



NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Protest over court order to delay enforcement of citizenship law

**BIRGUNJ:** The local youths in Birgunj staged demonstrations on Monday to protest against the Supreme Court’s order not to enforce the new amendments to the Citizenship Act. The protest was organised by a struggle committee of the people without citizenship. The protesters chanted slogans against the political parties and their leaders opposed to the new amendments of the Citizenship Act. The Supreme Court on Sunday issued an interlocutory interim order asking the authorities not to enforce the new amendments to the Citizenship Act that were authenticated by President Ramchandra Paudel last week.

Death toll in Palpa jeep crash reaches five

**PALPA:** The death toll in Sunday’s Palpa jeep accident has reached five. Two critically injured passengers succumbed to their injuries while undergoing treatment on Monday, according to the District Police Office. Three people had died on the spot when the Arghakhanchi bound jeep swerved off the road and plunged around 70 metres at Rainadebi Chhahara Rural Municipality-8 of Palpa district on Sunday. Ten injured are receiving treatment in various health institutions in Rupandehi district.

Woman held on charge of murdering husband

**PARASI:** Police have arrested a woman from Ramgram Municipality-14 in West Nawalparasi on the charge of murdering her husband. Hasibun Nisha of Parsawal allegedly murdered her husband Abdul Naseem on Thursday night. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Bhojraj Pandey, the victim’s body was found buried in a field with a USB cable wrapped around the neck. Nisha was accompanied by an Indian national in committing the crime, said police. Preliminary police investigation shows that the perpetrators were in a relationship for the past two years. It is suspected that they planned the murder after Naseem came to know about their relationship. The other accused is on the run.

Girl drowns in West Nawalparasi

**WEST NAWALPARASI:** A girl drowned in a pond at Ramgram Municipality of West Nawalparasi district on Sunday. According to police, an 11-year-old drowned in a local fish pond in Naduwa. Police informed that the victim and her sister, daughters of Lekhraj Khatri, a resident of Naduwa and originally from Khotang, had gone to the pond for swimming. Deputy Superintendent of Police Bhojraj Pandey of the District Police Office said that both the girls were taken to Prithvi Chandra Hospital for treatment, but the 11-year-old died while undergoing treatment. The other sister has been referred to Bhairahawa Medical College for further treatment.

Students protest demanding subject teachers

**DOLAKHA:** Students of Sharada Secondary School in Bigu Rural Municipality-3, Dolakha have launched a protest after the school failed to fill four subject teacher positions for the past four months. The agitating students on Monday boycotted their classes demanding that new teachers be appointed immediately. Teacher appointment has been delayed in the school due to a long-running dispute between the principal and the school management committee.

नाम परिवर्तन गरिएको सूचना

प्रथम पटक प्रकाशित मिति: २०८०/०२/२३  
यस कम्पनीको मिति २०८०/०२/०९ मा सम्पन्न विविध साधारण सभाको निर्णय बमोजिम साविकको कम्पनी R.G. Design and Engineering Pvt. Ltd. को नाममा रहेको सम्पत्ति जल अवन समिति तथा तिनूने कर दायित्व आदि परिवर्तित नामको कम्पनीले सकर्ने ब्यहोने नामका सम्बन्धमा भ्रम सजना भई उजुरी परेमा संशोधन पुर्ण शर्तमा कम्पनी रविष्टार कार्यालयको मिति २०८०/०२/१० को निर्णय अनुसार साविकको नाम परिवर्तन गरी Krithiya Studio Pvt. Ltd कायम गरिएको जानकारी गराइन्छ ।

Nursing लाइसेन्स हरायो

मिति २०८०/०२/१८ भन्ने खजुरादेखि नेपालगन्ज भेरी अस्पतालसम्म जाँदा भेरी निम्न अनुसारको Nursing लाइसेन्स हराएको हुँदा पाउनु हुने महान्भावहरूले तलको ठेगाना वा नजिकको प्रहरी चौकीमा बुझाईदिनु हुन स-धन्यवाद सहित हार्दिक अनुरोध गर्दछु ।  
नाम: निलम श्रेष्ठ  
लाइसेन्स नं.: ३६५२४  
ठेगाना: आदर्शनगर-१०, नेपालगन्ज, बाँके  
सम्पर्क नं.: ८८४८०३५४७१

State neglect leaves Surkhet-Jumla section of Karnali Highway in dire condition

The 232-km stretch was last blacktopped in 2012 and annual repairs have been consistently shoddy.

TULARAM PANDEY  
KALIKOT, JUNE 5

The Surkhet-Jumla section of the Karnali Highway, which is considered the backbone of development in Karnali region, is in poor condition. The 232-km section was last blacktopped in 2012, but it is currently riddled with cracks and potholes. The blacktopping has peeled off in around 90 percent of the road stretch while several sections have been damaged by floods and landslides.

During elections, parties promise to upgrade the road, but quickly forget their pledges.

“The authorities concerned repair the road every year by hiring private-sector contractors. While millions of rupees are spent for the repair works, the road’s condition has not improved,” said Bijaya Bista, the former deputy mayor of Khadachakra Municipality in Kalikot. According to her, the repair work done by the Department of Roads is mostly shoddy, leaving the road accident-prone. She further complained that two under-construction bridges across the Jaksi stream of Dailekh district and the Takulla stream of Kalikot district have been left incomplete for the past 12 years mainly due to indifference of the authorities. The then prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala had laid the foundation for the highway in 1992, but the passage was opened only in 2007. The highway connects Surkhet, Dailekh, Kalikot, Jumla and Mugu districts with the national road network. The



A landslide-damaged section of the Surkhet-Jumla road pictured a few months ago.

residents of neighbouring Achham and Bajura districts also benefit from the road. The highway is a single-lane road about 5 metres wide. The government had asphalted only 4.5 metres (width of the road) with financial assistance from the World Bank. “The road is narrow. It is quite difficult for two vehicles to pass in the cliff areas, causing hours-long traffic jams,” said Padam Bishwakarma, a bus driver who operates on the highway regularly. Come federal and provincial elections, big political parties make ‘Upgrade of the Karnali Highway’ their main agenda. As they canvass for votes, they promise to widen the highway to two lanes and blacktop it. “But soon after the elections are over, the parties forget their campaign trail promises,” said Ramesh Nepali, a local of Khadachakra-2. He complained that the local people are disappointed as the budget for the upcoming fiscal year has also failed to

address the public demand for a road upgrade. A Jumla-bound passenger bus and a truck heading for Surkhet were stuck in the Chhahara cliff area of Kalikot on Tuesday last week. The road is too narrow to accommodate the passage of two vehicles simultaneously. “It caused a traffic jam for about three hours. We were supposed to reach Sinja (Jumla) on the same day, but had to stay in Manma, the district headquarters of Kalikot,” complained Jeevan Baduwal. The unseasonal rains in October last year caused damage in several places along the Surkhet-Jumla road stretch. The damaged roads are yet to be repaired. The locals said that the government has completely ignored the Karnali people and the highway. “Construction of the highway has greatly eased our life. However, the road has been quite rough with potholes and cracks. The government should repair and upgrade the road

immediately,” demanded Nabaraj Nepali of Tila Municipality-2 of Jumla district. Karnali Highway, which is infamously named ‘death trap’, is highly accident prone primarily due to lack of maintenance and periodic repairs. According to the Karnali Province Traffic Police Office, a total of 209 people have died since the highway came into operation in 2007. The floods and landslides triggered by rains last October badly damaged the road at Sunarkhola, Pili Serawada, Bali, Takulla among other places in Kalikot district. “Repair work is underway in the sections damaged by floods and landslides. Efforts are on to install a Bailey bridge across the Takulla stream. The work was in limbo for the past 12 years,” said Dipak Bista, chief at the Division Road Office in Jumla. He, however, said road widening work will not be possible this year due to the lack of budget.

Usury probe panel chief says court should be last resort

>> Continued from page 1  
The taskforce in Bara that received the highest number of complaints, is also preparing to invite both sides in order to settle disputes. “We will start inviting them in the next few days,” said Krishna Prasad Acharya, assistant chief district officer in Bara who is leading the taskforce. “If a dispute can be settled amicably, why make it a big court case?” He said that the taskforce would encourage settlement of disputes through the payment of the exact loan amount and an interest rate which is not more than what the banks charge. “Otherwise, the issue should be settled through a legal process, based on an ordinance issued in early May,” Acharya said. The ordinance, which was introduced on May 3, has criminalised loan sharking. It defines loan-sharking activities and specifies penalties to be imposed on the perpetrators. The ordinance defines loan sharking as activities like making victims sign a promissory note without any money being lent, mentioning higher amounts in the documents than what was actually lent, and preparing a promissory note by adding interest to the principal before lending. Likewise, other activities defined as loan sharking include not providing the receipt for the amount paid by the borrowers, threatening borrowers, exploiting them and seizing their properties based on inappropriate lending terms. The ordinance also has a provision of

jailing loan sharks for up to seven years along with a fine that can go as high as Rs70,000. As per the ordinance, if a loan shark has confiscated cash or property of the borrower, equivalent cash or property should be returned to the borrower. “If it is proved that the ownership of fixed assets of the borrower has been transferred in the name of a person nominated by the loan shark, such transfer becomes null and void,” says the ordinance. The ordinance has also amended the National Criminal Procedure (Code) Act-2017 to include a provision for prosecuting loan sharks under the anti-money laundering law. Despite the formation of an inquiry commission and introduction of the ordinance, victims have continued their sit-ins at Kathmandu’s Ratnapark for the past two months. “We are still protesting as we want to continue to build pressure on the government,” said Awadhesh Kushwaha, coordinator of the Farmers-Workers Struggle Committee against Loan Sharking and Frauds. He said the victims are asking for a justified settlement of their issues given that there are many whose loans have not been cleared despite paying multiple times more than what they actually received. He also commented on the efforts being made by the inquiry commission to settle disputes outside the courtroom, terming it a good decision. “The question, however, is how the commission determines whether the documents [promissory notes] presented by money lenders are real or fake, as they make different documents,” said Kushwaha. “How will it deal with a case where the loan shark has already seized the property of the victim through a court verdict that was based on a fake document?”

