



THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily
Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXXI No. 102 | 8 pages | Rs.5
Wednesday, May 31, 2023 | 17-02-2080
40.3° C 4.0° C
Sunrise
Sunset

Nepal pins hopes on PM's visit as airports languish

Those in Bhairahawa and Pokhara are said to be unfeasible without entry routes from the west.

□ SANGAM PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, MAY 30

Cross-border air routes are once again in the spotlight as Nepal seeks extra entry points from India to give life to its newly completed empty airports.

But experts say the possibility of the southern neighbour cooperating is slim with ties at a low ebb, and this is what Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal will try to set right during his southern sojourn starting Wednesday.

Tourism Ministry officials say new air entry points are one of the key items on the agenda during his four-day visit to New Delhi. The prime minister appears to be optimistic that things will work out, they say.

Nepal had formally requested India to allow air access through Janakpur, Bhairahawa, Nepalgunj and Mahendranagar during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kathmandu in 2014.

These air routes will facilitate the movement of international flights, particularly those coming from western Nepal, to the two new international airports in Bhairahawa and Pokhara. "The issue is being discussed at higher levels this time," said Buddhi Sagar Lamichhane, joint secretary at the Tourism Ministry.

On May 24, a seven-member technical team led by Lamichhane met Indian officials and held talks about the possibility of getting the new entry points.

"Discussions are ongoing. We are hopeful," said Lamichhane. "We have requested India to make the L626 route, which passes over Kathmandu-Mahendranagar-Delhi, bi-directional."

The last time Nepal opened a new

air route was on November 19, 2009 when the L626 passing over Dhangadhi was launched. The Indian government approved the L626 route as per the air service agreement signed between the two countries in September of the same year. But it is only for foreign carriers leaving Nepal.

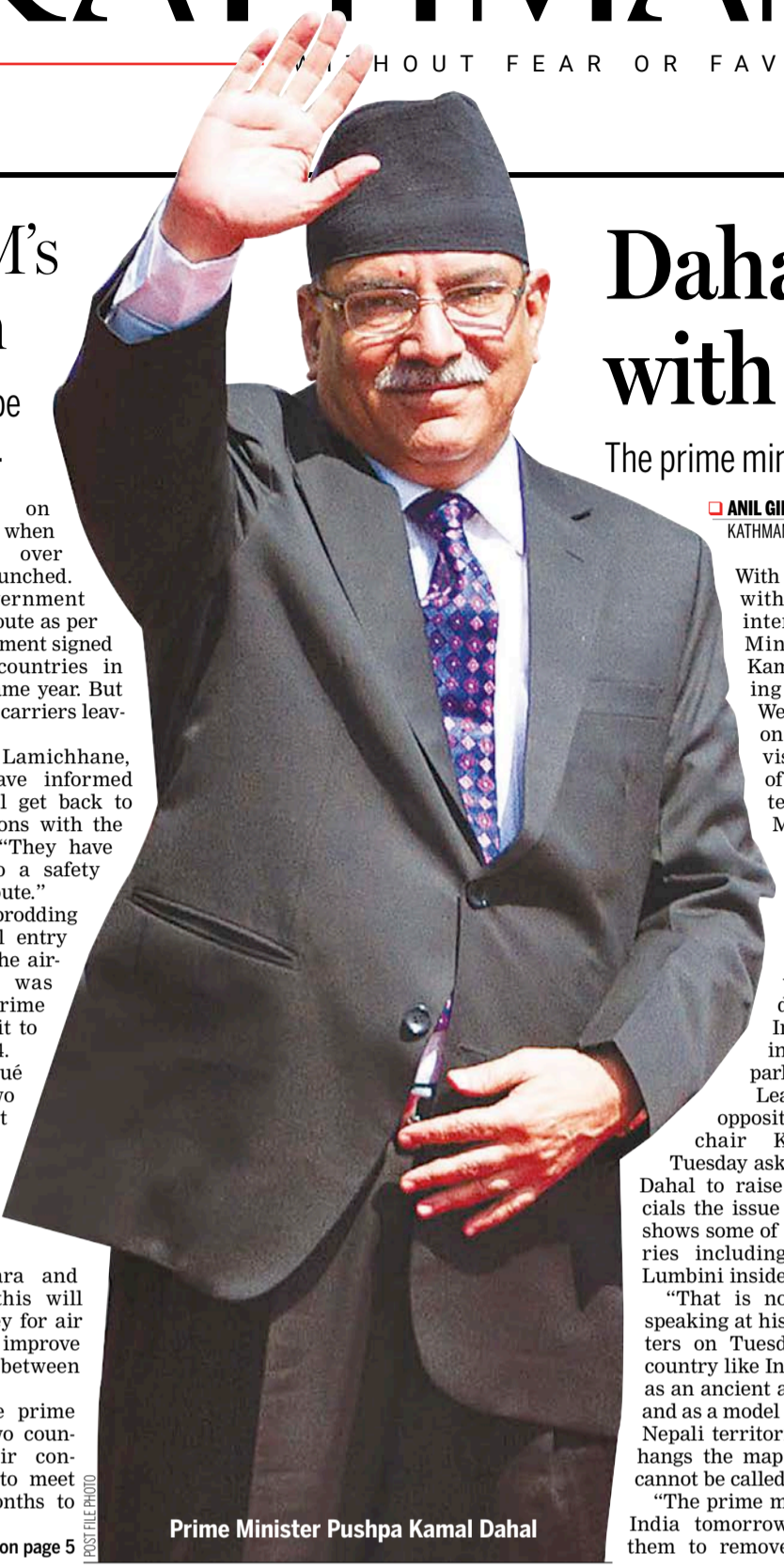
According to Lamichhane, Indian officials have informed them that they will get back to them after discussions with the Indian Air Force. "They have cited a need to do a safety assessment of the route."

Nepal has been prodding India for additional entry routes since 2009. The air-space agenda was endorsed during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Nepal in August 2014.

A joint communiqué issued by the two countries at the end of the visit said: "The cross-border direct routes will facilitate flights between regional airports in Pokhara and Bhairahawa, and this will save time and money for air travellers and also improve air connectivity between India and Nepal."

Subsequently, the prime ministers of the two countries directed their concerned authorities to meet in the next six months to resolve the issue.

>> Continued on page 5



Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal

Dahal heads for India today with a long wish list

The prime minister says he won't sign any controversial agreements.

□ ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, MAY 30

With an agenda packed with meetings and interactions, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is heading for India on Wednesday afternoon on a four-day official visit at the invitation of his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

Besides his set template of meetings and engagements, Dahal now has a new issue to deal with—a mural depicting ancient India in the newly inaugurated Indian parliament building.

Leader of the main opposition and CPN-UML chair KP Sharma on Tuesday asked Prime Minister Dahal to raise with Indian officials the issue of the mural that shows some of the Nepali territories including Kapilvastu and Lumbini inside India.

"That is not fair," said Oli, speaking at his party's headquarters on Tuesday, adding, "if a country like India that sees itself as an ancient and strong country and as a model of democracy puts Nepali territories in its map and hangs the map in Parliament, it cannot be called fair."

"The prime minister is going to India tomorrow. He should ask them to remove the mural. You

[prime minister] have to talk to the Indian government to correct that mistake. There is no point in visiting India if you can't do that," said Oli.

Prime Minister Dahal also assured his party lawmakers that he would inquire about the mural with Indian officials. The prime minister gave the assurance after some Maoist Centre lawmakers took exception to the Indian mural during their parliamentary party meeting held to discuss the India visit.

"The prime minister told us that he would take up the matter with Indian officials," said a Maoist Centre lawmaker.

A team led by a foreign ministry joint-secretary has reached New Delhi to discuss the agenda.

Ahead of the prime minister's India visit, a team led by foreign ministry joint-secretary Ram Prasad Subedi has reached New Delhi to discuss and finalise some outstanding and contentious bilateral issues.

Subedi's team will discuss contentious issues such as new air routes for Nepal through Indian skies, construction of an integrated check post in Chandani-Dodhara and issues related to trade, transit and some projects to be funded by India, said a foreign ministry official.

Ahead of his India visit, Prime Minister Dahal also promised to his party's lawmakers that he would not sign any controversial agreement and try his best to make the visit fruitful.

On energy, the prime minister said he would try to secure a stable market for Nepali electricity in India.

"As there was no big market for electricity, we could not produce more power, and this has deterred big investors from coming to Nepal. So during the visit, we will try to ensure a stable market for Nepali electricity in India," said Dahal.

"History will remember us if we can open an electricity trade route with Bangladesh. For 26 years, there has been no progress on the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project. It would be good if it moved forward. The other items of the visit agenda are finalisation of the trade and transit agreements and finding a solution to the border dispute. My goal is to strive to do good," said Dahal.

Foreign Minister NP Saud also held a press conference on Tuesday and said that Dahal's visit agenda was packed with issues and events related to trade, commerce, air entry route, transit, and infrastructure, among others.

"We have long-standing relations with India and both countries have been practising pluralism, democracy and the multi-party system. We also have good relations between our people and governments," said Saud.

The prime minister will leave for New Delhi on Wednesday afternoon and later in the evening attend a function organised by the Nepali Embassy in honour of his delegation.

"We will explore the possibility of further Indian investment in Nepal's hydropower sector in order to tap the Indian energy market. For this, we have to build more transmission lines," said the foreign minister, adding, "we will also seek India's permission for energy trade with Bangladesh."

>> Continued on page 2

TODAY

□ NATIONAL

Saraswati Aadharbhat School in Thapadanda, Pyuthan recorded no new admissions this year and is on the verge of closure. Citing low enrolment, the municipality reduced the number of grades from five to three. Pg 2

As the Nepali Congress leadership failed to start policy discussions even a year and half after the general convention, leaders say they will press for a policy convention to be held by mid-September this year. Pg 3

□ OPINION

While weather forecasts, alerts and early warnings help mitigate damages, major improvements are required to enable the government and humanitarian agencies to support the people at risk, writes Rakesh Kumar Shah. Pg 4



□ MONEY

Finance Minister Mahat on Tuesday clarified that the tax on foreign tour packages for Nepalis has been imposed for the first time to encourage them to travel inside their own country and prevent capital flight. Pg 5

□ SPORTS

Ananta Tamang scored a brace as leaders Church Boys United thrashed APF 4-1 to open up a four-point lead in the Martyrs Memorial A-Division League. Jawalakhel beat Army 2-0 to climb up to second. Pg 7

CPC leader in Kathmandu on eve of Dahal's Delhi trip

Chinese side could still be exploring the possibility of unity among leftist parties in Nepal, Maoist Centre leader says.



Wang Xiaohui

□ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, MAY 30

At the invitation of the ruling Maoist party, Wang Xiaohui, Communist Party of China (CPC) Secretary of the Sichuan Province, arrived in Kathmandu on Tuesday evening.

Wang is among senior CPC leaders to visit Kathmandu after the formation of the Pushpa Kamal Dahal government in December last year.

The former deputy head of the publicity division of the CPC is currently a central committee member of the party. The publicity department is also the propaganda department of the Chinese Communist Party that has close contacts with top Chinese leadership including the president.

"He came at the invitation of our party and will meet us at the party headquarters on Wednesday morning," Dev Gurung, general secretary of the CPN (Maoist Centre), told the Post. It is unclear whether the Wang-led delegation will meet Prime Minister Dahal who leaves for India on Wednesday afternoon.

"The Chinese side is still exploring the possibility of unity among leftist parties in Nepal, which could be one reason for Wang's visit," a Maoist Centre leader said. "But we will know the exact reason only after meeting the delegation."

A 20-member Maoist Centre delegation led by former Speaker Agni Sapkota is still in China and meeting CPC leaders. Soon, a delegation of the CPN-UML will also visit China, said a UML leader.

According to some Nepali communist leaders who recently returned from China, the Chinese continue to be concerned about the future of the current ruling coalition and continue to explore the possibility of left unity.

Other areas of their concern, said Nepali communist leaders, are grow-

A 20-member Maoist Centre delegation is in China, meeting Chinese political leaders.

ing Indian and American presence in Nepal, which they believe could have a direct bearing on Nepal-China ties, economic cooperation and execution of the Belt and Road Initiative.

"We are unaware of the Chinese delegation's other engagements in Kathmandu," said Gurung, adding that the Chinese Embassy is coordinating their meetings.



ISSUER RATING BY ICRA (NEPAL)
Nepal's safest bank-four times in a row.

SAVOUR THE SPICY & REFRESHING FLAVOURS

FOR RESERVATION:

☎ 9815597346

📍 Durbarmarg

Free Parking Available at Hotel Annapurna

DISTRICT DIGEST

Mother and son die after falling off a cliff

DHADING: A 19-year-old woman and her two-year-old son fell to death while cutting grass in Benighat Rorang Rural Municipality on Monday. According to police, the accident occurred at around 5:30pm. Superintendent of Police Gautam Mishra said the woman, who was seven months pregnant, was cutting grass at a local forest carrying her son on her back when she slipped and fell off the cliff. Mishra said the child died on the spot while the woman died in the course of treatment at Malekhu City Hospital.

Armed gang robs NMB Bank in Mahottari

MAHOTTARI: A gang of armed men robbed a bank in Mahottari district in broad daylight on Tuesday. The heist took place at an NMB Bank branch in Mahottari bazaar around midday, police said. According to Superintendent of Police Prakash Malla, the robbers held the bank employees at gunpoint and looted the bank. They fled on motorbikes with Rs3.5 million. Police have been kept on high alert and search for the robbers is underway, Malla added.

Rural municipality providing accident insurance

GORKHA: Bhimsen Thapa Rural Municipality in Gorkha district has provided accident insurance coverage to all the residents of the local unit for a year starting May 28. According to Lok Prasad Banjara, chairman of the rural municipality, a total of 16,986 residents of the municipality have been insured for all types of accidents. The victim or the victim's family can claim a sum of Rs50,000 for medical treatment, according to the insurance policy that came into effect on Monday.

Two children die of snakebite

SINDHULI: Two young boys, aged 13 and 3, from Dudhauri Municipality ward-1 died of snakebite on Tuesday. According to Chiranjivi Dahal, spokesperson of the district police office, the boys, sons of Ganesh Pahadi of Bhaluwahi, were found unconscious in their room and later taken to a snakebite treatment centre in Mahottari. Later, they were referred to a hospital in Janakpur where they were declared dead.



Community schools in Pyuthan Municipality blame downgrades and mergers for low enrolment

School administrations are pulling out all stops to bring their former students back and to encourage new students to join.

