

Still no payment for sugarcane farmers
Farmers begin second phase of protest

Kathmandu: Sugarcane farmers in the country were ecstatic when the sugar mills agreed, after the government's pressure, to clear all pending dues to the farmers within January 21. But the sugar mill owners have yet to clear the dues and the farmers are worried that they will be tricked again. Sugarcane farmers have complained that some of the payment have made its way to the middlemen instead of the farmers. "After the agreement with the government, the factories made the payment to sugarcane middlemen and the farmers returned barehanded," said Shishupal Koiri of Pratappur-7, Jhulanipur. According to him, though middlemen have benefited from the



'Farmers visit the factories hundreds of times in a year but have not received their entitlement rather are told off rudely.'

agreement made with the government, real farmers have not received anything yet. "Those who bought chits from farmers got the payments, farmers like us who are involved in farming have not received the payment," Koiri said. Koiri is yet to

receive Rs 563,000 from Indira Sugar Mill for 1,200 quintals of sugarcane he had supplied last year. He shared that his family is engulfed in loans as he has not received his payment. "Like me, there are many farmers who are compelled to live as borrowers," he complained.

Indira Sugar Mill, after the agreement with the government, has paid only Rs 7.5 million, but real farmers have not received the amount. After not getting the payment, some of the farmers have sold the chit to middlemen at cheaper prices in order to pay back their loans to the lenders. Middlemen buy a quintal of sugarcane for Rs 300/350 from the farmers and get Rs 471 from the factories. Farmers have complained that SP Shukla, the manager of the mill is paying the middlemen from the Bardaghat area. Kamalesh Gupta, a farmer of Pratapur-9 Belatar said that when farmers go to the factory asking for payment, the staff tell

the farmers that they do not have the authority to make the payment. The factory owes Rs 250,000 to Gupta from last year. Chairperson of Sugarcane Producers Association, Nawalparasi, Umesh Chandra Yadav said that the farmers have been facing injustice for years. "Farmers visit the factories hundreds of times in a year but have not received their entitlement rather are told off rudely," he said. He warned of picketing Singha Durbar if the government does not make take action against the sugar mill owners. "We have asked for the payment and we should get it, if not we will be obliged to picket Singhadurbar," Yadav said. Continue in page 4...

Oli, Modi jointly inaugurate Biratnagar ICP

Kathmandu: Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi jointly inaugurated the second integrated check post (ICP) at Biratnagar- Jogbani border point along Nepal-India border. This is the country's second integrated check post (ICP). The Indian side handed over the key trade infrastructure to Nepali authorities amid a function held in Biratnagar. The ICP, which is a



shared structure at the bordering point of two countries, is considered an important facility for trade logistics. It offers a common platform for traders to get customs clearance for the traded

goods from one place. Apart from this, the ICP also offers services like immigration, banking, quarantine, warehouse, litigation, and parking yard under single roof, facilitating both importers

and exporters. According to the board, the newly-built ICP consists of eight buildings incorporating administrative works,

clearance system and security system, among others. In addition, the infrastructure also features four inspection towers, two warehouses, two import-export

Oli invites Modi to visit Nepal

Kathmandu: Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has extended an invitation to his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi to visit Nepal at an appropriate time soon. He also invited Modi for Nepal visit. "I am eager to welcome you in Kathmandu. Your visit will make the bilateral relationship stronger."As the two leaders met via video conferencing, Oli invited Modi to Nepal saying Continue in page 4...

dispensary, customs Continue in page 4...



Editorial

India's 71st Republic Day

India has celebrated its 71st Republic Day on January 26 marking it with grand celebrations in the national capital and all across the nation. Republic Day is celebrated to honor the historic date when the country completed its transition towards becoming an independent republic after its constitution came into effect.

Republic Day marks India's adoption of a republic constitution (with a president rather than a monarch) on January 26, 1950, after gaining of independence from British rule in 1947. Understandably, this makes it an occasion that's close to the hearts of all Indians. India fought a long and hard battle for freedom from the British empire. Known as the Indian Independence Movement, the battle spanned 90 years, starting from the large-scale Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the British East India Company in the northern and central parts of the country. During the later decades of the movement, Mahatma Gandhi (who is affectionately referred to as the "Father of a Nation") led a successful strategy of non-violent protests and withdrawal of cooperation against British authority.

In addition to many deaths and imprisonments, independence came at a price — the 1947 Partition of India, in which the country was split along the line of religious majorities and Muslim-dominated Pakistan came into being. It was deemed necessary by the British due to growing conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, and the need for a unified secular democratic republic. What's important to note is that although India officially gained independence from the British on August 15, 1947, it still wasn't entirely free of them. The country remained a constitutional monarchy under King George VI, who was represented by Lord Mountbatten as the Governor General of India. Lord Mountbatten appointed

This day commemorates the historic moment when India became the Independent Republic after years of struggle.