DeSantis is courting anti-Trump voters

>> Continued from page 1  
Trump dominates the field among potential Republican primary voters with 49% support and DeSantis next with 19%. There is a yawning chasm between the front-runners and the rest of the field: Pence has just 5% backing, while former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley has 4%, according to the latest Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll conducted in May. Others are barely registering at all. Christie has just 1% backing him, as does U.S. Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, while former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, who declared in April, has 0%.

WHY LONG SHOTS ARE STILL JUMPING IN  
A casual observer might ask why candidates with such low poll numbers are jumping into a race that already has a clear front-runner early on. “Most get in because they truly think they have a chance of winning the nomination,” said Oscar Brock, a Republican National Committee member from Tennessee. Some know they cannot win, said John Feehery, a Republican strategist, but they might be angling for a cabinet position, or hoping to join the ticket of the eventual nominee as the vice presidential candidate, or simply looking for 15 minutes of fame to secure a book deal. Long shots have also emerged from nowhere to win past nominating fights, Feehery noted, including



US ex-vice president Mike Pence, who is also eying presidency, speaking in Iowa, US in April.

Democrat Jimmy Carter in 1976 and Trump, who was polling at just 4% when he announced his candidacy in June 2015. Many may have also decided to enter the 2024 race because of the perceived vulnerabilities of the two front runners, Feehery said. Trump faces potential indictments for withholding classified documents and seeking to overturn the results of the 2020 election, while DeSantis is trying to regain his footing after losing ground

in opinion polls. “These candidates who are striving to be the alternative see DeSantis continue to stumble and fumble. And they say, ‘Well, why couldn’t that be me?’” said Jason Miller, a senior Trump adviser. Perhaps with an eye on the soon-to-expand field, DeSantis finally began punching back against Trump on the campaign trail last week after weathering an onslaught of attacks from his former ally for months.



Devotees burning votive butter lamps during Saga Dawa, a holy month in Buddhist calendar, at Bhagawanpau at Swayambhu on Monday. Gautam Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment during this month over 2,500 years ago.



OPINION



# Beyond the optics

India will struggle to win Nepali hearts unless it is seen as working in Nepal's interest.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s four-day official India visit was a mixed bag. In terms of commitments, Nepal got a lot. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi publicly committed to importing 10,000MW of Nepali energy in the next 10 years. Work on the long-pending Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project is to be expedited. Prime Minister Modi even committed to resolving the rather thorny border issues. A host of other agreements to increase connectivity were announced. Moreover, the agreement on power export to Bangladesh via India could ultimately be a game-changer for Nepal’s economy. Even if a fraction of these commitments are realised, Nepal stands to gain immensely. Yet it is also hard to hide the disappointment of a lack of progress on the most important issues for Nepal. The biggest of these concerned getting an additional air entry route for the functionality of the two new international airports in Pokhara and Bhairahawa. Despite the two countries discussing the high-altitude entry route for over a decade, India keeps giving the same excuse that it needs more time to settle what is a ‘technical’ matter.

The other big disappointment was the failure of the Nepali side to even broach the final report of the Eminent Persons Group. Unless the issue gets some kind of a safe-landing, it will keep acting as a niggle in Nepal-India relations. If India had no intention of receiving the final report, why was such an elaborate mechanism involving some of the best minds in the two countries set up, to start with? One curious matter that cropped up during Dahal-Modi discussions was ‘land swap’. The idea is: if there cannot be an agreement on, say, Kalapani, Nepal will cede the area to India in return for a passage to Bangladesh through India’s ‘chicken’s neck’ Siliguri corridor. The Nepali opposition parties have already made much hullabaloo about this in the Parliament. We believe all options to resolve boundary disputes must be openly discussed. As PM Dahal has put it, and rightly so for once, unless Kalapani is first settled, Nepal-India relations will continue to be rocky. Additionally, the transit treaty was renewed and a new deal on a cross-border digital payment system was signed.

So was the prime minister’s India visit a success or a failure? Time will tell. A lot depends on India’s willingness to follow through on its pledges. But more than that, India will find it hard to create a space in Nepali hearts and minds unless it is seen as working in the interest of its smaller neighbour. Giving an additional high-altitude air-route would, for instance, be an unmistakable sign of friendship and goodwill towards Nepal. India must be ready to help Nepal on the latter’s terms rather than expecting Nepalis to appreciate them all. We also hope that Prime Minister Dahal will prove his critics—who argue that the visit was no more than an exercise to get New Delhi’s blessings for his premiership—wrong. The basis to judge this will be his ability one, to hold India accountable on the agreements and understandings made during the visit and two, to dexterously use Nepal’s diplomatic channels to keep pressing the southern neighbour on a final settlement of vital matters like the EPG, the air-entry route and seamless third-country trade and travel rights.

## THEIR VIEW

### Answers for failed policies

Power outages often occur despite the government boasting about its power sector policies.

As the ongoing heatwave gets worse, the country’s power shortage is unfortunately showing no signs of improvement. In fact, it is likely to get worse as the Payra power plant is going to shut down completely—currently, one of its units is out of operation—after June 5 due to a coal crisis. According to the State Minister for Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources, Nasrul Hamid, power outages have increased alarmingly due to the shutdowns of several power plants. The government is struggling to import fuel for these power plants. So, even though it increased the country’s power generation capacity to 23,370 MW—more than the real demand—what it is actually capable of producing at present is much less (around 11,753 MW during peak hours on Saturday, for example) than what is necessary. This is a perfect example of the poor planning and policies the government has pursued over the years in regards to the power sector.

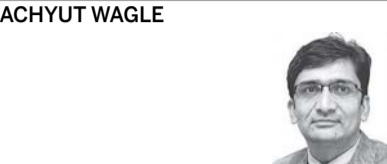
Residents of Dhaka city have been complaining about their extreme suffering amidst frequent power cuts as the temperature rose to 37 degrees Celsius on Saturday. In many areas of the capital, power outages have been occurring seven times or more, and both during the daytime and at night. As a result, children and adults have been falling sick, and hospitals across the country have been struggling to operate. Industries are also being affected badly and are facing production losses. People living in rural areas are doing even worse, as they are reportedly getting electricity for only five to six hours a day.

It is shocking that after boasting so strongly about their power sector policies, government officials have brought the sector to such a disastrous state. How can the power ministry allow the plants to close over its failure to pay the coal bills? Simultaneously, the government has allowed for huge amounts of payments to be made to idle power plants in the form of capacity charges. So, while on one hand the people were made to foot that bill, on the other, it is they who are also being made to suffer through these frequent power outages. The energy minister in particular, and the government in general, must answer for this.

—The Daily Star (Bangladesh)/ANN

# Saffronisation of Dahal’s diplomacy

The India visit has opened up prospects for the integration of Nepali and Indian economies.



Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal tangibly exuded a sense of achievement and content upon landing at Kathmandu airport on Saturday after completing a four-day official visit to India. Even before embarking on the trip, he seemed to have decided to be pragmatic and focus on economic issues instead of getting entangled in drawn out issues like the Kalapani-Limpiyadhura border dispute. His single political objective was to win the “personal” confidence of his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi. However, it was difficult to decipher whether his smugness was due to having clinched critical economic deals or projected his new *avatar* as a conservative Hindu venerating Lord Shiva on camera. Both these facets have their own ramifications in national politics.

Despite the harsh criticism of the operational and protocol aspects of Dahal’s Delhi junket, it has opened up prospects of the integration of the Nepali and Indian economies. Out of four items on the economic agenda, three seemed to have been resolved amicably. First, the Nepal-India transit treaty has been renewed and the way has been opened for the use of waterways for the transportation of goods.

**Oil pipelines**  
Second, the power trade agreement enabling Nepal to export up to 10,000 megawatts to India in the next 10 years is an important milestone, even though it has expected a 25-year deal. More importantly, India’s nod for the commencement of wheeling service to export 50 megawatts to Bangladesh via Indian transmission lines opens up prospects for Nepal to trade power in the subcontinent.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF PRIME MINISTER’S SECRETARIAT

But the pact to construct two oil pipelines—Siliguri-Kakarbhitta and Amlekhgunj-Chitwan—is contradictory. Nepal will need at least 15,000 megawatts to replace gas burning cooking stoves. The pipeline projects are also anachronistic in light of the increased global emphasis on replacing fossil fuels. Nepal will need a significantly higher amount of electricity for a moderate level of industrialisation, urbanisation and green transport infrastructure. Also, the electricity produced in Nepal can easily be consumed domestically for several decades to come.

If the whole idea of exporting electricity is to offset the ever-ballooning trade deficit, this can be better addressed by substituting imported petroleum products with hydropower. Nevertheless, presenting evidence of a readily available export market for Nepal’s electricity may encourage investors to put money in hydropower development. Therefore, the power trade agreements need not necessarily be portrayed as an achievement of Dahal’s visit. Nepal needs to emerge out of the confusion over its policy on energy production, consumption and energy mix.

Third, signing a memorandum of understanding for cross-border digital payment between Nepal Clearing House and National Payment Corporation of India is an important step towards inte-

grating the Nepali and Indian economies formally. In fact, the two economies are quite well integrated informally. For example, Indian currency notes of Rs500 and higher denominations are illegal in Nepal. But the informal market accepts notes of any denomination and in any amount, and billions of rupees worth of notes are in circulation in the Nepali market. The impractical restriction on carrying high denomination notes has only made things difficult for tourists, students and pilgrims on either side of the border.

