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TODAY

■ NATIONAL

The Rolpa District Prison in Libang in ward 4 of Rolpa Municipality is in a dilapidated condition, accommodating prisoners twice its capacity. According to the acting chief, the prison built in 1982 was for 50. Pg 2

The Koshi Provincial Assembly on Friday endorsed a resolution motion directing Chief Minister Kedar Karki to seek a vote of trust. As many as 52 members in 93-strong assembly voted for the motion. **Pg 3**

□ WORLD

Explosions echoed over an Iranian city on Friday in an apparent Israeli attack, but Tehran played down the strike and indicated no plans for retaliation—a response gauged towards averting a region-wide war. Pg 4

■ MONEY

The World Bank has agreed "in principle" to lead the consortium of international financiers for the development of the 1,063 MW Upper Arun hydel project in Sankhuwasabha, the Finance Ministry said on Friday. Pg 5

■ SPORTS

Nepal's hopes of qualifying for their second Asia Cup ended after they lost to the United Arab Emirates by six wickets in the semi-final of the ACC Men's T20 Premier Cup in Al



CULTURE

When Pabitra Badi was 16, her and Bimala BK's families put presure on tnem to split and marr unable to accept their mutual attraction. Relatives harassed them, warning of a legal case to keep them apart. Pg 8





A sadhu displays his inked finger after casting his ballot at a polling station in Haridwar in the Indian state of Uttarakhand on Friday. India began voting in a six-week poll with an all but assured win for Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi, as the opposition is pushed to the sidelines.

Indians vote in first phase of world's largest election

If Modi wins, he'll be only the second Indian leader to retain power for a third term, after Jawaharlal Nehru.

to hold votes, from the Himalayan mountains to the tropical Andaman Islands. Nearly 970 million votersmore than 10 percent of the world's population—will elect 543 members to the lower house of Parliament for five years during the staggered elections that run until June 1. The votes will be

counted on June 4. This election is seen as one of the ful regional parties. It's not clear who will lead India if

the opposition alliance, called INDIA, wins the election. Its more than 20 parties have not put forward a candidate yet

Hindi-speaking northern and central parts, but is now trying to gain a foothold in the east and south.

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ASSOCIATED PRESS most consequential in India's history NEW DEI HI APRII 19 and will test the limits of Modi's political dominance. Millions of Indians began voting on If Modi wins, he'll be only the sec-Friday in a six-week election that's a ond Indian leader to retain power for a referendum on Narendra Modi, the third term, after Jawaharlal Nehru, populist prime minister who has chamthe country's first prime minister. nationalist politics and is seeking a and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya rare third term as the country's leader. Janata Party, who are up against a People began queuing up at polling broad opposition alliance led by the Indian National Congress and powerstations hours before they were allowed in at 7 am in the first 21 states

The BJP controls much of India's

KMC bars private schools from collecting admission fees from continuing students

Warns of legal action. But schools say law allows them to levy some charge annually.



ARJUN POUDEI

The Kathmandu Metropolitan City has instructed institutional schools operating within its jurisdiction not to charge admission fees when they

move up grades in the same school. The KMC's Education Department has also instructed schools not to charge new students more than a

month's fee for admission.

Issuing a statement on Friday, the KMC has said schools charging students in violation of the instructions will face legal actions. "There have been complaints over some institutional schools operating in the metropolis charging additional fees."

The city office reminded that the Kathmandu Metropolitan City School Education Act 2018, the

Kathmandu Metropolitan City School Education Management Regulations-2018, and Rule 4.2.6 of Institutional Schools Criteria and Operation Directives-2013 prohibit schools from charging amounts other than the monthly fee of the respective class during new admissions.

Rule 4.2.7 of the same directive also prohibits schools from charging admission fees of students who are already enrolled in the same school.

'We will send school inspectors to schools and take legal action against any schools found charging additional fees," said Deepak Adhikari, joint spokesperson at the metropolis. "This time we are committed to strictly enforcing the existing rules and regu-

Operators of institutional schools, however, claim that the law allows them to collect an annual fee every year-two months' worth of monthly fees from existing students, and three months' worth of monthly fees from new students.

"We don't know if schools have charged more than what the law permits," said DK Dhungana, president of Private and Boarding Schools' Organisation Nepal (PABSON).

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Beijing's message: Won't tolerate anti-China activities in Nepal

Parties and stakeholders should be involved in projects, CPC leader tells Nepali Maoists.

A senior leader of the Communist Party of China warned that Beijing will not tolerate any third-country activities in Nepal targeting China.

During a meeting on Thursday with the general secretary of the ruling CPN (Maoist Centre), Dev Gurung, who is currently in Beijing on a 10-day visit, Liu Jianchao, minister of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee (IDCPC), told Gurung and the Maoist delegation that Beijing will not tolerate any actions in Nepal by third countries targeted against China.

The IDCPC is in charge of maintaining relations with political parties of other countries, especially fellow communist parties.

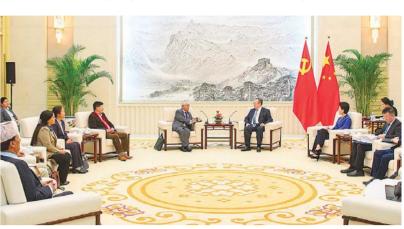
A jumbo delegation from the Maoist Centre is currently in China at the invitation of the IDCPC and it held talks with Liu and other leaders in Beijing on Thursday and Friday.

We are in favour of world peace," Liu told Gurung and the visiting Maoist delegation. "If any country tries to act against China in Nepal, we will not tolerate it." But Liu, who is being spoken of as

the next foreign minister of China, did not name the country, Gurung told the Post over the phone from Beijing. Earlier in January-end, Sun Haiyan, vice-minister of the IDCPC, made sim-

ilar remarks in Kathmandu during a roundtable with major party leaders. Sun had alleged that some countries were trying to disrupt development cooperation between Nepal and China and defame bilateral relations.

...Some criticise our relations. Some are trying to sabotage our bilateral relations and some have increased



In this image provided to the Post, Maoist Centre politicians meet Chinese leaders in Beijing.

activity against China," Sun had said during a consultative conference in Kathmandu between Nepali political leaders and the Communist Party of China. Her statement had sparked a controversy in Nepal.

During their Thursday meeting, Gurung told Liu that Nepal is quite aware about the elements trying to destabilise Nepal-China relations and creating misunderstanding and conflict between the two countries.

"Their [Liu's] focus was mostly Western countries but he did not name any particular country,' said Gurung, adding that Nepal's priority is stability and it will continue to focus on the principles of Panchasheel. Besides discussing what China

wants to see in Nepal, other issues included Nepal's failure to present a list of projects to be executed under the Belt and Road Initiative, according to Gurung.

Liu also proposed involving

political parties and other chan-

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nels including stakeholders to facili-

tate the execution of various Chinese

from Beijing whose blueprint remains

progress on the BRI, delays in imple-

menting Chinese-funded projects in

Nepal, and the slow progress of pro-

jects undertaken by the Chinese con-

This is the first-of-its-kind proposal

Beijing is also displeased with the

initiatives in Nepal, Gurung said.

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Manufacturing Company







400 SQMM



WOLF





350 SQMM





PANTHER

NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

190 people visit free health camp

KALIKOT: At least 190 residents of Uchhab, a remote village in ward 7 of Naraharinath Rural Municipality, visited the two-day free health camp that started on Thursday. According to Dr Jitendra Mahato, head of the free health camp programme, this is the first camp organised in the village, and most elderly and poor people who could not afford to pay for medical treatment at health facilities benefited from the camp. The nearest health facility is more than a seven-hour walk away, and there is no motorable road connecting the village to the facility. Eleven pregnant women, who had never visited any hospital for health check-up, also benefited from the camp, said Mahato.

Man held on charge of killing father

TANAHUN: On Friday, police arrested a 26-year-old man from ward 6 of Myagde Rural Municipality who was absconding after allegedly killing his 76-year-old father a day earlier. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Dipak Kumar Rai of Tanahun District Police Office, their preliminary investigation showed that the man in a fit of rage following a dispute killed his father with a knife. The man fled the village after the murder and was nabbed the next day. Further investigation into the case is going on, said Rai.

Elderly man dies in forest fire

SYANGJA: A 74-year-old man from Kumeridung in ward 7 of Biruwa Rural Municipality burned to death after accidentally starting a forest fire on Friday. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Indra Bahadur Rana of the Syangja District Police Office, he accidentally started a forest fire while burning hay near his house. He got trapped while attempting to control the fire from spreading. The forest fire was brought under control with the help of locals and security personnel. Local officials have warned the residents against burning near forested areas to prevent such incidents from recurring, said Rana.

Metropolis targets schools charging unauthorised fees

>> Continued from page 1

"If schools have done so, the administrations of respective schools should be able to justify it." Some schools have also been charging a security deposit during the time of admission.

Dhungana said schools are allowed to charge an amount equivalent to one month's fee as security deposit.

Experts say it is the responsibility of the rele-

enforce rules and regulations.

"The Kathmandu Metropolitan City has sim-

ply enforced the existing laws, rules and regulations. It is not doing anything new," said Pramod Bhatta, an educationist. "Other relevant bodies including local units should also collaborate to enforce the law effectively."

School admissions have become a nightmare

School admissions have become a nightmare for less well-off parents in Nepal. The apathy of agencies with grading schools has also left parents confused about the quality of education they provide

they provide.

Bhatta said some schools collect security deposits, but do not pay interest on the money, which is returned when students leave school. Some schools do not even return the security deposit if parents misplace the deposit vouchers.

Officials said that the warning is among the measures being taken by the KMC as it tries to improve school education. The KMC has also prohibited institutional schools from selling books, stationery and uniforms.

The metropolis had barred community schools operating within its jurisdiction from charging any fees to students.

The city office had recently issued a deadline at the end of March to institutional schools with foreign names operating within its jurisdiction to change their names within 35 days.

Officials said that over 200 private schools operating in the KMC have applied to the Education Department under the city office requesting some time for such name-change.

Officials said some schools have proposed new names, and others have promised to change their foreign names within the deadline set by the metropolis.

Officials said that schools should choose names having local relevance, such as renowned persons who have made significant contributions to the country, popular cultural icons, historical places, deities, religious mythologies, pilgrimage sites, and heritage sites.

The metropolis has also been training teachers to serve in community schools. Professors and experts from Kathmandu University are currently conducting a four-day training at 55 centres starting this Sunday, according to Shailendra Jha, a member of the City Planning Commission.

Officials hope the skill training for teachers will help improve the quality of education, the learning outcome in government schools and make students there more competent.

The City office earlier this month had signed a memorandum of understanding with the Kathmandu University for capacity building of teachers, and conducting a study on the effectiveness of teaching-learning and child psychology, among others. For this, the metropolis has allocated over Rs28 million to Kathmandu University.

cated over Rs28 million to Kathmandu University.
The City office has already started book-free
Fridays, in which people's representatives from
many local governments have shown interest.

Under the programme, students from grades 9 to 12 are taught optional short-term courses covering topics including agriculture and urban farming, cosmetology, carpentry and wood-carving, culinary arts, fashion design and clothing, electrical wiring, disaster preparedness, mobile and electronics repair, plumbing, stitching, and sculpture.

The metropolis has also introduced an integrated curriculum for grades 1 to 3, under which the knowledge of interlinked subjects are

Officials said that they are incorporating extracurricular activities—music, poem recitation, essay writing, plant-growing, and waste management, among other skills—into the curriculum of grades 4 to 8 for mental and physical growth of students.

Dilapidated Rolpa district prison housing inmates twice its capacity

Prisoners, especially those in judicial custody, face frequent attacks from older inmates.



The Rolpa Distrct Prison in Libang, the district headquarters, in this recent photo.

of communicable disease outbreaks.

"There is a risk of spread of infectious diseases during the summer season. There is a possibility of an increase in the incidence of skin, respiratory, and communicable diseases if people are forced to stay in small places," said Dangi.

that overcrowding increases the risk

"Almost everybody in the prison is infected with some kind of skin-related communicable disease or mental health issue. The accused who are remanded into judicial custody for investigation and transferred prisoners are also kept with the other prisoners, and they often have mental breakdowns after being bullied by regular prisoners," Dangi added.

Khim Bahadur Rayamajhi, chief district officer of Rolpa, who recently got transferred, said that authorities are forced to keep more prisoners than the capacity at the district prison due to the delay in the construction of the new prison building.

"Four years ago, after repeated requests from the prison authorities, construction was started for a new prison building in Reuga in ward 2 of Rolpa Municipality, but due to a lack of coordination between the construction company and the provincial government that allocated the budget, the work has been left in limbo," said Rayamajhi.

