

# THE KATHMANDU POST

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXXII No. 77 | 8 pages | Rs.5 Sunday, May 05, 2024 | 23-01-2081



39.3° C 4.2° C

### **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.

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 Infrastructure and Physical 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.

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

>> 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.

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 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,

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 communicated 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



Experience

our 24x7 Client Care Centre

at +977 1 4791800/5424198









**SCAN TO** INSPIRE THE YOUNG

VISIT OUR REGISTRATION DESK

LOCATION: CENTRAL BUSINESS PARK, THAPATHALI

TIME: 10AM - 5 PM

CONTACT: 01-5135019 | +977-01-5135000

FORMS AVAILABLE AT ALL

**GLOBAL IME BANK BRANCHES.** 

### 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

national election.

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

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.

"He is not involved in any doctored



Arun Reddy

video. We are supporting him," she

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"

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 con-

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













### NATIONAL

THE KATHMANDU POST

### Seven taxi drivers booked for overcharging passengers

□ DISTRICT DIGEST

**BHAIRAHAWA:** The District Administration Office in Rupandehi has booked seven taxi drivers for overcharging passengers from various places in Bhairahawa. The taxi drivers were taken into custody on Friday and released on Saturday after they expressed written commitment not to fleece the passengers again. The district administration deployed a team for field inspection in Buddha Chowk, Bhairahawa Airport area and Belahiya after service seekers repeat edly complained that the taxi drivers overcharged passengers on various

#### Devotee dies apparently of altitude sickness

DOLAKHA: An elderly devotee died apparently of altitude sickness on the premises of Kalinchowk Bhagawati temple in Dolakha on Saturday. According to the District Police Office in Dolakha, 65-year-old Golandar BK of Tikhatal in Bhimeshwar Municipality-2 died in Kalinchowk. BK collapsed when he reached the premises of the temple which lies at an altitude of 3,841 metres above sea level. He might have died of altitude sickness, said police.

#### Two people drown in **Doda River**

KANCHANPUR: Two people drowned in the Doda river of Belauri Municipality-5, Kanchanpur, on Saturday. The victims drowned while swimming in the river. Police identified the deceased as Rajendra Kunwar and Bijaya Kunwar of Belauri-4. Two other youths sustained injuries in the incident. They are receiving treatment at Primary Health Centre in Belauri, said police.

#### Army constructs helipad to aid rescue

KALIKOT: Nepal Army's Shamsher Company in Manma has constructed a helipad at Sukatiya of Shuvakalika Rural Municipality-5, Kalikot, keeping in view of emergency rescue. The helipad, which was constructed at the cost of Rs1 million, was handed over to the rural municipality on Saturday 'The helipad will be helpful to medevac the injured of natural disasters and pregnant women as well as postpartum mothers with health complications," said Gobinda Prasad Acharya, chairman of Shuvakalika Rural Municipality.

# Lack of funds affects embankment construction along Narayani River

Local people are worried about possible flooding due to delayed work.

RAMESH KUMAR PAUDEL

Budget crunch has affected the construction of an embankment that aims to protect the residents of Chitwan and Nawalparasi East from inundation and erosion caused by floods in the Narayani River during the monsoon.

Manohar Kumar Sah, head of the Narayani River Management Project, said that the contractors of the embankment construction are upset because they could not get payment for the work done in the current financial year due to which the progress of the embankment construction was greatly affected.

To control floods in the Narayani River, a major river system in the country, construction of a 35-kilometre embankment on the Chitwan side and a 57-kilometre embankment on the Nawalparasi side is underway.

"Along with the embankments towards Nawalparasi area and Bharatpur area in Chitwan in the Narayani River, the embankment construction is also underway in the Kayar stream and Riu stream in Chitwan. The first phase of constructing a 31 km embankment in Chitwan and Nawalparasi is currently going

on," said Sah.
"The contractors are unhappy because they have not been paid Rs424 million for the work they completed so far in the current fiscal year. The contractors on the Bharatpur side alone have not received Rs375.6 million despite submitting the necessary bill vouchers to the office. We have sent a file to the Finance Ministry asking for funds. We hope the amount will be sent soon.'

Floods-prone settlements are prioritised in the first phase, as part of which, an embankment of 20.5 kilometres is being constructed towards the Bharatpur side and 10.5 kilometres the Nawalparasi side towards currently.

