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TODAY

□ NATIONAL

People across the Tarai will have no respite from the sweltering heat for at least three days as there is no system in place to bring clouds or cause rainfall, the Meteorological Forecasting Division predicts. Pg 3

OPINION

Identity politics in Nepal hasn't succeeded as most identity lobbies are either absorbed in major parties or are weak in setting their agendas, writes Lok Raj Baral. Pg 4



■ MONEY

Private sector internet service providers have again warned that services could be disrupted as the government has not provided them foreign exchange to pay the vendors from whom they source the bandwidth. Pg 5

□ WORLD

Top US diplomat Antony Blinken urged Hamas on Wednesday to accept a Gaza truce plan despite an Israeli warning that the army will keep fighting the Palestinian militant group after any ceasefire. Pg 6

Eastern India experienced its hottest April on record as a heatwave scorched parts of the country amid an election, killing nine people, and the weather office on Wednesday forecast above normal temperatures. Pg 6

■ SPORTS

Nepal coach Desai will bank on experience after retaining most Cup campaign in the final 15-man squad for the T20 World Cup in the West Indies and the United States. Pg 7





West Indies A players wear mask during their match against Nepal at the TU cricket ground in Kirtipur on Wednesday. At 11:30 on Wednesday night, Kathmandu Valley ranked third among the cities with worst levels of air pollution across the world, according to IQ Air.

Is Congress debacle in Ilam, Bajhang threat to fight-election-solo proposal?

Thapa and Sharma are under fire for taking charge of the bypoll campaign but failing to secure victory.

☐ PURUSHOTTAM POUDEL KATHMANDU, MAY 1

Nepali Congress general secretaries Gagan Kumar Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma were designated the election 'commanders' for two of the three constituencies where by-elections for the House of Representatives seats were held last year.

The Congress party also entrusted the general secretaries with leading the campaign for the by-election held for a federal seat in Ilam on Saturday. Sharma was even named the party's election commander for Ilam-2.

However, the party couldn't do well as CPN-UML's Suhang Nembang won the seat defeating the Congress candidate with a margin of 5,830 votes.

In the by-election held last year, Thapa was appointed the election commander of Tanahu-1 and Sharma of Chitwan-2.

the Ilam by-election, political observers have questioned the general secretaries' views. It appears that the general secretaries believe no other Congress leader represents the party as well as they do. If it was the duo's recommendation that kept the party president from campaigning in Ilam, then their political calculations are wrong, analysts say.

The general secretaries are in trouble if they think they are the only face of change in the Congress, Pitambar Bhandari, a political analyst, told the Post. "They need to learn from Ilam's case that the party organisation matters more than the leaders' personality."

Last year, Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) President Rabi Lamichhane was elected in the bypoll in Chitwan-2, the constituency he also won in November 2022 House of Representatives election. He lost the lawmaker position when the Supreme Court invalidated the citizenship certificate that he had surrendered as a US citizen.

Later, after reacquiring citizenship certificate, Lamichhane contested the election and defeated his competitor, Congress leader Jeet Narayan Shrestha, by a huge margin.

The Congress candidate got roughly around the same vote this time as party's 2022 PR count.

Wagle, who quit the Congress to join the RSP just ahead of the election, won from Tanahun-1, defeating Govinda Bhattarai of the Congress The constituency had been vacant after Ramchandra Paudel got elected the country's President. The new party, RSP, snatched away Tanahu-1, traditionally a Congress stronghold.

Thapa and Sharma were elected the general secretaries from the 14th general convention held in 2021.

>> Continued on page 2

Clash at UCLA hours after pro-Palestinian demonstration is cleared at Columbia

Confrontations with law enforcement and more than 1,000 arrests across US campuses.



Demonstrators clash at a pro-Palestinian encampment at UCLA on Wednesday in Los Angeles.

ASSOCIATED PRESS LOS ANGELES, MAY

Duelling groups of protesters clashed overnight at the University of California, Los Angeles, shoving, kicking and beating each other with sticks after pro-Israel demonstrators

tried to pull down barricades surrounding a pro-Palestinian encampment. Hours earlier, police burst into a building occupied by anti-war protesters at Columbia University, breaking up a demonstration that had paralysed the school.

After a couple of hours of scuffles

between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli demonstrators at UCLA, police wearing helmets and face shields slowly separated the groups and quelled the violence. The scene was calm as day broke. UCLA cancelled classes on Wednesday and urged people to avoid the area where the clashes happened.

"Due to the distress caused by the violence that took place on Royce Quad late last night and early this morning, all classes are cancelled today," UCLA said in a statement.

Tent encampments of protesters calling on universities to stop doing business with Israel or companies that support the war in Gaza have spread across campuses nationwide in a student movement unlike any other this century. The ensuing police crackdowns echoed the removal decades ago of a much larger protest movement at the school against the Vietnam War.

There have been confrontations with law enforcement and more than 1,000 arrests. In rare instances, university officials and protest leaders struck agreements to restrict the disruption to campus life and upcoming commencement ceremonies.

>> Continued on page 2

NHRC to stay away from office-bearer nomination panel

Conflict victims want amendments to transitional justice bill before the process to appoint office bearers begins.

As demanded by victims and human rights defenders, the National Human Rights Commission has decided not to send its representatives to the committee constituted to nominate candidates for chairpersons and members of the two transitional justice bodies.

Bypassing the demand of conflict victims and rights advocates to amend the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act before starting the selection process, the government on April 12 constituted a five-member recommendation committee. Led by former chief justice Om Prakash Mishra, the panel includes the rights body chair or any member the chair picks.

However, a meeting of the constitutional rights watchdog on Tuesday decided not to send its representative unless the government makes a timebound commitment to endorse an

amendment bill, which is currently under discussion in a parliamentary committee.

"For around two years, the government said that the vacant positions would be filled once the Act is amended. We have sought a clear commitment from the government to amend the Act with a timeline before we send our representative," Surya Dhungel, a member at the NHRC, told the Post. "Conflict victims and rights defenders have also been suggesting the same." The commission has sent its decision to the Prime Minister's Office.

A large section of conflict victims, backed by human rights advocates, had objected to the government's decision to form the Mishra-led panel without first making any significant effort to endorse the bill. The Pushpa Kamal Dahal administration, however, said the recommendation panel was formed as per the Supreme Court's January order, whose full text was issued after two months.

Rights body not to send member to panel until government commits to passing crucial revision.

The court on March 12 had asked the government to start the appointment process in the two transitional justice bodies within a month.

Constitute task forces within the commissions to carry out preliminary investigations into the victims' complaints until office bearers are appointed, it had said.

Following the court order, the victims and the human rights defenders had demanded the government and the parties endorse the bill to amend the Act by the top court's deadline before starting the selection process.

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□ DISTRICT DIGEST

Couple found dead in Banganga of Kapilvastu

KAPILVASTU: A couple was found dead at Dhodekol in ward 8 of Banganga Municipality in Kapilvastu district on Wednesday. According to the Area Police Office in Pipara, Teklal Bhusal, 60, and his wife Juthi Bhusal, 55, were found dead inside their residence. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Hari Bahadur Wali, a neighbour informed the police after he saw the man hanging from the ceiling at around 8:30 am. The woman, who sustained injuries around her body, was found lying dead in the bed. It is suspected that the man died by suicide after killing his wife following a dispute, police said.

Forest fire destroys 15 houses in Kavrepalanchok

KAVRE: Fifteen houses were destroyed when a forest fire entered a settlement in ward 4 of Roshi Rural Municipality in Kavrepalanchowk district on Tuesday evening. There are no human casualties. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Raj Kumar Shrestha, the bushfire in Mahadev Community Forest entered Mahadevtar Sanokota village and gutted 15 houses. Preliminary police investigation shows that property worth around Rs22.5 million was destroyed in the incident.

Community schools in Kanchanpur undergo mergers, downgrades amid falling enrolment

Officials say the move aims to ensure student retention and teacher positions in community schools that are struggling with resources.

BHAWANI BHATTA

ANCHANPUR, MAY 1

The Shantipur Basic School in ward 7 of Shuklaphanta Municipality has merged with the Dharma Janata Secondary School in the same ward this year due to a shortage of students. The Shantipur Basic School, which ran classes up to grade 5, had been operating with just three teachers and 15 to 20 students for several years. Only 20 students had been enrolled at Shantipur Basic School in the last academic year.

The condition of Milan Basic School in ward 12 of Shuklaphanta was even worse than that of Shantipur Basic School. In the last academic session, there were only one teacher and 14 students. Due to the low numbers, there was only one post of teacher, who was appointed under the relief quota. Relief quota teachers are those employed on a contractual basis by local units to fill the shortage of teachers. Milan Secondary School also merged with Shivashakti Secondary School for the same reason.

According to the Shuklaphanta Municipality, four community schools with low numbers of students have been merged with other schools in the current academic session. Two other schools have been downgraded. All six had fewer than 30 students each.

"This situation arose due to the falling number of students every year, and the merger and downgrade are the only ways to keep the enrolled students at school and maintain the teachers' posts who teach there," said Dipendra Joshi, technical assistant of the municipality. "This step was taken because the number of students was very low and there was no possibility of boosting enrolment. The merger and downgrading plan was introduced after a detailed study and analysis," Joshi added.

The municipality also merged Trimurti Basic School located in Ward 10 with Krishna Secondary School located in the same ward, and Saraswati Basic School in ward 12 with Siddhartha Basic School in the same ward. Similarly, Bhawani Basic School and Janachetana Secondary School, which were teaching classes up to grade five, have been downgraded to teaching only up to grade three.

The Teacher Position Matching and Management Procedure 2020 has given the responsibility of the merging community schools and adjusting teachers to local units.

Not only Shuklaphanta Municipality, but several other local units are also merging and downgrading schools with low student numbers.

According to Padmaraj Bhatta, the chief administrative officer of Bedkot Municipality in the district, the municipal authorities are planning to downgrade two schools with low enrolment.

Some schools have no teachers, while others have surplus, hence the action, say officials.

"After a detailed study of a secondary school and a basic school, we are planning to downgrade them. Our officials have submitted a report suggesting a downgrade because there is no possibility of the student numbers increasing at those schools," said Bhatta. "Due to the dwindling number of students and poor management of teachers' posts, the enrolled students were unable to receive a good education, so downgrading is the only remedy," Bhatta added.

According to Bhatta, even though the report of the technical team suggests the downgrading, the decision will only be taken after discussing the issue with people's representatives, members of school management committees and other stakeholders.

Similarly, Beldandi Rural Municipality has also completed technical studies regarding school merger and downgrading of schools with low enrolment.

Bhanubhakta Joshi, head of the education unit of Beldandi Rural Municipality, said that even though the study has been completed, they have yet to decide which schools would be merged.

"The number of students in the basic level is mainly low, and the rural municipal office has made a list for merger and downgrading, but the plan will be put forward after some time once the ongoing new student enrolment programme ends," said Joshi. "Due to the growing attraction of parents towards private schools, the number of students in public schools at the basic level is decreasing. To protect government schools, the local level, district level authorities, and provincial level authorities have to make new plans and policies to attract students and parents," he added.

According to Rajendra Bhatta, head of the Education Development and

Coordination Unit in Kanchanpur, the number of students in community schools is decreasing every year, and the ratio of teachers and students is also imbalanced in most schools in the district. Similarly, in some schools, there are no teachers, and in some schools, there are more than the required human resources.

"We know schools are being merged and downgraded by local units, but we don't have exact data on it," said Bhatta. "In recent times, the local units have started merging and adjusting teachers' posts, and if all the local units pay attention to this, government school education can be organised and improved. Some public schools are doing various attractive works to improve the education system and attract parents and students, such as teaching all classes in English medium and operating buses for students," said Bhatta.

"Most private schools offer Englishmedium education and buses, among other amenities, which appeal to parents. Due to a shortage of qualified teachers and limited budget for community schools in our local unit, we are unable to provide the support public schools truly need," said Khemraj Bista, chief administrative officer of Shuklaphanta Municipality.