"The prison is 42 years old, and is in such a poor condition that the authorities struggle to provide basic needs such as food and water to the inmates. Due to a shortage of toiletries, the cleanliness and hygiene of prisoners have been severely compromised," said Dangi.

According to Wali, there are only eight rooms at the 'D'-category prison. Similarly, the prison rule book says five rooms are allocated for 35 male and three rooms for 15 female prisoners. However, currently, seven rooms are being used by male prisoners and only one room by females.

"We are forced to keep 17 to 20 prisoners per room, and until the new prison building is completed, prisoners have no choice but to suffer in silence. The contractor of the new prison building has gone out of contact leaving the work incomplete," said Wali.

Wali said that due to the poor

condition of the prison, several prisoners have escaped twice by digging tunnels, and some of the escapees have yet to be nabbed by the police.

Two years ago, a male prisoner

brought from Banke Prison killed himself by hanging in Rolpa Prison. A detailed investigation was also launched by the Nepalgunj office team of the National Human Rights Commission into the case.

Human rights advocate Basanta Gautam, who has been monitoring the prison, said that the inmate committed suicide due to poor safety arrangements in the prison.

"The human rights commission's investigation found that the man was persistently bullied and attacked by other prisoners, and due to that, he became mentally ill and killed himself. The provincial and district authorities should soon build another prison and treat prisoners humanely; otherwise, such incidents will continue to occur," said Gautam.

Beijing praises Nepal coalition, stresses unity among leftist parties

>> Continued from page 1

"We and our party thwarted attempts to destabilise our relations with China in the past, and the current government led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal will check such attempts in the future too," Gurung conveyed to the IDCPC team.

Besides Liu, other senior IDCPC leaders including Sun were present at the meeting.

"Liu said that any military or security activities in Nepal targeting China will not be tolerated. Any move by a third country inside Nepal targeting China is not acceptable to China," Gurung quoted Liu as saying.

Gurung said he assured the Chinese leaders that Nepal is committed to one-China policy and will not allow any activities detrimental to China's security interests.

In his remarks, Liu told the visiting Maoist delegation that Beijing is pleased with the new political equation in Nepal and stressed the need for unity among Nepal's leftists parties, said Gurung.

This is not the first time that China has encouraged unity among leftist parties in Nepal in general and pushed for unity between the CPN-UML and the CPN (Maoist Centre) in particular. In 2018, too, Beijing pushed for the unity between the UML and Maoist Centre.

The two parties merged to be the Nepal Communist Party, but that unity did not last beyond three years. Once again, Beijing is encouraging similar unity after the UML and the Maoist Centre partnered to form a new government in March first week after Prime Minister Dahal ended his alliance with the Nepali Congress.

But UML leaders have been dismissing the chances of a new leftist unity. Recently, UML Chairman KP Oli outright rejected the idea of unity between communist parties of Nepal.

"At present, unity among leftist parties is not a necessity," Oli said while addressing the UML's parliamentary party on Monday.

He, however, said that "there is a need for cooperation among the forces that are in favour of good governance and national unity." There is also an opposition voice in the Maoist Centre on the potential unity between the UML and Maoist Centre.

"We are pleased with the formation of government through partnership between UML, Maoist Centre and other communist parties," Gurung quoted Liu as saying.

"The unity between the two communist parties is good for the Nepali people. We want a stable communist government in Nepal," Gurung said, again quoting Liu. "We want to see the leftist parties of Nepal united for the greater stability and prosperity of the country. We also believe that Nepal's prosperity lies in the hands of communist forces. We are always in favor of stability and development and stand ready to provide all possible support to Nepal," Gurung quoted Liu as saying at the meeting.

It is natural for any communist party in the world to favour unity among the communist parties in other parts of the world, Gurung said.

"Liu said, in recent years, under the joint leadership of President Xi Jinping and Nepali leaders, relations between the two countries have continued to develop," the IDCPC said in its statement released on Friday.

"The Chinese side supports the Nepali side in exploring a development path that suits its national conditions, and is willing to help Nepal prosper and develop."

"The CPC attaches great

importance to its friendly relations with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center). Under the new situation, it is willing to expand exchanges between the two parties, deepen exchanges and mutual learning of experience in state governance and administration, and promote practical cooperation between the two sides in agriculture, investment, infrastructure, border trade and tourism through 'political party + [plus]' and other channels, so as to push China-Nepal relations to a new level," said the statement.

Liu in the meeting had expressed his displeasure at Nepal's failure to present a list of projects to be developed under the BRI and as per the agreements signed between two sides after 2016 including during the state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Nepal in 2019

Gurung thanked the Chinese side for its long-term support in safeguarding Nepal's sovereignty and independence and achieving economic and social development, according to the Chinese statement.

"The Nepali side firmly adheres to the one-China principle and does not allow any force to use Nepal's territory for anti-China activities. The anti-China activities. Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center) highly admires the CPC's governance achievements and governance concepts, and is willing to further strengthen exchanges between the two parties, deepen theoretical exchanges, promote Nepal-China relations for healthy developpeace, and development and stability," the IDCPC statement

Seven-phase Indian elections kick off. Counting to begin June 7

>> Continued from page 1

THE KASHIRAM DANG

The Rolpa District Prison located in

Libang in ward 4 of Rolpa Municipality,

is in a dilapidated condition, and

houses prisoners twice its designated

acting chief of the district prison, the

prison was built in 1982 with a maxi-

mum capacity of only 50 prisoners,

but currently there are 123 prisoners

structure were built to hold only 35

men and 15 women, but currently

there are 114 male and nine female

prisoners. We are forced to keep new

arrivals and transferred prisoners in

a tiny cell due to a lack of space," said

"There is always a risk of prisoners

getting attacked by other prisoners in

a cramped cell, mostly the detainees

who are remanded in judicial custody

for investigation. Very often, prison-

ers start brawls and injure others;

new arrivals and transferred prison-

ers are the most vulnerable ones

tion office, the number of prisoners

serving time for committing homicide

and rape is higher. There are 36 pris-

oners convicted of homicides, 29 of

rape, and nine of illegal drug-related

Similarly, among the prisoners and

Krishna Dangi, a health worker at

detainees, there are three who have

the Rolpa Hospital who has been treat-

ing the inmates of the prison, said

According to the prison administra-

here," Wali added.

cases, among others.

"The prison guidelines and infra-

According to Yam Bahadur Wali,

ROLPA, APRIL 19

capacity.

in the prison.

Their toughest challenge is in the southern Tamil Nadu state, with 39 seats, where voting was held on Friday.

Voters in hot and humid Chennai, the state's capital, began briskly filling the city's nearly 4,000 polling booths. A number of them said they were voting for a change in federal government given rising prices, unemployment and religious polarisation stoked by the BJP.

"First thing I came to vote for is to have a country without any religious disharmony. In Tamil Nadu—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, we're all together. And this unity should grow," said 65-year-old Mary Das, who was waiting to vote.

P Chidambaram, an opposition Congress party leader and the country's former finance minister, said that the people of Tamil Nadu would not vote for the BJP as "it is imposing one language, one culture, one system and one kind of food".

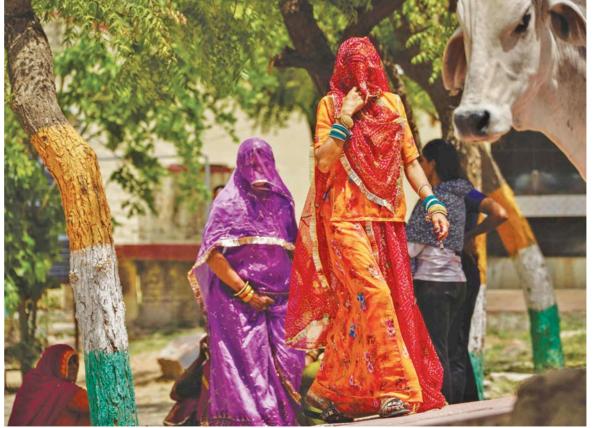
The BJP has long struggled to capture votes in the state, where two powerful regional parties—the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam—dominate. The BJP drew a blank in 2019, and won one seat in 2014.

In Rajasthan, people returning from polling stations covered their heads against dusty winds.

"If the new government is able to solve unemployment, then it will be good. People are migrating from this region to earn a living," said Atinder Singh, 26.

Voting is also taking place in the northeastern state of Manipur, where a near-civil war for a year has triggered ethnic violence. Mobs have rampaged through villages and torched houses, and more than 150 people have been killed.

The election comes after a decade of Modi's leadership, during which



r in

Women heading for a polling station to cast their ballots in the first phase of voting for India's general elections in Parbatsar in Rajasthan, on Friday. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party hopes for a landslide win powered by its popular welfare programs.

the BJP has consolidated power through a combination of Hindu-first politics and economic development.

Modi has ratcheted up Hindu nationalist rhetoric on the campaign trail, and has sought to present himself as a global leader. His ministers tout him as the steward of a surging India, while his supporters celebrate his campaign promise to make India a developed nation by

2047, when it marks 100 years of independence.

But while India's economy is among the world's fastest-growing, many of its people face growing economic distress. The opposition alliance is hoping to tap into this, seeking to galvanize voters on issues like high unemployment, inflation, corruption and low agricultural prices that have driven two years of farmers' protests.

The opposition—and critics—also warn that Modi has turned increasingly illiberal. They accuse Modi of using tax authorities and the police to harass the opposition, and they fear a third term could undermine India's democracy. His Hindu nationalist politics, they argue, has bred intolerance and threatens the country's secular roots.

"Modi has a very authoritarian

"Modi has a very authoritarian mindset. He doesn't believe in democracy. He doesn't believe in parliamentarianism," said Christophe Jaffrelot, a political scientist who has written about Modi and the Hindu right.

Modi insists that India's commitment to democracy is unchanged. He told a Summit for Democracy meeting in New Delhi in March that "India is not only fulfilling the aspirations of its 1.4 billion people, but is also providing hope to the world that democracy delivers and empowers."

The Indian leader, who enjoys vast popularity, is targeting a two-thirds majority this time.

The BJP hopes for a landslide win

The BJP hopes for a landslide win powered by its popular welfare programs, which it says have improved access to clean toilets, health care and cooking gas, as well as providing free grain to the poor. Moves like the construction of a controversial temple to Ram on the site of a demolished mosque, and the scrapping of the disputed Muslim-majority region of Kashmir's former autonomy, may resonate with supporters who hail him as the champion of the Hindu majority.

"Any party that comes back for a third term, and with a brute majority, is a scary prospect for democracy," said Arati Jerath, a political commentator.

Modi's two terms have seen civil liberties in India come under attack, while implementing what critics say are discriminatory policies. Peaceful protests have been crushed

A once free and diverse press is threatened, violence is on the rise against the Muslim minority, and government agencies have arrested opposition politicians in alleged corruption cases. The BJP has denied its policies

are discriminatory and says its work benefits all Indians.

NEWS

Supreme Co-operative chair Gurung sent to judicial custody, Pun and others released on bail

GHANASHYAM GAUTAM

The Rupandehi District Court on Friday sent Om Prakash Gurung, chairman of the Butwal-based Saving and Credit Co-operative, to jail for judicial custody on cooperative fraud charges.

Gurung has been accused of misusing over Rs1 billion in public deposits.

Gurung, who has been accused of embezzling over Rs 1 billion of savings deposited by over 10,000 individuals at the Gitendra Babu (GB) Rai-led co-operative, was jailed by judge Shriprakash Upreti.

However, the court released six others, including Dipesh Pun, the son of former Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun, who were also accused of embezzling cooperative funds.

Pun has been ordered to post a bail Rs400,000, district court Information Officer Ananta Raj

Marasini told the Post.

The court has demanded a bail amount of Rs1.8 million from Durga Pandey Chapagain, manager of the Butwal-based co-operative, Rs1 million from Nabin Achhami, Rs445,000 from Deepak Neupane, and Rs200,000 each from Nita Thapa Magar and Roshni Gurung.

The International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol), in January last week, issued a diffusion notice against GB Rai, who is the founding the Suryadarshan Savings and Credit Cooperatives, who has been accused of embezzling over Rs1 billion. He has been on the run.

Police investigation found that Rs79.5 million from the Butwal-based cooperative was provided to five different companies led by Rai.

Rai also co-founded Television jointly with Rabi Lamichhane, who is now the deputy prime minister and minister for home

Lamichhane, who was managing director of the media company, later quit the television, and formed the party. He won a federal parliamentary seat from Chitwan.