According to Sah, work is being done by making five sections towards Bharatpur, of which one section should be completed by the end of the next fiscal year while four sections should be completed by December 30, 2024. Due to the payment issue, around 41 percent of the work has been done in all five sections collectively,

The least amount of work has been



done in the 5.6-kilometre Sisai Bhagadi, and Baluwa sections located in wards 26 and 27 of Bharatpur Metropolis. An agreement was signed with Sharma Construction Company and Sagun Construction Company for the embankment construction on the 5.6-kilometre section on June 23, 2022 at a cost of Rs370 million. According to the agreement, the construction should be completed by June 23, 2024, but so far, only eight percent of the work, worth a total of Rs31.5 crore, has been completed.

"We could not continue embankment construction as the government has not released amounts for the works we have already completed. Even the project head is not sure when the budget will be released. After work, I have to pay for my labourers, and if I don't have money, how am I going to convince them to work?" said Nahakul Khadka, a representative of Sagun Construction Company. "The construction of the embankment was also affected due to the shortage of 50-centimetre-big stones. Recently, we got the stones, and preparation is going on to transport them and accelerate the construction, but it is not sure when the contractors will

Khadka went on, "The area we are constructing comes under the buffer

zone area of Chitwan National Park, due to which we have to face various difficulties getting permission to work. Renu Dahal, mayor of the Bharatpur Metropolis, who came for the inspection and to monitor the construction work on Sunday, said that she would help us get permission from the park officials and start the work.'

Flood-prone settlements are prioritised in the first phase of construction.

Although there has been 41 percent progress towards the Chitwan side, only 20 percent progress has been made towards the Nawalparasi side.

The Narayani River, one of the big gest rivers in Nepal, causes flooding and erosion in Ramghat, Shivghat, Mangalpur, Gunjanagar, Dibyanagar, Meghauli settlements in ratour Metropolitan City. Bharatpur Metropolitan Similarly, the problem of flooding and erosion in the lower areas of Mukundpur, Rajhar, Pitholi, Naya Belhani, Prasauni, Narayani, and Kolhuwa settlements in Gaindakot

Municipality and Kawasoti Municipality in Nawalparasi is also the same

To prevent problems caused by the Narayani River in this area, the 'People's Embankment' Programme was started in the fiscal year 2009-2010. At that time, there was a master plan to build 97 kilometres of embankment on both sides by spending Rs10 billion, but only around 17 kilometres of embankment were built by spending a total of Rs760 million. For the remaining work, the Narayani River Management Project was started in the financial year 2020-2021.

"A budget of Rs4.72 billion has been secured from the Ministry of Finance for the first phase of work, and due to economic slowdown, the budget has not come on time as requested in recent years, resulting in the non-payment of Rs375.6 million. The work of the first phase should be completed within the financial year 2025-2026,

Kumar Acharya, one of the contractors who has embanked nearly nine kilometres from Bahraghare to Kabreghat and Gajipur to Hirapur, says that he is continuing the work in the hope of getting payment soon. Acharya is the only contractor among three whose work is being appreciated by everyone

"On the basis of the bill voucher that has reached the office of the project, the office has not paid an amount of Rs370 million to the contractors but I have done work worth almost Rs500 million alone, but I have sent some of my bills to the office because they don't have money," said Acharya

The embankment will be nine-metres high and six-metres wide, and can also be used as a road. If the embankment is completed, 35,000 bighas of arable land will be saved from erosion and flooding. After the embankment, in Hirapur, 65 bighas of land that was eroded by the river can be used.

According to project officials, in Hirapur, an embankment has been built about one and a half kilometres from the bank where the river has eroded. The embankment has benefited 197,996 people from 45,785 households living in different settlements in Chitwan and Nawalparasi.

After being elected for the first term, Mayor Dahal said that after seeing the flood in the Narayani and Rapti areas in July 2017, she prepared a comprehensive plan for embankment.

"Despite the delay in the budget, the construction work on the embankment is satisfactory," said Dahal.

However, the local people are wor ried about the possible flooding due to the delayed embankment construc tion. Manju Mahato, from Bhagadi in Bharatpur-26, said that she always lives in fear during the rainy season, and she is worried for the upcoming monsoon because, although embankments are being built in other areas, the work is not progressing towards her village

"The embankments are being built slowly, but I think we are being neglected. The authorities assure us that work will start soon in my area, but they never say exactly when. The locals of my village can only take a sigh of relief after the embankment is completed," said Mahato.

Shamsher Pariyar, a 55-year-old man from Bharatpur-26, said that work has stopped after building an embankment up to Hirapur, and work on the section protecting his home and fields has not progressed.

"I had 25 kattha of land, and five kattha of land was cut off by the Narayani River in different floods,' Pariyar said. "I don't know whether or not I will be able to stay home in peace during the monsoon.'