SHUMSHER BIKRAM GC
PYUTHAN, MAY 30

Hari Prasad Thapaliya left no stone unturned to try and convince the Pyuthan-4 locals to admit their children to his school. The principal of Saraswati Aadharbhut School went door to door requesting the villagers to admit their children at his school. He even asked the seniors in the village to accompany him as he tried his best to convince the villagers.

The Thapadanda-based school recorded no new admissions this academic session and is on the verge of closure due to a lack of students. The new academic session started on April 16 this year.

Established in 2012, Saraswati Aadharbhut School has been facing a drop in student enrolment numbers for the past several years.

Given the low enrolment rate, the Pyuthan Municipality downgraded the school that ran classes up to the fifth grade, to run classes up to the third grade only effective this academic session. Thapathaliya believes this could be one of the reasons why guardians have not sent their wards to his school.

"Until last year, we used to run classes up to the fifth grade," Thapaliya said. "This year, the municipality has allowed us to run classes only till the third grade."

Thapaliya claims that the municipality's move to downgrade the school is the reason behind the lack of new enrolments this year.

"We have been discussing merging with another school for a long time," he said. "The guardians have failed to understand the reason behind the downgrade and they have been misinformed that the move was the result of poor quality of education at the school."

He shares that such misinformation has discouraged guardians from admitting their children to his school, and are instead opting for a different institute, mostly private schools.

The school administration has taken multiple decisions on what the next move should be since there is not a single student enrolled this year. The administration is pulling out all stops to bring its former students back and to encourage new students to join the school. They have also announced that they will reimburse all the expenses guardians had to incur while enrolling their wards in other schools. "We will bear all the expenses if the stu-



Saraswati Primary School at Thapadanda in ward 4 of Pyuthan Municipality has closed due to lack of students.

POST PHOTO: SHAMSHER BIKRAM GC

dents who have joined private institutes return to our school," Thapaliya told the Post. "The admission fees paid to other schools, a year's worth of books and stationeries and school uniform will be provided by the school."

Thapaliya shares that although the parents verbally agreed to send their children to his school, none have transferred their children from private to government schools yet. "Downgrading community schools and promoting private schools have posed a threat to community schools," said Thapaliya.

Bal Mandir Aadharbhut School, located in Ratomata of the Pyuthan Municipality-3, has also been downgraded from this academic session. The school had previously been running classes up to the fifth grade but now it runs classes only up to grade 3.

"The educational landscape is the same. The number of schools, both government and private, increased but the number of students did not," said Lok Bahadur Bista, the principal

of the Pyuthan-3-based school. "Now they are harming community schools more by downgrading them."

In the previous academic session, the school had enrolled 45 new students in various grades. The number has plummeted to 14 this year. "We have five students at the child development centre [kindergarten], while we have nine students enrolled from grade 1 to 3," Bista added.

There are five community schools within a 2km radius in the area. Only one of the five schools in Pyuthan Municipality has an adequate number of students—Mukti Secondary School in Ratomata in Ward 3 has more than 600 students enrolled for this academic session.

"The number of students in all community schools has been declining," Bista said. "We cannot tell what the situation will be if this continues."

More than half-a-dozen schools in the Jhimruk Rural Municipality are also facing a decline in student numbers, shares the rural municipality

vice-chair Pramod Pokharel.

"We have been discussing school mergers," Pokharel said. "In some schools, the number of teachers is more than that of the students. While in other schools, there is a lack of teachers. This has created a huge problem."

Even schools that were once performing well are on the verge of closure, he further added. "People have migrated from the villages. People are moving out of the villages with the purpose of educating their children in city schools," said Pokharel.

According to him, the women in the village migrate to the cities with their children as soon as their husbands travel abroad for work, causing a considerable decline in the number of students in the rural areas.

To witness the closure of community schools is hard, says shares Pyuthan Ward -4 Chairman Resham Bahadur Karki. "Even the schools in urban areas of the municipality are facing such problems. It's worse in the rural

areas," he said.

The municipality's education department head Basudev Bhattarai says they decided to downgrade some community schools so that the schools can improve the quality of education they can provide. "The local body has already instructed the community schools to improve their teaching standard," said Bhattarai. "In the first phase, we have limited the number of classes they can run. We may have to merge some schools later."

As per a municipal education department's report, increasing migration and a slowdown in the number of births, among others, are the main reasons for the problem.

Pyuthan Municipality in coordination with the municipality's vice chair formed an education improvement committee and examined the schools. The number of students in privately-owned institutes in urban areas has been increasing while the opposite is true for community schools in rural areas, Bhattarai said.

The students have increasingly been attracted towards private institutes due to the inability of the community schools to fulfil demands as per their needs, says Head of Education Development and Coordination Unit's Pyuthan chapter Shiva Pandit. There are five private schools in Pyuthan Municipality.

"There are no other options than to improve the standards of the community schools. Else, more schools will have to close their doors," Pandit added.

The closure of community schools in Thapadanda has become a major challenge for the school authorities while also acting as an example for institutes in other areas. The lack of a concrete academic plan in secondary-level schools also invited trouble, Pandit further says.

In 2015, 10 community schools in Pyuthan were merged following a decline in student enrolment numbers. Millions of rupees worth of investments, that went into building the school infrastructure, went down the drain after closures, Pandit said.

Currently, there are a total of 397 community schools in the district.

"It is justified to merge those schools that face financial crunch or lack enough students," he added. "That responsibility has been handed to the local bodies now. Apart from closure and mergers, there are no other solutions to this problem."



Artists dressed in various Nepali costumes perform at a belated Republic Day celebration function in Kathmandu on Tuesday. Nepal officially marked its Republic Day on Monday.

Dahal says he seeks to secure stable market for Nepal's hydroelectricity

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"We are basically seeking assurance for our energy market, so we want a long-term power deal with India. The investors are ready to pour in billions of rupees, but they need a reliable market," said Saud.

According to the itinerary of the visit, Dahal will meet Modi at 11:00 am in Hyderabad House and the meeting will be followed by delegation-level talks, a luncheon and joint press briefings. Several Indian ministers and officials including External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, National Security Ajit Doval, and Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kataria will call on the prime minister ahead of the delegation-level talks.

Other issues that are on the prime minister's agenda are signing an amended and consolidated transit treaty. Nepal and India in the past have exchanged several notes through letters of exchange on the transit treaty, but they are yet to be consolidated.

"We have an open border with India and we are doing trade with third countries and China via Indian ports and territory so we need to incorporate some new provisions in the transit treaty. We have a huge trade deficit with India and there are some non-reciprocal arrangements in bilateral trade needing updates and revisions. We need to remove the provision of anti-dumping so that Nepali agricultural products including jute products can reach Indian markets. These issues will be sorted out during the visit," said Saud.

Five ministers, secretaries, government officials, media persons and members of the business community will accompany the prime minister to India. The delegation size has crossed 100 members, said officials.

Besides looking to address the hugely lopsided Nepal-India trade, Nepal wants to update the bilateral trade treaty, which is nearing its expiry.

"As a third of our business is dependent on India, the private sector will explore all business opportunities. We are also... considering using Indian air routes via Biratnagar, Nepalgunj, Dhangadi and Mahendra Nagar. We have suggested these four air entry points to India," said Saud.

Prime Minister Dahal will address the Indian business community and meet the Indian President and Vice President during his stay in New Delhi, but whether he will meet leaders from the Indian National Congress, the main opposition has yet to be confirmed. The prime minister will then visit Ujjain and Indore, Madhya Pradesh after completing his engagements in New Delhi.

The two prime ministers will remotely inaugurate the railway yard in Biratnagar, the Jaynagar-Janakpur railway that has been expanded up to the Bijalpura, and the integrated check posts in Biratnagar and Nepalgunj.

Some transmission lines will also be built with Indian soft loan, said Minister Saud.

"Besides these, we will discuss high-level exchange visits, boundary dispute, the report of Eminent Persons' Group, use of Indian digital payment system in Nepal, broadcast of Nepal Television in India, import of chemical fertilisers, issue of embankments, inundation, and access for the Nepal broadband to the Indian submarine cables for cheaper internet use are other items on the agenda."

"We have long-pending issues like boundary issues. We have several bilateral mechanisms and working groups too. They need to be activated so that we can plan which issue can be resolved immediately and which in the long-term. So we will discuss ways to revive and activate these mechanisms," said Saud.

After completing his engagements in Delhi and Madhya Pradesh, the prime minister will return home on June 3. This will be Dahal's fourth India visit as Nepal's prime minister.



Schedule 10
Related to Sub-rule (1) of Rule 52
Notice by the Mechi Customs Office
Kakarvitta, Jhapa, Nepal.

Notice issued in the name M/S S. K. Logistics, Village-Sidhroul, Chatakpur Road

(Near Maa Kalawati Hospital), P.S.-Namkum, Ranchi-834010, Jharkhand

It is notified to you to be present at the office hour of the customs office within Fifteen days except the time taken to travel, for the enquiry into the crime committed as referred to in Customs Act, 2064. If you appear, your views shall be taken into account or if you do not present, the decision shall be taken in accordance with the legal provisions. No complaint may be filed later on. No date could be extended relating to this Notice.

Date 2023 Year May Month 31 date 4 day



Schedule 10
Related to Sub-rule (1) of Rule 52
Notice by the Mechi Customs Office
Kakarvitta, Jhapa, Nepal

Notice issued in the name Mr./Ms Harsh Chand Jain, Papurana Khetri, Jhunjhunu, DT. Rajasthan - 333503

It is notified to you to be present at the office hour of the customs office within Fifteen days except the time taken to travel, for the enquiry into the crime committed as referred to in Customs Act, 2064. If you appear, your views shall be taken into account or if you do not present, the decision shall be taken in accordance with the legal provisions. No complaint may be filed later on. No date could be extended relating to this Notice.

Date 2023 Year May Month 31 date 4 day

Doctors Wanted

We are looking for female medical doctors, with MDGP and Pediatric Post-graduation to work "PART TIME" in Friendly professional & supportive clinical facility in Pulchowk, Lalitpur/Chandol, Maharajgunj Kathmandu Please call: 9851225348 or email: needdoctor@gmail.com for further queries.

Work on 400 basic hospitals in local units may not start next fiscal year

The UML-led government had decided to build 5- to 15-bed hospitals in all 753 local units, but the current government has decided to shelve the plan citing funds crunch.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, MAY 30

The construction of more than 400 basic hospitals at local units may not start in the next fiscal year starting July 16, as the government has lowered the country's overall health budget by around 16 percent, year-on-year, citing funds crunch.

Along with reduction in the overall health budget, Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat during the budget speech on Monday also declared that the government won't be starting new constructions.

"Construction of new health facilities may not start in the next fiscal year, as per the budget speech," said Dr Samir Kumar Adhikari, joint spokesman at the Ministry of Health and Population. "More can be said only after seeing a detailed breakdown of the budget. But one thing is clear: no new programme will be started in the next fiscal year."

The government has allocated Rs83.99 billion to the health sector for the upcoming fiscal year 2023-2024, a major cut from the nearly Rs104 billion allocated for the current fiscal year. Officials said the total budgetary allocation for health, also includes the health budgets of local and provincial governments.

As per the plan to establish 5-to-15-bed hospitals at local units, the CPN-UML-led erstwhile government had laid the foundations for basic hospitals in 396 local units out of the 753, in 2020. Of them, the construction work has started only in 322 local units.

"We don't know if the ongoing construction of the health facilities will be continued or not," said Adhikari. "If the ongoing construction works are to continue, the government should allocate a budget accordingly."

Construction of basic hospitals has not yet started in 431 local units.

Officials at the Health Ministry said the continuation of priority programmes of healthcare, including

maternal health, child health, immunisation, nutrition, HIV, tuberculosis, and epidemic control is the big takeaway from the new budget.

Public health experts, however, said the budget allocated to healthcare is already very low and a further reduction in allocations means the country is not in line with the spirit of the Constitution and the health targets set by the government itself.

The decline in the health budget could affect the country's priority programmes, including those of maternal health, child health and immunisation. "How can we achieve the health targets we have committed to achieving, if we cut the health budget?" asked Dr Padam Bahadur Chand, former chief of the Policy Planning and International Cooperation Division at the Ministry of Health. "We have not even completed building the infrastructures as envisioned by our constitution."

Along with the health budget of local and provincial governments, the salaries of staff too, have been included in the health budget, as are the grants for Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, Nepal Police Hospital, Nepal Army Hospital and the Civil Hospital.

Nepal witnessed outbreaks of several diseases including dengue, cholera and diarrheal diseases, and other vector-borne diseases in the past years. As the country has been dealing with emerging health challenges of late, experts say more funds are required to address the new challenges.

Studies show that two out of every three deaths in Nepal are caused by non-communicable diseases, such as heart diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lower respiratory infections and stroke.

"Reduction in the budget for healthcare will have severe negative impacts and the progress that we have made from years of investments and efforts will likely be jeopardised," said Chand.



A young swimmer performs a back flip at Kamalpokhari on Tuesday. The Valley is experiencing hotter days.

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

Congress leaders press party to hold policy convention by mid-September

It's essential for the party to allow the leaders to vent their ire against the leadership, says leader Pradeep Paudel.

TIKA R PRADHAN
KATHMANDU, MAY 30

The largest party in federal parliament—Nepali Congress—is currently a mess with many of its leaders demanding President Sher Bahadur Deuba call crucial meetings so that they could air their discontent.

The Nepali Congress in December 2021 concluded its national convention, which only elected the party's leadership, but the party is yet to organise a policy convention.

Following the convention that elected Deuba as chief, the new leadership promised to convene its policy convention within six months.

"As per our party statute, central working committee meetings must be held every two months," said Ajay Babu Shiwakoti, a central working committee member. "But the leadership is flouting the rule on various pretexts."

As the leadership failed to start policy discussions even a year and half after the convention, leaders have said they would press the leadership to convene the convention by mid-September.

Leaders close to the dissident Shekhar Koiraal-Gagan Thapa faction have accused the party leadership of intentionally avoiding questioning and have demanded that party meetings be convened without delay.

"Both general secretaries would press the party president to hold the central committee meeting by mid-June and schedule the policy convention to be held by mid-September," said Shiwakoti, who is close to general secretary Thapa.

"The two general secretaries are preparing to press the party leader-

ship to hold the policy convention as soon as the monsoon is over."

A number of Congress leaders have accused the leadership of remaining mere spectators to the illegal activities of party leaders including Balkrishna Khand, who is among the main accused in the notorious Bhutanese refugee scam and has not yet been suspended from the party.

"Conflicting voices are being raised within the party—some demanding a Mahasamiti meeting and others calling for a special convention, as the procedure for convening the policy convention is not clear," said Pradi Paudel, a lawmaker and central committee member. "However, there is an urgent need for holding serious discussions on policy issues in the party."