The television channel shut down its operations recently



Former President Bidya Devi Bhandari and Lalitpur Mayor Chiribabu Maharjan (second row), among others, are seen enjoying the inaugural golf cart ride at Central Zoo in Jawalakhel on Friday. The electric vehicle was gifted to the zoo by the mayor earlier in the day to serve elderly and disabled visitors.

Former Nepal Telecom MD Paudel convicted in payment gateway scam

The Special Court has acquitted Secretary Madhu Kumar Marasini and seven others accused in the case.

🔲 MATRIKA DAHAL

The Special Court on Friday convicted former managing director of Nepal Telecom Sunil Paudel on corruption charges while procuring the National Payment Gateway system

A joint bench of Special Court Chairperson Tek Narayan Kunwar and member Murari Babu Shrestha found Paudel guilty of causing loss to the state coffers and misusing public funds.

However, eight others accused, including Secretary Madhu Kumar

Marasini, have been acquitted. Paudel has been charged as per Section 17 of the Prevention of

Corruption Act 2002. Section 17 states that a public servant who misappropriates, causes loss to or abuses or causes others to do so, or destroys or uses for personal purposes, while performing his/her duties per taining to his/her office, shall be liable to punishment pursuant to Section 3 and the property which has been misappropriated, damaged, misused or destroyed or caused others to do so,

On October 2, 2023, the CIAA filed a

graft case against nine people including Paudel and Marasini in the National Payment Gateway purchase

The anti-graft body accused them of causing loss to the state coffers and misusing government funds by purchasing the system for Rs250 million without preparing the necessary infrastructure and approving an unreasonable high estimate for the procurement.

The court findings showed that the defendant's failure to fulfil his responsibility and put the software to proper use had caused financial loss to the

"It has been found that Paudel had ordered Rs232,758,077 be paid for procuring the system," the court said in its order. "It was the responsibility of the defendant, as the head of the organisation, to make sure that the purchased software is put to proper use. However, the system has yet to be brought into operation.'

Thus, the government has incurred a loss due to the negligence of the defendants [Paudel], the court said.

announced on May 7, the court said.

Koshi Assembly passes resolution asking chief minister to seek trust vote

Kedar Karki and his ministers say the Cabinet formed as per Article 186(5) is not bound to face the Assembly.

■ POST REPORT

KATHMANDU, APRIL 19

The Koshi Provincial Assembly on Friday endorsed a resolution motion directing Chief Minister Kedar Karki to seek a vote of trust

As many as 52 members in 93-strong provincial assembly voted for the motion which says as the CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist Centre) have withdrawn their support to the chief minister, he is directed to face the assembly as per Article 188(2) of the Constitution of Nepal. If any party supporting the government withdraws its support, the chief minister should go for the floor test as per the Article.

With a change in the political alliance at the federal level, the two communist parties withdrew their support to the Karki government on March 8. A special session of the provincial assembly was called following a demand from more than a fourth of the provincial assembly members as Karki was reluctant to face the assembly.

UML leaders say that with the endorsement of the motion, the chief him: either seek a vote of trust or

resign. "The autonomous assembly has directed him to seek a trust vote by May 8. We believe he doesn't defy the assembly's directive," said Rewati Raman Bhandari, the UML chief whip in the assembly.

Karki's ministers, however, have a different say. They argue that the motion's endorsement is a parliamentary anarchy demonstrated by the UML and the Maoist Centre. "Can the chief minister be dictated to face the assembly through the resolution motion? The parties, in the name of majority, have committed unparliamentary acts in the assembly," said Samsher Rai, a minister in the Karki Cabinet.

He said the chief minister appointed as per Article 168(5) of the constitution is not bound to face the trust vote just because the parties withdrew

Individual assembly members, irrespective of their party's decision, can support the candidates of their choice for the chief minister to be elected as per Article 186 (5).

"The present government was assembly members, not the parties

they belong to. The withdrawal of the support from the UML and Maoist Centre makes no sense," said Rai. "Securing a vote of trust is the discretionary authority of the chief

With 40 seats, the UML is the largest party in the assembly while the **Maoist Centre has 12.**

Karki, who revolted within his party Nepali Congress after it decided to support Indra Bahadur Angbo of the Maoist Centre as the chief ministerial candidate, became the chief minister with the UML's support on October 14. As many as eight Congress provincial assembly members had stood against the party's decision to

Karki had garnered the support of 48 members in the provincial assem-

However, the political dynamics in

the province changed with the formation of a new alliance at the centre on March 4. As per the deal among the five ruling parties, the UML has been given the leadership of the province.

Rai said the discussion should be over the validity of the resolution motion rather than the motion itself. Karki maintains that as he became the chief minister as per Article 168(5), which is the last option for government formation, there is no possibility of a new government. Dismissal of his government will directly lead to the dissolution of the provincial assembly, he claims.

Karki, therefore, is in no mood to face the assembly immediately but to go for legal consultation.

With 40 seats, the UML is the largest party in the assembly while the Maoist Centre has 12. Together, the two parties have more than half the seats in the assembly. The UML and the Maoist Centre

argue that the Karki government cannot last longer. If Karki continues to defy, the provincial head can appoint a new chief minister who has the

As Pakistan begins new deportations, Afghan women fear what lies ahead

JAMAIMA AFRIDI ISLAMABAD, APRIL 19

The aspirations of Afghan girls are stifled-their potential locked away behind closed doors. This restriction not only robs them of the experience of academic learning but also crushes their dreams for a brighter tomorrow.

Shakeeba, 23, has dreams as big as the challenges she faces. Currently enrolled in the first semester at the Department of Radiography at Khyber Medical College (KMC), Peshawar, her path has been marked by resilience and sacrifice.



Born to parents holding Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC), her roots lie in a journey across borders—a journey they embarked upon when she was a child. Despite the odds stacked against her, Shakeeba, whose family lives in Khurasan camp [a designated camp for Afghan refugees in Peshawar], has relentlessly pursued her education.

Her story echoes the struggles of thousands. Restricted by limited opportunities for ACC holders, Shakeeba was forced to move to Afghanistan after completing her FSc in Pakistan to pursue a degree in medicine. Yet, fate dealt her another blow when the Taliban imposed a ban on girls' education in Afghanistan, leaving her with no choice but to return to Pakistan to continue her studies.

"I have wasted so many years already struggling to complete my education to achieve my dreams," said Shakeeba. "So now, the news of our deportation to Afghanistan is incredibly painful to hear. It feels like all my struggles have been in vain."

In Afghanistan, a harrowing truth persists: girls are denied the right to education, making it the only country in the world enforcing such a ban. This injustice transpired on September 17, 2021, when the Taliban prohibited girls older than 11 or beyond sixth grade from pursuing higher studies.

The restriction not only robs them of the experience of academic learning but also crushes their dreams for a brighter tomorrow. Tragically, the only flicker of hope lies for those privileged enough to carve a life outside of Afghanistan

Forced to flee, now forced to return For the past several decades, Pakistan has served as a home for Afghan refugees. However, the current discourse on deportations has considerably complicated the situation.

On October 3, the Pakistan government said that an estimated 1.7 million undocumented refugees, the vast majority of them Afghans, were living in different parts of the country. It then ordered everyone who did not have documentation to leave the country by November 1 or risk being forcibly evicted. These unregistered migrants were also referred to as 'aliens', who had no form of identification, including either a POR (Proof of Residency) card or an ACC (Afghan Citizen Card).

The POR cards were introduced in collaboration with the UNHCR and were issued to over 2.15 million Afghan refugees between 2006 and 2007. These cards were valid for two years, after which they would have to be renewed every two years. In 2017, the Pakistan government, in collaboration with the Afghan government, introduced the ACCs, which were to be issued to those who could not obtain the PoR cards for some reason. In January 2022, the UNHCR estimated the number of ACC holders to be around 840,000.



On October 3, the Pakistan government said that an estimated 1.7 million undocumented refugees, the vast majority of them Afghans, were living in different parts of the country.

No official data has been released as to how many of the estimated 1.7 million undocumented Afghans have left for their country since November 2023, though the figure likely fell hugely short of what is now being considered a grossly exaggerated number.

But according to informed sources, the total number of undocumented Afghans who have returned to Afghanistan via Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan in the first round stands at around the half million-mark.

The authorities have now decided to move on to the second phase of deportations—targeting those holding ACC permits. This looming reality is particularly alarming for Afghan women, whose fundamental rights stand imperilled back home.

Speaking to Dawn.com, Ziauddin Yousafzai, father of Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai and a prominent advocate for Afghan girls' education, voiced concern over Pakistan's deportation practices that appear to target Afghan refugees. "The policies of Pakistan regarding Afghans are flawed (outdated) and failed," he said.

Forcing individuals, especially

women, into environments where

basic human rights such as education, employment, and freedom of movement are compromised, unequivocally violates humanitarian principles and international law. He denounced the deportation of Afghans, rejecting the use of the term "refugees" for them due to their long-standing history and multi-generational presence in Pakistan.

"This decision is very unjust, especially considering the awful circumstances in Afghanistan, particularly for vulnerable groups like women pursuing education, journalists, musicians, and others. My empathy extends to those Afghan girls receiving education in Pakistan, and are forced to return to a nation where access to education is systematically restricted," he said.

UNHCR spokesperson Qaisar Afridi shared Yousafzai's sentiments. Shedding light on the pressing issues faced by ACC holders, he stressed the profound human rights challenges they face, drawing particular attention to the predicament of Afghan girls, who were currently enrolled in schools and colleges in Pakistan, and whose academic pursuits now hang in the balance with the threat of deportation to Afghanistan.

"While we understand Pakistan's sovereign right to implement legislation, we have asked the government to take Afghan refugees' difficult circumstances into account. We are in constant discussions and negotiations with Pakistan to address the challenges faced by Afghan refugees," he

Education for refugees—a luxury instead of a basic right

Tahira, a 25-year-old resident of Kohat with a bachelor's degree in psychology, shared her family's concerns amid reports of deportations unfolding in different phases. Despite holding POR cards, they fear being the next targets in the aftermath of the deportation of ACC holders.

She reflected on her family's experience as refugees, describing how they encounter numerous hurdles on a dayto-day basis-from mundane tasks such as opening bank accounts to more significant milestones like being enrolled in a university. "We hold onto hope that undergoing the lengthy processes in Pakistan will eventually grant us access to education and employment opportunities. But the ambiguity surrounding the situation as of now has cast a shadow over our future."

Tahira also highlighted her younger sister's case—having just passed her matriculation exams, her family is now grappling with uncertainty about her college prospects. "We're unsure whether to proceed with my sister's higher education or hold off due to the uncertainties surrounding the government's actions. It's a heavy burden for us as we are made to navigate such difficult decisions," she added somberly.

Tahira expressed a profound sentiment: she would rather stay in Pakistan-even at the cost of her life—than venture to a country where women face severe restrictions on their access to jobs, education, mobility, and most importantly, their freedom to simply be.

According to Abbas Khan, Pakistan's Chief Commissioner for Afghan Refugees, Tahira and her family's apprehensions are justified. He confirmed the intention to deport holders of POR cards following the completion of the second phase targeting Afghans with ACC. "Although the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) is raising issues regarding Afghan girls' education and other vulnerable communities, engaging with various stakeholders, including UN representatives, the repatriation plan remains unchanged," said Khan.

The human cost of deportation For his part, Yousafzai stressed upon

the government to rethink its stance and preserve the educational dreams of these young learners enrolled in Pakistani institutions. With a heartfelt plea, he urged decision-makers to lead with empathy and compassion in shaping policies affecting these vulnerable communities.

"Having been internally displaced in 2009, we have firsthand experience of the grave consequences of relocation. These Afghans consider Pakistan to be their home, therefore deporting them would be like forcibly removing them from their homes. The decision to deport Afghan refugees ought to be reversed," he said.

For now, Shakeeba dreads the impending doom of the forced deportation of her family, fearing it may derail her aspirations and educational

"We've called Pakistan home all our lives, born and bred here. The thought of being uprooted to Afghanistan, where women's rights are at risk, is daunting. It seems authorities overlook the struggles of students like us during the decision-making process. While we're prepared to comply with Pakistan's procedures, we earnestly request the government to not

Ukraine claims it shot down bomber as Moscow's missiles kill 8

Russia's air force is vastly more powerful than Ukraine's, but sophisticated missile systems provided by Kyiv's Western partners are a major threat to Russian aviation.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ukraine's air force claimed on Friday it shot down a Russian strategic bomb er, but Moscow officials said the plane crashed in a sparsely populated area due to a malfunction after a combat

Neither claim could be independently verified. Previous Ukrainian claims of shooting down Russian warplanes during their more than two-year war have met with silence or denials from

Meanwhile, Russian missiles struck cities in the central Dnipro region of Ukraine, killing eight people, including a 14-year-old girl and 8-year-old boy, and injuring 28, local

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy repeated Kyiv officials almost daily appeals for more Western air defense systems, again drawing a parallel with how Israel blunted a recent Iranian attack.

