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Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani (centre right), with President Ramchandra Paudel as he receives a guard of honour at the airport in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

### TODAY

### NATIONAL

In a bid to ensure their quality, the Department of Drug Administration is preparing to carry out on-site tests of medicines. The DDA has trained 28 drugs inspectors and technicians for the purpose. **Pg 2** 

**The Supreme Court has scrapped a provision in the Electronic** Procurement System Directive-2023, which made it mandatory to publish procurement notices only in the electronic medium. **Pg 3** 

### OPINION

Mallory's last letter from Everest: Odds of reaching top were '50 to 1 against us'

Mallory and Irvine were last seen alive on June 8, 1924 when they were said to be still going strong some 900 feet beneath the summit.

### BRIAN MELLEY/ASSOCIATED PRESS LOS ANGELES, APRIL 23

In his final letter to his wife before he vanished on Mount Everest a century ago, George Mallory tried to ease her worries even as he said his chances of reaching the world's highest peak were "50 to 1 against us"

ing the world's highest peak were "50 to 1 against us". The letter, digitised for the first time and published online on Monday by his Cambridge University alma mater, expressed a mix of optimism, exhaustion and the difficulties his expedition encountered on their

quest to be the first party to conquer the peak. "Darling I wish you the best I can—that your anxiety will be at an end before you get this—with the best



### President asks emir for Bipin Joshi's release from Hamas captivity

The Gulf emirate of Qatar is keen on diversifying areas of cooperation with Nepal and investing in hydropower projects.

### ANIL GIRI KATHMANDU, APRIL 23

Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani arrived in Kathmandu on Tuesday afternoon on a two-day state visit in what is the most high-profile visit from the emirate to Nepal since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1977.

Al Thani had arrived at the invitation of President Ramchandra Paudel, who welcomed the guest at the Tribhuvan International Airport upon his arrival from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Vice President Ramsahay Prasad Yadav, Speaker Dev Raj Ghimire, Chairman of the National Assembly Narayan Dahal, ministers and heads of the security agencies were present at the special function organised at the airport upon the emir's arrival, a statement issued by the Office of the President said.

Al Thani is the highest-ranking head of state visiting Nepal from the West Asia or Gulf region.

After the ceremony, the emir left for Sheetal Niwas for a courtesy meeting with President Paudel. The government declared a public holiday on Tuesday in honour of the state visit by the emir. Heavy security has been deployed in Kathmandu for the safety of the state guest. Nepal Army Lieutenant General Ashok Sigdel is leading the security deployment that comprises security personnel from the Nepal Army, the Armed Police Force, the Nepal Police and the National Intelligence Department, said a senior security official.

Upon the emir's arrival at Sheetal Niwas, he was welcomed by President Paudel. According to the Office of the President, besides President Paudel, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Narayan Kaji Shrestha, Minister for Energy and Water Resources Shakti Basnet, Foreign Secretary Sewa Lamsal, Secretary at President's Office Dilliram Poudel, as well as advisers to President Poudel, among others, were present at the meeting.

President Paudel appealed to the emir for his support and intervention in securing a safe release of Bipin Joshi, who is believed to be in Hamas captivity following their October 7 attack on Israel. Nepal has made repeated requests to Qatar and other nations and international humanitarian organisations to help with Joshi's release. Responding to the President's request, the emir assured that he would try his best to secure Joshi's safe release, Suresh Chalise, foreign relations adviser to President Paudel, told the Post.

"Joshi's safe release is one of our prime concerns, and the President asked for the emir's support in securing it," Kiran Pokhrel, press adviser to President Poudel, told the Post.

Qatar maintains good relations with Palestine and Hamas and has been working to broker a deal to end the fighting between Hamas and Israel.

Qatar has been working to broker a deal to end the fighting between Hamas militants and Israel.

The National Human Rights Commission also had requested Qatar's Human Rights Committee to take the initiative to locate Joshi. The commission made the request in writing and also during face-to-face meetings with the officials from the Qatari committee, according to Surya Dhungel, a commissioner at the constitutional human rights watchdog.

In the meeting with President Paudel, the emir vowed to boost bilateral engagements with Nepal and gradually increase investments, according to Chalise. "We will diversify the socio-economic support provided to Nepal," Chalise quoted the emir as saying during the meeting with the President. >> Continued on page 3

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The Maoist leadership has realised that Nepal is India-locked for all practical purposes, *CK Lal* argues. Pg 4



### □ WORLD

Asia was the world's most disaster-hit region from climate and weather hazards in 2023, the United Nations said on Tuesday, with floods and storms the chief cause of casualties and economic losses. **Pg 6** 

### SPORTS

**Inter Milan have dominated Italian football this season and when the** final whistle blew on their 2-1 win at AC Milan, marking the club's 20th Serie A title, it was a moment of sweet triumph for Simone Inzaghi's men. **Pg 7** 



ty will be at an end before you get this—with the best news," he wrote to Ruth Mallory on May 27, 1924 from Camp I. "It is 50 to 1 against us but we'll have a whack yet & do ourselves proud."

It remains a mystery whether Mallory, who once famously said he wanted to conquer Everest "because it's there", and climbing partner Andrew Irvine reached the summit and died on the way down or never made it that far. Mallory's body was found 75 years later far below the peak, but Irvine's has never been located. The first documented ascent came nearly three dec-

ades later when New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Nepal's Sherpa Tenzing Norgay scaled the mountain on May 29, 1953. Magdalene College posted the letters British mountaineer George Mallory with Andrew Irvine at the base camp as they get ready to climb Everest in June, 1924.

online to mark the centenary of Mallory's ill-fated attempt to stand atop the world.

>> Continued on page 2

# Chhau sheds reappear. Deep-rooted tradition, failed campaign blamed

Four years ago, a one-off campaign was launched by the government to dismantle menstruation sheds, but there was no follow-up.



POST PHOTO: MENUKA DHUNGANA

A woman with her child pictured outside a makeshift chhau goth (menstruation shed) in Biratolli village in Mangalsen Municipality of Achham in this recent photo.

### MENUKA DHUNGANA

ACHHAM, APRIL 23

In ward 5 of Dhakari Rural Municipality in Achham district, a 23-year-old woman lives in a chhau shed outside her house for three days every month during her menstrual period.

"Four years ago, with the help of security personnel and all three levels of government, a campaign

was launched to demolish chhau goth [menstruation sheds] and put an end to this deep-rooted practice," said Thapa.

"After the authorities demolished the sheds, I started staying in a room at my house during my periods, but after a couple of months, I was compelled to stay in a tarpaulin tent outside the house every month. Later, everyone in our village erected chhau sheds again, and currently all the girls of the village live in sheds during three days of menstruation," Thapa added.

Despite various functions and campaigns organised by the government and international and local development organisations, the chhaupadi tradition—an outdated social practice in which menstruating girls, women, and postpartum mothers are deemed impure and banished into seclusion for three days—still prevails in various districts of the Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces.

The civil and criminal codes enforced in 2017 have criminalised chhaupadi.

>> Continued on page 2



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### NATIONAL

### DISTRICT DIGEST

### Arsonist arrested after 20 years of crime

MAHOTTARI: Police have arrested a fugitive after 20 years of the crime in Mahottari district. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Santulal Jaiswal, Rakesh Yadav, 40, was arrested from his residence in ward 8 of Loharpatti Municipality The Supreme Court had sentenced him to seven years in prison on December 31, 2018, for setting fire to 12 houses at Khuttapipradhi in 2004 Police apprehended him based on a tip-off. According to Jaiswal, Yadav was presented before the Mahottari District Court on Monday before being sent to prison to serve his term

### **Bardiya Hospital launches** dialysis service

BARDIYA: Bardiya Hospital in Gulariya has started providing dialysis service. Health Minister of Lumbini Province Dipendra Kumar Pun formally initiated the service amid a function on Tuesday. According to Dr Subhash Pandey, the medical superintendent at the hospital, two doctors and 10 staff nurses have been deployed to run the dialysis service round-theclock. "The patients need not to go to other districts or neighbouring India for dialysis service now onwards. The federal and provincial governments provided financial support to operate the service," said Pandey.

### Ilam ready to conduct by-election



**ILAM:** The Office of Chief Election Officer in Ilam, a hill district of Koshi Province, is all set to conduct the by-election slated for Saturday in constituency No 2. The polling officers assistant polling officers and election employees set off for the designated places after receiving election materia als and other logistics on Tuesday. According to the election office, a total of 745 employees and around 3,000 security personnel have been mobi lised for the by-election in Ilam-2.

### Nepal drugs regulator to conduct on-site testing of medicines

Ensuring medicine quality remains a challenge due to chronic deficiencies at the Department of Drug Administration.

### **DOST REPORT**

KATHMANDU, APRIL 23

In a bid to ensure the quality of medicines being prescribed to patients, the Department of Drug Administration (DDA) has been preparing to carry out on-site tests of medicines

For that the national drugs regulatory body has imparted training to its 28 drugs inspectors and technicians, who will be deployed to hospitals across the country.

"A four-day field-based screening training for drug inspectors has been completed today," said DDA Director General Narayan Prasad Dhakal. "Our drug inspectors carried out testing of drugs at Bir Hospital as a demonstration on Tuesday.

Officials at the department said many countries have been practicing drug test ing outside the laboratory, which gives immediate results within minutes of the collection of samples. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided technical as well as financial support to carry out field based screening training.

Officials said that basic qualities of the drugs-identification, disintegration, visual inspection for cracks, splitting, capping and cavitation, as well as contamination, foreign matter, presence of empty capsule, stickiness, color and odor of the solution, taste of liquid, labeling, brand name, generic name, among others, will be examined during on-site testing.

During demonstration testing carried out at Bir hospital on Tuesday, metronidazole of three different companies--two Nepali companies and one of Indian companies were examined. Officials said that they did not find any problems in the medicine samples collected randomly from pharmacies operating near the hospital.

Ensuring quality of medicine in Nepal has always become an issue, as the national drug regulatory body strug-

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Sinamangal, Kathmandu invites Electronic Bids from eligible bidders for the

procurement of Goods "Supply, Delivery, Installation, Testing and

gles with a shortage of staff, and its laboratory doesn't have capacity to carry out testing on time.

Drug inspectors deployed from the DDA collect drugs through the random sampling methods and send them for testing in the government's laboratory If drugs are found problematic or substandard, the department directs the manufacturing companies concerned to recall those drugs from the market. However, the department does not have an effective mechanism to ensure the recall

The drugs regulator has been struggling with shortage of staff and inadequate lab facilities.

In most cases, delays in testing at the laboratory mean that results come in only after all the substandard drugs have been sold in the market.

Experts say the use of substandard medicines could adversely affect the patients' health.

While thousands of medicines manufactured by national as well as international pharma companies and are being sold from pharmacies across the country, DDA inspectors collect only around 1,000 samples from the market in a year. The inspection work is especially daunting because DDA has just around two dozen drug inspectors tasked with monitoring over 21,000 registered pharmacies and thousands of others unregistered pharmacies.

And it takes several months to examine some medicines as the DDA's laboratory is understaffed with several posts for technicians remaining vacant. The department allows the drug manufacturing companies to supply medicines into the market directly from the factory.

### George Mallory held dim hopes of summitting Everest, his last letter shows

### >> Continued from page 1

The collection, which had previously been available to researchers, also includes letters he wrote from the battlefront in World War I and correspondence he received from others, including his wife.

The only surviving letter his wife wrote from England during the expedition was sent as his party sailed toward Bombay. It recounts a recent snowstorm, how her bank account was overdrawn and how she fell off a ladder before telling him how much she missed him.

"I know I have rather often been cross and not nice and I am very sorry but the bottom reason has nearly always been because I was unhappy at getting so little of you," Ruth Mallory wrote on March 3, 1924. "I know it is pretty stupid to spoil the times I do have you for those when I don't."

In his final six-page correspondence to his wife, addressed to "My dearest Ruth," George Mallory speaks of trials and triumphs as the party slowly made its way up the mountain, setting up higher camps and then retreating to lower elevation to recover.

'This has been a bad time altogether," Mallory wrote 12 days before he was last seen alive. "I look back on tremendous efforts & exhaustion & dismal looking out of a tent door and onto a world of snow & vanishing hopes — & yet, & yet, & yet there have been a good many things to set on the other side.

cough "fit to tear one's guts" that left him sleepless and made climbing difficult. He described a near-death plunge into a crevasse when he failed to detect it beneath a blanket of snow.