Considering the fact that two-thirds of Nepal’s international trade is conducted with India, it makes sense to facilitate payment through digital platforms. Such payments are transparent and traceable and happen in real time. The system should support businesses in both countries. But there are people in policymaking circles and businesses working to block this process from coming into operation. There are orthodox regulators who think that digital payment gateways will drain out Nepal’s foreign currency reserves in no time. Businesses that have thrived by using non-transparent payment transfers and engaging in blatant under-invoicing of imported goods wish to subvert the entire plan.

The fourth expectation of the prime minister to convince Indian authorities to grant an air entry route from the

westernmost Nepali city of Mahendranagar did not materialise. For lack of a direct route, Nepal’s newly constructed Gautam Buddha International Airport in Bhairahawa is facing challenges to attract international airlines.

**The saffron hiccup**  
To the great astonishment of many, the prime minister and his entourage took time out to be in the company of Hindu preachers and ascetics widely labelled as the “saffron brigade”. Draped in saffron *dhotis*, Dahal and six cabinet ministers, including those who were supposedly indoctrinated in Mao Tse-tung’s Cultural Revolution, participated in Hindu rituals, and were even seen bowing to a young *guru* who was seated higher than them.

The political or diplomatic rationale behind the prime minister’s participation in such events could hardly be established except for expressing cultural allegiance to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party’s predominantly right-wing Hindutva politics. Back home, in Nepal’s domestic politics, the saffronisation adventure of Maoist “atheists” certainly will enthuse those who want to replace the constitutional provision of “secularism” with the declaration of Nepal as a “Hindu state”. Thus, it was an unnecessary hiccup in Dahal’s Delhi diplomacy.

# A budget amid economic slowdown

Achieving revenue target to meet expenditure needs will continue to be challenging.



Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat presented the budget for the next fiscal year 2023-24 against the backdrop of weak aggregate demand, slowdown in revenue mobilisation, high inflation, low demand for credit, stabilising external sector, and low confidence in the private sector. Political constraints in expenditure allocation for certain schemes aside, the budget has tried to address the core economic issues while maintaining fiscal discipline. It also attempts to reorient economic reforms to finetune public service delivery and to enhance private sector confidence.

As with previous budgets, the main

ed that the real gross domestic product (GDP) will grow by just 1.9 percent in 2022-23, much lower than the 5.6 percent in 2021-22 and the government’s initial target of 8 percent. This was mostly due to tight fiscal and monetary policies that slowed public spending and credit disbursement.

Accordingly, both public and private demand fell. The private sector complained of factory closures, issues in cash flow management, and decreased capacity utilisation. The slowdown was stark in the first two quarters of 2022-23, as seasonally adjusted quarterly GDP data pointed to two consecutive quarters of economic contraction. The lower growth projection was attributed to a contraction in manufacturing, construction, and retail and wholesale trade activities, which together account for about 28 percent of GDP.

Given the dilemma of boosting aggregate demand amidst the limited fiscal space and spending capacity, the finance minister took a balanced approach. The expenditure outlay is Rs1751.3 billion, which is 16.4 percent higher than the revised estimate but 2.4 percent lower than the budget estimate for 2022-23. Of the total expenditure outlay, 65.2 percent is for recurrent expenses, 17.3 percent for capital expenditure, and 17.5 percent for

ations as well. For instance, the government has decided to either close or merge 20 offices and boards that are not relevant or have identical roles and functions. It has committed to not purchasing new vehicles, curbing the construction of new buildings and foreign trips, and providing cash to entitled officials instead of fuel allowance.

The finance minister has committed to overhauling contract management to boost capital spending, reviewing the viability of public enterprises to save resources, lowering fiscal risk, and promoting fiscal federalism, including restructuring Town Development Fund. However, succumbing to political pressure, he has revived the controversial constituency development fund, which was rife with governance issues.

**Four issues**  
The expenditure plan and reform agenda of the government are broadly in line with the evolving macroeconomic situation and the direction of reforms needed to address them. However, this was also generally true of most previous budgets. They simply could not deliver as promised, owing to implementation shortfalls. Four issues will be particularly important for improved budget execution and the realisation of committed reforms.



POST PHOTO

hurdle will be on the implementation of the promises as they are easier to make than deliver on time with the current state of bureaucracy and politics. This will be particularly true for higher capital budget execution and meeting the revenue target.

**Balancing act**  
A few weeks before the finance minister delivered his budget speech, the National Statistics Office released national accounts estimates that detailed a surprisingly unexpected level of economic slowdown. It estimat-

First, achieving revenue target to meet expenditure needs will continue to be challenging. The budget targets revenue growth of around 20 percent over the revised estimate for 2022-23, which looks ambitious given that economic activities have still not picked up pace and private sector confidence continues to be weak. The last time revenue growth was this high was in 2016-17. The focus on marginal increases in most tax rates is in most categories but not on improving tax administration with concrete measures to boost efficiency gains may require reconsid-

eration if monthly targets are not as per expectation.

The budget estimates tax changes and administrative reforms to contribute just 6.4 percent of the total estimated revenue, implying that most of the expected increase in revenue will be through existing measures and sources. Revenue buoyancy, which refers to revenue growth relative to nominal GDP growth, of about 2 percent is also not realistic. In fact, the upward revision of tax rates may discourage private sector investment and dampen consumer demand. It will also put upward pressure on inflation.

Second, enhancing capital budget execution is going to be the key in boosting aggregate demand. Public capital spending affects construction, mining and quarrying, and manufacturing sectors, which are currently performing poorly. It also indirectly affects a few key activities in the services sector.

While higher capital spending allocation compared to the revised estimates is encouraging, the government should come up with a concrete, enforceable implementation plan that decisively tackles three key issues that are contributing to a chronically low capital budget absorption rate: Bureaucratic delays (project approval delays and weak inter- and intra-ministry coordination), structural weaknesses (limited planning and implementation capacity, weak contract management, and delayed procurement), and allocative inefficiency (lack of project readiness and the lack of a strong pipeline of bankable projects). The capital budget absorption rate was just 57.2 percent last fiscal and is estimated to be about 68 percent this fiscal.

Third, the allocation for financing provision (5.2 percent of GDP) has drastically increased in 2023-24, and is also slightly higher than the capital budget. To make room for more capital spending, it needs to be decreased gradually. Increasing government share and loan investment in public enterprises and amortisation of external and internal borrowings are driving expenses in this category. A judicious fiscal and debt management and cash flow strategy is required to control the rising public borrowing. Note that outstanding public debt is over 42 percent of GDP, up from just 23.8 percent in 2016-17.

Finally, constant engagement with the private sector to enhance their confidence is vital. While the budget commits to introducing several private sector-friendly reforms—lower export requirements for firms operating inside special economic zones, lower cost of company registration and simple entry and exit rules, removal of foreign investment threshold in the IT sector, and promotion of micro, small and medium enterprises—the private sector itself is not fully convinced.

Sapkota is an economist.


FOREX

US Dollar	132.58
Euro	141.73
Pound Sterling	164.25
Swiss Franc	145.43
Australian Dollar	87.34
Canadian Dollar	98.59
Singapore Dollar	98.04
Japanese Yen (10)	9.45
Chinese Yuan	18.62
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.35
Qatari Riyal	36.36
Thai Bhat	3.80
UAE Dhiram	36.10
Malaysian Ringit	28.96
Korean Won (100)	10.15

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES						
Nepse (in percent) 1,901.99pts -0.91%						
HIGHEST LOSERS						
SHVM	JOSHI	MERO	KMCDB	BARUN	PPL	
-4.5	-4.34	-4.3	-4.17	-4.05	-3.47	
MODERATE LOSERS						
MKHC	AHL	GFCL	CHL	CORBL	HURJA	
-3.38	-3.32	-3.12	-3.11	-2.96	-2.92	
MODERATE GAINERS						
MKLB	SDB087	MAKAR	CHCL	BPCL	SPL	
2	2	2.35	2.43	3.19	3.67	
HIGHEST GAINERS						
IGI	MLBS	BPW	GULF	GIBF1	RPPL	
3.7	3.84	4.02	5.22	5.88	10	

BULLION

	PRICE PER TOLA
 Fine Gold	Rs 111,600
 Silver	Rs 1,415

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Standard Chartered Bank conducts blockchain knowledge sharing session for central bank



**KATHMANDU:** Standard Chartered Bank Nepal Ltd in partnership with Contour, a digital trade finance network, arranged a Blockchain knowledge sharing session for Nepal Rastra Bank on Friday. During the programme, benefits of Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT), its use cases and how it can help trade finance by removing the inefficiencies of the current system were discussed. During the programme, benefits of Distributed Ledger Technology, its use cases and how it can help trade finance by removing the inefficiencies of the current system were discussed, reads the press release issued by the bank. **(PR)**

BYD plants 1,500 trees on World Environment Day



**KATHMANDU:** Cimex Inc, the authorised distributor of BYD in Nepal, has planted 1500 trees on the occasion of World Environment Day. The ‘Building Dreams & Forest’ initiative is an afforestation drive campaign in collaboration with the Revolution Project. The campaign aligns with BYD’s vision to ‘Cool the Earth by One Degree’ while reforesting an area at Chakhandol Community Forest in Kathmandu. By taking this initiative, Cimex seeks to mitigate the adverse effects of air pollution in Kathmandu, which has long grappled with the harmful consequences of environmental degradation. All of the 1500 trees were grown in Modern Research Nursery, Kageshwori Manohara and are native to Chakhandol Community Forest. **(PR)**

Qatar minister picked to head UN labour conference

**GENEVA:** Qatar’s labour minister was on Monday appointed without a vote to head the International Labour Organisation’s annual decision-making conference, despite criticism from some unions amid concerns over labour conditions in Qatar. Asian and Pacific nations, which according to a regional rotation had dibs this year on selecting the president of the two-week International Labour Conference, had proposed Ali Bin Samikh Al-Marri. Usually, such picks are approved by acclamation, but this year, some unions had called for a vote, deeming that continued concerns around labour conditions in Qatar raised questions about the suitability of having a Qatari minister in the post. **(AFP)**

INTERVIEW

‘We can share technology in mountaineering tourism’



POST PHOTO: KESHAV THAPA

Vincenzo De Luca, the Italian ambassador to Nepal and India.

