



THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Publisher's note

Kantipur Publications completes its 29 years and turns 30 today. On the occasion of the Publication's 29th anniversary, I would like to extend my heartfelt wishes to all our readers, well-wishers and associates.

In the post-1990 era of liberalisation, Kantipur was established as an attempt to lay a strong foundation of professional journalism. This journey is completing its three decades. We've come a long way since, and over the years we have encountered multiple crises, issues and accomplishments. Overcoming obstacles as we move ahead has become our trait which perhaps fuels our pursuit of journalism without fear and favour.

In the last two years, just like the world, we have been facing a multi-pronged crisis in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic. Here's hoping that the Omicron variant of the coronavirus is the beginning of an end of the pandemic and we commit ourselves to moving ahead with more vigour than ever before. I would like to express my gratitude to all my colleagues at Kantipur Publications for fulfilling their responsibilities despite unusual circumstances brought by the pandemic. We are also indebted to all our well-wishers for their relentless support, assistance and encouragement during these difficult times. During this period, we've learnt how to navigate the pandemic. This experience, we believe, will help us soar to new heights. But whatever challenges may come our way, we remain committed to the values and principles of journalism.

Moving with the times, we continue to adopt and incorporate new technological innovations across all our mass media channels. We've upgraded our mechanical press operations and equipment for a state of the art printing press. We have revamped our digital platforms to ensure that latest and reliable news updates are available round the clock for our tech savvy readers who are increasingly switching to handheld devices. This is but a start of how we would like to adopt emerging technologies as we move ahead.

We adhere firmly to democracy, rule of law and constitutional values and principles. When there were two attempts to dissolve the House of Representatives and misinterpret the constitution, we made our stance clear and stood firmly against it. The Supreme Court aptly resolved the cases. But once again, we find ourselves divided as a nation over a foreign grant project. We expect that the responsible political parties will end this stalemate and come to a logical conclusion at the earliest to resolve the social confrontations.

Lastly, I would like to convey my best wishes to colleagues, readers, distributors, advertisers and advertising agencies, supporters and well-wishers on the occasion of this major milestone.

Thank you.

Kailash Sirohiya

Kailash Sirohiya
Chairman and Managing Director



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POST PHOTO: KABIN ADHIKARI

A man takes rest at a children's park at Teku, Kathmandu on Friday.

Caught between ruling coalition and MCC, Deuba feels the heat

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba wants to ratify the US grant, but doing so comes with the risk of breaking the five-party alliance. His choices are limited.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, FEB 18

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba appears to have fallen between two stools.

He is under pressure to move the Millennium Challenge Corporation-Nepal Compact from Parliament. Any move to table the compact could lead to breakdown of his coalition. He, however, won't be able to table the compact by keeping the coalition intact, as his partners, particularly the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) and the CPN (Unified Socialist), are dead against the US grant's ratification.

Of the multiple options Deuba explores, one is joining hands with the CPN-UML to get the compact ratified. That, however, also comes with a risk. His coalition may break and the Maoist Centre could forge an electoral alliance with the UML, like in 2017 when the prime minister's party, the Nepali Congress, faced a defeat.

In order to seek consensus on MCC tabling, Deuba has been holding meetings with the coalition partners almost every day. After failing to arrive at a conclusion on Thursday, the coalition partners met on Friday



RSS

Sher Bahadur Deuba

as well, but the meeting ended without any decision. The next meeting has been scheduled for Sunday.

A senior Nepali Congress leader said some leaders within his party are putting pressure on Deuba to find such a way that the MCC can be tabled while keeping the alliance intact. Maintaining the alliance will give the Congress a better chance to emerge as the single largest party in the upcoming elections which will ensure Deuba's return as prime minister

again, according to the leader.

"So Deuba is not going to take the risk of breaking the alliance and joining hands with the UML," the leader told the post.

After Thursday's coalition meeting ended inconclusively, Deuba went to meet Oli in Balkot. In the meeting, Oli clearly said that once he will terminate his ties with his ruling partners, UML will support Deuba's government and there is possibility of cooperation between Nepali Congress and UML, according to two UML leaders.

Oli on Friday morning briefed some UML leaders about his meeting with Deuba. A senior UML leader, who is familiar with the meeting of the two leaders, told the Post that Oli's message to Deuba was that as long as the prime minister sets his feet on two boats, he will continue to be in a crisis.