"In I went with the snow tumbling all around me, down luckily only about 10 feet before I fetched up halfblind & breathless to find myself most precariously supported only by my ice axe somehow caught across the crevasse & still held in my right hand," he said. "Below was a very unpleasant black hole.'

Mallory said only one member of the party remained "plum fit" and they planned to rest up for two days before pushing for the summit, which was expected to take six days.

Mallory and Irvine were last seen alive June 8, 1924 when they were said to be still going strong some 900 feet (274 metres) beneath the 29,035 feet (8,850 metres) summit. Mallory's body was found at 26,700 feet (8,138

metres). A group of mountaineers who tried in 2007 to reconstruct Mallory's ascent were unable to determine if the pair made it to the top.

'50 to 1 against us.'

"I still believe the possibility is there they made it to the top, but it is very unlikely," said Conrad Anker, who participated in a documentary recreating the climb and who had discovered Mallory's body in 1999.

In Mallory's final letter to his wife he says, "the candle is burning out & I must stop." He signs off: "Great love to you. Ever your loving, George.'

### Chhaupadi tradition persists despite ban

### Continued from page 1

The practice of chhaupadi is not only discriminatory against women, but is also life-threatening, as seen from reports of girls and women dying in chhau sheds due to cold, suffocation, snakebites, and wildlife attacks surfacing frequently.

In Achham, the sheds that were demolished four years ago have started to be built again, and women have resumed living in them during menstruation due to lack of attention from cal units and government ag Four years ago, Parbati Budha Rawat, a 20-year-old woman from Siddheshwari in ward 3 of Sanphebagar Municipality of the district, died in a chhau shed due to asphyxiation caused by a woodfire she had lit to keep warm before going to



Comp I

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, 2024 | 02

May 27. 1924 My devert Ruth This is going to be the scrappient letter \_ a time limit for the mil has and and hearput a + this morning when I might have been writing to m Durs busy dring a communique at Norten's request, 2 I find it an impossible back to write that sort of thing up here. Any way such as it is you will have read it, so that is some satisfaction.

Dear Girl , this has been a bad time altogether . I look back on fremenoms efforts a exhaustion a dismil looking out of a tent dror on to a work of snow & vanwhing hopes - o get & get , & get there thave been a 5 good many thing to set in the other side. The part has pluger hype wonderfully. The first visit to the North Col was a triumph for the old gang. North of did the job . the cutting of curse was all my part - so far as force dimby above Camp TII Denjoyed the anguest of the ice wall a crack the crix of the route, & making the steps too withe steep final 200 ft. Obeld did very useful work leading the way on from the camp to the cal; I was prac-tically bust to the world a contract have lead that half have though I still had enough mind to direct him. We made a viry bad braining the descent. It surflendy recursed to

This is an undated photo provided by Magdalene College Cambridge on Monday of part

of the final letter that mountaineer George Mallory wrote to his wife before he vanished

on Mount Everest a century ago. The letter has been digitised. In the letter, Mallory tried

to ease her worries though he said his chances of reaching the world's highest peak were

Mallory said he had a nagging

- Commissioning of Refueller Parts at NOC/AFD, Sinamangal, Kathmandu, Nepal" under International Competitive Bidding (ICB) - Single Stage Two **Envelope Bidding Procedure.**
- Under the Single Stage, Two Envelope Procedure, Bidders are required to submit 2. simultaneously two separate Bids, one containing (i) the Technical Bid and the other (ii) the Price Bid as per the provision of ITB 23 of the Bidding Document.
- Eligible Bidders may obtain further information and inspect the bidding documents 3. at the office of NOC/AFD, Sinamangal, Kathmandu, Nepal or or may visit e-GP system of PPMO: www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp.
- A complete set of Bidding Document for the task in English is available online and 4. may be downloaded for e-submission from the e-GP system of PPMO: www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp. Bidders, submitting their bid electronically, should deposit the cost of the Bidding Document (non-refundable fee) of Nepalese Rupees 3,000.00 or equivalent United States Dollars (USD) to the NOC/AFD's Current Account Number: 169010000047001, Rastriya Banijya Bank Ltd., Trivuwan Antarastriya Bimansthal, Airport Gauchar, Kathmandu branch and scanned copy in PDF format of the voucher/receipt of the deposited amount must be submitted/uploaded along with the Electronic Bid.
- 5. Pre-bid meeting shall be held at NOC/AFD, Sinamangal, Kathmandu, Nepal at 1:00 P.M. local time on 24 May 2024.
- 6. Interested eligible and qualified Bidders are required to submit the Electronic Bids through e-GP system of PPMO: www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp on or before 1:00 P.M. local time on 9 June 2024.
- Submitted Electronic Bids will be opened in the presence of Bidder's 7. representatives who choose to attend at 1:15 P.M. local time on 9 June 2024 at the office of NOC/AFD, Sinamangal, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Bids must be valid for a period of 90 days counting from the date of bid opening 8. and must be accompanied by a scanned copy of the bid security in PDF format, amounting to a minimum of Nepalese Rupees 370,000.00 or equivalent USD which shall be valid for a minimum of 30 days beyond the bid validity period (i.e. Valid up to a minimum of 6 October 2024).
- 9. If Bidder wishes to submit the bid security in the form of cash, the cash should be deposited in NOC/AFD's Current Account Number: 1690100000047001. Rastriya Banijya Bank Ltd., Trivuwan Antarastriya Bimansthal, Airport Gauchar, Kathmandu branch and scanned copy in PDF format of the voucher/receipt of the deposited amount must be submitted/uploaded along with the Electronic Bid.
- 10. Other details are available in the e-GP system of PPMO: www.bolpatra. gov.np/egp.

bed. According to the police, after Parbati's death, her brother-in-law Chhatra Rawat, was arrested by the police after finding out he had forced her to live in the shed during her menstruation. But the police failed to build a strong case against him because nobody from the family or outside registered any complaint.

Based on the police report, Chhatra was presented at the Achham District Court and was only sentenced to serve 45 days in prison for forcing the victim to live in a shed, said police

Clause 168 (3) of the Civil and Criminal Code provisions threemonth jail and a fine of Rs3,000 against anyone found guilty of forcing a woman to live in a chhau shed during menstruation. The punishment is more severe for those holding public positions

After the formation of local governments under the federal structure in 2017, the trend of destroying chhau sheds gained momentum with sporadic campaigns aimed at ridding the villages of menstrual taboos.

On January 22, 2020, the federal Ministry of Home Affairs directed the administration in 19 districts of Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces to dismantle chhau sheds.

According to the District Administration Office of Achham, District under the instruction of the federal Ministry of Home Affairs, more than 10,000 chhau sheds were torn down in 91 wards of ten local units of the district in around a month. Similarly, the local people's representatives, police, and local residents came forward to support the campaign, but it was later stopped after a couple of months.

Neither the police administration nor the local units gave continuity to the campaign.

Bindu Rawal, deputy chair of Bannigadi Jayagad Rural Municipality, said that currently her office has no plan to dismantle chhau sheds, or monitor them, or conduct any awareness programmes.

"How can we stop such a deep-root-



This recent photo shows people rebuilding a menstruation shed, which was dismantled during a government campaign four years ago, in ward 5 of Kamalbazar Municipality in Achham.

ed tradition without coordinated efforts and federal funding? Due to lack of budget the rural municipality is unable to launch any effective programmes to end the practice." said Rawal.

Meanwhile, Netrakala Devi Shahi, deputy chair of the Dhakari Rural Municipality of the district, said that nobody in her local unit has rebuilt chhau sheds after they were dismantled a few years ago. But some people still send their women to animal sheds during the period of menstruation.

"Women are still living in barns or under tarpaulin tents after the chhau sheds were demolished, and if we take any action about it, it can cause a major dispute in the rural municipality because of their old beliefs," said Shahi.

According to the officials of other local units in the district, currently, nobody is conducting awareness campaigns or making efforts to tackle the chhaupadi tradition.

Srijana Saud, a 24-year-old woman from ward 3 of Mangalsen Municipality, said until four years ago, due to the fear of the law and legal action, women in the district used to stay at home during their periods, and nobody would force them to live outside.

"But women are returning to sheds, barns, and tents again because the campaign was discontinued. If the campaign had been given continuity, things would have been much better by now," said Saud. "The provincial and federal governments only seem to show concern about the Chhaupadi issue when a serious incident occurs. Women always suffer in this patriarchal society, especially in the rural areas where getting help from anybody is very hard," Saud added.

"The monsoon and winter are very difficult for the people living in higher altitudes, and in such harsh weather conditions, women are forced to live outside during menstruation. However, some women willingly go to live in chhau sheds as well due to superstition and old beliefs," said Shushila Thapa, a women's rights activist from Sudurpaschim. "This practice can only be stopped if all three governments and government authorities work in coordination. The practice is widely followed in the remote areas of Achham, Doti, Bajura, and Bajhang districts. The government should work continuously in those areas to educate and make people aware until the people themselves put an end to the practice," said Thapa.

Senior Superintendent of Police Prajwal Maharjan, spokesperson of Sudurpaschim Provincial Police, said that there is not official data on how many women died in chhau sheds, but since the fiscal year 2006-2007, at least 19 women died, and almost all of them were from remote areas.

"Since the fiscal year 2006-7, altogether 14 women died in Achham, two in Doti, and three in Bajura. Even after the tragic deaths, nobody has lodged any complaints, so police could not do anything," said Maharjan. "We have not conducted any monitoring programme since the last campaign to demolish chhaupadi sheds because we have not received new instructions from higher authorities, agencies, or the local units where the practice continues. Also, police cannot intervene in such matters because that could spark social disputes," Maharjan added.

### Court scraps provision to publish public procurement notices only through e-medium

A division bench of the top court repealed the provision as it contradicted the existing legal provision.

#### POST REPORT KATHMANDU. APRIL 23

The Supreme Court has scrapped a provision in the Electronic Procurement System Directive-2023 which made it mandatory to publish procurement notices only through the electronic medium.

A division bench of the top court repealed the provision as it contradicted the existing legal provision. The Advertising Association of Nepal had challenged the controversial directive in the top court.

"The provision to limit public procurement only to the electronic medium contradicts the Public Procurement Act," reads the full text of the January verdict released on Monday. "The provision is, therefore, scrapped."

With the court order, notice of all the public procurements must be published in national and international newspapers.

A division bench of Justices Sushma Lata Mathema and Abdul Ajij Musalman had ruled the directive cannot supersede any Act. The Act says the notice of the national level bidding must be published in a national newspaper while the one related to the international bidding must be published in an international newspaper.

The Public Procurement Monitoring Office issued the directives with the provision to exclude the newspapers from publishing the bidding notice. The office planned to publish the notice only in the electronic procurement system. Defending the move before the court, the government had argued that the electronic procurement process is more transparent and reliable. It had also argued that accessing the notice from the electronic medium was easier than it was in the

newspaper. The Mathema-led bench, however, didn't buy the argument and issued the verdict as demanded by the advertising association. The plaintiffs had argued that limiting the procurement only to the electronic medium in countries like Nepal where internet penetration and the digital literacy is low can not be justified on any ground.

The umbrella body of the advertising agencies had moved the top court on November 29, 2023. The directive came into implementation with the start of the current fiscal year in mid-July. The verdict was issued two months after the writ petition was filed. However, it took another three months for its full text to be out. The advertising companies had criticised the directive, claiming it contradicted the Act.

In its petition, the advertising association also had demanded an order to scrap the Advertisement Board. The court, however, refused to act as per its demand.

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# No immediate chance of Congress, UML partnering for poll reforms, leaders hint

As rumours swirl of two biggest parties uniting to topple Maoist-led government soon, UML leaders defend the coalition.

### PURUSHOTTAM POUDEL KATHMANDU APRIL 23

With a fractured election mandate resulting in political instability from federal to provincial governments, there is growing sentiment in favour of amending the constitution to change the current electoral system.

Soon after the change in power-sharing at the centre, almost all provincial governments have faced the problem. The CPN (Maoist Centre) ditched its earlier coalition partner Nepali Congress on March 4 and stitched a new ruling coalition with the CPN-UML.

The electoral system is the reason behind the political instability, argue some political leaders. They also point to the need for constitutional amendment to address the issue. For instance, the mixed electoral system is often blamed for unstable governments.