**Vincenzo De Luca** is the Italian ambassador to Nepal and India. He is a member of the Italian Democratic Party, and has served as President of the Campania region and also as one of Italy’s longest serving mayors. Currently, he’s on a campaign to promote relations between Nepal and Italy through economic and cultural cooperation. The Italian capital Rome is one of the candidates to host World Expo 2030, and De Luca wants the Nepal government and the private sector to support the bid. The Post’s **Subin Adhikari** caught up with De Luca to talk about Nepal-Italy ties. Excerpts:

**Nepal and Italy established diplomatic relations in 1959, and Nepal has been participating in trade exhibitions in Italy since then. But Nepali goods haven’t been able to attract buyers there. What is the reason for that?**

Bilateral trade between Italy and Nepal has grown substantially in the last couple of years. We had 34 million euros worth of bilateral trade in 2022, which is double that of 2021. To promote trade between the two countries, we have recently set up the Nepal-Italy Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Italian customers want sustainable and high quality products, therefore, Nepal needs to invest more in technology and machinery to produce more sustainable and profitable products. Around 3,000 Nepalis are working in Italy at present, and the number is growing. This signals that Nepali products will have high demand in the Italian market in the near future. I would like to suggest that Nepali industrialists be more informed about the needs of the international market, attend more global exhibitions, and be active in the Nepal-Italy Chamber of Commerce and Industry to have greater access to the market.

**The main products that Nepal exports to Italy are knotted carpets, knitted sweaters and scarves. What are other potential export products?**

**What are the probable sectors where Nepal and Italy can collaborate for mutual benefit?**

We are more interested in collaboration between Nepali and Italian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). We can collaborate in the field of tex-

tile machinery to bring better technology in the textile sector in Nepal and import the finished textile products into Italy. We can do the same in agriculture and food technology. We can make Nepal’s agriculture more sustainable and profitable through technological upgradation. This is why we want to promote the Nepal-Italy Chamber of Commerce and Industry as a new tool for a synergistic effect. We want a very friendly partnership with Nepal. We don’t only want to export to Nepal. We want to import from Nepal as well.

**Italy’s expertise in hydro and renewable energy can be of benefit to Nepal. How can the two countries work together?**

We have pioneering technology in renewable energy like hydropower and geothermal energy. Some of our companies are the first to use this technology in Europe. Through our chamber of commerce, Nepali companies can partner with Italian companies to bring more investment and technology to hydroelectricity.

**Is there any prospect of direct flights between Nepal and Italy?**

As the number of tourists increases, we will work on it. It depends upon the demand of the market. Some companies can operate charter flights from Italy as the number of tourists spikes. But that largely depends upon the number of travellers.

India’s monsoon onset delayed by 2-3 days

Nearly half of India’s farmland depends on the annual June-September rains to grow several crops.

REUTERS

MUMBAI, JUNE 5

India’s monsoon onset over the southernmost Kerala coast is delayed by another two-three days because the formation of cyclonic circulation in the Arabian Sea has reduced cloud cover over the Kerala coast, weather officials said on Monday. The monsoon, the lifeblood of the country’s \$3 trillion economy, delivers nearly 70 percent of the rain India needs to water farms and recharge reservoirs and aquifers. The state-run India Meteorological Department (IMD) was expecting the arrival of monsoon rains over the Kerala coast on June 4, the latest arrival in four years. “The development of cyclonic cir-

ulation over the southeast Arabian Sea has been pulling moisture out of Kerala coast,” said a senior IMD official, who declined to be named as he is not authorised to talk to media. The monsoon could arrive in the next two-three days, the official said, offering relief to farmers keenly waiting for the start of the wet season which is crucial for summer crops. Nearly half of India’s farmland, without any irrigation cover, depends on the annual June-September rains to grow several crops. The monsoon’s late start could delay the planting of rice, cotton, corn, soybean and sugar cane. The monsoon should pick up momentum and cover the entire country on time, said another official who declined to be named.

Global airlines more than double 2023 profit outlook

The sector was achieving a profit of about \$2.25 per passenger, IATA says.

REUTERS

ISTANBUL, JUNE 5

Global airlines more than doubled their 2023 industry profit forecast to \$9.8 billion from \$4.7 billion on Monday cheered by strong travel demand as the sector recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic. “The pandemic years are behind us and borders are open as normal,” Director General Willie Walsh told the annual meeting of the International Air Transport Association (IATA). But profit margins, clocking in at 1.2 percent, were still too thin to ensure the industry’s long-term financial robustness, he added. Global airlines have in recent months reported strong results as they prepare for a busy summer season, with travel demand showing no

sign of flagging despite peaking inflation. Pressure from oil prices has also eased this year. Revenue levels for 2023 are also inching closer to pre-pandemic levels, climbing to an expected \$803 billion versus \$838 billion in 2019. “A lot of people not just have to travel, but want to travel. And they will continue to do so through this year,” Walsh told Reuters in an interview separately. Demand is being lifted by high levels of employment even with a weaker macroeconomic outlook, he said. “That tends to give consumers confidence that they can spend money, that they can incur some debt to continue to enjoy what it is they’re doing.” Still, Walsh told delegates from some 300 airlines that ongoing challenges, such as supply chain issues

and rising airport charges, were dragging down the industry’s recovery. “OEM suppliers have been far too slow in dealing with supply chain blockages that are both raising costs and limiting our ability to deploy aircraft,” he said. “Airlines are beyond frustrated. A solution must be found.” Cargo volumes were also still quite low compared to 2019, expected to be 57.8 million tonnes in 2023 compared to 61.5 million tonnes in 2019 due to a slowdown in global trade volumes. Despite a strong rebound in demand, Walsh said, the industry’s current low level of profitability was not sustainable, noting the sector was achieving a profit of about \$2.25 per passenger, “which is less than the price of a cup of coffee, a subway ticket”.

Contractors demand deadline extension for 3,000 projects, again

PAWAN PANDEY

KATHMANDU, JUNE 5

The contractors have warned of halting projects if the government did not extend the deadline for around 3,000 projects. They have demanded extension by a year. The contractors said as the government has not settled their payments and adjusted the cost of construction materials in line with the dramatic surge in inflation, they would be compelled to take to the streets. They have given a June 19 ultimatum for the redressal of their grievances. Rabi Singh, president of the Federation of Contractors’ Association of Nepal, told the Post that the government needs to take responsibility for all the issues in the construction sector. “The problem in the construction has arisen because of the government’s policies.”

The negative performance of the economy in the second quarter (mid-October 2022 to mid-January 2023) was triggered by slowed trade and deceleration of the construction and mining sectors. As per the National Statistics Office, the seasonally adjusted growth rate or the gross domestic product (GDP) for the second quarter may drop by 0.73 percent. This follows a nearly 0.34 percent drop in the first quarter (mid-July 2022 to mid-October 2022).



POST FILE PHOTO

Most of the projects were targeted at winning votes during the general elections held in November last year.

Singh said the government had issued tenders for the projects without knowing where the resources would come from. A number of projects such as the construction of 300 hospitals, 180 strategic roads, cold storage, local government buildings, and irrigation projects were started at once. But there were no resources to fund them after the government’s revenue stream dried up following the imposition of the imports ban which lasted

for nearly eight months. According to Singh, for example, a strategic road project would cost Rs 50 million, but the government allocated only Rs3 million. Most of the projects were targeted at winning votes during the general elections held in November last year. “We have requested the government to prioritise critical infrastructure. We have also requested the government to scrap unnecessary projects from the lists,” said Singh.

The government has said there is a deficit of Rs 400 billion in the current fiscal year. Devendra Karki, a former government secretary, who once headed the energy and physical infrastructure ministries, told the Post that there is no logic in demanding deadline extension for 3,000 projects. “This is an absurd idea.” He added: “There are clear provisions in the contract documents regarding deadline extension and cost adjustments. Both the government and contractors need to abide by the law.” Karki said that each project needs to be analysed on a case by case basis as each tender has its own terms and conditions. “To seek deadline extension for projects affected by the Covid-19 pandemic is an exceptional case, but it is not reasonable to make similar demands repeatedly.” Last August, the government extended the project deadline for a year, citing Covid impact by amending the Public Procurement Regulation, in July. The contractors said that they are optimistic that the government would offer them a further extension. “Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal had assured us a day before his India visit that he would address the issues,” Singh said. Nepal lifted all Covid-19-related restrictions in March 2022. Then as per the law, there was no extraction of riverbed materials used in construction work, from mid-June to mid-October.

The national holiday—Dashain and Tihar—in October, further affected the projects. Then, the November elections disrupted the projects’ work further. In January this year, the government ordered the closure of the crusher plants. Again the economy started to slow down and the government was unable to pay the contractors. This followed a stringent monetary policy as the interest rates on loans went through the roof. The fuel prices doubled. “The diesel price, when we signed the project contract was at around Rs 100 per litre. It surged above Rs180 per litre,” said Singh. “The government, in the past two months, paid us around Rs 25 billion,” Singh said. “It still owes us around Rs 70 billion in payments.” Ramhari Pokharel, spokesperson at the Department of Roads, told the Post that there are payment issues in some projects due to a meagre budgetary allocation and the lack of transfer of funds. “Some projects which were transferred to provinces after completion of the bidding at the federal level, have been in a limbo,” said Pokharel. “But the contractors are highlighting such projects to extend the deadline of all projects, for the benefit of non-performing contractors.” Pokharel said the contractors are worried since they have to pay the penalty for not completing the projects in the stipulated time period.

