



THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Dhangadi Jiri

TODAY

NATIONAL

A lack of funds affects the construction of embankment to protect residents of Chitwan and Nawalparasi East from inundation and erosion caused by floods in the Narayani river during monsoon season. Pg 2

OPINION



The state should provide legal and psychological support if anybody is discriminated against, writes *Sajhana Tolange*. Pg 4

MONEY

Strategically placed Sri Lanka's economic recovery was essential for stability in the IndoPacific region, Japan's foreign minister said on Saturday, urging Colombo to swiftly restructure its foreign debt. Pg 5

WORLD

Ukrainian village of Ocheretyne has been battered by fighting, drone footage obtained by Associated Press shows. The village has been a target for Russian forces in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine. Pg 6



CULTURE

As open spaces in Kathmandu Valley are slowly being encroached on, people are deprived of the chances to live communally, to rejuvenate mentally and to have a safe space when disaster strikes. Pg 8



Fans cheer Nepal cricketers during their last match of the T20 series against West Indies A at the TU ground, Kirtipur on Saturday. (Report on Pg 7)

Sudurpaschim Chief Minister Sodari's trust vote uncertain as UML buys time

Assembly meetings scheduled for Friday and Saturday deferred due to dispute.

PURUSHOTTAM POUDEL
KATHMANDU, MAY 4

The floor test of Sudurpaschim Chief Minister Dirgha Bahadur Sodari was postponed at the last moment on Saturday after the major coalition partner CPN-UML sought more time to decide on the issue.

Sodari, a leader of CPN (Unified Socialist), was appointed chief minister of the province on April 18 despite his bitter relations with the UML's local politicians.

The Unified Socialist was born out of a factional dispute in the UML, with former prime ministers Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhala Nath Khanal forming the new party in 2021.

The UML was compelled to accept Sodari as the chief minister, and the party is now buying time before a vote of trust. This makes Sodari's position shaky.

At the chief minister's request, the provincial assembly was scheduled to meet on Saturday for the trust vote. However, the meeting was postponed in the afternoon, for the second time. Earlier, the assembly had set a Friday meeting.

Some UML provincial assembly members flew to Kathmandu on Saturday morning to discuss the matter with the party's central leaders, leaving the confidence motion in limbo.

However, provincial minister for Physical Infrastructure and Development Kailash Chaudhary expressed his confidence that Chief Minister Sodari will win the vote of

trust in a few days despite the postponement of meetings.

"The UML is yet to select ministerial candidates for the provincial Cabinet and the CPN (Maoist Centre) is also still discussing the portfolios of its leaders in the government. This is delaying the vote of trust," Chaudhary told the Post. But the delay poses no threat to the incumbent provincial government, he added.

Some UML assembly members in Kathmandu to consult party seniors on the issue.

Sodari, who earlier appointed two ministers from the Nagarik Unmukti Party, leads a three-member Cabinet.

The UML leaders accused the chief minister of scheduling the assembly meeting in haste, without consulting them.

Rajendra Singh Rawal, the UML's assembly leader in Sudurpaschim, said the chief minister appointed on April 18 still has sufficient time before the expiry of the month-long constitutional deadline.

The constitution requires a chief minister appointed with the support of two or more parties to obtain a vote of confidence from the assembly no later than 30 days after taking charge.

>> Continued on page 2

Dahal hints at House panel on cooperative cash embezzlement

Prime minister informs Congress chief Deuba about plan to refer the issue to a House committee for investigation.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, MAY 4

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has hinted of his readiness to form a parliamentary committee to investigate the embezzlement of depositors' money by the operators of several cooperatives around the country.

According to a police probe, dozens of cooperative firms have embezzled and misused billions of rupees from millions of depositors.

The main opposition Nepali Congress has long been demanding such a parliamentary panel to initiate a probe against Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Rabi Lamichhane, who allegedly was involved in embezzling millions of rupees, particularly from two cooperatives based in Butwal and Pokhara. Addressing a parliamentary party meeting of the CPN (Maoist Centre) on Saturday, the prime minister said that the misuse of cooperatives deposits has become a serious and complex issue. Discussions are underway to constitute a parliamentary committee to comprehensively deal with the issue, he added.

The proposed committee will study the problems faced by all cooperatives and will explore ways to return the money of depositors, Devendra Poudel, a Maoist lawmaker, told the Post.

A Nepali Congress leader said the prime minister has commu-

nicated his plan to party president Sher Bahadur Deuba.

The committee will look into the issue in totality rather than targeting a particular politician, the Congress leader said. However, the largest party in the House of Representatives, which obstructed its proceedings in the winter session of Parliament, is not convinced by the prime minister's proposal, according to the leader.

As budget session starts on Friday, PM fears the main opposition may disrupt the House again.

As the government has called the budget session for May 10, the main opposition says it will again raise the matter of constituting a parliamentary committee.

Ahead of the house session, "we will call a meeting of the parliamentary committee on Thursday", Nepali Congress General Secretary Bishwa Prakash Sharma said. "The formation of a parliamentary committee to probe [the issue of] cooperatives [fund] embezzlement and the involvement of Home Minister Lamichhane and investigating the property of all public office holders after 1991 will be our main agenda," Sharma said.

>> Continued on page 2

India opposition social media chief arrested over doctored video

Reddy detained over edited footage falsely showing Amit Shah vowing in a campaign speech to end affirmative action policies for millions of poor and low-caste Indians.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW DELHI, MAY 4

Indian police said on Saturday they had arrested the social media chief of the country's main opposition party over accusations he doctored a widely shared video during an ongoing national election.

The Congress party's Arun Reddy was detained late Friday in connection with the edited footage, which falsely shows India's powerful interior minister Amit Shah vowing in a campaign speech to end affirmative action policies for millions of poor and low-caste Indians.

Shah is often referred to as the second-most powerful man in India after Hindu-nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the pair have been close political allies for decades.

Reddy "was arrested yesterday on investigation about... a doctored video of the home minister", deputy commissioner of Delhi police Hemant Tiwari told AFP.

"We produced him in the court and he is in police custody."

Congress spokesperson Shama Mohamed confirmed Reddy's arrest to AFP but denied he was responsible for creating or publishing the clip.



Arun Reddy

video. We are supporting him," she said.

Authorities seized Reddy's electronic devices for forensic verification, the Indian Express newspaper reported on Saturday, quoting an unnamed police officer who accused Reddy of having "cropped and edited" the video.

Shah has been campaigning on behalf of Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is widely expected to win a third term when India's six-week election concludes next month.

Analysts have long expected Modi to triumph against a fractious alliance of Congress and more than two dozen

parties that have yet to name a candidate for prime minister.

His prospects have been further bolstered by several criminal investigations into his opponents and a tax investigation this year that froze Congress's bank accounts.

Opposition figures and human rights organisations have accused Modi's government of orchestrating the probes to weaken rivals.

Modi's prospects bolstered by several criminal investigations into his opponents.

Modi's government remains widely popular a decade after coming to power, in large part due to its positioning of the nation's majority Hindu faith at the centre of its politics despite India's officially secular constitution.

That in turn has left India's 220 million-strong Muslim community feeling threatened by the rise of Hindu nationalist fervour.

>> Continued on page 6



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‘अर्थतन्त्रको आधारभूत आवश्यकता: राजनीतिक नेतृत्वको सामूहिक प्रतिबद्धता’

अर्थतन्त्रको अवस्था देखाउने क्षेत्रहरूको आँकडा हेर्ने हो भने कतै उत्साह त कतै निराशा देखिन्छ। निरन्तर बढिरहेको रेमिट्यान्स र घटिरहेको आयातका कारण विदेशी मुद्रा सञ्चितिले हरेक महिना नयाँ कीर्तिमान बनाइरहेको छ। तर नेपालीले दुःखले कमाएर पठाएको पैसा चलायमान भएको छैन। बैंक तथा वित्तीय क्षेत्रमा साढे ६ खर्ब रुपैयाँ थन्किएर बसेको छ। बैंक ब्याजदर घट्दो क्रममा छ तर व्यापार-व्यवसाय गर्नेले सहजै ऋण पाइरहेका छैनन्। नवीन सोच भएका नवप्रवर्तक र ऋण पाउन सक्ने क्षमताका उद्योगी-व्यवसायीले थप लगानी विस्तार गरिरहेका छैनन्।

एक दशकयता तीन वटा लगानी सम्मेलन भएका छन्, तर प्रत्यक्ष वैदेशिक लगानी (एफडीआई) अपेक्षित रूपमा बढ्न सकेको छैन। सरकारी खर्च र आम्दानीमा पनि उस्तै समस्या छ। लक्ष्यअनुसार राजस्व संकलन भएको छैन, संकलन भएको राजस्वअनुसार पुँजीगत खर्च भएको छैन। वैदेशिक सहायता र अनुदान पनि बढ्न सकेको छैन।

