



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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## TODAY

### NATIONAL

At least four people have died after eating wild mushrooms in Bhujhing of Lungri-5, Rolpa since July 11. Around a dozen people who also consumed toxic mushrooms are being treated for critical conditions. Pg 2

Amid a rise in dengue cases, the World Health Organisation's South-East Asia Region invited experts from its collaborative centre in Thailand to impart case management training to health workers in Nepal. Pg 3

### MONEY

A huge quantity of chemical fertiliser remains stranded at the Tatopani port for two months. Customs officials say around 735,000 sacks of urea ferried by 111 containers in April-May are lying in Larcha. Pg 4

The central bank has allowed "non-business licensees" to establish their own digital payment system. They also can serve as a member of the board of directors of the payment system operator. Pg 4

### SPORTS



Spain issued a Women's World Cup warning with a 3-0 win over Costa Rica while Switzerland defeated the Philippines 2-0. Chiamaka Nnadozie saved a penalty to earn Nigeria a 0-0 draw with champions Canada. Pg 6

### CULTURE

The Madhushravani festival underlines the importance of relationships and the respect a new entrant to the family—the bride or the groom—deserves. The bride stays with her parents for the month of Shravan. Pg 8



Usury victims prepare to return home from their encampment at Shantivatika in Kathmandu on Friday. Even as their demands remain unaddressed, the sufferers of the exorbitant lending practice say time is slipping away for paddy plantation in their villages in the Tarai. POST PHOTO: SANJOG MANANDHAR

## Court refuses to free ex-poll commissioner, Bhatbhateni owner in Lalita Niwas scam

But releases Secretary Krishna Bahadur Raut saying there is no reason to keep him in judicial detention.

By BINOD GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU, JULY 21

The Supreme Court on Friday scrapped the habeas corpus writ petitions demanding release of those accused in the Lalita Niwas land grab scam, thus continuing the judicial custody of everyone except Krishna Prasad Raut, the secretary at the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology.

Lawyers on behalf of Raut, Min Bahadur Gurung, chairman and managing director of Bhatbhateni Supermarket; ex-election commissioner Sudhir Shah; and former employee at Land Revenue Office Dharma Prasad Gautam, had moved the Supreme Court with habeas corpus petitions seeking the release of their clients. The division bench of justices Prakash Dhungana and Nahakul Subedi, after conducting hearings for five days, scrapped the petitions saying the arrests and detentions were done lawfully in line with a district court order.

"However, the bench ordered the release of secretary Raut since it didn't find adequate reasons for keeping him in judicial custody," Bimal Poudel, the Supreme Court spokesman, told the Post.

While ordering Raut's release, the court cited an earlier decision of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) not to lodge a case against Raut in connection with the land scam.

"While he doesn't appear to be in a position to be able to influence the case even if freed, there is no ground

to keep him in custody," said the court order. The court, however, stopped him from leaving the country until the conclusion of the investigation into the case.

On Friday, the Kathmandu District Court had extended the custody of all the four accused, by five days. With the apex court's decision, Raut will be released while the custody of three others will continue until the final investigation in the case is concluded.

### Court opens door for the arrest of 17 persons who were freed based on an order last year.

Responding to a petition by the four accused, the court, on July 14 had issued a show cause notice against the government and the police asking them to furnish reasons for the arrests. The final hearing began on Monday after the court received the written clarifications from the government agencies.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court has also opened the door for the arrest of 17 others who got out of police detention following a court order in July last year. They were released following a Supreme Court stay order.

The lawyers of the plaintiffs had claimed that there were no grounds to arrest them as the police had missed the statute of limitations.

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## Gold smuggling via international airport hints at big collusion

The Department of Revenue Investigation has started its own probe but police have yet to join the effort.

By PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA  
KATHMANDU, JULY 21

Nepali Congress lawmaker Sunil Sharma has demanded resignation of Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha and Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat over the latest gold smuggling scam.

"It seems that the Customs Department under the finance ministry and the police under home ministry could not stop repeated smuggling of gold at the airport," he told the meeting of the Law, Justice and Human Rights Committee of Parliament on Friday. "They should resign to pave the way for investigation and support the prime minister's drive [against corruption]."

On Tuesday, the Department of Revenue Investigation (DRI), under the Prime Minister's Office, seized gold estimated to be worth over a billion rupees and arrested six individuals. Two days later, on Thursday, four persons including a Chinese national were apprehended.

"So far, the DRI has nabbed 10 individuals and they are being probed in judicial custody with permission from the High Court, Patan," said Nawaraj Adhikari, information officer at the DRI.

The gross weight of the smuggled consignment, which includes motorcycle brake shoes and electric shavers, is 155 kg, according to officials at the Mint division of the Nepal Rastra

Bank, which has now been entrusted with the consignment.

The gold was concealed inside motorcycle brake shoes and as the metal (gold) was covered by another metal, it was difficult for the X-Ray machine to differentiate the two metals, according to the customs department. The DRI said that the central bank is yet to determine the actual weight of the smuggled gold.

### In a House committee, Congress MP Sharma seeks the resignation of home, finance ministers.

According to the DRI, a taxi cab carrying the gold, which had passed the airport customs undetected, was seized at Sinamangal, a location close to the Tribhuvan International Airport. Since the busting of the 33-kg gold smuggling scam in January, 2017, Tuesday's is the biggest seizure of gold that passed through the TIA at a time, according to officials.

As highlighted by lawmaker Sharma, officials and experts say that it is unusual that both the customs office and police failed to detect such a huge amount of gold despite the presence of X-ray devices, which are capable of detecting even small quantities of metals.

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## Mental health patients in Nepal suffer due to shortage of qualified experts

As tailor-made therapy is expensive, patients are often caught in two minds.



By MANUSHREE MAHAT  
KATHMANDU, JULY 21

An 18-year-old student, who spoke to the Post on condition of anonymity, has been battling borderline personality disorder for the past two years. Although she had been visiting a men-

tal health counsellor, her condition saw little improvement during her time with her counsellor.

She feels her experience with the counsellor failed short of her expectations and that the treatment her counsellor offered had been ineffective.

She recalls her therapist giving her

the most generic of advice. Although she had been taking purportedly exclusive therapy sessions for her condition, she says she was nowhere close to feeling better despite meeting up with her counsellor several times.

"I thought that going to a mental health counsellor would help me get better but it didn't. My expectations from the counselling sessions were not in sync with the reality I faced at the clinic," she said. "I would talk about my problems hoping she would provide me with guidance based on a thorough understanding of my problems. I had about 12 sessions with her, and every session felt like she was improvising with no concrete steps to cure me. Ultimately it was medication prescribed by my psychiatrist that got me to a better place mentally. I just wish I had received good therapy so that I could understand my condition better."

The teenager is not the only one who has been struggling to find the right direction towards recovery.

Shiksha Risal, a 33-year-old NGO employee, who also advocates for mental health well-being, had been battling depression for three years.

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## NATIONAL



Activists of the CPN-UML's youth wing National Youth Federation stage a torch march at New Baneshwar, Kathmandu on Friday calling for independent investigation into Tuesday's gold seizure. They accused the authorities of catching the small fry while ignoring the kingpins.

POST PHOTO

## Four people die after consuming wild mushrooms in Rolpa

Since the start of the monsoon, around a dozen people from Lungri Rural Municipality have fallen ill after eating wild mushrooms in the last 10 days.

□ KASHIRAM DANGI  
ROLPA, JULY 21

At least four people have died after consuming wild mushrooms in Bhujhing of Lungri Rural Municipality-5 in Rolpa district, since July 11. Around a dozen people who also consumed wild mushrooms are in critical condition and are receiving treatment in various hospitals.

A seven-year-old girl from Bhujhing village fell sick after consuming wild mushrooms on July 11. She was immediately rushed to the Universal Medical College in Bhairahawa for treatment. She died on July 18.

On July 16, three members of the same family in the Bhujhing village died after eating wild mushrooms. According to Inspector Prakash Bhusal of the District Police Office,

33-year-old Bhima Gurung and her two children aged 11 and six years fell ill after consuming wild mushrooms. They were taken to the Butwal-based Lumbini Provincial Hospital where they died while undergoing treatment.

Locals from different parts of Lungri Rural Municipality have fallen ill after consuming wild mushrooms since the beginning of the monsoon season, said Bhusal.

Bimala BK, a 26-year-old woman, 24-year-old Akriti BK, and a six-year-old from the Dalit community also fell seriously ill on July 11.

According to Bharat Thapa, chairman of the Lungri Rural Municipality, they were first taken to a Primary Health Centre at Sulichaur, which referred them to Butwal City Hospital.

But the patients could not reach Butwal on the same day. They were taken to the hospital on July 14.

Bimala is in a very critical condition and has been admitted to the ICU said Thapa.

"Around a dozen people in the rural municipality are still sick after consuming wild mushrooms and are receiving treatment at different hospitals and health facilities," said Thapa.

"To prevent any further casualties, we are conducting awareness programmes with the help of the District Public Health Office. Health workers have also been deployed in the rural municipality for immediate aid."

The rural municipality is providing financial relief to patients for treatment at various hospitals, he added.

### □ DISTRICT DIGEST

#### Men arrested on charge of raping an elderly

**DANG:** Police on Thursday arrested two people on charge of gang-raping a 73-year-old woman. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Pushparaj Malla, 30-year-old Puskar Roka and 20-year-old Resham BK have been taken into custody on rape charges. The duo were arrested from Tulsipur bus park on Thursday night. The victim, who had been living in an old age home, had reached Tulsipur Buspark on Thursday evening to meet her relatives. Roka and BK had then lured her by offering help, following which she was raped inside a parked bus.