"Our party has a clear position. Until the alliance remains, there is no chance of cooperation," Oli told Deuba, according to the leader. "If you [Deuba] terminate your partnership with your partners, then UML will lend its support in lifting House obstructions, ratifying the MCC compact and reaching a power-sharing deal with the Nepali Congress."

>> Continued on page 2

Nepal's democracy revolutions, and achievements and failures

As the country celebrates democracy, observers see some gains, some hollow promises.



POST FILE PHOTO

Democracy can be strengthened only when the people are empowered.

BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, FEB 18

The country has witnessed three revolutions for democracy in the past seven decades. The first was in 1950

when the people revolted to end the century-long autocratic Rana regime. The long protest of the people paid off when the country ushered in democracy in 1951.

It, however, was short-lived as King

Mahendra hijacked it through a royal-military coup in 1960. He took direct control of the executive authority from the leaders who were elected for the first time by the people. It took 30 years to end the rule of the Palace until the Nepali people in 1990 launched a decisive protest to restore democracy in the country.

The country adopted a multi-party democracy with constitutional monarchy. Freedom of speech, right to equality and other civil and political rights were enshrined in the 1990 constitution. That, however, didn't get translated into actions, fully. The parties elected to power failed to live up to the expectations of the people. They were more focused on petty partisan interests and leaders paid little attention to people and their concerns who yearned for development and prosperity.

Six years into democracy, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist waged an armed struggle against the state which it said was to establish the "rule of the people."

>> Continued on page 2

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BRIEFING

Community schools get buses

SINDHULI: The Bagmati provincial government provided six community schools in Sindhulimadi with a school bus each. According to Kama-lamai Municipality, school buses received from the province have been handed over to six community schools in the district headquarters Sindhulimadi. With this, the number of community schools with school bus services in Sindhuli has reached nine. Institutional schools have school buses but community schools did not have them until a year ago. The Education Development Directorate of Bagmati Province had provided Rs2.5 million per school for the provision of school buses.

Woman killed in truck accident

SINDHULI: Tikaram Shivbhakti, aged 45, of Devasthan, Sunkoshi Rural Municipality-1 was hit by a tipper truck and died on the way to Dhulikhel Hospital on Wednesday. Police immediately took the driver into custody. "It looks like an accident but we are investigating the case and doing what is necessary," said Manoj Kumar Lama, DSP of Sindhuli district.

3 held with 400kg marijuana

UDAYAPUR: Three youths were arrested with 400kg of marijuana from Sirubani in Belka Municipality. The police caught the trio with 13 sacks of the illegal substance, according to DSP Bed Prasad Gautam of Area Police Office. Authorities also seized Rs69,025 and four mobile sets from the trio, said Gautam.

873 people get free treatment

KAPILVASTU: A total of 521 women and 352 men have been treated free of charge at the three-day Comprehensive Gynaecology and Disease Health Camp at Saunhawa in Krishnanagar Municipality of Kapiilvastu district. On the occasion of Lumbini Province Establishment Day, a team of 15 health workers including four doctors led by District Hospital Medical Officer Ganesh Chhetri was mobilised for the purpose. Among 41 women diagnosed with uterine prolapse, 14 were operated at Kapiilvastu Hospital free of cost. Six women have been referred to a well-equipped hospital for further treatment as they showed early signs of uterine cancer.

US Embassy takes to social media to dispel MCC rumours

There have been a number of videos on YouTube awash with disinformation on the MCC compact, calling it an American ploy to 'trap' Nepal.

SHUVAM DHUNGANA
KATHMANDU, FEB 18

After at least two interviews by American officials to the Post and separate calls to top leaders of Nepal by an US assistant secretary from the Department State, the debate over the Millennium Challenge Corporation-Nepal Compact has heated up in Nepal.

As the government prepared to table the \$500 million US grant in Parliament, protests erupted with police resorting to using tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds. There have been a number of videos on YouTube awash with disinformation on the MCC compact, calling it an American ploy to “trap” Nepal.

The United States has time and again tried to clarify that the MCC compact is purely a grant assistance that it is extending to Nepal in honour of its long-standing relations with the only objective of helping plug the gap in electricity supply and improving roads.

The US has also for long raised its concerns about the spread of disinformation in Nepal on various platforms like social media and YouTube channels about the MCC compact.