Missile and drone attacks can be

thwarted, he wrote on social platform X: "This has been demonstrated in the skies over the Middle East, and it should also work in Europe.'

Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba added: "Children must not be killed in airstrikes in modern Europe.

Russia's air force is vastly more powerful than Ukraine's, but sophisticated missile systems provided by Kyiv's Western partners are a major threat to Russian aviation as the Kremlin's forces slowly push forward along the around 1,000-kilometre front line in what has become a grinding war of attrition. Ukrainian officials say they expect a major Russian offensive in the summer.

Ukraine said the air force and military intelligence cooperated to bring down the Tu-22M3 bomber with anti-aircraft missiles. Russia commonly uses the bomber to fire Kh-22 cruise missiles at Ukrainian targets from inside its own airspace. The plane can also carry nuclear warheads.

The Russian defence ministry said the warplane crashed "in a deserted area" in the southern region of Stavropol, hundreds of kilometres from the Ukrainian border.

Three crew members were rescued after ejecting from the aircraft, and the search for a fourth is taking place, according to the ministry. But Stavropol Gov. Vladimir Vladimirov said one of the rescued pilots died.

On Christmas Eve, Ukraine claimed



This photo provided by the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Military Administration shows the damage after Russia's attack on residential building in Dnipro, Ukraine, on Friday.

to have shot down two Russian fighter jets. In January, the Ukrainian air force said it shot down a Russian early warning and control plane and a key command center aircraft that relays information to troops on the ground, in what appeared to be a significant blow for the Kremlin's forces. The next month, Ukraine said it knocked out another early warning and control plane.

Also in January, Moscow accused Kyiv of shooting down a Russian military transport plane that was carrying Ukrainian POWs who were headed for a prisoner swap.

Russian forces overnight conducted a combined aerial attack with the use of 22 missiles of various types and 14 Shahed drones during the night, the Ukrainian air force said. All the drones and 15 of the missiles were intercepted, it said.

The attack hit urban areas as well as train infrastructure in the Dnipro region, Ukraine's National Railway Operator said. Among those killed in the strikes was employee Oksana Storozhenko, the mother of two teenage sons, it said.

Zelensky says NATO must choose 'whether we indeed are allies'

KYIV: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Friday that NATO must choose whether it really is an ally of Ukraine by accelerating weapons supplies to help his struggling forces

"Our sky must become safe again," Zelensky said during a video conference with NATO defence

"It depends fully on your choice. Choice whether life is indeed equally valuable everywhere. Choice whether you have an equal attitude to all partners. Choice whether we indeed are allies," Casting a bleak picture of his forces' ability to

hold off Russian attacks on the ground and from the air, Zelensky said Ukraine could not defend itself without Western support. "It is obvious that now, while Russia has air advantage and can rely on its drone and rocket ter-

ror, our capabilities on the ground, unfortunately, are limited," he said. Zelensky called a Saturday vote in the US House of Representatives on whether to unlock a long-delayed

\$61 billion military aid package a "vitally important The aid has been delayed since last year amid political infighting in the Republican Party.

Speaking after another week of Russian aerial barrages that killed and injured dozens across the country, the Ukrainian leader said Kyiv needed more air defence systems to protect Ukrainian cities and

"To defend, we need seven more 'Patriots' or similar air defence systems—and it's a minimum number. They can save many lives and really change the situation" Zelensky told a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council.

He also stressed the urgency of getting hold of the much-needed arms.

"This year we can't wait for decisions to be made,"

Ukraine is reliant on Western, primarily US,

military support to fend off the Russian invasion. systems, such as longer-range rockets, have previously been credited with allowing Ukraine to match the better-supplied

But Kyiv has also complained that promised deliveries throughout the two-year war have often arrived too late or in too small numbers to have a decisive impact on the battlefield. (AFP)

G7 slams Chinese firms' military help for Russia

CAPRI, ITALY: G7 foreign ministers on Friday expressed 'strong concern" about transfers of dual use materials and weapons components from Chinese businesses to Russia being used by Moscow for its military

At a meeting in Italy, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had urged European counterparts to increase pressure on Beijing, who Washington accuses of helping Russia's "most ambitious defence expansion since the Soviet era".

We express our strong concern about transfers to Russia from businesses in the People's Republic of China of dual-use materials and weapons components that Russia is using to advance its military production," the Group of Seven ministers said in a final statement after talks on the island of Capri.

"This is enabling Russia to reconstitute and revitalise its defence industrial base, posing a threat both to Ukraine and to international peace and security.

"China should ensure that this support stops, as it will only prolong this conflict and increase the threat that Russia poses to its neighbours.' In addition to the United States, the G7 countries

include Canada, the UK, France, Germany, Japan and Italy, which holds the presidency this year.

Washington has set a red line for Beijing-not to supply weapons to Russia for its war in Ukraine. And so far it has not presented proof that this has

But the United States is increasingly denouncing what it says is China's backdoor support for Moscow "When it comes to Russia's defence industrial base, the primary contributor in this moment to that

is China," Blinken told reporters after the meeting in Capri. This was "allowing Russia to continue the aggression against Ukraine", he said.

The diplomat added: "China can't have it both "If China purports on the one hand to have positive, friendly relations with Europe and other coun-

tries, they can't be fuelling on the other hand what is the biggest threat to European security since the end of the Cold War.' A senior US official said last week that China was helping Russia undertake "its most ambitious defence expansion since the Soviet era and on a fast-

er timeline than we believed possible" early in the Unveiling US findings, officials said China was helping Russia on a range of areas including the

joint production of drones, space-based capabilities and exports vital for producing ballistic missiles China has been the key factor in revitalising

Russia's defence industrial base "which had other wise suffered significant setbacks" since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a senior US official told reporters on condition of anonymity. (AFP)

UN says complex medical equipment 'purposefully broken' in Gaza hospitals

Recent United Nations-led missions to 10 Gaza hospitals found many 'in ruins' and just a couple capable of providing any level of maternal health services,

GENEVA, APRIL 19

The UN decried on Friday the intentional destruction of complex and hard-to-obtain medical equipment in Gaza's beleaguered hospitals and maternity wards, further deepening risks to women already giving birth in "inhumane, unimaginable conditions". Recent United Nations-led missions

to 10 Gaza hospitals found many "in ruins" and just a couple capable of providing any level of maternal health services, said Dominic Allen, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) representative for the State of Palestine. He said that what the teams found at

the Nasser hospital complex, long besieged by Israeli forces during their operations in the southern city of Khan Yunis, "breaks my heart".

Speaking to journalists in Geneva via video-link from Jerusalem, he described seeing "medical equipment purposefully broken, ultrasoundswhich you will know, is a very important tool for helping ensure safe births-with cables that have

"Screens of complex medical equipment, like ultrasounds and others

The World Health Organization has described the difficulty of bringing such equipment into Gaza even before the current war erupted following Hamas's October 7 attack inside

'Women discharged just hours after giving birth, and after C-sections, it is less than a day.'

Meanwhile at Al-Khair, another specialised maternity hospital in Khan Yunis, "it didn't seem as if there was any piece of working medical equipment", he said, lamenting that the birthing rooms "stand silent".

"They should be a place of giving life and they just have an eerie sense

Only 10 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are currently even partially functioning. And Allen said that only three of those were now capable of providing assistance to the estimated 180 women

day—around 15 percent of whom complications requiring significant care. The hospitals that can provide such care are thus facing significant capacity constraints.

The Emirati Hospital in the south, which is the main maternity hospital in Gaza currently, is for instance supporting up to 60 births every single day, including as many as 12 Caesarian sections, he said.

Given the heavy pressure on the facility, women are discharged just hours after giving birth, "and after C-sections, it is less than a day", Allen said, stressing "that increases risks".

The current war started after Hamas launched its unprecedented attack on October 7 that resulted in the deaths of 1,170 people in southern Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

The militants also took about 250 hostages. Israel estimates 129 remain in Gaza, including 34 who are presumed dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 33,970 people in Gaza, mostly women and children. according to the Hamas-run territory's

Iranian women without wearing their mandatory Islamic headscarf walk past a banner

showing missiles being launched from Iranian map in northern Tehran, Iran, on Friday.

ASSOCIATED PRESS DUBAL APRIL 19

An apparent Israeli drone attack on a major air base near the central city of Isfahan activated Iranian air defences early Friday. The strike came just days after Tehran's unprecedented drone-

and-missile assault on Israel.

No Iranian official directly acknowledged the possibility that Israel had attacked, and the Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment. However, regional tensions have been high since the Saturday assault on Israel amid its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip and its own strikes

Speaking at the G7 meeting in Capri, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said the US received "last-minute" information from Israel about the attack on Isfahan.

Blinken did not dispute that, but said: 'We were not involved in any offensive operations.'

The apparent attack came on Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's 85th birthday. Israeli politicians also made comments hinting that the country had launched

al provinces over reports of drones being in the air, state television reported. Iranian army commander General Abdolrahim Mousavi said crews targeted several flying objects.

Iran fires at apparent Israeli drones

near Isfahan base and nuclear site

The attack comes on Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's 85th birthday.

'The explosion this morning in the sky of Isfahan was related to the shooting of air defence systems at a suspicious object that did not cause any damage," Mousavi said. Others suggested the drones may be so-called quadcopters-four-rotor small drones that are commercially available.

Authorities said air defences fired at a major air base in Isfahan, which long has been home to Iran's fleet of American-made F-14 Tomcats-purchased before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Tasnim news agency published a video from one of its reporters, who said he was in the southeastern Zerdenjan area of Isfahan, near its "nuclear energy mountain."

The footage showed two different anti-aircraft gun positions, and details of the video corresponded with known features of the site of Iran's Uranium Conversion Facility at Isfahan.

"At 4:45, we heard gunshots. There was nothing going on," he said. "It was the air defence, these guys that you're watching, and over there too."

The facility at Isfahan operates three small Chinese-supplied research reactors, as well as handling fuel production and other activities for Iran's civilian nuclear program.

Isfahan also is home to sites associated with Iran's nuclear programme, including its underground Natanz enrichment site, which has been repeatedly targeted by suspected

State television described all atomic sites in the area as "fully safe". The United Nations' nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, also said "there is no damage to Iran's nuclear sites" after the incident.

The IAEA "continues to call for extreme restraint from everybody and reiterates that nuclear facilities should never be a target in military conflicts," the agency said.

Iran's nuclear programme has rapidly advanced to producing enriched uranium at nearly weapons-grade levels since the collapse of its atomic deal with world powers after then-President Donald Trump withdrew America from the accord in 2018.

While Iran insists its programme is for peaceful purposes, Western nations and the IAEA say Tehran operated a secret military weapons programme until 2003. The IAEA has warned that Iran now holds enough enriched uranium to build several nuclear weapons if it chose to do so - though the US intelligence community maintains Tehran is not actively

Dubai-based carriers Emirates and FlyDubai began diverting around western Iran about 4:30 am local time. They offered no explanation, though local warnings to aviators suggested the airspace may have been closed.

seeking the bomb.

Iran then grounded commercial flights in Tehran and across areas of its western and central regions. Iran later restored normal flight service,

authorities said. Around the time of the incident in Iran, Syria's state-run SANA news agency quoted a military statement saying Israel carried out a missile strike targeting an air defence unit in its south and causing material damage. The Britain-based Syrian

Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said the strike hit a military radar for government forces. It was not clear if there were casualties, the Observatory

That area of Syria is directly west of Isfahan, some 1,500 kilometres away, and east of Israel. Meanwhile in Iraq, where a number

of Iranian-backed militias are based, residents of Baghdad reported hearing sounds of explosions, but the source of the noise was not immediately clear.

China's new cyber force to 'fight, win' wars

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BEIJING, APRIL 19

China announced the creation of a new military cyber corps on Friday, saying it would bolster Beijing's capacity to "fight and win" wars.

The force represents 'a strategic step to establish a new system of services and arms'.

The Information Support Force will act as a "key support for coordinated development and application of network information systems", defence ministry spokesman Wu Qian

China has ploughed billions of dollars into modernising its armed forces in recent years as tensions with the United States and other regional powers have escalated.