"The electoral system we are practising has been giving us fractured mandates, resulting in no single party winning a majority in Parliament," chief whip of the Congress Ramesh Lekhak told the Post. "Therefore, public sentiment is building in favour of amending the constitution to reform the electoral system."

The UML chief whip, Mahesh Bartaula, also stands on the same ground as Lekhak on electoral reforms. But, Bartaula said, constitutional amendments to reform the electoral system would not happen immediately.

"Indeed, the mixed electoral system that we are practising is not yielding desired results. Instead, it is causing political instability," the UML chief whip told the Post. "If needed, our party is open to discussing its remedy."

For one, the parties whose political agendas do not align should not be allowed to form poll alliances, says Bartaula. "If we can control this practice of parties with differing ideologies forming alliances, this electoral system too can function well," added Bartaula.

Though some leaders are in favour of immediate constitutional amendment in order to give the country a semblance of stability, a two-thirds majority in the lower house of parliament is needed to do so.

This means 182 seats in the 275-strong House. For that, Nepali Congress, the largest party in Parliament with 88 seats, and the UML, the second largest with 78 seats, need to come together. Even after that 16 more MPs' support is needed, but there will be a possibility of gaining that support if the two big parties make a joint effort, experts say.

"Constitutional amendment is necessary to address the political instability that we are facing today," political analyst Arun Kumar Subedi told the Post. "If the Congress allies with political forces other than the UML, chances of a constitutional amendment will be slim. Therefore, if the political parties are considering changing the electoral system by amending the constitution, the Congress and the UML should come together."



History suggests that the Congress and the UML have cooperated only in special cases

also be done even if one among the two big parties sit in an oppositional bench.

But a close aide of Deuba, on condition of anonymity, claims that should the Congress and UML stand together for constitutional amendment it will not be only for electoral reform, they will also address other pressing issues of the country.

But Bartaula ruled out a power alliance with the Congress. "Reforming the election law might be one thing which will take its due course; it is not a matter of a day or two. However, our party is not considering a power equation with the Congress anytime soon," Bartaula stressed.

At an event organised by the UML to mark the Diamond Jubilee of the formation of the Nepal Communist Party on Monday, Maoist chair Dahal

At an event organised to mark the Diamond Jubilee of the formation of the Nepal Communist Party on Monday, Maoist chair Dahal and UML chair Oli stood together to strengthen their cooperation.

and UML chief KP Sharma Oli stood together to strengthen the cooperation between the communist parties. Amid the rumoured possibility of a governing partnership between the Congress and the UML in the near future, the chairmen of two communist parties vowed to strengthen the ties between the two communist forces.

But the Congress leaders claim that

ment led by Girija Prasad Koirala, and in the 2015, the two parties shared power in the government led by Sushil Koirala that promulgated the constitution of Nepal through the second constituent assembly.

Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba's close aide NP Saud told the Post that the two major political parties in the nation only work together on exceptional conditions.

UML vice-chair Surendra Pandey, too, denied the possibility of forming an alliance with the Congress. "Congress General Secretary Gagan Thapa has been talking about cooperation between the two parties, but we have had no concrete discussion on the matter," Pandey told the post. "Politics is a game of possibility and we cannot completely rule out the prospect of future cooperation."

General Secretary of UML Shankar Pokharel, while addressing a press conference at the party headquarters Chyasal a few days ago, had said his party will be ready to work with the Congress if needed.

"Naturally, when there is a crisis in democracy and challenges in the stability, the UML will not hesitate to work together with the Congress," POST FILE PHOTO

seats, after no single party won a majority. Its chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal formed the government on December 25 of that year with the support of the UML, the second largest party in Parliament, along with the newly emerged Rastriya Swatantra Party and other fringe outfits.

But in February 2023 Dahal ditched the UML within two months of government formation and rebuilt an alliance with the Congress. On March 4, Dahal rejoined the UML to form the government.

Since the first constituent assembly election held in 2008, Nepal has been practising First-Past-the-Post and Proportional Representation (PR) election, a mixed electoral system that gives no party a clear majority in Parliament, resulting in a coalition government.

One and a half years since the November 2022 federal and provincial elections, the federal and provincial governments have seen many ups and downs. The instability in central politics has made provincial governments unstable every time.

Political leaders are using provincial governments as a power-sharing platform. The change in the power equation at the centre results in an immediate change in the provincial governments. At least 18 governments have formed in the seven provinces since the election held in November 2022.

"Most of the time the provincial governments come into being due to the change in alliance at the centre," UML deputy general secretary Prithvi Subba Gurung told the Post.

But Gurung does not see any fault in the election system, denying the possibility of amending the election law.



People walk past bougainvillea blossoms in front of the Supreme Court at Ramshahpath in Kathmandu on Monday.

A question naturally arises: why should the Congress and the UML agree to power-sharing to amend the constitution and reform the electoral system, if it is a need of the day? It can UML is open.

History suggests that the Congress and the UML have cooperated only in special cases. The two parties first cooperated in the Krishna Prasad Bhattarai-led government during the promulgation of the constitution of Nepal back in 1990. Similarly, for the second time in the 1996 election, the two parties cooperated in the govern-

ne salu.

But while addressing a national gathering of UML representatives on April 20, he said his party would like to continue the present coalition of the UML and the Maoists until the next election.

Following the election in November 2022, the government has been headed by the CPN (Maoist Centre), the third largest party in Parliament with 32 "Instability in provincial governments is not due to the failure of our election system or the provincial structures. It is a failure of our central-level leaders. Otherwise, they would not let developments at the centre affect the functioning of the provinces," Gurung said.

### PM Dahal will seek Qatari investment for major project, hydropower

#### >> Continued from page 1

The Qatari side showed keen interest in increasing investment in Nepal's hydropower sector, according to Chalise.

During the meeting, President Paudel praised Qatar's role in maintaining global peace, particularly in the West Asia region. The emir praised the role of Nepali nationals living and working in Qatar for their contribution in building infrastructure of Qatar and for their continued work even during the Covid pandemic.

According to the Office of the President, Paudel and Al Thani discussed protecting mountains, water resources conservation and climate change.

President Paudel stressed the need for collaboration between Nepal and Qatar in order to mitigate adverse effects of climate change, protect mountains, save water resources and maintain environmental balance, according to a statement issued by the Office of the President.

"The common challenge of the present world is how to save the earth from the adverse effect of climate change, how to protect the mountains, sources of water and how to save the environment. This is the issue of human existence and particularly developing countries should be sensitive towards this issue. All the countries of this world should come together on these pressing issues," Paudel said at the meeting, according to the statement.

Paudel expressed his concerns about the escalating conflict in the Middle East and told the emir that Nepal is in favour of peace while praising the role being played by Qatar as a peace broker, said Kiran Pokhrel, press adviser to the President. In response, the emir said the entire world has been impacted by climate change and countries should work together to adhere to the agreements and accords to mitigate its adverse effects.

"If all countries adhere to past agreements in mitigating the adverse effect of climate change, it will give positive results and create a happier situation," the statement issued in Nepali by the Office of the President said, quoting the emir.

The emir stated that his visit would be fruitful in exploring more avenues of cooperation, and further strengthening bilateral ties between Nepal and Qatar, said the statement issued by the office.

The emir also praised the contribution of Nepali citizens to the development of Qatar.

The emir also praised the contribution of Nepali citizens in the development of Qatar and thanked President Paudel for their efforts.

As many as 400,000 Nepalis are currently living and working in Qatar.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Dahal and Emir of Qatar will hold delegation level talks where the two sides will explore, discuss and reach some understanding in areas like hydropower, agriculture and



Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal welcomes Qatar Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani at Kathmandu airport on Tuesday.

tourism.

The prime minister and Emir Al Thani are expected to discuss several issues of bilateral interest including inviting Qatari investments in various sectors of Nepal, and renewal of labour agreement, among other things, according to officials. The prime minister is likely to make a request for Qatari investment for a big project, either the construction of an international airport or a hydropower project, according to officials privy to the meeting's agenda.

During Tuesday's meeting, Paudel stated that Nepal and Qatar should

work together in areas like trade, tourism, and investment, and reminded the role of Nepali migrant workers in Qatar's prosperity.

After the delegation level talks, President Paudel hosted a state banquet in the honour of the Qatari Emir and the visiting delegation.

From the Qatari side, Sheikh Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, the chief of the Amiri Diwan, Jassim bin Saif Al Sultani, Minister of Transport, Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Qassim Al Thani, Minister of Commerce and Industry, Soltan bin Saad Al Muraikhi, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Saad bin Nasser Kabbi, Director of Studies and Research Department of Amiri Diwan, Sheikh Faisal bin Thani Al Thani, Chief of Asia and Africa Investments of Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), Yousef Sultan Laram, Director of Asian Affairs Department of Ministry of Foreign Affairs are accompanying the Emir.

Similarly, Sultan Bin Ghanim Alhodaifi, chief of Emir's private affairs office, Talal bin Almas Al Sulaiti, assistant director of the Amiri Ceremonies department and Mansour Faleh Al Hajri, personal assistant of Amir are accompanying the Qatari Emir on the visit.

Emir Al Thani arrived in Kathmandu after completing a state visit to Bangladesh leading a delegation of over 150 people, according to a security official in Kathmandu.

Besides his special private jet, three other planes carrying members of the delegation, officials, members of the business communities and security personnel also landed in Kathmandu on Tuesday afternoon.

Al Thani is scheduled to depart on Wednesday afternoon following delegation level talks with Prime Minister Dahal and a luncheon hosted by the prime minister in honour of the emir and his delegation.

### OPINION



### Putting out the flames The government must bring together various stakeholders to make wildfires a rarity.

It's the season of inferno all over again. Almost everywhere in the country, you see amber and smoke in forests and grasslands. These fires are not "wild" per se, as most of them have been deliberately started by unscrupulous people with little concern for the environment or the society at large. And, as expected, the wildfires have entered villages, turning homes and sheds into ash and killing people and animals alike.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction Portal of the Government of Nepal has said 14 people were killed, 49 injured, and 1,132 families affected in fire incidents in the past month alone. But more than numbers, they represent the high cost of our neglect and lack of preparedness. What is more distressing is that fire incidents are an annual occurrence and we continue to maintain the same lackadaisical attitude we had adopted last year and the years before. Last year, 112 people were killed, 506 injured, and 5,328 families affected in such fire incidents.

History repeats itself tragically each year, killing people and animals and destroying property and environment, and it is as if we are doomed to repeat old mistakes. It's an age-old general knowledge that the dry season comes with the risk of wildfires. Scientists say it is sometimes possible for wildfires to start on their own, but most of the time, they are mediated by human activity. Coupled with the propensity of the wild to catch fire during drought is the pseudo-scientific notion among the people that burning stubble makes the land more fertile, paving the way for better-quality grass or crops. It is this dangerous mix of the natural and the human factors that makes late spring and early summer a season of fires.

In being reluctant to mend our ways, we are subjecting ourselves to the vicious cycle of death and destruction each year—a travesty of civilisation indeed. The sheer scale of fire this season is rendering responders helpless, as they have neither the human resources nor equipment to deal with the crisis. Therefore, the best way out is to find ways to stop the generation of wildfires in the first place. And for this, the government must begin a massive awareness campaign at the community level against the use of wildfires for generating so-called organic fertiliser.

There are in fact legal provisions in place to punish those who start wildfires. Outside protected areas of forests, the prevailing Forest Act provisions for a fine of Rs 60,000 and or three years of jail, in addition to covering the losses. These are big penalties, yet also meaningless if they cannot be enforced. With years of experience in dousing wildfires—or the lack thereof—the government is well aware of the highrisk zones for wildfires. It should work with local levels to prevent, monitor and respond to wildfires in such localities. Additionally, there should be more investment in firefighting resources. Finally, preventing wildfires is not the prerogative of one ministry or department, as beyond human cost it also imposes social and environmental costs. So what is needed is a multi-dimensional, multi-pronged approach that brings together various stakeholders to make wildfires a rarity.

### Geoeconomics of alternative energy

### SOUTH SIDE

Political negotiations can help Nepal benefit from Chinese power projects as long as India is kept out of the arrangement.

CK LAL



It is possible to be pedantic about the plausibility of the term, but Israel has made no attempts to hide its genocidal intentions in Gaza. The Israeli military's relentless campaign is an exemplar of the textbook definition of genocide: "the deliberate and systematic destruction of a group of people because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, or race".