UCLA cancels classes after clashes on campus

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The clashes at UCLA erupted as counter-protesters tried to pull down parade barricades, plywood and wooden pallets protecting a tent encampment built by pro-Palestinian protesters. Video showed fireworks exploding over and in the encampment.

People threw chairs and other objects. A group piled on one person who lay on the ground, kicking and beating them with sticks until others pulled them from the scrum.

People outside the encampment, one draped in an Israeli flag, played recordings of a variety of sounds, including a baby crying and sirens.

Authorities have not detailed

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass called the violence "absolutely abhorrent and inexcusable" in a social media post and said city police were on the scene. California Highway Patrol officers also appeared to join. The university said it requested help.

The university tightened security on Tuesday after officials reported "physical altercations."

Later Tuesday, New York City police officers entered Columbia's campus after the university requested help. They cleared a tent encampment, along with Hamilton Hall where a stream of officers used a ladder to climb through a second-floor window. Protesters had seized the Ivy League

school building about 20 hours earlier. "After the University learned overnight that Hamilton Hall had been occupied, vandalized, and blockaded, we were left with no choice," the school said in a statement. "The decision to reach out to the NYPD was in response to the actions of the protesters, not the cause they are championing."

A few dozen protesters at Columbia were arrested after shrugging off an earlier ultimatum to abandon the encampment Monday or face suspension, inspiring demonstrations on campuses elsewhere.

Fabien Lugo, a first-year accounting student who said he was not involved in the protests, said he opposed the university's decision to call in police.

"This is too intense" he said "It

university's decision to call in police.
"This is too intense," he said. "It feels like more of an escalation than a de-escalation."

Blocks away from Columbia, at The City College of New York, demonstrators were in a standoff with police outside the public college's main gate. Video posted on social media by reporters late Tuesday showed officers forcing some people to the ground and shoving others as they cleared the street and sidewalks.

After police arrived, officers lowered a Palestinian flag from the City College flagpole and tossed it to the ground before raising an American

Brown University, another Ivy League school, reached an agreement Tuesday with protesters on its Rhode Island campus. Demonstrators said they would close their encampment if administrators consider divestment from Israel in October—apparently the first time a US college has agreed to protester demands to vote on divestment.

Meanwhile, at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, police in riot gear closed in on an encampment late Tuesday and arrested about 20 people for trespassing. University officials warned earlier that day that students would face criminal charges if they did not disperse.

First-year student Brayden Lang watched from the sidelines. "I still know very little about this conflict," he said. "But the deaths of thousands is something I cannot stand for."

Police also cleared an encampment on Wednesday morning at Tulane University in New Orleans and took down all but one tent at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where police with shields shoved protesters, resulting in a scrum and at least a dozen arrests.

The nationwide campus protests began at Columbia in response to Israel's offensive in Gaza after Hamas launched a deadly attack on southern Israel on October 7. Militants killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took roughly 250 hostages. Vowing to stamp out Hamas, Israel has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the Health Ministry there.

As cease-fire negotiations appeared to gain steam, it wasn't clear whether those talks would lead to an easing of protests.

Israel and its supporters have branded the university protests as antisemitic, while Israel's critics say it uses those allegations to silence opposition. Although some protesters have been caught on camera making antisemitic remarks or violent threats, organisers of the protests, some of whom are Jewish, say it is a peaceful movement aimed at defending Palestinian rights and protesting

Columbia's police action happened on the 56th anniversary of a similar move to quash the occupation of Hamilton Hall by students protesting racism and the Vietnam War.

The police department had said officers wouldn't enter without the college administration's request or an imminent emergency. Now, law enforcement will be there through May 17, when the university's commencement events are scheduled to end. In a letter to senior police officials, Columbia President Nemat Shafik said the administration asked officers to remove protesters from the occupied building and a tent encampment "with the utmost regret."

New York City Mayor Eric Adams said on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" that

police had to move into Hamilton Hall "for the safety of those children."

He again blamed outside agitators for the building takeover—an idea Shafik has also raised, though neither provided specific evidence to back up the contention, which was disputed by protest organisers and participants.

Adams, a Democrat and former police captain, insisted that while students were among those who entered Hamilton Hall, "It was led by individuals who were not affiliated with the university."

"There is a movement to radicalize young people. And I'm not going to wait until it is done to acknowledge the existence of it," Adams said. He said that, as mayor, he would "not allow that to happen."

Pressed, however, about the identities of the "outside agitators" cited by the mayor, officials repeatedly declined to provide details. Police commanders talked generally about tactics demonstrators had used, like using chains to secure doors, saying those strategies must have been taught.

Rebecca U. Weiner, the NYPD's deputy commissioner of intelligence and counterterrorism, simply said that some of the people present at the campus protests were "known" to the department to have participated in past protests.

Adams said revealing those details would be "too sensitive" to an ongoing law enforcement investigation.

The police department's deputy

The police department's deputy commissioner for public information, Tarik Sheppard, said 40 to 50 people were arrested at Hamilton Hall and that there were no injuries.

About 300 people were arrested at Columbia University and City College in police crackdowns, Adams said.

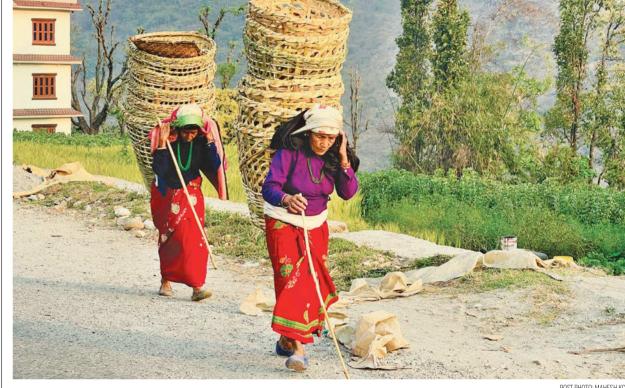
Protesters first set up a tent encampment at Columbia almost two weeks ago. The school sent in police to clear the tents the following day, arresting more than 100 people, only for the students to return.

Negotiations between the protesters and the college came to a standstill in recent days, and the school set a deadline for the activists to abandon the tent encampment Monday afternoon or be suspended.

Instead, protesters defied the ultimatum and took over Hamilton Hall early Tuesday, carrying in furniture and metal barricades.

Ilana Lewkovitch, a self-described "leftist Zionist" student at Columbia, said it's been hard to concentrate on school for weeks. Her exams have been disrupted with chants of "say it loud, say it clear, we want Zionists out of here."

Lewkovitch, who is Jewish, said she wished the current pro-Palestinian protests were more open to people like her who criticise Israel's war policies but believe there should be an Israeli state



Women in Musikot Municipality in West Rukum heading for the market to sell locally-made wicker baskets in this recent photo. Traditional handicraft skills are dying out due to a lack of skill transfer to the new generation and the increasing popularity of plastic goods.

Political observers question Congress election strategy after Ilam loss

>> Continued from page 1

Their victory was hailed as a generational shift in the party's leadership. However, the two leaders have neither been able to stop party president Sher Bahadur Deuba from taking decisions against their wish nor have they prevailed in mobilising the party to secure any transformative

Though Thapa and Sharma were firm about fielding Bhesh Raj Acharya for the Ilam-2 by-election, Congress chief Deuba handed the ticket to Dambar Bahadur Khadka. Khadka had lost the election from the same constituency in 2022, by 114 votes, to UML leader Subas Nembang, who died last year. This time around, despite efforts from the party general secretary and election commander, Khadka did not win.

While Suhang, the late Nembang's son, secured 27,772 votes, Khakda of the Congress trailed with 21,942.

However, Sharma claims that his only purpose in Ilam was to support the party's election campaign.

"The election result mostly depends on local factors and, the central leader's visit to the constituency for campaigning has only a little impact on

whether the party wins or loses," Sharma told the Post.

For the Congress general secretary, the recently concluded bypoll was important for another reason too. During the Mahasamiti meeting of the party held on February 19-22, General Secretary Thapa proposed the party contest the election without an alliance, which was accepted in principle by the conclave after thorough discussion.

In 2022, the Congress formed a coalition for local elections and joined a pre-poll alliance for federal and provincial elections.

In keeping with the decision of the Mahasamiti meeting, the Congress did not form any alliance in the recently concluded by-elections. But the party then faced a setback. When Congress had lost the previous election in Ilam-2 by a slim margin of 114 votes, the difference this time between the UML and Congress candidates

widened to 5,830 votes.

Not only in Ilam-2, the Congress also lost the bypoll in Bajhang (A) constituency of the Sudurpaschim provincial assembly to a UML candidate, a seat they had won during the provincial election of 2022.

When Daman Bahadur Bhandari, the winning candidate of the UML in Bajhang, secured 11,613 votes, Abishek Singh of the Congress managed to gain 11,346 votes. The provincial assembly seat which Congress earlier won with the alliance's support was lost when it contested the seat alone this time.

The performance of the Congress in the bypoll challenged general secretary Thapa's resolve not to ally before the election, experts say.

"The moral ground of the Thapa-led faction that advocates for contesting election alone might be high after the bypoll result as the Congress, it argues, was able to get as many votes this time as it got under the proportional representation (PR) category in the constituency in the last election," said Bhandari, the political analyst. "But the establishment faction, which has a clear majority in the party, may argue that winning is all that matters and on that count, the party

failed in Ilam."

The Congress had secured 22,333 votes under the PR category in the constituency in the 2022 elections. Its candidate from the constituency got 21,942 votes this time.

Victims and rights activists laud NHRC for delaying involvement in office-bearer selection panel

मोटरसाईकल हरायो

मिति २०८१/०१/१७ गते अन्दाजी विहान ३:00 बजे लपुमनपा-१७ टेटाटोल बाट बा.प्र. ०२ ०४७ प ३०१२ नं. को ४००८८ BS Savanna Green रंगको होमिनार मोटरसाइकल हराएको हुँदा पाउनु हुने महानुभावहरुले फोन नं. ४८२३०४६३३४, ४८२३५०४४४४ वा नजिक को प्रहरी चौकीमा बुभगईदिनु हुन अनुरोध गर्दछु । नाम: उमेश पोडे

>> Continued from page

However, the amendment bill couldn't be endorsed within the deadline, prompting the government to form the committee based on existing laws. The victims and rights advocates had accused the government and the parties of wasting a month since the court's ruling.

Following the government's decision to form the Mishra-led panel, the victims and activists had requested the NHRC not to send its representative to the panel. The committee cannot commence its recommendation process until it has all five members. Along with the chairperson, three other members have been selected by the government.

"We are happy to learn about the human rights commission's decision. The selection process shouldn't begin before the Act is amended," Gopal Shah, chairperson of the Conflict Victims' National Network, told the Post. "No person with high integrity and competence will lead the commission under the existing Act."

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons have been without office-bearers since July 2022. The then Sher Bahadur Deuba government had decided not to extend the terms of the chairpersons and members of the commissions. It said new teams would be selected only after the endorsement of the amendment bill by October that year.

However, there has been little progress towards amending the Act. The major parties haven't ironed out their differences over the bill registered in the House of Representatives by the incumbent government when the Nepali Congress was in the ruling alliance.

Deliberations on the amendment bill, which is currently at the Law, Human Rights and Justice Committee of the lower house, has stopped after the largest party was pushed to the opposition bench after the formation of the new alliance of the CPN (Maoist Centre) and the CPN-UML on March 4.

Until the new alliance was formed, the Maoist Centre and the Congress unanimously advocated the bill's endorsement. They said the bill needed to be decided by a vote if the UML didn't agree to it.

The two parties blamed the UML for politicising the matter and creating barriers to its endorsement. But with the changes in the political dynamics, the Congress has changed its voice. The party's shift in position was visible at the March 3 meeting

of the House committee where its lawmakers said some homework is needed before deciding on the hill

The UML, which had been maintaining a tough stance on the bill, had shown flexibility at the meeting. However, the House committee ended inconclusively after then-minister for law and justice Dhanraj Gurung sought time for homework. The meeting called for the next day was postponed.