निजी र सरकारी क्षेत्रका विभिन्न अध्ययन-अनुसन्धानअनुसार धेरै साना उद्योग व्यवसाय बन्द भएका छन्। सञ्चालनमा रहेका उद्योग पनि ४० प्रतिशतभन्दा कम क्षमतामा चलिरेका छन्, तिनको उत्पादन स्वतः घटेको छ। उद्योग-व्यवसायले जनशक्ति कटौती गरिरहेका छन् भने नयाँ रोजगारी सिर्जना भएको छैन। युवा पलायनको संख्याले हरेक वर्ष कीर्तिमान कायम गरिरहेको छ। उपभोक्तृ जनशक्ति पलायन हुँदा बजारमा उपभोक्तृ वस्तुको मागमा कमी आई दीर्घकालका लागि अर्थतन्त्रमा असर निरर्तितै छ।

अर्थतन्त्रको बागडोर सम्हाल्दै आएको राजनीतिक नेतृत्वबीच ठूलो विमति छैन, तर आन्तरिक समस्या समाधान गर्न आमसहमति पनि देखिएको छैन। आन्तरिक समस्यालाई सम्बोधन नगर्ने र अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय अवस्थालाई दोष दिने प्रवृत्तिले नेतृत्वलाई बहाना त प्राप्त हुन्छ, तर यसले आमसर्वसाधारणको जीवनमा कस्तो निराशा छाइरहेको छ। यो अवस्थाको अन्त्य अहिले नगरे कहिले ? फेरि राजनीतिक दलहरूले नै नगरे कसले ? दलहरूलाई एक ठाउँमा ल्याएर सार्वजनिक रूपमा प्रतिबद्ध बनाउन र सरोकारवालाका आवाज तथा नीति निर्माताका योजना अभिव्यक्त गर्न कान्तिपुर इकोनमिक समिट-२०२४

कान्तिपुर इकोनमिक समिट-२०२४

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US Dollar	133.78
Euro	143.79
Pound Sterling	167.97
Swiss Franc	147.51
Australian Dollar	88.05
Canadian Dollar	97.91
Singapore Dollar	98.95
Japanese Yen (10)	8.73
Chinese Yuan	18.48
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.67
Qatari Riyal	36.69
Thai Bhat	3.64
UAE Dhiram	36.42
Malaysian Ringgit	28.22
Korean Won (100)	9.85
Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank	
BULLION	
PRICE PER TOLA	
 Fine Gold	Rs 135,400
 Silver	Rs 1,645
SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA	
BIZLINE	

India’s government lifts ban on onion exports, sets floor price

NEW DELHI: India has lifted restrictions on the export of onions, according to an official notification on Saturday, a day after the government announced a 40 percent export duty. The export ban was imposed by the world’s biggest exporter of the vegetable last December and then extended in March. The policy changes comes in the middle of staggered voting in India’s national election in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a rare third term. Parts of India’s onion producing belt in the western state of Maharashtra are yet to vote. While lifting the ban, the government also announced a minimum export price of \$550 per metric ton for exports. “This is after taking into account estimated rabi production 2024 and good kharif prospect because of above normal monsoon,” a government official said. **(REUTERS)**

Trump Media’s newly hired auditing firm was just busted by the SEC for ‘massive fraud’

SAN FRANCISCO: The Securities and Exchange Commission on Friday charged an auditing firm hired by Trump Media and Technology Group just 37 days ago with “massive fraud”—though not for any work it performed for former President Donald Trump’s media company. The SEC charged the accounting firm BF Borgers and its owner, Benjamin F. Borgers, with “deliberate and systematic failures” in more than 1,500 audits. The charges include failing to abide by accounting rules, fabricating documentation to cover up its shortcomings, and falsely stating in audit reports that its work met audit standards. To settle the SEC charges, BF Borgers agreed to pay a \$12 million fine while its owner agreed to pay a fine of \$2 million, according to the SEC. Benjamin Borgers did not immediately return a call seeking comment. BF Borgers and Benjamin Borgers also agreed to permanent suspensions, effective immediately, that will prevent them handling SEC-related matters as accountants. Trump Media named BF Borgers as its auditor on March 28, according to the company’s most recent annual report filing. The company disclosed at the time that BF Borgers had also handled its audits before the company went public by merging with a cash-rich shell company called Digital World Acquisition Corp. **(AP)**

Berkshire pares huge Apple stake as cash, operating profit set records

OMAHA, NEBRASKA: Berkshire Hathaway, opens new tab significantly reduced its enormous stake in Apple, opens new tab in the first quarter, as Warren Buffett’s conglomerate let its cash hoard swell to a record \$189 billion. Buffett’s company also posted a record operating profit exceeding \$11 billion, as its insurance operations benefited from improved underwriting and higher income from investments as interest rates rose. The value of Berkshire’s stake in Apple fell 22 percent to \$135.4 billion as of March 31 from \$174.3 billion at the end of 2023, even though the iPhone maker’s share price fell just 11 percent in the quarter. Based on changes in Apple’s stock price, Berkshire appears to have sold 13 percent of its Apple shares in the quarter, ending with about 790 million. A large sale is an about-face for Buffett, who is normally tech-phobic but came to view Apple as a consumer goods company with strong pricing power and devoted customers. Some investors, however, have expressed concern that Apple consumed too much of Berkshire’s investment portfolio. But the sales leave Buffett with more than six times the minimum \$30 billion cash cushion he has pledged to keep. **(REUTERS)**

INTERVIEW

Digital payment will enable Indians to spend more in Nepal



Ritesh Pai, CEO of International Payments, PhonePe

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

NPCI decides. We just tailgate them immediately, so that once that particular geography is enabled as in the merchants, they are ready to accept the UPI apps from a payment perspective and we immediately come and start the operation. This is because there is not much technical development that we have to do as our existing app, once activated for international transactions, can start working. It is just the on-ground awareness that we need to create like branding and marketing. So, when an Indian app user comes to Nepal, they can relate and know that the UPI apps are being accepted here. The merchant is also aware that this is a new financial instrument that can be accepted while purchasing goods and services.

Do you have any marketing plans in Nepal and India?

In India, we have already started to make the consumer aware. As

PhonePe has a 530 million user base, the in-app notification itself can help to reach the users in one go. Apart from that, we started a major outdoor activity on Thursday where we are doing a lot of branding exercises in very high convergence areas like airports and some other strategic locations. We are doing a lot of promotion on the digital media. Social media is something that we are leveraging very well. In Nepal, we will do both. In terms of outdoor, a lot of decals will happen at the merchant locations which will consist of social, digital and brand strategies to create awareness. This will be a continuous exercise. We may have to come up with different strategies for different locations as what works in a city like Kathmandu may not be true in the other border areas. So border areas may require a slightly more grounded kind of communication or a slightly different approach, which will be more human-to-human than social or digital media.

We are exploring and just figuring out how to do it.

How do you observe Nepal's digital payment ecosystem?

The very fact that we are sitting and discussing means Nepal has achieved something. I think the initial building blocks are there. Of course, there is more to do. Even at PhonePe, we feel there is more to do. We are in discussion with various stakeholders in Nepal as there are a lot of things which are built today that are slightly proprietary, or owned privately. Maybe going the interoperable way or coming up with a very good public digital infrastructure can help many players come and leverage that ecosystem. Otherwise, today, each one trying and creating his network at some point will start bleeding as it becomes too much when it comes to managing, growing and investing in these infrastructures. But if a common platform is created where everyone can come and take part, then its use becomes slightly easier as compared to building everything from the ground. So, maybe, that is a shift I see.

Tell us about PhonePe's partnership with the Fonepay network. What are the benefits for the customers?