The geoeconomics—the interplay of international economics, geopolitics and strategy—of fossil fuels prevents Western powers from speaking against the country they helped create and sustain in the middle of the Arab World to protect their long-term interests. Volatile West Asia holds almost half of the known fossil fuel reserve globally.

In the early 1970s, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) refused to sell crude to the USA. The subsequent Oil Shock prompted a serious search for substitutes for fossil fuel. The petroleum lobby, however, has succeeded in scuttling most such efforts in the countries of the West.

The energy angle of the Ukraine-Russia conflict is less discussed. However, Russian natural gas continues to light large parts of Europe, and its oil supply powers the engines of economic growth in China and India. There must be a reason the USA has decided to pump in \$61 billion and \$26 billion aid into the foreign frontiers of the West in Ukraine and Israel, respectively. Fossil fuel supplies have to be secure, and their prices must remain stable to maintain the hegemonic order of the West. A lead in the search for alternative energy will determine the future of geoeconomics and ultimately redefine the geopolitics of the 21st century.

Alternative energy is an umbrella term encompassing everything from water, wind and the sun to the gas produced from animal waste. These green and renewable sources that do not use the earth's natural resources or harm the environment are sustainable and dependable alternatives.

Other than environmentally harmful fossil fuels and the radioactive risks of



nuclear power, all sources are also relatively safer alternatives for producing, distributing, and using energy. With the supply and price of fossil fuels becoming more volatile and the hazards of nuclear power plants becoming more alarming, rethinking alternatives has become imperative. The Chinese have been putting much effort into exploring options at home and abroad as they are less invested in traditional energy sources.

### **Emergent Beijing**

While commercial vehicles with internal combustion engines (ICE) still dominate the highways, electric vehicles (EVs) are increasingly becoming popular as modes of personal transport. Concerns about carbon emissions and their consequences on climate change will likely push the conversion from ICE to EV even further and faster. China has emerged as the biggest producer of EVs, the largest fabricator of batteries and the processor of more than half of its crucial inputs, such as lithium, cobalt and graphite globally.

With an installed capacity of 22,500 megawatts, the "Three Gorges Dam" is the most productive hydroelectric dam in the world. China is way ahead of everyone else in developing renewable energy. In 2023, the country's installed solar electric power generation capacity reportedly rose by 55.2 percent, and wind power generation capacity jumped by 20.7 percent. The Chinese are also world leaders in hydrogen cell production and use.

It is almost impossible to ensure energy security, let alone produce enough electricity for export, without some form of Chinese participation in financing, construction and operation of power plants in Nepal. India's commitment to purchasing 10,000 MW of electricity over the next decade through a long-term Power Trade Agreement (PTA) has opened the door for foreign direct investment in renewable energy. Nevertheless, the latch of procedural impediments remains in place.

Buried inside a 40-page bureaucratese of the Indian Ministry of Power, the 6.3 Eligibility criteria of the "Procedure for Approval and Facilitating Import/ Export (Cross Border) of Electricity by the Designated Authority" sets forth the condition that the power export entity not be "any natural/ legal personality(ies) whose effective control or source of funds or residence of beneficial owner, is situated in/ citizen of a third country with whom India shares land border and that third country does not have a bilateral agreement on power sector cooperation with India."

In effect, the procedural guideline says without mincing its words: You can have anyone build, own and operate electricity plants in Nepal, but please keep China out of it! But it also contains a caveat: "For any relaxation in this provision, the Designated Authority will consult Ministry of Power and Ministry of External Affairs." Perhaps it implies that political negotiations can help remove the latch and allow Nepal to benefit from Chinese participation in power projects as long as the bugbear of Indiansthe Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)-is kept out of the arrangement.

The Maoist leadership has realised that Nepal is India-locked for all practical purposes. There is a limit to what trans-Himalayan connectivity can do to transform a remittance-dependent and consumption-based economy. Finance Minister Barshaman Pun met Chinese ambassador Chen Song before embarking on his Washington trip to court the Bretton Woods sisters—the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—for more funds.

If the Chinese investment in hydroelectric projects in Nepal is routed through international institutions, Indians will probably have a face-saving excuse to draw downstream benefits from the regulated water flow of POST FILE PHOTO

tributaries of the Ganga River. Even though the funding from the Asian Development Bank has failed to change the fate of the Gautam Buddha International Airport in Bhairahawa, getting international agencies and multinational corporations involved in the hydroelectric projects of Nepal is perhaps a more workable idea than handing them over to Indian entities and face an inefficient execution or invite their ire by getting the Chinese parastatals on board.

### **Enigmatic Washington**

Apart from both Asian countries being landlocked, there is another relationship between Laos and Nepal that is not often mentioned in polite conversations. When Americans were raining cluster bombs upon the newly independent territories of the former French Indochina in the name of saving Vietnam from communists, the US dumped "more than 2.5M tons of ordnance on Laos during 580,000 bombing sorties—equal to a planeload of bombs every eight minutes, 24 hours a day, for nine years", the devastating campaign was partly being directed from Kathmandu.

It is said that when Ellsworth Bunker hesitated to accept the offer of being appointed the US ambassador to Vietnam, President Lyndon B. Johnson gave him the authority to use a special aircraft to visit his spouse Carol Laise who happened to be the US ambassador in Nepal. Even after the war ended, the USA made little effort to help Laos stand on its feet.

Despite the risk of a possible debt trap, the Chinese have invested heavily in Laotian hydropower and turned it into the battery of Southeast Asia with an economic growth rate of 7 percent. The Laos-China Railway is a technological marvel. The possibility of Indo-Chinese cooperation with European assistance for hydropower development in Nepal must be on the agenda of the Nepal Investment Summit 2024.

### THEIR VIEW Opposition space

### The language of political control

### Our vocabularies today

the 1940s, the proliferation of euphe-

dystopian literature was not his depiction of the modern surveillance state only part of the story. What we are facis not state-generated Newspeak but rather a politically correct vocabulary that has emerged from the mechanisms of liberal democracy itself. In Democracy in America, Alexis de Tocqueville warned against the unchecked power of the majority in a society free from traditional constraints and dedicated to equality. In traditional societies, he noted, "few new words are coined, because few new things are made." By contrast, democratic countries embrace change for its own sake, a characteristic evident not just in their politics but also in their language. Moreover, Tocqueville observed that such societies tend to assign grandiose titles to modest occupations, apply technical jargon to everyday items, change the meanings of words so they become ambiguous, and replace idiomatic expressions with abstract ones. He states, "I had rather that the language should be made hideous by words imported from the Chinese, the Tartars, or the Hurons, than that the meaning of words in our language should become indeterminate.' Unlike the largely homogeneous American society Tocqueville described, today's linguistic excesses are not driven by the tyranny of the majority. Instead, they are initiated by minorities, or lobbies claiming to speak for them, seeking "equal recognition" for their inherent or chosen identities. This shift imposes a moral obligation on outsiders to use language that avoids causing "mental distress" to members of these minority groups. Democratic governments begin to regulate language to prevent distress from escalating into political disorder. Consequently, the category of "hate crime" has been introduced into the statute books. But the biggest problem with today's democratic rhetoric is its tendency to frame international relations in moral terms, dividing the world into "good' and "bad" countries. While this dichotomy might boost morale, it impedes efforts to achieve global peace. As the British historian A.J.P. Taylor famously observed, "Bismarck fought 'necessary wars' and killed thousands; the idealists of the twentieth-century fight 'just' wars and kill millions.'

### The spotlight intensifies on India's democratic institutions, particularly the role of the opposition.

As India undergoes another monumental electoral exercise, the spotlight intensifies on the condition of its democratic institutions, particularly the role and effectiveness of the opposition. A vibrant democracy thrives not only on the strength of its government but also on a robust, competent opposition that can hold the government accountable and offer viable policy alternatives.

Unfortunately, India's primary opposition party, the Congress, appears to be in a prolonged state of decline, which bodes ill for the health of its democracy. The dominance of the Nehru-Gandhi family within the Congress party has been a double-edged sword. While providing a semblance of continuity and a rallying symbol for party loyalists, this dynastic tradition has stifled innovation and excluded potentially transformative leaders from rising. The repeated electoral debacles should serve as a wakeup call. The party must democratise its leadership and embrace merit over legacy. However, internal reform is only one facet of the challenge facing Congress. The party also confronts a transformed political landscape where the rhetoric and policies of the current government resonate deeply with the electorate.

The ruling party's narrative, centred around national rejuvenation and economic development coupled with cultural nationalism, has a compelling appeal that the opposition has struggled to counter effectively. To regain relevance, Congress must articulate a clear and forward-thinking vision for India's future. This vision must extend beyond mere criticism of the ruling party or nostalgic evocations of past glories. It must address the pressing issues facing the country, from educational reform and healthcare improvement to economic inequality and climate change. Moreover, it must present these plans not just as alternatives to the current government's policies but as superior choices that resonate with the day-to-day concerns of ordinary Indians. Moreover, the Congress party must harness modern communication strategies to connect with voters.

In an era where social media and digital platforms are crucial battlegrounds for public opinion, merely pointing to a skewed media landscape or decrying censorship is not enough. The party needs to engage citizens directly, using every tool available to cut through the noise and make its case creatively. Finally, the emergence of regional parties as significant players in various states, while enriching India's democratic tapestry, poses another challenge for Congress in its bid to position itself as a credible national alternative. The party must find ways to collaborate with these regional forces without losing its distinct political identity, crafting a coalition that can effectively challenge the ruling party's dominance at the national level.

The future of India's democratic health relies significantly on the resurgence of an effective opposition. The Congress is best positioned to undertake this role. But to do so, it must embrace radical internal reform, articulate a compelling alternative vision for India, and modernise its engagement with voters. Only then can it hope to revive its fortunes and contribute effectively to India's democratic process.

-The Statesman (India)/ANN

### emerge from the mechanisms of liberal democracy.

ROBERT SKIDELSKY



Language shapes our thinking and perception of the world and, consequently, what happens in it. That is why I worry less about the troubling state of the world nowadays than about the words we use to describe it.

For example, we use the word "war" to describe a phenomenon that exists independently of our term for it. But if we consistently describe and perceive the world as hostile, it tends to become so. By the same token, declaring that we are on the verge of World War III, as many do nowadays, could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I first started contemplating the impact of evolving language on thought in the 1970s, after reading George Orwell's essay "Politics and the English Language." At the time, I was struck by the increasing vagueness of our political language.

Writing in 1946, Orwell noted that the harrowing events of his time—the mass atrocities of Nazism, Soviet communism, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—necessitated the use of doublespeak as a numbing agent. "Political speech and writing," he wrote, "are largely the defence of the indefensible." As an example, Orwell cited the euphemistic terms "transfer of populations" and "rectification of frontiers," used to describe the forced relocation of millions of people.

Orwell viewed such euphemistic absurdities as a disease of democracy. "When one watches some tired hack on the platform mechanically repeating the familiar phrases," he wrote, "one often has the curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy."

By the 1970s, many writers shared Orwell's concerns about the deterioration of public language. Although the world had undoubtedly improved since misms had intensified. Faul Johnson characterised this trend as the "effort of the well-meaning to avoid hurting others' feelings." Why, I wondered, have we become so sensitive?

The vagueness of public language has markedly increased over the past few decades. Consider, for example, the Royal Society of Arts' aim to foster a "resilient, rebalanced, and regenerative" world, or Ian Hogarth's commitment, as head of the UK government's AI Foundation Model Taskforce, to forging a "nuanced" policy that "manages downside risks while protecting the upside of this technology."

Such mission statements raise the question: Are public communication professionals handed playbooks filled with the right adjectives, acronyms, and stock phrases to construct sentences "tacked together like sections of a prefabricated henhouse," as Orwell described them, or do they simply imitate what they perceive as



industry best practices?

In his dystopian novel 1984, Orwell explores how manipulating language can control thought, thereby rendering "thoughtcrimes" impossible. To be sure, Big Brother's telescreens, successors to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, represent a technologically advanced form of surveillance foreshadowing today's ubiquitous CCTV cameras.

But Orwell's greatest contribution to

tion of the modern surveillance state, but rather "Newspeak": If everyone used only the words sanctioned by Big Brother, laws and surveillance would become redundant.