After the phone conversations by Donald Lu, US assistant secretary, to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, Maoist chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal and UML chair KP Sharma Oli, reports suggested he also warned of some external hands, including China, in the attempts to block the compact in Nepal.

Lately, the US embassy in Nepal has activated its social media team and put out a series of tweets and Facebook posts on disinformation and propaganda, stopping short of mentioning the MCC compact.

The context is obvious. “Disinformation and propaganda have had serious consequences throughout history. State-led disinformation and propaganda have threatened democracies, inflamed wars, and provoked violence,” the

US embassy Nepal wrote on Facebook on February 13. “It has fomented distrust of facts, science, and credible journalism.”

Only recently, the US embassy even organised an interaction on disinformation with Nepali media experts. “For the next few weeks, we will discuss disinformation and how we all can be fooled by it,” the embassy wrote.

Washington has set a February 28 deadline for the Nepali leadership to ratify the compact from Parliament, as demanded by Prime Minister Deuba and Maoist chair Dahal. Lu during his conversations also said that failure to do so could force the US to review its ties with Nepal.

Amid the raging debate over the MCC compact, geopolitical factors too have come strongly into play.

US officials have communicated on multiple occasions that they are seriously concerned about disinformation in Nepal about the MCC compact. Last month, in an interview with the Post, Mahmoud Bah, acting CEO of MCC, said that MCC has been the target of “a sophisticated and malicious mis-information and disinformation campaign to discredit our agency and the Government of Nepal in order to prevent the MCC-Nepal Compact from progressing.”

“You will notice that each time the government of Nepal seems poised to move forward towards ratifying the MCC compact, there is a sudden increase in false and misleading statements about the MCC, especially on social media and YouTube,” Bah said.

"It is even more disheartening when some of Nepal's political leaders have perpetuated these misleading statements, which only hurts the people of Nepal."

Earlier this week, a US State Department spokesperson expressed the US concerns about disinformation campaigns in Nepal. "Yes. We have been concerned about disinformation campaigns surrounding the MCC

Compact, as we are concerned with disinformation everywhere,” the spokesperson told the *Hindustan Times*. “Should outside influence or corruption have influenced parliamentarians’ actions to vote against this electricity-transmission project, it would be deeply disappointing and a loss for the people of Nepal.”

Nepal in September last year had even written to MCC seeking clarifications on some of the points, including whether the compact is above Nepal's constitution and whether it has any security component attached to it. MCC in its point-wise response had said compact is not above Nepal's constitution and that it does not have any security components.

Those opposing the compact, including some Nepali politicians, however, have refused to accept the US assertion.

Nepal's ruling alliance has been in a bid to find consensus on the compact ratification as the deadline nears. A meeting of the five parties on Friday, the second in a row, failed to reach any consensus. They have decided to sit again on Sunday. Prime Minister Deuba, however, appears firm on tabling the MCC compact. He reached out to UML chair Oli on Thursday evening after the five-party meeting ended inconclusively.

US Ambassador Randy Berry lately has held talks with both Deuba and Oli, according to leaders from their orbits.

On Friday, demonstrators gathered in New Baneshwar in front of the Parliament building and resorted to burning tyres to protest against MCC.

Berry took to Twitter to assert that America believes in free speech. “We are a strong supporter of free speech & public discourse based on fact, including on MCC. The right to express one’s views is intrinsic to democracy, and people must be allowed to peacefully share their views,” Berry tweeted. “Violence & incitement to violence are never acceptable.”

437 cases as rapid antigen tests added to daily infection tally

KATHMANDU: Nepal on Friday reported 275 new PCR-confirmed Covid cases in the last 24 hours, taking the nationwide infection tally to 975,132. As many as 162 people tested

positive in 3,958 antigen tests, according to the Health Ministry. As of Friday, 5,369,664 PCR and 1,032,197 antigen tests have been carried out across the country. **(PR)**

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BRIEFINGS

Renault returns to profit but chip shortage hits output
PARIS: Renault returned to profit last year but the global shortage of semi-conductors will crimp production again in 2022, the French automaker said Friday. The company posted a better-than-expected net profit of 967 million euros (\$1.1 billion) after a record eight-billion-euro loss in 2020, when the onset of the pandemic pum-melled the global economy. Renault sold fewer cars last year but the company has cut costs, raised prices and shifted to a strategy of focusing on its more profitable brands instead of vol-umes. Revenue rose 6.3 percent to 46.2 billion euros as the company exceed-ed its financial targets despite the shortage of semiconductors and the higher cost of raw materials. “Renault is back,” chief executive Luca de Meo said at a news confer-ence. “The difficulties are behind us. We have shown that we can overcome adversity,” he said. **(AFP)**

