics with 'Beggar Master' and 'Joker ra Desh.'

during the festival.

The entire structure of the chariot is modeled in the shape of a temple. The chariot is pulled with large ropes from both sides. According to legend, Machhindranath was the teacher of Gorakhnath.

The festival of Seto Machhindranath is believed to have begun in 595 A.D. The deity is also known as Janmadyo, Aryavalokiteshwor, Karunamaya and Jamaleshwor.

Many people perform religious activities during the festival to attain prosperity in their lives and to fulfill their wishes. Every year, Nepali people celebrate the chariot-pulling festival with great devotion. It is believed that if the chariot festival concludes successfully, the year will be free from drought and famine.

HOROSCOPE

tarot.com

ARIES: As the Moon meets Mercury in your 12th house, quiet honesty can ease your mind. Write down a lingering worry in your journal, then share it with a trusted confidant. Gentle reflection and conversation may clear confusion and bring emotional relief.

CANCER: Your caring voice guides the room today. As the Moon meets Mercury in your 9th House of Learning, small moments of curiosity and sharing ideas may gently expand your worldview and support meaningful personal growth.

LIBRA: Your life moves to a rhythm shaped by daily choices. If things feel out of sync lately, the Moon joining Mercury in your 6th house encourages gentle adjustments, helping you restore balance through mindful routines and healthier habits!

CAPRICORN: Your words set the day's pace. As the Moon meets Mercury in your 3rd House of Communication, speak clearly and kindly. Organizing plans, sharing notes, or resolving small issues can help everything flow smoothly.

TAURUS: Today's energy favors friendly, low-pressure connections. As the Moon meets thoughtful Mercury in your 11th House of Social Networks, reaching out with genuine interest can strengthen friendships, clarify shared goals, and deepen cooperation within teams or community circles.

LEO: A confident attitude can melt the ice of fear, even if you aren't feeling as bold as you act. Your intimate 8th house is the focus of Mercury and the Moon's embrace, inviting candid discussions of vulnerable topics.

SCORPIO: Morning invites play, afternoon asks for focus. Creative courage returns as the instinctive Moon conjoins mischievous Mercury in your 5th House of Play, urging you to express whatever stirs within.

AQUARIUS: Calm practicality steadies your money moves. Your 2nd House of Assets draws attention as the unconscious Moon conjoins information-gathering Mercury there, revealing habits that are shaping your financial journey!

GEMINI: You can act without knowing everything — but knowing SOMETHING sure helps! Snap decisions may become necessary with this Moon-Mercury conjunction in your 10th House of Motivation, nudging you to name your goal and take that next step.

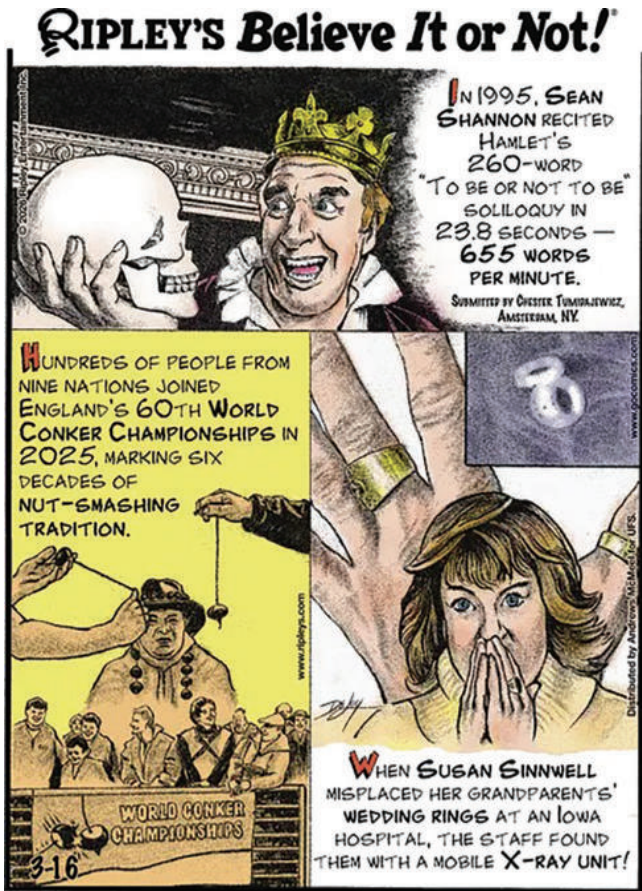
VIRGO: Progress builds through every conversation today. Clear agreements matter as the Moon conjoins mental Mercury in your 7th House of Alignments, encouraging honest dialogue that balances your needs with someone else's!