Prime Minister Dahal broke alliance with the Congress and joined hands with the UML on March 4

Around two months later, it is still unclear when the discussion on the bill will resume in the House panel. "The bill is in priority but when the discussions will resume is still undecided," said Bimala Subedi, the committee chair.

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NEWS



Elderly people share their joy upon being able to see after a long time, at a free eye camp in Kapan, Kathmandu on Wednesday. As many as 335 people attended the three-day camp led by ophthalmologist Sanduk Ruit, who is known for propounding the small-incision cataract removal technique

Nepali embassy in Canada issues advisory for students

Urges Canada aspirants to stay informed about recent changes in government policies.

POST REPORT

Th0e Nepali embassy in Canada has advised Nepali students planning to study in the North American country to be mindful of recent changes in government

The Canadian government implemented a new policy regarding international students in January of this year, considering the challenges encountered by overseas students and the strain on the country's educational infrastructure and housing resources, stated the embassy

As per the policy, the government aims to decrease the intake of international students by 35 percent in two years.

The government is also enforcing a policy that will withhold the issuance of post-graduation work permits to students enrolled in bachelor's degree programmes and below in private-public partnership colleges. A post-graduation work permit is a permit granted to international students upon completion of their studies in Canada.

With the permit, students can work anywhere in Canada for any employer without limitations on

This new regulation is scheduled to take effect in September. "Hence, it is advisable for students planning to study in Canada to consider these policies," the embassy said.

Furthermore, the embassy urged prospective students and their guardians to thoroughly research suitable colleges/universities, scholarship opportunities, educational fees, living expenses and

climate, among other factors.

The embassy said international students can reach out to the international student council of their respective college/university, as well as mental health and career counselling services, among other resources, to stay informed about various notices and opportunities.

Students have been asked to reach out to the Nepali embassy in Ottawa, the consulate in Toronto, Non-Resident Association Canada chapter, and various Nepali organisations for advice or assistance

Temperatures of many districts in Tarai region exceed 40 degrees Celsius

Heat wave conditions to continue for next three days, and western disturbances likely to cause rainfall next week, Met division says.

POST REPORT

People residing across the Tarai region will not have a sigh of relief from the sweltering heat for at least three days as there is no system in place to bring clouds or cause rainfall, the Meteorological Forecasting Division predicts.

The temperatures of many districts across the Tarai region have exceeded 40 degrees Celsius.

temperatures will continue to increase in most parts of the country in the next three days, as no system is currently in place to cause rainfall," said Raju Pradhananga, senior divisional meteorologist at the division. "Heatwave conditions, which have been continuing for the last two weeks, will be prolonged further.'

Locals in the Tarai region complain that life has become too difficult due to excessive heat.

"It is very difficult to come out of home after 10 in the morning due to hot air, dust and high temperature," said Kiran Poudel, a local from Bhairahawa of Rupandehi district.

Health facilities of the region have been grappling with an uptick in cases of diarrhoea, vomiting, and urinary infections, among other ailments.

The Met division under the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology said that on Wednesday, the maximum temperature of the 20 Met stations, mostly of Tarai districts, remained between 40 and 45, 17 districts had 35 to 40 degrees Celsius, and 19 districts had 30 to 35 degrees Celsius.

Experts say a heat wave occurs when the maximum and minimum temperatures at a location are unusually high over three consecutive days.

One could feel tiredness, weakness, thirst, headache, leg cramps, muscle pain, vomiting, dizziness and fainting due to exposure to excessive heat, according to the department.

Heat-related illnesses include heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps and heat syncope (fainting). Heat stroke is the most severe form of heat-related illness and

requires immediate medical attention. Officials said if the maximum temperature at a place exceeds 40 degrees Celsius, residents should immediately take precautions. They advised people not to venture out of home in the afternoon, take sufficient fluids and water to remain hydrated, and wear cotton clothes so as to avoid adverse effects of the scorching heat.

Locals, however, complained that these suggestions are good only for those who can afford to stay at home.

If the maximum temperature exceeds 40 degrees Celsius, residents should take precautions.

According to the Met division, the maximum temperature of Bhairahawa reached 43 degree Celsius, Janakpur 42.4 Biratnagar 40.2, Simara 41.5, Nepalgunj 37.6 and Dhangadhi 39.4 degrees Celsius on Thursday. Kathmandu recorded 33.5 degrees Celsius, the maximum temperature this year. Kathmandu recorded 36.6 degrees Celsius on May 7, 1989, the most extreme temperature ever recorded.

The World Health Organisation said that heatwaves are among the most dangerous of natural hazards, but they rarely receive adequate attention because their toll and destruction are not always immediately

People's exposure to heat is increasing due to climate change. Globally, extreme temperature events are observed to be increasing in their frequency, duration and magnitude, according to the UN health body.

Nepal is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the climate crisis and has witnessed extreme weather events increasingly over the past decade and a half.

The average annual maximum temperature of Nepal has risen by 0.056 degrees Celsius, according to a study conducted by the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology in 2017. The study shows most districts witnessed increasing temperatures annually.

Political funds scandal brings election defeat to Japan's Liberal Democratic Party

LDP members may increasingly move away from PM Kishida, but there are currently no signs that efforts to remove him from the party leadership are strengthening.

■ THE JAPAN NEWS

The Liberal Democratic Party's effective defeat in all three by-elections for the House of Representatives on Sunday is likely to strengthen speculation that Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will struggle to dissolve the lower house.

Among the three electoral districts in play-Tokyo Constituency Number 15, Shimane Constituency Number 1 and Nagasaki Constituency Number 3-the LDP fielded a candidate only in the Shimane race and lost that battle to the opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan.

Kishida, who is also LDP president, is almost certain to see his influence within the party decline, which will cast a shadow over his management of the government. "This often happens in an election that takes place after a scandal," Kishida reportedly said to people around him on Sunday. "We have no choice but to overcome the challenges one by one."

LDP members may increasingly move away from Kishida, but there are currently no signs that efforts to remove him from the party leadership are strengthening.

"If the party is seen to be engulfed in infighting, that will have a negative impact," a former cabinet member said, adding that LDP members are exercising restraint amid the strong headwinds now battering the party.

Another reason for the lack of significant criticism against Kishida may be that many lawmakers have been away from the Diet for overseas trips and regional activities during the Golden Week holiday period.

The prime minister is said to be aware that it will be extremely difficult to dissolve the lower house in June, but he still retains that option.

A fixed-rate tax reduction, a key policy of the Kishida administration, is planned to be implemented in June. Some within the government are hoping that the atmosphere will change if the economic situation improves as a result of tax cuts and wage hikes. Kishida is believed to be intending to make a move if the approval rating for his Cabinet recovers to a certain degree once revisions to the Political Funds Control Law are completed by the end of the current Diet session.

Whether to dissolve the Diet is regarded as solely the decision of the

prime minister. However, if Kishida certain to face a backlash from LDP members concerned about a possible loss of Diet seats. It is therefore increasingly difficult to dissolve the Diet.





Prime Minister Fumio Kishida

"If the prime minister tries to dissolve the lower house, I will do everything to stop him," an LDP executive told a younger lawmaker. Senior officials of Komeito, the LDP's coalition partner, have also openly expressed their desire not to hold a snap election in the near future.

If Kishida decides to dissolve the lower house and the LDP loses a significant number of seats, he may have difficulty running for the LDP presidency again. Some people close to the prime minister are cautious, with one saying, "It would be best for him to refrain from political maneuvering, including personnel changes, and instead concentrate on policy implementation and seek a mandate in the [LDP] presidential election."

Will post-Kishida moves gain momentum?

Kishida's LDP presidential term is set to expire in September. The best scenario for him is to win the next lower secure reelection as LDP president, on the back of voter confidence.

However, the LDP's dismal performance in Sunday's by-elections is expected to lead some LDP members to think that Kishida is "not sufficient as the face of elections" for the party. Given that, LDP members are likely to become more aware of moves toward a post-Kishida leadership.

Among Cabinet ministers and senior party officials, LDP Secretary General Toshimitsu Motegi, digital minister Taro Kono and Sanae Takaichi, minister in charge of economic security, are eyeing the opportunity to run for the LDP's top post.

Motegi appears to be seeking to expand his support by taking advantage of his good relationship with LDP Vice President Taro Aso, who maintains his own party faction and serves as Kishida's "backer." Motegi is also repeatedly dining with younger members of the faction once led by the late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Kono and Takaichi, who both ran in the 2021 LDP presidential race, have held regular study sessions, fueling speculation that they are trying to build a foothold for a future presidential election. Takaichi has made no secret of her desire to run, saying, "I'll be happy to fight again."

Former Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, former LDP Secretary General Shigeru Ishiba and Kono have strong name recognition, so they may gain more support within the party as "the face of elections" to replace Kishida. Both Koizumi and Ishiba were asked by the party to visit the Shimane electoral district to support the LDP candidate during campaigning, even though they are not currently in LDP executive positions.

It has been speculated that the trio might receive support from non-mainstream LDP figures, such as former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and former Secretary General Toshihiro Nikai. Suga and Nikai have maintained a certain distance from Kishida.

Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa has attracted attention as a possible candidate for the nation's first female prime minister. Aso has described her as a "new star," and respondents to a recent opinion survey conducted by various companies ranked her high among the top figures for a possible next LDP president.



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SCAN TO REGISTER

OPINION



RSP after llam

Congress and UML continue to be the mainstays of Nepali politics. They are still hard to challenge.

Even at the risk of excess generalisation, the resounding win of CPN-UML's Suhang Nembang in Ilam-2 federal constituency and the concomitant failure of the Rastriya Swatantra Party candidate Milan Limbu is being endlessly analysed. Following its stellar showing in the 2022 general elections and the 2023 by-elections, many extrapolated a mighty electoral success for the RSP in the years ahead. In their reckoning, the party was expected to challenge the Nepali Congress and the UML, the two mainstays of post-1990 Nepali politics, in the national elections due in 2026. It still might. Yet the failure of its candidate in Ilam-2 to even recover his election deposit after failing to get at least 10 percent of valid votes suggests that the message of change the RSP champions has not quite percolated down to the grassroots. Perhaps some prospective voters were put off by the RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane's untiring quest to get into the government and his involvement in various scams. Nor did it have the kind of robust party organisations the UML and the Congress do.

The UML in particular boasts of an unrivalled party organisation that is connected to the lowest rungs of society. Come election time, no other party is as good at marshalling its cadres. The UML also benefits from a stable left-leaning voter-base, with roughly half of all votes cast in the country going to leftist parties in each election. This by-election, Suhang Nembang must also have gotten many sympathy votes, standing as he was in lieu of his late father, Subas Nembang. Nonetheless, the election results of both Ilam-2 and Bajhang-A (with the UML and the Congress polling in first and second in each place) suggests that the main contest in Nepal will continue to be between the Congress and the UML for some time. Any other force will struggle to come anywhere close. Again, new outfits like the RSP and the Janamat Party are only just throwing down their roots across Nepal.

Yet there are some fundamental challenges for the RSP or any new force. For instance, how does any force challenge the Congress-UML duopoly without resorting to extremist positions or ideologies? Despite their many faults, both the Congress and the UML are tried and tested moderate forces. Nepali people have time and again shown that they have little appetite for extremism, whether on the right or the left. At the same time, people are clamouring for change, as there is significant disgruntlement with the Congress and the UML. The problem is that most Nepali voters right now see no new credible alternative to the old parties. The RSP can be that force. It would be too early to write of its demise on the basis of one electoral loss. But some soul-searching is certainly warranted. Lamichhane is popular, but his murky past also makes people ambivalent. Moreover, the strategy of the old parties to pull the RSP into the grimy business of governing the country and portray it as just another power-hungry party might be working. The party can either be a part of the old establishment or an alternative force for change. It cannot be both.