Jawaharlal Nehru to be the first Prime Minister of independent India.

In order to move forward as a republic, India needed to draft and implement its own Constitution as the governing document. The work was headed by Doctor Babasaheb Ambedkar, and the first draft was completed on November 4, 1947. It took almost three years for the Constituent Assembly to finally ratify it though. This occurred on November 26, 1949, but the Assembly waited till January 26, 1950, to put the new Constitution of India into effect.

The Republic Day is a national holiday of India, which is celebrated to mark the day when India officially adopted the Constitution of India. This national holiday honours the date 26 January 1950, when India's Constitution came into effect by replacing the Government of India Act. This day commemorates the historic moment when India became the Independent Republic after years of struggle.

India has no dearth of brave young men and women and if they get the opportunity and help then we can compete with other nations in space exploration and one of them will fulfil her dreams. Let's salute India's Republic Day.

China: Economic Prospects for 2020

It is likely that China will put up a positive figure of growth for 2020 at the next NPC. This is particularly because 2020 is the last year of China's Five Year Development plan.

As curtains came down on Year 2019, China found itself at cross roads with its economy under increased scrutiny as much on account of trade war with the US and due to the rapid growth in household debt amidst desperate government's efforts to boost consumption. The Chinese state has thus far shied away from real market reforms and instead has focused on providing artificial stimuli, tax cuts and reduced lending and banking loans to spur growth. What China requires is market reform and on an unprecedented scale if the economy is to be turned around.

In March 2019, Premier Li Keqiang had stated at the Annual National People's Congress that there would be 'greater risks' ahead for China. It was also announced that official economic growth target for 2019 would be 6.0 to 6.5 percent, slower than last year. The forecast is that 2020 may turn out to be even worse than the year gone by. If this is indeed the case, then President Xi Jinping will have to return to the drawing board for strategies to weather the brewing storm.

Many analysts predict that China's economic growth could drop below 6 per cent in 2020 for the first time since 1990. Real gross domestic product (GDP) is set to increase by just 5.7 per cent in 2020. That compares with an estimated 6.1 per cent in 2019 and would mark the third straight annual slowdown. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, in 2018, China's GDP growth slipped to 6.6 per cent from 6.8 per cent the previous year, and was 6.2 per cent year-on-year in the first nine months of 2019. For most part of 2019, Chinese economic growth witnessed slowing domestic demand fuelled by a slump in investment.

Knowing fully well that the

economy could well slow down further, the Chinese leadership has moved towards a trade deal with the US. Under the agreement, the US will roll back tariffs on Chinese goods in exchange for more US goods purchases and structural reforms from the Chinese side. The trade dispute with the US, led to a significant decline in exports.

The statistics are telling in this regard. GDP growth rate fell to 6.1 per cent from 6.6 per cent in 2018. This is the lowest growth registered since 1990. In 2019, China's imports fell by 4.3 per cent (first quarter), while exports increased marginally by 0.1 per cent. Devaluation of the Yuan by more than 2 per cent also accounted for comparatively less export revenue. Forex reserves went down to US\$ 3.1 billion, the lowest since 2011. Minxin Pei, author of 'China's Crony Capitalism' avers that the New Year 2020 may turn out to be Xi's worst year yet. He rests his case on the fact that Xi's intolerance of dissent and vulnerability to bad information has made his government more prone to policy blunders.

Economists view China's household debt growth as a financial risk. Household debt makes up for 60.4 per cent of GDP, up from 52 per cent in 2018. Household debt to income ratio is 99.9 per cent and outstanding balance of credit card loans had reached US\$ 1 trillion by mid-2019. The middle class in China is reeling under the impact of joblessness, which jumped to 5.3 per cent in 2019.

China has never managed to come to grips with its debt (25.4 per cent of GDP). Intervention by the state in China makes debt resolution hostage to, no credit recall, no litigation and no reporting of defaults to the Central Bank. China's non-bank financial institutions are looking for

an official bailout and are hoping for a turnaround in Chinese debt repayment culture. The challenge for President Xi Jinping is actually market reform, which has been promised in the past, but has not been implemented. Instead, the CPC continues to strengthen the State Owned Enterprises at the cost of the private sector, which account for roughly two-thirds of the GDP.

Given the opaqueness of the Chinese system, it is likely that China will put up a positive figure of growth for 2020 at the next NPC. This is particularly because 2020 is the last year of China's Five Year Development plan. And, in 2021 is the CPC's 100th year of establishment. In that sense, it is important for China to be able to show its economic strength rather than weakness. However, according to the World Bank, China's growth is forecast to decelerate to 5.9 per cent this year.

Observers of China find it difficult to measure China's economic indices and one study (2019) even claimed that government figures overstated inflation-adjusted GDP by 2 percentage points every year from 2008 to 2016. The larger picture of China today is that of a nation attempting several reforms ranging from urban housing, environment protection to the ambitious BRI. The degree to which these succeed will depend on China's ability to cross the current economic downturn.