Chinese food delivery giant slumps on fee-cut measures
BEIJING: Shares of Chinese food deliv-ery giant Meituan slumped Friday as Beijing released new guidelines instructing internet platforms to lower fees for struggling eateries. The guidelines, published by China’s top economic planner, aim to support a service sector hit especially hard by restrictions to curb the spread of Covid-19. Shares in Meituan, which has hundreds of millions of users in China, plunged almost 15 percent in Hong Kong when markets closed Friday. Earlier this week, a State Council meeting pledged to scale up support for sectors such as catering, retail and tourism, including tempo-rary tax breaks. **(AFP)**

Nepal gives Indian travellers digital payment access

The move would be of huge relief to the Indian people travelling north as there are restrictions on the use of high denomination IC notes in Nepal.

KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, FEB 18

If things go as planned, come this May, Indian visitors in Nepal will no longer be required to carry paper money. They can simply make payments by scanning quick response (QR) codes.

The Gateway Payment Service Private Limited, a payment service operator, is all set to begin the cross-border payment system for the first time in Nepal based on interoper-able and mobile first technology.

“We are all set to launch the system after three months,” Anu Maity Shakya, marketing head of Gateway Payment Service, told the Post.

The National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI) and International Payments Limited (NIPL), the inter-national arm of National Payments Corporation of India, have joined hands with Gateway Payments Service and Manam Infotech to deploy a uni-fied payment interface (UPI) in Nepal.

The system will enable payments for larger digital goods and boost interoperable real-time person to per-son (P2P) and merchant payment transactions (P2M) in Nepal.

The UPI is a real-time payment sys-tem that provides person to person and person to merchant transactions simply, safely and securely in India.

Industry insiders say that the move would provide a great relief to the Indians travelling to Nepal because there are restrictions on using high denomination Indian currency notes in Nepal. Since December 2018, Nepal allows use of only IRS100.

The government move to ban the use of high denomination Indian cur-rency notes in Nepal had drawn criti-cism particularly from the tourism industry because Indian bills were widely used in Nepal.

However, according to Nepal’s cen-tral bank, the system is currently not on a reciprocal basis or Nepalis are not allowed to make payments through Bharat-QR while travelling to India.

“We have sought permission to allow digital transactions for Nepalis while travelling to India as well. We are waiting for the response from Nepal’s central bank,” said Shakya.

The system will enable an interop-erability electronic payment network between banking and financial insti-tutions and payment service provid-ers to transfer money from any pay-



SHUTTERSTOCK

The system is currently not on a reciprocal basis or Nepalis are not allowed to make payments through Bharat-QR while travelling to India.

ment service providers in India to any banking and financial institutions and e-wallets in Nepal.

“UPI’s real-time catalyse the pro-cess of financial inclusion in Nepal and will also create more opportuni-ties for businesses. It will help mod-ernise Nepal’s digital payment infra-structure and bring the convenience of digital payments to citizens of Nepal,” according to a statement issued by Gateway Payment Service

Private Limited.

“Our system will be enabled in the apps of banking and financial institu-tions and payment service providers through the connection of ‘UPI Nepal’,” said Shakya.

With the system, the customer with-out displaying their bank account details can make bank to bank trans-fers and can make payment through payment service providers by using the ID and pin number, Shakya said.

The system mainly provides securi-

ty without exposing the bank account details, Shakya said. “The system will also eradicate the closed system in the Nepali digital payment service as there is no wallet to wallet fund trans-fer option and not easy for bank to wallet transfer,” Shakya said.

According to Shakya, to make digi-tal payment, it requires the account number of the receiver or mobile number and it only gets sent only after a one-time password (OTP) is generat-ed. If OTP is linked with a bank

account, there are higher chances data regarding accounts can get leaked. But the UPI system which cre-ates virtual addresses will help in making payment without displaying bank account details, she said.

Customers taking mobile banking app service or wallet service are en-abled with UPI identity, and customers will create an identity and they can make payment from the UPI identity or can be sent on mobile number. “The national identity can also be created in the country,” Shakya said. Besides Nepal, UPI system is being operated in Bhutan, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates by cross-border payment agreement.