Winston Smith, the novel's protagonist, is tasked with rewriting history. His duties include altering yesterday's news stories to conform with the latest policy shifts, removing outdated inscriptions, statues, memorial stones, and street signs, and burning old books. Meanwhile, his colleague Syme is responsible for "destroying [hundreds of] words" every day or translating them into Newspeak, the only language "whose vocabulary gets smaller every year." As Smith explains, "In the end, we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it.

Orwell regarded the purification of thought through language as a hallmark of totalitarianism. But as the "cancelling" or shaming of individuals

for using "inappropriate" language

shows, even democracies are not

immune to such practices. In his 1978

novel 1985, the British author Anthony

Burgess observed, "If I, a writer, use

words that betray even grammatical

discrimination, I am in danger of legal

While much of today's language

policing represents a deliberate

attempt at social engineering, this is

punishment."

Skidelsky is Professor Emeritus of Political Economy at Warwick University. – Project Syndicate

### MONEY

#### FOREX 133.66 **US** Dollar 142.62 Euro 165.58 Pound Sterling 146.65 Swiss Franc **KRISHANA PRASAIN** 86.28 Australian Dolla **KATHMANDU, APRIL 23** Canadian Dollar 97.52 The investment from development finance institutions (DFIs) is crucial 98.09 Singapore Dollar for Nepal as it stands at a critical juncture to graduate from the least devel-Japanese Yen (10) 8.64 oping countries (LDCs) category by 18.44 Chinese Yuan 2026, experts and participants at a function said on Tuesday. Saudi Arab Riyal 35.64 DFIs are specialised foreign government-backed institutions that invest 36.64 Qatari Riyal in commercially feasible private-sector projects in low- and middle-income 3.61 Thai Bhat countries where projects face financ-36.39 ing gaps and are unserved by private **UAE** Dhiram banks. 27.96 Malaysian Ringgit Overall, between 2014 and 2023, DFI investments reached around \$1.09 bil-9.7 Korean Won (100) lion, most absorbed by the energy Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

PRICE PER TOLA **BULLION** Rs 135,500 Fine Gold Rs 1,660 Silve Silve SOURCE: FENEGOSID

### **BIZLINE**

### **Citizens Bank launches** Fonepav credit card



KATHMANDU: Citizens Bank on Tuesday launched the Fonepay Credit Card. According to the statement issued by Fonepay, Nepal's largest payment net work, the eagerly awaited Fonepay Credit Card is now technically and operationally ready and Citizens Bank has become the first bank to introduce it to its customers. The virtual credit card scheme is expected to redefine the payment card industry and customer experience. Fonepay Credit Card is a fully functional Digital Card and customers can avail of a card and transact from their mobile banking application. This card scheme facilitates a wide array of digital transactions across the Fonepay network where customers can make QR pay ments, online or e-commerce pay ments, and leverage advanced features like seamless EMI conversion. The Fonepay Credit Card empowers customers by providing seamless onboarding and delivery of the card within a few seconds in their mobile banking apps, the company says. Customers can benefit from the new and advanced features of the Fonepay card, enhancing their full control over card management, limit control and statement delivery, setting it apart from conventional payment cards. "We are excited to introduce the Fonepay Credit Card Scheme as the latest addition to our suite of digital payment solutions," said Diwas Kumar, CEO of Fonepay. "Our mission has always been to prioritise customers and this new product embodies that commitment. With the aim of democratising credit, we're ensuring that credit access is within reach of all.'

### Investment from DFIs crucial for Nepal's graduation

Structural issues, regulatory ambiguities and political uncertainty have prevented big foreign investment in Nepal, says British envoy.

sector.

On Tuesday, Invest for Impact Nepal, a platform to support foreign direct investment into Nepal, powered by British International Investment (BII), the Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank (FMO) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation Nepal (SDC), organised the second edition of the DFI mission to promote private investment in Nepal

The three-day event is seeing participation of as many as 30 delegates from 14 institutions.

Danielle Meuwly, the ambassador of Switzerland to Nepal, speaking during the inaugural session, said that during the 60 years of partnership between Nepal and Switzerland, both countries have made several important milestones and the second DFI mission is one of them, building on the outcomes of first DFI mission organised in the spring of 2023.

"During the first mission of the DFI, we had the opportunity to meet the Ministry of Finance, Nepal Rastra Bank and the Security Exchange Board of Nepal," Meuwly said. "We had the opportunity to discuss the concerns jointly and suggested some ideas to the government," she added.

"Now, a year later, many of these recommendations have been acknowl-



### The three-day event brings together 30 delegates from 14 institutions.

edged and steps were taken to address issues like locking investment, payment before disbursement and decomposing interest rate. This shows that the government has a strong commitment to facilitating DFI investment in Nepal," Meuwly said.

To achieve sustainable and inclusive growth, it will be important that the government and private sector work together to jointly increase investment and strengthen the partnership with DFIs, she said. "And this is why Switzerland supports Invest in Nepal Impact.'

Switzerland joined hands with British International Investment and Entrepreneurial the Dutch

Development Bank FMO with a vision to unlock DFI investment and nurture investment ecosystem, Nepal's Meuwly said.

"At present Nepal needs investment support to generate employment," said Finance Secretary Madhu Kumar Marasini. "We should transform our system and bring more investment, especially from the private sector and DFIs. "Bringing investment from DFIs helps to bring in technology, knowledge and expertise besides money," he PHOTO: COURTESY OF INVEST FOR IMPACT NEPAL

vate sector. "So investment needs to be facilitated by creating a conducive environment," Marasini said.

The government has decided to amend nine laws related to investment through an ordinance as Nepal has planned a third investment summit next week.

Rabi Rayamajhi, the country representative of the BII Nepal, said that in the last 15 years, investment commitment from DFIs has been growing in

The DFI investment commitment in

"The number of DFI investment

the external commercial borrowing window, which allowed the foreign lender [BII] to come and engage with Nepali banks.

According to Rayamajhi, about 59 percent of DFI commitments have come into financial services, 28 percent in energy, 10 percent in the funds and the rest in other sectors, Rayamajhi said.

In terms of product, 84 percent has been invested as debt in hydropower projects or banks, 15 percent in equity, and some DFIs are bringing guarantee instruments as well, he added.

"DFI commitment in Nepal stands for two reasons, one, it is sizable. Compared to the last 15 years of commitment from the Department of Industry that are looking at small-scale investments, DFI investment to date is one-third of it," Rayamajhi said.

"Second, the conversion rate of commitments in Nepal is roughly around 30-40 percent from the general investment but the commitment from the DFI is almost 100 percent materialized. That's the difference in quality investments," Rayamajhi said.

The top five investors in Nepal by commitment in the last 15 years are the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Development Finance Corporation (DFC), BII, the Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank, FMO and the Asian Development Bank.

"There are deep-rooted structural issues, legal and regulatory ambigui ties and political uncertainty in Nepal, which has been preventing the flow of large amounts of investments into Nepal," said Rob Fenn, British ambassador to Nepal. "Removing those hurdles requires a policy change.'

"There are attractive investment opportunities across several sectors in this country. Together DFIs and development partners can unlock the access to finance for those strategic sectors." "Our task is to create a pipeline of investment deals to DFIs in Nepal and development partners can help bridge the massive gap between supply and demand for investment here," Fenn said.

### EU to greenlight new spending rules

### AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

STRASBOURG (FRANCE), APRIL 23

The EU hopes to move towards healthier public finances after the expected passage of reforms to the bloc's spending rules on Tuesday in the European Parliament.

Brussels has spent two years negotiating an overhaul of its budget rules that have pitted fiscally hawkish states against the bloc's most indebted nations

EU negotiators finally reached agreement on the reform in February and now the European Parliament must give its final green light. It will

become official once the EU's 27 member states endorse the text. Once in place, the new rules force governments to get national spending under control, but they give greater leeway for investment in critical areas like the green and digital transitions, as well as defence.

rules without changes to make them practicable, despite public debt ballooning across the bloc

Known as the Stability and Growth Pact, the rules stipulate a country's debt must not go higher than 60 percent of gross domestic product, with a public deficit of no more than three percent.

These goals remain in place, though there was fierce debate over how much the limits should be relaxed to give more room for investment.

"This reform constitutes a fresh start and a return to fiscal responsibility at the same time," said Markus Ferber, an EU lawmaker for the parliament's biggest centre-right group, the EPP.

The old fiscal rules had many to fiscal health.

The new rules will apply to member states' 2025 budgets.

Germany and its "frugal" allies pushed to impose a quantifiable minimum effort to reduce debt and deficits, but critics have slammed its complexity.

Left-wing groups say the new rules are a tool for imposing austerity on Europe.

In an open letter on Monday, Belgian, French, Italian and Spanish trade unions hit out at rules they said were "unfit for (the) future"

"This agreement, forced by the austerity approach of some European capitals, will require member states to reduce their debts rapidly and in ways unsustainable: this will mark a return to austerity," they warned.

# Pakistan eyes new IMF loan by

### REUTERS ISLAMABAD, APRIL 23

Pakistan could secure a staff-level agreement on a new long-term larger loan with the International Monetary Fund by early July, its finance minister said on Tuesday.

The country's current \$3 billion arrangement with the fund — which it secured last summer to avert a sovereign default — runs out in late April.

The \$350 billion South Asian economy faces a chronic balance of payment crisis. The government is seeking a larger, long-term loan to help billse economic activity and finar cial markets so it can execute longdue, painful structural reforms.

in Washington," he said.

He said he did not know at this stage the volume and tenure of the longer programme, although he has previously said that he was looking for at least a three-year bailout plan.

Both sides have said they were already in discussions for the new loan. A formal request, however, will be made once the current facility expires, with the IMF board likely to meet late this month to approve the second and last tranche of the current support scheme.

The economy is expected to grow by 2.6 percent in the fiscal year 2024, the nce minister said, adding that the inflation was projected at 24 percent, down from 29.2 percent in fiscal 2023. It touched a record high of 38 percent last May. Aurangzeb said structural reforms would include increasing the government's tax revenue-to-GDP ratio to 13 percent to 14 percent in next two or three years from the current level of around 9 percent, reducing losses of state-owned enterprises through their privatization, and better management of the debt-laden energy sector.

### said. He said that the private sector's contribution to the country's GDP is 80 percent and more than 86 percent of employment is generated by the pri-

Nepal.

2023 was \$300.75 million

commitments has spiked after 2018 as that year the government opened up

early July, finance minister says

### Tattva Farms launches flavoured jaggery in the market



KATHMANDU: Jaggery, traditionally known as Shakhar and Gund and used in sweet dishes, is gradually vanishing from Nepali kitchens. However, Tattva Farms is reviving this staple by introducing it in various flavours to the market, preserving its original and medicinal properties. Tattva Farms offers a variety of products including Original Jaggery Powder, Cinnamon Jaggery Powder, Saffron Jaggery Powder, Masala Tea Jaggery Powder, Turmeric Jaggery Powder, Black Pepper Jaggery Powder, and Ginger Jaggery Powder, catering to various tastes and uses. Himanshu Tripathi, the founder of Tattva Farms, said that jaggery powder in different flavours could be enjoyed not only with ghee and curd, but also with roti and rice, and can be used in bakery products too. Currently, Tattva Farms products are available at Bhatbhateni supermarket, Big Mart, Salesberry and other general grocery stores in Kathmandu Valley, various cities in Nepal's east, as well as Pokhara, Bhairahawa, Butwal, and other west ern cities. Jaggery powder is currently available in two jars of 300 grams and 600 grams. The establishment of the industry in Nawalparasi's Pratappur employs about 200 people, while also benefiting the families of sugarcane farmers.

The old rules had been suspended between 2020 and 2023 to help the European economy weather the Covid pandemic and then Russia's assault on Ukraine, which sent energy prices soaring.

There was widespread agreement that there could be no return to the old weaknesses and loopholes and suffered from almost non-existent enforcement," he added.

The new text provides looser fiscal rules adapted to each state, allowing big spenders a slower route back to frugality.

The tailormade approach means each country presents its own adjustment trajectory to ensure debt sustainability. That gives them more time if they undertake reforms and investments and allows a less painful return

The Greens group in the parliament warned the reform was an "economic disaster" and said it would limit public expenditure on the green transition.

"It is clear that private investment will not be able to pay for the transition on its own, especially if there are no public funds to offer incentives, and we cannot leave the costs of the transition to citizens alone," the group said.

If secured, it would be the 24th IMF bailout for Pakistan.

"We are still hoping that we get a staff-level agreement by June or early July," Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb told a conference in Islamabad.