However, this is not going to be easy, as each of the plans invested in by President Xi will require a road map for economic development that is sustainable and equitable. With the trade war with the US beginning to wind down, there is an opportunity for China to take steps domestically to trigger economic growth. Whether this will happen in 2020 remains a moot question.

RJP's participation in government is a betrayal of Madhes

-Presidium members of the party have not played crucial role for entire unification within the party.

-Some tried to bring a rift between the RJP and the Socialist Party by bringing unwanted matters.

-Anyone brings a proposal to go to the government, then the leaders and cadres to protest against them.

➤ **RJP is increasing its affiliation with the NCP. It supported in speaker's election. Will RJP-Nepal getting deputy speaker?**

• There is nothing like that. These are rumors. RJP had only cooperated with the NCP as an equal status the National Assembly. On the other hand, no party other than NCP filed candidate for the election of the Speaker of the House of Representatives. We are trying to convey the message that parliament should move forward in terms of consensus. It does not mean that the NCP has a new equation with RJP. RJP is firm in its demands. RJP is the party formed to address the Madhes agenda. There is no slight deviation in the party.

➤ **It means the alliance between the RJP and the NCP only for elections?**

• In the National Assembly elections, it was agreed that cooperation between each other in two seats and political issues could be discussed and consensus was reached. Unless there is a discussion on political issues, there is no question of cooperation unless NCP takes the initiative to address RJP's demands. Therefore, no new equation has been created. Some leaders within the RJP who consider going to the government as their main agenda may have been acting differently.

➤ **Does electoral cooperation and supporting the Speaker not mean preparing the foundation to join government?**

• The way to go to the government does not seem to be open to electoral cooperation and support in the Speaker. It is not our agenda to go to government. It can be a person's agenda. This may be the agenda of those who play the Madhes movement, but the agenda of the RJP is not going to the government. The leaders of the RHP and leadership cannot use the Madhesh movement as a weapon to participate in the government. RJP is the party formed to address the issues raised by the Madhes movement.

➤ **It seems that RJP has cooperated with the NCP only to its advantage, why should discussion with NCP about the Madhes agenda?**

• So far these issues have not been discussed. There is something to be discussed later on political issues. We're always ready to discuss. Our political issues, agendas must be addressed. The situation has not changed, so it is not possible to discuss it now. The political party wants everyone to vote to save their seats and that cooperation is only for the elections. The CPN needed help, and we

needed help too. There seemed to be no other alternative to that support.

➤ **It means RJP should compromise with anyone to protect its seat?**

• It's not just about securing a seat. The National Assembly is a House, whose election is held in a constitutional manner. Rather than getting a political advantage it sends representative to the House. On the other hand, we also proved that the NCP agreed with us and helped each other to eliminate what we had previously portrayed as 'international, divisive, hostile'. The party that called us anti-nationalist and fragmentary sought our support, which is also a political achievement. That agreement was for election only. RJP's agenda is not to go to the government; if anyone talks about going to the government, it is a betrayal of Madhes and political dishonesty. There has not been any discussion within the RJP about going to government. So anyone brings a proposal to go to the government, then the leaders and cadres to protest against them.

➤ **If the party formally decides to go to the government, will you protest?**

• I do not think RJP should take such decision. But if any leader of the party thinks



Brisesh Chandra Lal

Senior Vice President, RJP-Nepal

so, he is neither a cadre of RJP nor a representative of the Madhes movement.

➤ **Is there a discussion within the RJP for the Deputy Speaker?**

• The issue is not yet discussed in the party. There has not been any proposal within the party regarding the Deputy Speaker. If such a proposal comes, it will be discussed. It is also our desire RJP to get Deputy Speaker.

➤ **Now a day, RJP's proximity with the NCP is increasing but there is reverse relation with Socialist Party, why?**

• There are no ups and down in relations with the Socialist Party. The Socialist Party also tried to increase the distance and some of RJP's leaders also worked to increase the distance. They tried to bring a rift between the RJP and the Socialist Party by bringing

unwanted matters. Both parties had promised to the people that they will move forward together. According to that commitment both parties should move forward and cooperate.

➤ **What is the situation of party unification with Socialist?**

• The unification is not easy process. There must be mental, ideological and theoretical unification. Talks over unification held informally and individuals. The talk was held about person-to-person position but did not linked with principle and thought. Unification talk was held with such a leadership that did not allow to RJP to become a single party. Such leader only sought to develop factions and divisions. Presidium members of the party have not played crucial role for entire unification within the party. It was not their priority to hold the General convention.

Still no payment...

1.3 million quintals of sugarcane worth Rs 680 million was crushed in Nawalparasi last year. The government provided subsidy of Rs 80 million to the sugar mill owners. According to the farmers, the sugar mills are supposed to pay Rs 610 million to the farmers but they have not received even half of the amount yet.