THEIR VIEW

US hurts itself

Silencing pro-Palestinian protesters isn't helping its reputation.

It is disappointing that more than 900 students have been arrested from a number of universities and colleges in the United States over the past two weeks because they demanded justice for Palestinians. Protesting against Israel's unjust war in Gaza, these students have been demanding that their universities divest from companies and businesses that have links with Israel in any shape or form. They want their educational institutions—and essentially their country—to be separate from Israel's genocidal campaign against Palestinians, and we stand in solidarity

Since the October 7 Hamas attack in Israel, the latter has been running a ruthless campaign in Gaza that has so far killed more than 34,000 people. Although the US, as usual, stood by Israel, its university students wanted no part in it. They have been holding rallies, sit-ins, hunger strikes and, most recently, encampments on their campuses in protest. Things escalated when, on April 18, police removed a pro-Palestinian encampment on the Columbia University campus, arresting over 100 demonstrators. Instead of getting subdued, the students pushed back, and similar demonstrations spread across the US.

Now university administrations and police are cracking down on protesters, with the accusations of anti-Semitism being thrown around to justify it. We fail to understand how a peaceful demonstration demanding justice for a persecuted population can be labelled anti-Semitic. What these protesters are being subjected to violates the principles of academic freedom and free speech, as the American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU) has pointed out.

The US government should pay heed to the demands of pro-Palestinian protesters. What we have seen so far is an extraordinary display of double standards and flouting of international and humanitarian laws in Gaza, and these students have been trying to bring critical focus to that. The US must re-evaluate its position regarding Israel and take a stance that is moral and in line with international humanitarian laws, not to mention its own stated policy on human rights. Protecting one nation's interests must not be detrimental to another nation's freedom and well-being.

- The Daily Star (Bangladesh)/ANN

Messages from Ilam and Bajhang

The tropes used in politics are temporary, and a leader's charisma cannot inspire voters for long.

LOK RAJ BARAL



The by-elections held in Ilam-2 and Bajhang-1 have indicated the continued dominance of the two major parties, Nepali Congress (NC) and CPN-UML At the same time, the setbacks suffered by the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), the Unified Samajwadi Party, along with the independents who fought the election in Ilam-2, demonstrate that they might be in the process of attrition, if not immediate extinction. Further, the UML has shown its undisturbed presence in the country's hills.

Vacuous slogans

The meteoric rise of the RSP during the last elections, 20 parliamentary seats in one go, was read as people's search for an alternative to the old parties that have failed to deliver. The two old parties have now sidelined the CPN (Maoist Centre), which too had come with a big-bang approach by catapulting itself into the first position in the 2008 Constituent Assembly election. It validated the hypothesis that parties soon weather away when they have vacuous slogans and rhetoric without established

The same Maoist leaders who became game changers in the Nepali political landscape are now increasingly being swept away. The tropes used in politics are temporary, and the charisma of a leader cannot go on inspiring the voters. This time, in the Ilam by-election, the Maoist party could not present its candidate and instead preferred to be a coat-tail of the CPN-UML despite having no formal alliance. Their tactic was to save their face by opting out of the race. However, their poor showing in Bajhang proves that the party is thinning out each passing day.



Identity politics

Identity politics in Nepal hasn't succeeded as most identity lobbies are either absorbed in major parties or are weak in scoring their agendas. Nevertheless, the vote gained in the name of identity is something to ponder over for the leaders of the two major parties. Promises made by the Maoists during the 10-year insurgency have been nullified by their own actions while in government and outside. Even the constitutional arrangements made for more inclusive democracy are ignored so much that now all parties seem to be sticking to the old patterns of governance where only lip service is paid for participation and empowerment. All parties look like birds of the same feather on the issue of inclusion and empowerment. So the deprived sections of society are increasingly becoming truculent, which is vindicated in media, demonstrations, and sitins (dharana).

However, identity politics isn't strong enough to influence the power elites as was seen during the finalisation of the 2015 Constitution of Nepal. The bullish behaviour displayed by the proponents of identity-based federal structure soon dissipated owing to the major parties' success in absorbing these leaders in their parties. Thus, Nepali politics has not yet come under the pressure of sustained movement for identity politics. The UML and the NC rejected the demand for an identity-based province, with the Maoist

Centre oscillating between choosing Koshi or an ethnic name for the erst while Province One. The acceptance of the name of Koshi Pradesh instead of an ethnic identity by a two-thirds majority seems to show the dominance

of the two major parties. The majority of the people Ilam belong to indigenous/ethnic groups such as Rai (20.79 percent), Limbu (16.10 percent), Magar (5.21 percent), Newar (3.76 percent), Gurung (3.04 per cent) and Dalit (3.50percent). Only Bahun (16.10 percent) and Chhetri (13.90 percent) belong to the "high caste" groups in the social hierarchy. Yet, despite the size of the predominant ethnic population, the identity movement is generally weak. It is a national phenomenon as no movement but in the Madhesh-Tarai have ever developed into a decisive stage for putting pressure on the dominant caste-based parties and their leaders.

Ideological vacuum

Ideas, leadership and organisation are the major ingredients for any party to under the banners of different nomenclatures and symbols, lack these viable ingredients Even the condition of the Dalits is precarious as they are simply the bystanders of the great political game being played around them. Thus, individuals fighting elections on populism and heroism may not hold on for long. How the RSP, under Ravi Lamichhne, would wade through the

emotive public behaviour and organisational deficit needs to be watched. Indications are not positive after Lamichhane decided to join the Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led coalition government as deputy prime minister and home affair minister.

There has been a gap between the RSP's decision to join the government and the perceptions of people who want to see Lamichhane clean and decisive. Under the existing circumstances, he can be neither. The claim that he is avoiding the case of his alleged involvement in the embezzlement of cooperatives' share in Pokhara and elsewhere would not be washed unless he prepares the ground for an independent investigation into the matter. Since he is the home minister, it is assumed that he may abuse his office to influence such investigations. The drubbings in by-elections have further weakened his bargaining position vis-à-vis the other coalition partners, especially the UML and the Maoists.

Performative legacy

Elections alone have no significance except to increase the numbers in Parliament. It is particularly so because Parliament has almost become a platform to show that all so-called elected governments are legitimate and democratic. For political leaders, an election is the only yardstick to establish such legitimacy regardless of other components such as what Samuel P. Huntington calls "performance legitimacy" based on delivery capability. If the UML or the NC adds two more seats, their numerical prospect would be improved during the making and breaking of governments, a regular phenomenon in Nepali politics.

The game of changing governments is now spread out in provinces. Yet, elections provide some clues to understanding political directions or pointers. The by-election results have such pointers for the upcoming Nepali party politics. Since the "creation of parties has been a continuous process", all parties except a few are perennially in the churning. As the once-monolithic Madhesi parties have shown, no one can predict their survival or attrition. The process of integration and disintegration has been evident since their formation during the Madhes movement.

Labour, life and liberation

One crucial, if not the only, significance of May Day resides in connecting oppressed subjects.

AZFAR HUSSAIN



On May Day-also known as International Workers' Day—we pay tribute to the achievements and sacrifices of labour-labour out of which "came villages/and the towns that grew cities," as the Black socialist poet Langston Hughes tells us. And to the extent that "events are the real dialectics of history"-to use the Italian Marxist revolutionary Antonio Gramsci's words-May Day emerged from a crucial concatenation of historical events, propelled significantly by the international socialist movement, as a day of unity and solidarity with workers, and, by extension, with the exploited and the oppressed even on a global scale.

It is not for nothing that this May Day, several organisations, collectives, and groups across the world have strongly prioritised supporting the besieged Palestinian people in their ongoing struggle against US-backed Israeli genocide and Zionist settler colonialism. One crucial, if not the only, significance of May Day resonantly resides in forging connections among oppressed subjects, sites, and scenes across the world in the interest of what Karl Marx calls "human emancipation" in its entirety.

Now May Day is customarily credited with originating in 1886 from the eighthour workday movement in the United States, but the Polish-German Marxist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg provides a distinct perspective on its genesis. As she puts it in her piece called "What Are the Origins of May Day?" (1894), "The happy idea of using a proletarian holiday celebration as a means to attain the eight-hour day was first born in Australia. The workers there decided in 1856 to organise a day of complete stoppage together with meetings and entertainment as a demonstration in favour of the 8-hour day. [...] The first to follow the example of the Australian workers were the Americans. In 1886, they decided that May 1 should be the day of universal work stoppage."

And, indeed, what has come to be known as the Haymarket massacre of 1886 is widely recognised and remembered today. May 1, 1886 marked the beginning of a vibrant nationwide movement in the United States demanding an eight-hour workday. In Chicagowhich at that time constituted the centre of a militant left-wing labour movement-worker strikes and protests continued to gather fierce momentum, met with escalating police violence. On May 4, roughly 1,200 workers came together in Chicago's Haymarket Square to protest police brutality perpetrated on a meeting of striking workers at the McCormick Reaper Works on May 3, where six workers were killed and many injured. That rally was peaceful; vocateur hurled a bomb at police officers. The police then opened fire, killing several people and injuring hun-

Following the incident, the city government and police launched a campaign of terror, increasingly homing in on workers, immigrants, and radical activists. Eight anarchist labour leaders-Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel, Samuel Fielden, Louis Lingg, Adolph Fischer, Oscar Neebe, and Michael Schwab—were unjustly convicted exclusively for their political affiliations. Four were executed, one committed suicide, and the remaining three were later freed and exonerated six years afterward owing to an international defense movement.

But, of course, the fight for the shorter workday—as a distinct mode of class struggle—began neither in 1856 nor in with express speed from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to In fact, over time, that movement became truly global amid the combined and uneven development of capitalism across the world; while later, of course, VI Lenin broadened the horizon of the very significance of May Day by decidedly zeroing in on the question of "liberation" itself, predicated as it was on the intersection between class politics and mass politics; for him, thus, point for "the irrepressible struggle for the political liberation of the Russian people" and for "the class development of the proletariat and its open struggle for socialism," to use Lenin's own

Whose May Day? And, throughout the 20th century, Lenin's emancipatory, socialist position was significantly rehearsed, applied, expanded, and even nuanced by a whole host of revolutionaries from Asia, Africa, Latin America-from the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui to the Caribbean Marxist CLR James and the African revolutionary Amilcar Cabral, to our own Maulana Bhasani-who variously foregrounded the agendas of what the African-American Marxist philosoNawal El Saadawi's contention-shared by Angela Davis, among many othersthat there is no emancipation of humanity without the emancipation of working-class women, all women, and all genders. But, to be specific, despite the longstanding tradition of May Day commemorations spanning 140 years, today we still witness women-who make up roughly half of the world's population-routinely working more than eight hours a day in many parts of

Let me now fast-forward to my own home country, Bangladesh, characterised as it was by the Egyptian political economist Samir Amin as the "periphery of periphery" under global capitalism. In her short but useful piece titled "The Leave Trap," the Bangladeshi Marxist-feminist activist and writer Taslima Akhter dwells on the historical significance of May Day vis-à-vis labour rights and the ongoing challenges encountered by workers, specifically in the garment sector in "fast-industrialising" countries like Bangladesh. The legal recognition of standard work hours and leave entitlements notwithstanding, workers often experience extended workdays far beyond legal limits and struggle to claim their entitled leaves due to various pressures and deceptive practices by their employers. Akhter's piece calls attention to the deleterious effects of these practices on workers' health, productivity, and ability to organise for their rights, accentuating the urgent need for labour movements to address these issues.

May Day can certainly serve as a day of historicising our people's struggles and envisioning the direction of a new, emancipatory politics that relentlessly centralises the agendas of the majority of the people that include all kinds of workers in alliance with poor peasants, women, religious and ethnic and linguistic minorities in Bangladesh, ones who cannot but relate to the Palestinians at this crucial historical conjuncture. And with Palestine solidarity movements building globally and with even student solidarity encampments remarkably underway throughout the US, I think we would do well to heed the call of Palestinian labour unions themselves and rally together on May Day. Let's continue to unite workers, students, and common people in a movement against genocide, against repression, against Zionist settler colonialism, against all forms and forces of exploitation and oppression, and for a

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Read the full text of this article on kathmandupost.com.