■ BRIEFING

Poisoned cider kills eight in Russia, dozens sick

**MOSCOW:** At least eight people have died and dozens are sick after drinking poisoned cider in western Russia's Ulyanovsk region, local officials said on Monday. Local governor Alexei Russkikh said the poisoned substance was labelled "Mister Cider" and had been sold on tap after being brought into the region, located on the river Volga, in 30 litre kegs. "Our medics and social services continue to provide all necessary assistance to the victims," he said. According to local media, the cider contained lethal amounts of methanol, much more toxic than the ethanol found in regular alcoholic drinks. Law enforcement services are seizing the affected goods, the governor said. Russia tightened controls on the production and sale of liquids containing high amounts of ethanol after 77 people died drinking cheap illicit alcohol in Siberia in 2016, but the consumption of homemade alcohol remains a problem. Twenty-nine people died in a single incident in 2021 after consuming locally produced spirits that contained methanol, also known as methyl alcohol or wood alcohol.

US, India agree roadmap for defence industry cooperation

**NEW DELHI:** India and the United States have concluded a roadmap for defence industry cooperation for the next few years, the Indian government said on Monday, a move expected to bolster New Delhi's defence manufacturing ambitions. Washington is working to deepen ties with the world's largest democracy and sees deeper military-to-military and technology ties with the South Asian country as a key counterweight to China's dominance in the region. The roadmap was finalised at a meeting between visiting US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. The agreement comes weeks before Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits Washington on June 22 for an official state visit and holds talks with President Joe Biden. Talks between Singh and Austin had a "particular focus on identifying ways to strengthen industrial cooperation", the Indian Defence Ministry statement said. "Both sides will identify opportunities for co-development of new technologies and co-production of existing and new systems and facilitate increased collaboration between defence start-up ecosystems of the two countries," it said.

Shootout between Pakistani troops and insurgents kills 2 soldiers, 2 militants

**PESHAWAR:** Pakistani troops and militants exchanged fire in a northwestern region along the border with Afghanistan in a shootout that killed two soldiers and two militants, the army said on Monday. The shootout took place late Sunday in North Waziristan, a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province that is a former stronghold of the Pakistani Taliban, a militant group also known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP. According to an army statement, two militants were also wounded and troops seized a cache of weapons at the site. A search operation was underway in the area, it said. Although the Pakistani military claims it has cleared North Waziristan of militants, occasional attacks and shootouts continue, raising concerns that the Pakistani Taliban are regrouping in the area.

(AGENCIES)

Russia says it thwarted major Ukrainian offensive, Kyiv says Moscow spreads lies

The success or failure of the counter-offensive is likely to influence future diplomatic and military support for Ukraine.

■ REUTERS

MOSCOW, JUNE 5

Russia said on Monday its forces had thwarted a major Ukrainian offensive at five points along the front in the Ukrainian region of Donetsk and killed hundreds of troops while Ukraine accused Moscow of spreading lies. It was not immediately clear whether or not the attack represented the start of a Ukrainian counteroffensive which Kyiv has been promising for months to drive out Russian forces after the invasion of February 2022.

Russia's defence ministry said Ukraine had attacked on Sunday morning with six mechanised and two tank battalions in southern Donetsk, where Moscow has long suspected Ukraine would seek to drive a wedge through Russian-controlled territory. "On the morning of June 4, the enemy launched a large-scale offensive in five sectors of the front in the South Donetsk direction," the defence ministry said in a statement posted on Telegram at 1:30 am Moscow time (2230 GMT).

"The enemy's goal was to break through our defences in the most vulnerable, in its opinion, sector of the front," it said. "The enemy did not achieve its tasks, it had no success."

Reuters was unable to immediately verify the Russian statement and the Ukrainian defence ministry and military did not immediately respond to written requests for comment.

The commander of Ukraine's ground forces, Oleksandr Syrskiy, said on Monday that Ukrainian forces continued "moving forward" near the long-contested city of Bakhmut in northern Donetsk. He made no comment on the counter-offensive.

The daily report from Ukraine's General Staff said only that there were 29 combat clashes in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine. Ukraine's Centre for Strategic Communications did not address the Russian statement directly but said, without providing evidence, that Russia would seek to spread lies.

"To demoralise Ukrainians and mislead the community (including their own population), Russian propagandists will spread false information about the counteroffensive, its directions, and the losses of the Ukrainian army," it said.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksii



REUTERS

A Ukrainian serviceman looks on near the Ukraine-Russia border, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kharkiv region, Ukraine on Sunday.

Reznikov published a cryptic message on Twitter on Sunday, quoting Depeche Mode's track "Enjoy the Silence".

Russian war bloggers reported fighting at several points across the front, particularly around Vuhledar, some 150 km southwest of Bakhmut.

Russia's defence ministry released video of what it said showed several Ukrainian armoured vehicles in a field blowing up after being hit.

Russian forces killed 250 Ukrainian troops as well as destroying 16 tanks, three infantry fighting vehicles and 21 armoured combat vehicles, the ministry said. Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, who is in charge of Moscow's military operation in Ukraine, was in the area at the time of the Ukrainian attack, the ministry said. Prominent Russian military blogger Semyon Pegov, who blogs under the name War Gonzo, said Ukrainian forces were attacking near Velyka Novosilka, a village west of Vuhledar.

"There is a tough fight going on."

Other Russian military bloggers reported also heavy fighting on Monday morning near Bakhmut, nearby Soledar and Vuhledar. Reuters could not independently

verify the reports.

For months, Ukraine has been preparing for a counter-offensive against Russian forces which officials in Kyiv and CIA Director William Burns have said will pierce Russian President Vladimir Putin's hubris.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told the Wall Street Journal in an interview published on Saturday that he was ready to launch the counteroffensive but tempered a forecast of success with a warning that it could take some time and come at a heavy cost. "I don't know how long it will take," he told The Journal. "To be honest, it can go a variety of ways, completely different. But we are going to do it, and we are ready."

After seeking tens of billions of dollars of Western weapons to fight Russian forces, the success or failure of the counter-offensive is likely to influence the shape of future Western diplomatic and military support for Ukraine. Ukraine has in recent weeks sought to weaken Russian positions but its specific plans have been shrouded in secrecy as it seeks to strike yet another blow against the much larger military of Russia.

Moscow was last month struck by drones which Russia said was a

Ukrainian terrorist attack while pro-Ukrainian forces have repeatedly crossed into Russia proper in recent days in the Belgorod region.

After a two-month lull, Russia has launched hundreds of drones and missiles on Ukraine since early May, chiefly on Kyiv, with Ukraine saying it was targeting military facilities but also hitting residential areas.

Putin sent troops into Ukraine on February 24 last year in what the Kremlin expected to be swift operation but its forces suffered a series of defeats and had to move back and regroup in swathes of eastern Ukraine. Russia now controls at least 18 percent of what is internationally recognised to be Ukrainian territory, and has claimed four regions of Ukraine as Russian territory.

For months, tens of thousands of Russian troops have been digging in along a front line which stretches for around 1,000km, bracing for a Ukrainian attack which is expected to try to cut Russia's so-called land bridge to the Crimean peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014.

Ukraine vows to eject every last Russian soldier from its territory, and casts the invasion as an imperial-style land grab by Russia.

Military factions battle for eighth week in Sudan

■ REUTERS

DUBAI, JUNE 5

Shelling hit western areas of Sudan's capital on Monday morning after rival military factions fought through the night, residents said, with reports of deepening lawlessness in Khartoum and in the western region of Darfur.

Fighting between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), who have been battling each other for more than seven weeks, intensified after the expiry late on Saturday of a ceasefire deal brokered by Saudi Arabia and the US

Late on Sunday, residents reported intense fighting across the three cities that make up the nation's wider capital -- Khartoum, Omdurman and Bahri -- and smoke could be seen rising from several areas early on Monday.

"The neighbourhood where we live in the centre of Omdurman is looted publicly on a daily basis without anyone intervening to prevent it, with clashes and shelling continuing around us," said 37-year-old resident Mohamed Saleh.

The RSF says it has been working to protect civilians by arresting looters.

As India grieves deadliest train crash, relatives wait for bodies of loved ones

■ ASSOCIATED PRESS

BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 5

Families of the victims of India's deadliest train crash in decades filled a hospital in Bhubaneswar city on Monday to identify and collect bodies of relatives, as railway officials recommended a federal criminal probe of the crash that killed 275 people.

Distraught relatives of passengers killed in the crash on Friday lined up outside the eastern city's All India Institute of Medical Sciences. Meanwhile, survivors being treated in hospitals said they were still trying to make sense of the horrific disaster.

Outside the hospital, two large screens cycled through photos of the bodies, their faces so bloodied and charred that they were hardly recognisable.

Each body had a number assigned to it, and relatives stood near the screen and watched as the photos changed, looking out for details like clothing for clues.

Many of the people waiting said they had spent days on desperate journeys from neighbouring states, travelling in multiple trains, buses or rented cars to identify and claim bodies, a process that stretched into a third day due.

So far only 45 bodies have been identified, and 33 have been handed over to relatives, said Mayur Sooryavanshi, an administrator who was overseeing the identification process at the hospital in the capital of Odisha state, about 200 kilometres south of the site of the train crash in Balasore.

Upendra Ram began searching for his son, Retul Ram, Sunday, after traveling some 850 kilometres from neighbouring Bihar state. The day-long journey in a rented car, which cost him 35,000 rupees (\$423), was exhausting for Ram. Retul, 17, had been on his way to Chennai to find work, Ram said.

After spending hours looking at photographs of the dead, Ram identified his son around noon on Monday.

"I just want to take the dead body and go back home. He was a very good son," said Ram, adding that Retul had dropped out of school and wanted to earn money for the family.

"My wife and daughter can't stop crying at home. They are asking me to bring the body back quickly," he said, wiping tears from his eyes with a red scarf he had tied around his head.