President Xi Jinping has also sought to bring the military more firmly under his control since rising to power a decade ago. The new cyber force represents "a

strategic step to establish a new system of services and arms and improve [China's] modern military force structure", Wu said. He did not give details about its role but said the corps "bears great respon-

development and the ability to fight and win in modern warfare". Xi "extended warm congratulations" on the force's establishment at a grand ceremony in Beijing on Friday,

sibility in promoting high-quality

state broadcaster CCTV said. Footage showed the Chinese leader

clad in khaki military dress address ing a beaming cohort of officers in full regalia at an event enlivened by marching songs.

Xi said the force's founding was "a major decision" by the top echelons of the ruling Communist Party to "improve the modern military force system with Chinese characteristics", according to CCTV. "We must resolutely obey the par-

ty's command [and] fully implement the fundamental principles and systems of the party's absolute leadership over the military," he said. China's territorial disputes include

committed to helping defend. Beijing also contentiously lays claim to almost the entire South China Sea, several islands also claimed by Japan, and areas along its ill-defined border with regional rival India.

its claim to the self-ruled island of

Taiwan, which the United States has

targeting Iran in Syria.

US Secretary of State Antony

Air defence batteries fired in sever-

MONEY

FOREX 133.86 **US Dollar** 142.56 166.47 Pound Sterling 147.24 Swiss Franc 85.8 Australian Dolla 97.21 Canadian Dollar Singapore Dollar 98.29 8.66 Japanese Yen (10) 18.49 Chinese Yuan Saudi Arab Riyal 35.68 36.7 Qatari Riyal 3.63 Thai Bhat **UAE Dhiram** Malaysian Ringgit 27.98 Korean Won (100) PRICE PER TOLA **BULLION**

□ BIZLINE

Samsung introduces the Galaxy M14 LTE

KATHMANDU: Samsung has unveiled the Galaxy M14 LTE in the market. The device has a 50MP triple camera, a 5000 mAh battery, a cutting-edge octa-core processor, and powerful features, the company claims. "Continuing our tradition of winning

the hearts of consumers, we are thrilled to



unveil the latest addition to the Galaxy M series: The Galaxy M14 LTE", said Pranava Ratna Sthapit, director, MX Business. Samsung Nepal.

Rs 139,300

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

Rs 1,720

Samsung is also providing a genuine 25W Samsung Adapter free for consumers. The Galaxy M14 LTE boasts a 6.7" PLS LCD Infinity-U display, offering an immersive viewing experience. Its expansive screen simplifies scrolling through social media feeds for tech-savvy Gen-Z and millennial users. The Galaxy M14 LTE comes in two blue and dark blue colours. It will be offered at an all-inclusive price of Rs16,999 for the 4/64GB version and Rs21,999 for the 6/128GB version. This model will be available at the retail outlets nationwide starting May 18, the company said.

The Everest Hotel celebrates 43rd anniversary

KATHMANDU: The Everest Hotel, Kathmandu celebrated its 43rd anniversary, marking over four decades of hospitality and service. In recognition of their service, employees who have been with the hotel for 35 years were honoured with a long service award to mark the occasion. The hotel said that over the years, it has established itself as a preferred destination for guests from around the globe, cherished for its great service and proximity to the airport. It boasts one of the largest pillarless banquet halls in the region, which has become a hub for significant events including workshops, conferences, seminars, and even destination weddings.

Daihatsu to resume all shipments after safety scandal

TOKYO: Japan will lift a sweeping shipment ban on Daihatsu vehicles, the Toyota subsidiary said Friday, following a scandal over faked safety tests dating back decades. The transport ministry has verified that all Daihatsu production vehicles meet official safety standards and will lift a shipment ban on three models, the company said. The Move Canbus, Rocky and the Toyota-branded Raize were the three remaining Daihatsu models awaiting approval. The transport ministry had already approved other models and lifted shipment bans on them. (AFP)

Japanese AI tool predicts when recruits will quit jobs

TOKYO: Bosses worried about turnover or wondering how long a new hire will stick around can now turn to AI for a heads-up on who might be next out the door. The artificial intelligence tool was developed by Japanese researchers to try and help managers provide targeted support to staff to stop them from quitting. It crunches data on employees at a company, from their attendance record to personal information such as age and gender, and was created by Tokyo City University professor Naruhiko Shiratori with a start-up based in the Japanese capital. The tool also analyses data on employees who left the company, or took a leave of absence, to create a turnover model for each firm. (AFP)

1,063 MW Upper Arun receives World Bank nod

Finance Ministry says the bank has agreed 'in principle' to lead the consortium of international financiers for developing the \$1.71 billion project.

The World Bank has agreed "in principle" to lead the consortium of international financiers for the development of the 1,063 MW Upper Arun hydropower project in Sankhuwasabha, the Finance Ministry said on Friday.

The project on the Arun River in eastern Nepal is estimated to cost \$1.71 billion.

The development comes following a meeting between Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun with Martin Raiser, World Bank's vice president for the South Asia region, in Washington DC, the United States.

Pun is currently in the US to participate in the joint spring meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

In a statement, Shree Krishna Nepal, joint secretary at the Finance Ministry, who is accompanying Pun, said that the World Bank has agreed "in principle" to lead the project.

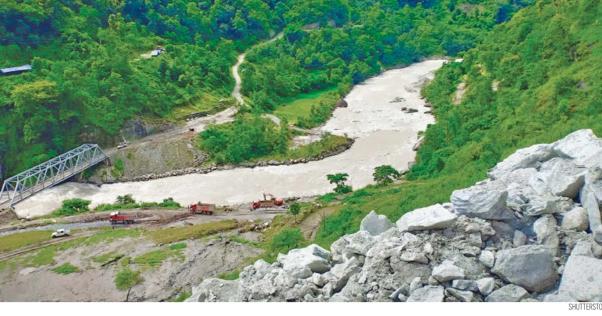
The agreement will be formalised receives the Cabinet's approval.

'There will be an agreement regarding financial management with the World Bank," said Nepal, who heads International Economic Cooperation Coordination Division of the Finance Ministry.

The Cabinet meeting on September 18, 2018, decided to develop the project through the Upper Arun Hydropower Limited, a subsidiary company of the Nepal Electricity Authority, established in January 2017. The survey licence was granted to the company in September 2019.

The feasibility study of the project was approved in June 2021. The construction period of the project is

Nepal has touted the Upper Arun as a game changer project among hydroelectric projects due to its relatively



low cost of generation and availability of abundant firm energy. Firm energy refers to the actual energy guaranteed to be available. The project can generate electricity in full capacity for six hours daily during the dry season. The average for hydropower projects in Nepal is four hours.

Nepal has been seeking an investment of around \$1 billion from the World Bank and other international financial institutions to develop the project. The global lender is set to return to an Arun River project after a gap of 28 years. Earlier, in 1995, the global lender

shelved its plan to invest in the Arun III Hydropower Project amid contro-The World Bank, however, is not

expected to provide all of \$1 billion for the Upper Arun Hydropower Project. "The World Bank could inject as

much as \$550 million," Kul Man Ghising, managing director of Nepal Electricity Authority, the project developer, told the Post in a recent

"The multilateral agency is expected to attract international financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank and others to inject more funds to take the total international financing to \$1 billion.'

According to the power monopoly, the project will be implemented under a 70:30 debt-to-equity ratio.

This means the project to be developed in the upper reaches of the Arun Bhotekhola Rural Municipality of Sankhuwasabha district will be funded with Rs150 billion The World Bank will lead the inter-

national financiers while the Hydroelectricity Investment and

Development Company Limited, a government entity, will lead the domestic financiers including Nepali banks and financial institutions, according to the power utility.

In September 2022, the Nepal Electricity Authority, the Upper Arun Hydroelectric Company and the Hydroelectricity Investment and Development Company Limited signed an investment agreement to generate resources for the project from domestic financers.

The Nepal Electricity Authority said it has targeted the financial closure of the project soon, which will ensure funds to develop the project.

This is the first time the World Bank is prepared to fund the Electricity Authority-led hydropower project. In 2014, the global lending agency approved \$84.6 million to finance the Kabeli-A

Hydroelectric Project developed by the private sector.

In 2019, its private sector arm—the International Finance Corporation (IFC)—had led international creditors to invest \$453 million in the 216MW Upper Trishuli 1 Hydropower Project. A South Korean consortium is developing this project.

The World Bank has been helping Nepal build transmission lines.

Nepal faced long hours of power rationing in 2008. Experts point to the bank's exit from the Arun III project in August 1995 as the main reason behind several years of load-shedding in the country. The outages officially ended only after 10 years, in May 2018.

On August 1, 1995, then World Bank President James Wolfensohn cancelled the Arun III project "in agree ment with the government of Nepal' citing concerns regarding Nepal's management capability to meet the demands and long list of actions which the project of that size and complexity would involve; difficulty gaining support to implementing many measures including power tariff, and difficulty mobilising an additional \$30-40 million cost overrun in case of

SJVN Limited, India's state-owned company, is now developing the Arun

Officials say that the bank's reentry into Nepal's hydropower generation could attract more foreign investors as the country has envisioned producing 30,000 MW by 2035.

Works on a 2-km tunnel road and 21-km access road have already started at the project site.

Officials added that the land acquisition and compensation distribution works have almost been completed.

The project aims to produce an annual electricity output of 3.44 billion units-1.36 billion during the dry season and 2.08 billion units during

Netflix beats expectations on profit and subscribers

☐ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE SAN FRANCISCO, APRIL 19

Netflix topped earnings expectations Thursday, reporting that profit and subscriber ranks grew as its heavy bet on a rich content line-up paid off amid a crackdown on password sharing.

The leading streaming television service said it gained 9.3 million subscribers in the recently ended quarter, raising the total to 269.6 million. Netflix reported a profit of \$2.3 billion on revenue of nearly \$9.4 billion in the quarter, compared to a net income of \$1.3 billion on \$8.2 billion in revenue in the same period a year earlier.

"Netflix continues to lay the smackdown on its competition," said Emarketer senior analyst Ross Benes.

even more common than previously thought as Netflix keeps converting freeloader viewers into paid users.

Company shares slipped more than 4 percent to \$581 in after-market trades, apparently due to the company saying sales in the current quarter might be less than market expectations.

Netflix shares have climbed since the start of this year, but investors seemed wary of the company's ability to keep pumping up revenue and develop its nascent ad-supported tier into a meaningful

The company launched an ad-subsidized offering last year around the same time as the crackdown on sharing passwords outside of homes. Netflix is still in early days of building its ad business, and it remains a work in progress, according to co-chief executive Greg Peters. Netflix unveiled a sprawling TV and film lineup for 2024 as it bet that must-see content would keep viewers paying for the streaming service. In March, Netflix released keenly-anticipated "3 Body Problem."

The series was adapted from a best-selling Chinese trilogy of novels which take place in an alternate version of modern reality where humanity has made contact with an alien civilization.

the eagerly awaited second season of "Squid Game"—the dystopian Korean horror tale about a fictional, deadly game show which remains by far the most-watched Netflix TV series ever.

Also among a notably international lineup were a Spanish-language, Colombianmade TV series based on Gabriel Garcia Marquez's beloved novel "One Hundred Years of Solitude," and a six-part drama about the life of Brazilian racing great

Meta releases beefed-up AI models tures powered by the technology to

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE SAN FRANCISCO, APRIL 19

Meta on Thursday introduced an improved AI assistant built on new versions of its open-source Llama large language model. Meta AI is smarter and faster

due to advances in the publicly available Llama 3, the tech titan said in a blog post. "The bottom line is we believe Meta AI is now the most intelligent AI assistant that you can freely

use," Meta co-founder and chief

executive Mark Zuckerberg said in a video on Instagram. Being open source means that developers outside of Meta are free to customize Llama 3 as they wish and the company may then incorporate those improvements and

insights in an updated version. "We're excited about the potencan have for people who use Meta products and for the broader ecosystem," Meta said.

"We also want to make sure we're developing and releasing this technology in a way that anticipates and works to reduce risk."

That effort includes incorporating protections in the way Meta designs and releases Llama models and being cautious when it adds generative AI features to Facebook, Messenger, according to Meta. "We're also making Meta AI

much easier to use across our apps. We built it into the search box right at the top of WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram messenger, so any time you have a question, you can just ask it right there," said Zuckerberg in the AI models, Meta's included, have

the rails, giving inaccurate or bizarre responses in episodes referred to as "hallucinations." Examples shared on social media included Meta AI claiming

been known to occasionally go off

to have a child in the New York City school system during an online forum conversation. Meta AI has been consistently

updated and improved since its initial release last year, according "Meta's slower approach to

building its AI has put the company behind in terms of consumer awareness and usage, but it still has time to catch up," said Sonata Insights chief analyst Debra Aho Williamson.