Indira Sugar Mill owes Rs 132.6 million to the farmers and Bagmati Khandari Mill owes Rs 86.1 million. Lumbini Sugar Mill which crushed sugarcane worth Rs 100 million last year has not made any payment so far.

Now, even after the government's deadline given to sugar mill owners to pay the dues of sugarcane farmers ended on January 21, the mill owners have failed to do so. As a result, the Sugarcane Farmers' Struggle Committee has started its second phase of protests from today to

pressure the government to recover the due payments of farmers from sugar mills.

Out of the dues worth Rs one billion that sugar mills had to pay, they have distributed only Rs 117.5 million so far. Moreover, farmers are still to receive the subsidy from the government. As per farmers, in Sarlahi district alone around 10 million quintals of sugarcane used to be produced. However, in the last fiscal year, only 4.2 quintals of sugarcane was produced.

Sarlahi produces the largest quantity of sugarcane in the country. "Farmers are being discouraged from taking up sugarcane farming in recent years as they have to struggle a lot to receive their payments for their produce," committee member Rajesh Yadav said. "Forget about receiving the government subsidy, we are

struggling to even get our personal payments."

Yadav further said that the lengthy process involved in getting the government subsidy is a bother for farmers. "Our committee requested the government to introduce a policy whereby sugar mills and the government would mandatorily provide farmers' payments within 15 days of sugarcane crushing," he said. He added that most farmers don't have any hope of receiving the government subsidy as they have not received it for the last two years.

In 2018, the government announced it would provide subsidy of Rs 60 per quintal to sugarcane farmers. The work of subsidy distribution was handed over to the District Treasury Office (DTO). Although the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development has

handed over Rs 920 million of the total subsidies worth Rs 1.37 billion to DTO, only Rs 230 million has been distributed till date. "The remaining Rs 69 million is stuck at the DTO, which has been citing the lengthy administrative process for the delay in distributing the subsidy," said Dinesh Bhattarai, spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies. As DTO is yet to distribute such a huge amount of subsidy, it wouldn't be appropriate to ask the Ministry of Finance to release the remaining subsidy amount, he added.

Meanwhile, Yadav accused the government of drafting bothersome policies. "The subsidy distribution policy must be amended and made effective so that the genuine sugarcane farmers can receive the amount without any hassle," he stated.

Oli, Modi...

processing area and two weighing machines that can measure loads of up to 80 tons.

The ICP in Biratnagar-Jogbani is the second ICP along the Nepal-India border. It is an Indian grant project constructed with an estimated budget of Rs 1.82 billion. Nepal's first ICP at Birgunj-Raxaul border is in operation since April 7, 2018. On the occasion, India also handed over 5,000 houses of the 2015 earthquake survivors, reconstructed by it, to the government of Nepal.

Oli invites...

the visit would give the two governments an opportunity to review the achievements made in the relations between the two countries while moving ahead. He stressed that the two neighbours resolve all issues through dialogues. PM Oli claimed that the relationship between the two countries have reached a new high. "We can take the bilateral relationship higher if we work on the basis of friendship," he stressed. "I also feel it is about time we resolved the outstanding bilateral issues." In response, Modi said he accepted the invitation and he would consider it while preparing plans for this year.

Nepal invites Modi, Imran for Sagarmatha Dialogue

Kathmandu: Nepal has invited the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan along with several other heads of government and heads of state for the Sagarmatha Sambaad, officials in Kathmandu have confirmed. The first ever multi-stakeholder dialogue event is expected to be the biggest diplomatic initiative in Nepal's recent history that will be attended by many global figures apart from the leaders of the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

"Invitations have been sent to over 150 foreign guests including heads of government and heads of state, Ministers, business leaders, media, members of multilateral organisations, think-tank experts, academics, civil society leaders and activists," said a source who is aware of the work of the Sagarmatha Secretariat of Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The official also confirmed that other SAARC leaders have also been invited.

An Indian source has confirmed that South Block has received the invite from Kathmandu. The Nepal Foreign



Ministry headed by Pradeep Kumar Gyawali has been spearheading the work for the event which is scheduled to focus on the threat of climate change to the modern world. Given the large number of global leaders, the event is expected to serve as a venue for bilateral interaction among leaders from various countries. India and Pakistan have been caught up in a cycle of hostility, which had prevented Islamabad from hosting the SAARC Summit in 2016. The Kathmandu event aims to draw all the SAARC leaders and provide an opportunity to break the ice. India had accused Pakistan of cross border

terrorism while boycotting the Islamabad summit leading to its cancellation.

Earlier last week, the Ministry of External Affairs had announced that India has invited all heads of government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation member countries, including Prime Minister Imran Khan for the heads of government council of the SCO that will be hosted by New Delhi later in 2020. The April 2-4 Sagarmatha Sambaad will also highlight Nepal's ability to assert its point of view before the global audience with officials saying that they are expected to build the event as a global and regional diplomatic venue.