He said an informal meeting of the party's office bearers recently agreed that the date for the policy convention should be fixed by the central working committee.

The central working committee meeting should also finalise the procedures of the policy convention as this would be the first convention of its type in the party.

During its previous conventions, the party would fix both the policies and leadership together. But the 2021 convention solely focused on electing the leadership after many complained that the election takes the focus away from the party's policy.

Therefore, the leaders are now pressing the leadership for the policy convention while they are also discussing other options fearing that party President Deuba could wind up the convention without allowing them to discuss major issues including the imminent threat from newer parties.

"It's essential for the party to allow



This undated photo shows a Nepali Congress central committee meeting.

POST FILE PHOTO

the leaders to vent their ire against the leadership," said Paudel. "There is a kind of suffocation within our party."

General Secretary Thapa, talking to the Post's sister paper Kantipur recently, said the party cannot wait until the national convention for a change in leadership.

Therefore, Thapa has started visiting various parts of the country to create an environment for a special convention. He says the current leadership is incompetent to lead the party amid the threat posed by new forces.

The Congress leadership, meanwhile, has been delaying the policy convention on various pretexts. The first excuse was the general election, and after that the party focused on

forming the government. After its bid to lead the government was unsuccessful with Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the CPN (Maoist Centre) going to the CPN-UML's side, the leadership focused its energy on breaking the Dahal-Oli partnership and then busied itself in power-sharing.

"The policy convention would determine the party's policy on various sectors—economic, social, political, foreign, and organisational, among others," said Jeevan Pariyar, a joint general secretary of the party. "A political document will be presented and endorsed by the convention."

Pariyar said everything about the policy convention will be decided by the central committee, but the problem is the leadership has not called any meeting yet.

BRIEFING

Budget fails to address demands of education sector, teachers' association says

KATHMANDU: The Nepal National Teachers' Association (NNTA) has said the budget for the fiscal year 2023/24 has failed to address its demands and agreements with the government. It has rued 'failure' to increase investment in education stating that investment in education means to fulfil the international commitments to education and provide rights to equitable, inclusive and quality public education as per the spirit of the constitution. Programmes have not been brought on the issues relating to school employees, private schools, higher secondary schools, early childhood education, teachers on a relief and contract quota, volunteers, nurses, learning subsidy, school employees appointed by local levels, and service, facilities, perks and social security of technical school teachers, NNTA General Secretary Hamsha Shahi said. (RSS)

Rural Film Festival in Namobuddha

KATHMANDU: A three-day rural film festival is set to take place in Namobuddha of Kavrepalanchok from June 8 to 10. The festival aims to honour and encourage films based on rural settings, organisers said, adding the fest will screen as many as 26 films and documentaries. The fest will award the films and documentaries in 10 categories. A similar rural film festival had been held earlier in Laprak of Gorkha. The festival is also expected to help promote the cultural, historical and tourist areas of Namobuddha. Celebrity Nepal is hosting the event with the support of the Film Development Board. (RSS)

Budget for transmission infra cut despite high-capacity power lines being top priority

The government's budget says both domestic and cross-border power lines are priorities.

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU, MAY 30

After being able to produce surplus energy during the wet season, improving the transmission line infrastructure has been a major priority of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) to increase domestic consumption and boost exports.

But the government has reduced the allocation of the budget for transmission line projects for the next fiscal year 2023-2024 starting on July 17.

According to the budget for the next fiscal year presented by Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat in parliament on Monday, the government has allocated Rs38.32 billion for the construction of domestic transmission infrastructure and cross border transmission infrastructure.

For the ongoing fiscal year, the government had allocated Rs43.95 billion for the construction of transmission lines and substations.

However, the overall budgetary allocation for the energy sector has increased to Rs87.45 billion for the next fiscal year from the Rs75.10

billion allocated for this year.

"Improving the transmission and distribution infrastructure is our biggest priority. We usually face budget crunch in these sectors," said Dirghayu Kumar Shrestha, chief of transmission directorate at NEA. "We had sought Rs19 billion from the government sources. We receive additional funding from the donors too."

Citing a resource crunch, the government had reduced the amount to be provided to the NEA from its sources for the current fiscal year, said Shrestha. "I am not immediately sure about the allocation from the donors."

According to the budgetary provision, construction of the 400kV New Butwal-Gorakhpur, Inaruwa-Purnia and Dodhra-Bareli Cross Border Transmission Line will be initiated.

Nepal and India had agreed to develop the 400kV Inaruwa (Duhabi-Purnia, Bihar) and 400kV New Lamki (Dodhra-Bareli, Uttar Pradesh) cross-border lines by 2027-2028 and 2028-2029, respectively, during the 10th joint secretary-level Joint Working Group and the Secretary-level Joint Steering Committee held in

Jaipur, India in February.

Lack of adequate cross-border transmission capacity has been worrying Nepal as the country's power production capacity has been on the rise. Nepal's entire installed capacity of operating power projects has reached 2,650MW as of early April and generation capacity is expected to reach 2,853MW by mid-July, according to the NEA.

But the peak domestic demand for power is expected to grow to 2,280MW in mid-July 2024. So, Nepal will have to export power to avoid spillages and for this, a reliable cross border power line is essential, the NEA officials said.

The work on the 400kV Karnali Corridor Transmission line will be intensified. Financial arrangements to construct power lines along the Bheri corridor, West Seti corridor and Arun corridor will be made, according to the budget.

Other high capacity transmission line projects including those to be constructed with the assistance of Millennium Challenge Corporation will also be initiated, as per the budget.

Construction work of Butwal-Lamahi-Dodhara, Lapsiphedi-

Ratmate-Hetauda and Ratmate-Damauli-Butwal will be taken forward, it said. None of the domestic 400kV power lines has been completed yet. The only 400kV cross border transmission line currently operating is the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur line.

NEA officials said the domestic transmission infrastructure also needs to be improved markedly to ensure the reliability of power supply and to promote the use of electricity from vehicles to kitchens.

The NEA has struggled to supply electricity in Birgunj areas in the winter during the current and last year because of a lack of high capacity transmission lines which led to power cuts in the Bara-Parsa industrial corridor.

In this context, the budget for the transmission line has been reduced for the next fiscal year.

Ashish Garga, vice-president of the Independent Power Producers' Association of Nepal said that a slight decline in the budget for the transmission line would not affect the NEA significantly. "The budget has, however, failed to introduce any new initiatives in the power sector," he added.

Hearing committee to seek complaints against chief justice nominee Karki

He will be appointed after parliamentary committee approves the nomination.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, MAY 30

The Parliamentary Hearing Committee has decided to seek public complaints against the chief justice nominee Hari Krishna Karki.

A meeting of the committee held on Tuesday decided to call for complaints within ten days after publishing a notice on Wednesday.

The meeting of the Constitutional Council on May 8 had nominated the senior-most justice of the Supreme Court Karki for the new chief justice.

Karki will be appointed by President Ramchandra Paudel after the parliamentary hearing committee approves the nomination.

Karki has been leading the apex court as acting chief justice since October 5, last year. The Supreme Court has been headless after the then chief justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana faced an impeachment motion in the second week of February last year. Rana retired on December 13 without the Parliament deciding on the motion.

OPINION



OUR VIEW

Lofty dreams in hard times

The finance minister has promised so much without spelling out how he intends to keep those promises.

The most quirky yet hard-hitting comment on the budget for the next fiscal year 2023-24, beginning mid-July, must have come from Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah, who chided lawmakers for coming down to the level of municipal ward chairs. Shah was alluding to the Rs50 million that each lawmaker would get as part of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to spend on projects of their choice. While the lawmakers' conspicuous silence on the controversial funds exposes their deep interest in distributing money to their near and dear ones in the name of infrastructure development, it also lays bare Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat's immaturity, even self-serving goals, even as he professes financial prudence.

The resumption of the CDF is also a setback to the spirit of federalism. At a time when infrastructure development has been devolved to the subnational levels, the idea of distributing petty funds to lawmakers to spend arbitrarily when there is a need for greater cooperation between subnational and federal governments is misplaced. In resuming the fund, which had rightly been scrapped for two years, the finance minister exhibited a lack of common sense when public and expert opinion is firmly against it. He also seemed confused when he presented the Rs1.75 trillion budget, even as his allocations reflect the financial crisis the country is undergoing.

While the finance minister's aim of raising the growth rate to 6 percent and keeping inflation within 6.5 percent sounds lofty, he also does not seem to know where the money is going to come from in the absence of drastic cost-cutting measures, especially considering how the budget had to undergo downward revision in the current fiscal year. For instance, the finance minister has provisioned for foreign loans of Rs50 billion, whereas the government was able to raise only Rs5 billion in the current fiscal. Surely, the country's creditworthiness has not shot up overnight.

Increasing excise and customs duty on low-end electric vehicles while reducing the same on high-end ones also does not make sense either. Mahat pushed for the construction of Nijgadh International Airport when the rationale of building twin international airports—Bhairahawa and Pokhara—remains unclear even after they came into operation. Apart from the lack of clarity in the investment modality for the said airport, as concerning is the environmental impact of felling millions of trees, disturbing the ecology of the crucial green cover in the area. And how can he justify increasing taxes on agricultural tools even as he promises to work for the farmers' benefit?

The budget seems to have failed to assure people that the government would help them get by on a day-to-day basis without compromising on the essentials of food, shelter and livelihood—let alone guarantee the more lofty welfare and inequality benefits. This is evident in the double-digit fall in the already fragile share market the day after the finance minister presented the budget. If the objective of the budget was to boost the morale of the people whose pockets are getting shallower, it has failed to do so. Importantly, in a political-economic climate where the government cannot spend its budget, the size of the yearly financial plan, big or small, could be just a small part of a much bigger problem with the country's long unaddressed fiscal mismanagement.

THEIR VIEW

Good idea, bad planning

The government's decision to scrap outdated commercial vehicles must be implemented properly.

We welcome the government decision to put over 74,000 outdated buses, trucks and other commercial vehicles under crushers. The decision was apparently revealed through a circular issued by the Road Transport and Highways Division (RHD) earlier this month. According to the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), there are at least 36,123 buses and minibuses that are past their 20-year economic life, while 38,123 trucks, lorries and tankers are past their 25-year life. Ensuring the roadworthiness of vehicles is vital to improve road safety and reduce pollution—both of which we need to work on desperately given the high number of accidents occurring every year and our record levels of air pollution caused, among other factors, by black smoke emanating from old vehicles.

Doing away with unfit vehicles is thus a step in the right direction. However, as typical of any government initiative in Bangladesh, this too risks becoming a victim of poor planning and lax enforcement. Reportedly, although the government set the economic lifespan of commercial vehicles, a guideline on scrapping them has yet to be finalised. Additionally, the gazette on economic lifespan hasn't been published either. The authorities say they would start dumping old vehicles once the gazette is published. But BRTA officials still don't know where to dump those, or for how long those should be kept in their custody.

The authorities will also have to hire contractors to scrap the outdated vehicles. According to the draft Motor Vehicle Scrapping Guideline-2023, the government will be outsourcing the job to enlisted private firms that will carry out the task under BRTA supervision. Officials, however, said the draft guideline and the RHD circular contained some discrepancies regarding the way private vendors would be hired. This only adds to the concerns given the government's poor history in hiring contractors. Also, there's no clarity on who will eventually foot the bills.

What all these inconsistencies and uncertainties show is that the decision, delayed as it is in a country long known for unsafe roads, has not been planned or coordinated properly. It can only mean further delays in execution, and further trouble when the scrapping begins. We urge the authorities to address these issues before getting started with the project, so that it doesn't get stuck halfway through or end up being a total waste of money and energy.

—The Daily Star (Bangladesh)/ANN

GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY

We must initiate several reforms to ensure citizens' continued trust in the current system.

KHIM LAL DEVKOTA



Nepalis celebrated the 16th Republic Day on Monday. Republicanism, federalism, secularism and proportional inclusivity are interconnected and reinforce one another. If the republican governance system is weak, federalism, proportional inclusion and other related principles will also suffer. The constitution could also be jeopardised if republicanism fails. To maintain a stable republican system, it is crucial to ensure the stability and effectiveness of the constitution. Citizens have expressed concern about the cost of the existing governance system and the attitude of the political leaders. The pressing need now is addressing the shortcomings of the governance system and working towards meeting the expectations of the people.

Reforming the executive branch should commence with the head of state—the President—whose role is primarily ceremonial. But the incidents of exceeding the constitutional powers by previous presidents have undermined the parliamentary system. The constitution clearly outlines the duties and responsibilities of the President. If past presidents had adhered to these constitutional provisions, disputes over the position of the President could have been avoided.

Term limits

Similarly, it is essential to introduce reforms concerning the head of government, particularly with regard to term limits. While the constitution limits the President to two terms, there is no such provision for the prime minister. Implementing term limits for the prime minister would facilitate a seamless leadership transition within the party and promote fresh perspectives and ideas. The role of the vice-president is also a subject of discussion. The vice-president has limited responsibil-

Safeguarding republicanism



POST FILE PHOTO

ties. Drawing inspiration from countries like India, Nepal should consider empowering the vice-president to preside over the National Assembly. This would enhance the importance of the upper house and alleviate the burden of maintaining a separate chairman.

Another crucial reform required is preventing presidents and prime ministers from assuming each other's roles after finishing their terms. Leaders should embrace retirement and not covet vacant positions. So it is vital to establish a provision that prohibits individuals from switching roles. Limitations should also be set for ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs). Some individuals repeatedly hold ministerial positions, while others never get an opportunity to contribute. Restricting ministers to a maximum of three terms and introducing a similar provision for MPs would ensure a fair distribution of opportunities and prevent individuals from monopolising power. To further reform the executive branch, it is necessary to cap the number of ministries at 15.

The federal level is burdened with an excessive number of staff. Proper procedures should be implemented to either remove the unemployed personnel or redistribute them to subnational levels where their skills and expertise can be utilised effectively. The House of Representatives should be downsized from 275 to 165 seats, and the proportional electoral system should be eliminated in favour of the first past the post

system. Seats should be allocated to ensure proportional and inclusive representation, including reserved seats for women, Dalits and marginalised communities. A reduction in the number of MPs in the House of Representatives and the Provincial Assemblies will allow the country to save on costs associated with the government system.