As far as the partnership with Fonepay is concerned, I think it all emanated from the fact that NPCI came and enabled that geography for us. If I have to drive consumption, then I have to engage all the stakeholders that matter. From an Indian customer perspective, I think some of the pain points are very well known such as the limitation to the quantity of cash and the denomination of cash that an Indian traveller can carry. Similarly, there are issues like non-acceptance of some of the debit and credit cards by Indian banks as they can't be used for paying in Nepali currency. There is no better situation than UPI to come in as when someone carries cash, they are always under that mental block when it comes to spending. But when it comes to digital with access to the entire balance that one has in their bank account, you tend to spend more because you are at peace, you are not even logistically worried about where to keep cash or the fear of it being stolen. In India, people are so well-versed with digital that I think we end up using cash for really very few things. I

don't even remember the last time I used cash. Maybe I used it the other day to pay for the taxi fare here in Nepal. But otherwise like paying my maids, drivers, and even the milkman—everything is happening digitally. So a lot of non-face-to-face transactions do happen. So, I think Indians will benefit definitely because Nepal is an absolutely beautiful use case where there are already a lot of frictions that exist which I think UPI can eliminate. I think merchants will also see value because a certain segment of customers who otherwise would never have come to him from a transactions perspective can now come because he is accepting a UPI digital payment ecosystem. In the longer run, a lot of these merchants will benefit from digital transaction acceptance as it helps leave a digital footprint as far as their financial activities are concerned. This graduates them to consume a lot many more financial services, which can help them grow their business. Tomorrow if there is an electronic trail of all his financial transactions, his creditworthiness also improves. Tomorrow if financial institutions want to give him some lending purely by looking at the digital trail of his financial transactions, they can take a more judicious call around his creditworthiness and lending.

Please share your success story.

It has been a long journey. I think we started with baby steps. We want to build solutions which are very interoperable rather than proprietary because many other startups in India who started almost at a similar time got into their proprietary wallets, and built their merchant ecosystem, among others. We firmly believe interoperable network is the way to go. There are multiple benefits to be derived from that and this. We started with peer-to-peer (P2P) and graduated to other payments like bill payments, top-ups, and recharge, among others. In the management part, we started doing the investments and insurance. We are now in the growth phase where we are doing lending and stock markets. Today, we have almost eight licenses across six regulators which means we are regulated as well. We know the importance of complying with the regulations. At the same time, we are diversifying into various other businesses.

Boeing is on the verge of launching astronauts aboard new capsule, the latest entry to space travel

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE CANAVERAL, FLORIDA, MAY 4

After years of delays and stumbles, Boeing is finally poised to launch astronauts to the International Space Station for NASA. It's the first flight of Boeing's Starliner capsule with a crew on board, a pair of NASA pilots who will check out the spacecraft during the test drive and a weeklong stay at the space station. NASA turned to U.S. companies for astronaut rides after the space shuttles were retired. Elon Musk's SpaceX has made nine taxi trips for NASA since 2020, while Boeing has managed only a pair of unoccupied test flights. Boeing program manager Mark Nappi wishes Starliner was further along. "There's no doubt about that, but we're here now." The company's long-awaited astronaut demo is slated for liftoff Monday night. Provided this tryout goes well, NASA will alternate between Boeing and SpaceX to get astronauts to and from the space station. A look at the newest ride and its shakedown cruise:

The capsule
White with black and blue trim, Boeing's Starliner capsule is about 10 feet (3 meters) tall and 15 feet (4.5 meters) in diameter. It can fit up to seven people, though NASA crews typically will number four. The company settled on the name Starliner nearly a decade ago, a twist on the name of Boeing's early Stratoliner and the current Dreamliner. No one was aboard Boeing's two previous Starliner test flights. The first, in 2019, was hit with software trouble so severe that its empty capsule couldn't reach the station until the second try in 2022. Then last summer, weak parachutes and flammable tape cropped up that needed to be fixed or removed.

The crew
Veteran NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams are retired Navy captains who spent months aboard the space station years ago. They joined the test flight after the original crew bowed out as the delays piled up. Wilmore, 61, is a former combat pilot from Mount Juliet, Tennessee, and Williams, 58, is a helicopter pilot from Needham, Massachusetts. The duo have been involved in the capsule's development and insist Starliner is ready for prime time, otherwise they would not strap in for the launch. "We're not putting our heads in the sand," Williams told The Associated Press. "Sure, Boeing has had its problems. But we are the QA (quality assurance). Our eyes are on the spacecraft."

The test flight
Starliner will blast off on United Launch Alliance's Atlas V rocket from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. It will be the first time astronauts ride an Atlas since NASA's Project Mercury, starting with John Glenn when he became the



AP/PRS

In this photo provided by NASA, the Boeing Starliner spacecraft is lifted at the Vertical Integration Facility at Space Launch Complex-41 at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida on April 16.

first American to orbit the Earth in 1962. Sixty-two years later, this will be the 100th launch of the Atlas V, which is used to hoist satellites as well as spacecraft. "We're super careful with every mission. We're super, duper, duper careful" with human missions, said Tory Bruno, CEO of ULA, a joint venture of Boeing and Lockheed Martin. Starliner should reach the space station in roughly 26 hours. The seven station residents will have their eyes peeled on the approaching capsule. The arrival of a new vehicle is "a really big deal. You leave nothing to chance," NASA astronaut Michael Barratt told the AP from orbit. Starliner will remain docked for eight days, undergoing checkouts before landing in New Mexico or elsewhere in the American West.

Starliner vs Dragon
Both companies' capsules are designed to be autonomous and reusable. This Starliner is the same one that made the first test flight in 2019. Unlike the SpaceX Dragons, Starliner has traditional hand controls and switches alongside touchscreens and, according to the astronauts, is more like NASA's Orion capsules for moon missions. Wilmore and Williams briefly will take manual control to wring out the systems on their

way to the space station. NASA gave Boeing, a longtime space contractor, more than \$4 billion to develop the capsule, while SpaceX got \$2.6 billion. SpaceX already was in the station delivery business and merely refashioned its cargo capsule for crew. While SpaceX uses the boss' Teslas to get astronauts to the launch pad, Boeing will use a more traditional "astrovan" equipped with a video screen that Wilmore said will be playing "Top Gun: Maverick." One big difference at flight's end: Starliner lands on the ground with cushioning airbags, while Dragon splashes into the sea.

The future
Boeing is committed to six Starliner trips for NASA after this one, which will take the company to the station's planned end in 2030. Boeing's Nappi is reluctant to discuss other potential customers until this inaugural crew flight is over. But the company has said a fifth seat will be available to private clients. SpaceX periodically sells seats to tycoons and even countries eager to get their citizens to the station for a couple weeks. Coming soon: Sierra Space's mini shuttle, Dream Chaser, which will deliver cargo to the station later this year or next, before accepting passengers.

Japan seeks Sri Lanka recovery for regional stability

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

COLOMBO, MAY 4

Strategically placed Sri Lanka's economic recovery was essential for stability in the Indo-Pacific region, Japan's foreign minister said Saturday, urging Colombo to swiftly restructure its foreign debt. Yoko Kamikawa said after talks with her Sri Lankan counterpart that Colombo should secure agreements with bilateral lenders and international sovereign bondholders to unlock suspended foreign funding. The Sri Lankan government which defaulted on its \$46 billion external debt in April 2022 had hoped to finalise deals with foreign creditors by April but there have been no final agreements yet. Kamikawa said she "stressed the importance of reaching a debt restructuring agreement with all the creditors", including China—the largest bilateral lender to the island. "I also conveyed Japan's intention to further support Sri Lanka's development by swiftly resuming existing yen loan projects (after a debt restructuring deal)," she said. She said Tokyo considered Colombo's economic recovery as crucial for the entire region. The island is located halfway along the main east-west international shipping route. "The restoration of stability and economic development of Sri Lanka, which is at a strategic location in the India Ocean, is essential for the stability and prosperity of the entire Indo-Pacific region," she added. Sri Lanka must secure agreement from all official creditors and a majority of private bondholders to continue with a four-year \$2.9 billion bailout loan begun since March last year. Japan, the second largest bilateral lender to the island has expressed concern about China's big infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the region. Tokyo maintains that the Chinese-funded projects did not meet international finance standards. Unable to repay a huge loan taken from China in 2017 to build a deep sea port in southern Hambantota, Sri Lanka handed it over to a Chinese firm for \$1.12 billion on a 99-year lease. Sri Lanka ran out of cash to pay for even the most essential imports in 2022, leading to chronic shortages of food, fuel and medicines. Then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who faced allegations of mismanagement and corruption, was forced to flee the country and resign in July 2022 after months of protests. His successor, Ranil Wickremesinghe has raised taxes, cut subsidies and is enforcing painful economic reforms in line with the IMF bailout.