#### Two girls drown in irrigation pond

**DAILEKH:** Two girls drowned in the Panikhola irrigation pond located in Chamunda Bindrasaini Municipality Ward 3 on Friday. According to Ganesh Kumar Shahi, mayor of Chamunda Bindrasaini Municipality, the girls were aged eight years and five years. The bodies of both girls have been sent to Dullu Hospital, Dailekh, for post-mortem. Further investigation is going on regarding the incident, said police.

#### Two Indians arrested with undeclared money

**SUNSARI:** Two Indian nationals were arrested with an undeclared INR 779,000 while entering Nepal from the Biratnagar customs office on Friday. According to Anjani Pokharel, DIG of the Armed Police Force, 81-year-old Ram Naresh Singh and Ratish Paswan of Bihar, India, were arrested during a routine check of Armed Police Force posted at the customs office. Along with the money, police also seized a motorbike with an Indian number plate and two mobile phones. Preparations are being made to send those arrested with the recovered materials to the Department Of Revenue Investigation in Itahari, said Pokharel.

## Lack of expert care leaves Nepali mental health patients frustrated

>> Continued from page 1

She recounts the lack of empathy she was dealt with by her psychiatrist and recalls being asked to bulldoze through her problems.

"My psychiatrist was indifferent to the problems I was suffering from. I would try talking about my problems, but I could tell that it fell on deaf ears. It is already difficult talking about mental health with the stigma attached to it in our society, and it is disheartening to be met with such disregard when we try to address our problems, especially by the very people who are supposed to heal us," said Risal.

While both psychologists and psychiatrists study human behaviour and mental processes, the qualifications of a psychologist do not extend to prescribing medication for a given condition. Psychiatrists, on the other hand, are trained medical doctors, who are able to both prescribe medications and provide therapies.

Psychologists tend to lead a talk session using a number of cognitive and behavioural techniques, while psychiatrists are consulted for mental health disorders that reach a severity requiring medication. Both psychiatrists and psychologists may be consulted to treat a mental health disorder.

A special initiative of mental health situation assessment conducted by the WHO in 2021 revealed the precarious situation of mental health issues and the lack of qualified mental health professionals in Nepal. According to the assessment, the number of psychiatrists in the country is as low as 144 while the number of psychologists in private practice is estimated to be around 30. The gap between the number of mental health patients and qualified mental health professionals is ever-growing with the National Mental Health Survey conducted in 2019 and 2020 revealing that 23 percent of the Nepali population is seeking treatment for mental health disorders.

Despite growing mental health problems in the country, access to mental health resources remains a major problem. Efforts to maximise available resources remain limited to

urban areas and that too with a gnawing shortage of qualified professionals.

The lack of properly trained and qualified psychiatrists, psychotherapists and psychologists in the country can be attributed to the government's inability to make mental health a priority. Psychology needs to be a regulated profession, but the failure of the authorities concerned to systematise and monitor the mental health medical field has led to the absence of well-trained and competent therapists adept at handling the sensitive nature of mental health processes and delivering productive and fulfilling counselling sessions.

Sajina Bhandari, a psychotherapist based in Kathmandu, also cites the lack of proper monitoring and regulatory mechanisms as the main reason for the dismal production of psychological resources in the country. "There is no regulatory board in the mental health sector in Nepal which has allowed malpractice to thrive. Dealing with psychological issues is no easy task, these are issues that must be handled with the utmost care. When there are no standards and guidelines to be met to become a psychologist, psychological practice becomes unethical," said Bhandari.

The lack of focus on mental health studies in the academic curriculum of the Nepali education system has also contributed to the dearth of qualified mental health professionals in the field.

Like the field of medicine is divided into various specialisations and sub-specialisations, so is the field of psychology. While M.Phil in Clinical Psychology and MA in Psychology focusing on clinical, counselling, and industrial psychology is offered by Tribhuvan University, several specialisations like addiction psychology, neuropsychology, and education psychology remain unexplored despite their importance as a solution to a wide variety of mental health problems.

This means that a therapist would have to navigate a particularly complex issue all on their own with little to no prior knowledge and experience,

while also guiding their patients. Imagine a psychologist in a drug addiction rehabilitation centre, with no prior knowledge about addiction-related issues. It is a bleak thought.

"The absence of specialised fields means that therapists lack the kind of intensive and in-depth training that is crucial in handling the sensitivity and complexity of a particular mental health problem," Bhandari told the Post.

**A 45-minute session with a professional therapist may cost over Rs 1,000.**

When one therapist has to deal with a broad set of issues from a wide range of age groups, it can get overwhelming for the therapist as well, says Bhandari. In cases where a patient has received one-on-one care and undivided attention from their therapist, the results have been fruitful. Mental health counselling and therapy have come to the rescue of many seeking help.

A competent and compassionate therapist can make a world of difference, says Amira, who has been dealing with depression. She has asked her real name to be withheld for privacy reasons.

"After starting therapy, the anxiety that I had associated with my condition has reduced. It feels uplifting to have a therapist who cares about my well-being enough to take the time to truly listen to all of my conflicting feelings and understand my issues. When I was first given the BDI (Beck's Depression Inventory), my score was high enough to be severe depression. But since I started the therapy, my condition is getting better. I am very happy with my sessions with my therapist," said Amira.

Amira's account of her experience shows that effective counselling sessions with qualified mental health

professionals can help in curing mental health issues.

Despite growing mental health awareness, the stigma attached to mental health issues is a hindrance several young people face in their search for medical help.

"The thought that I will be met with prejudice and backlash once I start talking openly about my mental health issues fills me with dread," said Amira. "I can only freely communicate about my state of mind with my therapist inside a closed room. I still haven't gathered the courage to speak about my condition openly for fear of rejection and apathy."

However, even if one chooses to speak freely about mental health issues they are facing, treatment for their condition is neither easily accessible nor affordable.

The cost of tailor-made therapy sessions is high. Patients are left to navigate through the web of cost-benefit analysis to ponder whether the costs of therapy are greater than their benefits.

According to Amira, a 45-minute therapy session with a professional therapist can cost anywhere above Rs 1,000 in Kathmandu.

Counselling is a long-term treatment process; patients have to have continuous contact with their therapist to ensure improvement and prevent relapse. With the costs of therapy as high as it is now, patients aren't able to commit to their psychological development.

In Nepal, psychological services are mostly provided by private practices, NGOs, and INGOS. The journey towards better mental health conditions is filled with uncertainty for patients who first have to overcome their own self-doubts, accept they need help, overcome the fear of social stigma, find the right mental health professional and be able to afford treatment. Government intervention in the mental health sector vis-à-vis funding hospitals to provide mental health services is a step forward in improving accessibility and affordability of mental health treatment. Officials at the Ministry of Health and Population said the government plans

to introduce mental health services in certain government-run institutions in future. Roshan Pokhrel, secretary at the ministry, said, "The placement of psychologists at hospitals could make a difference in opening accessibility to mental health services to all age groups from all backgrounds. The child psychiatry wing of Kanti Children's Hospital provides both psychiatric and psychological services to children under the age of 15. We are currently in the process of adding new positions for psychologists at certain state-run hospitals in the country in the hopes of improving accessibility to mental health services."

Efforts to develop and adopt dynamic and introspective policies can also go a long way in changing the landscape of mental health development in Nepal from the early stages to the implementation phase.

"The ministry has been working to develop a separate division for mental health for years now, but we have not been able to implement the plan," said Pokhrel.

"We have also included drugs for mental disorders like anxiety and depression in the list of essential medicines provided by the government, making it accessible and affordable to all. We plan to extend psychological resources in the country with a well-trained and dedicated set of psychologists in government hospitals. We have not been able to direct our resources to the mental health sector nearly as much as we should, but we are working on changing that."

Highlighting the positives of aligning oneself with the right approach to mental health treatment through professionals, Risal says she is on her path to recovery after finding the right therapist for herself.

"I'm in a much better place now after undergoing CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy). The therapy helped me understand myself better and I'm so much happier now," she said.

"But I've come across people who, despite wanting to start therapy, aren't able to afford it. The lack of government funding has made therapy expensive and inaccessible."

## Supreme Court frees Lalita Niwas-accused Secretary Raut

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After the investigation, the CIAA, the constitutional anti-graft body, filed a case on February 5, 2020 in connection with the land scam.

Nearly a year and a half after the District Attorney Office, Kathmandu returned the investigation report to the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) requesting further investigation into the land scam, the police have again started apprehending suspects.

The anti-graft body had filed cases against 175 individuals. Of them, 110 were accused of corruption, while 65 persons faced cases as the government sought the return of lands illegally obtained by them.

Former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport Bijay Kumar Gachhadar, and two former land reforms ministers Dambar Shrestha and Chandra Dev Joshi, along with three former government secretaries, are

among those accused of corruption over the illegal transfer of the government land.

Most of those charged with corruption, including Gurung, had earlier been released by the court on bail.

After completing a separate investigation in the forgery of government documents in connection with the land scam, the CIB on January 6 last year had submitted its investigation report to the District Attorney Office, Kathmandu, recommending prosecution of more than 300 people including some top retired officials.

As per Section 283 of the Criminal (Code) Act-2017, the statute of limitations for cases of forgery of government documents is two years from the date of the knowledge of the crime.

But the District Attorney Office returned the police document recommending more investigations so that they could be prosecuted based on the General Code-2020 BS since the land grab at Baluwatar happened before the Criminal (Code) Act-2017 came into force.

Point Number 18 under the 'Forged Document or Forgery' section of the General Code states: "If a suit on any matter other than on the matter of forgery or fraud of a document bearing government seal or of any other document held in a government office or on any matter of verbal forgery or saying or writing any false designation or of dismissal of employees by saying or writing so is not filed within six months of its knowledge, from the date of cause of action, the suit shall not be entertained."