Friday's crash was one of the worst



AP/IPS

Jenima Mondal (left) whose son Mamjur Ali Mondal died in Friday's train accident mourns at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences hospital in Bhubaneswar, Orissa on Monday.

rail disasters in India's history. Investigators said that a signalling failure might have been the cause of the disaster, in which a passenger train hit a freight train, derailling on the tracks before being hit by another passenger train coming in the opposite direction on a parallel track.

The collision involved two passenger trains, the Coromandel Express traveling from Howrah in West Bengal state to Chennai in Tamil Nadu state, and the Yesvantpur-Howrah Superfast Express traveling from Bengaluru in Karnataka to Howrah, officials said.

Many people had to make arduous journeys to reach the hospital.

At least 123 trains scheduled to pass through Odisha were either cancelled or delayed after the accident, Indian railways said on Sunday. The disruption led air fares to Odisha to spike, prompting India's civil aviation ministry to warn airlines over abnormal surges in pricing.

Usman Ansari, who came from Bihar to collect the body of his brother-in-law, Kasim Mia, said spent 24 hours on the road. He first took a train to Howrah in West Bengal state, and then another to Kharagpur, in the same state. From there he, along with two other friends, took a bus to the site of the crash, where they were told the bodies had been moved to Bhubaneswar.

The three of them rented a car to drive to the hospital, where Ansari was finally able to identify and collect

US Navy shows Chinese warship's 'unsafe interaction' near Taiwan

■ REUTERS

TAIPEI/BEIJING, JUNE 5

The US Navy has released a video of what it called an "unsafe interaction" in the Taiwan Strait, in which a Chinese warship crossed in front of a US destroyer in the sensitive waterway, a risky incident amid deteriorating Sino-US ties.

The encounter comes as both countries trade blame for not holding military talks -- with disagreements between the two over everything from trade and Taiwan to Russia's invasion of Ukraine -- and raises the spectre of future face-offs that could spiral out of control.

The US military said the USS Chung-Hoon, a destroyer, and Canada's HSMC Montreal, a frigate, were conducting a "routine" transit of the strait on Saturday when the Chinese ship cut in front of the US vessel, coming within 137 metres.

In the video, released by the US Navy late on Sunday, a Chinese warship can clearly be seen sailing across the path of the Chung-Hoon in calm waters. The Chung-Hoon does not change course.

A voice can be heard in English, apparently sending a radio message to the Chinese ship, warning against "attempts to limit freedom of navigation", though the exact wording is unclear because of wind noise.

"The measures taken by the Chinese military are completely reasonable, legitimate, and professional and safe," said Wang Wenbin, a spokesperson at the Chinese foreign ministry.

"The US had caused trouble and provocation first, while China dealt with it in accordance with the law and regulations afterwards," Wang told a regular press conference on Monday when asked about the video released by the US Navy.

The Chinese defence ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment on Monday.

On Saturday night, China's military rebuked the United States and Canada for "deliberately provoking risk" with the rare joint sailing.

Chinese military commentator Song Zhongping told Reuters that this "point blank interception" was a demonstration of both the capabilities and "courage" of China's navy.

"The more intensified the provocation from the United States, the stronger the countermeasures from China," Song said.

No survivors found after plane that flew over DC and led to jet scramble crashes

It was technically flying above some of the most heavily restricted airspace in the nation.

■ ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, JUNE 5

A wayward and unresponsive business plane that flew over the nation's capital Sunday afternoon caused the military to scramble a fighter jet before the plane crashed in Virginia, officials said. The fighter jet caused a loud sonic boom that was heard across the capital region.

Hours later, police said rescuers had reached the site of the plane crash in a rural part of the Shenandoah Valley and that no survivors were found.

The Federal Aviation Administration says the Cessna Citation took off from Elizabethtown, Tennessee, on Sunday and was headed for Long Island's MacArthur Airport. Inexplicably, the plane turned around over New York's Long Island and flew a straight path down over DC before it crashed over mountainous terrain near Montebello, Virginia, around 3:30 pm. A US official confirmed to The Associated Press that the military jet had scrambled to respond to the small plane, which wasn't responding to radio transmissions and later crashed. The official was not authorised to publicly discuss details of the military operation and spoke on condition of anonymity.



AP/IPS

Search and rescue teams leave the command post at St Mary's Wilderness en route to the Blue Ridge Parkway to search for the site where a Cessna Citation.

Flight tracking sites showed the jet suffered a rapid spiralling descent, dropping at one point at a rate of more than 30,000 feet per minute before crashing in the St Mary's Wilderness.

The North American Aerospace Defence Command later said in a statement that the F-16 was authorised to travel at supersonic speeds, which caused a sonic boom that was heard in Washington and parts of Virginia and Maryland.

"During this event, the NORAD aircraft also used flares -- which may have been visible to the public -- in an

attempt to draw attention from the pilot," the statement said. "Flares are employed with highest regard for safety of the intercepted aircraft and people on the ground. Flares burn out quickly and completely and there is no danger to the people on the ground when dispensed."

Virginia State Police said officers were notified of the potential crash shortly before 4 pm and rescuers reached the crash site by foot around four hours later.

No survivors were found, police said.

# Sabalenka sets up Svitolina clash at French Open

The Belarusian beats Sloane Stephens 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 to book a last eight clash against Ukrainian Elina Svitolina, who defeats Daria Kasatkina 6-4, 7-6 (7/5).



Elina Svitolina

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
PARIS, JUNE 5

Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus moved into a politically-charged French Open quarter-final with Ukraine's Elina Svitolina on Sunday and immediately set the tone for the high-profile confrontation by boycotting Roland Garros media for a second time.

Australian Open champion and world number two Sabalenka defeated Sloane Stephens 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 to reach the last eight in Paris for the first time.

Tuesday's clash will be the third meeting between Sabalenka and Svitolina but first since Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year. Belarus is a key military ally of Moscow.

Svitolina has played two Russians so far at the tournament and refused to shake hands with both in protest at the war.

Sabalenka defeated Svitolina's Ukrainian compatriot Marta Kostyuk in the opening round last weekend. Kostyuk's decision also not to shake hands brought her a chorus of boos from the Paris crowd. Kostyuk said the spectators who jeered her should be "embarrassed".

After beating Stephens on Sunday, it was announced that for the second match in suc-

sion Sabalenka would not appear at a post-match news conference. She boycotted her last scheduled press conference on Friday after defeating Kamilla Rakhimova in the third round.

She claimed she "did not feel safe" when previously questioned about the war and her relationship with Belarus president Alexander Lukashenko. "Aryna Sabalenka will not be doing a general press conference tonight," said the organisers in a statement. "An interview with a WTA editorial reporter will be conducted shortly and transcribed and distributed."

Not surprisingly, the delicate question of a Belarus vs Ukraine clash was avoided in a bland, official handout provided by organisers.

Sabalenka limited her comments to her expectations for Tuesday's match, pledging to show "my best tennis".

After her first two rounds, Sabalenka had fended off a series of tough questions over her individual stance on the war as well as links to the government in Belarus.

On Wednesday she was asked why in 2020 she "signed a letter to support Lukashenko" when "he was torturing and beating up protestors" in the street. "I have no comments to you, so thank you for your question," she replied.

Earlier, Svitolina, playing her first Grand Slam since becoming a mother, reached the quarter-finals for the fourth time.

The Ukrainian defeated Daria Kasatkina 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) for a seventh win in seven meetings against the Russian who was a semi-finalist last year.

Despite not shaking hands, Kasatkina still gave her rival a friendly thumbs-up.

Svitolina had described Kasatkina as "brave" for supporting the decision by British tennis authorities to provide all Ukrainian players with two hotel rooms throughout the forthcoming grass court season peaking at Wimbledon.

"Definitely I acknowledged the match today.

Really thankful for her position that she took," said Svitolina on Sunday.

"Yeah, she's a really brave person to say it publicly, not so many players did."

Svitolina said that she will not be shaking the hand of Sabalenka when they meet on Tuesday.

"I have played last two matches against Russian players so it will not change, everything will be the same," she said. "So I'm used to it now, it's going to be the same."

In marked contrast to Sabalenka, the 28-year-old Svitolina insisted that post-match press conferences have provided her and other Ukrainian players with a vital public platform. "To have a press conference is a great thing. Players are sharing some moments that they have on the court, off the court," she said.

Svitolina's charge to the quarter-finals has caught the imagination at home.

"It's the story about self belief... it's a story about bravery... s t o r y a b o u t courage... W e l l deserved @ E l i n a Svitolina, thank you for giving Ukraine a reason to celebrate," tweeted former ATP Tour player Sergiy Stakhovsky.



A-DIVISION LEAGUE

**PLAYING TUESDAY**

Khumaltar vs APF	15:00 NST, Chhyasal Stadium
Army vs Police	15:00 NST, ANFA Complex
CBU vs Three Star	15:00 NST, Dasharath Stadium
Satdobato vs Jawalakhel	18:00 NST, Dasharath Stadium

**FRENCH OPEN**

**WOMEN'S SINGLES (FOURTH ROUND)**

Bernarda Pera	3	1
<b>Ons Jabeur</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>

Sloane Stephens	6 <sup>5</sup>	4
<b>Aryna Sabalenka</b>	<b>7<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>6</b>

<b>Elina Svitolina</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7<sup>1</sup></b>
Daria Kasatkina	4	6 <sup>5</sup>


**MEN'S SINGLES (FOURTH ROUND)**

Sebastian Ofner	5	3	0
<b>Stefanos Tsitsipas</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>

<b>Carlos Alcaraz</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
Lorenzo Musetti	3	2	2

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**



It's the moment to say goodbye to football, not just to you. There are too many emotions for me right now. Forza Milan and goodbye.

— AC Milan's Zlatan Ibrahimovic says while announcing his retirement from football.