Another effective way to strengthen Parliament is to transform the 110 MPs who have been elected through the proportional representation system into the National Assembly, eliminating the current provision of a 59-member system. A crucial and necessary reform concerning the legislature is to empower the National Assembly to perform all the functions of the House of Representatives in its absence. This will provide strong support to Nepal's parliamentary practice, especially when the House cannot be convened due to regular elections or political disputes. In such cases, the budget should not be brought through the ordinance route, and the government will remain accountable to Parliament. Bills that are pending in the House can be passed by the National Assembly, ensuring no legislative inactivity. Furthermore, Parliament needs to play a more active role in monitoring and scrutinising government activities. It appears that Parliament's effectiveness in this area has been limited. Therefore, a more vigilant and engaged approach is necessary to ensure proper oversight and accountability.

Political interference

Reforms in the judiciary are crucial, similar to the legislative and executive branches. First and foremost, the judiciary must be shielded from political interference by ending the practice of appointing political figures as judges. Additionally, a system should be established where the senior judge automatically assumes the position of Chief Justice according to the roll order. Corruption within the courts is a common complaint. To address this issue and enhance security, a collective accommodation system should be implemented, ensuring judges at all levels, from the District Court to the Supreme Court, do not rely on intermediaries. And instead of burdening the courts with cases related to village disputes and local conflicts, there should be greater emphasis on developing methods of settlement through reconciliation at the local level in coordination with the local judicial committee.

These reforms are essential for enhancing the republican governance system and restoring people's hope and trust in the government. Failing to address these necessary safeguards may result in a decline in citizens' trust in governance itself. We are already witnessing the beginning of a concerning trend, with former king Gyanendra attracting and garnering support from the public. Unless political parties take heed of the people's grievances and work towards their resolution, the overall strength of the governance system will undoubtedly be compromised.

Monsoon's here: Are we prepared?

More needs to be done to enable the government and humanitarian agencies to support the people at risk.

RAKESH KUMAR SHAH



In 2022 in Nepal, 119 people died, 115 were injured, 1,006 houses were destroyed, and 32 people went missing due to monsoon-related disasters. But it is not only the monsoon rains that have created havoc; sixty people died, and 157 were injured due to the accompanying thunderstorms. The onslaught of the monsoon, with all its hazards, is inevitable this year as well. But are we prepared to minimise losses of lives and properties?

The National Seasonal Outlook for Monsoon Season June–September 2023, released by the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology in the first week of May, forecasts a lower-than-average rainfall in most parts of the country. However, we should not forget that the forecast is probabilistic, with a 35-55 percent chance, and the fear of monsoon-induced disasters looms large.

A study conducted by the Ministry of Forests and Environment in 2021 shows that about 647 people die annually from climate-induced disasters in Nepal. The report also notes that the average economic loss per year is Rs2,778 million, or about 0.1 percent of the country's GDP. Floods, landslides and droughts are the primary climatic hazards in Nepal and are likely to intensify due to climate change.

About 8 percent of Nepal is flood-prone, while 59 percent is landslide-prone. The 2022 World Bank Country Climate and Development Report alerts that floods and landslides have been the most frequently occurring hazards over the past 40 years and will increase as climate change accelerates. There is no doubt that the monsoon is intensifying with the extreme rainfall and flood events that trigger landslides and flash floods.

The floods in 2017, 2019 and 2021 prove that extreme floods with an expected return period of 20 or 40 years do not occur only during those periods. Monsoons are getting fierce and will continue to threaten the very livelihoods of millions of Nepalis. Losses

and damages will escalate if the government and the people do not take adequate measures for monsoon preparedness and response.

However, Nepal has made remarkable advancements in mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Management in recent years. The Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2017 and Rules 2019, the National Policy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2018, the National Disaster Response Framework, the Local Government Operation Act 2017 and many other acts, policies, frameworks, etc., have defined the roles and responsibilities of all three tiers of the government, and have strengthened the institutionalisation of disaster preparedness, response and recovery from the federal to the local level.



PHOTO: RAKESH KUMAR SHAH

The 17th meeting of the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Executive Committee chaired by Deputy Chairperson and Home Minister Honorable Narayan Kaji Shrestha decided to prepare the Integrated Monsoon Preparedness and Action Plan that defines the roles and responsibilities of different agencies in minimising damage this monsoon. The government has also mandated the District Disaster Management Committees and the Local Governments to update the Disaster Preparedness and Response Plans and conduct flood simulation exercises.

However, the plans fail in terms of tangible actions for adequate preparedness before the disaster and its aftermath. The Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) issues flood bulletins twice daily during monsoon, along with three days of weather forecasts and alerts. Similarly, increasing flood early warning systems and mass

SMS in major river basins have also been crucial in preserving people's livelihoods in recent years. This is also justified as fewer human casualties exist in those river basins.

While weather forecasts, alerts and early warnings effectively mitigate damages, major improvements are required to enable the government and humanitarian agencies to support the people at risk. To illustrate, the weather forecasts issued by the DHM are very generic. For example, the weather forecast of May 15, 2023, said, "There is a chance of light rain with thunder/lightning at few places in Koshi, Bagmati and Gandaki provinces." As a DRR practitioner, this confused me. How probable is it that it will rain in Biratnagar or Solukhumbu, or Koshi province? There is also an urgent need

that people vulnerable to floods during the monsoon do not search for weather forecasts that are readily available through online searches.

I spoke with DRR focal persons of some municipalities and local media to better understand the causes of scant awareness of weather forecasts and early warnings in these two districts. I learned that there are two significant challenges/limitations. First, the forecast is non-specific at the provincial level, and the local media or municipalities could not determine if it applies to their areas. Second, people do not know about the advancements and accuracy in Nepal's weather forecasts made in recent years. Thus, the trust level is minimal.

This clearly shows limitations at both ends, which can cause losses of lives and properties in the upcoming monsoon season. We earlier witnessed the devastation caused by the October 2021 floods. The DHM, which issues the weather forecasts, needs to take additional measures for the timely dissemination of risk information to the broader population and to address the need of the end users who can trust and respond to them. Similarly, there is an urgent need to create awareness among vulnerable people to access the available risk information that would enable them to take necessary actions to prepare and respond to floods immediately.

All limitations and constraints aside, timely sharing of risk information and taking necessary actions remains essential as always. Early warnings can save many lives in a monsoon with heavy rainfall. Or, for a monsoon with less rain, timely information can help the farmers and government take necessary actions to decrease losses to monsoon crops, thereby enhancing food security. Early warnings during monsoon are vital in either case.

National and local media could be crucial in informing individuals about weather forecasts and alerts and building trust to take necessary actions. The media can also bring out the needs of the rural people and analyse the effectiveness of the weather forecasts and alerts in averting losses and damages. Officially, the monsoon begins on June 1, so let us all unite to disseminate the weather forecasts and early warnings to ensure minimal losses of lives and properties due to the monsoon in 2023. United, we can achieve this.

Shah is a disaster risk management and agriculture expert at the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) Nepal, an Intergovernmental Organisation.

FOREX

US Dollar	132.64
Euro	142.34
Pound Sterling	164.81
Swiss Franc	147.04
Australian Dollar	86.78
Canadian Dollar	97.66
Singapore Dollar	98.15
Japanese Yen (10)	9.46
Chinese Yuan	18.74
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.37
Qatari Riyal	36.38
Thai Bhat	3.82
UAE Dhiram	36.11
Malaysian Ringgit	28.83
Korean Won (100)	10.05

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES

Nepse (in percent) **1,888.61pts**
-2.74%

HIGHEST LOSERS					
SGHC	CMF1	SLBSL	SPHL	ADLB	SHEL
-9.26	-9.1	-8.72	-7.28	-7.23	-6.56
MODERATE LOSERS					
NABCC	BHDC	BHPL	MHL	MB08/7/31NMB50	
-0.54	-0.5	-0.43	-0.3	-0.12	-0.11
MODERATE GAINERS					
NSIF2	SAGF	EHPL	GIBF1	NBLD85	BOKD86
0.49	0.25	0.23	0.12	0.07	0.04
HIGHEST GAINERS					
ANLB	BPW	GBB085	JOSHI	MMF1	3WF083
10	9.98	4.04	3.94	3.35	2.72

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 110,500
Silver	Rs 1,375

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Elon Musk kicks off China visit, Tesla expansion in focus

BEIJING: Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk on Tuesday kicked off a high-stakes visit to China with a meeting with the country's foreign minister in Beijing, marking his return to the electric carmaker's largest production hub after three years. The trip is the latest return by a top US CEO to China since the country reopened its borders and reversed its zero-COVID policy in December. Apple's Tim Cook visited in March, while JP Morgan's Jamie Dimon and Starbucks' Laxman Narasimhan are also in China this week. Musk met Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang hours after landing in Beijing. Qin told Musk China was committed to improving the business environment for investors, including Tesla, and used an elaborate driving metaphor to describe China-US relations, according to a statement from his ministry. "We must step on the brake in time, avoid dangerous driving and be skillful at using the accelerator to promote mutually beneficial cooperation," Qin said. (Reuters)

Nvidia hits \$1 trillion in market value on booming AI demand

NEW YORK: Nvidia Corp on Tuesday became the first chipmaker to join the trillion-dollar club, as the company bets on a surge in demand for its AI chips that power chatbot sensation ChatGPT and many other applications. The gaming and AI chip company's shares rose 4.2 percent. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co Ltd is the next largest chipmaker globally, valued at about \$535 billion. Meta Platforms Inc, valued at about \$670 billion as of last close, clinched the trillion-dollar market capitalization milestone in 2021, while Apple Inc, Alphabet Inc, Microsoft Corp and Amazon.com Inc are the other US companies that are part of the club. Wall Street analysts called Nvidia's forecast "unfathomable" and "cosmological", hinging their price targets in droves. The highest price target valued the company at about \$1.6 trillion, on par with Google-parent Alphabet. (Reuters)

Roundabout routes to new airports hike carriers' costs

>> Continued from page 1

Based on this instruction, Nepal and India agreed to make the L626 route two-way in 2016.

In February 2017, the two countries decided to form a joint technical team and initiate discussions on the opening of three air routes.

At that time, the Indian side expressed reservations over the opening of the airspace over Bhairahawa and Nepalgunj due to the presence of its defence base in Gorakhpur. The base is spread over a large area where fighter jet exercises are conducted regularly.

However, they had hinted at the possibility of opening sections of the airspace over Nepalgunj.

Nepal has been pushing the agenda of expanding cross-border air routes as there is only a single entry point in Simara for most aircraft flying into the country.

In contrast, there are seven exit points—Bhairahawa and Mahendranagar in the west and Simara, Biratnagar, Tumlingtar, Kakkarbhatta and Janakpur in the east—for aircraft flying out of Nepal.

Two other entry points over Mechi and Tumlingtar (NONIM, to the east of Everest) have been designated for planes coming from Bhutan and Lhasa, respectively.

But the entry point in Simara is used by the majority of aircraft flying into Nepal and is, therefore, congested most of the time.

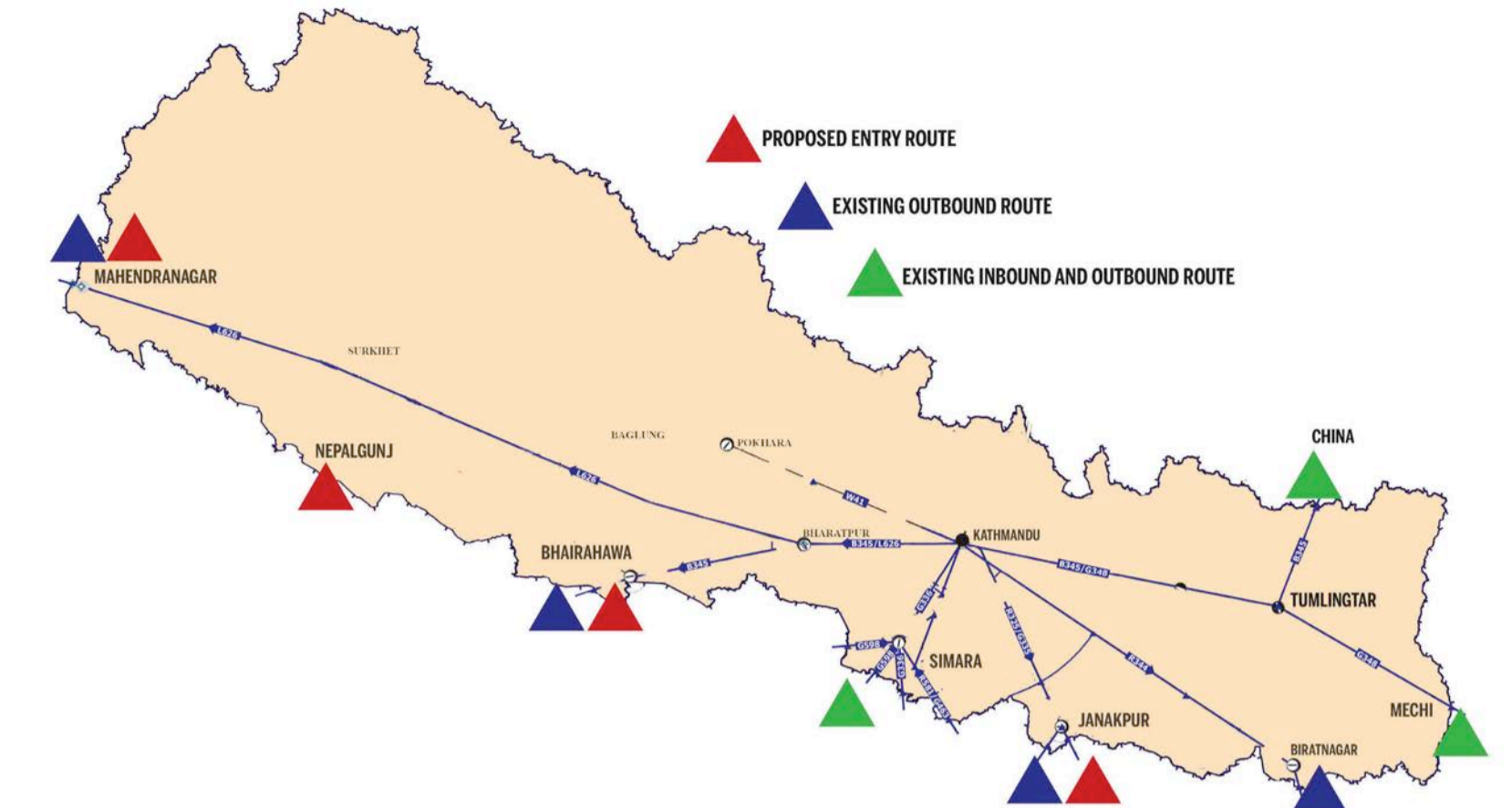
"The air route has now become a geopolitical issue, but Nepal has been sending government officials to deal with it," said an unnamed former director general of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal. "The issue should be dealt with at the political level."