## Twin probes looking into Tuesday's mega gold haul

>> Continued from page 1

The customs staff usually check the cargos brought from abroad when they arrive in the customs area.

"It is highly unusual that the customs office failed to detect such a large quantity of gold," said Punya Bikram Khadka, director at the Department of Customs.

The customs department has formed a six-member probe committee to look into the lapses that led to the passage of the gold without detection. "We have suspended one staff involved in customs clearance and sought approval from the Finance Ministry to suspend another," said Khadka.

Non-detection of large quantities of smuggled gold hints of collusion among the smugglers, customs officials and others at the top level. "Collusion is an obvious possibility," said former deputy inspector general of Nepal Police Hemanta Malla Thakuri.

"The condition of the customs infrastructure including X-ray machines and competence of human resources at the customs office at TIA are other factors to be considered during the investigation."

He said that capable human resources should also be deployed at the customs office considering the high likelihood of illegal activities taking place there.

"The Nepal Police have for long deployed specialised human resources with expertise in narcotics and counter-terrorism at the TIA. Capable customs staff should also be deployed considering the high volume of potential illegal trade through the customs," Malla said.

Officials at the DRI said that they had to keep the operation secret to control possible leakage of information to the smugglers and those helping them.

Nawa Raj Dhungana, director general at the DRI, told the Post that it was his office's top secret mission. "I had shared the information that we had received about the gold smuggling,



POST PHOTO: ANGAD DHAKAL

Armed Police Force personnel bring the seized gold at Nepal Rastra Bank's Mint Division for evaluation, Thursday.

as well as my plan of action with the prime minister," he said. "The prime minister ordered me to go ahead with the mission—and we did so."

Dhungana, however, refused to discuss whether any other political figure besides the prime minister was aware of the smuggling plan before the gold was seized. "Now, the investigation is underway and it will identify those connected with the smuggling," he said.

The DRI has initiated investigation into the case through a five-member probe team. It is yet to take the help of the police.

"The DRI has not requested for our help officially," said Superintendent of Police Sanjya Singh Thapa, who is also the spokesman at the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB). "We are ready to help if a request is made."

Former DIG Malla, however, called for involving the police in the investigation.

"It is an organised crime with international dimension as gold has been brought from another country," he said. "Besides investigating revenue leakages, there should also be a probe on organised crime."

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People buy umbrella at Indrachowk in Kathmandu on Friday.

POST PHOTO: ELITE JOSHI

## Congress jamboree veers from agenda as members speak as they please

Central Working Committee members criticise party president Deuba and general secretaries for failing to improve party affairs. Many seek generational change in leadership.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, JULY 21

The ongoing Central Working Committee (CWC) meeting of the Nepali Congress that is being live-streamed to the audience for the first time in the party's history lacks a structured and focussed debate.

A joint meeting of the party's office bearers and former office bearers on Sunday had set the agenda for the meeting, which is taking place after a gap of almost a year. The party's statute requires the meeting to be held every two months. But the ongoing meeting of the committee has failed to follow the agendas set by the office bearers as they mostly targeted party president Sher Bahadur Deuba and two general secretaries Gagan Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma in their remarks.

The joint meeting of the office bearers and former office bearers had decided to focus the discussion on current issues, presenting the decision of the work execution committee for the central committee's approval, the proposed action plan on strengthening the party organisation, determining the date and place for the Congress policy convention, announcement of a national campaign for the party's revival, discussing the report of the disciplinary committee, and the role of the Nepali Congress in Parliament.

Most of the members speaking at the meeting in the last four days criticised the party leaders. Some others disputed former home minister Bal Krishna Khand's arrest, flaying the party president Deuba and the general secretaries for failing to improve the party's image.

"No one is seriously discussing or raising their voice for boosting the party's image, building up the party organisational base, on how to present themselves effectively in the House and the government and how and when the meeting of the policy convention will be called.

The party's two general secretaries have made some proposals on the first day of the meeting, but no one seems bothered about them," one central member said.

The committee members are also not paying attention to reviving the party organisation as there is extreme frustration against the party's leadership among the general public, party leaders, and cadres due to rampant corruption and bad governance, another leader said. "Our focus should be on how to bridge the gap between the party and the people, but we are only focused on how to nudge Deuba, Thapa, and Sharma."

"The Nepali Congress should find out how to deliver [services] to the people and how we can ensure good governance," said Prakash Man Singh, former vice-president of the party. "As we are in govern-

ment, we have to work in order to improve the party's image."

"We are discussing at the central committee meeting what people expect from us and what we are giving them," said Singh.

"Several local units are now led by us so we should instruct our representatives to work in favour of the people."

Singh also urged Congress chief Deuba to run the party as per its charter by addressing complaints against him for not running the party in a democratic manner.

Deuba is facing ire for not giving a full shape to the various party departments, not being able to hold the general convention of the party's sister organisations, and for failing to address the complaints about the party's weak performance in the government and in parliament.

The party is the largest party in Parliament and has the biggest share in the government led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

"This meeting has widened the rift between the party president and the general secretaries," Bal Bahadur KC, another member, said at the meeting.

"Admittedly, the ideology, organisation, and leadership of the party have been weakened for various reasons."

At a time when a party has come under huge criticism for not taking action against the former home minister Khand, who is in jail for different charges, including his involvement in the fake Bhutanese refugee scam, several party leaders on Friday also came forward to his defence. Leaders like Gopalman Shrestha, Min Bishwakarma, and Jeet Jung Basnet among others

it is natural that the guardian should come to his defence. "At a time when a member of the family lands in trouble, do we rescue him or should we go to the police and send him to jail," asked Bishwakarma.

A group of Congress leaders had met with Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha after the arrest of Khand, a central working committee member. They thanked him for taking a resolute position on corruption and exposing the fake Bhutanese refugee scam. Some party leaders including general secretaries Thapa, Sharma, and others have demanded Khand's suspension as a central member.

Basnet also criticised some party members for speaking against Khand. "Now Home Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha is being dragged into the gold smuggling case," said Basnet.

"Let's demand his resignation. Are we ready for that?"

Another central member Sunil Sharma also joined the chorus of defending Khand.

Shankar Bhandari expressed his differences over the constitution of Nepal. Bhandari is in favour of reinstating the Hindu statehood in Nepal. The present constitution has declared Nepal as a secular nation. He also proposed at the meeting seeking an alternative to federalism.

Coming down heavily on the paper presented by the general secretaries, Arzu Rana Deuba said that it read like a wishlist of an NGO. The spouse of party president Deuba also called for unity in the party. "Any challenge can be dealt with if we stand together," she said.

Former foreign minister Narayan Khadka said that the issue of leadership handover to the new generation was raised. "Some of the office bearers are raising the issue of generation gap and handing over party reins to younger leaders."

Commission will have an impact on its recommendations and transitional justice. "As per the proposed provisions, even if any political party or group commits a violent and grave criminal offence, the leaders and cadres of the political party or group can get immunity through a political agreement," said Top Bahadur Magar, chair of the commission.

"The lack of judicial trial and withdrawal of sub justice cases can provide immunity to the culprits and may erode public confidence in the judicial system."

The commission believes that the provision will render transitional judicial mechanisms irrelevant. "There is a strong possibility that even the conflict victims who have been awaiting justice for the past 17 years will be deprived of their right to justice," the commission said in a statement.

"The commission cannot agree to acquit anyone guilty of serious human rights violations under any pretext."

## Health ministry sought WHO help for dengue case management

Four experts from WHO centre in Thailand imparted knowledge of case management, critical care, nursing care and on child care after severity of infection to health workers from all provinces.

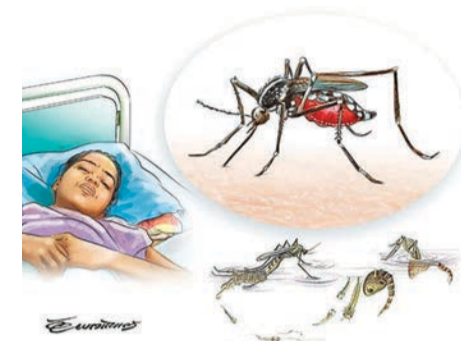
ARJUN POUDEL  
KATHMANDU, JULY 21

Amid a steady rise in dengue cases across the country, the World Health Organisation's South-East Asia Region invited technical experts from its collaborative centre in Thailand to impart case management training to health workers in Nepal.

The Ministry of Health and Population had sought the help of the UN body for the same. "The UN health agency had invited four technical experts from its collaborative centre in Thailand to impart training to our health workers upon our request," said Dr Gokarna Dahal, chief of the Vector Control Section at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division.

"An expert team [some three weeks ago] imparted knowledge of case management, critical care, nursing care and how the infected children are to be taken care of to the health workers from all the provinces."

At least one person has died and more than 2,500 people across the country have been infected by the dengue virus, as of Friday. Cases of infection from the virus have been reported from around 70 districts, including from mountainous ones, namely Sankhuwasabha, Myagdi and Darchula. Officials say most cases have been reported from Dharan of Sunsari, and Dhading and Kaski districts. All three districts of the Valley have reported dengue cases.



were reported in June and July.

Experts say that the real number of infections could be several times higher, as the government's case reporting system is not very effective and more than 80 percent of the cases are asymptomatic. Many people infected with the dengue virus exhibit mild symptoms, which do not need any treatment or get treated with paracetamol, at home.

Last year, 88 people died and more than 54,000 were infected with the virus, which had spread to all 77 districts of the country. Hospitals in Kathmandu Valley were overwhelmed with dengue patients and many complained that they were deprived of treatment. At the time, pharmacies had run out of paracetamol, the most widely used medicine to treat fever.