# Sudurpaschim vote of confidence deferred as UML lawmakers fly to Kathmandu

Continued from page 1

"We have yet to agree on the common minimum programme of the provincial government. We need to reach a logical conclusion on the issue before we give our vote to the chief minister," Rawal, who flew to Kathmandu from Dhangadhi on Saturday morning, told the Post. "The chief minister planned the assembly meeting without consulting the major coalition

**UML** assembly leader says Sodari scheduled trust vote unilaterally.

Rawal said they had requested the chief minister to defer the trust vote by a few days also because Daman Bahadur Bhandari of the UML, who won the election in Bajhang (A) on April 27, is mourning his father's

"Our party asked the chief minister to delay the plan because our provincial assembly member has not even taken the oath of office after his election,' Rawal said.

Sodari had staked his claim to

### **WANTED**

A well-reputed school in Baluwatar, Kathmandu requires the following:

Primary Level (Science)-1 Pre-primary (Grade teacher)-2

Contact No. 9851262000 9851281516 the chief ministerial position claiming the support of 27 assembly members—four from the Unified Socialist, 10 from the UML, 10 from the Maoist Centre, two from the Nagarik Unmukti Party (Ranjita Shrestha faction), and from independent lawmaker Tara Prasad Joshi. On the day of his appointment,

Chief Minister Sodari appointed Kailash Chaudhary of Nagarik Unmukti Party (NUP) the minister for physical infrastructure and development. Chaudhary, who was vying for the post of chief minister, from the Ranjita Shrestha faction of the NUP, later accepted the ministerial position. Later, Tika Thapa from the same party was appointed the minister for Land Management, Agriculture and Cooperatives.

Earlier, Sudurpaschim politics had been riddled with disputes due to intra-party feuds between the two factions led by Ranjita Shrestha and her husband and founder Reshamlal Chaudhary. While Shrestha joined the Maoist-UML alliance, Reshamlal wanted to forge an alliance with the Nepali

The Unified Socialist's relations with other coalition partners soured when leaders from the UML and the Maoist Centre promised Shrestha that a Nagarik Unmukti member would be elected the chief minister. But the Unified Socialist foiled the coalition partners' plan as the party joined hands with the Congress to forge a parallel alliance in the province. Later, leaders from the UML-Maoist coalition were compelled to accept Unified Socialist's Sodari as chief minister.

Even in Kathmandu, Unified Socialist leaders including its vice-chair Rajendra Pandey have been publicly accusing Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and UML chair KP Sharma Oli of undermining his party's strength in the coalition.



Locals at work to build the chariot for the upcoming Rato Machhindranath jatra at Pulchowk, Lalitpur, on Saturday.

### PM accuses Congress of hatching conspiracy against government

>> Continued from page 1

Some Congress leaders including the other party general secretary Gagan Thapa have proposed that properties of public office holders since 1991 be investigated by an all powerful body in order to control corruption that has become rampant in recent years.

Demanding the committee, the Congress continuously protested in the House and did not allow the government to present any bill. The budget session will start on

"The party has not changed its position on the cooperative issue and will disrupt House proceedings if the government does not heed our demand," said Ramesh Lekhak, the Congress chief whip. The prime minister briefed his

party leaders on the possibility of the Congress giving continuity to the protests in the House. "It is not sure whether the upcoming House session can do its regular business," a Maoist lawmaker quoted the prime minister as saying at the parliamentary party meeting. "There is uncertainty if the House can run smoothly."

Prime Minister Dahal also told party leaders that the government was in consultation with several political parties to resolve the crisis.

"If the House fails to resume its normal business, the government cannot present its budget and hold discussion on it," said Poudel. "This is why the prime minister is serious about resolving the matter soon.'

The prime minister told his party that he would call an all-party meeting soon to discuss a way out.

In the meeting, the prime minister also defended Home Minister Lamichhane. "We know issues about cooperatives are serious but we should not blame one leader," said the prime minister. "As this is a serious and complex issue, we will seek some kind of remedy from the Cabinet. Not just one leader, we have to look at the problem in its totality and this is what we are trying to do now."

However, Lamichhane has been

denying his involvement in the embezzlement of the cooperatives' fund. In the Maoist meeting, the prime minister reportedly said that the main opposition might have linked the home minister with cooperative scams in order to sow discord in the ruling coalition.

Congress leader Shekhar Koirala, however, said they were not asking for the home minister's resignation but wanted a parliamentary committee to look into his alleged involvement in the misuse of savings.

"But why is the government reluctant to form the probe?" Koirala asked. "If Lamichhane is clean and is not involved in the misuse of cooperative funds, he wouldn't stand against the parliamentary committee and would be sure about continuing as home minister.'

Dahal says his government would increase the size of the annual budget.

On the other hand, the prime minister accused Congress leaders of hatching a conspiracy against the government immediately after they were forced to leave the government.