BRIEFING

Israel official says delegation not yet in Cairo for Gaza talks

JERUSALEM: A top Israeli official on Saturday said Israel will send a delegation to Cairo for talks on a Gaza truce only if it sees a “positive movement” on a framework for a hostage deal. “What we are looking at is an agreement over a framework for a possible hostage deal,” the official told AFP on condition of anonymity. “Tough and long negotiations are expected for an actual deal. “The indication for positive movement over a framework would be if we send a delegation led by Mossad chief to Cairo,” said the official, who spoke in English. The comments came after a senior Hamas official said the group’s negotiators had arrived in Cairo on Saturday for new talks on a proposed pause in the nearly seven-month war in the Gaza Strip. Mediators from Qatar, Egypt and the United States have been waiting for Hamas to respond to a proposal that, according to details released by Britain, would halt fighting for 40 days and exchange hostages for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. If they manage to reach a deal, it would be the first since a week-long truce in November, when militants released 105 hostages, the 80 Israelis among them in exchange for 240 Palestinians held by Israel. Months of negotiations stalled in part on Hamas’s demand for a lasting ceasefire and the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, and on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s repeated vows to launch a ground assault in Gaza’s southern city of Rafah. The prospect of a large-scale invasion of Rafah, where some 1.2 million civilians are sheltering, has sparked intensifying global alarm. The war broke out after Hamas’s October 7 attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of more than 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures. The militants also took some 250 hostages, of whom Israel estimates 128 remain in Gaza. **(AFP)**

US blames Rwanda for deadly attack on displaced camp in DR Congo

WASHINGTON: The United States has accused Rwanda of involvement in a deadly attack on a camp for displaced people in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a claim dismissed as “absurd” by Kigali on Saturday. At least nine people were killed in blasts on Friday in the camp on the outskirts of the city of Goma, local sources said. “The United States strongly condemns the attack (Friday) from Rwanda Defense Forces and M23 positions on the Mugunga camp for internally displaced persons in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo,” State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement. Miller said the United States was “gravely concerned” by the expansion in DR Congo of Rwandan forces and the M23, a mostly Tutsi group that resumed its armed campaign in the vast, long turbulent DR Congo in 2021. “It is essential that all states respect each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and hold accountable all actors for human rights abuses in the conflict in eastern DRC,” he said. DR Congo government spokesman Patrick Muyaya on Friday had also accused “the Rwandan army and its M23 terrorist supporters” of being responsible in a statement on X, the former Twitter. Rwandan government spokesperson Yolande Makolo described the US comments as “ridiculous”, in a post on X. “How do you come to this absurd conclusion? The RDF, a professional army, would never attack an IDP camp,” she said. “Look to the lawless FDLR and Wazalendo supported by the FARDC (the Congolese armed forces), for this kind of atrocity,” she added. **(AFP)**

Footage shows Ukrainian village battered to ruins as residents flee Russian advance

Russian troops have been pounding Kyiv’s depleted, ammunition-deprived forces with artillery, drones and bombs.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KYIV, UKRAINE, MAY 4

The Ukrainian village of Ocheretyne has been battered by fighting, drone footage obtained by The Associated Press shows. The village has been a target for Russian forces in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

Russian troops have been advancing in the area, pounding Kyiv’s depleted, ammunition-deprived forces with artillery, drones and bombs.

Ukraine’s military has acknowledged the Russians have gained a “foothold” in Ocheretyne, which had a population of about 3,000 before the war, but says that fighting continues.

Residents have scrambled to flee the village, among them a 98-year-old woman who walked almost 10 kilometres alone last week, wearing a pair of slippers and supported by a cane, until she reached Ukrainian front lines.

Not a single person is seen in the footage, and no building in Ocheretyne appears to have been left untouched by the fighting. Most houses, apartment blocks and other buildings look damaged beyond repair, and many houses have been pummelled into piles of wood and bricks. A factory on the outskirts has also been badly damaged.

The footage also shows smoke billowing from several houses, and fires burning in at least two buildings.

Elsewhere, Russia has in recent weeks stepped up attacks on Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city, in an attempt to pummel the region’s energy infrastructure and terrorize its 1.3 million residents.

Four people were wounded and a two-story civilian building was damaged and set ablaze overnight after Russian forces struck Kharkiv, in northeastern Ukraine, with exploding drones, regional government Oleh Syniehubov said Saturday.

The four, including a 13-year-old, were hurt by falling debris, he said on the Telegram messaging app.

Russian state agency RIA reported Saturday that Moscow’s forces struck a drone warehouse in Kharkiv that



This drone footage shows the village of Ocheretyne, a target for Russian forces in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

had been used by Ukrainian troops overnight, citing Sergei Lebedev, described as a coordinator of local pro-Moscow guerrillas. His comments could not be independently verified.

Russian forces continued hitting Kharkiv and its surroundings on Saturday, according to updates posted by Syniehubov and other Ukrainian officials on the Telegram messenger app. One strike hit a civilian business in an industrial district of the city, wounding at least five people, Syniehubov said. A further attack killed a 49-year-old civilian outside his house in Slobozhanske, a village northeast of the city, the governor reported.

In the Black Sea port of Odesa, which has been repeatedly targeted in recent days, three people were hurt in a rocket attack on “civil infrastructure,” regional Gov. Oleh Kiper said.

Ukraine’s military said Russia launched a total of 13 Shahed drones at the Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions of eastern Ukraine overnight, all of which were shot down by Ukrainian air defences. Ukraine’s energy ministry on Saturday said the overnight strikes damaged an electrical substation in the Dnipropetrovsk region, briefly depriving households and businesses of power.

According to Serhii Lysak, the province’s governor, falling drone debris damaged critical infrastructure and three private houses, one of which caught fire. Two residents were hospitalized.

Russia’s Defence Ministry claimed early on Saturday that its forces overnight shot down four US-provided long-range ATACMS missiles over the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow illegally annexed from Ukraine in

2014. The ministry did not provide further details. Ukraine has recently begun using the missiles, provided secretly by the United States, to hit Russian-held areas, including a military airfield in Crimea and in another area east of the occupied city of Berdyansk, US officials said last week.

Long sought by Ukrainian leaders, the new missiles give Ukraine nearly double the striking distance—up to 300 kilometres—than it had with the mid-range version of the weapons it received from the US last October.

A Ukrainian drone also damaged telecommunications infrastructure on the outskirts of Belgorod, a Russian city some 50 kilometres from the Ukrainian border, according to the local governor. Vyacheslav Gladkov did not say what the site was used for.

Russia puts Ukrainian President Zelensky on its wanted list

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KHARKIV REGION, UKRAINE, MAY 4

Russia has put Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on its wanted list, Russian state media reported Saturday, citing the interior ministry’s database.

As of Saturday afternoon, both Zelenskyy and his predecessor, Petro Poroshenko, featured on the ministry’s list of people wanted on unspecified criminal charges. The commander of Ukraine’s ground forces, General Oleksandr Pavlyuk, was also on the list. Russian officials did not immediately clarify the allegations against any of the men. Mediazona, an independent Russian news outlet, claimed Saturday that both Zelensky and Poroshenko had been listed since at least late February.

In an online statement, Ukraine’s foreign ministry dismissed the reports of Zelensky’s inclusion as evidence of “the desperation of the Russian state machine and propaganda.”

Russia’s wanted list also includes scores of officials and lawmakers from

Ukraine and NATO countries. Among them is Kaja Kallas, the prime minister of NATO and EU member Estonia, who has fiercely advocated for increased military aid to Kyiv and stronger sanctions against Moscow.

Russian officials in February said that Kallas is wanted because of Tallinn’s efforts to remove Soviet-era monuments to Red Army soldiers in the Baltic nation, in a belated purge of what many consider symbols of past oppression. Fellow NATO members Latvia, Lithuania and Poland have also pulled down monuments that are widely seen as an unwanted legacy of the Soviet occupation of those countries. Russia has laws criminalizing the “rehabilitation of Nazism” that include punishing the “desecration” of war memorials.

Also on Russia’s list are cabinet ministers from Estonia and Lithuania, as well as the International Criminal Court prosecutor who last year prepared a warrant for President Vladimir Putin on war crimes charges.

BJP steps up campaign rhetoric on India’s principal religious divide

>> Continued from page 1

Since voting began last month, both Modi and Shah have stepped up campaign rhetoric on India’s principal religious divide in an effort to rally voters.

In the original campaign speech at the centre of the police investigation against Reddy, Shah vows to end affirmative action measures for Muslims established in the southern state of Telangana.

Modi last month used a campaign rally to refer to Muslims as “infiltrators” and “those who have more children”, prompting condemnation and an official complaint to election authorities by Congress.

But the prime minister has not been sanctioned for his remarks despite election rules prohibiting campaigning on “communal feelings” such as religion, prompting frustration from the opposition camp.

“Where is the election commission when the prime minister is spewing hate every day?” Shama said.

India waits for details on arrests in Canada over Sikh separatist’s murder

REUTERS
BHUBANESWAR, INDIA, MAY 4

India will wait for Canadian police to share information on the three Indian men it has arrested and charged with the murder of a Sikh separatist leader last year, Foreign Minister Subrahmanyan Jaishankar said on Saturday.