The number of deaths from dengue infection in Nepal is considered very high.

In 2019, the disease gripped 68 districts; six people died, and more than 16,000 were hospitalised.

"This year too, hospitals have reported severe dengue cases," said Dahal. "If the number of cases continues to rise in the coming days, serious cases will rise too."

Although the post-monsoon time is considered the peak season for dengue transmissions, the country has already witnessed outbreaks of the potentially deadly disease since the start of the year.

Experts say the virus has become endemic with cases of dengue infection being reported throughout the year.

As there is no specific treatment for dengue infection, experts have been urging authorities concerned to enforce preventive measures. However, enforcing preventive measures is primarily the responsibility of the local units.

Local governments get up to 90 percent of their health budgets from the federal government and their role is crucial in controlling any outbreaks.

"We are going to Dharan on Saturday for a meeting to sensitise elected representatives about the risks," said Dahal.

"Everyone's role is important in controlling the spread of the dengue virus, but the role of the local units is even more crucial."

In 2019, the disease gripped 68 districts; six people died, and more than 16,000 were hospitalised.

Dengue is a mosquito-borne disease transmitted by female *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes.

The same vector also transmits chikungunya, yellow fever, and Zika, according to the World Health Organisation.

According to doctors, mild to high fever, severe muscle pain, rashes, severe headache and pain in the eyes are some of the symptoms of dengue. Doctors advise that those experiencing these symptoms should immediately seek treatment.

While there is no specific cure for the disease, early detection and access to proper medical care can lower fatalities. Dengue-transmitting mosquitoes breed in clean water and bite people in daylight. Uncovered water tanks and discarded objects such as plastic cups and bottles could be breeding grounds for dengue-carrying mosquitoes.

Officials at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division said that most of the cases

are reported in June and July.

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## National Human Rights Commission objects to bill aimed at withdrawing sub justice cases

Watchdog says such a provision violates human rights, promotes impunity and hinders transitional justice.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, JULY 21

The National Human Rights Commission on Friday said it is concerned over a bill that allows the government to withdraw cases that are sub justice in courts.

Holding a press meet, the constitutional rights watchdog expressed its serious objection to the bill, arguing that such a provision violates human rights and promotes impunity. It has asked the authorities concerned to revise it.

The Bill to Amend Some Nepal Acts has a provision that says "cases sub justice in any court against anyone from a party or a group which conducted violent protests in the past but is carrying out its activities peacefully now, based on the constitution and the law, can be withdrawn".

Through the bill, the government has added a sub-section to Section 116 of the Criminal Procedure Code which ultimately aims to with-

draw cases from all tiers of the court—Supreme, High and district—against such political leaders. The bill has been endorsed by the House of Representatives and is currently under consideration at the National Assembly.

The commission is of the view that the provi-



Commission officials at the press meet on Friday.

POST PHOTO

## MONEY

## FOREX

US Dollar	131.42
Euro	146.20
Pound Sterling	168.80
Swiss Franc	151.74
Australian Dollar	88.56
Canadian Dollar	99.71
Singapore Dollar	98.84
Japanese Yen (10)	9.27
Chinese Yuan	18.31
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.04
Qatari Riyal	36.08
Thai Bhat	3.82
UAE Dhiram	35.78
Malaysian Ringgit	28.81
Korean Won (100)	10.23

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

## BULLION

PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 112,800
Silver	Rs 1,480

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

## BIZLINE

## Russian central bank surprises with sharper-than-expected rate hike to 8.5 percent

**MOSCOW:** Russia's central bank raised its key interest rate by a greater-than-expected 100 basis points to 8.5 percent on Friday, raising the cost of borrowing as the weak rouble added to inflation pressure from a tight labour market and strong consumer demand. It was the first time the bank had lifted rates in more than a year, having gradually reversed an emergency hike to 20 percent made in February last year after Russia sent its armed forces into Ukraine, which prompted the West to impose sanctions on Moscow. Its last cut, to 7.5 percent, was in September. "The increase in domestic demand surpasses the capacity to expand production, including due to the limited availability of labour resources," the bank said in a statement. (REUTERS)

## Brazil's Embraer to build flying taxis in Sao Paulo

**SAO PAULO:** Brazilian aeronautics company Embraer and its urban mobility subsidiary Eve said on Thursday they would build a factory near Sao Paulo to manufacture electric flying taxis that could take off as soon as 2026. The factory for "electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft" or eVTOL, will be built in the city of Taubate in Sao Paulo state. Taubate is a city of some 310,000 inhabitants about 140 kilometres from Sao Paulo, Brazil's economic capital. The drone-like passenger vehicles, which resemble small helicopters, will initially be used in taxi fleets, with the first flights costing about \$50 to \$100 per person per trip, company sources told AFP. (AFP)

## Britain sees improved momentum in latest round of India trade talks, source says

**LONDON:** Talks between Britain and India on a free trade agreement (FTA) have gained momentum but further work is needed on services and tariffs to secure a deal, a British source close to the negotiations told Reuters. Talks had seemed stuck earlier this year, with the two sides struggling to make progress in a number of key areas amid concern there could be further political complications if talks drag on. (REUTERS)

## Central bank expands digital payment system

Hotels, travel and trekking agencies and retail stores, among others, allowed to establish digital payment system.

□ KRISHANA PRASAIN  
KATHMANDU, JULY 21

The central bank has allowed "non-business licensees" to establish their own digital payment system.

Publishing a notice on July 10, Nepal Rastra Bank amended the licensing policy for institutions operating payment related activities, allowing non-business licensees like hotels, travel and trekking agencies, airlines, cargo agencies and retail stores, among others, to establish their own digital payment system.

They also can serve as a member of the board of directors of the payment system operator.

"Earlier, there was no provision for non-business licensees to sit on the board of companies operating payment systems," said Guru Prasad Poudel, executive director of the Payment Systems Department at Nepal Rastra Bank.

"We have amended the provision based on demand from non-business licensees," he said.

But the central bank allows only non-business licensees making transactions in foreign currency to create their own digital payment system. There are more than 3,000 such entities.

According to the Payment Systems Oversight Report of 2021-22 published by Nepal Rastra Bank, the real-time gross settlement system has processed large value payments.

In 2021-22, the number of real-time gross settlements surged by 40.6 percent from 2020-21.

Similarly, the value of transactions increased 105 percent year-on-year.

The number and value of connectIPS transactions grew by 109.3 percent and 127.1 percent respectively during the review period.

Similarly, the number of quick



SHUTTERSTOCK

The use of mobile banking, internet banking and digital wallets has been rising in recent years.

response (QR) code-based payments, the most widely used digital payment instrument, in the country surged by 382.8 percent in 2021-22.

The value of QR-based payments jumped 366 percent.

The use of mobile banking, internet banking and digital wallets has been rising in recent years.

The central bank's statistics show that post-Covid 19, the use of fast payment systems like connectIPS, QR,

e-wallets, mobile banking and internet banking has grown by leaps and bounds.

As digital financial services are proliferating, the use of cheques and electronic cheque clearing system is decreasing, the report said.

According to the central bank, the Nepali payment system consists of two types of instant payment systems—high value and retail systems.

Currently, two major networks

facilitate retail instant payments.

Nepal Clearing House operates connectIPS and corporatePAY instant payment systems.

Fonepay offers instant payment through Fonepay direct and Interbank Fund Transfer systems.

These two networks link one bank customer with another through their instant payment system.

According to Nepal Rastra Bank, there were 10 payment system opera-

## India to trade power with Southeast Asia: Sources

Country already exports to Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

□ REUTERS  
BAMBOLIM, JULY 21

India is considering trading power with Southeast Asian countries through Myanmar and Thailand, five sources briefed on the matter said, as New Delhi looks to use its growing renewables capacity to boost regional diplomatic engagement.

The grid linkages, which an industry official said could take at least four years to complete, follow India's effort to begin trading power with Middle Eastern countries such as the United Arab Emirates.

The sources, who also include four power ministry officials, declined to be identified as the previously unreported plan has not been made public.

India's federal power ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has been trying to promote closer political and economic ties with its neighbours, pushing back against China's growing regional influence.

Indian energy officials are holding separate and group discussions with some countries on advancing regional power grid interconnections at ongoing Group of 20 (G20) ministerial meetings in the Indian state of Goa, the power ministry officials said.

Support from G20 members is seen as key to winning backing from

bankers and developers in making investment decisions, one of the ministry officials said.

India has engaged France's EDF to prepare a regulatory framework that would address key challenges including pricing, the industry official said. EDF is expected to complete the report by the end of this year, the official added.

EDF did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"Once we are able to connect India's national grid to Burma (Myanmar), we should be able to strengthen the grid there and further transmit to Thailand and even Asia's east," the industry official said.

While cross-border grid linkages have drawn investment and government interest in regions from Europe to Southeast Asia, the rising cost of building subsea cables, surging prices of raw materials needed to upgrade grids and geopolitical tensions have raised questions about the viability of such projects.

Members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have been trying for decades to form a regional grid to facilitate multilateral power trade, but progress has been limited to bilateral deals between countries.

India plans to boost its renewable and big hydropower capacity to 500 gigawatts (GW) by 2030, from 177 GW currently.

Solar parks are expected to account for much of the new capacity.

## Delays and price issues leave tonnes of urea stranded at Tatopani

As the private supplier could not import the chemical fertiliser on time, the Agriculture Inputs Company, the buyer, is hesitant to receive the consignment.

□ ANISH TIWARI  
SINDHUPALCHOWK, JULY 21

A huge quantity of chemical fertiliser has remained stranded at Tatopani dry port for the last two months amid a supply crunch.