"Its social media apps represent a massive user base that it can use to test AI experiences.

By weaving AI into its family of apps, Meta will quickly get feabillions of people and benefit from seeing what users do with it. Meta cited the example of refin-

ing the way its AI answers prompts regarding political or social issues to summarize relevant points about the topic instead of offering a single point of view. Llama 3 has been tuned to better

discern whether prompts are innocuous or out-of-bounds, according to Meta.

"Large language models tend to overgeneralize, and we don't intend for it to refuse to answer prompts like 'How do I kill a computer program?' even though we don't want it to respond to prompts like 'How do I kill my neighbor?', Meta explained. Meta said it lets users know

when they are interacting with AI on its platform and puts visible that were in fact generated by AI.

Beginning in May, Meta will start labeling video, audio, and images "Made with AI" when it detects or is told content is generated by the technology.

Llama 3, for now, is based in English but in the coming Meta will release more capable models able to converse in multiple languages, the company said.

'Ancient Roman' solar roof tiles power Pompeii villa

□ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE POMPEII (ITALY), APRIL 19

Pompeii is shining a light on mysterious rites of ancient Rome thanks to terracotta-style solar roof tiles installed on one of its most famous

photovoltaic cells inside, allowing the UNESCO

traditional-looking tiles have solar

World Heritage Site to preserve its aesthetics while generating clean energy to illuminate its And though the project is in its early stages,

experts say the tiles could one day help historic city centres across Italy turn green. The tiles look "exactly the same as the ancient

(Roman) ones", found in archaeological sites and cities across the Mediterranean, Pompeii director Gabriel Zuchtriegel told AFP. But while "Pompeii is a unique site due to its

vast size and complexity ... I hope this will not be

a unique project," said Zuchtriegel, who wants the site near Naples to be a "real-life lab for sustainability". The scheme weds emerging technologies with an extraordinary mural unearthed in 1909 under deep layers of volcanic ash at the Villa of the Mysteries, which was buried along with the rest

The mural depicts female devotees of Dionysus—the god of wine and revelry—engaged in mysterious rites.

of the city when Vesuvius erupted nearly 2,000

They have intrigued scholars for decades, with some historians suggesting they are evidence that the lady of the villa was a priestess whose slaves took part in cult rituals.

The fresco, which covers three walls and is one of the best preserved in Pompeii, is illuminated by special LED lights designed to bring the deep red, purple and gold images to life, while not damaging the painted surfaces.

The lights are powered by electricity generated



A picture shows solar panels on the roof of the 'Villa of Mysteries' which has been partly retiled on April 15, in Pompeii.

by the solar panels, which were installed in

Ahlux, the Italian company behind the lights, patented the system in 2022 and produces both curved and flat panels varnished in terracotta tones

The solar panels on the villa's roof are flat and lie between traditional ceramic curved tiles. They cover 70 square metres (750 square feet) of roof, produce a maximum of 13 kilowatt-hours

and are linked to an ecologically-friendly sodium battery, according to project manager Alberto Pompeii, which gets over 15 hours sunlight a

day in peak summer, intends to extend their use to other villas in the archaeological site, he said. Augusto Grillo, the founder of Ahlux, said the tiles are about five percent less efficient than a traditional solar panel.

"This nominal loss is compensated however by

the fact that our panels heat up less in summer," while traditional ones are covered by glass, and can lose efficiency on very hot days, he said.

"The performance ends up being very similar,"

Various institutions have expressed interest in the tiles, from Rome's MAXXI modern art museum to the 17th century Pinoteca Ambrosiana museum in Milan, Grillo said. "The problem is finding the funds," he said, adding that many of Italy's famous historic buildings are public or owned by Catholic institutions.

The cost is a bit more than the price of a new roof and traditional panels put together—though the solar tiles, which last between 20 to 25 years, serve double duty, because they function as a roof too, Grillo said.

Project manager Bruni said the cost of the panels "is coming down", meaning they may be able to play a part in the wider ecological

Italy is under pressure to make red-roofed cities such as Florence or Bologna greener as part of efforts to combat climate change.

The European Union aims to reduce carbon emissions by 55 percent compared with 1990 levels by 2030, and will have to upgrade existing buildings to do so.

That is a mammoth challenge for Italy, where

some 60 percent of buildings are in the worst two energy categories, compared to 17 percent in France and six percent in Germany, according to Italian Constructors' Association ANCE. "There needs to be some national and perhaps

European co-investment to make sure that the very, very ambitious timelines have a chance of being respected," Angelica Donati, president of the youth constructors' association ANCE Giovani, told AFP.

"We have the most beautiful cities in the world, which means we need much more thoughtful interventions, and quickly. There's a lot to be done".

SPORTS | MEDLEY

Klopp tells Liverpool to push for title despite damaging spell

The Reds exited the Europa League after a 1-0 win against Atalanta failed to overturn the three-goal first leg deficit.



Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Jurgen Klopp has told spluttering Liverpool they can still clinch the Premier League title if they recover from a dismal spell by winning the last six matches of his reign. Klopp's side crashed out of the

Europa League quarter-finals on Thursday after a 1-0 win against Atalanta that failed to overturn the three-goal first leg deficit.

It was the latest blow for Klopp in the closing weeks of his nine-year stay

Liverpool also bowed out of the FA Cup at the quarter-final stage after losing to a last-gasp goal at bitter rivals Manchester United

United rubbed salt into Liverpool's wounds by holding them to a draw in the Premier League on April 7, before Crystal Palace plundered a shock win at Anfield last weekend.

Klopp's men have gone from leading the table to sitting two points behind leaders Manchester City in third place.

But the German, whose team travel to Fulham on Sunday, has not given up hope on giving Liverpool a record-equalling 20th English title as a parting gift.

"It's not obviously in our hands, it is not about that. I think if we would win all our games there is a good chance we will be champion. If not there is a good chance someone else will be champion," Klopp told reporters on

"Maybe we only have to win five, but nobody knows. Who would have thought that Arsenal lose against

"We all sit here and think 'OK, yeah. City will win all their games' and that's happened quite frequently, but they have a lot of games to play and difficult opponents as well.

"We don't think about that. We don't think about them. It is just how can we make sure we start wining games again.' Liverpool have had two seasons

where the title race with City has seen them miss out by just one point after both clubs finished strongly But Klopp, who ended Liverpool's

30-year wait to win the title in 2020, said that experience was not necessarily useful for the current three-team battle with City and second-placed "When we were in the position we didn't win the league in the end. We

that. What kind of experience is that?" he said. "We know how to get there, and then don't win. It's not about that.

lost by a point and stuff like

"It's good to know that you are good and you can cause other teams problems. But the thing is clear: if you want to be champion in the Premier League you have to be close to

"If you are not perfect you have to deal with the setbacks in the best possible way or in a perfect way.

"That is what we are now doing. We had a setback week with three games we didn't like too much, the results especially, and now we have to start turning it around.

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE STANDINGS (TOP FIVE)

STANDINGS (TOT TIVE)										
Team	P	P W		L	GF	GA	PT			
Man City	32	22	7	3	76	32	73			
Arsenal	32	22	5	5	75	26	71			
Liverpool	32	21	8	3	72	31	71			
Aston Villa	a 33	19	6	8	68	49	63			
Tottenhan	n 32	18	6	8	65	49	60			

UAE shatter Nepal's Asia Cup hopes

The Rhinos lose the ACC Men's T20 Premier Cup semi-final match by six wickets following a batting collapse.



United Arab Emirates players celebrate a wicket of Nepal during the ACC Men's T20 Premier Cup semi-final match in Al Amerat, Oman on Friday.

SPORTS BUREAU

Nepal's hopes to qualify for their second Asia Cup ended after they lost to the United Arab Emirates by six wickets in the semi-final of the ACC Men's T20 Premier Cup in Al Amerat, Oman on Friday.

Sundeep Jora scored a half-century for Nepal but the defending champions, who were invited to bat first, struggled to build a significant partnership and were restricted to a paltry 119-9 in their 20 overs

UAE's Junaid Siddique (2-26) and Ali Naseer (2-28) were the thorns in Nepal's flesh as the bowlers took crucial wickets early on, triggering a collapse in Nepal's batting line up.

Siddique got the breakthrough with the first delivery of the innings, removing opener Kushal Bhurtel for a golden duck. Bhurtel's opening partner Aasif

Sheikh also departed for a cheap eight after Omid Shafi Rahman trapped him leg before in the fourth over.

Naseer then took out Nepal's captain and dangerman Rohit Paudel for five, reducing the Rhinos to 28-3 after

Jora was the sole fighter for Nepal.

The 22-year-old batter withstood the UAE bowling attack looking for support from the other end of the wicket but it never came, with big hitters Kushal Malla (3) and Dipendra Singh Airee (5) also kneeling to other destroyer-in-chief Basil Hameed (2-4) and Aayan Afzal Khan, respectively, without making any impact.

Jora reached his fifty off 40 balls, that included four boundaries and two maximums, before he was undone by Muhammad Farooq in the 15th over.

Gulsan Jha then added 20 runs off 16 balls and Karan KC contributed 17 runs off 12 balls to drag Nepal past 100.

In the ensuing chase, the UAE lost their captain Muhammad Waseem to Sompal Kami for 11 in the

But opener Alishan Sharafu showed Nepal how to bat with an unbeaten half-century, also helping the UAE avenge for the losses at the last year's ACC Men's Premier Cup final and ICC Men's T20 World Cup Asia Qualifier

Nepal defeated the UAE by seven wickets in the Premier Cup final in Kirtipur in May last year to qualify for the 2023 Asia Cup. Six months later, the Rhinos beat the UAE by eight

wickets, again, in the semi-finals of the World Cup Asia Qualifier in Mulpani to book their ticket to the 2024 T20 World Cup.

Sharafu scored 55 runs off 41 balls. His innings featured four fours and two sixes. Jha gave the UAE some unsteady

moments, breaking the partnership between Sharafu and Vishnu Sukumaran (28 off 28) and dispatching Asif Khan (10) but Sharafu held on. Syed Haider then added 14 runs off

15 balls, aiding Sharafu to take the UAE to 123-4 in 17.2 overs. The UAE will face Oman in a high-

stake final on Sunday. The winners of

the tournament will secure their ticket to the 2025 T20 Asia Cup. Oman defeated Hong Kong by five wickets in the other semi-final match, thanks to an allround performance

from Aqib Ilyas. Ilyas took 3-14 to restrict Hong Kong to 130-9 and scored an unbeaten 62 off 51 to guide Oman to 132-5 in 19.2

Nepal will play against Hong Kong in the third-place play off on Saturday. The third-placed team will qualify for the ACC Emerging Cup along with

the two finalists.

ACC MEN'S T20 PREMIER CUP

SEMI-FINAL 1, AL AMERAT TOSS: United Arab Emirates, field first. **Nepal 119-9** (20/20 overs)

Sundeep Jora 50 (40), Gulsan Jha 20 (16); Basil Hameed 2-0-4-2, Junaid Siddique 4-0-26-2, Ali Naseer 4-0-28-2 United Arab Emirates 123-4 (17.2/20 overs)

Alishan Sharafu 55* (41), Vishnu Sukumaran 28 (28); Gulsan Jha 2.2-0-21-2 United Arab Emirates win by six wickets.

Player of the match: Alishan Sharafu

SEMI-FINAL 2, AL AMERAT TOSS: Oman, field first.