## Striker Benzema will not return to Real Madrid next season

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
MADRID, JUNE 5

Karim Benzema will not stay with Real Madrid next season, the club said Sunday.

Real Madrid said they reached an agreement with the French striker to "to bring his brilliant and unforgettable time as a player at our club to a close."

Benzema scored with a second-half penalty kick in his final game with Madrid later Sunday—a 1-1 draw against Athletic Bilbao in the final round of the Spanish league.

Madrid said Benzema "has represented the values" of Madrid and "has earned the right to decide his future."

The announcement comes amid reports that Benzema will play in Saudi Arabia.

The 35-year-old Benzema had been with Madrid since 2009, playing 14 seasons with the club. He helped Madrid win 25 titles, a record for any player with the Spanish powerhouse. Among his titles were five Champions Leagues, five Club World Cups

and four Spanish leagues.

Benzema is the current Ballon d'Or winner and UEFA's player of the year. He had a memorable season in 2021-22, leading Madrid to the Champions League title with a competition-best 15 goals.

Benzema has made 648 appearances for Madrid, fifth most by any player. He is the club's second all-time leading scorer with 354 goals. The Frenchman is the fourth top scorer in the history of the Champions League and the fourth top scorer in the history of the Spanish league.

"Benzema's career at Real Madrid has been a shining example of conduct and professionalism," Madrid said.

The club said on Tuesday they will organise an "act of homage and farewell" for Benzema. "Real Madrid are and always will be his home, and we wish him and all his family all the best in this new stage of his life," Madrid said.

Three other players are also leaving Madrid this summer: Eden Hazard, Marco Asensio and Mariano Diaz.

## Kumal, Shah set national records in swimming

**SPORTS BUREAU**  
KATHMANDU, JUNE 5

Bikash Kumal and Alexander Gadegaard Shah dominated the pool at the 11th NSA Cup Swimming Competition on Monday.

Kumal claimed record in the men's 100m breaststroke with a time of 1 minute 10.14 seconds at the Satdobato Swimming Complex, beating the previous mark of 1:10.59 seconds achieved by Shuvam Shrestha during the ninth edition of the event in July 2019.

Shah rewrote records in the 50m freestyle and 100m freestyle. Shah took 24.12 seconds in the heat beating the mark of 24.97 seconds he set in 2019, before improving his new record with a new time of 23.97 seconds.

Shah also completed the 100m freestyle in 52.96 seconds to better his own previous record of 53.41 seconds.

Khumal had broken two national records on Sunday. His timing of 30.30 seconds in the 50m breaststroke heat and 2:34.74 seconds in the 200m breaststroke finals eclipsed the previous records of 31.57 seconds (50m breaststroke) and 2:36.75 seconds (200m breaststroke), both set by Shrestha in the previous editions.

Yahya Nasir Hussain also made a new national record in the men's 400m freestyle with a time of 4:12.17, bettering the previous mark of 4:12.23 he set in 2019.

## Premier Golf tees off today

**SPORTS BUREAU**  
KATHMANDU, JUNE 5

Surya Nepal Premier Golf Championship, the final and eighth event of the Surya Nepal Golf Tour 2022-2023, will tee off on Tuesday at the Gokarna Golf Club in Kathmandu.

The 72-hole event will be played for four days from June 6 to 9, said Nepal Professional Golf Association (NPGA) general secretary Deepak Acharya at a press conference on Monday. Altogether, 41 professionals along with nine amateur golfers will compete in the event.

Cut will be applied after two days and only top 21 pros and ties along with top six amateurs will be eligible for the final two rounds.

The outcome of the event will also determine the rankings of the pro golfers for next season. Nepal number one Sukra Bahadur Rai is behind Bhuwan Nagarkoti on the list of highest prize money earners this season. While Nagarkoti has earned Rs513,500 from the last seven tour events, Rai has bagged a cash prize amounting to Rs494,000 from five tours.

Rai had claimed trophies in Surya Nepal Eastern Open, Western Open and Central

Open while Nagarkoti was the winner of Surya Nepal Kathmandu Open and Surya Nepal Challenge, among pros. The highest earner at the end of the tour will be crowned Nepal Number 1 for the next season.

The final event of the tour carries a purse of Rs1.52 million, almost double that of any of the last seven tour prizes. The champion will walk away with a purse of Rs270,000 and the runners-up will get Rs170,000. The third place finisher will earn Rs120,00. All pros inside the top 21 rankings will have a share in the cash prizes.

The top pros are expected to face tough challenges from amateur Subash Tamang, the twin gold medallist of the 2019 South Asian Games (SAG), and Sadbhav Acharya. The duos were the winners of the last two tour events.

NPGA president Rabindra Man Shrestha said that they were expecting an exciting tournament as the pros faced stiff challenges from amateurs in the last two tours. "We were able to conduct eight tour events in the season despite the challenging situation," he said.

The event will conclude with a pro-am championship on Saturday.

## HOROSCOPE

**ARIES** (March 21-April 19)



Understand your limitations without restricting your self this morning. Luckily, these funky vibes will dissipate by mid-morning, allowing you to feel present and more in control of what the future holds. Financial discussions could come into play this afternoon.

**TAURUS** (April 20-May 20)



Today will bring a wonky vibe to the table. Don't feel guilty about embracing solitude if it's what your soul craves. Give yourself permission to lay low and prioritise your needs. Luckily, you'll feel more outgoing and charismatic.

**GEMINI** (May 21-June 21)



The vibe may feel a little harsh or competitive within your community this morning. Don't bother getting sucked into petty games or power struggles, opting instead to focus on yourself. Luckily, it'll be easy to work from behind the scenes.

**CANCER** (June 22-July 22)



Today will threaten to throw off your game within matters of the heart. Luckily, you'll have a chance to redeem yourself, especially if you focus on seeking harmony within your surroundings. You'll crave intellectual stimulation later in the afternoon.

**LEO** (July 23-August 22)



Try not to juggle too many things at once this morning that could cause you to fall short of your goals. Luckily, you'll feel more in control by mid-morning, though you may need to take an unconventional approach to your agenda.

**VIRGO** (August 23-September 22)



Try not to let others push you around this morning. However, you'll want to watch your demeanor as well and take care to avoid power struggles amongst your peers. Spiritual enlightenment may catch you off guard. Divine inspiration may hit you.

**LIBRA** (September 23-October 22)



You may feel a bit still, out of sorts, or unrested this morning. Luckily, these wonky vibes will dissipate by mid-morning, so be sure to make a conscientious effort to release any tension, worries, or fears that aren't serving you.

**SCORPIO** (October 23-November 21)



Try not to put unnecessary pressure on yourself this morning. Though you'll certainly need to honour your responsibilities, rushing through them or demanding perfection of yourself won't serve your highest good. Luckily, you'll have a chance to snap out of this funk.

**SAGITTARIUS** (November 22-December 21)



Give yourself permission to move slowly this morning. Luckily, the vibe will elevate by mid-morning, encouraging you to invest in your overall health. Consider creating a self-care to do list later this afternoon, asking you to embrace luxury and wellness.

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



Try not to ignore your feelings. Though this cosmic climate could throw you for an emotional loop, you'll have a chance to snap free from these funky vibes, bringing out your playful nature while encouraging you to shake things up a bit.

**AQUARIUS** (January 20-February 18)



Try not to ignore your feelings this morning. Though it could throw you for an emotional loop, you'll have a chance to snap free from these funky vibes, bringing out your playful nature while encouraging you to shake things up a bit.

**PISCES** (February 19-March 20)



Try not to get sucked up in your electronics this morning, as it could leave you feeling disconnected from the material realms. Luckily, you will break up these funky vibes, jolting you back into a state of clarity.

## CROSSWORD

**ACROSS**

1 Brief

6 Grassy shoulder

10 Send forth

14 Winter constellation

15 Rocky Mountain people

16 Brubeck of jazz

17 Not abridged

18 Many Greek plays

20 Kept in office

22 Center

23 Future fish

24 Alphabet ender

25 Worn to a frazzle

29 In a distasteful manner

34 Made inquiries

35 Tempestuous

36 Caustic substance

37 Naturalist John —

38 Fresco base

39 Zhivago's love

40 Impediment

41 Waterfall

42 Dust particles

43 Pilot's concern

45 Least cooked

46 Aunt or bro.

47 Large amount

48 Barbecue garb

51 Cutting

**DOWN**

1 Vacation trip

2 Ocean flyer

3 Sushi staple

4 Psyche

5 Keyed in data

6 Montana city

7 French l verb

8 Be a bookworm

9 Food additive

10 Vortexes

11 Household helper

12 Currier's partner

13 Pop quiz

14 Abrasive mineral

21 Fish choice

24 Goose egg, in sports

25 "La —" (Valens tune)

26 Customary

27 Mini or maxi

28 Possessive pronoun

**PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED**

MOUE	MGM	PUNCH
ALLY	OLEO	OPERA
LINE	NEIL	STEAK
TVA	GRAND	SURGE
SESSION	HOURL	
ALE	WARMNESS	
ELAND	TINES	DOE
LIRE	RINDS	WELL
MEA	VICES	PANEL
OUTTALKS	AHS	
ONES	REDHEAD	
EMEND	ODORS	ALA
BOSSY	FAVA	ATON
BATIK	FRET	SENT
STALE	ERE	URGE

6-7-23 © 2023 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS

29 Theater part

30 Sleeveless garment

31 Buoy up

32 Stringed instruments

33 Fermenting agent

35 Vendetta

38 Ancient France

39 Feeling blue

41 Trial figure

42 Coped

44 Did a laundry chore

45 Fabled bird

47 Stair part

48 Parroted

49 Say grace

50 Increased, as prices

51 Weather word

52 Real estate unit

53 OK, but not great (hyph.)

54 Ballerina's attire

55 Dangerous March date

56 Give a darn

58 Strange sighting

## SUDOKU

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

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

# You’ve decided to go to therapy. Where do you start?

Finding a therapist who is the right fit can be a significant challenge.  
But with a little patience and proper research, things get much easier.