Customs officials say around 735,000 sacks of urea brought by 111 containers through the month of mid-April to mid-May are lying in the Larcha warehouse.

The Silk Group, one of the key players in the China-Nepal trade, had won a tender to import chemical fertiliser from the state-owned Agricultural Inputs Company.

Although the contract was signed during the last fiscal year, the supplier could not import the chemical fertiliser on time, citing many problems.

The Agricultural Inputs Company does not want to receive the fertiliser any longer stating that the supplier crossed the deadline as per the contract agreement.

Dayanand KC, chief of Tatopani Customs Office and dry port, said the entire warehouse has been filled with sacks of chemical fertilisers. "It has been causing difficulties for loading and unloading of other goods," said KC. "We have informed the company to clear the warehouse."

There is a provision to confiscate goods if it is not collected within 60 days, he added.



POST FILE PHOTO

Customs officials say around 735,000 sacks of urea brought by 111 containers through the month of mid-April to mid-May are lying in the Larcha warehouse.

KC said they have heard that a process is underway to clear the dry port of the fertiliser stock.

Tatopani border point, which was opened one-way after a four-year hiatus following the April 2015 earthquakes, was opened for exports in May last year.

Ramesh Sherpa, an official of Silk Group, said since the process has not been completed with the Agricultural Inputs Company, they have been holding further discussions.

"Once the process is completed, the fertiliser will be transported to

Kathmandu," Sherpa said.

As fertiliser prices have decreased this year, importers have been requesting the Agricultural Inputs Company to accordingly adjust their prices.

Gokul Subedi, the local leader of Bahrabise Municipality, said due to the irresponsibility of the government and the concerned importer, fertiliser stocks have piled up on the border, while the farmers are suffering.

"Farmers are in trouble due to a lack of fertilisers. This is strange," said Subedi.

## INTERVIEW

## 'Tourism will cushion Nepal against economic slowdown'

**Varun Talwar** is the general manager at Hyatt Place, Kathmandu. Talwar has been associated with the hospitality industry, particularly serving reputed brands in India, for the past 17 years. Experienced in dealing with diverse teams and working in hotels with large inventories, Talwar believes competition is always beneficial for the growth and success of any industry. In an email interview with the Post, he said Nepal needs to increase its flight frequency and decrease air fares between prime travel cities. Excerpts:

## How do you observe Nepal's tourism industry and its growth potential?

The current tourism industry scenario is extremely positive. The month of May witnessed an increase in overall tourist arrivals reaching pre-pandemic levels. All hotels in the Kathmandu Valley are doing extremely well with regard to occupancies. It is great to see that all sectors associated with tourism are back on track. Nepal, however, is facing a challenge to retain skilled manpower. Lack of skilled manpower and brain drain has always been a challenge here. It is not a recent occur-

rence. While opening the hotel, we had foreseen this. To stop the brain drain, we have come up with various incentive schemes to keep them motivated. Also, the constant training being conducted has been helpful in creating meaningful relations with all trainees. The idea is always to connect with colleagues on a one-on-one basis to understand what they require. The future of the hotel industry in Nepal looks extremely promising. With proper development of infrastructure, Nepal, being a beautiful country, possesses tremendous potential for growth. I believe that the industry has a bright future ahead which is confirmed by the number of international hotel chains entering the market.

## There are several luxury hotel chains in Nepal now. What is your strategy to compete with global brands?

Our strategy to compete with global luxury hotel chains entering the Nepali market is multi-faceted. First and foremost, we at Hyatt put 'care' at the heart of the business. We operate in a way where coworkers become friends who, in turn, care for our guests. We are committed to providing



POST PHOTO: ELITE JOSHI

Varun Talwar, the general manager at Hyatt Place, Kathmandu.

exceptional service without compromising on quality and standards as per international standards.

Additionally, we strongly believe in the well-being of our colleagues and guests. The Hyatt revolves around caring for our people so that they can be

ground for all hoteliers to think out of the box and do things differently. It's high time that we challenge the status quo in Nepal and change how things were done before. After all, any competition is good. Competition is always beneficial for the growth and success of any industry, including the hotel industry. Without competition, I believe the market would not flourish. I perceive competition in a positive manner as it encourages innovation, enhances customer service, and drives hotels to constantly improve their offerings to stay ahead in the market.

Although there has been a rise in the number of hotels, the tourist arrivals figure has not kept pace. What should Nepal do to increase tourists?

I would recommend that both the government and the private sector should concentrate on enhancing tourism-related infrastructure and implementing an effective marketing plan in order to increase tourist arrivals. Another area for improvement would be with regard to increasing the flight frequencies and decrease in fares between prime travel cities. There, however, has been a growth in domes-

tic tourists. We have implemented several strategies to attract domestic tourists. We are organising a wide range of promotions, focused on food, by bringing in internationally-renowned chefs and hosting events featuring international DJs. We believe that these initiatives will enhance the overall experience for our domestic guests.

## How has the ongoing economic slowdown affected the hotel industry? What's your view regarding the new luxury tax imposed by the government?

The current economic slowdown has had a noticeable impact on our industry. The industry has observed a decrease in business for 'outlets and events' compared to projected numbers. However, that is mitigated by international travellers spending more at hotels. I believe it is beneficial for high-end hotels and resorts to contribute to a luxury tax, provided that the tax revenue is utilized appropriately and for the advancement of the hospitality industry and the betterment of the overall infrastructure.



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9858030677 (Ashok, Nepalgunj), 9852028123 (Anuj, Biratnagar)

SPORTS



# Spain send World Cup warning

An own goal puts La Roja on their way and after Bonmati nets, Gonzalez makes it three in a ruthless six-minute first-half spell to kill off Costa Rica in double-quick time.



AP/RSS  
Players of Spain celebrate after scoring their third goal against Costa Rica during their Women's World Cup Group C football match in Wellington on Friday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WELLINGTON, JULY 21

Rampant Spain issued a Women's World Cup warning on Friday with a 3-0 win over Costa Rica while Switzerland ensured there would be no fairytale debut for the Philippines. Goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie was meanwhile the hero for Nigeria by saving a penalty to earn them a 0-0 draw with Olympic champions Canada. Spain's build-up to the tournament in Australia and New Zealand was clouded by a simmering row involving a group of 15 players who refused to feature under coach Jorge Vilda. Three eventually returned to the squad for the World Cup and one of them, Aitana Bonmati, was on the scoresheet in Wellington as La Roja launched wave after wave of attacks at the overwhelmed Costa Rican defence. An own goal put Spain on their way

and after Bonmati netted, Esther Gonzalez made it three in a ruthless six-minute first-half spell to kill off Costa Rica in double-quick time. In truth Spain should have won by many more—Jennifer Hermoso fluffed a first-half penalty—and did not miss their two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas. Putellas started as a substitute, but ominously for Spain's rivals for the last 13 minutes, allaying fears about a possible injury. She only returned in April from a serious knee injury. This World Cup is just two days and five games in, but already there has been a penalty in every game. In the first match Friday, Nnadozie denied Canada and their record-breaking goalscorer Christine Sinclair from the spot in front of 21,410 fans in Melbourne. Nnadozie called it a dream come

true as both sides took a point in a tight-looking Group B which is topped by Australia following their 1-0 win over Ireland on Thursday, again through a penalty. "It was a great thing today that we were able to at least get something and it was a dream come true for me personally," said the goalkeeper, who was named player of the match. The 22-year-old Paris FC stopper said she wanted revenge on Sinclair—the all-time top scorer in international football—after conceding against the forward previously. "When she took the ball, I was like, 'Okay, it's Sinclair again', because the last time we played against them, she scored against me. I was very angry, and I told myself, this is the opportunity to make things right." The Philippines were beaten 2-0 by Switzerland as their World Cup debut fell flat.

The tournament minnows thought they had taken the lead in the first half in the New Zealand city of Dunedin but the goal was ruled out for offside in front of 13,711 spectators. If that was the correct call, the VAR decision which gave the Swiss a penalty on the stroke of half-time was more contentious. Ramona Bachmann was nevertheless unerring from the spot, sending goalkeeper Olivia McDaniel the wrong way. The Swiss, ranked 20th in the world to their opponent's 46th, were good value for their lead and doubled it in the 64th minute when Seraina Piubel slammed in a rebound from close range for a routine win. Switzerland joined co-hosts New Zealand at the top of Group A on three points.

# United States begin quest for unprecedented third successive title

The defending champions have a new cast of players at this World Cup, including 14 who are making their first appearance in football's biggest tournament.