1886. One may trace it to at least as early as the threshold of the age of industrial capitalism itself when-as Alexander Trachtenberg rightly put it—"during the conspiracy trial against the leaders of striking cordwainers in 1806, it was brought out that workers were employed as long as nineteen and even twenty hours a day." Indeed, contestations over temporali-

ties have crucially characterised class struggles under industrial capitalism, which Karl Marx theorises in Capital, Vol. 1. And in its famous chapter called "The Working Day," Marx spotlights the inauguration of the eight-hour workday movement by the National Labor Union, maintaining, "The first fruit of the Civil War was an agitation for the 8-hour day—a movement which ran

ly called the "dark proletariat," by bringing up—on various May Days, of course-the questions of working-class struggles against capitalism, racism, imperialism, and (neo)colonialism, profoundly interconnected as they are, making the point that the working-class struggle for emancipation cannot but embody and enact the dialectics of intersectionality.

But what about the "female proletariat" as such? Indeed, the fact that women's labour-power was organically integrated into the system of capitalist exploitation right from the get-go as well as women's central roles in labour movements and in numerous areas tend to be overlooked even in progressive political practices. And we'd do well to heed the Egyptian Marxist feminist

MONEY

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UAE firm to resume output from Iraq gas complex hit by drone

DUBAI: A UAE firm said Wednesday it was taking steps to resume production from an Iraq gas complex which was halted after a deadly drone strike last week. The Khor Mor complex owned by a consortium of two United Arab Emirates energy firms has been hit several times in recent years. But last Friday's strike was the first dead ly attack, with four Yemeni workers killed and at least eight other people wounded. On Monday, Dana Gas said it would "temporarily suspend production" at Khor Mor before reversing the decision days later. "Dana Gas and its partners have taken steps to recommence production from the Khor Mor field," the firm said in a statement published on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange on Wednesday. (AFP)

Microsoft announces Thai datacenter region, AI training BANGKOK: Microsoft said Wednesday

it would create Thailand's first data centre region to boost cloud and artificial intelligence infrastructure. promising AI training to more than 100,000 Thais to develop tech. Bangkok is a key economic player in Southeast Asia, but it has lagged behind Indonesia and Singapore when it comes to the tech industry. Thailand had an "incredible opportu nity to build a digital-first, AI-powered future", Microsoft chairman and CEO Satya Nadella said in Bangkok, Data centre regions are physical locations that store comp ing infrastructure, allowing secure and reliable access to cloud platforms. "Our new datacenter region. along with the investments we are making in cloud and AI infrastructure. as well as AI skilling, build on our long-standing commitment to the country," Nadella said. (AFP)

Weak ven boosts tourist wallets in Japan

TOKYO: Foreign tourists are flocking to Japan in record numbers and thanks to a sliding yen many are living like kings, splashing out on everything from kimonos to knives and slap-up meals. "I bought three pairs of shoes, which is something I would never normally do," French tourist Katia Lelievre, 36, said with a laugh in the bustling Asakusa area of Tokyo famous for its Buddhist temple and souvenir shops. The brands available in Japan are the same as in Europe—Converse, Nike and Adidas—but because of the exchange rate "it was really worth it" to buy, she told AFP. "The food is really cheap. (I spent a lot) especially on food. I tried everything I wanted, Dominique Stabile, 31, visiting from Italy, told AFP. (AFP)

Dollar steady before Fed update on rates LONDON: The dollar steadied and

London shares were slightly higher in holiday-thinned trading Wednesday as investors awaited clarity on the outlook for US interest rates. The Federal Reserve is set to keep borrowing costs on hold following a regular policy meeting that winds up later Wednesday but accompanying statements could hint at when cuts may begin, or not. "Recent concerns around a resurgence in inflation pressures have pushed back the expected rate cuts that had until recently been scheduled to commence next month,' noted Joshua Mahony, chief market analyst at Scope Markets. The dollar, which has gained in recent days against other currencies on interest rate differentials, was largely flat Wednesday as many investors were either away for the May Day holidays or on hold ahead of the Fed's announcements. (AFP)

ISPs warn of possible internet disruption

Nepal's telecom regulatory body has asked the central bank not to provide foreign exchange and bank guarantees to the internet service providers until they clear their taxes.

Nepali private sector internet service providers (ISPs) have again warned that services could be disrupted as the government has not provided them foreign exchange to pay their foreign vendors from whom they source the bandwidth.

It has already been a year since Nepali ISPs defaulted on payments for upstream services

The Nepali ISPs said that Indian telecommunications firms have once again issued a warning to settle their dues or face consequences.

A former parliamentary Public Accounts Committee had a few years ago ordered the government that internet service providers should be exempted from paying taxes on non-telecom components like web service, co-location, hosted service, disaster recovery, managed service, data centre, and cloud service.

Following the order, in a letter dated July 15, 2018, the licensing department Nepal Telecommunication Authority wrote to the Inland Revenue Department requesting not to subject internet service providers to telecommunication charges for non-telecommunication services.

The committee had said that internet service providers do not have to pay royalties and Rural Telecommunications Development Fund charges for three fiscal years-2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20.

After the Auditor General, the constitutional body and the supreme audit institution of Nepal, pointed out that such fees should not be waived, and instructed recovery of the charges, the government wrote to the ISPs to clear the dues.

"The current Public Accounts Committee has ordered us to recover the dues from the ISPs. Unless they clear their dues, the ministry will not make recommendations for foreign currency," an official at the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, told the Post on condition of anonymity.

While the Public Accounts Committee of the past parliament had ruled that internet service providers should be exempted from paying taxes on non-telecommunications components, the Ministry of Communication and Information



The Nepali ISPs said that Indian telecommunications firms have once again issued a warning to settle their dues or face consequences.

Technology rejected the ruling and declined to provide foreign exchange to the companies

The ISPs make annual transactions totalling around Rs27 billion and pay more than Rs9 billion in revenue to the government under eight various headers.

"After months, Indian upstream service providers have again warned us that they would stop services if payment is delayed," according to a member of the ISPs.

"The government needs to take the issue seriously. The issue is sensitive," Binay Bohra, owner of Vianet Communication, an internet service providing company in Nepal, told a press meeting last Friday.

"Who will take the responsibility if

Indian upstream service providers cut off the internet." Sudhir Parajuli, president of Internet Service Providers' Association Nepal, said that the Indian upstream service providers have sought a letter of bank guarantee after Nepali ISPs were unable to pay their dues in foreign currency. However, the Nepal Telecommunication Authority, the regulatory body, has asked the central bank not to provide bank guarantee letters either.

In December last year, Tata and Airtel, the Indian firms that provide upstream bandwidth to Nepali ISPs even threatened to cut off services from January 1, 2024, if the Nepali ISPs failed to clear the dues. However, the issue remains unre-

solved due to the change in the government, but the Indian firms have not disrupted their services at the request of Nepali ISPs. Nepali ISPs buy 70 percent of their

internet from Airtel. The ISPs are yet to pay around \$30 million in dues to the Indian company.

In December last year, officials from India's Tata and Airtel—the bandwidth providers-visited Nepal to discuss the issue as the dispute over the payment of tax dues escalated between the government and the ISPs

Around 10.60 million people use the internet in the country and there are 20 ISPs in the country, including the state-owned Nepal Telecom. ISPs say more than 15,000 people are directly employed with them

Amazon triples quarterly profit as cloud surges

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE SAN FRANCISCO, MAY 1

E-commerce titan Amazon on Tuesday said profit in the first three months of 2024 tripled as its cloud, ads, and retail businesses thrived.

Amazon shares were up about one percent in after-market trades that followed release of the earnings figures, with Wall Street keeping a close eye on the impact of AI as well as costs involved.

"It was a good start to the year across the business," Amazon chief executive Andy Jassy said in an earnings release

The Seattle-based company report ed \$10.4 billion in profit on revenue of \$143.3 billion, compared with a profit of \$3.2 billion on \$127.4 billion in sales in the same period a year earlier. "Amazon opens its new fiscal year

with a robust set of numbers that show it has mostly brushed off pressures in the consumer economy,' GlobalData managing director Neil Saunders said in a note to investors. Sales at Amazon online stores grew

by seven percent in the quarter despite competitive pressure from rivals such as Shein and Temu, according to Saunders. "Our customer data still shows that

Amazon is a focal point for those consumers wanting value for money and convenience," Saunders said. "We also believe that Prime mem-

bers are leaning more heavily into Amazon to maximize value from their subscriptions." Growth in online store sales indicated last year's turnaround at Amazon's e-commerce business is continuing, according to Emarketer senior analyst Blake Droesch.

"While the core e-commerce business is no longer the biggest growth driver, it remains an essential component of the Amazon flywheel, particularly in propelling its ad business,' Droesch said.

Jassy said the allure of AI capabilities was getting companies to bring infrastructures up to date relying on Amazon's AWS cloud computing division, which is on track to bring in a hundred billion dollars over the course of the year. "We've seen considerable momen-

tum on the AI front," Jassy said on an earnings call. "Companies are pursuing this relatively low hanging fruit of modernizing their infrastructure.

Hong Kong faces uphill battle to lure back Chinese tourists

■ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

The Lo Wu arrival hall on Hong Kong's border used to throng with visitors during mainland China's "Golden Week", but as the five-day tourism bonanza kicked off on Wednesday, the queues there were modest.

Mainland Chinese visitors have historically been the lifeblood of Hong Kong's retail and services sectors, spending on everything from basic goods like baby formula to luxury handbags and upscale restaurantshelping to shape the city's economy in the process.

But after three years of Covid isolation, and before that a year of sometimes violent pro-democracy protests-not to mention the growing appeal of fast-developing mainland cities-Hong Kong has lost its shine for many Chinese tourists and is a long way from regaining its go-to status, observers say.

Local authorities had hoped one million people would cross the border on May 1, the start of the traditional "Golden Week" boom time for Hong Kong's tourism and retail sectors, but the crowds at Lo Wu were moderate on Wednesday. "Hong Kong is much more expensive than before," said a technician surnamed Leung, 54, who was planning to visit local theme parks with his young children.

"In terms of value for money, Hong Kong is not that competitive." Though Leung said he was staying for three days, many visitors passing through Lo Wu said they were making more

affordable day trips instead. Hong Kong is desperate to revive its tourism sector-which at one time made up around five percent of GDPto offset the economic toll from the pandemic and political unrest in recent years. But industry insiders say Hong Kong is still catching up, with visitors spending less during China's economic downturn and local residents preferring to vacation in neighbouring Chinese cities.

"After the pandemic, people's travelling mode and interests have changed, but we are lagging behind in terms of discovering and packaging unique local attractions," the city's tourism sector lawmaker Perry Yiu told AFP.

Emerging from a nearly three-year tourism drought, Hong Kong in 2023 saw 34 million visitors—a figure buoyed by China's decision to reopen its borders after Covid.

But that number was still far short of the pre-pandemic, pre-protest peak seen in 2018, when Hong Kong received more than 65 million visitors who collectively spent around \$35 billion.

Worse still, official figures showed a 73.5 percent drop in spending among daytrippers from mainland China, the largest demographic of visitors to Hong Kong. Xu Dengkai, an IT professional from Shanghai, paid his first visit to Hong Kong on Wednesday, but would not stay for another day.

Mainland Chinese visitors have historically been the lifeblood of Hong Kong's retail and services sectors.

"It's not particularly attractive to me, as it looks just like Shanghai," Xu told AFP. A young mother surnamed Jiang, who was concluding a five-day trip in Hong Kong with husband and toddler in tow, said she hadn't set aside any money for shopping.