□ DRISTY MOKTAN

Therapy, for many of us, is still a door to a new and unknown world. Even if we do have little or some knowledge, there is hesitation within ourselves to actually take a step. Stigma is the biggest reason for this. Going to therapy is a brave step in itself because asking for help is never easy. But most people in our society still think that asking for



MENTAL HEALTH

help is a sign of weakness. In reality, it is actually the opposite. Life has weird ways of bringing us down. Each one of us is going through something. We are constantly fighting a battle within ourselves. But the moment we decide that we can do something for ourselves—that we can become better—be it through self-care or therapy, that in itself is a courageous step for our mental health. If therapy is something we are considering, then finding a therapist who is

the right fit can be a significant challenge. If we are not careful, the search for the right therapist can become a difficult and enduring step. We may not know where to begin. There may not be enough qualified therapists to choose from, or we may feel that we're not connecting with the therapists we sit with. Reasons can vary, but that shouldn't come in the way of us seeking the right kind of help. The right therapist can help us get started with our healing journey, so finding someone who is right for us is worth the effort.

When assessing potential therapists, it is acceptable and perhaps even necessary to search around and ask a lot of questions. Doing our research beforehand is important because the bond with our therapist matters a lot. We need someone we can trust—someone with whom we can discuss anything and everything, from our everyday concerns and even confidential information. Therapy will not be as effective unless we have this bond, so we should devote some time to look for the right therapist.

**Ask those who've been to therapy**  
A referral from a friend, doctor, colleague, or someone who has previously been to therapy might be a good place to start. Getting recommendations for good therapists from someone who has

been to therapy or knows a good therapist could make things easier for us. If we are uncomfortable asking questions directly to the therapist, we can ask the person who referred us about their experience with that particular therapist. It is also critical to recognise that different therapists work in different ways and

It is important to check a therapist's credentials to ensure that you are in the hands of a qualified professional.

with different issues. If someone else had a positive experience with a therapist, it does not necessarily mean we will, too, so we must remain open-minded about this.

**Check credentials**  
Additionally, it is critical to check the therapist's credentials to ensure that we are in the hands of a qualified professional. How much experience do they have? What is the speciality or area of expertise of my therapist? How long have they been in practice? Do they have

experience working with people in similar situations? These genuine questions may arise in our minds before selecting a therapist, and they must be addressed.

**Figure out your therapy objectives**  
Finding the right therapist can be easier if we have already determined our therapy objectives. We can easily narrow our search for good therapists if we know why we are considering therapy. Whether we are seeking therapy for stress, relationship problems, or to deal with trauma, it is always best to be aware of our goals ahead of time so that we can communicate them to the therapist clearly and work collaboratively with them.

**Streamline your budget**  
The hunt for an ideal therapist requires careful consideration of our budget as well. Therapy can vary in cost depending on where we get it. So, before scheduling a session, we must assess how much we are willing to pay for therapy. Determining this will allow us to prioritise therapists who are within our budget. If it works for us, we can even try out an online session, which is generally offered for considerably less price than the normal in-person session.

**Have patience**  
Furthermore, even after going to multiple sessions, we may feel as if the therapy is not helping us and that we aren't seeing any progress. But we have to understand that therapy is a work in progress where both the client and counsellor work collaboratively to tackle the issues of the client. However, we should trust our gut too. We can always look at other options if we don't click with the therapist. A good therapist will respect our choice and will never put any pressure or make us feel bad about it.

Many people may visit several therapists before finding the best fit. Although the journey may be long and the experiences may be discouraging, we shouldn't give up. In the long run, it will be helpful to us once we find a therapist with whom we connect and trust. Why not take that chance for the right one? We'll never know until we try.



Moktan is a psychosocial counsellor at Happy Minds, a mental health and well-being platform.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SOUTH KOREAN EMBASSY

## Riding the K-wave

South Korean Embassy in Kathmandu sent out an open call for its annual 'K-pop World Festival.'

□ POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU

The K-pop world festival, hosted by the Embassy of the Republic of Korea, is set to take place in 2023. This thrilling event celebrates Korean culture, dance, and music in various Asian countries. The festival pulls participants worldwide annually and promises an exciting experience for all attendees.

Nepali citizens interested in K-pop dance or music can participate in the competition. The registrations are open online, and the registered participant list will be announced on June 9. The preliminary round will take place virtually, where the participants perform via video. The submission date for the video is from June 12 to 29. Participants are directed to upload the video on YouTube with the hashtag #KWFNEPAL2023 as well as email the link of the video to the organisers.

Interested individuals can enter the competition as either a solo artist or as a part of a group. There is no limit to the number of individuals in a group. However, the groups cannot add additional members after registration. The final event will be held in person, although the location is yet to be revealed. The winner will receive a cash prize along with an opportunity to go to Korea.

## Prince Harry a no-show on first day of court

The Duke of Sussex's showdown against the publisher of the Daily Mirror kicked off Monday without him present.

□ BRIAN MELLEY & JILL LAWLESS  
LONDON, UK

Prince Harry's highly anticipated showdown against the publisher of the Daily Mirror kicked off Monday without him present in court—and the judge was not happy.

Harry's lawyer said the Duke of Sussex would be unavailable to testify following opening statements because he'd taken a flight from Los Angeles after the birthday of his 2-year-old daughter, Lilibet, on Sunday.

"I'm a little surprised," Justice Timothy Fancourt said, noting he had directed Harry to be in court for the first day of his case.

Mirror Group Newspaper's lawyer, Andrew Green, said he was "deeply troubled" by Harry's absence on the trial's opening day. The case against Mirror Group is the first of the prince's several lawsuits against the media to go to trial, and one of three alleging tabloid pub-

lishers unlawfully snooped on him in their cutthroat competition for scoops on the royal family.

Harry's lawyer, David Sherborne, said phone hacking and forms of unlawful information gathering were carried out on such a widespread scale, it was implausible the publisher's newspapers used a private investigator to dig up dirt on the prince only once, which is what they have admitted.

"The ends justify the means for the defendant," Sherborne said.

Stories about Harry were big sellers for the newspapers, and some 2,500 articles had covered all facets of his life—from his illnesses at school to ups and downs with girlfriends, Sherborne said.

"There was no time in his life when he was safe from these activities," Sherborne said. "Nothing was sacrosanct or out of bounds."

Mirror Group has said it used documents, public statements and sources to legally report on the prince.

But Sherborne said it was not hard to infer that Mirror journalists used the same techniques on Harry—eavesdropping on voicemails and hiring private eyes to snoop—as they did on others.

Harry had been scheduled to testify Tuesday, but his lawyer was told last week the duke should attend Monday's proceedings in London's High Court in case the opening statements concluded before the end of the day.

When he enters the witness box, Harry, 38, will be the first member of the British royal family in more than a century to testify in court. He is expected to describe his anguish and anger over being hounded by the media throughout his life, and its impact on those around him.

— Associated Press



AP/RSS

## A space for spiritual solace

Jeevan Vigyan, a wellness organisation based in Chabahil, Kathmandu, offers diverse programmes on meditation, yoga and spirituality.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF JEEVAN VIGYAN

LP Bhanu Sharma (left) and Ramesh Nepal, the founders of the organisation.

□ RUKUSHA GIRI  
KATHMANDU

Jeevan Vigyan, a spiritual organisation, is dedicated to helping individuals of all ages find true happiness and inner peace. It was established in 2011 by Ramesh Nepal and LP Bhanu Sharma and since then, the organisation has positively impacted a number of individuals all over the country.

Combining spirituality and prosperity, Jeevan Vigyan offers diverse programmes encompassing meditation, yoga, psychology, and more. Nepal emphasises the role of selflessness in attaining happiness. "If a person doesn't have selfishness, they can have happiness," he says. Inspired by his lifelong interest in spirituality, Nepal left the trade business as a textile importer to open Jeevan Vigyan to share his knowledge and insights with others.

Sharma, who is the former principal of Apex College, is both a spiritual guide and educator. Dedicated to Jeevan Vigyan, Sharma believes in empowering individ-

uals to unlock their potential and leadership skills.

Homnath Acharya, a former student turned instructor, underscores the importance of giving before receiving. "Whatever you want to get from others, give that to others first," he says. He reveals that his life underwent a transformative change after joining Jeevan Vigyan, instilling a sense of purpose and kindness in his day-to-day life.

Deepa Poudel, an instructor at Jeevan Vigyan, also has embarked on her personal journey of healing through meditation. Previously reliant on medication for various health issues, Poudel found relief and learned valuable life lessons through the organisation. Now, she is committed to giving back by guiding new members.

Radha Subedi, once plagued by arthritis—both physically and mentally—found hope and healing through the organisation's 'Chakra Vigyan' programme, after which her health improved drastically. "I used to frequent hospitals all too often, but with exercise and meditation, I am able to manage my health," she says.

The organisation offers several courses such as 'Bishow Maitri', 'Saurya Kanti' 'Jeevan Amrit', 'Jeevan Umanga' and 'Chakranadh' meditation techniques. These programmes are available online free of charge. However, they do ask for donations.

Jeevan Vigyan's commitment to personal growth and well-being extends beyond the valley. They are constructing an International Meditation Centre in Dhadhing to promote spiritual tourism and provide a meditation space for Nepalis.

Empowering the young is another core focus for the organisation. 'Aishwarya Vigyan,' a course tailored for young individuals aims to build leadership abilities in the participants.

According to the instructors, Jeevan Vigyan's overarching mission is to give back to society. Through their teachings and practices, the organisation wishes to teach individuals to embrace a positive outlook, cultivate inner peace, and make a meaningful impact on the world around them.