AP/RSS  
United States' Sophia Smith (left) and Kristie Mewis take part in drills in Auckland on Friday.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
AUCKLAND, JULY 21

In the words of Vietnam's coach, facing the US national team in the Women's World Cup is a daunting quest, something "like a mountain," said Mai Duc Chung. Vietnam make their World Cup debut Saturday against the United States, the heavy favourites to win the tournament for an unprecedented third time. The Americans enter Saturday's game in Auckland at Eden Park with the same confidence they carried through their last two World Cup-winning runs. "The US are very, very strong. It is like a mountain. But it doesn't mean that we will give up," said Mai. But few believe Vietnam have a

chance. The national team are very similar to Thailand, who the Americans thumped 13-0 in the opener at the World Cup four years ago in France. The United States went on to beat the Netherlands 2-0 for their second consecutive World Cup and fourth overall, the most of any nation. "Fear? We believe," said captain Nuynh Nhu. "We've already prepared. Nothing to fear, nothing to be afraid of." The Americans wouldn't dare discount their opponents, particularly after the criticism they took for running up the score against Thailand four years ago in France. They are taking Vietnam in the opening game quite seriously. "We want to show our respect by giving our best game, and we know

that they'll do the same for us," captain Lindsey Horan said Friday, the eve of the match. "I think everyone always gives us their best game." The United States have a new cast of players at this World Cup, including 14 who are making their first appearance in football's biggest tournament. Among them is 18-year-old phenom Alyssa Thompson and up-and-comer Trinity Rodman, the 20-year-old daughter of former NBA star Dennis Rodman. Another quickly rising star is Sophia Smith. Just 22, she was named National Women's Soccer League's Most Valuable Player and US Football's Player of the Year last year. Coach Vlatko Andonovski infused the United States with young talent after the team finished with a disappointing bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics. "I think that we have a very good mix of young, energetic, enthusiastic players, and experienced players that have been through tough games, that have been in big tournaments and know how to win big games," Andonovski said. Megan Rapinoe is among the veterans on the squad and should make her 200th appearance for the national team if she plays against Vietnam. Rapinoe, 38, announced before the team left for New Zealand that this would be her last World Cup and she would retire from her professional team at the end of the season. Rapinoe and Rose Lavelle were both limited by injuries in the run-up to the tournament, but Andonovski said both are available to play. There were still several other players that weren't available for the US roster. Mallory Swanson, the team's top scorer this year, injured her patella tendon in her left knee during an exhibition match against Ireland in early April. Catarina Macario tore an ACL last year while playing for the French club Lyon and was unable to recover in time. But the biggest blow was the loss of captain Becky Sauerbrunn, who announced that a right foot injury suffered in April would keep her out of the World Cup. Saturday's game will be the first meeting between the United States and Vietnam. The Vietnamese lost two exhibition matches ahead of the tournament and fell 9-0 to Spain in a closed-door tune-up match in Auckland last Friday.

# Former power China aim to kick-start new era

The Steel Roses were fourth-place finishers in 1995 and runners-up to the United States in 1999.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
PERTH, JULY 21

Coach Shui Qingxia said Friday she hoped the Women's World Cup will help usher a new dawn for China, starting with a "very significant" opening match against Denmark in Perth. China were an early powerhouse at the showcase event, finishing fourth in 1995 and then runners-up to the United States in 1999. But they've failed to get past the quarter-finals since, and were knocked out in the round of 16 at the 2019 event in France. Overtaken by several European nations, China's status as a women's football heavyweight diminished, but a surprise triumph at last year's Asian Cup ended a 16-year title drought. Qingxia, China's first woman head coach, hoped the momentum would reignite their status as a world force. "I want this to be a fresh start for this generation," she told reporters ahead of China's opener on Saturday. "I hope we can give our best performance in this tournament. Everything has a start, I think." The Steel Roses face the tough task emerging from Group D headlined by title contenders England, seemingly raising the stakes for the match



PHOTO: COURTESY OF FIFA  
Shui Qingxia is China's first woman head coach.

between 13th ranked Denmark and 14th China. Denmark coach Lars Sondergaard, however, preferred to play down the match's importance. "We don't see it that way. I don't see it as a decider yet," he said, with Haiti also pitted in the group. "You have to pay respect to Haiti, they could play a part in it. The importance of this game is obvious because it is the first game of the tournament." Denmark will end a 16-year World Cup absence with their bid for a deep run seemingly resting on star striker Pernille Harder, who has returned from hamstring surgery.

FIFA WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2023

RESULTS (GROUP STAGE)

Philippines	0-2	Switzerland
Nigeria	0-0	Canada
Spain	3-0	Costa Rica

Valeria del Campo (OG) 21  
Aitana Bonmati 23  
Esther Gonzalez 27

PLAYING SATURDAY

US	6:45	Vietnam
Zambia	12:45	Japan
England	15:15	Haiti
Denmark	17:45	China

FIFA WOMEN'S WORLD CUP TEAM RANKINGS

Team	Rank	Team	Rank
United States	1	Switzerland	20
Germany	2	Portugal	21
Sweden	3	Ireland	22
England	4	Colombia	25
France	5	New Zealand	26
Spain	6	Argentina	28
Canada	7	Vietnam	32
Brazil	8	Costa Rica	36
Netherlands	9	Nigeria	40
Australia	10	Jamaica	43
Japan	11	Philippines	46
Norway	12	Panama	52
Denmark	13	South Africa	54
China	14	Haiti	53
Italy	16	Morocco	72
South Korea	17	Zambia	77

ACC EMERGING TEAMS ASIA CUP

SEMI-FINAL/P SARA OVAL, COLOMBO  
TOSS: Pakistan 'A', bat first.  
Pakistan 'A' 322-10 (50/50 overs)  
Omar Yousef 88 (79), Mohammad Haris 52 (43)  
Pramod Madushan 10-0-56-2,  
Lahiru Samarakoon 7-0-42-2  
Sri Lanka 'A' 222-10 (45.4/50 overs)  
Avishka Fernando 97 (85),  
Sahan Arachchige 97 (109)  
Arshad Iqbal 7-4-0-37-5,  
Sufiyan Muqem 10-1-44-2  
Pakistan 'A' win by 60 runs  
Player of the match: Arshad Iqbal

ICC MEN'S ODI BATTING RANKING

Rank	Player	Country	Rating
1	Babar Azam	Pakistan	886
2	Rassie van der Dussen	South Africa	777
3	Fakhar Zaman	Pakistan	755
4	Imam-ul-Haq	Pakistan	745
5	Shubman Gill	India	738
6	Harry Tector	Ireland	726
7	David Warner	Australia	726
8	Virat Kohli	India	719
9	Quinton de Kock	South Africa	718
10	Rohit Sharma	India	707

ICC MEN'S ODI BOWLING RANKING

Rank	Player	Country	Rating
1	Josh Hazlewood	Australia	705
2	Mohammed Siraj	India	691
3	Mitchell Starc	Australia	686
4	Rashid Khan	Afghanistan	682
5	Matt Henry	New Zealand	667
6	Mujeeb Rahman	Afghanistan	661
7	Trent Boult	New Zealand	660
8	Adam Zampa	Australia	652
9	Shaheen Afridi	Pakistan	630
10	Shakib Al Hasan	Bangladesh	618

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Thinking I won Wimbledon is tough to believe. I can't believe that I won and beat Novak (Djokovic), probably it will take some days to believe.



— Carlos Alcaraz says ahead of Hopman Cup.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF GRAPHIC ARTS  
Nepal Volleyball Association on Friday feted national men's and women's team that clinched silver medal at the CAVA Beach Volleyball Championships held in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh in December 2022. (From left) Coach Bharat Shah, men's team members Dil Bahadur Sunar and Man Bahadur Shrestha, women's team member Kopila Uprety and Kamala Pun, and manager Junu Pun were each honoured with Rs25,000 and letter of appreciation.

EVENTS

Three Years of Lavie

Lavie Garden is hosting an event to celebrate its third anniversary. The event will feature a live performance by The Elements, who will play their popular songs like 'Sapana Ko Mayalu' and 'Birsiney Hau Ki' and more. Singer Karan Joshi will open the event.

Where: Lavie Garden, Bauddha, Kathmandu  
When: July 27  
Time: 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm  
Tickets: Rs500 via Eswa



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LAVIE GARDEN



PHOTO: COURTESY OF MR NEPAL WORLD/FACEBOOK

Mr Nepal 2023 Grand Finale

The grand finale of Mr Nepal 2023 is here. Finalists selected from participants from all over the country will showcase their talent, intelligence and beauty to win the coveted title.

Where: Hotel Yak and Yeti, Durbarmarg, Kathmandu  
When: July 22  
Time: 6:00 pm  
Entry: Rs2,500, Rs5,000 (entry and dinner)

Workshop on Consent

Chautari Youth Club (CYC) is organising a workshop on consent to spread awareness on why giving and receiving consent in different situations is important. The club aims to promote a culture of respect and understanding. The registration form for the event is available on CYC's social media.

Where: Kimdol, Swoyambhu, Kathmandu  
When: July 27  
Time: 12:00 pm to 2:30 pm  
Entry: Free



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHAUTARI YOUTH CLUB/FACEBOOK



PHOTO: COURTESY OF PHOTO.CIRCLE

All This Weight Exhibition

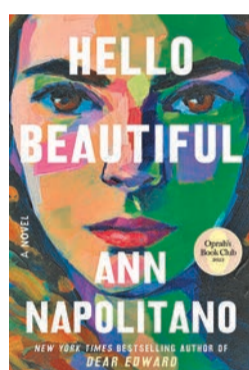
Explore the depths of art at photo.circle's exhibition 'All This Weight.' It features photographs from ten visual artists from India and Nepal and is an intimate sharing of experiences, which range from tales of the body, nature, society, and relationships to investigations of chance, intimacy, loss and the resourceful ways we negotiate life.

Where: Patan House, Lalitpur  
When: Till July 30  
Time: 11:00 am to 7:00 pm, closed on Mondays  
Entry: Free

BEST-SELLERS | NEW RELEASES

Fiction

1. Hello Beautiful by Ann Napolitano
2. The God of Good Looks by Breanne Mc Ivor
3. Chain Gang All-Stars by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah
4. CIU: Criminals In Uniform by Sanjay Singh & Rakesh Trivedi
5. King of Pride by Ana Huang



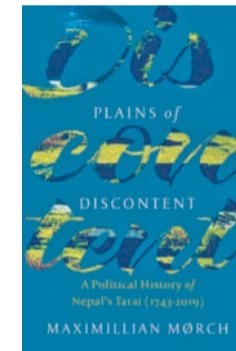
**CIU: Criminals in Uniform**  
Author: Sanjay Singh & Rakesh Trivedi  
Price: Rs638.40  
Publisher: Harper Collins

India is thrown into turmoil as explosives are discovered in a car parked outside the residence of Asia's wealthiest individual. The appointment of the controversial leader of Mumbai Police's esteemed Crime Investigation Unit (CIU), renowned for handling high-profile cases, as the chief investigator intensifies the situation. As the plot thickens, a series of sensational events culminate in the suspicious death of the sole witness, adding intrigue beyond the vehicle, explosives, and terrorist threats. The unfolding events possess the potential to embarrass the state government, raising questions about the CIU chief's role as either a manipulator or a pawn in a covert conspiracy.