"I would probably save my shopping spree for Japan," Jiang said with a laugh, adding that goods in Hong Kong cost double or triple what they would in Chongqing, their hometown. Jason Wong, former chair of Hong

Kong's Travel Industry Council, said the city "has a lot to do" to find unique offerings to attract visitors. "Visitors now want more in-depth experiences, as they can shop either in

mainland or online instead of relying on Hong Kong," he told AFP. The city's US dollar-pegged currency and overall high prices, as well as competition from regional rivals such as Singapore and Japan, have also

Even among locals, Hong Kong's appeal is dimming. Since China reopened its border in February 2023, Hong Kongers have

affected tourist sentiment, Wong said.

flocked to neighbouring mainland cities such as Shenzhen and Zhuhai for weekend outings. On a recent day in late March, daily

departures exceeded 760,000—nearly three times the number of arrivals.

Funeral services worker Ryan, 35, has been paying weekly northbound visits to the mainland for "more fun with the same amount of money", and said he was far from alone.



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SCAN TO REGISTER

THE KATHMANDU POST

Blinken urges Hamas to agree Gaza truce as he meets Israel leaders

Netanyahu on Tuesday repeated his vow to send Israeli ground forces into Gaza's far-southern city of Rafah.



A woman holds a banner and shouts slogans with families and supporters of Israeli hostages held by Hamas in Gaza during a protest calling for their return, outside a meeting between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and families of hostages in Tel Aviv, Israel on Wednesday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

US top diplomat Antony Blinken urged Hamas on Wednesday to accept a Gaza truce plan despite an Israeli warning that the army will keep fighting the Palestinian militant group after any ceasefire.

"There is a very strong proposal on the table right now," said Blinken, in Israel on his seventh Middle East crisis tour since the war broke out in October. "Hamas needs to say yes and needs to get this done.

Hamas said it would respond "within a very short period" to a plan proposed by mediators to halt the fighting for 40 days and to exchange a few dozen hostages for many more Palestinian prisoners. But the group's aim remains "an end to this war" senior Hamas official Suhail al-Hindi told AFP by telephone—a goal at odds

with the stated position of Israel's hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin

The premier on Tuesday repeated his vow to send Israeli ground forces into Gaza's far-southern city of Rafah, despite major concerns over the fate of some 1.5 million civilians shelter-

"We will enter Rafah and we will eliminate the Hamas battalions there with or without a deal," Netanyahu told a group representing families of remaining hostages in Gaza. UN chief Antonio Guterres warned

that an Israeli assault on Rafah would "be an unbearable escalation, killing thousands more civilians and forcing hundreds of thousands to flee"

Netanyahu made his threat shortly before the arrival of Blinken and at a time of tensions between the traditional allies as the Gaza war has sparked global anger and weeks of

pro-Palestinian demonstrations on US university campuses.

In talks with Netanyahu on Wednesday, Blinken "reiterated the United States' clear position on Rafah", said State Department spokesman Matthew Miller, two days after Blinken had last voiced opposition to an assault. Talks on a potential truce and hostage release deal to pause the bloodiest ever Gaza war have been held in Cairo, involving US, Egyptian and Qatari mediators.

An Israeli official told AFP the government will wait for an answer from Hamas until Wednesday night before it decides whether to send its envoys back to the indirect talks in Egypt's capital.

Hindi of Hamas, speaking by phone from an undisclosed location, said there is "great interest from Hamas and all Palestinian resistance factions to end this insane war on

Palestinian people, which has consumed everything"

"But it will not be at any cost," he added, stressing that the group "cannot under any circumstances raise the white flag or surrender to the conditions of the Israeli enemy"

Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry called on all sides to "show the necessary flexibility" to achieve a deal "that stops the bloodshed of Palestinians", during a visit to Cairo by his French counterpart Stephane Sejourne.

Analysts voiced doubts whether Hamas would sign up to another temporary ceasefire like a week-long truce in November that saw more than 100 hostages released, knowing that Israeli troops could resume their onslaught as soon as it is over.

"I'm pessimistic about the option of Hamas agreeing to a deal that doesn't have a permanent ceasefire baked into it," said Mairav Zonszein, senior analyst at the International Crisis Group.

"The US and Egypt and Qatar all have very strong interests of their own, for various reasons, why they're trying very hard now to pressure both sides into agreeing to a deal."

A source with knowledge of the negotiations said Israel's proposal contained "real concessions" including a period of "sustainable calm" following an initial pause in fighting.

The war started after Hamas's October 7 attack on southern Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures.

The militants also took about 250 hostages. Israel estimates that 129 captives remain in Gaza, but the military says 34 of them are dead.

Israel's massive retaliatory offensive has killed at least 34,568 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

Widespread bombing has left Gaza filled with "more rubble than Ukraine", a UN agency said, warning that clearance efforts will be hampered by unexploded ordnance and toxic asbestos.

Israel also imposed a siege on Gaza's 2.4 million people that has sharply restricted access to food, drinking water, medicines, fuel and

Parts of India record hottest April as heatwave kills nine

Eastern India experienced its hottest April on record as a heatwave scorched parts of the country amid a general election, killing at least nine people, and the weather office on Wednesday forecast above normal temperatures for May too.

Searing heat has been cited by political analysts as one of the reasons for low voter turnout in the seven-phase parliamentary election that began on April 19, with results due on June 4.

Heatwave conditions are, however, forecast to abate gradually in the coming days. The mean temperature in eastern India was 28.12 Celsius (82.61 Fahrenheit) in April, the warmest since records began in 1901, with experts blaming a combination of factors.

"In an El Nino year, you get more heating," said Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, chief of the India Meteorological Department, referring to a climate pattern that typically leads to hot and dry weather in Asia and heavier rains in parts of the Americas

He said fewer thunderstorms and an anti-cyclonic circulation near India's southeastern coast were causing heatwaves. "Wind blows from land towards the sea during an anti-cyclone

so land becomes warmer and tem-

In April, the eastern Indian state of West Bengal recorded the most number of heatwave days for the month in the last 15 years, followed by the neighbouring coastal state of Odisha where heat conditions were the worst in nine years. Authorities have also declared a rare heatwave in the southwestern coastal state of Kerala, where at least two deaths have been recorded due to

soaring temperatures Central and northwestern India, which includes major wheat producing states that typically witness heatwaves this time of the year, have been largely spared due to intermittent thundershowers last month, Mohapatra said.

The weather office said rainfall in May is likely to be normal and that it expects more showers during the sec ond half of the monsoon season in August and September as compared to June and July due to the La Nina climate pattern, which typically brings higher rainfall to India.

Monsoon is the lifeblood of India's economy, delivering 70 percent of the rain needed to water crops and recharge reservoirs, and the met department has predicted that India will receive above normal monsoon rainfall in 2024



A drone view of women drawing water from a well on a hot day in Kasara, India, on Wednesday.

BRIEFING

Russian attack kills two, injures six in Ukraine's east

KHARKIV: A Russian attack killed at least two people and injured six on Wednesday in the Ukrainian town of Hirnyk, just over 12 km from the most tense frontline area, a local official said. Russian troops used a multiple rocket launcher for the strike, regional governor Vadym Filashkii said on the Telegram messenger. Images he shared alongside the post showed private houses destroyed by fires and damaged by blast waves. Hirnyk is just about 12-15 km from the active combat zone near Ukraine's Maryinka in the Donetsk region, where Russian troops have stepped up their offensive push. Ukraine's Army Chief Oleksandr Syrskyi has recently described the situation in the Marvinka area as one of the most difficult. Outgunned and outnumbered Kyiv troops are desperately waiting for an inflow of fresh ammunition and weapons delayed for months by political wrangling in the US Congress, Although some weaponry has been already coming. President Volodymyr Zelensky urged a significant acceleration in the speed of deliveries, saving the whole battlefield situation directly depended on it. (REUTERS)

Scottish government survives no confidence vote after leader's resignation

LONDON: The Scottish government

survived a vote of no confidence on Wednesday, giving the Scottish National Party (SNP) a chance to pick a new leader to replace outgoing First Minister Humza Yousaf. Yousaf's decision to step down as first minister and SNP leader on Monday has thrown the party into chaos and boosted hopes in Britain's opposition Labour Party that it can regain Scottish seats to win a national election later this year. Polls show that Labour is ahead of or level with the SNP in Scotland for the first time in a decade. Yousaf said he would resign after he ended a coalition with the Green Party. It means the SNP are seeking a third leader in little over a year, undermining what had once seemed like its iron grip on power in the devolved Scottish government. While the Greens made Yousaf's position untenable by withdrawing their confidence in him personally, they voted with the SNP against Wednesday's vote of no confidence in the Scottish government. The no confidence motion was defeated by 70 votes to 58. Defeat for the government would have led to the resignation of all ministers and most likely triggered a Scottish election. (REUTERS)

Trump returns to his campaign facing a warning of jail time if he violates a trial gag order

ASSOCIATED PRESS WAUKESHA, WISCONSIN, MAY 1

Donald Trump on Wednesday is using a one-day break from his hush money states of Wisconsin and Michigan, a day after he was held in contempt of court and threatened with jail time for violating a gag order.

His remarks are being closely watched after he received a \$9,000 fine for making public statements about people connected to the case. In imposing the fine for posts on Trump's Truth Social account and campaign website, Judge Juan M Merchan said that if Trump continued to violate his orders, he "will impose an incarceratory punishment."

The former president is trying to achieve a balancing act unprecedented in American history by running for a second term as the presumptive Republican nominee while also fighting felony charges in New York.

Trump frequently goes after Merchan, prosecutors and potential witnesses at his rallies and on social media, attack lines that play well with his supporters but that have potentially put him in further legal jeopardy.



Donald Trump

ing his free speech rights, but the offending posts from his Truth Social account and campaign website were taken down. Merchan is weighing other alleged gag-order violations by Trump and will hear arguments on Thursday.

Trump appeared frustrated after the ninth day of the trial came to an end, saying he should be out in Georgia and New Hampshire instead of sitting in court.

"They don't want me on the campaign trail," he told reporters.

Trump has often called this case and other criminal cases against him "election interference," saying they

keep him from campaigning for the presidential election in November.

The gag order bars him from making public statements about witnesses, jurors and some others connected to

Manhattan prosecutors have argued Trump and his associates took part in an illegal scheme to influence the 2016 presidential campaign by purchasing and then burying negative stories. He has pleaded not guilty.

Trump's visits to Wisconsin and Michigan mark his second trip to the swing states in just a month.

For the previous rallies, the former president largely focused on immigration, referring to people who are in the US illegally and who are suspected of crimes as "animals."

Meanwhile, Democrats are hoping to remind voters ahead of these visits about Trump's position on abortion, which Trump has been openly concerned about being a political liability for him and Republicans.

Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan met on Wednesday with half a dozen women, including a family doctor, and warned that a second Trump term would threaten abortion rights even in her state, which enshrined those rights in $its\, state\, constitution\, after\, the\, Supreme$ Court overturned national rights to

Whitmer appeared with the women at a bookstore in Flint surrounded by on Health Care" and "Stop Trump's Abortion Ban." She told reporters not to believe Trump's contention in a Time Magazine interview that Republicans would never have enough votes in the US Senate to pass a national abortion ban.

"We cannot trust anything that Donald Trump says when it comes to abortion. So no one should take any comfort in the fact that, yes, he wants an abortion ban, but he won't get it because he doesn't think we'll have 60 votes in the Senate. Baloney," she said. "No one would have imagined we'd be here in this moment.'

Wisconsin and Michigan are among a handful of battleground states expected to decide the 2024 election.

For Trump to win both states, he must do well in suburban areas like the areas outside of Milwaukee and Saginaw, Michigan, where he will hold Wednesday's events. He underperformed in suburban areas during this year's primary even as he dominated the Republican field overall.

Americans agreed with a statement

that China is using the app to "spy on

everyday Americas," an allegation

Beijing has denied.

Evacuation continues following Indonesia's Ruang volcano eruption

REUTERS

Hundreds residents of Indonesia's Tagulandang island were waiting at the island's port to be evacuated on Wednesday, footage from National Search and Rescue Agency showed, while grey smoke continued to erupt from Ruang volcano.