In 2021, UPI enabled 39 billion trans-actions amounting to commerce worth \$940 billion which is equivalent to approximately 31 percent of India’s GDP, the company stated.

As of now, five banks have consent-ed to join the system, she added.

Guru Prasad Poudel, executive director of Nepal Rastra Bank, said that the system would help ease cross-border payment. This system will give the Indian currency direct access to Nepali banks, he said.

“Although we have not permitted the system on a reciprocal basis, it’s on a priority of the central bank,” Poudel said. “Nepal currently imposes some restrictions on sending money outside the country.”

The Gateway Payment Service got operator’s licence in mid-February 2021 and was the first company in the country to get cross-border pay-ment system operator licence. The company was running an e-commerce platform for card payment to mer-chants directly.

Transactions through digital pay-ment systems have grown tremen-dously in recent years in Nepal, and the development and expansion of digital payment related infrastructure like real time gross settlement (RTGS), interbank fund transfer, payment card, mobile wallet, mobile banking and internet banking has played a significant role in the spread of online transactions.

Digital payments during the period mid-December to mid-January, the sixth month of the current fiscal year, amounted to Rs5.14 trillion with 54.56 million digital transactions, the highest single-month digital transac-tions on record.

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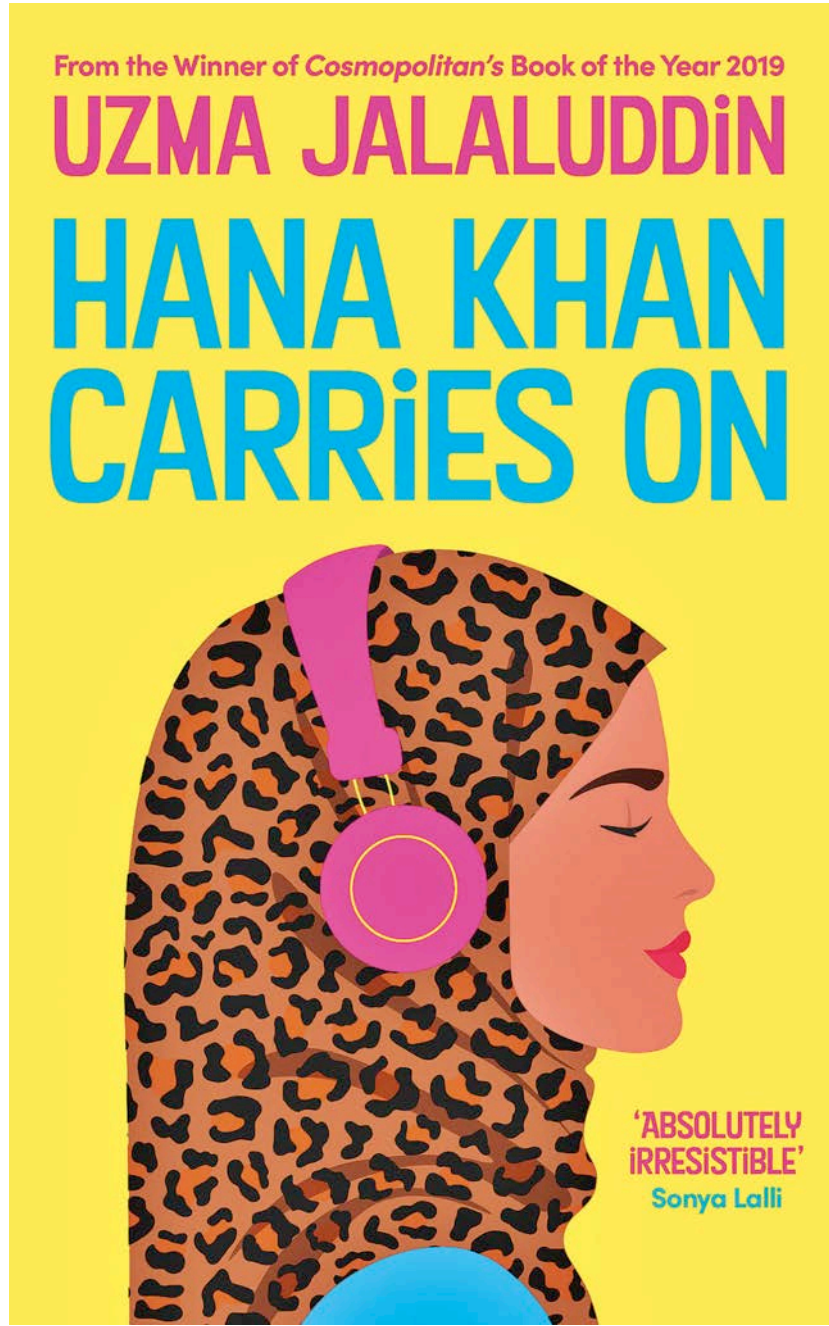
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Hana Khan Carries On
Author: Uzma Jalaluddin
Publisher: Penguin Random House
Pages: 368