The two international airports in Bhairahawa and Pokhara on which Nepal spent Rs60 billion are said to be technically unfeasible without entry routes from the west.

For example, if a Bhairahawa-bound international flight approaching from the west is not allowed to use the airspace over Bhairahawa, Nepalgunj or Mahendranagar, it has to make a 300-km detour to Simara to enter Nepali airspace, according to Tourism Ministry documents.

This roundabout route to Gautam Buddha International Airport will raise the operating cost of airlines and make flights costlier, experts say.

International flights to Pokhara will face the same problem. Ministry documents say that Pokhara-bound



international flights from western Nepal will have to cover an additional 185 km in aerial distance if the new cross-border air routes are not opened.

But not all buy the argument that the only reason why Pokhara and Bhairahawa don't see international air traffic is because of lack of entry routes.

"Obviously, the airport is financially infeasible for aircraft coming from the west. But there is no problem for aircraft coming over the east," said Sanjiv Gautam, former director general of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal.

But nearly 50 percent of the international flights serving Nepal—from Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, China, Bhutan and Kolkata—enter the country from the east.

"So why are the planes not coming to these new airports?" asked Gautam. "The civil aviation authority is building a narrative that these airports are not being operated as India has not

given routes. That is a grossly false statement," he said.

"If Bhairahawa airport is properly marketed, flights will come. The airport should create a business environment first."

Some officials say that these two airports have become victims of geopolitics as Pokhara airport was built with Chinese money and Bhairahawa airport was built by a Chinese firm.

India has been withholding landing permits for Himalaya Airlines to fly to New Delhi since 2015 as it is owned by a Chinese company.

"It's clear that there is a geopolitical issue here. India is also clear that it will not buy Nepal's electricity if any hydro project in Nepal has a Chinese component. The airport case is similar," said insiders.

This was evident when Indian Prime Minister Modi overflew the new international airport in Bhairahawa as it was being inaugurated and landed in Lumbini in May last year.

"The possibility of getting the route is slim if we look at all these geopolitical developments," said another former chief of the aviation authority.

Another official at the Tourism Ministry told the Post that India refused to give operating authorisation to Buddha Air to fly to Lucknow from Pokhara saying it was a "diplomatic issue".

Buddha Air has access to Indian airports from Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport. Until April 2018, India was positive about opening air access from the west after a technical team was formed to sort out safety issues.

"Then it abruptly became unforthcoming," said one former air route expert from the civil aviation body.

Nepal's relations with India soured after Nepal abruptly refused to be an observer at a joint military exercise of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation countries in Pune in September 2018 after having made a

commitment to participate.

At that time, India had expressed displeasure at Nepal's withdrawal. The Indian defence establishment was especially angry.

Nepal then participated in the second Nepal-China joint military exercise called Sagarmatha Friendship-2 held in China's Sichuan Province the same year.

Things, including air route development, were complicated further.

"Since then, the safety assessment of the route stopped," said the route expert.

After that, another controversy followed. India had asked Nepal if in-flight security officers—known as air marshals—travelling on Indian airlines could stay overnight in Kathmandu if there was a need. The demand stirred "unnecessary" controversy, with parliamentarians expressing suspicion over India's intent.

Nepali officials say that after five years, they are hopeful that India won't disappoint Nepal.

France opens its first electric car battery factory

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BILLY-BERCLAU (FRANCE), MAY 30

France launched its first factory for electric vehicle batteries on Tuesday, taking a big step in its race to build up a sector dominated by China.

The plant in Billy-Berclau is the first in a clutch of factories that are due to open over the next three years in a northern corridor billed as a "Battery Valley" for the rapidly growing industry.

The "gigafactory" is owned by Automotive Cells Company, a partnership between French energy giant TotalEnergies, Germany's Mercedes-Benz and US-European automaker Stellantis, which produces a range of brands including Peugeot, Fiat and Chrysler.

French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire, who attended the opening ceremony, likened the factory to the creation of Airbus, which turned Europe into a powerhouse in the aircraft manufacturing sector.

"The European Union must flex its muscles" in terms of industry as "China will give no quarter", he said.

German Transport Minister Volker Wissing said the facility, along with two other ACC factories due to open in his country and Italy, will ensure that "Europe remains at the forefront of global progress tomorrow".

The heads of Mercedes, Stellantis and TotalEnergies also attended the

event. Building up the battery industry is at the heart of President Emmanuel Macron's "reindustrialisation" plan for France.

The ACC factory is the length of six football pitches. Production is due to begin this summer.

Europe is racing to step up its production of batteries and electric vehicles as the European Union has set a 2035 deadline to phase out the sale of new fossil fuel cars.

Around 50 battery factory projects have been announced in the EU in recent years as the bloc scrambles to meet its goal of becoming climate neutral by 2050.

The ACC factory is the first of four due to open in the burgeoning "Battery Valley" in the Hauts-de-France region.

Sino-Japanese group AESC-Envision is building a plant near the city of Douai which will supply French automaker Renault from early 2025.

French startup Verkor is scheduled to begin production at a facility in Dunkirk from mid-2025.

Taiwan's ProLogium has also chosen the coastal city for its first overseas factory, with output to start in 2026.

The French government has set a target of producing two million electric vehicles per year by 2030.

The ACC plant is expected to supply 500,000 vehicles per year by then.

Stock markets wobble as traders await US debt ceiling vote

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LONDON, MAY 30

Stock markets wavered on Tuesday as a deal to hike the US debt ceiling and avoid a painful default heads to a vote in Congress this week.

On its return from the three-day Memorial Day weekend, the Dow fell after opening in the green.

But the S&P 500 rose and the tech-rich Nasdaq jumped more than one percent, with chip company Nvidia, a key supplier to the artificial intelligence boom, seeing its market value top \$1 trillion as its shares surged four percent.

Oil prices fell more than three percent as traders await the Congress vote and digest conflicting messages from OPEC+ members about new output cuts, analysts said.

President Joe Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy hammered out an agreement at the weekend that saw both sides give ground, a week before a June 5 deadline when the government is expected to run out of cash to pay its bills.

While the deal provided some relief to markets, the two leaders must convince waverers on both sides to back the deal, with the House expected to vote Wednesday followed by the Senate.

"Presently, it feels like investors are confident that the US debt ceiling will

be raised," said Ipek Ozkardeskaya, senior analyst at Swissquote Bank.

"The kneejerk reaction to a debt ceiling deal will be positive but gains could remain short-lived as most of the deal is already priced in," she said.

Ultra-conservative Republicans feel McCarthy should have secured far deeper spending cuts in exchange for raising the debt ceiling and allowing the government to keep borrowing.

The left wing of the Democratic Party is equally unhappy that Biden agreed to any spending limits at all.

Oil prices fell more than three percent as traders await the Congress vote.

"A deal may have been struck on the debt ceiling, but it's not fully calmed nervousness on financial markets," noted Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at stockbroker Hargreaves Lansdown.

"Clamour from dissenting voices on both sides of the political divide are rising, ahead of a crucial Congressional vote. Nevertheless, the US does appear to be inching towards agreement," added Streeter.

Still, the US president and House speaker were optimistic.

"I never say I'm confident what the Congress is going to do. But I feel very good about it," Biden said Monday.

In Asian markets, Tokyo extended gains while Hong Kong and Shanghai edged up after recent losses fuelled by worries about the Chinese economy as the post-lockdown recovery fades.

But Sydney, Wellington, Taipei, Manila, Bangkok and Jakarta retreated.

London declined as dealers returned from a three-day weekend, while there were also losses in Paris. Frankfurt bucked the trend as it rose.

Analysts said that while the debt ceiling resolution will remove one worry for markets, there is now concern about liquidity that could weigh on sentiment.

They said the Treasury will need to sell more than \$1 trillion of Treasury bills to replenish its coffers, meaning a flood of sales that will soak up cash from the banking sector and put fresh pressure on the economy.

"We don't know at what speed at which the market liquidity will drain, but we know that it will drain," Ozkardeskaya said.

Investors are also keeping an eye on the US Federal Reserve's next interest rate decision in June after data on Friday showed a key gauge of inflation rising in April.

Tax on foreign trips for Nepalis will boost domestic tourism, finance minister says

KRISHANA PRASAIN

KATHMANDU, MAY 30

Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat, on Tuesday, clarified that the tax on foreign tour packages for Nepalis has been imposed for the first time to encourage them to travel within their own country and prevent capital flight.

The Financial Bill has made a provision that Nepalis going abroad for a visit will have to pay as much as 5 percent tax on the total tour package.

Speaking at a post-budget presentation, Mahat said the tax policy on electric vehicles (EVs) has been rationalised.

"If you see the tax structure of fossil fuel-driven vehicles, it has been raised up to 300 percent. In contrast, tax on the EVs is nominal."

Mahat said there is no truth in reports that have said the government has hiked taxes on EVs.

He said the EVs with more than 100cc capacity, have been taxed at a few percent. "The automobile dealers are selling EVs by keeping huge margins, which need to be reduced," Mahat added.

The customs duty on EVs below 50cc is 10 percent.

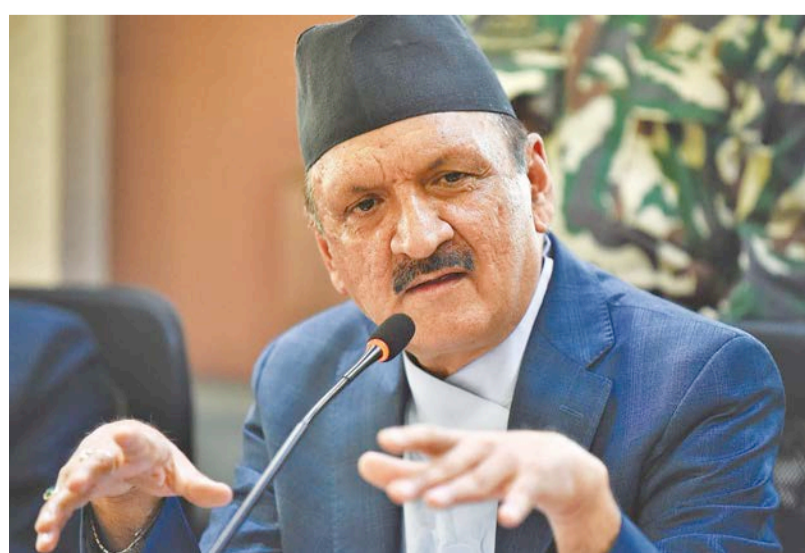
For 50-100cc EVs, the custom and excise duties are 15 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

For EVs of 100cc-200cc, the customs and excise duties are at 20 percent each.

For the EVs of 200cc-300cc, the customs and excise duties are 40 percent and 45 percent, respectively and for 300cc EVs, the customs duty is 60 percent.

The government on Monday presented its annual financial plan worth Rs1.75 trillion for the next fiscal year 2023-2024, beginning mid-July.

The budget size for the next fiscal year is 2.37 percent smaller than



Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat

POST PHOTO: ANAGD DHAKAL

the unrevised budget of the current fiscal year.

The government has allocated Rs1.14 trillion or 65.2 percent of the total budget for recurrent spending, which consists of regular expenses of salaries and allowances.

It has set aside Rs302 billion or 17.25 percent of the budget for capital spending, to build projects and critical infrastructures.

The government has earmarked Rs307 billion, or 17.55 percent of the total budget, for financing.

Mahat said the liability of loans has been increasing. He also said that the social security expenses cannot be minimised and that has been creating pressure on the availability of resources.

The government, through the budget, said that it will raise Rs1.24 trillion in revenues, Rs49.94 billion in foreign grants, Rs212 billion in external loans and Rs240 billion in

internal loans.

"There is a need to change our working style to achieve the target envisaged by the budget," said Mahat. "We have improved the revenue policy so that there is no tax evasion."

"We are optimistic that the revenue collection will increase," Mahat added. "On that basis, the revenue target has been set."

"The budget for the current fiscal year has been presented quite differently as we have cut on unnecessary expenditure," Mahat said.

"Regarding the implementation of the budget for the coming fiscal year, we have presented solutions in a pointwise manner by analysing the problems," Mahat added.

He said the economic growth rate has been kept at 6 percent and that's not ambitious. "We expect that a balanced fiscal policy and the coming monetary policy will help revitalise the economy," said Mahat.

WORLD

BRIEFING

NATO deploys additional forces to Kosovo

ROME: NATO said on Tuesday it was deploying extra forces to Kosovo after clashes in the north of the country in which 30 soldiers from a NATO-led peacekeeping force were injured. "The deployment of additional NATO forces to Kosovo is a prudent measure to ensure that KFOR (the Kosovo Force) has the capabilities it needs to maintain security in accordance with our UN Security Council mandate," said Admiral Stuart B Munsch, commander of Allied Joint Force Command Naples. "I want to commend KFOR for taking swift, restrained and professional action to intervene to stop the unrest and to save lives. "The violence must stop and all sides must stop taking actions to undermine the peace in any and all communities of Kosovo." NATO said it was deploying the Operational Reserve Forces (ORF) for the Western Balkans, who would be ready to move within seven days. On top of that, it said, "an additional multinational battalion of reserve forces has been ordered to decrease their readiness-to-deploy status from 14 days to seven days, in order to be ready to reinforce KFOR if necessary".

UK's Sunak to meet Biden in Washington next week

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will meet US President Joe Biden in Washington next week for talks, Downing Street announced on Tuesday. Biden invited Sunak to the White House when the British leader was in San Diego in March for the launch of a nuclear submarine deal with Australia. Next week's meeting will build on talks the pair have had about closer cooperation on economic challenges such as supply chain security and net zero transition. "It will also be an opportunity to discuss issues including sustaining our support for Ukraine," Sunak's official spokesman told reporters in London. Sunak has carried on Boris Johnson's staunch support for Kyiv since Russia's invasion last year, announcing the supply of long-range missiles. Biden followed up by supporting the provision of advanced F-16 fighter jets for Ukraine at the recent G7 leaders' summit in Japan. Overshadowing the talks will be the unresolved issue of a free-trade deal between the two countries, which London sees as a key prize since leaving the EU. Sunak's spokesman said that was not on the agenda. The UK has already signed trade agreements with North Carolina, South Carolina and Indiana. It is also seeking closer trading partnerships with US powerhouses California and Texas, and is in discussions with Utah and Oklahoma.