**The Coincidence Plot**  
Author: Anil Menon  
Price: Rs958.40  
Publisher: Simon & Schuster

'The Coincidence Plot' enchants readers with its mesmerising exploration of fate, interconnections, and the complexities of human existence. The tale unfolds as a dreamer, firmly believing in the grand design of life, crosses paths with a woman who finds the notion repulsive. This unexpected encounter sets in motion a transformative journey for both and those they hold dear. Menon's masterful storytelling skillfully weaves together a diverse cast of characters, various cities, and intricate circumstances, forming a tapestry of subtle parallels and captivating coincidences.



**Plains of Discontent**  
Author: Maximillian Morch  
Price: Rs798  
Publisher: Fine Print

Look through the hidden pages of Terai's political history, unearthing the untold stories that illuminate the roots of anger, resentment, and discontentment within this often overlooked land. 'Plains of Discontent' reveals the consequences of the Gurkhal conquest in Terai, encompassing deforestation, resource theft, colonisation, disfranchisement, and suppression of indigenous communities like the Madhesi and Tharus. These factors sparked the civil war, Madhesi and Tharu uprisings, and calls for independence. Citing historical sources from various eras, including the reigns of King Prithvi Narayan and King Mahendra, the book highlights the failure of kingdoms.

Non-Fiction

1. The Great Tech Game by Anirudh Suri
2. Without a Doubt by Surbhi Sarna
3. The Forever Prisoner by Cathy Scott-Clark & Adrian Levy
4. The Russo-Ukrainian War by Serhii Plokhy
5. Plains of Discontent by Maximillian Morch



Ekta Books

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Connect with your surroundings while breaking free from typical Saturday routines. These vibes pair well with hikes, picnics, and exploration, so focus your energy accordingly. Watch out for hazy vibes.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

You'll shine brightly and gain attention quite easily today. This cosmic climate invites you to be unapologetically yourself, as people will find appreciation for the qualities that define you. Your mind will be a busy place this evening.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Don't be afraid to swim in the depths of your soul, doing so with a revolutionary and playful disposition. Old love interests may resurface throughout the coming weeks. You'll also have a chance to smooth out old wounds.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Surprising news may find you, so be sure to keep your phone nearby. These vibes will also bring a certain level of genius your way, so don't be afraid to speak up if you have something interesting to say.

LEO (July 23-August 23)

Shocking developments could manifest within your field today. Don't be surprised if foundations are rocked, use chaos that ensues o showcase reliability. You'll perk up tonight, putting you in favour with the universe.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

The moon continues its journey through your sign. These vibes will put you in an unconventional mood, encouraging you to embrace what makes you unique. You may be forced to reckon with heartache throughout the coming weeks.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

You may reach a breaking point of sorts, offering to revolutionise the way you think and feel. If you've been carrying around bad habits or vibes you'd rather be rid of, now is the perfect time to finally cut ties.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

You should feel loved by your community this morning. These vibes are also great for an impromptu date or gathering of friends, so don't hold back if you feel inspired to leave the house. Career insecurities may bubble to the surface.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Your inventive side will shine through around the office today. Embrace unconventional techniques under this cosmic climate. Doing so will help you gain the respect of your peers. You'll elevate your connection with the universe.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Flashes of insight could crawl into your psyche this morning. This celestial exchange is poised to supercharge your connection with the universe, which means moments of brilliance may have divine origins.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

You'll crave intimacy this morning, inspiring you to scratch below the surface. People will be eager to break free from tradition, helping you see loved ones in a new light. Your love life may be tested in the coming weeks.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

All signs point to an exciting start to the week-end. Use this energy as an excuse to be wild and weird, bringing your closest companions along for the ride. The stars will ask you to reevaluate your habits.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Dry off
- 5 "PTI" channel
- 9 Mesa dweller
- 13 Fraud
- 14 You, once
- 15 Fridge maker
- 17 Get poison ivy
- 18 Chopped down
- 19 Causes to lean
- 20 Bullfighter
- 22 Flying machines
- 24 Mispronounces
- 26 Fruit cake ingredient
- 27 Strange
- 30 Bring into accord
- 32 Two-person bike
- 34 Mongkut portrayer
- 35 Drown a doughnut
- 39 FN colleagues
- 40 Car crash protection (2 wds.)
- 43 "For shame!"
- 44 Puts
- 46 "-Pan" (Clavell novel)
- 47 Fix a boot
- 49 Rushing sound
- 52 Painter's device
- 53 Sorrel
- 56 Emulates Galen

DOWN

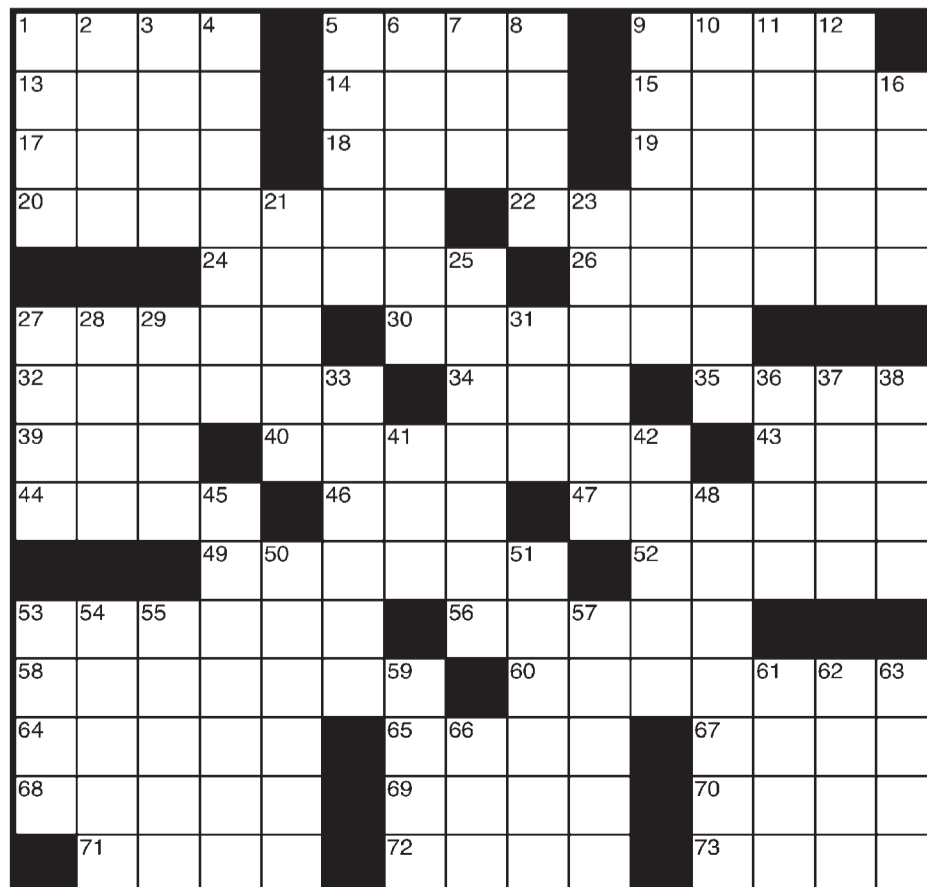
- 1 Odd notion
- 2 Tad
- 3 International agreement
- 4 Breathed out
- 5 Social mores
- 6 Everest guide
- 7 "Bam!"
- 8 Now, to Caesar
- 9 Chapeau securer
- 10 Skipped
- 11 Less tanned
- 12 Opening remarks
- 16 Org.
- 21 Informal restaurant
- 23 Of the eyes
- 25 In vogue

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



7-29-23 © 2017 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS

- 27 Banking conveniences
- 28 Put cargo aboard
- 29 Part of MIT
- 31 Place to soak
- 33 Drives along
- 36 Tabloid topics
- 37 Shade of green
- 38 Boat's bottom
- 41 Thai neighbor
- 42 Film spools
- 45 Eddied
- 48 Struts
- 50 Steals
- 51 — in (surrounded)
- 53 Takes steps
- 54 Misplay due to nervousness
- 55 Hayes or Reddy
- 57 Walkway
- 59 Weight
- 61 Actor — Guinness
- 62 Game with mallets
- 63 Equinox mo.
- 66 Aloha token



SUDOKU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

# Madhushravani: A festival celebrated by women of Mithila

The festival is believed to have started during ancient times to ease newly married women into their married life.

□ NITYANAND MANDAL

*Purainik patta, jhilmil latta, tahi chade  
baisali Bishari mata  
Haath supari khoicha paan Bishari karti  
shubh kalyan*

*Goddess Bishari, seated on a lotus leaf,  
holding a betel nut in hand and paan in her  
sari, showers us with her blessings*

The song is dedicated to Bishari, the snake goddess who is believed to save people bitten by a snake. These days the whole of the Mithila region is vibrant with echoes of songs like the one above. Moreover, *nachari* (a type of folk music) and folklore are performed on the streets, in gardens and in people's homes. The lives of newly married women are agog with excitement, curiosity and enjoyment.

Mithila culture is diverse in terms of tradition, rituals and lifestyle. One such unique festival is Madhushravani, a 15-day ritual that newlywed women participate in. The festival is celebrated throughout the Madhesh Province and some neighbouring parts of India, like northern Bihar.