Canadian police charged the three on Friday over the murder of Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar and said they were probing whether the suspects had links to the Indian government.

Jaishankar said he had seen news of the arrests and said the suspects “apparently are Indians of some kind of gang background... we’ll have to wait for the police to tell us.”

The trio, all Indian nationals, were arrested in the city of Edmonton in Alberta on Friday, police said.

Nijjar, 45, was shot dead in June outside a Sikh temple in Surrey, a Vancouver suburb with a large Sikh population. A few months later, Canadian Prime Minister Justin

India’s foreign minister rejects Biden’s ‘xenophobia’ comment

REUTERS
NEW DELHI, MAY 4

Indian foreign minister Subrahmanyan Jaishankar rejected US President Joe Biden’s comment that “xenophobia” was hobbling the South Asian nation’s economic growth, The Economic Times reported on Saturday.

Jaishankar said at a round table hosted by the newspaper on Friday that India’s economy “is not faltering” and that it has historically been a society that is very open.

“That’s why we have the CAA [Citizenship Amendment Act], which is to open up doors for people who are in trouble... I think we should be open to people who have the need to come to India, who have a claim to come to India,” Jaishankar said, referring to a recent law that allows immigrants who have fled persecution from neighbouring countries to become citizens.

Biden said ‘xenophobia’ in China, Japan and India held back growth in their economies.

Earlier this week, Biden had said “xenophobia” in China, Japan and India was holding back growth in the respective economies as he argued migration has been good for the US economy.

“One of the reasons why our economy’s growing is because of you and many others. Why? Because we welcome immigrants,” Biden said at a fundraising event for his 2024 re-election campaign and marking the start of Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast last month that growth in Asia’s three largest economies would slow in 2024 from the previous year.



Karan Brar, Kamalpreet Singh and Hardeep Singh have been charged with first-degree murder.

Trudeau cited credible allegations of Indian government involvement, prompting a diplomatic crisis with New Delhi. Nijjar was a Canadian citizen campaigning for the creation of Khalistan, an independent Sikh homeland carved out of India. The presence of Sikh separatist groups in Canada has long frustrated New Delhi, which had labeled Nijjar a “terrorist”.

Canadian police said they had worked with US law enforcement agencies, without giving additional details, and suggested more detentions might be coming.

Houston braces for flooding to worsen in wake of storms

ASSOCIATED PRESS
HOUSTON, MAY 4

High waters flooded neighbourhoods around Houston on Saturday following heavy rains that have already resulted in crews rescuing hundreds of people from homes, rooftops and roads engulfed in murky water.

A flood watch remained in effect through Sunday afternoon as forecasters predicted additional rainfall Saturday night, bringing another 1 to 3 inches of water to the soaked region and the likelihood of major flooding.

Friday’s fierce storms forced numerous high-water rescues, including some from the rooftops of flooded homes. Officials redoubled urgent instructions for residents in low-lying areas to evacuate, warning the worst was still to come. “This threat is ongoing and it’s going to get worse. It is not your typical river flood,” said Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the top elected official in the nation’s third-largest county.

She described the predicted surge of water as “catastrophic.” Schools in the path of the flooding cancelled classes and roads jammed as authorities closed highways taking on water.



Tim McCanon sits on the road with his dogs after being rescued by the Community Fire Department during severe flooding on Friday in New Caney, Texas.

and parts of Louisiana have filled reservoirs and saturated the ground.

Floodwaters partially submerged cars and roads this week across parts of southeastern Texas, north of Houston, where high waters reached the roofs of some homes. More than 21 inches of rain fell during the five-day period that ended Friday in Liberty County near the city of Splendora, about 48 kilometres northeast of Houston, according to the National Weather Service.

In the rural community of Shepherd, Gilroy Fernandes said he and his spouse had about an hour to evacuate after a mandatory order. Their home is on stilts near the Trinity River, and they felt relief when the water began to recede on Thursday. Then the danger grew while they slept.

“Next thing you know, overnight they started releasing more water from the dam at Livingston. And so that caused the level of the river to shoot up by almost 5 or 6 feet overnight,” Fernandes said. Neighbours who left an hour later got stuck in traffic because of flooding. The Harris County Joint Information Center told KPRC-TV that 196 people and 108 animals have been rescued by emergency response agencies in Harris County.

Elsewhere, in neighbouring Montgomery County, Judge Mark Keough said there had been more high-water rescues than he was able to count. “We estimate we’ve had a couple hundred rescues from homes, from houses, from vehicles,” Keough said.

In Polk County, located about 160 kilometres northeast of Houston, officials have done over 100 water rescues in the past few days, said Polk County Emergency Management Coordinator Courtney Comstock.

She said homes below Lake Livingston Dam and along the Trinity River have flooded. “It’ll be when things subside before we can do our damage assessment,” Comstock said.

Authorities in Houston had not reported any deaths or injuries. The city of more than 2 million people is one of the most flood-prone metro areas in the country and has long experience dealing with devastating weather.

Hurricane Harvey in 2017 dumped historic rainfall on the area, flooding thousands of homes and resulting in more than 60,000 rescues by government rescue personnel across Harris County.

Of particular concern was an area along the San Jacinto River in the northeastern part of Harris County,

which was expected to continue rising as more rain falls and officials release extra water from an already full reservoir. Judge Hidalgo on Thursday issued a mandatory evacuation order for those living along portions of the river. Most of Houston’s city limits were not heavily impacted by the weather, except for the northeastern neighbourhood of Kingwood.

Officials said the area had about four months of rain in about a week’s time. Houston Mayor John Whitmire said rising flood waters from the San Jacinto River were expected to impact Kingwood late Friday and Saturday.

Shelters have opened across the region, including nine by the American Red Cross.

The weather service reported the river was nearly 74 feet (22.56 meters) late Saturday morning after reaching nearly 78 feet (23.7 meters). The rapidly changing forecast said the river is expected to fall to near the flood stage of 58 feet (17.6 meters) by Thursday.

The greater Houston area covers about 25,900 square kilometres—a footprint slightly bigger than New Jersey. It is crisscrossed by about 2,736 kilometres of channels, creeks and bayous that drain into the Gulf of Mexico, about 80 kilometres to the southeast from downtown.

Nepal win fifth T20 to salvage some pride

Half-centuries from Aasif Sheikh and Anil Sah, and an explosive innings from Kushal Malla, backed by three wickets hauls from Sagar Dhakal and Sompal Kami give Nepal a six-wicket victory over visiting West Indies A in Kirtipur.

Arsenal maintain Premier League title push

REUTERS
LONDON, MAY 4

Arsenal cleared another hurdle in their Premier League title quest with a 3-0 victory over Bournemouth in their penultimate home game on Saturday to pile the pressure on Manchester City.

A penalty shortly before halftime converted by Bukayo Saka gave Arsenal the lead, Leandro Trossard eased the nerves inside the Emirates Stadium with a second goal on 70 minutes and Declan Rice added the third deep into stoppage-time.

Victory put Arsenal on 83 points from 36 games. Bournemouth had cause to feel aggrieved with the Arsenal penalty confirmed after a long VAR check and they also had a goal ruled out in the second half after another VAR check.

Gabriel also had a goal ruled out for Arsenal but Rice put the icing on the cake as Mikel Arteta's team stayed firmly in the hunt to win a first Premier League title for 20 years.

Arsenal dominated possession but 10th-placed Bournemouth frustrated the hosts with 10 men behind the ball for much of the opening half.

Trossard twice had shots blocked as Bournemouth threw players in front of the ball and captain Martin Odegaard was also denied early on in the Arsenal siege.

The inevitable nerves surfaced as a mistake by Gabriel let in Bournemouth danger man Dominic Solanke but William Saliba rescued his side with a last-ditch tackle.

Arsenal made the breakthrough just before halftime thanks to a rather fortuitous penalty.

Kai Havertz was played in behind Bournemouth's defence and the German's first touch took him past keeper Mark Travers before he fell to the ground and referee David Coote pointed to the spot.

A lengthy VAR check followed and the decision was allowed to stand despite Havertz appearing to have dragged his foot to initiate contact with the leg of Travers when it would have been simpler for him to convert the chance.

Saka then calmly rolled the penalty into the net past a static Travers, his 16th league goal of the season met with relief around the stadium.

Bournemouth were more adventurous after the break, aided by Arsenal mistakes, and Solanke had a chance but his angled shot was easily saved by David Raya.

Arsenal then doubled their lead with Rice setting up Trossard for a clinical finish.