RJP divided on government participation

Kathmandu: The RJP -Nepal, which had been backing the KP Sharma Oli government since February 2018, suddenly turned hostile to the governing Nepal Communist Party in March last year after a district court handed a life term to its lawmaker Resham Chaudhary.

The party withdrew its support to the government, saying the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) had failed to uphold a deal reached between the two parties to keep Chaudhary out of jail. Chaudhary was convicted of masterminding the August 2015 Kailali violence, in which nine people were killed.

The Janata Party then started demanding constitutional amendments and the withdrawal of “false cases” against its members. It was even planning to form an alliance with “like-minded forces”, including the Samajbadi Party, to launch protests for constitutional amendments. Talks were ongoing for a merger between the Janata Party and Samajbadi Party Nepal, which together have 33 seats in the



lower house—16 for the Janata Party and 17 for the Samajbadi Party—of the federal parliament. The Janata Party, however, had insisted that the Samajbadi Party quit government before a merger could take place.

But in the third week of December, days before the Samajbadi Party quit the government, the Janata Party forged an electoral alliance with the Nepal Communist Party for the National Assembly election, which was held on Thursday.

Three days ago, when the communist party fielded Agni Sapkota for Speaker, Janata Party stood in support, which was seen as a precursor to the

party’s joining the government. This has created a rift in the party. The party’s senior vice-chair, Sarbendra Nath Shukla said that some leaders in the six-member presidium had held meetings, at least three, with the ruling party leadership to decide on candidates for the National Assembly election. He did not rule out a deal that the leaders might have reached with the ruling party on joining the government.

“A large number of party leaders are against joining the Oli government, largely because the prime minister has shown no signs of addressing our demands for constitutional amendments,” Shukla told.

Five senior leaders from the

Janata Party handed over a memorandum to party coordinator Mahendra Yadav, accusing the six-member presidium of hobnobbing with the ruling party leadership in a bid to join the government. Multiple politicians that at least four leaders from the presidium are in a bid to join the government while two are opposed. There are now concerns that the four leaders could push through a decision on joining the government. Within the ruling party too, there are two distinct lines. Oli is in favour of inducting the Janata Party into government in a bid to ensure a two-thirds majority, which he lost after the Samajbadi Party quit. But Co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who has suddenly appeared stronger since extracting the Speaker post for the Maoist faction, is not too keen on bringing in the Janata Party. Some leaders fear that by siding with the ruling party, they run the risk of their demands not getting addressed. But others believe the party could finally make Oli address their demands.

Buddha Air flights to Rajbiraj

Rajbiraj: Buddha Airlines is set to provide daily flight services from Kathmandu to Rajbiraj and vice-versa from February 1.

Earlier, Shree Airlines had provided the flight service, three days a week from Kathmandu to Rajbiraj and vice-versa. Buddha Airlines is all set to provide one flight service on a daily basis.

Shree Airlines has been providing the service for three days: on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, every week. Civil Society Saptari Chairperson Than Singh Bhansali said it was a matter of great pride that Buddha Airlines had decided to offer daily air service for passengers flying to and from Rajbiraj. Bhansali added that the operation of additional daily air service



would help make Visit Nepal Year 2020 a grand success. Senior Officer Durga Mani Chaudhary at Rajbiraj Civil Aviation Office said preparation to resume regular flights from February 1 had been completed. He said a

ticket counter has also been brought into operation. “Buddha Airlines is scheduled to fly from Rajbiraj to Kathmandu at 12:10pm and from Kathmandu to Rajbiraj at 11:20am,” he said. “The fare for the route has been fixed at Rs 3,600,” he added.

School building constructed with India’s assistance

Kathmandu: The Charge d’ Affairs of Embassy of India in Nepal, Ajay Kumar ceremonially inaugurated new building of Aurobindo Ashram School in Thankot, Kathmandu. Director General, Department of Urban Development and Building Construction of Nepal, Mani Ram Gelal along with political and community leaders also attended the programme. The new infrastructure is constructed with the Government of India’s grant assistance of 28.25 million Nepali rupees. The three story building comprises eleven class rooms, three labs, four store rooms, two staff rooms. Besides rooms for accounts, administration, record, library and principal, it also has examination and multi-purpose hall. Aurobindo Ashram School was established in 1993 by Sri Aurobindo Yoga Mandir in Thankot area of Kathmandu district.

Nepal, Bangladesh and India to open road network

Kathmandu: Bangladesh, India and Nepal have finally taken the initiative to open a road network connecting the three South Asian nations, excluding the fourth party, Bhutan.

Although Bhutan was also part of the initiative, it withdrew temporarily from the agreement and will not join the network for now. Meanwhile, passenger and cargo vehicles will start moving among the three countries as soon as the protocols are set up.