He returned from Washington last week after leading a team to attend the IMF and World Bank's spring meetings. "We had very good discussions



### A dollar surge propelled by a strong economy, sticky inflation and geopolitical tensions have unnerved policymakers from Tokyo to Beijing

The dollar is at its highest since November against other major currencies, poised for a fourth straight month of gains.

Its latest rally, following stronger-than-expected March inflation numbers that pushed back U.S. rate cut bets even further, highlights how sensitive currency markets are to relative interest rate changes.

"We track investor flows, and the dollar buying since the CPI release has been strong," said Tim Graf, head of macro strategy for Europe at State Street Global Markets. Here are some pressure points sparked by dollar strength.

#### Japan and Korea

Tokyo's yen warning light is flashing.

One dollar is worth just under 155 yen, its strongest since 1990, and Japan has warned that it might start buying yen to support its value.

Even after Japan ended eight years of negative rates last month, the gap between Japanese and U.S. rates remains wide and is set to remain so for some time, keeping the yen weak. The yen, the worst performing G10 currency this year, has fallen 9 percent.

The dollar has risen around 7 percent on Korea's won in the last month alone and is at its highest in a year. Last week, the United States, Japan and South Korea agreed to "consult closely" on currency markets in a rare warning.

"A statement like this suggests if Japan's Ministry of Finance or equivalent authorities in South Korea wanted to go ahead and moderate the volatility of their exchange rate, the U.S.

### Where king dollar is causing pain the most



wouldn't necessarily object," said James Lord, head of FX and emerging market strategy at Morgan Stanley.

### **China and Emerging Asia**

Dollar strength is causing pain across Asia.

India's rupee and Vietnam's dong are at their weakest ever. Indonesia's rupiah is at its softest in four years and its central bank is talking about intervention although this is much more common in emerging markets.

Traders are also watching China's yuan, onshore and offshore which has depreciated much less than peers.

A weak yuan would help Chinese exporters but could encourage capital outflows.

"The offshore yuan is definitely top of the list" when it comes to Asian currencies under pressure, said Adarsh Sinha co-head Asia rates and currencies strategy at Bank of America.

"It's one of the more popular ways to be short because it hasn't moved.'

#### **Euro Zone**

The euro, trading just above \$1.06, is by no means among the weakest major currencies versus the dollar. But notably, banks have recently downgraded euro/dollar forecasts.

Before the latest U.S. inflation data, markets had largely seen the European Central Bank and Federal Reserve as moving in lockstep on rate cuts. Now the ECB is expected to cut in June and an anticipated Fed cut in September has pushed the euro to five-month lows.

"If the euro continues to weaken below \$1.05 and oil prices go up, then you have an inflationary tailwind, and so the ECB will have to be very careful after a first rate cut," said Societe Generale's head of corporate research FX and rates Kenneth Broux.

#### Sweden

Importing inflation via a weaker currency is a particular problem for small economies.

While Swedish inflation is falling, driving expectations for a May rate cut, central bank Deputy Governor Per Jansson reckons further currency weakness could create problems for the inflation outlook. Sweden's crown has shed about 8 percent against the dollar so far this year and could weaken to 11.14 per dollar in six months versus 10.89 now, Goldman Sachs forecasts.

"The higher for longer narrative in the U.S. creates a problem for (the Riksbank)," said UBS FX strategist Yvan Berthoux. "As monetary conditions (in Sweden) start to loosen in the near term it widens the rate differential, and that is negative for the currency."

#### Switzerland

It is not bad news everywhere.

The Swiss franc has weakened 7.5 percent versus the dollar so far this year, partly due to March's surprise Swiss rate cut.

Unlike most of its peers, however, the SNB is concerned about currency strength, given worries about struggling exporters.

"Inflation keeps surprising on the downside, so that implies monetary conditions are a bit too restrictive, meaning (the SNB) are happy to see the franc weaken," said Berthoux. UBS sees the dollar climbing to 0.952 francs by year-end from 0.91 francs now.

### WORLD

### Asia hit hardest by climate, weather disasters in 2023: UN

Asia's temperatures last year were nearly two degrees Celsius above the 1961 to 1990 average, UN says.

### AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE GENEVA, APRIL 23

Asia was the world's most disaster-hit region from climate and weather hazards in 2023, the United Nations said on Tuesday, with floods and storms the chief cause of casualties and economic losses.

Global temperatures hit record highs last year, and the UN's weather and climate agency said Asia was warming at a particularly rapid pace. The World Meteorological Organization said the impact of heatwaves in Asia was becoming more severe, with melting glaciers threatening the region's future water security.

UN weather agency says the impact of heatwaves in Asia is becoming more severe.

The WMO said Asia was warming faster than the global average, with temperatures last year nearly two degrees Celsius above the 1961 to 1990 average. "The report's conclusions are sobering," WMO chief Celeste Saulo said in a statement.

"Many countries in the region experienced their hottest year on record in 2023, along with a barrage of extreme conditions, from droughts and heatwaves to floods and storms.

"Climate change exacerbated the frequency and severity of such events, profoundly impacting societies, economies, and, most importantly, human lives and the environment that we live in."

The State of the Climate in Asia 2023 report highlighted the accelerating rate of key climate change indicators such as surface temperature, glacier retreat and sea level rise, saying they would have serious repercussions for societies, economies and ecosystems in the region.

"Asia remained the world's most disaster-hit region from weather, climate and water-related hazards in 2023," the WMO said.

The annual mean near-surface temperature over Asia in 2023 was the second highest on record, at 0.91 degrees Celsius above the 1991-2020 average, and 1.87 C above the 1961-1990 average. Particularly high average temperatures were recorded from western Siberia to central Asia, and from eastern China to Japan, the report said, with Japan having its hottest summer on record.

As for precipitation, it was below normal in the Himalayas and in the Hindu Kush mountain range in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile southwest China suffered from a drought, with below-normal precipitation levels in nearly every month of the year.

The High-Mountain Asia region, centred on the Tibetan Plateau, contains the largest volume of ice outside of the polar regions.

Over the last several decades, most of these glaciers have been retreating, and at an accelerating rate, the WMO said, with 20 out of 22 monitored glaciers in the region showing continued mass loss last year.

The report said 2023 sea-surface temperatures in the northwest Pacific Ocean were the highest on record.

Last year, 79 disasters associated with water-related weather hazards were reported in Asia. Of those, over 80 percent were floods and storms, with more than 2,000 deaths and nine million people directly affected.

"Floods were the leading cause of death in reported events in 2023 by a substantial margin," the WMO said, noting the continuing high level of vulnerability of Asia to natural hazard events.

Hong Kong recorded 158.1 millimetres of rainfall in one hour on September 7 -- the highest since records began in 1884, as a result of a typhoon.

### Pro-Palestinian protests sweep US college campuses following mass arrests at Columbia

Students sympathising with Palestine demand that their schools condemn Israel's assault on Gaza



Several hundred students and pro-Palestinian supporters rally at the intersection of Grove and College Streets, in front of Woolsey Hall on the campus of Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, Monday.

#### ASSOCIATED PRESS NEW YORK, APRIL 23

Columbia cancelled in-person classes, dozens of protesters were arrested at New York University and Yale, and the gates to Harvard Yard were closed to the public Monday as some of the most prestigious US universities sought to defuse campus tensions over Israel's war with Hamas.

More than 100 pro-Palestinian demonstrators who had camped out on Columbia's green were arrested last week, and similar encampments have sprouted up at universities around the country as schools struggle with where to draw the line between allowing free expression while maintaining safe and inclusive campuses.

At New York University, an encampment set up by students swelled to hundreds of protesters throughout the day Monday. The school said it warned the crowd to leave, then called in the police after the scene became disorderly and the university said it learned of reports of "intimidating chants and several antisemitic incidents." Shortly after 8:30 pm, officers began making arrests.

"It's a really outrageous crackdown by the university to allow the police to arrest students on our own campus," said New York University law student Byul Yoon.

"Antisemitism is never OK. That's absolutely not what we stand for and that's why there are so many Jewish comrades that are here with us today," Yoon said.

The protests have pitted students against one another, with pro-Palestinian students demanding that their schools condemn Israel's assault on Gaza and divest from companies that sell weapons to Israel. Some Jewish students, meanwhile, say much of the criticism of Israel has veered into antisemitism and made them feel unsafe, and they point out that Hamas is still holding hostages taken during the group's October 7 invasion.

Tensions remained high Monday at Columbia, where the campus gates were locked to anyone without a school ID and where protests broke out both on campus and outside.

Kathy Manning, a Democrat from North Carolina who was visiting Columbia with three other Jewish members of Congress, told reporters after meeting with students from the Jewish Law Students Association that there was "an enormous encampment of people" who had taken up about a third of the green

"We saw signs indicating that Israel should be destroyed," she said after leaving the Morningside Heights campus. Columbia announced on Monday that courses at the Morningside campus will offer virtual options for students when possible, citing safety as their top priority.

A woman inside the campus gates led about two dozen protesters on the street outside in a chant of, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!" —a charged phrase that can mean vastly different things to different groups. A small group of pro-Israel counter demonstrators protested nearby. University President Minouche Shafik said in a message to the school community Monday that she was "deeply saddened" by what was happening on campus.

"To deescalate the rancor and give us all a chance to consider next steps, I am announcing that all classes will be held virtually on Monday," Shafik wrote, noting that students who don't live on campus should stay away.

Protests have roiled many college campuses since Hamas' deadly attack on southern Israel, when militants killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took roughly 250 hostages. During the ensuing war, Israel has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the local health ministry, which doesn't distinguish between combatants and non-combatants but says at least twothirds of the dead are children and women.

On Sunday, Elie Buechler, a rabbi for the Orthodox Union's Jewish Learning Initiative at Columbia, sent a WhatsApp message to nearly 300 Jewish students recommending they go home until it's safer for them on campus.

The latest developments came ahead of the Monday evening start of the Jewish holiday of Passover.

Nicholas Baum, a 19-year-old Jewish freshman who lives in a Jewish theological seminary building two blocks from Columbia's campus, said protesters over the weekend were "calling for Hamas to blow away Tel Aviv and Israel." He said some of the protesters shouting antisemitic slurs were not students.

# Aide to far-right German MEP arrested for spying for China

### AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

An aide to a German far-right member of the European Parliament has been arrested on suspicion of spying for China, German prosecutors Tuesday, deepenin concerns about foreign interference ahead of June's European elections The allegations, coming a day after three other people suspected of spying for China were detained in Germany, sparked an angry reaction from Beijing, which said the arrest was designed to "smear and suppress" China. It was also a new blow for Germany's farright AfD party, which has been battling a series of scandals, including allegations that some of its members have links to Russia

Chinese opposition figures in Germany, federal prosecutors said in a statement.

The European Parliament lists Jian Guo as an accredited assistant to MEP Maximilian Krah, the AfD party's lead candidate in the forthcoming European serious" and demanded a thorough investigation.

"If it is confirmed that spying for China is happening from the European Parliament, then that is an attack on European democracy from within," she said.

democracy from within," she said. An AfD spokesman described the allegations as "very disturbing" and said the party had no further information on the case.

### 5 migrants die crossing English Channel after UK approves bill

ASSOCIATED PRESS
PARIS, APRIL 23

Five people, including a child, died while trying to cross the English Channel from France to the UK, French authorities said on Tuesday, just hours after the British government approved a migrant bill to deport some of these who entryed the country The Voix du Nord, a regional newspaper, said the bodies were discovered at the beach on Tuesday morning. About 100 migrants were rescued and placed aboard a French navy ship. They will be taken to the port of Boulogne, the paper said.

It came hours after British Prime Minister Rishi

The suspect, identified only as Jian G, stands accused of sharing European Parliament information with a Chinese intelligence service and of spying on Union-wide elections.

Guo is a German national who has reportedly worked as an aide to Krah in Brussels since 2019.

Prosecutors said the suspect "is an employee of a Chinese secret service".

"In January 2024, the accused repeatedly passed on information about negotiations and decisions in the European Parliament," they said.

"He also spied on Chinese opposition members in Germany for the intelligence service."

The European Parliament said it had suspended the aide "with immediate effect" in the wake of the revelations.

German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser called the allegations against Guo "very Krah said he had found out about his assistant's arrest from the press.

"Spying for a foreign state is a serious allegation. Should the allegations prove to be true, this would result in an immediate termination of employment," he said in a statement.