The lively representation we need and deserve

Uzma Jalaluddin's 'Hana Khan Carries On' is a mindful peek into the triumphs and tribulations of a second-generation immigrant.

RICHA BHATTARAI

Twenty-four-year-old Hana Khan dreams of being a broadcast journalist and telling meaningful stories to the world. However, at the radio station she interns for, she keeps being shunted into drafting reports that stereotype her religion and culture.

Hana Khan also dreams of turning her family's halal restaurant with the unforgettable name, 'Three Sisters Biryani Poutine', into a booming success. Unfortunately, clientele is at an all-time low, and she does not enjoy working at the restaurant. To add to it, the insufferable Aydin Shah is opening a swanky new halal restaurant right at the edge of their Golden Crescent neighbourhood in Toronto.

There is at least one thing Hana can still enjoy, away from the pressures of her two part-time jobs as an intern and restaurant help. She has a secret podcast, 'Ana's Brown Girl Rambles', where she promises to impart 'nothing of substance, and nothing but my truth.' When dealing with her father's illness, her parents' multiple guests, and the family's dwindling finances get too much for Hana, she can drop a note to her listener StanleyP, who admits he also has 'family-and-business-shaped' complications, but is always willing to lend her an ear.

This, then, is the premise for 'Hana Khan Carries On', the second novel by Uzma Jalaluddin, who is surprisingly knowledgeable about the lingo and idiosyncrasies of her young heroine. The story starts off simply, but do not be fooled, this is no abridged bildungsroman. There are complications galore, just as in life. Hana faces challenges that span across money and class, race and religion, authenticity and confirmation, career and heritage, family and romance.

All these dilemmas are so real, after a while she stops being a character and is a living person. Because it is the story that is being lived by you and me and every person

that has ever grappled with questions of belongingness and roots and ethics. "There's a lot of freedom in being a pioneer of your family's history in a new place, of course," says Hana, "But there's a lot of loneliness, too."

It is not difficult to surmise that these are all issues that the author has experienced, or seen, or watched develop, as a second-generation Indian Muslim herself. The way she has adapted these experiences for the novel, in a way that is thought-provoking and passionate, but also so gentle, compassionate, and full of worldly love—it is a rare balance, indeed. Uzma has beautifully intertwined faith into the story, illustrating how there is so much to learn about the religion of Islam.

The story starts off simply, but do not be fooled, this is no abridged bildungsroman.

Even though the novel makes you feel heavy-hearted when you comprehend the extent of the scrutiny and prejudices that millions like Hana face around the world, it is also a work of great joy and exuberance. Not everything is neatly wrapped up at the end as we would like it to be; there are no overnight solutions to the evils of communal hatred and xenophobia; and we are not even promised that the Muslim community of Scarborough will be magically welcomed by everyone from the next day. However, there is a strong undercurrent of the possibility of change, of transformation, and of the gradual shift in our mindsets that will lead us towards the path of acceptance and tolerance. This feeling of hope and courage might seem overtly positive, yet it

is a true skill to be able to impart this through a book.

Uzma has said that the novel is inspired by 'You've Got Mail', and indeed, the trope of secret friends-open enemies-lovers is hard to miss. But it also reminded me a little of 'The Hate U Give', of young people battling the lethal diseases of anti-Muslimness and anti-Blackness. One of the ways to counter this fear born through ignorance is to educate and inform. Though it is of course not Uzma's (or Hana's) responsibility to carry this heavy burden of educating someone, they do it valiantly and with great poise. Hana is such a relatable heroine, with her self-doubt, dilemmas, and a beautiful heart underneath it all. The best thing is, she grows throughout the novel; we watch her turning mature and resilient in front of our own eyes. Aydin is a surprisingly good match for her, never allowed to overshadow her, but a good friend throughout all the chaos in her life.