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN) had signed the Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) on June 15, 2015. But due to Bhutan's temporary withdrawal from the deal, the implementation of the road network has been hanging in the balance for years. Hence, Bangladesh, India and Nepal (BIN) – following a series of tri-nation meetings in the last couple of years – will initial a new agreement to be known as BIN-MVA, in place of the existing BBIN-MVA, excluding Bhutan.

A meeting of the Joint



Working Group (JWG) regarding the transformation from the existing BBIN-MVA to BIN-MVA is scheduled to be held on January 30 and 31 in India in this regard.

“The purpose of the meeting is to finalize the [BIN-MVA] protocols, namely the Passenger Vehicle Protocol (PVA) and the Cargo Vehicle Protocol (CVP),” according to a foreign ministry official.

Mohammad Sarwar Mahmood, Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (South Asia),

will lead the Bangladesh delegation to India at the JWG meeting. Considering the overall situation, the foreign ministry has called an inter-ministerial meeting on Thursday aimed at formulating Bangladesh's position as well as preparing for the JWG meeting on BIN-MVA. Officials concerned from relevant ministries will be present at the meeting.

If the BIN-MVA is signed, movement of passengers and goods would become significantly easier. The hassle

of changing vehicles during immigration would not be necessary if passenger and cargo vehicles could pass through borders directly from some selective routes, he said. “Although a meeting is finally going to be held in India, there are still some uncertainties over certain issues. No one can say for now how long it will take for the first journey to begin, but we are trying to do it as soon as possible,” he added.

At one point, Bangladesh wanted to open a bilateral network with India as Nepal was reluctant to join the deal said Tribune. “If the three nations can open the road network, business as well as tourism will get a boost in South Asia,” the BRTC chairman said. Nepal Army In Search Operation To Find Out Missing Korean And Nepali In Annapurna Circuit Nepal Army's mission continues its search and rescue operation in Annapurna Circuit since last four days in search of four Korean and two Nepalese nationals missing in avalanches last week.

‘Lifetime Destination’ in India



Kathmandu: Nepal has reached out to promote itself as a ‘Lifetime Destination’ in western India through a sales mission.

Almost 100 local tour operators participated in sales missions organized in Surat and Pune since early January, according to a statement issued by Nepal Tourism Board (NTB). “The programs were ideal one to reach out to the market in western India especially the local travel trade with fresh communication and updates,” it added. The

programs were focused on showcasing Nepal as a lifetime experience for travelers around the world, particularly Indian travelers. “Easy accessibility, value for time and money, and a wide variety of options offered by Nepal including luxury, soft adventure, spiritual getaways, and entertainment were focused on during the presentations at both the cities,” the NTB added in the statement. The sales missions in Surat and Pune was the third leg of the Nepal Sales Mission in India which started in early January from Amritsar and Chandigarh as the first in the series, and Indore and Jaipur as the second. The NTB is organizing similar sales missions in Trichy, Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi in the coming weeks.

Tharuhat Morcha unveils its protest programs



Kathmandu: Tharuhat Tharuwan Rastriya Morcha has made its protest programs public putting forth a 14-point demand.

Organizing a press conference, it warned that it would hit the streets if its demands were not met immediately.

The party's demands include that the government should withdraw

the cases of all the 11 individuals including Resham Chaudhary accused in the Tikapur incident. Similarly, the party has also demanded that Tharu language be given official recognition in all the offices in the Tharuhat region. The party said it would hit the streets from February 17, if the demands were not met.

Inspection of Nepal-India border pillars starts

Kathmandu: Nepal-India joint border survey team started an on-field assessment of the border pillars in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts.

Out of 133 missing pillars, 27 have been created. Chief of the joint team, Survey Department Officer Janak Bahadur Bhandari, informed that two separate teams

will inspect the border pillars between Khakraula in eastern Kailali and Brahmadev in Kanchanpur. The decision for the survey was approved in a joint

meeting held in Tanakpur, India last week. The meeting decided to carry out the field visit and take local residents' opinion on disputed areas.

NA Elections: NCP wins 16 seats, RJPN victorious in two

Kathmandu: The Nepal Communist Party (NCP) has registered a thumping majority winning 16 seats while Rastriya Janata Party Nepal (RJPN) has won two seats in the National Assembly (NA) elections.

The RJPN had forged an electoral alliance with the ruling party in Province 2. The opposition Nepali Congress (NC) party failed to win even a single seat, and now has seven fewer members in the upper house. In Province 1, NCP candidates Gopi Achhami, Indira Gautam and Devendra Dahal have been elected as the NA members. Achhami got 6336 weight while his rivals Nir Bahadur BK of NC received 2718 and Gyan Bahadur Pariyar of Samajbadi Party got 664.