There was still anxiety, though, and a crazy goalmouth scramble ended up with the ball in Arsenal's net but Solanke was adjudged to have impeded Raya with minimal contact.

In the end, Arsenal won with a flourish and will now focus on beating Manchester United and Everton in their final two games and hope that City falter.

Adebayo rescues Luton

Elijah Adebayo kept Luton in the hunt to avoid relegation from the Premier League as his equaliser rescued a 1-1 draw against Everton.

Rob Edwards' side trailed to Dominic Calvert-Lewin's penalty but Adebayo scored the crucial leveller before half-time at Kenilworth Road.

Despite earning just one win in their past 15 league games, third-bottom Luton are still in contention to beat the drop.

"We are still in this fight as we speak. I'm proud of the performance but it would have been huge to win tonight. Almost but we've had a lot of them this year," Edwards said.

Despite losing eight points as punishment for financial breaches of their own, Everton have already secured their Premier League status with three games to spare.



(Clockwise from top) Players of West Indies A pose with the trophy after clinching the five-match T20 series 3-2 at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Saturday. Sagar Dhakal celebrates a wicket of West Indies A. Kushal Malla bats. Aasif Sheikh and Anil Sah run between the wickets.

WEST INDIES A TOUR OF NEPAL

FIFTH T20, TU CRICKET GROUND, KIRTIPIR

TOSS: West Indies A, bat first.

West Indies A 172-7 (20/20 overs)

Alick Athanaze 42* (29), Roston Chase 33 (23); Sagar Dhakal 2-0-17-3, Sompal Kami 4-0-16-3

Nepal 173-4 (18.5/20 overs)

Anil Sah 58 (45), Aasif Sheikh 51 (35), Kushal Malla 37* (18); Obed McCoy 3.5-0-36-3

Nepal win by six wickets.

Player of the match: Sagar Dhakal

Series result: West Indies A win the five-match series 3-2.

Player of the series: Rohit Paudel

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, MAY 4

Aasif Sheikh, Anil Sah and Kushal Malla all starred with the bat to back impressive bowling spells from Sagar Dhakal and Sompal Kami as Nepal defeated West Indies A by six wickets in the fifth and final T20 to restore some pride at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Saturday.

Despite the defeat, West Indies A clinched the five-match series 3-2.

Nepal's successful chase of 173-run target was built on a solid 96-run second-wicket partnership between opener Aasif Sheikh and Anil Sah—both of whom were finally able to end their dismal run and scored their first fifties of the series.

Nepal lost opener Kushal Bhurtel (13) cheaply, again, to Obed McCoy (3-36) but Sheikh and Sah held firm and batted with patience to bring Nepal back in the game.

Sheikh scored 51 runs in his 35-ball knock that included two fours and five sixes. He departed in the 14th over when McCoy had him caught by Matthew Forde.

Sah then completed his half-century off 41 balls with a six off Hayden Walsh in the 15.1 overs and fell to McCoy in the 17th over.

Malla was the top entertainer of the day.

Nepal still needed 22 runs from the last 12 balls but Malla batted with full steam and completed the chase with seven balls to spare.

Malla smashed a six and four fours off McCoy, and also earned a four from leg bye in the 19th over to complete a dramatic victory for Nepal. Malla was unbeaten on 37 in his 18-ball knock.

Earlier, the tourists opted to bat first and posted 172 from their 20 overs, losing seven wickets.

West Indies A breathed fire early adding 21 runs from the first nine balls but spinner Dhakal quickly hit back getting the breakthrough wicket of opener Kadeem Alleyene (11) with his fourth delivery in the second over.

Mark Deyal and Johnson Charles, who was the biggest headache for Nepal in the

last two matches (an unbeaten century and a half-century), tried to build the innings slowly against a tight Nepal bowling.

But Dhakal turned out to be the destroyer-in-chief as he returned with the ball in the eighth over and dismissed Charles for 24 in the 7.1 overs with his only fifth delivery and Deyal for 11 two balls later to put Nepal firmly in control.

Roston Chase rebuilt the innings adding 33 runs facing 23 deliveries but Abinash Bohara checked the run flow dispatching the West Indies A captain in the 14th over.

Forde and Alick Athanaze briefly threatened adding 31 runs from the 15th and 16th over.

But, Kami ended their stand dismissing Forde (12-ball 23) in the 17th over and removed Fabian Allen and Gudakesh Motie with his brilliant bowling display in the

penultimate over.

Athanze, who was not out on 42, and Walsh (seven not out) then took the West Indies A to a fighting total.

Dhakal returned a match figures of 3-17 in his magical two-over spell and was adjudged player of the match.

Kami took 3-16.

Rohit Paudel, who scored 265 runs from his three innings that featured a century and two half-centuries, was declared player of the series.

Nepal will now participate in a high performance camp in the West Indies and the United States before participating in the 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup, which is scheduled to take place in the West Indies and the United States next month. Nepal will open their World Cup with a match against the Netherlands on June 4.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Devote your Sunday to whatever it is you want to do. Remember to live your life on your terms, soaking. Just be mindful to play nice with others mid-afternoon, as a loved one might accuse you of being insensitive.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Devote your Sunday to relaxing, flying under the radar and seeking healing from the depths of your spirit. Themes around introspection and breaking patterns come into focus. Be aware of your actions and consciously choose the healthier and higher path.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Use this day to set a good example and look for opportunities to connect with new allies. Avoid slipping back into old habits or mannerisms. You may also want to hold back on sharing connections during this time.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

You'll feel most elevated when you work toward long-term goals. Reconnect with a sense of purpose, and reclaim control of any situations that have gotten messy or out of hand. Honour your emotions, taking care to approach conflict or drama.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

Use your Sunday to reclaim motivation while reaching for high aspirations and personal dreams. Find a happy medium between working hard and believing you can emerge to new pinnacles. You're due for a win and perhaps a lucky breakthrough.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Focus on letting go. This day will also aid you when navigating important commitments, helping you work alongside partners without neglecting your own needs. Take care to ground mid-afternoon especially if conflict or power struggles emerge.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Don't hesitate to give freely to those you adore, taking care to invest in those who embrace you with as much kindness and generosity. Imbalances within your dynamics will make themselves known mid-afternoon. Plan on a blissful night of self-care.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

This day inspires you to get organised. Use this energy to prepare for the work week ahead, tempering your stress levels before they have a chance to build up through smart planning. Be sure to make health a central focus.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

The universe favours the bold, putting you in a playful and passionate mood. Use this energy to follow your gut, pushing toward the people, activities and situations that spark inspiration and joy. Remember who your true friends are.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Don't feel guilty about devoting your Sunday to selfish indulgences, especially if you're overdue for some personal nurturing. Give yourself plenty of space for healing and fresh starts, breaking free from old structures or patterns that have let you down.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

This day also takes the edge off socially, sharpening your wits to help you stay afloat conversationally. If there are any new friendships you've been hoping to initiate, use this day as an excuse to say "hello".

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

You'll feel motivated to plant seeds for your highest ambitions. Now is also a good time to connect with your gratitude as you reflect on how far you've come. Remind yourself of the many blessings that fill your life.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Rounded handle

5 Leading man

10 Abandoned

14 British noble

15 — Island

16 Mimic

17 Classy beach resort

18 Remedies

19 "— Dark Thirty"

20 Farm laborer

22 "The World of Henry —"

24 Sty cry

25 Mother superior

26 Prove wrong

29 Conceited fellow

34 Rounded

35 Pummel

36 Popular papal name

37 Command for Fido

38 "La — Vita"

39 "— — Little Teapot"

40 Greek letter

41 Just

42 Plait

44 Keep for later (2 wds.)

47 Nice and warm

48 Attila the —

49 Ponder

DOWN

1 Seaweed

2 Brad

3 Church calendar

4 Tire failure

5 Known only to a few

6 Lump

7 Rocky outcrop

8 Poem

9 Strike a chord

10 Doing nothing

11 Cousin to a foil

12 Office plant

13 Run

21 Little bit

23 Bearskin item

26 Tournament of —

27 Madonna movie role

28 Deadly

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

S	E	A	L	S	T	R	A	D	A	B	B	A
U	R	G	E	H	A	I	R	Y	D	E	A	R
E	L	A	N	O	R	G	A	N	V	E	S	T
D	E	R	I	D	E	D	A	P	A	T	H	Y
B	L	A	N	D	F	L	I	N	C	H	E	D
R	O	U	T	E	T	A	L	C	E	U	R	O
O	U	R	I	O	R	I	O	R	A	M		
A	S	A	P	M	A	R	T	P	R	O	S	E
D	E	L	I	C	A	C	Y	H	O	N	E	D
C	U	C	K	O	O	O	I	L	L	A	M	P
A	R	I	L	O	P	I	U	M	I	D	O	L
P	A	T	E	N	O	R	S	E	N	A	D	A
S	L	E	D	S	P	E	E	D	G	M	E	N