Hong Kong 130-9 (20/20 overs) Zeeshan Ali 36*(25), Babar Hayat 33 (37); Aqib Ilyas

4-0-14-3, Bilal Khan 4-0-36-3 **Oman 132-5** (19.2/20 overs) Aqib Ilyas 62* (51), Zeeshan Maqsood 15 (14); Aizaz

Oman win by five wickets Player of the match: Agib Ilyas

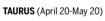
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April 20, Saturday	Nepal vs Hong Kong							
FINAL								
April 21, Sunday	UAE vs Oman							

TUIDD DI ACE DI AVOEE

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

ronment that could lead to disorganization and impulsive action. Do your best to map out all the details before making important decisions. Fatigue may find you as evening creeps in



Focus on that which lifts you and offers inspiration and consider taking a break from social media outlets if you've been struggling to connect with personal passions. Focus on supporting yourself physically and mentally by establishing healthy routines.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)



You may struggle to shift gears this morning, especially if work responsibilities have been weighing heavily on your shoulders recently. Luckily, fate steps in to elevate your aura, especially when you take a moment to socialize and nurture new friendships.



tions will inspire you to invest in new structures or long-term plans, though acting impulsively could lead to larger messes later. Try not to get carried away with your dreams. Opt for a

LEO (July 23-August 22)

CANCER (June 22-July 22)



This morning asks you where your empowerment stems from. Slow down and focus on the

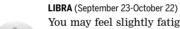


present moment to make the most of these vibes, asking for guidance where you need it most. Just be mindful not to make serious com-

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)



You may feel conflicted about what the future holds, especially within matters of the heart. Consider where your loyalties lie, understanding that new commitments could be on the horizon. Ethereal Energy grants permission for





to sleep in this morning. Lessen the pressures you place upon yourself. Confusion fills the air this evening, clouding important details and making it difficult to see the bigger picture.





Don't force yourself into group engagements if you're not in the mood, putting self-preservation above the demands or expectations of others. Excitement and romance could blossom when urging you to take a chance and open your

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

social later tonight.



Agitation fills the air early this morning. Avoid criticizing yourself when navigating these vibes, look instead for opportunities to work as a team. Hazy vibes flow when this evening, tempting you to hide away. You'll feel more



CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

optimistic mood. You'll feel motivated to take action, though it would be wise to approach major choices from a place of critical thinking. Your focus fades this evening, nudging you to

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)



Bring yourself to a place of grounded calm before tackling today's agenda. Avoid risky investments or large purchases. Connect with your senses through a hot salt bath or relaxing shower, setting intentions to release that which



does not serve you. PISCES (February 19-March 20) Tread lightly when dealing with difficult companions. You may feel more irritable than usual, making it important that you monitor your

mood and curb passive-aggressive behaviors. Float away on a cloud of self-care this evening.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS 1 Borscht

vegetable 5 Increase (with "up") 9 Design détail 13 English river

14 Anew 16 "10 Things I -About You' 17 Sausage 18 Early science fiction writer

Jules -

19 Apple device 20 Origin Fellow traveler "Travels with My 26 Stalk

27 Awesome 31 Peru's capital 34 Stat. in baseball 35 Hit a softball 36 Directs 38 Photos

40 Lines of stitches 43 Coffee type 44 Legal wrongs 46 — and robbers 48 Writer — Tolstov 49 Fiddling ruler 50 Decisive blow 52 Signs

55 Auth. unknown

56 Chilly time

(2 wds.)

64 Gothic arch

65 Town in Maine 67 Gruesome 68 Flourish 69 Thin candle

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1 Moves up and

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4 Four together 5 Hungry

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25 Melody 27 Showed sorrow 28 Hunter of myth 29 Mother-of-pearl 30 Heap

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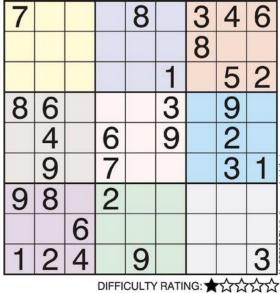
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World*

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SUDOKU

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



Domestic lives of delightful characters

In 'The Gurkha's Daughter', a collection of eight short stories, Prajwal Parajuly delves into the intricate inner worlds of familiar characters.

ANUSHA DHAKAL

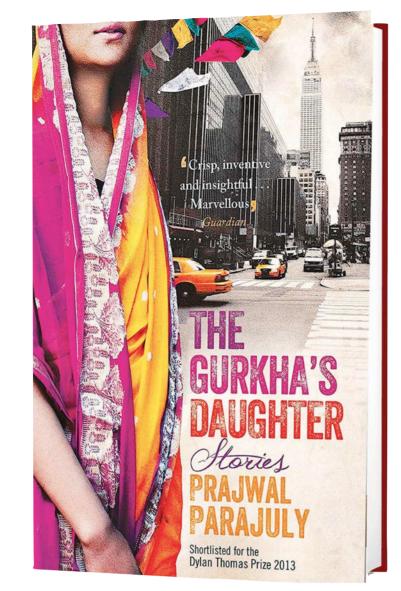
nen does a book become memorable? Perhaps when it resonates deeply, evoking a sense of familiarity and reflecting one's own experiences. 'The Gurkha's Daughter' by Prajwal Parajuly left a lasting impression on me precisely for this reason—it exuded a comforting familiarity that lingered long after I turned the final page.

This collection of eight short stories revolves around the common theme of 'dis-belonging', a sense of not quite fitting in. Parajuly, himself a Nepali-Indian who was raised in India, explores this theme with profound understanding. Throughout the stories, the intricate layers of mixed identity and the palpable feeling of being out of place resonate powerfully.

All of Parajuly's characters are relatable and easy to empathise with. He avoids embellishing or vilifying their personalities.

In each of his stories, Parajuly guides us through the everyday lives of his characters, weaving in larger societal issues that impact their existence. While some characters may be more endearing than others, Parajuly possesses a remarkable talent for breathing life into each of them, ensuring they remain etched in our memories. He refrains from resorting to clichéd writing tactics to achieve this; instead, his characters feel authentic, like individuals we might encounter in our

Parvati, featured in 'The Cleft', embodies the archetype of the Nepali aunty, grappling with a strained relationship with her mother-in-law. Rajiv, portrayed in 'Mixed Blessing', mirrors the struggles of a once-promising engineering student who finds himself adrift and burned out. Ravi, from 'No Land is Her Land', embodies the archetype of the distant relative plagued by anger issues, trapped in soci-



THE GURKHA'S DAUGHTER Author: Prajwal Parajuly Year: 2012

Publisher: Quercus

etal expectations. And Gita, in 'The Gurkha's Daughter', resonates as the childhood friend who drifted away, leaving a void in our lives. Through these charac-

ters, Parajuly crafts a narrative that feels deeply personal and universally relatable. All of Parajuly's characters are inherently relatable and easy to empathise

with, as he avoids embellishing or vilifying their personalities. Instead, he presents them as raw and unapologetically human. This approach allows readers to

connect with them on a deeper level, rec-

ognising the nuances in their interactions, prejudices, inclinations, choices, and backgrounds. Despite the multitude of characters introduced in this collection of short stories, Parajuly demonstrates a rare talent for making each one memorable. This ability to craft distinct and memorable characters within the confines of short-story fiction is a testament to his skill as a storyteller.

The book also delves into significant cultural and social issues, addressing topics such as child labour, caste-based discrimination, gender prejudices against female children, the Bhutanese refugee crisis, and the phenomenon of brain drain. Parajuly approaches these themes without adopting a saviour complex; he refrains from offering solutions or assigning blame. Instead, he observes his characters grappling with these complex issues, humanising them poignantly. As the narrator, he doesn't position himself above the characters; rather, he simply tells their stories as they unfold.



BOOK REVIEW -

People are shaped by their circumstances, and Parajuly captures this truth eloquently. The progression of his characters through life events feels natural and authentic. An excellent example of this is his portrayal of Anamika in 'No Land is Her Land'. Anamika stands out as a strong female character; her self-awareness threatens the men around her, yet she remains unapologetic about her identity and choices. Despite acknowledging that her decisions may invite differential treatment, she exudes confidence and makes bold decisions. This portrayal not only endears Anamika to readers but also embodies a compelling depiction of a resilient female character—one who embraces her identity amidst challenges and choices.

In 'The Immigrants', Parajuly's narrative echoes his own experiences as a Nepali-Indian living abroad. The character of Amit emerges as particularly approachable, embodying the archetype of the successful immigrant thriving in New York City with a six-figure salary and his own apartment in Manhattan. Amit's tendency to casually mention his achievements, especially to a white woman he encounters, exudes a subtle vanity and boastfulness which reads in a very comical manner. As the story unfolds, Amit's desperate attempts to assimilate into his new environment provide both entertainment and a mirror to the immigrant experience.

When he encounters Sabitri, another Nepali immigrant woman who hasn't achieved the same level of success financially or academically, their unequal footing becomes apparent. Despite Amit's initial superiority, his world is shaken when his visa application is rejected, thrusting him into a shared sense of desperation with Sabitri. At this moment, regardless of their achievements, they are both immigrants grappling with a sense of not belonging. Amit's visa troubles and Sabitri's linguistic challenges highlight the universal struggles faced by immigrants, reminding readers that, despite their efforts, they may always feel like outsiders in their adopted homeland.

All the stories in this collection are marked by clever, synchronised endings. A notable aspect is the consistent use of open-ended conclusions, which add to the intrigue of each narrative. What sets Parajuly's stories apart is the unexpected behaviour of his characters in these concluding moments. This pattern of contradictions between expectation and action emerges as a recurring theme throughout the book. While this stylistic choice may have been effective in some stories, it feels somewhat overdone and detracts from the collection's playful and cheeky tone. In particular, the ending of 'The Immigrants' feels forced and inorganic, as the author attempts to impose a synchronised conclusion. This departure from the natural flow of the narrative diminishes the impact of an otherwise engaging story.

Overall, 'The Gurkha's Daughter' offers a captivating and effortless read, characterised by delightful characters navigating the intricacies of their everyday lives. Parajuly's skilful portrayal of these characters, with all their quirks and complexities, adds a layer of charm to the narrative, making it a truly enjoyable experience from start to finish.





For the Record: Celebrating **Record Store Day**

Sattva Media Collective is hosting a celebration of record store day, where attendees can exhibit or sell theri cherished records and record players/turntables

Where: Sattya Media Collective, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur 2:00 pm onwards

Blood Donation Drive

Pasang Lhamu Foundation is organising a blood donation in her honour as the first Nepali woman to conquer Mount Everest.

Shankha Park, Pragati Tole Marg, Kathmandu

When: April 20 8:00 am onwards

Procurement and Contract

Management Practice in Nepal ing a Procurement and Contract Management Practice training session. The 10-day online training is open for engineers, project managers, planners and consultants working on related field,

government officials, lawyers, and acade-

Where: Online When: April 23 onwards 6:300 to 8:30 pm

Participation: Rs8,000 (inidividual participants), Rs10,000 (institutional participants), pre-registration

Kandara Live in Dharan

Nepali Lok-pop band Kandara will perform live in Dharan this Saturday. The event organised by Silver Entertainment promises to bring a big dose of entertainment through different live performances.

Where: Dharan Rangashala, Dharan

When: April 20 5:00 pm onwards **Entry:** Rs300 to Rs1,500

Oxygen Exhibition



Gallery Mcube is organising an exhibition by six contemporary artists from Germany: Armin Baumgarten, Bernd Zimmer, Carsten Fock, Claus Fottinger, Helge Achenbach and Yuliia Balabukha. Where: Gallery Mcube, Chakhupat,

Lalitpur Till April 28 11:00 am to 7:00 pm Time:

Balaju Food Festival

Entry: Free

The Balaju Food Festival is happening this Tuesday. The event will have a stalls with a variety of foods and musical performances from Nepali artists, including John and the Locals and Anuprastha.

Where: Macchapokhari, Balaju Aarati

Party Palace Ground, Kathmandu 12:00 pm onwards Rs500 to Rs1,000

'Ticket to Hollywood' Play

The Sagar Khati Kami directed play, 'Ticket to Hollywood', starring Milan Karki and Sudip Khatiwada will open at Mandala Theatre on Saturday.

Where: Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun, Kathmandu April 20 to May 5

In 'The Gurkha's Daughter', a collection of eight short stories, Prajwal Parajuly delves into the intricate inner worlds of familiar

characters. Tickets: Rs300 to Rs500

Meaning within Meaning



Takpa Gallery is hosting a solo exhibition by Bhuwan Thapa titled 'Meaning within

Where: Takpa Gallery, Lazimpat, Kathmandu **Time:** 11:00am to 7:00pm

Entry: Free

Ruma Music Festival

Attend an unforgettable music festival at Ruma Village, Myagdi, in western Nepal. The three-day festival is presented by Music for Education, a not-for-profit, non-religious, non-political educational programme, based in Pokhara, Nepal.