Victorious Gautam got a weightage of 6422. Dahal got 6234 while his rivals from NC, Devendra Ghimire got 2234 weight and Bharat Bahadur Dahal of Samajbadi got 264 weight.

In Province 2, Tulasa Kumari Dahal and Radheshyam Paswan of the ruling party and



Shekhar Kumar Singh and Mrigendra Kumar Singh Yadav of RJPN were victorious.

According to the election office, Mrigendra got 5,400 votes while his nearest rival and brother Aniruddha Kumar Singh got 4,512 votes. Likewise, Shekhar obtained 5502 weightage to defeat NC's Vola Panjyar who got 4512.

NCP's Dahal defeated NC's Nagina Yadav. Dahal got 5208 while Yadav got 4740 weightage. Likewise, Paswan received 5292 weight and his rival from Samajbadi got 4704 weightage.

NC and Samajbadi had fielded joint candidates in the province.

Ganga Kumari Belbase and Bedu Ram Bhusal of NCP were victorious in Bagmati Province. Belbase got 6828 weight to get elected as NA member. She defeated NC's Chali Kumari Sharma and Nepal Labor and Peasant Party's Gita Kafle.

Likewise, Bhusal received 6810 weight to defeat NC's Hari Saran Shrestha and Peasant party's Krishna Bahadur Tamang.

In Gandaki Province, Narayan Kaji lower house election to Dr. Baburam Bhattarai from Gorkha-2 in the 2017 Elections.

Similarly, Neupane got 3,366 votes and her rival Bimala Gauchan of Nepali Congress achieved 2,340. In Province 5, Bimala Ghimire, Jag Prasad Sharma and Gopal Bhattarai of NCP were victorious.

Ghimire defeated NC's Girija Devi Neupane, Sharma defeated NC's Meraj Ahmed Halwai and Samajbadi's Suni Kumar Singh, and Bhattarai defeated NC's Bal Krishna Neupane, Samajbadi's Krishna Ahir and Rastriya Janamorcha's Sihva Prasad Paudel.

In Karnali Province, Sumitra BC and Maya Prasad Acharya of the NCP and in Sudurpaschim Province Sarada Devi Bhatta and Tara Man Swar of the NCP got the victory.

Acharya received 3,618 votes to defeat her closest contender Dilli Ram Pathak who got 1,026 votes. According to election officer Dr. Rajendra Kumar Acharya, BC got 3,684 votes to be elected, defeating Ganesh Kumari Basket who bagged 1,026 votes. Likewise, Bhatta won garnering 3,738 weight while her closest rival was NC's Tulasi Devkota got 1,854 votes, according to chief returning officer Bidur Kafle.

In Sudurpaschim, Bhatta got 3738 to get elected in women's quota and Swar obtained 3720 weightage. Bhatta defeated NC's Tulasa Devkota who received 1854 weightage. In other's quota, NC's Pratap Thagunna got 1842.

RJP-Nepal likely to get Deputy Speaker

Kathmandu: The ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) lawmaker Agni Sapkota has been elected as the Speaker of the House of Representatives (HoR) unopposed after no party registered their nomination for the post.

According to the federal parliament secretariat, Sapkota was the sole candidate to file nomination for the position within the allocated time. The secretariat had set the time frame between 11 am to 2 pm for filing the candidacy for the post of speaker.

The lower house will officially announce his election to the post on Jan 26. Sapkota's candidacy was proposed by NCP parliamentary party deputy-leader Subash Nembang and seconded by NCP chief whip Dev Gurung, NCP



lawmaker Onsari Gharti and Rastriya Janata Party Nepal (RJPN) lawmaker Laxman Lal Karna.

The position has remained vacant since Krishna Bahadur Mahara stepped down following a rape attempt allegation in October.

Since the ruling party commands an overwhelming

majority at the parliament making Sapkota certain to get elected as speaker, the opposition parties Nepali Congress (NC), RJPN and Samajbadi Party all have their eyes set on the post of the deputy speaker.

The constitution bars both speaker and deputy speaker to be the representatives from the same party and gender. NC was earlier rumored to field Pampha

Bhusal against Sapkota but decided not to field anyone prior to the nomination period. As the second-largest party in the House, NC is expecting the position and the party's decision not to field anyone against Sapkota might have been moved to lure the ruling party for its support since whoever succeeds to garner NCP's support will surely get the deputy. But, the party has clarified it did not field its candidate to bag the deputy speaker's post.

Another strong possibility points to RJPN, with whom the ruling party has allied for the upcoming National Assembly election. Furthermore, RJPN was one of the three to second Sapkota's candidacy.

Samajbadi's chances to the position seem thin given the strained relation between Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli and Upendra Yadav lately.