Dahal briefed Maoist lawmakers that the discontent expressed by Madhav Kumar Nepal, chairman of the coalition partner CPN (Unified Socialist), was not serious but is manageable.

"This does not threaten the stability of the government," said the prime minister, according to another Maoist lawmaker. There are some technical issues at the centre and in provincial governments, said the prime minister. "These are manageable."

The prime minister also said that the government would increase the size of the annual budget to address public aspirations.

THE KATHMANDU POST 03 | SUNDAY, MAY 05, 2024









Presents



In Association with





### 'अर्थतन्त्रको आधारभूत आवश्यकताः 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 वितीय क्षेत्रमा साढे ६ खर्ब रुपैयाँ थनिकएर बसेको छ। बैंक ब्याजदर घटदो ऋममा 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 दशक्यता 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 पुँजीञात 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 चलिरहेका 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। उपभोज्य जनशक्ति पलायन हुँदा बजारमा उपभोज्य वस्तुको माजमा कमी आई दीर्घकालका लाजि अर्थतन्त्रमा असर निर्नितँदै छ।

अर्थतन्त्रको बागडोर सम्हाल्दै आएको राजनीतिक नेतृत्वबीच ठूलो विमित छैन, तर आन्तरिक समस्या समाधान गर्न आमसहमित पनि देखिएको छैन । आन्तरिक समस्यालाई सम्बोधन नर्जो र अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय अवस्थालाई दोष दिने प्रवृत्तिले नेतृत्वलाई बहाना त प्राप्त हुन्छ, तर यसले आमर्स्रवसाधारणको जीवनमा कन् 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 इकोनिमक सिमट-२०२४

Insurance Partner



Remit Partner





**Partners** 





### **OPINION**

### Climate change is a threat to health

Rising temperatures can facilitate the emergence and spread of drug-resistant pathogens.

MANICA BALASEGARAM



It is widely believed that climate change is the single biggest threat to human health. A global temperature increase of 2° Celsius—a threshold that will likely be exceeded by the end of the century-could claim as many as one billion lives, with extreme weather events, heatwaves, droughts, flooding, infectious disease outbreaks, and food shortages among the causes of death. But the situation may in fact be far worse because the current forecasts fail to account for the inevitable increase in antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Climate change could have a profound effect on AMR, as evidence increasingly indicates that adverse weather and rising temperatures can facilitate the emergence and spread of drug-resistant pathogens. But models seeking to gauge the health effects of climate change disregard the growing risk of drug resistance one of the world's biggest killers. The World Health Organisation has identified AMR as one of ten major threats to global health, alongside climate change, and world leaders are serious about addressing the problem, with a high-level meeting on AMR to be held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in September.

But many still think of AMR as distinct from global warming. For example, the latest Lancet Countdown report on health and climate change makes no mention of AMR, drug resistance, or antibiotics. Similarly, the Quadripartite Secretariat for One Health-comprising the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, the UN Environment Programme, the WHO, and the World Organisation for Animal Health— has failed to study the relationship between global warming and AMR, let alone how AMR will affect the health risks of climate change.

The international community is severely underestimating the impact of climate change on people's health and our ability to treat them. To prepare for the mounting AMR crisis, we must increasingly rely on preventing and controlling infection, and, more importantly, ensure the judicious use of effective antibiotics. That will require developing new antibiotics, which are often unattractive for pharmaceutical companies, making the right investments and establishing the



resistance, as do policy responses to global warming—a massive oversight that will hinder our ability to treat infections and keep peo-

Despite increasing the likelihood of extinction for nearly 11,000 species, a warmer planet could improve conditions for bacteria and fungi. Higher temperatures are associated with increased bacterial growth and infection rates, and can also put selective pressure on microbes to mutate and develop antibiotic resistance. One recent study in China found that each 1°C increase in air temperature was associated with a 14 percent drug-resistant in Klebsiella pneumoniae infections and a 6 percent increase in drug-re-

Similarly, extreme weather, especially floods and droughts, will increase the spread of infectious diseases such as water-borne cholera and typhoid, as well as drug resistance. Such events often disrupt access to clean water and sanitation, making prevention and control of infection much more challenging. Moreover, urban density tends to accelerate the transmission of pathogens. According to some estimates, the climate crisis could displace 1.2 billion people by 2050, likely resulting in ever more crowded cities.

sistant Pseudomonas aeruginosa

AMR is already recognised as an escalating global crisis. In 2019, it was associated with nearly five million deaths, making drug

right incentives so that existing antibiotics reach the people who

To this end, organisations like Development Research & Partnership, are encouraging the creation of new drugs and improving access to essential antibiotics already on the market, particularly in lower-income countries. Equitable antibiotic use and distribution will become increasingly important, because, as with climate change, it is the poorest communities that are usually hit hardest by AMR.