SAGITTARIUS: When insight lands, home choices feel simpler. Your 4th House of Patterns takes center stage as the Moon uplifts Mercury, guiding honest conversations about comfort and the kind of support you want.

PISCES: Self-trust deepens as you speak with gentle confidence. The Moon joining Mercury in your empathetic sign highlights self-awareness. Updating a profile or meeting someone new, you clearly sense how you present yourself today.

CARTOON

gocomics.com



Hat trick for Raphinha as Barcelona stay 4 points clear

AP
Barcelona, Mar. 16

Raphinha scored a hat trick, including two goals from the penalty spot, as Barcelona reclaimed its four-point lead over Real Madrid at the top of the Spanish league on Sunday.

Barcelona routed Sevilla 5-2 for its fourth straight league win and boosted its confidence ahead of the second leg of its Champions League last 16 match against Newcastle on Wednesday.

Barcelona needed Lamine Yamal's penalty with the last kick of the game to rescue a 1-1 draw at Newcastle in the first leg.

After Portugal defender João Cancelo was fouled in the box, Raphinha put the Catalan side ahead in the ninth minute with a little dink of a shot known as a "Panenka," which fooled goalkeeper Odysseas Vlachodimos.

Cancelo, who returned to Barcelona this winter on loan from Saudi Arabia club Al-Hilal, earned another penalty in the 18th and Raphinha again converted. Vlachodimos read the shot well and managed to touch the ball but could not stop it.

Dani Olmo made it 3-0 in the 38th minute from Marc Bernal's cross.

Oso pulled one back for Sevilla before halftime and Raphinha completed his hat trick after the interval with a shot that took a deflection and went over the 'keeper. Cancelo then added more lustre to the win, with Djibril Sow reducing the gap in added time.

Barcelona midfielder Gavi returned to action after more than 200 days on the sidelines because of a right knee meniscus operation.

Gavi came on in the 82nd minute as a replacement for Raphinha to huge cheers. He was then applauded every time he touched the ball.

Elsewhere, Mallorca came from behind to beat Espanyol 2-1, and Real Betis and Celta Vigo drew 1-1.

Man United beat Villa

Bruno Fernandes closed in on the Premier League 's assists record as



PHOTO: AP
Barcelona's Raphinha celebrates after scoring his side's opening goal during the Spanish La Liga soccer match against Sevilla.

Manchester United tightened its grip on a return to the Champions League with a 3-1 win against Aston Villa on Sunday.

Tottenham avoided extending an unwanted club low by halting its losing run with a late equalizer to draw 1-1 with Liverpool.

Fernandes provided assists for two of United's goals against Villa to take his tally for the season to 16.

The record for a single Premier League campaign is 20 — jointly held by Thierry Henry and Kevin De Bruyne.

Fernandes, who now has 100 assists as a United player, has up to eight more games to set a new record in English soccer's top division.

Of more importance to United was a seventh win in nine games under head coach Michael Carrick. United is third -- three points clear of Villa in fourth.

United is on course for a return to the Champions League after two seasons outside of European club soccer's top competition.

The top four are guaranteed to qualify, with English teams likely to earn a fifth spot because of their performances in Europe this season.

The victory saw United close the gap on second-place Manchester City to seven points.

Liverpool is two points further back in fifth after squandering victory

SNIPPETS

Double gold for Kachhyapati

Kathmandu (TRN): Nepali WUMA Kung Fu athlete Sujan Kachhyapati has struck gold twice in his debut international competition. Kachhyapati secured two gold medals at the Battle of Bavaria, held in Regensburg, Germany, organised by the World Martial Arts Committee (WMAC). According to Sanjeet Kumar Rai, President of the Nepal WUMA Kung Fu Association and General Secretary of WMAC Nepal Chapter Kachhyapati competed in the Chinese Creative Form and the Traditional Form with Weapon categories at the event. He topped both disciplines, scoring 23.02 points in the Chinese Creative Form, which featured five competitors, and 22.58 points in the Traditional Form with Weapon, contested by seven athletes. The Nepal WUMA Kung Fu Association reported that the tournament drew 1,200 participants from 10 countries, including Nepal.