The chaos in the novel is sometimes too much. Yes, the same does happen in real life, and yes, all the issues are worth talking about, but perhaps they did not need to be crammed into a single volume. At one point in the novel, the plot goes haywire; the characters crowd in the pages, and it is so all over the place that readers might even lose interest. The author does catch hold of the plot after a while, but those multiple simultaneous incidents and innumerable characters call for some ruthless editing.

Apart from this hitch, the novel is quite enjoyable. The language is nothing extraordinary, but quite routine I would say. But the dialogues are the ones we speak, the thoughts are ones we fall asleep to, the challenges are what we face—it is our story. When Hana asks her supervisor at the radio station if she wants Hana to help the next day, Marisa responds, "Of course, sweetie. You're a natural."

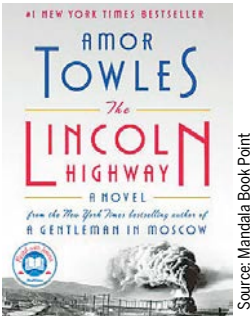
So is Uzma a natural, and I will watch out for her next books with great interest.

Richa Bhattarai is a writer from Kathmandu.

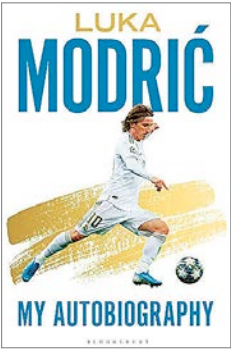
BEST-SELLERS | NEW RELEASES

Fiction

1. The Lincoln Highway by Amor Towles
2. Great Circle by Maggie Shipstead
3. One Last Stop by Casey McQuiston
4. The Promise by Damon Galgut
5. The Dutch House by Ann Patchett

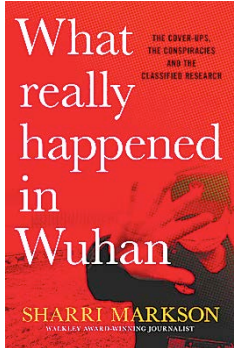


Source: Mandala Book Point



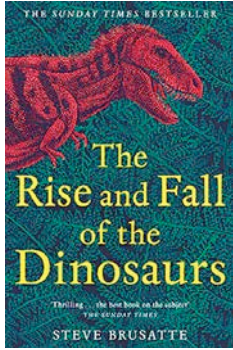
My Autobiography
Author: Luka Modric
Publication: Bloomsbury Publishing
Price: Rs 1438

Considered one of the greatest midfield players, Croatian legend Luka Modric tells the story of his journey from his childhood days growing up during the Croatian War of Independence to becoming a serial UEFA Champions League winner and the personal events that have shaped him.



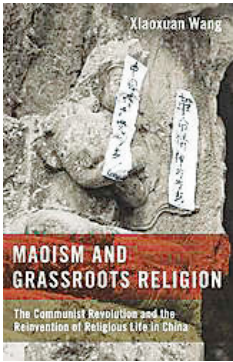
What Happened in Wuhan
Author: Sharri Markson
Publication: HarperCollins
Price: Rs 1598

Part-thriller, part-expose, 'What Really Happened in Wuhan' is a ground-breaking investigation into the origins of Covid-19. The book, which acclaimed journalist Sharri Markson wrote, features never-before-seen primary documents and interviews, exposing how China hid the spread of the virus from the world during the initial stage.



The Rise and Fall of The Dinosaur
Author: Steve Brusatte
Publication: Pan Macmillan
Price: Rs 1118

In this book, Dr Steve Brusatte, one of the leading dinosaur experts, tells us dinosaurs' origin and how they came to power. Based on the fossil clues that were gathered using state of the art technology, Brusatte traces the journey of the magnificent animals from their beginnings in the Early Triassic period.



Non-Fiction

1. Maoism and Grassroots Religion: by Xiaoxuan Wang
2. The Long Game: Chain's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order by Rush Doshi
3. Literary Theory and Criticism: Recent Writings From South Asia Edited by Arun Gupto
4. Envisioning a Tibetan Luminary: by William M Gorvine
5. My Reflections on Nepal's onstitution, Governance and Politics by Ganesh Raj Sharma

South Korea's cyberbullies driving victims to suicide

The country's online harassment crisis is spreading and victims have had no way out.

