

International

Nepal's parliament approves new map including Indian territory

New dispute strains ties between South Asian neighbors

KATHMANDU: The upper house of Nepal's parliament approved a new map of the country yesterday including land controlled by India, in a row that has strained ties between the South Asian neighbors.

India, which controls the region — a slice of land including the Limpiyadhura, Lipulkeh and Kalapani areas to the west of Nepal — has rejected the map, saying it was not based on historical facts or evidence. Members in the 59-seat National Assembly, or upper house, voted 57-0 in favor of a constitutional amendment bill seeking to replace the old map, chairman of the house Ganesh Prasad Timilsina said. The bill was passed by the lower house over the weekend. "We have enough facts and evidence and we'll sit (with India) to resolve the dispute through diplomatic negotiations," law minister Shiva Maya Tumbahamphe told parliament.

The new map requires President Bidhya

Devi Bhandari's approval. The row over the map began last month after India inaugurated an 80-km (50-mile) road from the northern state of Uttarakhand to Lipulekh on the border with the Tibet region of China, about 19 km of which passes through the area Nepal says belongs to it.

The road cuts the travel time and distance from India to Tibet's Mansarovar lake, considered holy by Hindus. Nepal says the land belongs to it as a river in the region formed its western border with India under an 1816 treaty with the British East India Company. Nepal, which was never a part of British India, and New Delhi differ over where the river originates. The disputed land, about 372 square km (144 square miles) in area, is strategically located at the tri-junction between Nepal, India and the Tibet region of China. India has kept a security presence in the area since a border war with China in 1962. — Reuters



KATHMANDU: People light candles as they celebrate after the parliament approved a new national emblem with a controversial political map that includes strategic territories disputed with its giant neighbor India, in Kathmandu.—AFP

Beijing residents rush to COVID test clinics

BEIJING: China's capital has mandated coronavirus tests for hundreds of thousands of people as it widens measures against a new outbreak of the disease that has sent anxious residents flooding to clinics for voluntary tests, putting a strain on the system.

Crowds of masked people waiting for tests have become a common sight in recent days across Beijing, which has tested more than 350,000 people, with many more expected. "It's very difficult right now," said musician Chen Weiwen, 31, whose plans to visit the southwestern city of Chengdu faced a delay because of the wait for a test.

"I don't mind waiting, but after the test I need to leave in 7 days and there may not be a flight I can get then." The measures are part of the city's "wartime" response to a surge of 158 infections since last week, the majority linked to its huge Xinfadi wholesale food center. Residents now require a negative result on a nucleic acid test to travel, officials say, as well as to visit some attractions or return to work in industries that involve food handling. That is in addition to mandatory tests for those with direct links to the market and their close contacts, as well as people in surrounding neighborhoods and frontline health workers. That could be a large number, as officials say about 200,000 people from all over Beijing have visited Xinfadi since May 30.

"Testing efficiency is high," Pan Xuhong,

deputy director of the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau, said yesterday.

"Those who need to leave Beijing can safely do so once tested negative in a nucleic acid test." Staff at a restaurant in the southern Fengtai district told Reuters that health workers had tested every employee.

Long waiting times

At the same time, state media warned that supplies in the city of 21 million could be strained, and Reuters checks showed waiting times for voluntary appointments stretched to weeks or months in some places. China, a top producer of nucleic acid tests, could turn out up to 5 million a day, authorities said last month. Beijing has expanded daily testing capacity to 90,000, but the new program puts a strain on resources. "Some citizens spontaneously go to medical institutions or fever clinics for (tests) and crowding occurs," the state-run Beijing Daily newspaper said. That in turn heightened infection risks and pressure on the supply of materials and testing capacity, it added. A Reuters check showed many testing facilities inundated by those seeking voluntary tests, with bookings filled as soon they opened on the city's official app. Just one of 11 test sites telephoned by Reuters answered. The First Medical Center of the People's Liberation Army Hospital said its next available slot was a month away.—Reuters

Pakistan's mango growers face a sticky season

ISLAMABAD: A combination of a coronavirus-spurred trade slowdown, locust attacks and odd weather have created a nightmare year for growers and exporters of Pakistani mangoes, with both production and demand plummeting this year, they said.

Domestic and international markets for the sought-after sweet seasonal fruit have been hit as harvests and exports have dropped by at least a quarter, they noted. Muhammad Ansar, a small-scale grower from the Sanghar area of central Sindh province, said his mango production had fallen 30 percent this year as a result of locust attacks. It was unusual for a broad belt of Pakistan's mango-producing areas to be hit by the pests, he added.

"We face double problems this year: the low production followed by less demand in markets due to the prolonged lockdown because of coronavirus," Ansar said. He usually sells about 500 crates of mangos, each weighing 10kg (22 pounds), but this year has harvested only 200 crates and could "hardly find any demand for export". That shortfall has cost him between \$2,000 and \$2,500 in income, he said.

Wild weather

Pakistan is the world's fifth-largest mango producer, after India, China, Thailand and Indonesia, according to Pakistan's Chambers of Commerce and Industry. But Abdul Waheed, a top mango grower and exporter and head of the All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Im-

porters and Merchants Association, said erratic weather linked to climate change was taking a toll on mangoes and a wide range of other crops in Pakistan.

Yields are falling and harvest seasons are shifting, he said, noting that "this change in weather conditions has weakened the resistance of mangoes to fight diseases".

"It ultimately damages mangoes at large scale," he said. Punjab, which produces about 70 percent of Pakistan's mangoes, has seen production fall more than 35 percent this year, mango growers and traders estimate, while Sindh province's harvest is down 15 percent.

Finding markets for the mangoes that are harvested is another problem. Suspended flights and high freight charges this year related to coronavirus lockdown restrictions are likely to reduce the country's mango exports substantially, officials said. Ahmad Jawad, chair of the agriculture standing committee for the chamber of commerce, said Pakistan's mango exports, which last year stood at 130,000 tons, may drop by 30,000 tons this year.

In the south London neighborhood of Tooting, where mango stands run by vendors of Pakistani descent are a seasonal highlight, prices for most varieties have doubled this year — and profits are down. "You cannot sell it," said Asif Khaliq, standing over a big display of the golden fruit. "We can't convince the customers to understand" why prices are so much higher than last year, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.—Reuters