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29 Breadbasket

30 Suggestive

31 Pen name

32 Send payment

33 Fawning lackey

35 — fide

38 Reduce the ranks

42 Intrepid

43 North Carolina capital

45 London's river

46 Arctic bird

47 Covered bowl

49 Flick

50 Cabbage salad

51 Pith helmet

52 "— of Eden"

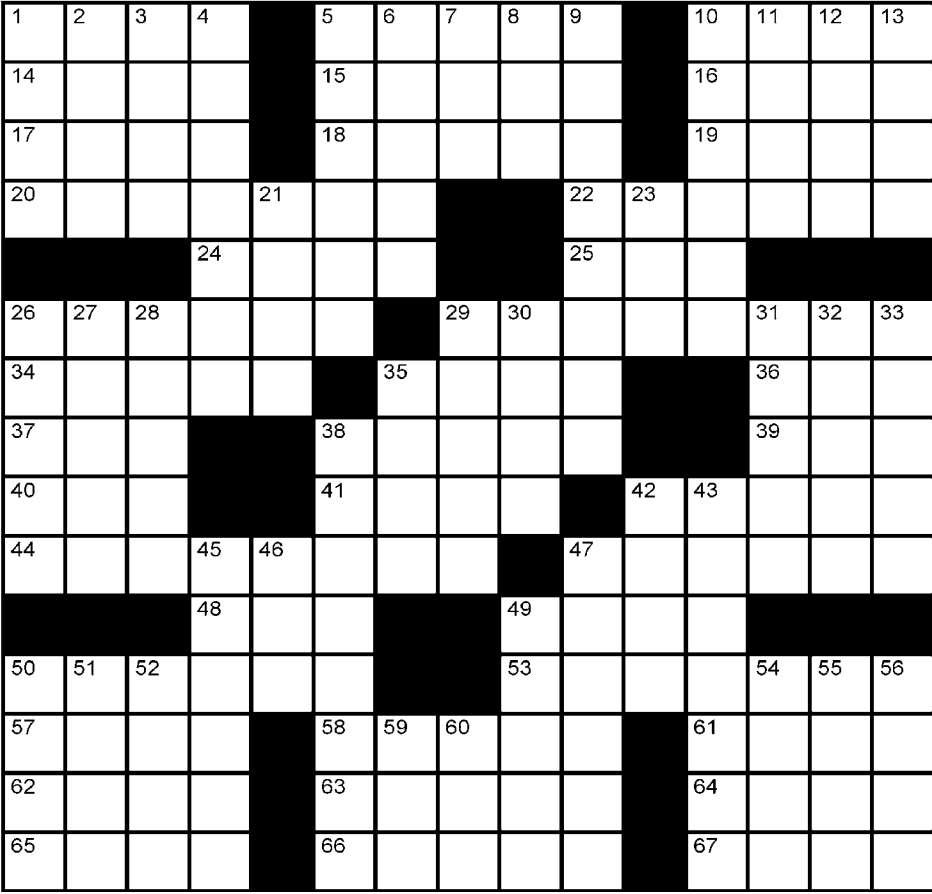
54 Function

55 Fancy jug

56 Hamlet, for one

59 Texter's chuckle

60 Barn bird



SUDOKU

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

3	8	1	4	2	6	5	9	7
6	5	7	1	9	3	2	8	4
9	2	4	7	8	5	3	6	1
5	6	2	3	7	9	1	4	8
1	9	3	5	4	8	7	2	6
7	4	8	6	1	2	9	5	3
4	1	9	2	6	7	8	3	5
2	3	6	8	5	1	4	7	9
8	7	5	9	3	4	6	1	2

5	2							
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

FICTION PARK

He smells like summer

The sight of him holding the beige paper hit a nerve somewhere in me.

KHUSHI DAS

It wasn't love at first sight, at least not for me. It felt more like reading a new book, every page pulling me deeper. Falling for him was a slow liberation, an invitation into a safe haven. It was like being enveloped in a tight, comforting hug, his arms wrapping around me with love, his kisses warming my heart to its very centre.

He smells like summer and his eyes resemble the pearly sight of water's surface on a warm sunny day. When you find yourself recycling your journal papers into clean beige paper and writing about him with cherry ink, know that you're doomed. There's no going back.

I have to cross the road to get to the café where we're supposed to meet. Everything that moves can and will kill you. I feel the shiver in my spine.

I love coffee. He doesn't. "Lemon tea?" he asks. "Sure."

Falling in love with him is like watching the purple dawn sky with glitters, waiting for the moon. It's like finding someone with a spare jacket when you're drowning deep in the water. He is also in the water, gasping for breath, gasping to hand me the jacket.

I remember the day we were lying on his bed after a long day. My hands on his chest, eyes on his wood eyes. I played Krishna.

"I don't believe in god," he said.

"I like to believe that there's someone over me I can count on," I replied.

He is someone I can count on. He doesn't understand. As I sip lemon tea, I taste nothing but the ocean in a sip. Something so calm yet so sour. He drowns a sugar cube into the cup while I stare at the dark circles under his eyes. He has trouble falling asleep after he tucks me into bed.

I love it when he wears grey. His closet is full of black clothes. He needs colour. He needs love. He needs to crack his shell. He looks at me like I'm the girl on the movie screen. He stares into my eyes like they're hollow, like they need his eyes.

He talks like a book. He writes like love is red and vanilla chocolates. I love myself, when people I love, love me back. Late evenings, we go to the café. He orders his



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lemon drink. They have ice cubes floating, gasping for air. I always put one in my mouth after he finishes it. Putting an ice cube inside your mouth until it melts diverts your body's response away from anxiety or panic. Today I asked for iced coffee. I love coffee. Now he loves coffee.

Every one of my cells loves him. Every day, my body creates trillions of new cells. And I love him a trillion times more every day. But everything that you love, you will eventually lose, there is no other version of this story.

"If one of us leaves, I'll forget how to breathe," he says.

"One of us has to leave. There's no other version of this story," I say as I feel my veins being pulled apart.

"How can you love someone and let them go?"

My heart skips a beat and my eyes drift

like the winter wind as I think of leaving. The conversation stops. I can still feel the birds chirping and the leaves brushing, which means the conversation is still on.

I sat on the redwood floor and he stood there, holding my hemp bag, falling in love with books all over again.

Only the words aren't being used. We were too tired to speak but sat next to each other. I am fluent in silence.

A week after, I acted as if I had put myself back together again, so quickly, so

easily. After seeing him, on my way home, I watched the sunset in my rear-view mirror while hustling in the traffic. I thought of him.

"When can we meet again?" he asks before I do.

"You're too clingy," I brush it off.

When Mitch Albom said, "It's such a shame to waste time. We always think we have so much of it," I listened to him. I have started getting out of bed. I have started dusting my cycle which has been sitting in the garage for an eternity. I used to ride it before I got sick.

When I taste his lips, I feel his heart beating against mine. I feel his systole and diastole pressure crumbling inside him, building a piercing pressure to beat outside his chest.

I remember the day we went to the bookstore and picked out every classic there.

From Sylvia Plath to Rabindranath Tagore, we shuffled every page. The air smelled like vanilla and roses. I sat on the redwood floor and he stood there, holding my hemp bag, falling in love with books all over again.

When you think you can't fall for the same person over and over again, he will prove you wrong. Every. Single. Time. It's like reading Judy Blume's book on a hot summer day. It makes you fall in love with life and lemonades and summer.

Pushing his ears against my heart feels like holding a little boy. He was somebody's little boy. Somebody's everything in 2005. Like he needed to hold somebody while he saw the large blue truck pass as he crossed the street. Like he needed the red ink to write it down.

Then he grew up. We started setting boundaries. Considering throwing ourselves off a cliff or swallowing a bottle of pills over inconveniences from the invisible boundaries. He started putting stuff back on the shelves. He never learned to put stuff into his cart.

When I told him I was sick, I saw his pupils dilate.

"No, my baby is fine," he said as I heard his voice scatter. It was his world.

I watched him appreciate himself a little. I watched him put stuff in his cart that wasn't beer. I watched him buy shirts that weren't black. I watched him in the rear-view mirror while he drove me to my appointments. That day, I saw the little boy in him grow. One day spent with someone you love can change everything.