Indonesia's Ruang volcano erupted on Tuesday, spewing lava that prompted authorities to evacuate more than 12,000 people from the nearby Tagulandang island.

The Center for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation (PVMBG) raised the alert status of Ruang to the highest level after yesterday's eruption, and warned the residents of Tagulandang island that a tsunami could be triggered by volcanic material collapsing into the ocean.

"Personnel of Manado Search and Rescue Agency are evacuating 109 Tagulandang residents to Munte port, while hundreds are still waiting in Minanga port to be evacuated," the National Search and Rescue agency said in a statement on Wednesday.

The app is ubiquitous in

America. Even Biden's re-election

campaign is using it as a tool to

win over voters ahead of the November

Biden's rival, Republican Donald

Trump, who has criticized a

potential ban and is the majority

owner of the company that operates

his social media app Truth Social, has

Most Americans see TikTok as a Chinese influence tool, poll finds

■ REUTERS

WASHINGTON, MAY 1

A majority of Americans believe that China uses TikTok to shape US public opinion, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted as Washington moves closer to potentialbanning the Chinese-owned short-video app.

Some 58 percent of respondents to the two-day poll, which closed on Tuesday, agreed with a statement that the Chinese government uses TikTok, which is owned by China's ByteDance, to "influence American public opinion." Some 13 percent disagreed, and the rest were unsure or didn't answer the Republicans were more likely than Democrats to see China as using the app to affect US opinions.

TikTok says it has spent more than \$1.5 billion on data security efforts and would not share data on its 170 million US users with the Chinese government. The company told

Congress last year that it does "not promote or remove content at the request of the Chinese government.' TikTok did not immediately

respond to a request for comment. President Joe Biden last week signed legislation giving ByteDance 270 days to divest TikTok's US assets

or face a ban. TikTok has vowed to challenge the ban as a violation of the protections of free expression enshrined in the First Amendment of the US Constitution, and TikTok users are expected to again take legal action. A US judge in Montana in November blocked a state ban on TikTok, citing free-speech concerns.

The Reuters/Ipsos poll found 50 percent of Americans supported banning TikTok, while 32 percent opposed a ban and the rest were unsure. The poll only surveyed US adults and doesn't reflect the views of people under age 18, who make up a significant portion of TikTok's users in the United States. About six in 10



TikTok logo is placed on the US and Chinese flags in this illustration taken, on April 25.

poll respondents aged 40 and older supported a ban, compared with about four in 10 aged 18-39.

The poll showed 46 percent of

A majority of Americans, 60 per-

5 presidential election.

cent, said it was inappropriate for US political candidates to use TikTok to promote their campaigns. Biden's signing of the law sets a

Jan. 19 deadline for a sale - one day before his term is set to expire - but he could extend the deadline by three months if he determines that ByteDance is making progress on divesting the app.

The poll, which was conducted online, gathered responses from 1,022 US adults nationwide and had a margin of error of about 3 percent-

Trump insists he is merely exercis-

Nepal bank on experience at T20 World Cup

Cricket Association of Nepal announces a 15-member squad adding Kamal Singh Airee and Sagar Dhakal. Binod Bhandari, Aarif Sheikh, Bibek Yadav, Lokesh Bam and Aakash Chand have been left out.



Players of Nepal celebrate a wicket of West Indies A during the third T20 match at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Wednesday.

SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, MAY 1

Nepal coach Monty Desai will bank on experience after retaining most of the players from the ACC Men's Premier Cup campaign in the final 15-man squad for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in the West Indies and the United States.

The announcement came hours after Nepal suffered a huge 76-run defeat against the West Indies A in the third T20 in Kirtipur that handed the visitors a 2-1 lead in the five-match T20 series.

With the T20 World Cup just a month away, coach Monty Desai will still be desperate to address Nepal's struggle with the bat which is turning out to be a big headache, again.

Nepal's team will be led by regular captain Rohit Paudel, who has regained his form at a perfect time. Paudel scored an unbeaten century that helped Nepal win the first T20 against the West Indies A. He also played an unconquered knock of 48-ball 71 in the second T20 but could not save his team from defeat.

Desai rested Paudel on Wednesday, and in his absence, the hosts could not match the tempo of a strong West Indies A team and could only manage 151 runs in their chase of a massive 228-run target that was set with the help of an unbeaten century from Johnson Charles and a half-century from Andre Fletcher.

Batters Binod Bhandari, Aarif Sheikh, Bibek Yadav and Lokesh Bam-

who were heavily experimented in the build-up to the World Cup—were all left out from the T20 World Cup squad after their dismal performance continued in the series against West Indies A as well.

Veteran cricketer Bhandari travelled to Hong Kong with the national side to participate in the Hong Kong T20 Series following his decent performance at the Prime Minister Cup. He was part of Nepal A team's all five games against Ireland A. But his outings have not been very satisfactory, with his 27 against PNG being the highest score of his last nine games.

Aarif was also out of form. Since his unconquered knock of 93 in a T20 match against visiting Ireland A a month ago, his handling with the bat has been a big disappointment. He has scored just 15 runs in his last four games

Yadav was seen as a bright prospect for Nepal in November last year when he smashed three consecutive sixes to Oman's Bilal Khan off the last over in the T20 World Cup Asia Qualifier. He carried that aggression to Nepal's

Tour of Hong Kong in March, blasting a four-ball 19 (not out) against Papua New Guinea that also featured three sixes off the last over. However, he has failed to touch the double digit figures in his last

Lokesh Bam scored a century against Ireland A in Nepal's first T20 match in March but has not been able to carry on with that form.

Anil Sah, however, has made his cut to the World Cup squad despite failing to impress in his recent matches. Sah returned to international cricket in February with a bang, scoring a fifty and an unbeaten century against Canada in the home ODI series. But he has lost his form since. He was dismissed cheaply for five runs in the first T20 and one run in the second T20 against West Indies A. On Wednesday, he

NEPAL SQUAD FOR T20 WORLD CUP

Rohit Paudel (captain), Aasif Sheikh, Anil Kumar Sah, Kushal Bhurtel, Kushal Malla, Dipendra Singh Airee, Lalit Rajbanshi, Karan KC, Gulsan Jha. Sompal Kami, Pratis GC, Sundeep Jora, Abinash Bohara, Sagar Dhakal and Kamal Singh Airee.

played 15-ball 14.

Fresh from a record-equalling feat of six sixes in an over against Qatar in the ACC Men's T20 Premier Cup in Oman, all-rounder Dipendra Singh Airee will be in the mix as always, alongside wicket-keeper and batsman Aasif Sheikh and Kushal Malla. Sheikh has been rested for the West Indies A series.

Desai's love affair with out-of-shape Kushal Bhurtel will continue at the World Cup despite the opener experiencing the lowest point of his career. He was dismissed for a duck for a three match in a row during the Premier Cup in Oman and has continued his poor show back at home (in the series against West Indies A) as well. There were questions whether his selection would be a right choice but Desai has no option but to hope Bhurtel will regain his form for the global event.

Gulsan Jha will also travel with the squad as one of the young players, while Pratis GC has also kept his place.

All-rounder Sompal Kami is the only player from Nepal's debut 2014 World Cup campaign in Bangladesh and will lead the fast-bowling with a mature Karan KC, while Lalit Rajbanshi will lead Nepal's spin attack

Spinner Sagar Dhakal and pacer Kamal Singh Airee are the only new changes from a squad that had a disastrous Premier Cup campaign.

Kamal took 10 wickets in Nepal A's two series (OD and T20) against Ireland A. However his bowling spell against West Indies A has proved expensive after conceding 53 runs in each of his two innings.

Dhakal took 2-19 in the second T20 and 1-41 in the third T20 against West Indies. He also picked four wickets for Nepal A in three T20 matches

Nepal are in Group D alongside the Netherlands, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and South Africa. They open their World

Cup against the Dutch on June 4. Nepal are appearing at a World Cup for the only second time.

Real Madrid stars keen on Kroos stay after Munich masterclass

☐ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MUNICH, MAY 1

Toni Kroos has not decided where his future lies but his team-mates are hoping he chooses to stay at Real Madrid after his Champions League masterclass Bayern Munich.

The experienced 34-year-old German midfielder shone for Real in their 2-2 semi-final first leg draw at his former stomping ground in Bavaria on a gripping Tuesday night.

Kroos's contract expires in the summer after a decade with the record 14-time Champions League

"I want to win as much as possible this season— I don't think about the future," he said after the

Looking beyond obvious standout Vinicius Junior, who netted both of Madrid's goals against Bayern, Kroos was Madrid's finest player in a match where Los Blancos could have been beaten.

Thomas Tuchel's Bayern created more chances and Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said they were at their best, compared to his side which only showed their top level in flashes.

Kroos was by contrast supremely consistent and his superb ball for Vinicius helped Madrid take the lead.

The former Germany interna-

tional was a step ahead of everyone else on the pitch, pointing to Vinicius where he planned to play the ball, a pass which didn't seem Vinicius, closely acquainted with Kroos's quality, made the

ed the needle with his slide-rule "We train together so much, I know Kroos very well and he

right run and the veteran thread-

knows me very well," explained the Brazilian forward Vinicius' strike-partner Rodrygo said he would love Kroos

"We always tell him (Kroos) to stay, not just one but many years

more, age doesn't matter,' Rodrygo told Movistar. "He's so masterful, with such class, I love playing with him, I

'No words'

hope he keeps going.

Kroos made some vital interceptions in midfield, was a threat from set pieces and in the first half hour did not misplace a sin-

By half-time only one of his 49 had gone astray and by the end 79 out of 82 found their target.



Looking beyond obvious standout Vinicius Junior, who netted both of Real Madrid's goals against Bayern Munich, Toni Kroos was the finest player in a match where Los Blancos could have been beaten.

The midfielder showed his

experience as well as his class, having a word with Madrid goalkeeper Andriy Lunin, telling him to stay calm after a hurried It was Kroos charging up the outside early in the second half,

with Manuel Neuer beating his effort to safety at full stretch after a slick move. He was booked for a tactical foul on Bayern striker Harry

Kane and took the armband after Nacho Fernandez was substituted. The Bayern match is Kroos' 10th semi-final tie and the only player who has lifted the trophy

more is former Madrid winger Paco Gento, a six-time winner. Kroos and several other players are tied on five.

The German did not look happy to be replaced in the final stages, given the calibre of his performance.

"(It was) just for more energy, Kroos played a very good game, explained Ancelotti.

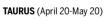
"There are no words to define him. He is a top player, crucial for our game, for the way he controls the speed (of the game), and for

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

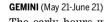


community. This makes it easier to clear away connections with those who trigger you politically or no longer serve your highest good. You'll feel like going within to take an honest look at yourself.





You may feel slightly overstimulated when you awaken. Reclaim control by returning to structures that have served you in the past, especially if you've been lagging within your responsibilities or personal boundaries have faltered. You will be nudged to expand your network.





The early hours will give you strange dreams that could cause you to lose focus. Take a moment to connect with your spirituality once you've awakened, but remember that empowerment comes when you find ways to marry the fantastical with reality.

59 Pickling

63 Jester

68 Maltreat

69 Expansive

70 Engrossed

teacher

66 Sub

substance

64 Winged cherub

Frizzy hairdo

71 Delayer's motto

72 "The Simpsons"

(in secret)





CANCER (June 22-July 22) space to let go of any thoughts, emotions, or ideas you're ready to release, darling Cancer. The day creates an opportunity to reverse behaviours and patterns in the name of personal transformation. You'll sense an elevating shift this afternoon.

LEO (July 23-August 22)



Work from the heart center as the day nudges you to invest in your relationships. Use this energy to correct any issues within your dynamics while considering how you can evolve as a com-



panion. Your feelings intensify this afternoon.



PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

P A S H A

ETHER

GEM

N O M A N S U A V E

ERRED

EATS

IDEA

GIFT

DEBTOR

AGUE

INHERENT

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

SLAT

TOPEKA

GREETS

LYNDA

T | A | N | A | G | E | R

GAVE

SINE

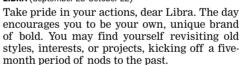
SEAR

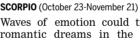
P E N E L O P E L A I R W A R

The morning triggers strange dreams that could lead to enlightenment around your work situation. Expect to see some changes within your daily routines throughout the next five months. Your thoughts drift toward sweeter themes as afternoon rolls in.



LIBRA (September 23-October 22)







Waves of emotion could trigger intuitive or romantic dreams in the early hours, dear Scorpio. Use this energy to get in touch with your feelings, stripping back any pretenses you've created for yourself. The atmosphere shifts as afternoon rolls in.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)



Keep your mind active, dearest Sagittarius, unlocking a world of creative and intellectual potential. Use this energy to empower yourself with words, being mindful of how your ideas are received. The day asks you to get in touch with your emotions.



CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

ifesting new ideas, learning, or unpacking your thoughts. Use the energy to slow down and breathe. You may notice some stagnancy within your goals, marking a five-month period of

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)



Your emotions could reveal interesting truths through the dream realms, dear Aquarius Revitalise your image without forgetting who

you are throughout the next five months. A supportive energy takes hold this afternoon.



PISCES (February 19-March 20)

The morning, dear Pisces, brings activity to your mind that could trigger enlightening dreams. Use this energy to acknowledge your patterns, looking for opportunities to grow and improve. Your energy levels pick up this afternoon, putting you in a popular place. ASTROLOGY.COM

SUDOKU

6 5 8 1 2 3 4 7 9 1 2 3 9 4 7 5 6 8 4 7 9 5 8 6 3 1 2 294758136 361294785 785631294 9 1 2 8 7 5 6 4 3 5 3 6 4 1 9 8 2 7

8 4 7 3 6 2 9 5 1 YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

DIFFICULTY RATING:

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

recyclables 5 Sage in a turban 10 Shambles

14 Freshly

1 Some

16 Lustrous stone 17 Kind of bean 18 Piano man -

15 Long-neck bird

- John 19 Mexican money 20 Beaten 22 - in a teacup
- 24 Turnstile 25 John Doe, aka Richard 26 Check
- 34 Lots and lots 36 Greek letter 37 "Wham!"
- 38 Soft food for babies 39 Truly vertical
- 42 Actress MacGraw
- 44 Breadwinner 47 Got back
- **52 SUV** 53 Love god
- 28 Impoverished
- 41 United
- 43 "You to be there'
- 51 Proximate
- 55 Self-denying

Krabappel **DOWN** Baby animal

Dye plant

Verne's captain 5 Baking item 6 Joined metal

parts

11 Sword

door

27 Subject

12 Talk back to

13 Opening in a

23 Miss Piggy's

perfume

Museum pieces 8 Debatable 9 Swim ring (2 wds. 10 Child

"- of Thrones"

32 Printer ink 33 Pitcher 34 Mast

land

48 Big cat

49 Cistern

35 Globular 40 Household god 45 Presently

29 Work by Chopin

30 — Browne belt 31 "Once — — 54 Contract afterthought midnight dreary 55 Remotely 56 Long seát 57 Abbr. in biz

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50 Develop

- 58 Actor Gooding Jr. 60 Prod 61 Org.
- 62 - tat-tat 46 Protected public 65 Situate

15 16 18 19 22 29 32 38 41 39 42 43 46 49 50 53 56 59 60 62 66 64 68 69 72

Reading today is more important than ever for critical observation

UNESCO representative to Nepal, Michael Croft, shares his love for reading, his message on the World Press Freedom Day and the threats of Al.

ichael Croft, the Head of Office and since August 2021. In an interview with the Post's

UNESCO representative to Nepal, has been actively engaged in advancing the shared goals of Nepal and UNESCO

Aarati Ray, Croft shared his love for reading, his message for World Press Freedom Day and threats How has your journey with

reading been? My parents were teachers, so

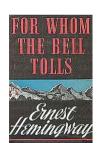
books and reading were quite important in my house and I learned to read early on. There was also a time in my





Michael Croft's

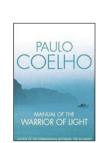
book recommendations



For Whom the Bell Tolls

Ernest Hemingway Publisher: Charles Scribner's Sons

This was the only book that ever made me cry. The narrative draws from Hemingway's first hand encounters during the Spanish Civil War while working as a correspondent for the North American Newspaper Alliance



Manual of the Warrior of Light Paulo Coelho

Publisher: Harper Collins 1997

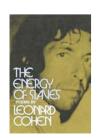
Coelho's book is full of advice on how to deal with problems, face challenges and become a better person. Reading it during my youth served as a reminder of the kind of person I was and the kind of person I wanted to be in the future.



The Bullet and the Ballot Box

Author: Aditya Adhikari Publisher: Verso

This book is about Nepal's Maoist revolution and social transformation. In this, we get to know that development work is like psychology; it involves understanding a country's psyche and citizens' needs which are essential for development.

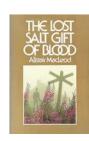


The Energy of Slaves

Leonard Cohen Publisher: McClelland & Stewart

1972

Cohen's work often explores the themes of religion, isolation, sexuality and complex interpersonal relationships. I have read a few of his other works but because of the complex and raw feelings reflected in poems, this is my favourite one.



The Lost Salt Gift of Blood Author: Alistair MacLeod

Publisher: New Canadian Library

This book features simple yet deep

stories about family bonds, generational conflicts, and personal loss. Penned by the most esteemed writer from my province, the book serves as a reminder of my roots and is a comfort read for me. handy because I moved around a lot to different places and didn't always have access to English books.

Now, I make sure to read as much as I can, especially in the evenings before bed. I especially read historical fiction and often literature about the new

> Before Nepal, you were in Vietnam as a UNESCO representative. What cultural differences have you noticed between Nepal and Vietnam?

see more similarities than differences between the two countries. Vietnam and Nepal both value their rich cultures and diversity. Vietnam leverages its cultural strengths for development, while Nepal still needs to fully leverage its cultural richness for development, which is something we're working on here.

strong social fabrics, but Vietnam is more homogeneous. Nepal's diversity is one of the most magical things about Nepal. It's not always possible in other countries, but Nepalis have this special space and freedom for creativity and embracing

> Do you think reading culture is declining

globally?

I'm not sure if it's true that people are reading less, but I do think the way we read has changed.

reading is indeed declining, worries me because understanding complex issues often requires reading about them thoroughly.

Reading allows us to inform ourselves about important topics, and it's hard to find a better way to do that. Plus, the act of reading itself improves our thinking process.

How important has reading been in your journey of developing diplomacy and negotiation skills?

Reading inspires my writing, and effective writing is essential for communicating ideas in diplomacy and development work. It's a skill that has served me well and even helped me deal with tricky situations.

While I don't claim to be wise, organisations like UNESCO rely on my experiences to ensure that I make good decisions in Nepal. Reading is crucial for making informed decisions across various issues and levels. I often depend on reading material I engaged with years ago, but I also continually integrate new subjects and topics into my reading to ensure I can fulfil my professional responsibilities effectively.

Are libraries and books becoming irrelevant due to digitalisation and online sources?

I don't think libraries are becoming irrelevant at all. While it's true that we have easy access to information online, there's a distinction between information, knowledge and wisdom. In today's world, where we're bombarded with misinformation and information overload, reading is more important than ever for critical observation.



Libraries, like museums, need to evolve in the 21st century, but they are still essential parts of society. While we may not go to libraries solely for information anymore, they still provide valuable knowledge, experiences, and learning opportunities.

How do you view the influence of artificial intelligence (AI) on freedom of expression (FoE) and speech?

AI presents both challenges and opportunities for institutions like developing agencies, governments and universities. However, the algorithms used in social media can shape what we see, potentially reinforcing stereotypes and narrow worldviews which is concerning as it limits exposure to diverse perspec-

AI will continue to be a topic of discussion for some time, and it's hard to fully grasp how much it will change our lives in the near future.

What has been UNESCO doing to minimise the risks of Al and are there further plans for the future?

A few years ago, member states globally recognised the challenge of AI and requested UNESCO to develop an ethical framework for AI, which was signed by all the then 193 member states in November 2021.

UNESCO is one of the first entities to put some guardrails on the great highway of AI but we also have to look at the applications of AI. So, currently, UNESCO is exploring AI's implications in science, education, and culture.

In Nepal, there are plans to launch an initiative this year focusing on integrating AI into education for its benefits while mitigating challenges.

What significant threats do you see in Nepal in terms of FoE and press freedom?

In Nepal, while significant strides have been made in the past to secure press freedom and FoE, new challenges have emerged in recent years.

One significant threat is the rise of social media

and online platforms, which have facilitated the spread of misinformation, deep fakes and fake news. These pose challenges to maintaining an informed public discourse, increase hate speech and undermine trust in media sources.

Despite these challenges, Nepal benefits from a relatively open political space where societal debates can take place openly. However, it's crucial for Nepal, like any other country, to reassess how it can reinforce and uphold press freedom and FoE in the face of evolving

What message would you like to convey for this upcoming World Press Freedom Day?

I want to emphasise the critical role that journalists play in addressing the pressing issue of climate change which is UNESCO's theme this year.

Climate change can often seem overwhelming and distant, filled with complex data and statistics. It's the responsibility of journalists to break down these complexities, to make the issue relatable and understandable for the average person.

While physical violence against journalists may be less prevalent in places like Kathmandu, online harassment, especially targeting women, remains a significant issue. Journalists reporting on environmental issues are increasingly at risk of harm, with instances of violence and even fatalities occurring

This World Press Freedom Day, we aim to reaffirm our commitment to defending press freedom, supporting journalists, and acknowledging their vital contribution to our understanding of the world and its challenges like Climate Change.

In what ways do books contribute to our understanding of culture and help mitigate differences?

Before travelling outside of North America for the first time at 28 for an internship at UNESCO in Paris, I read a book on cultural shock. Despite my initial confidence as a Canadian going to Paris, I quickly realised how different everything was—from groceries to navigating daily tasks like going to the post office.

The stress of adaptation made me initially dislike the place, but later thanks to that book, I grew to appreciate French culture as I embraced its differences.

That's just one instance of how a single book influenced me. It equipped me with a vital life skill that has proven instrumental in shaping both my personal and professional journey.

So, books offer insights into diverse cultures, developing empathy and appreciation for diversity. They serve as windows into unfamiliar worlds and help bridge the gap between people from different backgrounds and cultures.

Alicia Keys, Daniel Radcliffe and more earn Tony Award nominations



Singer Alicia Keys at the Shubert Theatre on April 20,

■ ASSOCIATED PRESS

inger Alicia Keys says she was unable to speak after her semi-autobiographical show 'Hell's Kitchen' earned 13 nods when the nominations for the 2024 Tony Awards were announced Tuesday.

"These are very, very special moments," said nominee and veteran star Brian d'Arcy James, who is nominated for actor in a leading role for 'Days of Wine and Roses.'

The Tony Awards ceremony will be on June 16. These were some of the reactions Tuesday from nominees:

"It is an exciting morning. I feel great. This is a very special thing. I've had the good fortune of being in this position before, but it does not get old."—'Days of Wine and Roses' star Brian d'Arcy James in an interview.

"I am so grateful for this nomination and for the historic recognition of our entire show. As a kid from Long Island who took the train in to see Broadway shows from 7 years old this is the fulfillment of a lifelong dream."—'Stereophonic star Tom Pecinka in a statement.

"I have always felt like doing stage and particularly doing it here has been such a huge part of my career and sort of like finding out who I was as an actor outside of Harry Potter."-'Merrily We Roll Along' star Daniel Radcliffe in an interview.

"This is unbelievable. This is so special. All of the collaborators that have been a part of this process, everybody being able to get recognized for their beautiful brilliance. I am totally at a loss for words. Don't ask me to write a song."-Alicia Keys in an interview.



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