Finalissima' clash cancelled

Barcelona (AFP): The 'Finalissima' clash between Euro 2024 winners Spain and world champions Argentina set to take place on March 27 in Qatar has been cancelled, UEFA said on Sunday. The European football governing body said in a statement that it was "not possible to reach agreement with Argentina" over an alternative date and location, required because of the Middle East war affecting the region. "It is a source of great disappointment to UEFA and the organisers that circumstances and timing have denied the teams of the chance to compete for this prestigious prize in Qatar," said UEFA in a statement. The Finalissima pits the latest Copa America winners against the European championship winners, with Argentina winning the inaugural edition by beating Italy in 2022 at Wembley in London.

Bangladesh win series

Dhaka (AP): Salman Ali Agha's century wasn't enough as Bangladesh beat new-look Pakistan by 11 runs in the third and final one-day international to win the series 2-1 on Sunday. Agha hit 106 off 98 balls, but his dismissal in the 48th over saw Pakistan eventually getting bowled out for 279 with skipper Shaheen Shah Afridi stumped off the final ball of the doomed chase. Opening batter Tanzid Hasan's (107) first ODI hundred had earlier propelled Bangladesh to 290-5 after Afridi won the toss and elected to field on the same bouncy wicket where Pakistan was bowled out for 114 in the first game which Bangladesh won by eight wickets. Bangladesh lost the second ODI by 128 runs under the DLS Method when it was also dismissed for 114.

Sarfaraz quits int'l cricket

Islamabad (AP): Former Pakistan captain Sarfaraz Ahmed retired from international cricket on Sunday after leading the country in 100 international matches across multiple formats. "I would like to thank the Pakistan Cricket Board for the trust they placed in me over the years," Sarfaraz said in a statement. "Pakistan cricket has always been very close to my heart and I will continue to support the game in every possible way." Sarfaraz scored 6,164 runs across multiple formats including six centuries and 35 half-centuries. He represented Pakistan in 54 test matches, 117 ODIs and 61 T20s.

AFC says Iran is still set to play World Cup

AP
Kualalumpur, Mar. 16

A leading soccer official in Asia says Iran is still set to play at the World Cup which kicks off in June in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

In a social media post last week in reaction to comments from U.S. President Donald Trump, Iran's national soccer team said "no one can exclude" it from playing in the global tournament.

On Monday, Asian Football Confederation general secretary Windsor John said the sport's continental governing body has heard nothing to suggest Iran won't contest the World Cup.

"They are our member. We want them to play," he told a news conference in Kuala Lumpur, where the AFC is based. "As far as we know, Iran is playing.

"It's a very emotional moment, everybody is saying a lot of things. At the end of the day, it's the (Iran soccer) federation who should decide if they're playing and, as for today, the federation ... has told us that they're going to the World Cup."

Trump had posted on social media that the Iranian team was welcome at the World Cup despite the ongoing war. Iran is set to play all three of its World Cup group games in the U.S., which is co-hosting the tournament with Mexico and Canada. The regional war has put doubt on Iran's ability to fulfill

its World Cup entry, and sports minister Ahmad Donyamali told state TV last week that the current circumstances meant it was not possible to play.

But the Iran team's riposte on Instagram confirmed it still wants to participate, and pointed out that the tournament is run by FIFA, soccer's world governing body, not Trump or the U.S.

Iran is scheduled to play in Inglewood, California, against New Zealand on June 16 and Belgium on June 21, before finishing group play in Seattle against Egypt on June 27.

Iran is a power in Asian soccer, ranked No. 20 in the world by FIFA and has qualified for its fourth straight World Cup edition.

English sides seek redemption from Champions League reality check

AFP
Manchester, Mar. 16

Kings of the league phase, England's six Champions League sides were made to look like paupers in the first legs of the last 16 as they failed to muster a win between them.

Manchester City, Chelsea and Tottenham have seemingly insurmountable mountains to climb, even with home advantage this week, as they trail by three goals against Real Madrid, Paris Saint-Germain and Atletico Madrid respectively.