South Africa faces legal bid to force Putin's arrest

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's leading opposition party said on Tuesday it had taken legal action to force the government to arrest Vladimir Putin if the Russian President were to attend a planned summit in the country. Pretoria has been faced with a diplomatic dilemma since the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant against Putin, who is supposed to visit the nation for a BRICS meeting in August. On Tuesday, the Democratic Alliance (DA) party said it launched a court application to ensure the government detains the Russian leader and hands him over to the ICC "should President Putin set foot in South Africa." "This pre-emptory court action aims to ensure that South Africa upholds its obligations," DA shadow minister of justice Glynis Breytenbach said in a statement. A member of the ICC, South Africa, which has close ties with Moscow, is due to host the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) bloc summit. (Agencies)

How drone warfare has evolved in Ukraine

The vast majority of drones are smaller models used on the front lines for both reconnaissance and attack.



Ukrainian air defence intercepts a Shahed drone mid-air in the third Russia aerial attack on the capital in 24 hours in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Tuesday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS, MAY 30

From tiny quadcopters buzzing over front-line trenches with cameras and grenades to flying bombs lugging warheads weighing dozens of kilograms into Kyiv and Moscow, drones have marked the Ukraine war like none before it.

In recent months, invading Russian troops have sent waves of Iranian-made Shahed "kamikaze" drones at Kyiv and other major cities, while Ukraine has launched unmanned attacks of its own in Crimea and Russian border region Belgorod.

The Russian government even accused Ukraine on Tuesday of attacking Moscow with such devices. Today's picture is a far cry from the hype surrounding Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones in the early months of the war.

The aircraft made headlines and were praised in song for their role in smashing Moscow's armoured columns and the Black Sea fleet flagship, the Moskva. But such models—known as MALE, for Medium Altitude, Long Endurance—have lost relevance as the conflict has dragged on.

"The front has stabilised and become impenetrable, as the Russians have deployed systems" to defend

Drones hit Moscow high-rises

MOSCOW: A swarm of drones hit Moscow on Tuesday in an unprecedented attack, while Russian drones struck Kyiv for a third straight day as Ukraine gears up for a major offensive against Russian forces.

The Russian defence ministry blamed Kyiv for the attacks that saw three drones crash into residential buildings in Moscow.

Officials said no one was seriously injured and there was only "minor" damage to buildings.

The Russian defence ministry said that eight drones were used in the

attack, adding that five of them were downed and three disabled.

Of the three that hit residential buildings, two crashed into high-rises located in Moscow's affluent southwest, while a third damaged a residential building in a suburb of the capital. The other drones fell outside Moscow. Some of the debris was found around 15 kilometres from President Vladimir Putin's Novo-Ogaryovo residence.

One video shared on social media showed an explosion followed by a column of smoke rising into the sky. (AFP)

against attack from the air, an anonymous European defence industry source told AFP.

Now the drone war has become a numbers game.

Most suicide drones are downed by air defences, "used to force the defenders to fire their missiles and run down reserves", a senior French military source said.

"You also create terror and uncertainty at all times. Over the long term, that has value," the source added.

Eroding enemy air defence cheaply

is especially vital for Russia, whose production of long-range missiles is limited to around 40 per month, analysts Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds of British defence think-tank RUSI wrote in a recent report.

Moscow's air force "launches large numbers of aircraft to increase the number of potential axes of threat... [and] to identify gaps in Ukrainian air defence" where traditional missiles could get through, they said.

Kyiv also uses "commercially available Chinese propeller-powered

drones or old Soviet jet-powered reconnaissance drones" that can attack "well inside Russian territory", the European industrial source said.

The vast majority of drones are smaller models used on the front lines for both reconnaissance and attack.

Ukrainian troops have published many videos on social media showing modified commercially available drones dropping bombs onto Russian soldiers' positions.

On any given 10-kilometre stretch of front line, "it is typical for there to be between 25 and 50 UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) from both sides", RUSI's Watling and Reynolds wrote.

Purpose-built Ukrainian Furia and Russian Eleron-3 drones range up to 50 kilometres, while modified commercial quadcopters—many bought through crowdfunding—can venture fewer than 10.

The swarms have pushed both sides into deploying electronic defences, lowering the cost of countering devices that are too cheap to be worth shooting down with pricey missiles.

Russian forces "now employ approximately one major electronic warfare system per 10km of frontage" according to RUSI, with "more specialised EW capabilities" further up the chain of command.

"The Russians have stepped up their electronic warfare game. It's a huge change," the senior French officer said.

Even individual Russian platoons are now equipped with anti-drone weapons, RUSI said, including "directional jammers and arrays for hijacking UAVs".

Anti-drone "rifles" that emit jamming signals are "the absolute basics of defence, what really works are non-portable jammers deployed close to the front line", the European industry source said.

But such "big spheres on tripods with generators" are "easily spotted and have a limited life expectancy", they added. Drone and anti-drone warfare were "a new form of combined arms combat", the French officer said.

"Just as we have infantry, cavalry and artillery, so we have drones, electronic warfare and connectivity."

With so much energy going into their destruction, most small drones "won't fly more than four or six times before being shot down", the officer added.

China declines US request for a meeting between defence chiefs

REUTERS
HONG KONG, MAY 30

China has declined a request from the United States for a meeting between their defence chiefs at an annual security forum in Singapore this weekend, media reported on Monday, a new sign of strain between the powers.

"Overnight, the PRC informed the US that they have declined our early May invitation for Secretary [Lloyd] Austin to meet with PRC Minister of National Defense Li Shangfu in Singapore," the Pentagon said in a statement to the Wall Street Journal, referring to China by the initials of its official name, the People's Republic of China.

Li has been under US sanctions since 2018 over the purchase of combat aircraft and equipment from Russia's main arms exporter, Rosoboronexport.



The Pentagon said it believed in open communication "to ensure that competition does not veer into conflict".

Last week, White House spokesman John Kirby said there were discussions by the defense department to get talks going between Austin and his Chinese counterpart, who was named defence minister in March.

The prospect of a meeting was being closely watched given regional security tensions and trade disputes that have derailed plans for re-engagement by the world's two largest economies.

China's foreign ministry on Tuesday blamed the United States for its decision, claiming that Washington was "well aware" of the reasons behind the lack of military communication.

"The US side should ... immediately correct its wrong practices, show sincerity, and create the necessary atmosphere and conditions for dialogue and communication between the two militaries," foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters at a briefing.

Last week, US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao traded barbs on trade, investment and export policies in a meeting in Washington that marked the first US-China cabinet-level exchange in months.

Singapore-based security analyst Ian Storey said China's decision to shun Austin did not bode well.

"At a time of rising US-China tensions, General Li's refusal to meet his American counterpart will fray regional nerves even further," Storey said.

Austin and Li will be in Singapore to attend the annual Shangri-la Dialogue that opens on Friday, an informal gathering of defence officials and analysts that also plays host to a string of side meetings.

Both are expected to hold bilateral meetings with counterparts from around the region.

Li, who security scholars say is a veteran of the People's Liberation Army modernisation effort, is a member of the Central Military Commission, China's top defence body that is commanded by President Xi Jinping.

China launches new crew for space station, with eye to putting astronauts on moon before 2030

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIJING, MAY 30



A Long March rocket carrying a crew of Chinese astronauts in a Shenzhou-16 spaceship lifts off at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwestern China, on Tuesday.

China launched a new three-person crew for its orbiting space station on Tuesday, with an eye to putting astronauts on the moon before the end of the decade.

The Shenzhou 16 spacecraft lifted off from the Jiuquan launch centre on the edge of the Gobi Desert in northwestern China atop a Long March 2-F rocket just after 9:30 am (01:30 GMT) Tuesday.

The crew, including China's first civilian astronaut, will overlap briefly with three now aboard the Tiangong station, who will then return to Earth after completing their six-month mission. A third module was added to the station in November, and space program officials on Monday said they have plans to expand it, along with launching a crewed mission to the moon before 2030.

China built its own space station after it was excluded from the International Space Station, largely due to US concerns over the Chinese space programs' intimate ties with the People's Liberation Army, the military branch of the ruling Communist Party.

China's first manned space mission in 2003 made it the third country after the former Soviet Union and the US to put a person into space under its own resources. On this latest

mission, payload expert Gui Haichao, a professor at Beijing's top aerospace research institute, will join mission commander Maj Gen Jing Haipeng, who is making his fourth flight to space, and spacecraft engineer Zhu Yangzhu.

The crew will stay aboard the station for around five months, during which they will conduct scientific experiments and regular maintenance.

The mission comes against the background of a rivalry with the US for reaching new milestones in space. That has been largely friendly, but also reflects their sharpening competition for leadership and influence in the technology, military and diplomatic fields.

American spending, supply chains and capabilities are believed to give it a significant edge over China, at least for now. China has broken out in some areas, however, bringing samples back from the lunar surface for the first time in decades and landing a rover on the less explored far side of the moon.

The US, meanwhile, aims to put astronauts back on the lunar surface by the end of 2025 as part of a renewed commitment to crewed missions, aided by private sector players such as SpaceX and Blue Origin.

In addition to their lunar programs, the two countries have also separately landed rovers on Mars, and China plans to follow the US in landing a spacecraft on an asteroid.

California overtime law threatens use of grazing goats to prevent wildfires

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WEST SACRAMENTO, CALIF., MAY 30

Hundreds of goats munch on long blades of yellow grass on a hillside next to a sprawling townhouse complex. They were hired to clear vegetation that could fuel wildfires as temperatures rise this summer.

These voracious herbivores are in high demand to devour weeds and shrubs that have proliferated across California after a drought-busting winter of heavy rain and snow.

"It's a huge fuel source. If it was left untamed, it can grow very high. And then when the summer dries everything out, it's perfect fuel for a fire," said Jason Poupolo, parks superintendent for the city of West Sacramento, where goats grazed on a recent afternoon.

Targeted grazing is part of California's strategy to reduce wildfire risk because goats can eat a wide variety of vegetation and graze in steep, rocky terrain that's hard to access. Backers say they're an eco-friendly alternative to chemical herbicides or weed-whacking machines that make noise and pollution. But new state labour regulations are making it more expensive to pro-

vide goat-grazing services, and herding companies say the rules threaten to put them out of business. The changes could raise the monthly salary of herders from about \$3,730 to \$14,000, according to the California Farm Bureau.

Companies typically put about one herder in charge of 400 goats. Many of the herders in California are from Peru and live in employer-provided trailers near grazing sites. Labour advocates say the state should look into their working and living conditions before revising the law, especially since the state is funding goat-grazing to reduce wildfire risk.

California is investing in wildfire prevention after the state was ravaged by years of destructive flames that scorched millions of acres, destroyed thousands of homes and killed dozens of people. Goats have been used to clear fuels around Lake Oroville, along Highway 101, and near the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

"My phone rings off the hook this time of year," said Tim Arrowsmith, owner of Western Grazers, which is providing grazing services to West Sacramento. "The demand has grown year after year after year."

His company, based in the Northern

California city of Red Bluff, has about 4,000 goats for hire to clear vegetation for government agencies and private landowners across Northern California. Without a fix to the new regulations, "we will be forced to sell these goats to slaughter and to the auction yards, and we'll be forced out of business and probably file for bankruptcy," Arrowsmith said.

Companies have historically been allowed to pay goat and sheepherders a monthly minimum salary rather than an hourly minimum wage, because their jobs require them to be on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. But legislation signed in 2016 also entitles them to overtime pay. It effectively boosted the herders' minimum monthly pay from \$1,955 in 2019 to \$3,730 this year. It's set to hit \$4,381 in 2025, according to the California Department of Industrial Relations.

So far the herding companies, which have sued over the law, have passed along most of the increased labour costs to their customers.

But in January, those labour costs are set to jump sharply again. Goatherders and sheepherders have always followed the same set of labour rules last year. But a state agency has ruled that's no longer allowed, mean-



Goats graze on dry grass next to a housing complex in West Sacramento, California, on May 17. Goats are in high demand to clear vegetation as California prepares for the wildfire season.

ing goatherders would be subject to the same labour laws as other farmworkers. That would mean goatherders would be entitled to ever higher pay—up to \$14,000 a month. Last year a budget trailer bill delayed that pay requirement for one year, but it's set to

take affect on January 1 if nothing is done to change the law.

Goatherding companies say they can't afford to pay herders that much. They would have to drastically raise their rates, which would make it unaffordable to provide goat

grazing services.

"We fully support increasing wages for herders, but \$14,000 a month is not realistic. So we need to address that in order to allow these goat-grazing operations to exist," said Brian Shobe, deputy policy director for the California Climate and Agriculture Network. The goat-grazing industry is pushing the Legislature to approve law that would treat goatherders the same as sheepherders. A bill to do so hasn't yet received a public hearing.

Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, who heads the California Labor Federation, said goatherders are among the "most vulnerable workers in America" because they are on temporary work visas and can be fired and sent back to their home country anytime. Most of them work in isolation, speak minimal English and don't have the same rights as Americans or green-card holders.

"We have a responsibility as a public to ensure that every worker who's working in California is treated with dignity and respect, and that includes these goatherders," said Gonzalez Fletcher, who sponsored the farmworker overtime bill when she was a state Assemblywoman representing San Diego.

No tickets please: India's cricket superhero Dhoni

The former India skipper could have spent his life inspecting tickets on Indian Railways if he had listened to his father.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
AHMEDABAD, MAY 30

MS Dhoni, who led Chennai Super Kings to a record-equalling fifth IPL title on Monday, could have spent his life inspecting tickets on Indian Railways if he had listened to his father.

Instead he followed his dream and became one of his cricket-crazy country's most beloved players, second only in adulation to the "little master" Sachin Tendulkar.

In a career spanning two decades, he was India's most successful skipper and even after retiring from international cricket in 2020 has had a glorious Indian summer still playing the IPL.

His journey, which was made into a Bollywood biopic, began in a cramped one-bedroom government flat in the eastern city of Ranchi provided by his pump operator father's employer.

As a boy Dhoni was passionate about sport and honed his skills playing tennis-ball cricket and borrowing bats and other kit from friends.

On his father's insistence, he took a job at Indian Railways but the hectic routine of juggling between collecting tickets and playing cricket finally saw him break free.

In 2004, he made his India debut and in 2007, took over from Rahul Dravid as India's one-day captain, the same year winning the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa.

In 2008, he became Test captain and won two home series against Australia, and in 2011 famously sealed winning the 50-over World Cup in India with a sumptuous six.

Along the way—with constant hairstyle changes, from



shaggy to spiky to shaved—numerous endorsements saw Dhoni become one of world sport's best-paid athletes, earning an estimated \$31 million in 2015.

But he stunned the cricket world by quitting the five-day format in 2014 after finishing with 27 wins from 60 Tests as skipper.