The arrest plunges the anti-Islam, anti-immigration AfD into further turmoil.

Krah was himself caught up in a separate scandal in which it was alleged that some European lawmakers had accepted money to spread pro-Russian positions on a Moscow-financed news website. illegally to Rwanda.

The prefecture responsible for the north of France said in a statement authorities spotted several boats packed with migrants off the coast of Pas-de-Calais, attempting to depart in the early morning.

Several French navy ships, including assistance and rescue tug Abeille Normandie, intervened to rescue "a very overcrowded boat carrying more than one hundred people on board," the statement emailed to The Associated Press said.

"They rescued several people, but unfortunately, five people have died," it said.

The regional prefect Jacques Billant said a woman, three men and a 7-year-old girl died. He said the boat carrying 112 people attempted to sail off the beach in Wimereux. Sunak's latest effort to send some migrants to Rwanda finally won approval from Parliament. The UK government plans to deport some of those who enter the country illegally as a deterrent to migrants who risk their lives in leaky, inflatable boats in hopes that they will be able to claim asylum once they reach Britain.

Human rights groups have described the legislation as inhumane and cruel. Both the United Nations refugee agency and the Council of Europe called on the UK on Tuesday to rethink its plans for fears they could damage international cooperation on tackling the global migrant crisis.

Migrants trying to cross the busy English Channel face drownings and sinking among other deadly incidents, often aboard crowded boats.

An estimated 30,000 people made the crossing in 2023, according to UK government figures.

### Ukraine launches military charm offensive as conscription flags

This softer call-up is being conducted on job-search sites and outreach centres, as well as billboards and social media, and offers a wartime novelty: an element of choice.

### DNIPRO, APRIL 23

Far from the trenches, at orderly new centres across Ukraine, civilian recruiters armed with laptops and info packs offer patriotic volunteers opportunities to join the war.

As Ukraine's efforts to conscript enough men to fight Russia are stymied by public scepticism, defence officials and military units are embarking on a multi-pronged charm offensive to recruit a citizens' army to resist the invasion.

This softer call-up is being conducted on job-search sites and outreach centres, as well as billboards and social media, and offers a wartime novelty: an element of choice.

Candidates can select their precise unit and roles suiting their skills, for instance, as well as how long they will serve.

On city streets, billboards of Ukrainian soldiers implore citizens to join up and defend their homeland, offering QR codes for convenience. Online, the 93rd Mechanised Brigade assures countrymen that "Everyone can do it!" in a glossy video campaign showing civilians, such as a chef and tractor driver, switching to analogous army roles as battlefield cook and tank driver.



#### Serviceman of the 3rd Separate Assault Brigade of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Natalia Kalmykova, a deputy defence minister, said military planners recognised that in a democratic country, giving people some choice could be key in attracting them to the military.

"The people who come to defend our country now are not those who chose the military as their career: it's civilians," she said during an interview in Kyiv. "And civilians are used to being able to choose." Kyiv is desperate to replenish its drained and depleted forces, which are vastly outnumbered and outgunned by Russia along a 1,000-km front as the war enters a third grinding year.

The initial patriotic flood of volunteers who flocked to the army following the invasion of February 2022 has dried up. The government has acknowledged its conscription drive has run into difficulties, with thousands of people evading the draft and some seeking to flee abroad rather than risk the trenches.

A mobilisation law that comes into force next month obliges men to update their draft data with authorities, although it was stripped of tough punishments for draft evaders after a public outcry.

Kyiv is desperate to replenish its drained and depleted forces.

Reuters is the first news outlet to detail the extent of the defence ministry's outreach plan, designed to combat public distrust about enlistment and plug a gaping hole in the military by offering recruits a greater sense of control over their fate.

Thirteen of the new recruitment centres have been opened since mid-February and the government plans to expand the number to 30 by the middle of the year, said Oleksiy Bezhevets, a ministry adviser who is overseeing the drive.

At the first centre, in Lviv, about 300 people visited in the first month,

Bezhevets said, without specifying if any signed up. The defence ministry is also working with four private recruitment companies to fill military vacancies, he added.

He conceded the plans were no "magic pill" for the military, though he said the range of roles needing to be filled was so broad that it didn't matter so much what people chose.

"The main goal is to give people the opportunity to conquer their fears and enter into the military sphere," he said. He was among over a half-dozen people involved in the new drive for voluntary recruits who were interviewed for this article, also including recruiters and service members.

Michael Kofman, a military specialist at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace think-tank, said the recruitment drive was positive for the army but would not be a decisive solution to a severe shortfall of troops that could only be fully addressed by mobilisation. "It likely needs hundreds of thousands of men to sustain the fight—in particular infantry, which few are likely to volunteer for, because it's the most likely combat arm to suffer casualties," he added.

Marines to military intelligence

Ukraine's conscription effort, launched in the wake of the invasion, has been hampered by local media reports of corruption, official abuse and administrative incompetence. Social media has been flooded with clips of officers corralling men off the street or barging into homes.

Common concerns about military service include inadequate training, poor commanders and the fact that there is no cap on the length of service, according to a February poll by Kyiv-based research agency Info Sapiens for media outlet Texty.org.

In the survey of 400 army-eligible men, only 35 percent said they were prepared to serve if called up.

"Somewhere, at some stage, trust was lost," said Bezhevets, the defence ministry adviser. "Right now, our task is to renew it."

Ukraine does not release figures on conscripts or voluntary recruits, which it deems sensitive information. President Volodymyr Zelenskiy nonetheless acknowledged shortcomings in mobilisation when he fired the heads of regional draft offices last August citing reports of corruption and official abuse. Bezhevets said the goal of the defence ministry's recruiting campaign was to triple the number of volunteers who join up. In the longer term, he added, at least a third of Ukraine's armed forces should be staffed through voluntary recruitment.

### THE KATHMANDU POST SPORTS | MEDLEY

# Nagarkoti takes lead after Day I

#### SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, APRIL 23

Bhuvan Nagarkoti carded even-par 68 to take onestroke lead over three golfers on the first day of the Surya Nepal Kathmandu Open, the seventh event under the Surya Nepal Golf Tour 2023-24, at the par-68 Royal Nepal Golf Club on Tuesday.

Former Nepal number one pro Nagarkoti is one shot ahead of Rabi Khadka, Bhuwan Kumar Rokka and Niraj Tamang after they played 1-over 69.

Five pros, Purna Prasad Sharma, Dhana Bahadur Thapa, Jayram Shrestha, Sanjay Lama and Dinesh Prajapati, are tied for fifth at 2-over 70. Pashupati Sharma is 10th at 3-over 71.

Tashi Tsering and Sadbhav Acharya share the lead in the amateur section after they played 4-over 72. The two amateur golfers share the overall 11th position with Subash Tamang, who made the Surya Nepal Golf Tour debut as a professional golfer.

Leader Nagarkoti played 2-over 36 on the back nine and carded 2-under 32 on the back nine. He started the day with a birdie on the first hole but faced three bogeys on the second, third and ninth holes before taking the turn. Nagarkoti carded two straight birdies on the 10th and 11th holes and added another on the 17th hole. He faced a lone bogey of the back nine on the 15th hole.

Another former top pro Khadka took the turn at 4-over 38 after he faced bogeys on the second, third, seventh and ninth holes. He bounced back strongly on the back nine carding 3-under 31 with the help of birdies on the 12th, 13th and 17th holes

Rokka played 1-over 35 on the front nine. He faced bogeys on the first and third holes and suffered a double bogey on the seventh hole against three birdies on the second, fourth and fifth holes. Rokka saved pars on all nine holes of the back nine.

Dharan pro Tamang carded 1-under 33 on the front nine and played 2-over 36 on the back nine. He carded a birdie on the second hole and sank an eagle on the fourth hole. He dropped shots on the third and ninth. After taking the turn, he faced a double bogey on the 11th and dropped a shot on the 13th hole before carding a birdie on the 16th hole.

A total of 41 players-32 pros and nine amateurs—are taking part in the tournament.

Cut will be applied after 36 holes. 21 top scoring professionals with ties (if any) and amateurs who make the pro cut will make it to the final 36 holes.



Bhuvan Nagarkoti is one stroke ahead of Rabi Khadka Bhuwan Kumar Rokka and Niraj Tamang.



## How Inter Milan won its 20th Scudetto

A 2-1 victory at San Siro lifted Nerazzurri 17 points clear of second-placed AC Milan with five matches to spare.

#### **ASSOCIATED PRESS** MILAN, APRIL 23

Inter Milan stormed to a 20th Serie A title and earned a second star on the team shirts after dominating the league just like Napoli did last season.

The Italian title race was expected to be a closer fight this campaign but the defending champions stuttered from the start just as Inter impressed from the outset.

Everything appeared to click seamlessly for the Nerazzurri, who were helped by remaining relatively injury-free, and it was inevitable for a long time when they clinched the league on Monday.

It was even sweeter for Inter that they did so at city rivals AC Milan, who also started the season hoping to secure their 20th Serie A trophy.

The 2-1 victory at San Siro lifted Inter 17 points clear of second-placed Milan with five matches to spare.

### **Impressive Inzaghi**

Inter coach Simone Inzaghi has finally graduated from his 'King of Cups' nickname.

The 48-year-old Inzaghi had never coached a team to a league title despite an impressive list of achievements.

With Lazio and then Inter, Inzaghi won three Italian Cups and five Italian Super Cups, earning him the title of "Re di Coppe" ("King of Cups"). He also steered Inter to the Champions League final last year.

The way he broke his Serie A duck has been particularly outstanding.

Inter ruled over the league. The Nerazzurri lost just one match-in late September-and have by far the best attack as well as the best defence

Inter have 79 league goals, 15 more than the next best attack-Milan-and went on a 13-match winning run in all competitions at the start of the year. That run was halted only last month in a shootout loss at Atletico Madrid in the second leg of the Champions League round of 16.

#### **Timely changes**

Inter have also garnered praise for their attacking flair. The team have

| STANDINGS (TOP SIX) |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Team                | Р  | W  | D  | L  | GF | GA | PT |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Inter Milan         | 33 | 27 | 5  | 1  | 79 | 18 | 86 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| AC Milan            | 33 | 21 | 6  | 6  | 64 | 39 | 69 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Juventus            | 33 | 18 | 10 | 5  | 47 | 26 | 64 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Bologna             | 33 | 17 | 11 | 5  | 48 | 26 | 62 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Roma                | 32 | 16 | 7  | 9  | 57 | 38 | 55 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Atalanta            | 32 | 16 | 6  | 10 | 59 | 37 | 54 |  |  |  |  |  |  |

INSIGHTS

Inter Milan last won Serie A in 2021, followed by AC Milan in 2022 and Napoli last year. Inter have become the second team to win 20 Italian league titles and will have a second star stitched onto

their jersey. A star is awarded for every 10 Serie A titles. Only Juventus

has won more, with a record 36 and thus three stars on its jersev

Lautaro Martinez (league high 23 goals) and Marcus Thuram (12 goals) have provided Inter with 35 goals and 16 assists this season in Serie A, with the team scoring 79 goals in total.

Not only has Inter conceded the least in the league (18 goals) but Yann Sommer has kept the most clean sheets, with 17 in 30 matches.

HOROSCOPE

been entertaining.

That aesthetic has been down to Inzaghi's player management.

While he tends to keep squad rotation to a minimum, he consistently uses all five substitutions available. Inzaghi also rarely uses them before the hour mark, unless a player is on a yellow card. Inter have not had two players sent off for two bookings this season.

### **Smart buys**

There was concern among Inter supporters when Romelu Lukaku and Edin Dzeko departed in the offseason to leave the Nerazzurri without a centre forward.

Those worries didn't last long as new signing Marcus Thuram seamlessly slotted in as Lautaro Martinez's new strike partner.

So much so, that Lautaro and Thuram have taken over from Napoli's Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia as Serie A's most dangerous strike pairing.

The 26-year-old Thuram—the son of former Parma and Juventus defender Lilian Thuram-has 12 goals and seven assists, while Inter captain Lautaro has a league-high 23 goals.

Ānother key signing that initially raised eyebrows was that of veteran Switzerland goalkeeper Yann Sommer for 6 million euros (then \$5.45 million) to replace Andre Onana

That was a fraction of the 51 million euros (\$57 million) that Inter gained from selling Onana to Manchester United, and has turned into a smart business deal.