Liverpool and Arsenal will expect to still get past Galatasaray and Bayer Leverkusen, while Newcastle are dreaming of shocking Barcelona in the Camp Nou after outplaying the Spanish champions in a 1-1 draw at St. James' Park.

But after unprecedented

domination of the early stages of the competition, AFP Sport looks at the reasons behind a reality check for the Premier League's best.

'Lions in winter, lambs in spring'

The Premier League's financial advantage over Europe's other major leagues, thanks to far more lucrative television rights deals, has not been reflected in the latter stages of the Champions League for some time.

Only three of the last 13 Champions League winners have come from England. Arsenal were the only Premier League club to reach the last four last season and none reached the semi-finals in the 2023/24 campaign.

Fatigue after a gruelling winter schedule is often cited as the main factor for the decline of English sides as the only major league without a winter break and two domestic

cup competitions.

French great and former UEFA president Michel Platini once referred to English sides as "lions in winter, lambs in spring".

"In general, I think it is not helpful for English clubs not to have a winter break," said Liverpool boss Arne Slot.

Of the six English sides involved in the Champions League, four of them also made the League Cup semi-finals and five were involved in FA Cup action in the days before their European disappointment last week.

Up against the best

Despite the Premier League's collective financial might, in three of the six last-16 ties involving English clubs, they are facing sides with greater revenue.

Real Madrid remain the world's richest club and defied recent poor form to blow away Manchester City 3-0 at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Sinner, Sabalenka clinch Indian Wells titles



AP
Indian Wells, Mar. 16

Jannik Sinner beat Daniil Medvedev in the Indian Wells final 7-6 (6), 7-6 (4) on Sunday, winning seven straight points to rally from a 4-0 deficit in the second-set tiebreak and claim the title without dropping a single set.

The No. 2-ranked Italian beat Medvedev for the ninth time in their last 10 matches to claim his first title at the California desert tournament. Medvedev handed top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz his first loss of the year in the semifinals of the BNP Paribas Open.

Sinner congratulated fellow Italian Kimi Antonelli, who won Formula One's Chinese Grand Prix earlier Sunday.

"It hasn't anything to do with tennis, but it has been a special day for Italy," Sinner said. "Because I'm a huge Formula One fan and having a very, very young Italian, Kimi, bringing Italy back home at the top, it's amazing. So, thanks, Kimi, thanks Formula One, and see you next year."

World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka beat Elena Rybakina 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (6) in the women's final Sunday for her first Indian Wells title. Sabalenka, a runner-up in 2023 and '25, finished off the win with a big serve that Rybakina hit long.

It was a sweltering afternoon on the court as the temperatures soared into the 90s. The 27-year-old Sabalenka had a chance to close out the third set but was broken at 5-4.

Rybakina found herself with a



championship point in the tiebreaker, only to have Sabalenka hit a backhand winner.

"I think the whole idea going into this match was to be mentally strong, to stay strong, no matter what, to show with the body language that I'm here, I'm fighting," Sabalenka said in a post-match interview on the Tennis Channel. "You have to get a win with incredible tennis and that was the whole idea going into this one. I'm happy that it really worked."

It's been quite a stretch for Sabalenka. First, a puppy and then an engagement ring from Brazilian businessman Georgios Frangulis. Now, a title in the desert.

"I'll remember it for the rest of my life," she said.

This marked the 16th time the two players have met, with Sabalenka now holding a 9-7 advantage. Rybakina of Kazakhstan beat Sabalenka at the 2025 WTA Finals championship and the Australian Open two months ago. She also edged Sabalenka in the finals at Indian Wells in 2023.

"It was a very difficult match," Rybakina said after the match as she congratulated Sabalenka.

There's not much time to celebrate for Sabalenka, who was set to leave Sunday night for the Miami Open, where she's the defending champion.

"Probably will have a couple drinks on the plane and that's it," Sabalenka said.

"I'm defending champion there, so I have to bring my best tennis there. But with these vibes that I'm taking from here, I think I'll be able to be there and to fight and to do my very best to defend that beautiful trophy."



PHOTO: BIKASH/TRN
Representatives of first division football clubs staging a sit-in protest in front of the All Nepal Football Association gate at Satdobato, Lalitpur on Monday.