He stepped down from the limited-overs captaincy in 2017 on the pretext of preparing Virat Kohli as leader, but continued to play a big part in the team's decision-making process.

Dhoni suggested after the IPL final that he will return for one more crack in 2024.

His last appearance for India was in their semi-final loss to New Zealand in the 2019 ODI World Cup.

He then briefly served with an army reserve unit, where he is an honorary lieutenant colonel, before announcing his international retirement.

But he didn't quit the IPL, using his unrivalled tactical nous and experience to guide the franchise, which he has captained since the league began in 2008, to 10 finals and now five victories. Dhoni has previously Chennai to titles in 2010, 2011, 2018 and 2021.

"There is no CSK without Dhoni and there is no Dhoni without CSK," N Srinivasan, the industrialist who owns the franchise, famously said after the previous triumph in 2021.

Hard-hitting and always unruffled, Dhoni has many nicknames including "Captain Cool" and "Thala", which means "leader" in Tamil, the language of Chennai.

Fans at the IPL go wild when he strides out to bat and cheer every shot—and not just those of Chennai but of all the other franchises.

The excitement has been heightened this year because of the expectation that—at 41, with a dodgy knee and no longer the force he was with the bat—this season might be Dhoni's last.

But he has kept fans guessing, saying last week that he would take until the auctions for the 2024 IPL in December to make his final decision.

"I will always be there for CSK whether in playing form or sitting somewhere," he said. "I don't really know. But frankly, it takes a heavy toll."

CBU open up four-point lead

With three games remaining, Bal Gopal Maharjan's men have 41 points from 23 matches.

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, MAY 30

Leaders and league debutants Church Boys United are now marching toward historic title in the Martyrs Memorial A-Division League.

CBU thrashed Armed Police Force (APF) Club 4-1 to open up a four-point gap at the top of 14-team standings, with Ananta Tamang scoring a double. Mausham Subba and Aashish Chaudhary also hit the targets for CBU.

With three games remaining, Bal Gopal Maharjan's men have 41 points from 23 matches, four ahead of Jawalakhel Youth Club, who defeated Tribhuvan Army Club 2-0 to keep the pressure on CBU.

Subba put CBU in front from close range after just three minutes as Ranjeet Singh Pandre pounced on a defensive error from APF's Adama Doumbia to tee up Subba. Doumbia had left the mess after unsuccessfully attempting to block a cross from Chaudhary.

Tamang doubled CBU's advantage in the seventh minute of first half injury time. Tamang found a back header from Franklin Kuete Talla inside the six-yard box, controlled the ball, lined it up and smashed the back of the net.

He then bundled in a third ten minutes after the restart in almost similar fashion to his first goal of the game,



Ananta Tamang (centre) scored a brace in Church Boys United's 4-1 win over APF on Tuesday.

this time his header finding the net. Awas Lamichhane reduced the deficit in the 83rd minute after Tamang switched off his senses to allow Lamichhane to drill the ball into the far post.

But Chaudhary wrapped up the rout in style when his screamer from outside of the box beat APF goalkeeper Raju Yogi for a beautiful finish.

Earlier, a double from Nkoto Synous Masoabi inspired Jawalakhel's victory against the departmental side Army. The Lesetho forward opened the scoring in the 55th minute with a low drive that nipped the palm of Army goalkeeper Bikesh Kuthu before

finding the net, thanks to a defensive lapse that allowed Samiraj Thokar to cut back for Masoabi.

Army upped the pressure in search for an equaliser but Masoabi had the final say when he took advantage of another poor defending to head home a cross from Fode Fofana.

The outcome snapped Jawalakhel's five-match winless run—they had drawn four consecutive games before losing against APF.

The win moved Jawalakhel up to second position on 37 points from 23 matches. Reigning champions Machhindra are third on 36 but have played a game less.

A-DIVISION LEAGUE							
Teams	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	PT
CBU	23	11	8	4	29	15	41
Jawalakhel	23	10	7	6	39	28	37
Machhindra	22	9	9	4	31	21	36
Police	22	9	4	9	24	28	31
Army	23	7	9	7	27	26	30
Satdobato	22	8	5	9	24	23	29
APF	23	8	5	10	27	28	29
NRT	22	7	8	7	30	34	29
Sherpa	22	7	8	7	26	30	29
Manang	22	6	10	6	22	24	28
Three Star	22	6	8	8	16	17	26
Sankata	22	6	8	8	22	28	26
Friends	22	6	6	10	36	35	24
Khumaltar	22	7	3	12	31	47	24

PLAYING WEDNESDAY		
Satdobato vs Machhindra	15:00 NST, ANFA Complex	
Three Star vs Sankata	15:00 NST, Chyasal Stadium	

NEPAL WOMEN'S TOUR OF MALAYSIA

SECOND T20I, BANGI/ TOSS: MALAYSIA, BAT FIRST.

Malaysia 97-5 (20 overs)
Mas Elysa 28 (34)

Rubina Chhetry 4-0-16-2

Nepal 103-3 (17.3/20 overs)
Rubina Chhetry 29* (21), Kabita Kunwar 26 (43)

Yoshifito Nuraisingam 2-0-14-1

Nepal women win by seven wickets.

Player of the match: Rubina Chhetry

Result: Five-match T20I Series is level at 1-1.

Third T20I is scheduled for Thursday.

FRENCH OPEN

FIRST ROUND RESULTS (selected only)

Men

Tommy Paul bt Dominic Stricker 6-3, 6-2, 6-4

Casper Ruud bt Elias Ymer 6-4, 6-3, 6-2

Alexander Zverev bt Lloyd Harris 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/0), 6-1

Yoshifito Nuraisingam bt JJ Wolf 1-6, 3-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3

Women

Wang Xinyu bt Marie Bouzkova 6-4, 7-6 (7/5)

Coco Gauff bt Rebeka Masarova 3-6, 6-1, 6-2

Onc Jabeur bt Lucia Bronzetti (ITA) 6-4, 6-1

Elena Rybakina bt Brenda Fruhvirtova 6-4, 6-2

QUOTE OF THE DAY



Better coach, better person, same DNA. The DNA is motivation, is happiness. Desire for these big moments, and these are the feelings that I try to pass to the boys.

— Roma manager Jose Mourinho says ahead of Wednesday's Europa League final against Sevilla.

Chhetry guides Nepal to victory over Malaysia

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, MAY 30

An all round performance by captain Rubina Chhetry inspired Nepal to a seven-wicket victory over hosts Malaysia in the second T20I as they levelled the five-match Twenty20 International bilateral series 1-1 at the YSD-UKM Cricket Oval in Bangi, Malaysia, on Tuesday.

Opting to bat first, Malaysia posted 97-5 in their allotted 20 overs before Nepal made 103-3 in 17.3 overs.

Captain Chhetry grabbed two wickets with the ball and then scored 29 runs, the highest of the game.

Malaysian captain Mas Elysa scored a 34-ball 28, the highest of the innings, before the number three batter was trapped leg before wicket Chhetry. She also clean bowled opener Winifred Duraisingam for 20 runs scored off 28 balls.

Nepal win team gold

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, MAY 30

Nepal won the team event gold medal at the 9th Nepal Amateur Open at the par-72 Gokarna Forest Golf Resort on Monday.

The Nepali team of Subash Tamang and Sadbhav Acharya carded 17-under 271 in the 36-hole competition to register a 14-stroke victory over India. Subash and Sadbhav had also won the team event gold medal in Bangladesh Amateur Open Golf Championship in March.

India's Sumit Kotwal and Suraj Joshi came second with the total score of three-under 285.

Bhutan came third at five-over 293. In the men's individual section, India's Sumit Kotwal moved to the top with the score of 12-under 132. Overnight leader, Nepal's Subash Tamang slipped to the second position, scoring 10-under 134. Another Nepali golfer, Sadbhav Acharya is in third place with a total score of seven-under 137.

In the women's individual section, Kashmiri Shah controlled the leaderboard at 14-over 158. The overnight leader Sushma Sigdel slipped to second place at 17-over 161 and Aaiesteena Tanadan (86) was in third place at 40-over 184.

A total of 51 golfers—44 men and seven women—are taking part in the 54-hole tournament organised jointly by the Nepal Golf Association and Nepal Tourism Board. Top 30 players survived the cut, including 14 Nepali golfers. The cut was applied at 20-over 164.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Your emotions will feel more raw than usual. Be wary of unforeseen circumstances this afternoon. Lay low. You'll have a chance to reset this evening. You'll want to move slowly if any opportunities seem too good to be true.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

It is important that you watch your words today. Avoid the temptation to doom scroll your social media feeds this afternoon. Open your heart to love this evening. Try not to get wrapped up in issues that don't concern you.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

You may feel slightly unsteady this morning. Tap into your gratitude while finding ways to reinforce yourself. Standing firm in your disposition could feel exhausting this afternoon. Do something nice for your body later tonight, and eat a well-balanced meal.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Your emotions may feel strained this morning. Try not to take your frustrations out on those around you. Carve out some time for meditation this. You'll feel more elevated and playful as evening rolls around, but avoid tense power dynamics.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

You might not feel very social or warm this morning. Consider prioritizing solitude over socializing. Miscommunications or confusion could manifest, but don't let this prevent you from moving forward. Be on guard for tension within your love life this evening.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Don't let your electronic devices take you away from the present this morning. Take care to acknowledge the beauty around you. However, stay on guard when for companions with a history of lying. Plan on socializing a bit this evening.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Set firm boundaries this morning. Though this will make you uncomfortable, do not sacrifice your needs right now. You will feel exhausted or overwhelmed this afternoon. Luckily, you'll have a chance to reset and unwind in the evening.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Turn to your higher power for comfort this morning. Inspired ideas will flood your psyche, but they can slip away, so be sure to take notes and follow through on them. You'll begin to perk up as evening rolls.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Your social media pages may feel more negative than positive this morning. Avoid investing in unproductive arguments. Allow yourself to take it easy this afternoon, escape into the comfort of your own home. Privacy will become a priority this evening.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

You may feel as though your commitments have left you stretched thin. Prioritize your personal harmony, even if it disappoints those around you. Watch out for deception this evening. You'll be drawn to your social media feed late at night.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

A disconnect between dreams and reality could trouble you this morning. Disorganization could cause you to feel stretched thin. Watch your spending this afternoon, don't overlook upcoming expenses. You'll need to maintain a healthy sense of empowerment this evening.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Watch out for possessive behaviors within yourself and others this morning. Be wary of false friendliness this afternoon, especially from a competitor. Positive affirmations can help you overcome self-doubt. Don't allow failures from the past to conjure new fears.

CROSSWORD

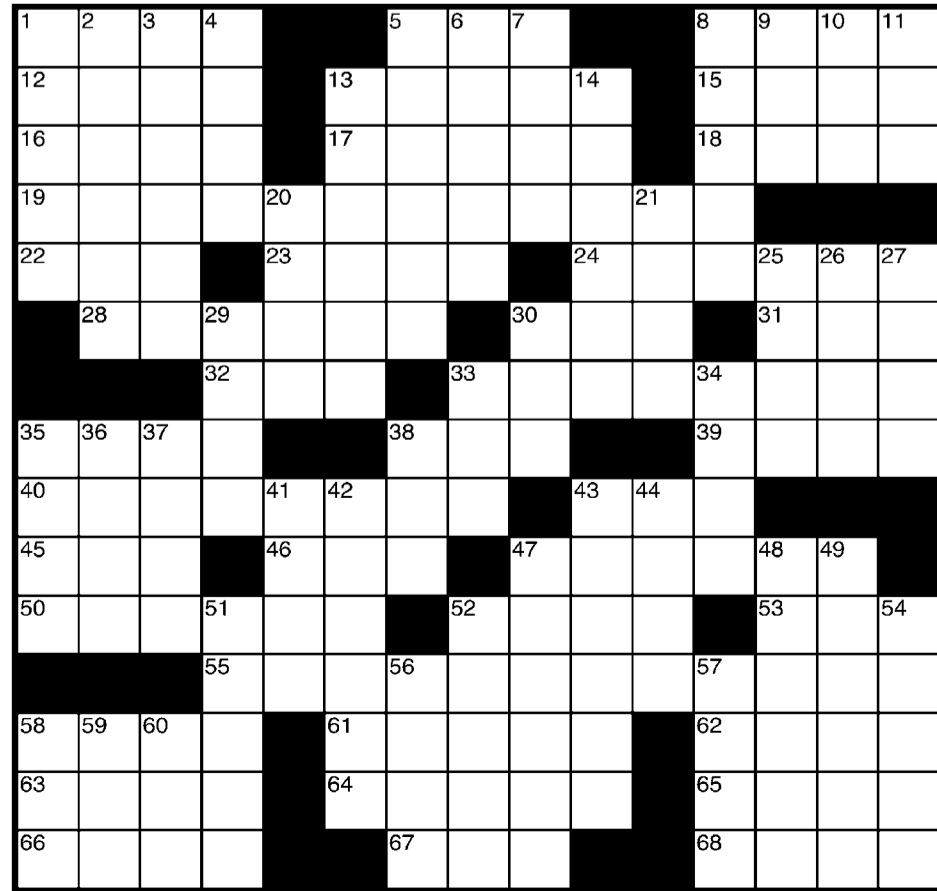
- ACROSS**
- Toad relative (2 wds.)
 - DDE successor
 - Baby elephant
 - "Dr. Zhivago" role
 - Ski equipment
 - Kitchen staple
 - Face sketcher's start
 - Bedside noise
 - Just for guys
 - Unruly
 - Each and every
 - Hula accompaniment
 - Consequence
 - Kind of agent
 - Harper Valley org.
 - Aussie jumper
 - Granted approval
 - Accelerator (2 wds.)
 - Layered cookie
 - Costa — Sol
 - Old Norse poem
 - Table
 - Baron — Munchausens
 - Ref's kin
 - Levin or Gershwin
 - Warning
 - Dangerous job
 - Mucho money
 - Alamos

- DOWN**
- Goddess of flowers
 - Becomes frayed
 - Soothsayer
 - Benefit, often
 - Illinois city
 - Ladies' casuals
 - "The Galloping Gourmet"
 - Prices
 - Neighbor of CTRL
 - Grassy field
 - Pea soup
 - Bundle
 - Stings
 - Entice
 - Least-varying tide
 - Karachi language
 - Temporary gift
 - Painted tinware

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



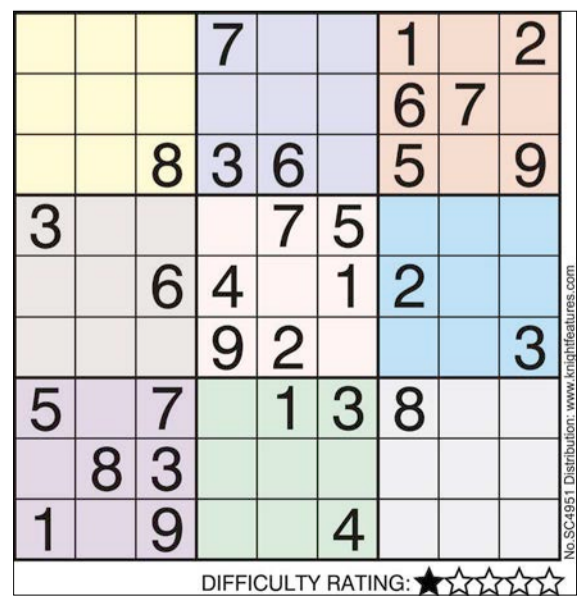
- 5-31-23 © 2023 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS
- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 29 Coagulate | 48 Recess |
| 30 Soulmate | 49 Barnstormed |
| 33 "Goshi!" | 51 Likeness |
| 34 Bird of prey | 52 Less polluted |
| 35 Comics penguin | 54 Marina sights |
| 36 Frisk about | 56 Cloy |
| 37 Spot | 57 Chew |
| 38 Forensic science tool | 58 Deli units |
| 41 Needle dropper | 59 Geologic division |
| 42 Gills and lungs | 60 Woosnam of golf |
| 43 Traveling bag | |
| 44 Kitchen appliance | |
| 47 Hoop | |



SUDOKU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

'Tulkee': A woman's pain is not a plot device

Sorry folks, putting a female character through the worst possible circumstances to say, 'Oh no! Bad things happen to women,' isn't good storytelling.