But that won't be enough. Global policymakers must significantly increase funding for AMR research to ensure that they are ready to respond to new forms of drug resistance caused directly or indirectly by global warming. Doing so will require including AMR in climate-change contingencies and, more importantly, viewing drug resistance and rising temperatures as interconnected, rather than distinct, challenges, starting at the UN high-level meeting on AMR in September and this year's UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku. Otherwise, the effectiveness of existing drugs will falter just when they are most needed.

 $Balasegaram\ is\ the\ Executive$ Director of the Global Antibiotic Research & Development Partnership.

— Project Syndicate

### Got a column idea? Write for us

The Kathmandu Post solicits well-researched, unapologetic opinion pieces from our readers.

Please email your pieces or pitches, a high-resolution headshot, and a one-line bio to tkpopinion@gmail.com.

Please google your pitches before writing to us. If you're submitting an article that the *Post* or other publications have already covered, tell us why your piece is important.

Make sure that your piece is original. Authors who plagiarise or get AI tools, including ChatGPT, to write their pieces are

The *Post* receives dozens of pitches daily from aspiring writers, students, analysts, activists, entrepreneurs and diplomats. We cannot respond to every single email, but if we like your idea, we will get back to you within a week.

- Editors

# Dalit women in local governance

Political parties must understand that quotas don't ensure adequate and meaningful representation.

SAJHANA TOLANGE



For the first time in Nepal, all but a few among the 753 local governments are represented by Dalit women. In some wards, quota seats for Dalit women members remain vacant because political parties could not nominate anyone. The Local Level Election Act 2017 mandated political parties to fill 40 percent of seats in local governments with women. This act mandates that there should be three women in the ward, including one in the executive position and two in the ward committee. Furthermore, among two women members, one must be a Dalit. This led to the entry of many Dalit women in local governance. In 2017, a total of 6,567 Dalit women were elected and 176 seats remained vacant. Similarly, 6,620 women were elected in the local level in 2022 and 123 seats remained vacant.

According to the 2021 census, Dalits comprise 13.8 percent of Nepal's population. Dalits are socially, culturally structurally discriminated against, based on the notion of purity and impurity. The status of Dalit women is the lowest compared to Dalit men and other categories of women, resulting in extreme vulnerabilities, exclusion and marginalisation. While political participation of Dalit women is increasing compared to the past, their representation is limited to quotas only. Very few Dalit women have been elected to decision-making positions such as chief/deputy chief and

Meaningful representation

Why and when do "participation" and "representation" become meaningful? Social scientists argue that active and meaningful participation is crucial not only for gender equality but also for social development. Factors including opportunity, functionality, capability, critical voice, leadership and decision-making are essential to meaningful participation. At a recent workshop titled "Dalit women in politics", participants lamented the lack of meaningful participation and representation of Dalit women because they aren't included in decision-making. They are omitted from policy planning and programmes on development issues and budget allocation. While such practices were more prevalent in the previous local governments, they

are a reality today as well, despite Dalit women representatives raising their voices.

Multiple factors hinder the meaningful participation and representation of Dalit women in politics. They experience unacceptance from people as politicians and representatives and lack support for any kind of initiation and activities. Reservation does not work if the society doesn't accept women as politicians. It is crucial to engage Dalit women in local governance to ensure inclusion and so quota seats were introduced and implemented. However, Dalit women politicians suffer from caste-based discrimination, stigmatisation and oppression. Elected Dalit women representatives say they face discrimination even from their colleagues after their caste belonging is made public.

Have quotas worked?

There has been a rise in the number of countries having reserved quotas or opening spaces for women's political participation in national parliament, government and public spheres in European, African, Eastern and American countries. A greater numbers of countries have more than 30 percent of women's participation and representation in politics after implementing reservation and quota policies. According to Esther Duflo, the quota system is a helpful procedure to ensure representation of disadvantaged groups such as women or ethnic minorities. Duflo says that without reservations, weaker groups

who are socially, politically and economically deprived and backward cannot be represented.

In Nepal, social inclusion was brought into existence in 1997 to ensure the inclusion of backward, excluded and marginalised communities. As per Om Gurung, before 1990, the participation and representation of indigenous people, women, Dalit, Madhesi and other excluded groups were very few and not represented proportionally. Yet, due to a lack of theoretical and practical knowledge of social inclusion, many people spread hatred against the communities using quotas. Moreover, there is not much debate among all the excluded and deprived groups and communities in Nepal about the necessity and feasibility of positive affirmative action and social inclusion.