Ruma Village, Myagdi When: April 22 to April 25 11:00 am to 11:00 pm Tickets: Rs5.000

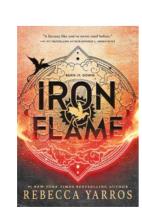
| NEW RELEASES **BEST-SELLERS**

Fiction

- Iron Flame by Rebecca Yarros The Housemaid's Secret by
- Freida McFadden The Seven Husbands of Evelyn
- Hugo by Taylor Jenkins Reid The Covenant of Water by
- Abraham Verghese
- A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini

Tiny Changes,

James Clear



Non-Fiction

- Atomic Habits by James Clear
- The Song of The Cell by Siddhartha Mukherjee
- Killing The Legends by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard
- What Happened To You? by Bruce D Perry and Oprah Winfrey
- Beyond Disruption by W Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne



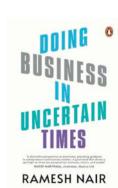
Cryptostorm Author: Sundeep Khanna Price: Rs798 **Publication:** Harper Collins

Sundeep Khanna's 'Cryptostorm' explores the transformative impact of cryptocurrencies in India and beyond. Khanna navigates the regulatory uncertainties surrounding cryptocurrencies, demonstrating the potential for significant gains and devastating losses in this rapidly changing market. He also investigates the experiences of ordinary people whose lives have been altered by the allure and risks of digital assets through moving stories. As cryptocurrencies move from the margins to the mainstream, Khanna emphasizes the critical need for stakeholders to understand and engage with this disruptive force in finance. By amplifying the voices of those exploring this new financial frontier, 'Cryptostorm serves as a timely call to action



Nalisa's Universe Author: Nalisa Chopra Price: Rs952 Publication: Om Books International

'Nalisa's Universe' provides an emotional glimpse into the soulful musings of Nalisa Chopra, a young poet whose love of verse shines through on every page. As a student aspiring to be a celebrated poet, Chopra finds inspiration in the mundane moments of daily life, creating these into an ensemble of emotion and reflection. Her collection is divided into seven thematic sections, including Mystical, Nature, Romance, and Feminist, which reflect the variety of her experiences and convictions. Chopra's simple yet evocative language captures the essence of her thoughts, dreams, and memories, inviting readers on a journey of self-discovery. With enchanting visuals, 'Nalisa's Universe' is a captivating testament to the beauty of the ordinary and the extraordinary



Doing Business in Uncertain Times Author: Ramesh Nair Price: Rs638

Publication: Penguin Books

'Doing Business in Uncertain Times' by Ramesh Nair is an influential exploration of controlling economic turbulence, drawing on Nair's extensive experience leading organizations through crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2008 economic downturn. The book is divided into fifty insightful chapters and provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and challenges of economic downturns. Nair offers valuable advice to entrepreneurs and business leaders through a multifaceted lens, encouraging them to unlearn and relearn, to challenge conventional wisdom, and to realise their untapped potential. Focusing on key elements, Nair's book provides readers with the tools they need to adapt and innovate.





CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

Family rejection, social criticism, poverty this lesbian couple has survived them all

Pabitra Badi Nepali, 51, and Bimala BK, 50, from Tulsipur, Dang, have been together for 27 years.

apart. Their families even threatinvolvement and made them sign a paper to stay away from each other.

The pressure wasn't just from family; even villagers mocked and pressured them to marry asking men, them how two women living together possibly run a household.

Besides the gender barrier, their castes added to their families' and villagers' determination to separate them. Badi, who was considered to be from a lower caste, faced immense discrimination couldn't even enter BK's house or share a cup of water with her.

'No one understood us. My partner and I faced constant surveillance and threats due to our different castes and same gender," recalls Badi. "During those times, I felt like I was losing my mind and

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MITINI NEPAL Pabitra Badi Nepali (left) and her partner Bimala BK posing together. wanted to give up on life.' Because of the continuous torture and

pressure, they planned to run away at the age of 16. However, Badi and her partner needed money and a place to live before they could run away. So Badi began working in a Kathmandu brick factory while searching for accommodation. Once everything was in place, they escaped from their village a year later.

Besides the gender barrier, their castes added to their families' determination to separate them.

As they arrived in the Capital, the couple lived in Harisiddhi for 11 years, away from their family. The few times they did visit their homes, they were scolded heavily and asked to return home and

Now, though, everyone in the family has

come to accept them. Even those who once pressured them to split up now envy their happiness and success 'We've shown our families that even

two women can build a life together," says

But getting to this point wasn't easy. Work at the brick factory wasn't reliable. at a time and pay her at the end of that period. Finding another job was difficult

"There were times when we couldn't

even get basic food and clothes," says Badi. When she worked at the factory, BK managed their home. Badi also worked in house construction projects to earn a living. Gradually, she learned enough about construction and lease contracts to become a contractor. She worked as a contractor for seven years. The couple also lived in Pokhara for four years

After years of living by themselves, they returned to their village in Tulsipur in 2017. Their village, Haattikhawa Nayabasti, is famous for its madals. Badi and BK began making madals, something they both loved from a young age, after moving back.

"We came back to Tulsipur despite the bad memories because we were tired of running away and we refuse to let society's narrow-mindedness stop us from reconnecting with our roots," says BK.

Upon their return, they were ignored by villagers, kin, and relatives. They felt lonely—especially during festivals like Dashain, when everyone would be celebrating with their closed ones. They also couldn't afford the food, meat, or new clothes for the festivities.

"There were times when we wondered if what we were doing was wrong. My biggest worry was that my love was causing Bimala pain. I felt guilty about not being able to give her the life she deserved,"

Despite everything, Badi is happy that they persisted against the odds and

Seven years have passed since they set-

easier, they initially faced pressure to marry again upon returning. They endured ridicule, with people suggesting they would be lonely and helpless and die alone in their old age without a man. Badi built a small tin-roofed house for BK and herself to live in. They've since

tled in Tulsipur. Although life has become

built a larger cement house, but Badi still prefers the small house because of all the memories they have shared there. Badi's strongest desire now is to connect with people from the LGBTQIA+ community. Four years ago, she met a young lesbian girl, Anu, which made her

community. Anu introduced Badi to Mitini Nepal, and now both Badi and BK are actively seeking to reach out and connect with more people in their community.

realise that there are more individuals

like them out there. Now, through TikTok,

she stays in touch with many others in the

"Finding acceptance and belonging has been a lifelong struggle for us," says Badi. So she wants to deepen her understanding of the community, their rights, and the challenges they face.

Badi, reflecting on past struggles, notes, "When we had nothing, society spit on us. Now, we're stable, and no one dares to speak against us. If anyone questions our relationship, I simply tell them, 'What's the difference between a man and a woman living together and two women living together? We're simply living our lives, just like you are."

When Badi sees younger individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community, she is always willing to offer support, whether it's financial or emotional. Having experienced the challenges of finding shelter and acceptance firsthand, she empathises with their struggles.

Despite limited resources, she's eager to help because she believes that even small gestures of encouragement or seeing someone similar to oneself can make a big difference in a world that may feel hostile.

They're also planning to get an official marriage certificate now that same-sex marriage laws are changing.

However, Badi also holds the perspective that love alone isn't always sufficient. She thinks that young people should not be carried away by the over-the-top romanticised portrayal of love in movies where eloping is fun, as per her, real-life love requires resilience and determination.

In 2007, Nepal's Supreme Court recognised LGBTQ+ rights under the Yogyakarta Principles. But despite a 2015 recommendation for same-sex marriage legalisation, no laws have been made on the subject, leaving queer couples in

Though Nepal recognised its first samesex marriage in 2023, bureaucracy and court cases hinder most couples

'Loving someone shouldn't be this challenging. We shouldn't have to face such struggles. However, in the society we live in, where we're labelled as abnormal and





Badi crafting a madal



Badi and BK during a day out at a park in Tulsipur.



challenging.

AARATI RAY

abitra Badi Nepali, a 51-year-old

cis-gendered woman from

Haattikhawa Nayabasti, Tulsipur,

Dang, runs a small business sell-

ing madal (a traditional Nepali

drum). She lives with her partner for 27

years, 50-year-old Bimala BK, also a

cis-woman. Their life together has been

challenging in a society where heterosex-

hood village, where they became friends

at the age of nine. Despite living a kilo-

metre apart, they frequently met while

tending to their cattle, eventually

becoming best friends. "We used to herd

she never shared their interest in boys.

Without resources like today, they had

no way to understand their feelings for

Initially, both of them believed their strong connection was simply friendship.

It wasn't until their families began

arranging marriages for them that they

else was a wake-up call. It was then that I

understood I loved her and couldn't

imagine life without her," recalls Badi.

However, acknowledging their love was

lies pushed them to split and marry

others, unable to accept their feelings.

Relatives blackmailed and harassed them,

threatening to file a case to keep them

"The prospect of marrying someone

realised their feelings ran deeper.

Badi felt different from her friends as

Their love story began in their child-

ual relationships are the norm

together," recalls Badi.

ho knew what Taylor Swift's latest era would bring? Or even what it would sound like? Would it build off the moodiness of 'Midnights' or the folk of 'evermore'? The country or the '80s pop of her latest re-records? Or its two predecessors in black-and-white covers: the revengepop of 'Reputation' and the literary Americana of 'folklore'

'The Tortured Poets Department', here Friday, is an amalgamation of all of the above, reflecting the artist who-at the peak of her powers—has spent the last few years re-recording her life's work and touring its material, filtered through synth-pop anthems, breakup ballads, provocative and matured considerations.

In moments, her 11th album feels like a bloodletting: A cathartic purge after a major heartbreak delivered through an ascendant vocal run, an elegiac verse, or mobile, synthesised productions that underscore the powers of Swift's story-

And there are surprises. The lead single and opener 'Fortnight' is '1989' grown up-and features Post Malone. It might seem like a funny pairing, but it's a long time coming: Since at least 2018, Swift's fans have known of her love for Malone's 'Better Now'

'But Daddy I Love Him' is the return of country Taylor, in some ways—fairytale songwriting, a full band chorus, a plucky acoustic guitar riff, and a cheeky lyrical reversal: "But Daddy I love him / I'm having his baby / No, I'm not / But you should see your faces." (Babies appear on 'Florida!!!' and the bonus track 'The Manuscript' as well.)

The fictitious 'Fresh Out The Slammer' begins with a really pretty psych guitar tone that disappears beneath wind-blown production; the new wave-adjacent 'My Boy Only Breaks His Favorite Toys' brings back 'Barbie': "I felt more when we played pretend than with all the Kens /

'Cause he took me out of my box. Even before Florence Welch kicks off her verse in 'Florida!!!', the chorus' explosive repetition of the song title hits hard with nostalgic 2010s indie rock, perhaps an alt-universe Swiftian take on Sufjan Stevens' 'Illinois'.

As another title states, 'So Long, London', indeed.

It would be a disservice to read Swift's songs as purely diaristic, but that trackthe fifth on this album, which her fans typically peg as the most devastating slot on each album—evokes striking parallels to her relationship with a certain English actor she split with in 2023. Place it next to



Taylor Swift.

a sleepy love ode like 'The Alchemy', with its references to "touchdown" and cutting someone "from the team" and well ... art imitates life.

Revenge is still a pervasive theme. But where the reprisal anthems on 'Midnights' were vindictive, on 'The Tortured Poets Department'," there are new complexities: 'Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?' combines the musical ambitiousness of 'evermore' and 'folklore'—and adds a resounding bass on the bridge—with sensibilities ripped from the weapons-drawn, obstinate 'Reputation'. But here, Swift mostly trades victimhood for self-assurance, warts and all.

"Who's afraid of little old me?" she sings. "You should be," she responds.

And yet, 'The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived' may be her most biting song to date: "You didn't measure up in any measure of a man," she sings atop propulsive piano. "I'll forget you, but I won't ever forgive," she describes her target, likely the same "tattooed golden retriever," a jejune description, mentioned in the title track.

Missteps are few, found in other mawkish lyrics and songs like 'Down Bad' and 'Guilty as Sin?' that falter when placed next to the album's more meditative pop

Elsewhere, Swift holds up a mirror to her melodrama and melancholy-she's crying at the gym, don't tell her about "sad," is she allowed to cry? She died inside, she thinks you might want her dead; she thinks she might just die. She listens to the voices that tell her "Lights, camera, bitch, smile / Even when you want to die," as she sings on 'I Can Do It with a Broken Heart', a song about her own performances—onstage and as a pub-

"I'm miserable and nobody even knows!" she laughs at the end of the song before sighing, "Try and come

star who burned fast and bright-an early "It girl" and Hollywood sex symbol subject to vitriolic gossip, a victim of easy, everyday misogyny amplified by celebrity. Once Bow's harsh Brooklyn accent was heard in the talkies, it was rumored, her career was over. In life, Bow later attempted suicide and was sent to an asylumthe same institution that appears on 'Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?' 'Clara Bow' works as an allegory and a cautionary tale for Swift, the same way

Mac star. Swift sings about a tortured poet, but she is one, too. And isn't it great that allowed herself the crea-