While Onana has been somewhat

### of a flop in the English Premier League, Sommer has proved ever reliable between the sticks. Not only has Inter conceded the least in the league but the 35-year-old Sommer has kept the most clean sheets, with 17 in 30 matches.

### Lack of challengers

Just under a year ago, Napoli were celebrating their first Serie A title in more than three decades. It must seem as if almost as much time has

passed since then for their fans. Napoli, who are on course for the worst title defence in Italian league history, are on their third coach of the campaign and sit a woeful eighth in the table.

Since 1995, only twice has a team failed to qualify for the Champions League the season after lifting the Serie A trophy.

Roma and Lazio also went through coaching changes after mediocre starts to the season, and a horrendous month for Milan towards the end of last year put paid to their title hopes

That left Juventus the last realistic challenger to Inter-far beyond expectations after a tumultuous year off the field for the Bianconeri. Juventus even moved into the lead in January while Inter were

involved in the Italian Super Cup. But Juventus spectacularly fell away as they failed to win another match for more than a month. The Bianconeri have won just two of their last 12 league matches in a miserable run.

Inter, meanwhile, have churned out the victories in a charmed season.

Inter Milan players and officials celebrate after winning the Serie A title at the San Siro Stadium in Milan on Monday.

After winning eight other trophies (three **Italian Cups and five** Italian Super Cups), Simone Inzaghi claimed his first

league title as a coach.

**CAPRICORN** (December 22-January 19)

Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Fry to look on the lighter side of life, dearest Cancer

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)



ou'll find empowerment through your closest bonds if you choose to look for it, dear Aries. Acknowledge how certain dynamics have evolved over the years, notating which have flourished in mutual respect or decayed through jealousy or miscommunications

### TAURUS (April 20-May 20)



You may find it easier to let go of conflict or disappointments within your relationships. Turn over a new leaf with any peers you've butted heads with this afternoon, maintaining healthy boundaries and a fierce sense of composure.

### GEMINI (May 21-June 21)



You'll find yourself in an efficient and empowered headspace. Use this energy as motivation to scratch items off your to-do list, but remember to include a few agendas that revolve around fun or wellness. Trust in your experience.

### CROSSWORD

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The day could also trigger fresh inspiration, motivating you to pull the trigger on creative projects. Consider how you might include more spiritual practices in your art.

### LEO (July 23-August 22)

If you can work remotely or afford an emotional health day, consider doing so. Give yourself space to unpack emotional weight, find comfort at home, and unapologetically nurture yourself. Don't hesitate to lean on someone special later today.

### VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Speak from a place of depth to truly connect with those you encounter, dear Virgo. Moments of enlightenment that found you vesterday will seem even clearer in the light of day, helping you shed old ways of thinking.

#### lapping into your gratitude can also help you crys tallise plans for the future, and be sure to acknowledge your ability to manifest and persevere. Good vibes flow later today making it easier to make healthy decisions

### **SCORPIO** (October 23-November 21)

You'll feel unstoppable today sweet Scorpion. Now is the time to barrel toward the future, though it'll be important to let go of the unnecessary along the way. You can't be responsible for other people all the time.

#### **SAGITTARIUS** (November 22-December 21)



Your energy levels may feel diminished making it important that you show yourself some grace. Use this energy as an excuse to lay low, letting go of the pressure you feel to respond to socialise, or impress others.



You'll sympathise with others more easily today, dear Capricorn. Don't shy away from group experiences, allowing yourself to see the true beauty within humankind. The more you search for good, the more easily you will find it.

### AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)



Don't apologise for all that you've had to fight for even if you're worried about coming off as slightly intense. Opportunities for prosperity could come into view making it important that you strike when the chance presents itself.

### PISCES (February 19-March 20)



Take what you've learned throughout the last 24 hours, putting into practice any guidance you received from beyond. Stand up for yourself later today as it will be easy to win respect while taking an authoritative stance.

|   |          |    |    |          |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |          |    | IZ         | JDO                | Nk   | Π        |             |        |          |        |              |
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| 3-30-24 © 2024 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS   | 39       |    |    |          | 40 |    |    |    |    |    | 41 |    |    |          |    |            |                    |      |          |             | 9      | 1        |        |              |
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| 43 Tainted  |          |    |    |          |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |          |    |            | DIFFICULTY RATING: |      |          |             |        |          |        |              |

### CULTURE & LIFESTYLE



The film offers a humorous yet insightful perspective on the everyday struggles and complexities of human existence.



(From left) Bipin Karki, Rabindra Singh Baniya and Rabindra Jha in a scene from the film.

#### RISHEKA JOSHI Kathmandu

our years after his film 'Jatrai Jatra' succeeded at the box office, Pradip Bhattarai has returned with another addition to the 'Jatra' franchise, 'Mahajatra'. The smooth storyline and sincere acting makes the film worth watching. The screenplay recognises the contemporary issues of Nepal, ranging from the Kathmandu Metropolitan City's street vendor rage to the sun and paisa kanda. Though the plotline seems a bit redundant in the second half due to stretched themes, its comedic bits effectively enamour the audience.

After losing Rs30 million in the prequel 'Jatra', the film's heroes, Phadindra Prasad, Jayesh and Munna-played by Bipin Karki, Rabindra Singh Baniya and Rabindra Jha, respectively-have settled down to build a sinless life. The storyline of this film exhibits the events that follow previous movie. Unlike other the 'so-called' sequels of Nepali cinema namely, 'Nai Nabhannu La', 'Ae Mero Hajur' and 'Chhakka Panja'-where the newer versions do not follow the prequel's story, 'Mahajatra' picks up right where 'Jatra' left off. The cleverly written screenplay also makes this movie a stand-alone and even the

viewers who haven't

watched the prequels can follow along. The three "frenemies" cross paths with each other and their familiar friend crime—all the time. In the prequels, they were forging banknotes and smuggling gold. Now, they get involved in hiding a big load of cash for a corrupted government official.

These characters embody the struggles of middle-class Nepalis—artists, drivers, and shopkeepers—navigating a capitalist society, often resorting to extreme measures to make ends meet. On the other hand, Hari Bansha Acharya's portrayal of politician Punya Prasad exposes the puppeteers behind the system, highlighting the stark class divides and power dynamics prevalent in society.

The film aptly portrays how our society nurtures individuals who cannot be trusted with power. Through the character of 'viral inspector' Khatri, played by Divya Dev, the writer shows how an individual who wanted to make his country a better place ends up welcoming a brutal fate.

Media plays a significant role in shaping people's opinions in the movie. 'The Third Eye' news channel, with its loud TV reporter, felt really close to reality. It shows how the media earns profit by disseminating sensationalised news rather than remaining intact with ethical reporting. The dramatisation of simple events persuaded the audience (in the movie) to believe a constructed reality—created



 

 Mahajatra

 Director:
 Pradip Bhattarai

 Cast:
 Hari Bansha Acharya, Bipin Karki, Rabindra Singh Baniya, Barsha Raut, Rajani Gurung

 Language:
 Nepali

 Duration:
 2 hours 20 mins

 by the hand-puppeteers.

Additionally, both the viral inspector and Phadindra Prasad's son, portrayed by Arbien Khadka, utilise platforms like Facebook and YouTube to disseminate the truth, underscoring the ongoing struggle between sensationalism and factual reporting in media.

The stereotypical image of women needing to clean after men is demonstrated in the movie. The leading men commit crime, once again, and the ladies—played by Barsha Raut and Rajani Gurung—are alert and save them. Multiple times in the movie Phadindra Prasad says how if his wife, Sampada (Barsha Raut), were there, she would have saved them with her wits. Though Sampada hates her husband's stupidity, she eventually comes to his rescue.

Punya Prasad is portrayed as a doting father deeply devoted to his son. However, his paternal love drives him to indulge his son with luxuries earned through unethical means, perpetuating corruption and causing harm to others. By the end of the film, the character acknowledges that his corrupt actions were motivated by his desire to provide for his offspring. This reflects the harsh reality of our political landscape.

Besides the solid storyline, the actors' commitment to their roles deserves praise. Karki, in particular, delivered a stellar performance with his nuanced expressions and delivery. While Rajaram Poudel and Shisheer Bangdel's roles felt somewhat stereotypical, the actors brought enthusiasm to their portrayals despite the familiar plotline.

The film's comedic elements occasionally felt forced, with some scenes stretched beyond credibility, especially the frequent encounters with law enforcement experienced by the three friends. Additionally, the lacklustre sound effects during fight scenes raise questions about the technical advancements in Nepali cinema.

Towards the end, a dance number titled 'Hamro Jodi', featuring Aashma Biswokarma and Arun Chhetri, was introduced during an election campaign sequence. However, this felt out of place, detracting from the storyline's coherence and serving as a needless distraction.

A run-in with crime brings Phadindra Prasad to an emotional realisation about how he (and the other characters) lack money not morals and their greed for more money is what makes them act the way they do. This line sums up the central moral of the movie. The friends are seen losing logic when an opportunity to get a lot of money shows up—which is true for many in real life, too.

The film effectively offers viewers a humorous yet insightful perspective on the everyday struggles and complexities of human existence, presenting them in a philosophical light. Overall, 'Mahajatra' is an entertaining watch.

### Wake up, sleeping beauties. It's almost Met Gala time

May 6, that is—to sip cocktails, have dinner and sample the new exhibit, 'Sleeping Beauties: R e a w a k e n i n g Fashion'.

So what is the point of the Met Gala? It started in 1948 as a

society midnight supper, and wasn't even at the Met. Fast

years, and it's one of

70-plus

foot of any party in the world.

#### Who's hosting this year?

Anna Wintour Me Preguntó', Bad Bunny could sing. Multi-hyphenate Jennifer Lopez adds yet another role to her busy year. And then there are two Marvel stars who have been spending a lot of time in the desert lately: Zendaya, who has continued to stun on red carpets with her 'Dune' and 'Challengers' looks, and Chris Hemsworth, who is trading in Mjolnir for the upcoming 'Furiosa'. (Hemsworth is, in

fact, a first-time gala attendee. ) And, of course, Wintour herself. ing exhibit, refers to garments from the Costume Institute's collection that have been "in slumber" and now will be on display, some too fragile to hang upright lest they disintegrate. Curator Andrew Bolton picked 250 pieces spanning four centuries.

The theme is accompanied by a dress code—this year, it's 'The Garden of Time'. The theme and dress code are often interpreted...loosely. So there's a chance you may see an Aurora on the carpet, after all.

### How much do i have to pay for a ticket?

**Ok, if i were famous or powerful and got invited, how much would it cost?** Well, you might not pay yourself. Generally companies buy tables. A fashion label would then host its desired celebrities. Tickets have in the past cost \$50,000 for an individual, and \$300,000 or more for a table.

#### How can I watch?

You can watch the whole carpet unfold on a Vogue livestream. If you're in New York, you can also join fans across the street, behind barricades, on Fifth Avenue or worn further cost on Matison

Vogue editor Anna Wintour attends The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute benefit gala in 2019.

### **ASSOCIATED PRESS**

NEW YORK, US

rue love's kiss or an invite to the Met Gala? Those in the rarified ranks of international celebrity—and Anna Wintour's good graces—need not choose. Stars of film, fashion, music, sports, politics and social media will ascend the steps of the

Metropolitan Museum of Art on the f i r s t Monday in

May



the most photographed events in the world, renowned for its head-spinning red carpet—though the carpet isn't always red.

forward

It's important to note, though, that the party has a purpose, raising money for the Met's Costume Institute—nearly \$22 million last year, a record for the self-funding department—and launching the annual spring exhibit that brings hundreds of thousands of visitors to the museum.

But it's the carpet itself that draws the world's eyes, with the 400-strong guest list the subject of rabid speculation until the last minute—a collection of luminaries that arguably makes for the highest celebrity wattage-per-square-



What does the Met Gala theme mean? The theme revolves around 'sleeping beauties', but has little to do with fairytales. 'Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion', the title of the accompanyWrong question. You cannot just buy a ticket. The right question is: If I were famous or powerful and got invited, how much would it cost?

even further east on Mauson.

### What happens inside?

Entering the museum, guests walk past what is usually an impossibly enormous flower arrangement in the lobby, with perhaps an orchestra playing nearby, and over to cocktails. Or, they head to view the exhibit. Cocktails are about 6 pm to 8 pm, followed by dinner, but the most famous—or those who plan to make the biggest entrance—sometimes come (fashionably) later.



18 MAY, 2024

JESTHA

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