Punam Yadav argues that quota policies increase women's representation in politics and also strengthened their position in family and society. However, the case of Dalit women has been different since they always faced caste discrimination and prejudice. Nevertheless, some such women concede that they got an opportunity to develop their political careers at least nominally. A Dalit woman ward member from Chandragiri Municipality says she faced increased discrimination after she became a ward member. Her experience aligns with that of women worldwide, especially marginalised women, who face several obstacles in political participation and representation

Moreover, patriarchy is seen to restrict women's leadership and rise in the political sphere. For Nepal's Dalit women, caste-based prejudices and Brahmanical patriarchy are the

major and foremost barriers, as they are neither accepted by society as politician or human being.

What next?

Dalit women ward members face several challenges. But does this mean that quota seats for Dalit women must be removed? No. Instead, Dalit women ward members need more training to enhance their leadership and capacity skills. They further need opportunities for growth and spaces where they can raise their voices. Furthermore, there should be budgetary provisions for engaging Dalit women. Political parties must understand that quotas that don't ensure meaningful resources and support are inadequate.

Most importantly, caste-based prejudice must stop. The state should provide legal and psychological support if anybody is discriminated against. Dalit women, in addition to Dalit men, continue to face discrimination in social and political spheres. Caste and gender are socially constructed identities, and we must put all efforts into dismantling the systems that perpetuate inequality, discrimination and violence.

Tolange is an independent researcher interested in studying the status of Dalit women in politics.

### The risks of 'Disease X' in Asia

Airborne diseases are more likely to become 'Disease X'. which can quickly spread beyond borders.

DR SHER BAHADUR PUN



Many experts believe it is only a matter of time before "Disease X" arrives, and that it is likely to be 20 times more lethal than Covid-19. "Disease X' refers to a currently unknown infectious but potentially lethal agent that could trigger a serious international epidemic. Covid-19 was the first "Disease X" since the term was coined by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2018. Asia, the world's most populous continent, will probably be the source/place of the next "Disease X" owing to inadequate infectious disease surveillance and preventive measures.

The WHO has released names of severe emerging infectious diseases with epidemic/pandemic potential: Covid-19, Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever, Ebola virus and Marburg virus, Lassa fever, Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Nipah and henipaviral diseases, Rift Valley fever, Zika, and "Disease X". However, the avian influenza virus (commonly known as bird flu), which poses a significant threat to humans due to its high mortality rate, has not been included in the list.

There has been an increase in H5N1 human cases in recent years. A few weeks ago, a person in Texas, USA, was found infected with the H5N1 virus after coming into contact with dairy cows, prompting a debate about source-transmission/route and its possible consequences. H5N1, a highly pathogenic avian influenza, was first

confirmed in humans causing disease and death in Hong Kong in 1997, while a human fatal case was first reported in Nepal in 2019.

Health policymakers pay little or no attention until there is a sudden rise in hospitalisations or even death. The majority of patients with fever and or diarrhoea usually go undiagnosed in Nepal due to limited pathogens sent for routine laboratory testing. In such cases, healthcare workers are compelled to treat them empirically. In recent years, patients with these symptoms of unknown origin have consistently become the top reason for hospitalisations at the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital (STIDH).

unknown infections/pathogens, observed in Nepal and elsewhere in Asia, have the potential to become "Disease X" and possibly trigger a serious international epidemic anytime, anywhere. Both Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2) and H1N1pdm09 were declared pandemics approximately 10 years apart.

There are lessens to be learnt from Covid-19, where a significant number of patients died (especially during the Delta wave) due to a shortage of oxygen supply rather than the disease itself. Fever with severe bleeding can lead to hemorrhagic shock and even death if left untreated. Hemorrhagic fever/shock was seen in several patients with dengue-like illness in

illnesses or respiratory tract infections, sounds like a more reasonable prediction of a serious epidemic/pandemic. Covid-19 (in 2019), H1N1pmd09 (in 2009), and H1N1 (known as Spanish flu, in 1918) are some diseases that caused serious pandemics and killed hundreds of thousands of people in the past. Regrettably, it is difficult, even impossible, to prevent the spread of airborne diseases from one person to another as well as from one country

to another country, despite strict poli-

cy-level control measures and preven-

appearing as the vector-borne origin

"Disease X", emerging from flu-like

of "Disease X" in Asia.