Swostima Karki as the eponymous Tulkee in a still from the film.

URZA ACHARYA
KATHMANDU

Some movies are bad. You know, dense dialogues, flaky plot, bad acting. But they're fun to deconstruct or hate-watch. Think 'The Room' or 'Mrs Serial Killer.' But some movies are dangerous. They're so cruel, detached, and painful to watch that you're left with a sense of dread—over what happens in the story, but mostly over how this particular film even made it to the screens—with so many people on board.



'Tulkee' was the latter. Even as I write this review, I've blocked a part of my mind from feeling things, afraid I'll internalise what I saw on screen. The story follows the life of 'Tulkee—a Bramhin girl born and brought up in a village near Shey

Phoksundo Lake in Dolpa.

And boy, does she have a hard life. No, hard won't cut it. The writer wanted to make sure that she should suffer, suffer and suffer some more. Let me tell you the story (spoiler alert, I guess): Tulkee's mother dies when she is young, and her father brings home the 'evil' stepmother. Sangey (the supposed hero) grabs her and forcefully takes her home, and now, because of the 'polyandry' tradition (per the cultural norm in Sangey's family), she is also married to two of his older brothers who, you guessed it, assault her on marital grounds.

As if this wasn't enough, she is assaulted once more by a neighbour and then blamed for having an affair. One of the brothers kills Sangey, the only husband that actually cared for her, and then (while pregnant and literally chained up) she kills her perpetrators and herself by drinking poison (which was so conveniently available at that very moment).

This plot isn't just bad. It's dangerous. In the guise of telling a 'social story', the movie is just a facade to see a woman in pain—as evident by the lingering camera

angles after Tulkee is raped. 'Fridging' is a term used for a trope in films where a woman is either killed, raped or brutalised just to move a male character's story arc forward. The term comes from an episode of the Green Lantern comic where the superhero finds his girlfriend chopped up and put in the fridge and only then finds the energy to fight the villain.

The film shows the characters—especially the men—to be so barbaric it's next to impossible to understand their actions.

The same thing happens in 'Tulkee'. Although Tulkee goes through the worst horrors possible, it's Sangey who gets multiple scenes where he walks up to the hills and yells loudly because he's so much in pain having to 'share' his wife. In fact, when he comes home after that, it is

Tulkee who comforts him.

The film is misinformed in so many aspects. The 'love story' comes out of nowhere. During her menstruation-banned walk, Tulkee briefly sees Sangey, and voila, a smile from both implies that they are head-over-heels.

Yes, I get it Nepali films want to show societal truth. This film's narrative seems to shed light on the polyandry tradition prevalent among some communities in the Himalayan Region. And, of course, the ways in which the women suffer because of it. To people who say, "This was what it was like back then," if it really was this bad, I'm sure no women would be left in the villages. I mean, there's only so much someone can take.

I think we owe it to our ancestors, both men and women, to have some form of rationality and morality. The film shows the characters—especially the men—to be so barbaric it's next to impossible to understand their actions by saying, "It was the sign of the times." And the women are so passive—either too pure and innocent or too conniving—that it's clear that they are manufactured by the male gaze,

in this case, of the writer and the director. It gets tiring at times. Things have become so normalised that women get smaller transgressions pass because they don't want to seem "difficult." But then you see a movie that is so cruel—in the name of showing women's plight—that it leaves you empty and terrified. That is what I felt.

Clearly, a lot of time and money went into making this film. The director, writer, actors and producers must have had some rationale for making the film, which has clearly evaded me. But in the end, their rationale doesn't matter. Because the minute you put it out for others to see (the author is dead, they say), the story is carried on by audiences' perceptions and judgement. And the message 'Tulkee' puts out is a distressing one.

While watching the film, I recalled an incident in a film studies class; a film director (a woman) said, "Dear men! Please stop making movies about us." Somedays, I can't help but agree.



Tulkee
Language: Nepali
Duration: 2 hours 14 minutes
Director: Dev Thapa
Cast: Sisir Bangdel, Som Lama, Swostima Karki, Himali Hamal, Shekhar Lama
Released: May 26
Now showing: One cinemas, QFX cinemas

Embracing the gym for optimal fitness

Rajan Munikar from I Fit Nepal explains the importance and benefits of joining a gym.

RUKUSHA GIRI
KATHMANDU

In today's digital era, where information flows freely at our fingertips, it's easy to assume that we have all the knowledge and resources we need to achieve our fitness goals. With countless workout videos, nutrition advice, and fitness apps readily available online, one might question the necessity of joining a gym. However, amidst this sea of virtual fitness guidance, there remains an irreplaceable allure to the brick-and-mortar establishments we call gyms.



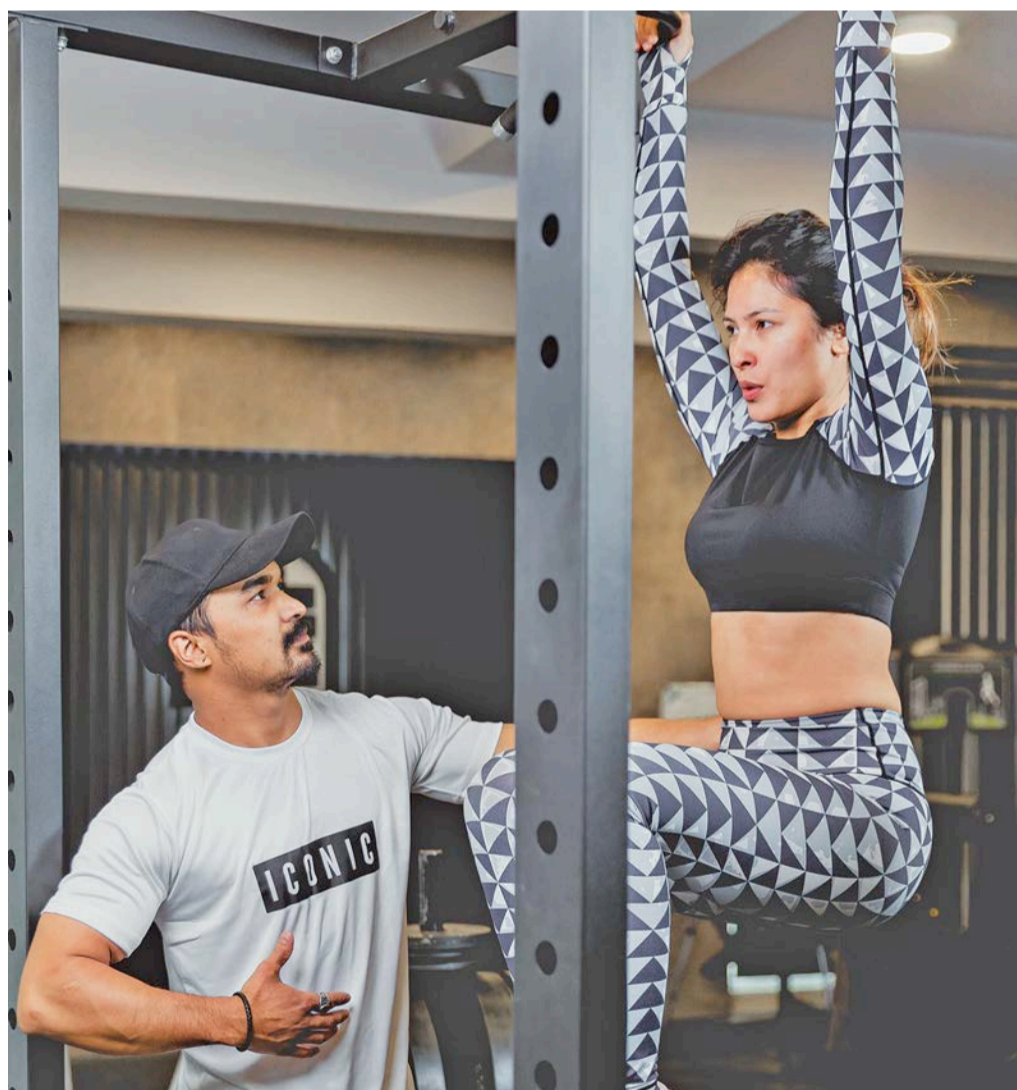
Fitness instructor and founder of the newly launched private gym I Fit Nepal, **Rajan Munikar**, tells us why joining the gym continues to hold immense value, even in an age dominated by online fitness information.

When you first join a gym

If you want to succeed in your fitness journey, choose a gym that fits your goals and preferences. Opting for the gym can motivate you to achieve your goals. Neglecting your physical health can lead to a sedentary lifestyle, so prioritising exercise is essential.

Starting a new workout routine can be tough on your body, and you may initially experience soreness and discomfort. But, by selecting a newly opened gym or choosing a well-maintained gym, you can be confident that all equipment and facilities are sanitised and hygienic, ensuring a safe and healthy environment for your fitness journey. So, why wait? Give it a try and see the results for yourself!

Going to the gym is an individual experience, as everyone has unique goals and training preferences. For beginners, the two-three years of going to the gym can be transformative, with noticeable body changes. However, after this initial period, the body can plateau and stop responding to the same intensity exercises that were previously effective. This can make people overly fixated on the gym and need to remember their original goals. This is especially true for young people who can become obsessed with the gym after seeing the visible transformations in their bodies.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF RAJAN MUNIKAR

Training to-dos

While the gym is an essential part of your fitness practice, you shouldn't depend on it completely to reach your fitness goals. You should also follow a diet that will complement your training.

I would suggest you to visit the gym at least two times a week. Try to focus on different muscle groups and not just a single part. Then consult with your trainer or a dietician/nutritionist and tweak your food intake slowly according to your bodily and fitness needs.

Air bikes are excellent for those looking to burn fat; they will improve your athletic performance and, most importantly, your cardiovascular health. These bikes go beyond the typical stationary bike, providing a full-body workout with variable resistance that will challenge your cardio and muscular endurance to the fullest, leading to real and noticeable gains in your fitness level. But keep in mind that this is a challenging exercise.

Similarly, a squat rack is strength equipment that can help improve your squats. Increase the weights as you get more used to the exercise. The squat rack can also help you better your back and front squats, barbell lunges, shelf pulls, and pressing movements.

The leg press is another one of my go-to machines. It is just as effective as squats to build your quads. It offers several benefits, one of them being, it allows you to add more weight than you

can handle with squats. Additionally, because you're braced against a pad, you don't have to worry about stabilising the load, so you can focus solely on pushing it for as many reps as possible without injuring yourself. The leg press is an excellent tool for anyone looking to push more weight than with squats and develop more control in their legs.

Why join the gym?

Going to the gym is a great way to improve your athletic performance, mental health and lose excess fat. Also, being healthy is not just about losing excess fat but also being mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially healthy. Joining the gym will teach you how to balance your life and stay active.

Joining the gym will help you stay consistent with your workouts. You've already paid for your subscription, so you're more likely to show up to the workout sessions.

Also, it's always good to have a professional overlook your movements to make sure you are not doing anything wrong and hurting yourself.

However, remember the added benefits of boosting confidence and having glowing skin that come with a regular gym routine. At my gym, I have a board where clients can track their progress and see how far they've come. Ultimately, the goal is to focus on being healthy and feeling your best.



MY PODCAST PICKS



Anjon Limbu

Limbu is the founder, director and senior colourist of Stellar Studios. He has been working in the media production industry since 2016.

>> VIEWS with David Dobrik and Jason Nash

This podcast, which has released 220 episodes so far, was started six years ago by David Dobrik and Jason Nash. The hosts take us behind-the-scenes on their lives off-screen and share unfiltered thoughts on different topics.

As a long-time fan of David Dobrik, I find enjoy his podcast. I feel a sense of nostalgia when I listen to his adventures. It teleports me to the time Dobrik was big on YouTube and I used to watch his videos routinely.



>> The Joe Rogan Experience

The Joe Rogan Experience has been on the air for 13 years and has a total of 2198 episodes aired to date. Joe Rogan, has a huge variety of guests from different backgrounds who give fascinating perspectives and diverse worldviews.

As a listener, I appreciate the opportunity to learn about new subjects, expand my knowledge, and gain a deeper understanding of things from these diverse perspectives.

>> Waqas Qazi

Started in 2019, YouTuber Waqas Qazi has put out a total of 76 episodes to date. This is the podcast where one can sharpen their technical skills and learn to become profitable as filmmakers.

As a colorist working in the film-making industry, I constantly strive to enhance my skills and stay up to date with the latest trends. This podcast is a valuable resource for me. Qazi teaches me new techniques, practical insights, and helps me discover innovative approaches to my craft.



>> The No Film School Podcast

The No Film School Podcast serves as a treasure trove of insightful discussions, interviews, and practical advice from industry experts. The show has released 675 episodes to date.

As a self-taught filmmaker, I have always looked to No Film School as a reliable source of inspiration and knowledge. Listening to this podcast empowers me to pursue my passion with renewed enthusiasm.