Nepal to send delegation to India to ease restriction on palm oil export



Kathmandu: The government is sending a high level delegation team to request the Indian government to rethink on its decision to restrict palm oil that was being exported from Nepal. Minister for Finance Yuba Raj Khatiwada told the traders that the restriction measure enforced by India on palm oil trade is likely hit the country's trade deficit that had eased in the past few months. "The government is sending a delegation team

consisting of high level officials to solve the problem through bilateral talk," said Khatiwada speaking at a program organized to mark the 40th annual general meeting of Nepal Foreign Trade Association.

Since last year, palm oil has emerged as one of the major contributors to the nation's exports, helping the government to reduce the ballooning trade deficit to some extent. The record of the Trade and Export Promotion Centre shows that the country in the first five months of the current fiscal year, exported palm oil worth Rs 11.5 billion, which accounted for 24% of the total export earnings of Rs 47.61 billion.

The export earnings during mid-July to mid-November

stood nearly eight times that the country had shipped in the same period last year. With soaring export of palm oil in particular, the country's export earnings went up by 27%, taking down the trade deficit by 6.3%.

However, the country's escalating export earnings is likely to be hit by the Indian government imposing restriction on the import of palm oil on January 8. Through utilizing the provisions of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), Nepal had been enjoying duty free access on the product that is claimed to be more than 30% value addition.

Following the restriction imposed by India, the government has sent a letter to the southern neighbor

requesting to ease the import of palm oil by the Indian traders. "We have sent letter via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but have not received any reply so far," said Navaraj Dhakal, joint secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies (MoICS). Dhakal however expressed his ignorance on forming the high level team for negotiating with the Indian government.

Although Nepal has been putting forth the issue in almost every bilateral trade talk, India so far has turned unheard to Nepal's plea. "Citing the evidence in the past, there is a little hope that India will consider request of Nepali side regarding the restriction on palm oil," said an official of MoICS on condition of anonymity.

Madhesi parties grabbing ministerial portfolios by joining govt: CK Raut



Rajbiraj: Chairperson of Janamat Party CK Raut has accused Madhes-based parties of trading martyrs' dreams for ministerial berths. Speaking at an interaction organised by the party in Rajbiraj, Saptari, Raut said, "They say they are fighting for the rights of the Madhesi people but in reality they're more invested in grabbing ministerial portfolios by joining the government. Further, Raut said the number of votes the party had received during the recent by-election was respectable. "I had to spend most of the time in prison, so couldn't give time for the expansion of the party. Despite that, whatever the votes we've got is not disheartening," he said, instructing party cadres to focus on organisation building. "As people in the Madhes don't have much political awareness, we need

to reach out to every nook and cranny here and educate people on the importance of elections," he said. Trying to distinguish his party from the Madhes-based parties, Raut said, "They (the Madhes-based parties) are pretty much into sign-secret deals and join-the-government business, but whatever deal we did with the government was a very clear one, done in the presence of journalists and many others. Our deal wasn't done with a view to joining the government. The deal we signed even has the provision of referendum on the issue of Madhes, should the people here so wish. Therefore, our deal hasn't let the Madhes down." "I wonder how the Socialist Party could bring itself to join the government led by a man they banned from entering the Madhes once and compelled five Madhesi youths to lose their lives. Also how come Rastriya Janata Party-Nepal played footsie with the party and strike an alliance for the National Assembly election. These parties have disrespected the Madhesi populace and the martyrs by these acts," he remarked.

India gifts 30 ambulances to Nepal



Kathmandu: The 71st Republic Day of India was celebrated at the Embassy of India in Kathmandu. The celebrations began with hoisting of the national flag by Charge d' Affaires (Cd' A) Dr. Ajay Kumar who then read out the message of the Hon'ble President of India for the occasion.

The Cd' A felicitated 01 Veer Nari, 08 widows and 05 next of kins of deceased soldiers by disbursing their dues worth NPR 5.97 Crore and a blanket to each.

The Embassy gifted books to 51 libraries and educational institutions spread across all the provinces of Nepal. The Embassy also gifted 30 ambulances and 06 buses to various hospitals, non-profit charitable organizations and educational institutions of Nepal thereby reaffirming Government of India's commitment to partner with Nepal in its journey towards socio-economic development. The Government of India has so far gifted 782 ambulances and 154 buses to various hospitals, non-

profit charitable organizations and educational institutions of 77 districts in Nepal, expanding healthcare access for thousands of Nepali people and serving to the educational needs of the thousands of students.

The 71st Republic Day of India celebrations were attended by members of the Indian community in Nepal and friends of India apart from Embassy officials and their families. The celebrations witnessed rendition of patriotic songs by students of Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre, Kathmandu, Kendriya Vidyalaya and Modern Indian School. The ceremony concluded with a mesmerizing performance by the Nepal Army Band. Later in the day, the Cd' A hosted a reception at India House. Rt. Hon'ble Vice President of Nepal Mr. Nanda Bahadur Pun graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The event was attended by more than 1500 dignitaries, including senior political leaders & public personalities.