tive measures. Flu-like illness is a fever of >38 degrees Celsius and a cough with onset within the last 10 days. It is interesting to mention here that patients with flu-like illnesses are usually found negative for flu viruses. According to the FluNet report (updated on April 15, 2024, WHO), nearly 90 percent of flu-like illnesses were of unknown origin (unidentified), a matter of grave concern indeed. Such unknown respiratory illnesses might, one day, turn into "Disease X" and potentially cause serious epidemics/

pandemics worldwide. To conclude, airborne diseases are more likely to become "Disease X", which can quickly spread beyond borders in a short time, despite the implementation of strict controls and premeasures. human-animal interfaces, lab-leak incidents (deadly and fast-spreading infectious agents), genetic mutations of pathogens, drug-resistant bacteria, and climate change are some of the reasons behind the potential appearance of the next "Disease X". To prevent the yet-hypothetical but potentially lethal "Disease X", with its concentration in Asia, there is a need for effective surveillance, early identification, strict preventive measures, and vaccine research and development apart from governments making it a top health agenda.



Studies have shown that patients Kathmandu in 2022. It shows that with unknown causes of fever unknown vector-borne disease/s can and/or diarrhoea are common in become "Disease X" at some point, Asia (especially in Southeast Asia). where adequate/sufficient blood may Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2) was initially not be available in hospitals/healthdubbed a "SARS-like virus". care centres. The Aedes mosquito, a H1N1pdm09 flu was "Swine flu" before vector for dengue and dengue-like the identification of its pathogen/s illness, is well established in Southeast and nomenclature. The currently Asian countries, elevating the risk of

Pun is Chief of the Clinical Research Unit at the Sukraraj Tropical & Infectious Disease Hospital.

### MONEY

#### **FOREX** 133.78 **US** Dollar 143.79 167.97 Pound Sterling Swiss Franc 147.51 88.05 Australian Dollar Canadian Dollar 97.91 98.95 Singapore Dollar Japanese Yen (10) 8.73 Chinese Yuan Saudi Arab Riyal 35.67 Qatari Riyal 36.69 3.64 Thai Bhat **UAE Dhiram** 28.22 Malaysian Ringgit Korean Won (100) Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank PRICE PER TOLA **BULLION**

阵 Fine Gold Rs 135,400 Silver Rs 1,645 SOURCE: FENEGOSID

#### □ 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 system atic 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 stand ards. 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 SECrelated 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 cashrich 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 per cent 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

# Digital payment will enable Indians to spend more in Nepal

Starting March 1, Indians have been allowed to make payments through their mobile phone marking a milestone in cross-border digital payment between Nepal and India. Fonepay Payment Service partnered with India's NPCI International Payments to launch the cross-border payment service using quick response (QR) codes. Indian visitors can now scan the Fonepay QR code using India's digital payment app-PhonePe. The Post's Krishana Prasain sat with Ritesh Pai, CEO of International Payments, PhonePe, during his brief visit to Kathmandu, to talk about PhonePe's entry into Nepal, its plan and strategies. Excerpts:

#### Tell us about PhonePe.

PhonePe is an Indian digital payments and financial services company headquartered in Bengaluru, India. The PhonePe app, based on the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), started its service in 2016. Today, we are seeing billions of transactions happening in India. It was one of the Indian government's initiatives to take UPI to an international level. The NPCI, the domestic network in India, is creating an enabler by adding new geography to promote the UPI. While the network will do what it is supposed to play the role of enabler or facilitator, entities like us with large app user bases can drive consumption. So, it is the thought process that started from the government for making India's homegrown financial instrument to be accepted internationally. With the blessing from the regulator and the network, we entered the Nepali market. Technically, all the UPI apps in India can be used, but since we are the ones who command a market share in excess of 50 percent for all the digital transactions that happen on UPI, we thought it would be best to lead the way. PhonePe does a transaction of IRs250 million daily. We do more than a million transactions hourly and this

### Why did PhonePe choose the Nepali

As I said, this was part of the overall thought process where UPI had to go global. So, there are multiple geographies that NPCI is going and enabling. As of now, we are in the UAE Singapore and Nepal. The decision regarding which markets to enable, among others, will be something that



Ritesh Pai, CEO of International Payments, PhonePe

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 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

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 humanto-human than social or digital media.

We are exploring and just figuring out

#### 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 milk man-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

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:

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.

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



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 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.

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 accept-

### Japan seeks Sri Lanka recovery for regional stability

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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 agree-

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 eco-

nomic 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.

pledged to keep. (REUTERS)

### □ 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 move ment" 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 pro posed 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 yows 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

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

resulted in the deaths of more than

1.170 people, mostly civilians, accord

ing to an AFP tally of Israeli official

figures. The militants also took some

250 hostages, of whom Israel esti-

mates 128 remain in Gaza. (AFP)

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 spokes man 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 ty 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

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 womanwho 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

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.