I drive to the café, carefully passing the obstructed traffic. I stand holding myself. A blue truck with jars of drinking water passes my sight. There he is. The sight of him holding the beige paper hit a nerve somewhere in me.

And I realise when I look at him, I am looking at the purest love I'll ever know.

"I hate the sun," I complain.

I want him to go inside and breathe slower. I want to hold his heart and glue it together and then give it back to him so that he can cherish it like it was in 2005 and he's four.

"Shall we cool it off with an iced lemonade?" he asks.

"Can we have lemon tea?"

"Sure."

'Development' putting communal living in danger

As open spaces in the valley are slowly being encroached, people are deprived of chances to live communally, to rejuvenate mentally and to have a safe space when disaster strikes.

ANISH CHIMIRE
KATHMANDU

Kathmandu Valley is old and traditional. Many *gallis* and *chowks* stand in the heart of the valley that have stood the test of time. These traditional *chowks* sit in the middle and surrounding it are many closely built houses. "These old houses were built small and were only used for daily household necessities," says heritage activist and documentarian Alok Siddhi Tuladhar. After finishing their private household chores, people in the olden days used to come out to these open spaces called *chowks* and do their semi-private activities.

"Whether it is to wash your clothes, comb your hair, or just chit-chat with your neighbours, people came out and spent more time in the open spaces," says Tuladhar. Having an accessible communal space made it easier for people to come together, connect and ease off from their tiring lives. "When cities were designed like this, it was easier for people to form a bond and to feel healthy," adds Tuladhar.

Similarly, Professor Bishnu Rai who works as the head of sociology department at Baneshwor Multiple Campus opines that when the valley entered massive urbanisation thirty years ago, feedback and opinions of sociologists

weren't taken. "Humans aren't just a part of nature. They are in fact, nature. If you try to control humans and not let them be their free-self, then they become disturbed and irritated," says Rai, adding that a person can be their free-self in open spaces.

In a city as big as Kathmandu, where people lead busy lives, they take their troubles with them to home and work. "By sitting in an open space, talking with friends and family, a person can begin to feel better," adds Rai.

Surya Tiwari, a 24-year-old resident of the Valley, often strolls in the Sankha Park in Sankhamul, Kathmandu. "There is something peaceful about just walking in an open space. It is so big and you begin to feel insignificant in a good way. Once you realise it is not that deep, then the troubles and worry seem to fade away," he says. The same type of feeling might be hard to come by when one is stuck in either their room or office.

Basically, lands are used for two purposes. One is for farming and the other is to build infrastructures but there's also a third kind says Tuladhar. In such land none of the farming or building houses is done, it is just left open.

"Such spaces are called *khyah* in the Newa language. This word was later adopted by Nepali and became *khel*, hence the name Tundhikhel," says Tuladhar. In such an open space, one can engage in



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People in Kathmandu during the 2015 earthquake were desperately seeking refuge in open spaces to save their lives.

individual, communal and social activities while adhering to acceptable public behaviour limits.

While designing a city, if priority is given to open spaces where people can gather and perform their social, cultural and religious activities then it strengthens the human bond. Open space is more than just a space, it is a platform where people come together to express their opinions and to exercise their rights.

Stuti Pokhrel, a 22-year-old resident of Lalitpur, studying public health, looks at

the issue from the lens of physical well-being of the citizens. "The first time I realised the importance of open spaces was when the 2015 earthquake hit and we were running from our homes," she says. In times of disaster, open spaces such as Tundhikhel can be used to provide medical services to the people.

A research article on the same heading published in 2021 by the students of Pulchowk Campus, IOE, discusses how critical the situation is. According to this research, open areas have slowly decreased, been encroached upon, turned into unusable spaces, or heavily developed. This decline in the available open space in the Kathmandu Valley may pose significant challenges for managing crises after disasters.

scenario, open spaces are targeted for the sake of development.

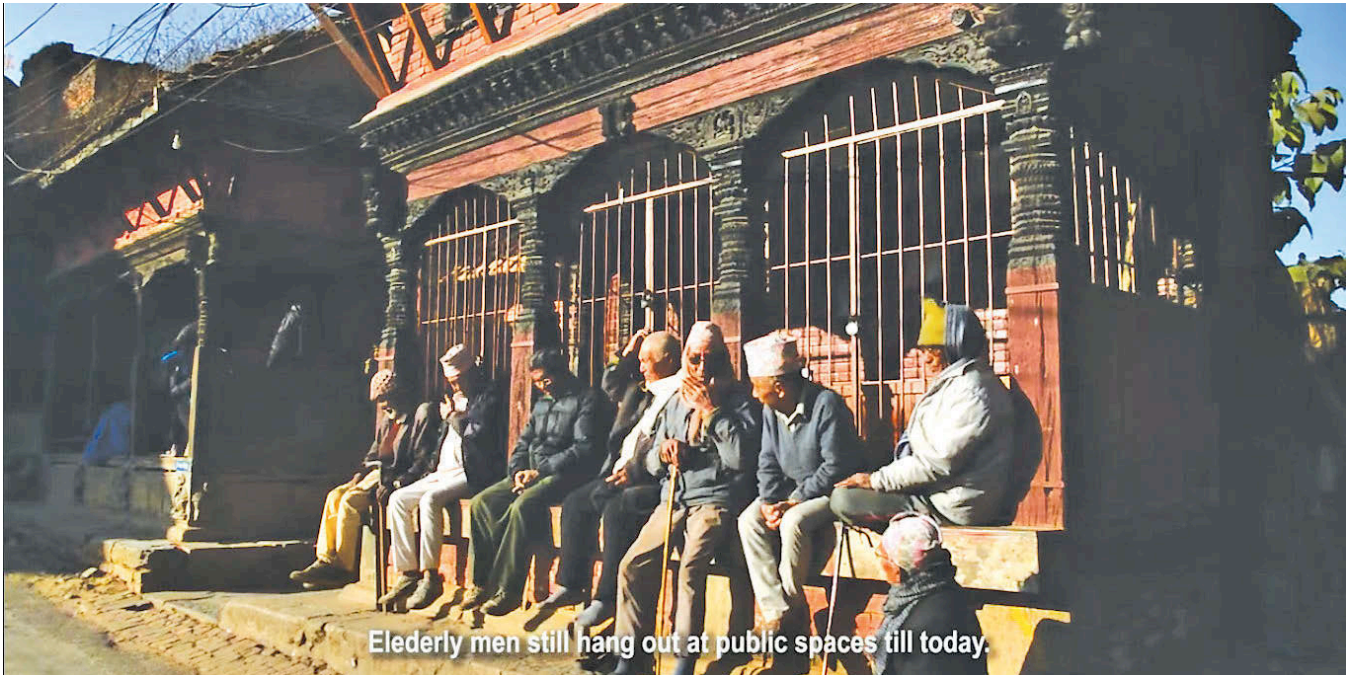
"The land mafia and even local government officials, upon seeing open spaces, immediately think how they can utilise it. Their intention is to commercialise it, seeking to benefit specific parties or individuals, rather than considering the public's ownership rights to it," says Tuladhar.

Development doesn't always have to mean the destruction or eradication of the existing organs of society. Development can also mean the preservation of what matters to the people. Development can also mean proper restoration of the existing system of society.

In a short documentary directed by Tuladhar titled, 'Kirtipur: An example of revitalization open space management', Kirtipur has been taken as an example of how open space management can be done by preserving the historic foundation on which the place stands. In the documentary, several Kirtipur residents express their worry about the public spaces built by our forefathers slowly falling into the hands of urbanisation. But even today when one walks into the core of Kirtipur, the city's community-living style can be seen, as shown in the documentary.

Despite all the encroachment and decreasing of the open spaces, Professor Rai believes that all hope is not lost. Even though the valley is already a victim of an ever-increasing population, the periphery areas of the valley can be planned better, because they are yet to be heavily urbanised.

"Proper planning can be done in new settlements where we can build open spaces for the people," says Rai. He further adds that frequently visiting such places elevates one's mood and can bring productivity to the person's daily life.



SCREENGRAB VIA YOUTUBE

A scene from the documentary 'Kirtipur An Example of Revitalization Open Space Management', shows elderly men hanging out in a public space.

In such spaces, people gather to perform their social, cultural and religious activities which strengthens the human bond.

Talking about the same issue Tuladhar recalls a doctor working in Bir Hospital saying to him, "If Bir Hospital were to be damaged in a disaster, then we will have to put tents in Tundhikhel and provide services from there." So, these spaces aren't just about the community coming together but also about being our answer at the time of crisis.

However, open spaces are continually being encroached in the name of development. The rising population demands more and more infrastructure. In such a