CLAIRE LEE
SEOUL

[Editor's note: This story contains references to suicide and bullying.]

Man-hating feminist, mentally ill, grind her into dog food: activist Kim Ju-hee endures a torrent of abuse from powerful South Korean cyberbullies, who are driving more and more of their victims to suicide.

From K-pop stars like Sulli to lesser-known figures like a volleyball player who killed himself earlier this month, South Korea's cyberbullying crisis is spreading and victims have no way out, activists say.

In a country where sexism is entrenched, a leading presidential candidate can vilify feminism, and misogynistic posts are a defining feature of Reddit-like forums, cyberbullies have the power to ruin people's lives—and face few repercussions.

YouTube is a key platform for such attacks—one video attacking activist Kim was watched hundreds of thousands of times, and garnered thousands of comments, including violent death threats.

"I always feel unsafe," Kim, who also works as a nurse, told AFP.

"I feel like this is never going to end unless I take my own life and disappear."

Earlier this month, South Korean volleyball player Kim In-hyeok killed himself after being brutally ridiculed online, suffering a barrage of hateful comments and online rumours that he was gay.

In January, YouTuber BJ Jammi ended

South Korea has the highest suicide rates in the developed world.

her life having endured years of abuse after South Korean online trolls accused her of being a "man-hating feminist".

Her uncle blamed the suicide on "severe depression caused by malicious comments and rumours", according to a post on her Twitch account announcing her death.

Jammi's mother had taken her own life in 2019, which her daughter blamed on the cyberbullying, saying in an emotional Twitch stream that she was struggling with her mental health.

"Those of you who leave me malicious comments, is it fun to make me suffer and destroy my life?" she said, fighting back tears during the 2020 live stream.

Profitable
Anti-feminist South Korean YouTube accounts, some of which have hundreds of thousands of followers, are profiting from the harassment, experts say.

"Famous YouTubers gain more attention by uploading videos denouncing feminism and feminists," Jinsook Kim, a University of Pennsylvania postdoctoral fellow, told AFP.

Women or minorities in the public sphere are particularly vulnerable to attacks, experts say, and South Korea's



AFP/RSS

South Korean feminist activist Kim Ju-hee posing for a photo at a subway station in Seoul.

lack of an anti-discrimination law leaves victims uniquely exposed.

"They were not just targeted and assaulted randomly," but were singled out and accused of being "feminist or gay", Jinsook Kim said, referring to the cases of volleyball player Kim In-hyeok and BJ Jammi.

Other women in the public eye have been doxxed—had their personal information published online—by male YouTubers who accuse them of being a "misandrist", or man-haters.

Some of the YouTubers even live-

streamed as they tracked down a victim and issued rape and death threats—with the hateful content generating more clicks and advertising revenue.

"They continue to produce sensationalist and hateful content for a profit," Jinsook Kim told AFP.

There have been few successful prosecutions of online trolls over any such attacks.

South Korea is a deeply wired nation with the world's fastest average internet speeds and female celebrities have endured online harassment for decades.

In 2008, top actress Choi Jin-sil took her

own life after enduring cyberbullying over claims she worked as a loan shark.

In 2019, K-Pop star Goo Hara killed herself after being the victim of "revenge porn" threats by a disgruntled ex-boyfriend, and her friend and fellow singer Sulli took her own life after online attacks that accused her, among other things, of not wearing a bra.

No help for victims

High-profile suicides after cyberbullying attacks typically prompt nationwide hand-wringing and petitions to the Blue House calling for change, but little has been done to help.

Known for its high-pressure and competitive society, South Korea has the highest suicide rates in the developed world, and online character assassination can be extremely damaging.

Anyone who is "perceived to be different from the norm" is at risk of an online attack, Seoul-based freelance journalist and online commentator Raphael Rashid told AFP, and it's difficult to recover.

Cyberbullying victims feel "they have nowhere to escape" after having their public profile ruined, and that "society cannot tolerate their existence", he said.

Activist Kim said that the doxxing and cyberbullying attacks had made her contemplate suicide. "It feels like the whole world has turned its back against you," she told AFP.

Unless laws and prosecutions catch up to the online trolls, more suicides are inevitable, she said. For now, "cyberbullying only stops when the victims die".

— Agence France-Presse