### India's foreign minister rejects Biden's 'xenophobia' comment

REUTERS
NEW DELHI, MAY

Indian foreign minister Subrahmanyam 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.

### Russia puts Ukrainian President Zelensky on its wanted list

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KHARKIV REGION, UKRAINE, MAY 4

Pussio has put Illrainian

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

"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 Subrahmanyam 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



Karan Brar, Kamalpreet Singh and Karanpreet 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.

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. For weeks, drenching rains in Texas



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.





### **WEST INDIES A TOUR OF NEPAL**

FIFTH T20, TU CRICKET GROUND, KIRTIPUR 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

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





(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.

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

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

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 destroyerin-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 firm-

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

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.

### Arsenal maintain Premier League title push

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

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

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

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 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 mini-

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 "We are still in this fight as we speak. I'm proud of the

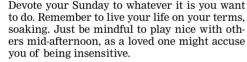
performance but it would have been huge to win tonight. Almost but we've had a lot of them this year," Edwards

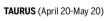
Despite losing eight points as punishment for financial breaches of their own, Everton have already secured their Premier League status with three games to spare.

### HOROSCOPE



### ARIES (March 21-April 19)





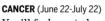


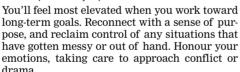
Devote your Sunday to relaxing, flying under the radar and seeking healing from the depths your spirit. Themes around introspection and breaking patterns come into focus. Be aware of your actions and consciously choose the healthier and higher path.

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.

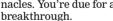




LEO (July 23-August 22)



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



DEAR

VEST

HONED

IDOL

50 Cabbage salad

"- of Eden

51 Pith helmet

54 Function

55 Fancy jug



PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

| H | A | I | R | Y |

ORGAN

O P I U M

NORSE

SPEED

AMUN

TALCEURO

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)



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

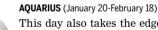


chance to build up through smart planning. Be sure to make health a central focus



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

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.





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

### 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

### **CROSSWORD**

#### **ACROSS** 1 Rounded

- handle 5 Leading man 10 Abandoned
- 15 Island 16 Mimic
- 18 Remedies 20 Farm laborer
- 25 Mother superior 26 Prove wrong
- 34 Rounded 35 Pummel
- Fido
- Teapot"
- 41 Just
- 42 Plait 44 Keep for later (2 wds.)

- 14 British noble
- 17 Classy beach resort 19 "- Dark Thirty"
- 22 "The World of Henry · 24 Sty cry
- 29 Conceited fellow 5 Known only to a
- 36 Popular papal 37 Command for
- 38 "La Vita" 39 "— Little 40 Greek letter
- 47 Nice and warm 48 Attila the

49 Ponder

50 Cookout fare 53 Made demands 57 Fertile soil

64 Valley

65 Sanity

2 Brad

13 Run

21 Little bit

28 Deadly

- "— Lucy 61 Hawkeye State 62 Vaulted recess "Holy cow!"
- Pompeo 67 Neither - nor
  - there **DOWN** Seaweed
- 3 Church calendar 4 Tire failure
- few 6 Lump 29 Breadbasket Rocky outcrop 30 Suggestive 8 Poem
- Strike a chord 10 Doing nothing 11 Cousin to a foil 12 Office plant

27 Madonna movie

- 38 Reduce the 23 Bearskin item 26 Tournament of
  - 42 Intrepid 43 North Carolina capital 45 London's river
  - 46 Arctic bird 47 Covered bowl

32 Send payment

33 Fawning lackey

breakthrough.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

27

37



15

18

38

29

53

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.

16

39

43

61

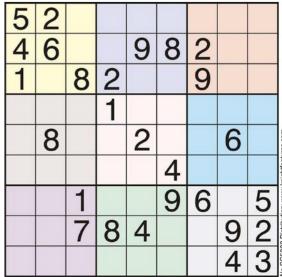
64

67



### many blessings that fill your life.

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



DIFFICULTY RATING:

58

40 41

56 Hamlet, for one 59 Texter's chuckle 60 Barn bird 60 59 62 63

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

FICTION PARK

### He smells like summer

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

KHUSHI DAS

t 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.

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

'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



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 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 rearview 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?"

### '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 GHIMIRE KATHMANDU

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 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



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 wellbeing 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.

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 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 pub-

lic'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.

Published and printed by Kantipur Publications Limited, Central Business Park, Thapathali, Kathmandu, Nepal, P. B. No. 8559, Phone: 5135000, Fax: 977-1-5135057, E-mail: kpost@kmg.com.np, Regd. No. 32/049/050, Chairman: Kailash Sirohiya, Managing Director: Sambhav Sirohiya, Editor: Biswas Baral