This year too, the Madhushravani festival is poised to be celebrated with great enthusiasm. This year, it started on July 7 and will conclude on August 19. Additional days to the festival have been added because of the leap year.

During the ritual, women of Brahmin, Kayastha, Sonar and Dev castes fast throughout the day for around two weeks. On the final day of the ritual—which has largely been a subject of debate—the knees of the women are brought in contact in a practice called 'temi.' This sometimes leads to burning on the skin and results in a wound.

Historically, it is believed that the

bigger the wound on a woman's knee, the longer her husband's life will be.

However, this is being contested these days. Women's rights activists have been raising their voices, saying it is wrong to continue such painful practices. They argue that human beings should not be pushed into enduring such cruel rituals in the name of tradition. Many believe the festival as a whole needs to be abolished.

There are also many women who want the festival to evolve in a way that doesn't result in women going through pain. They say that it is best to transform some parts of the rituals in a pragmatic way so that the festival could be even more meaningful for its followers.

Thus, it has now become more common to practice 'shital temi,' where the ritual is practised without fire. Even if fire is used, they just bring an oil lamp close to women's knees before quickly moving it away.

Besides the 'temi' ritual, many Maithil women have a positive view of the festival. Bharati Choudhary, a member of Sakhi-Bahinapa, a women-lead organisation, argues, "In other cultures, they have a honeymoon, but in ours, we have Madhushravani."

Adding to Choudhary's views, writer Poonam Jha says, "Along with justifying traditional and religious values, this festival also brings forth human values. Celebrating this festival means preserving our people's cultural heritage and identity."

Madhushravani is believed to have been established during ancient times to ease newly married women into their married life. Women dress up in bridal clothes, collect seasonal flowers and leaves of trees, and put them in baskets made of bamboo. They also worship Lord Shiva with his consort Gauri daily, and the senior-most woman in the family—called *bidkari*—narrates stories



PHOTO: COURTESY OF NITYANAND MANDAL

**This year, the event started on July 7 and will continue till August 19.**

daily during the period.

A distinctive feature of this festival is that women have to read different holy stories and sing hymns daily. Similarly, they also have to worship Naga (serpent) gods, Gauri, Surya (the sun), Chandrama (the moon) and Navagrah (the nine planets).

The festival also aims to build awareness about the environment. Plants such as juhi (jasmine) and maina (taro) are used in the rituals to signify their importance in sustaining the culture.

The stories told throughout the festival make Madhushravani all the more fun. Of the many stories relating to Shiva narrat-

ed during the festival, one goes: Once, Shiva and Parvati, deeply in love, were playing in the water. In a fit of excitement, Shiva placed his semen on the leaves of five lotuses. Out of the leaves, five Nagakanyas (female serpent deities) were born. Shiva often stepped out to spend time with his daughters. Once, Parvati, unaware of the situation, spotted him playing with the girls, became angry and raised her foot to crush them. That's when Shiva revealed the truth.

Another version says that the girls were created from Shiva's hair that fell into the water of Sonada Lake when he was having a bath. They were born as lotuses, and he wanted to see them in their human form. Thus, his daughters Jaya Bishari, Dhoothila Bhavani, Padmavathi, Mynah Bishari and Manasa Bishari emerged from the water.

Another folk story of intrigue from the Shiva Puran (a Sanskrit text) is that of

Behula, the devout wife who travelled to the heavens on a raft to successfully save her husband, Lakhindar, after a snake bite. This story is also performed as a play to appease the serpent goddess Manasa.

Many of the folktales of Mithila also impart knowledge about the importance of nature for human survival. Thus, the festival is an amalgamation of *kala, katha* and *vrai* (art, stories and fasting).

The Madhushravani festival underlines the importance of relationships and the respect a new entrant to the family—the bride or the groom—deserves. The bride stays with her parents and, in some communities, even the husband goes and stays with his in-laws.



Mandal is a journalist and Maithili cultural expert based in Janakpur.

## Amid a Bollywood wave, Maithili films offer new perspective on societal issues, but lack exposure

They are raising concerns of ordinary citizens' day-to-day life, blurring the linguistic and aesthetic divide.



PHOTO: SCREENGRAB FROM YOUTUBE

□ ARVIND DAS

There are nearly 50 languages in which films are made in India, but films produced from Bollywood in Hindi are invariably discussed and debated in the mainstream media. They hog the limelight. We seldom get to know about movies made in North-Eastern languages or other regional cinema.

Recently, during the 76th Cannes Film Festival, a Manipuri film, 'Ishanou', directed by renowned filmmaker and musician Aribam Syam Sharma, was screened under the Cannes Classics category, but it didn't get the attention from the film fraternity it rightly deserved. Manipur has a 50-year-long cinema history. The truth is, many people still don't know about the movies of Sharma or young Manipuri filmmakers like Haobam Paban Kumar and Romi Meitei.

The same is the situation with some other regional cinemas, for example, in Maithili.

But now, it can be hoped that things are changing. In the last two decades, films made by new independent directors have created waves at national and international festivals. With the digitalisation and coming of online media platforms (OTT), there has been a phenomenal rise of regional cinema in India. New media and digital tech-

nologies have propelled regional cinema to conquer new territories. Films made in Marathi, Punjabi, Malayalam, Telugu, etc, have been popular beyond their language markets. Could this also happen with Maithili cinema?

**In the last five decades, more than 50 Maithili films have been released, but only a few are known.**

Last year, during the San Sebastian International Film Festival, young film director Parth Saurabh's 'Pokhar Ke Dunu Paar' (On both sides of the pond) got the 'Special Mention New Directors award.' Based in Darbhanga, it has not been released yet in cinema halls or on any OTT platform, but it's being discussed in the festival circuit. Next month, it will be screened at the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne along with Anurag Kashyap's 'Kennedy.'

**The history of Maithili films**  
Maithili film history is more than 50 years old. 'Kanyadan', based on famous Maithili writer Harimohan Jha's novel of the same name (1933), directed by

Phani Mazumdar and released in 1971, is credited with being the first Maithili film. It depicts the problem of mismatched marriage through language problems in pre-independent India. Nabendu Ghosh wrote its script, while famous Hindi writer Phanishwar Nath 'Renu' wrote the dialogue for 'Kanyadan.'

Before 'Kanyadan', a Maithili-speaking filmmaker, C Parmanand, was trying to direct the first Maithili film in 1964, named 'Naihar Bhel Mor Sasur.' It was delayed and released in 1982 as 'Mamta Gabay Geet' (Mamta sings the song). Both movies are still remembered for their sonorous songs.

In the last five decades or so, more than 50 Maithili films have been released but only a few, like 'Jai Baba Vaidyanath', 'Sasta Jingsi Mahag Senur' (Life is cheap, marriage is expensive), 'Kakhan Harab Dukh Mor' (When will my sorrow go away), and 'Mithila Makhaan', are known and talked about. Most of the films follow the narrative of mainstream Hindi cinema, and a few have worked at the box office.

**A lack of exposure**  
Maithili and Bhojpuri cinema production started around the same time in the 1960s. While Bhojpuri cinema has a market and industry, Maithili cinema has failed to develop a market. A reason for this could be the lack of sup-

port and distribution network for Maithili films all these years, which is true even in the age of OTT.

In an interview, well-known film director Girish Kasaravalli told me: "When the idea of online platforms came, we thought it would help the small filmmakers, but our expectations did not come true. OTT is more concerned about returns, profits, and so on. Kerala recently started a government-owned OTT platform to screen off-beat Malayalam films that have received critical acclaim and national and international attention."

Perhaps, the Bihar government will take the lead.

Maithili was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in 2004. The Mithila region, which encompasses parts of North Bihar and Nepal, is known for its rich language, literature, and culture. And yet, it is Bhojpuri, the language spoken in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand, that has produced a more vibrant and sustainable cinema. Any discussion of the cinema of Bihar begins and ends with Bhojpuri films. It's true that Bhojpuri films have a vast catchment area which makes them commercially viable, but unlike Bhojpuri films, contemporary Maithili cinema is set in realism.

With the critical acclaim of movies like 'Gamak Ghar' (Village Home) and 'Dhuin' (Fog), directed by Achal Mishra, people have begun noticing Maithili cinema in film festival circuits. Last year, 'Dhuin' was screened at the Cannes Film Festival along with five other movies. Besides Cannes, they were shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and other international festivals, too.

Both the Maithili films deal with the issues of migration and unemployment and the aspirations of small town youth in a globalising India.

Partha Saurabh's film, 'Pokhar ke Dunu Paar' (On either side of the pond) is also set in Darbhanga against the backdrop of the Covid-19 lockdown. Although the language of the film is Hindi, the lilt of Maithili is heard in every frame.

In all three films, we notice a certain minimalism and visual quality unheard of in the history of both Bhojpuri and commercial Maithili cinema.

In this era of blockbusters and nationalistic Bollywood films, these movies are raising issues which concern day-to-day life of ordinary citizens, blurring the linguistic and aesthetic divide. But they need to get exposure which, given the recognition in film festivals, will, it is hoped, come sooner than later.

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## Young artists shine at Gallery MCube show

The exhibition features a unique body of works by 12 up-and-coming artists.

□ POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU

Gallery MCube is currently displaying artworks by 12 young artists—eleven Nepali artists and one from the UK—for this year's iteration of the 'Young Artists Show.' The featured artists are Annabelle Keyes, Momin Pradhan, Nilesh Shakya, Nirvita Shakya, Rahul Maharjan, Rasik Rai, Rubi Maharjan, Samana Rai, Sanod Maharjan, Shailesh Rajbhandari, Suraj Shilpakar and Suresh Maharjan.

The exhibition opened on July 14 and was visited by Naradmani Hartamchhali, the chancellor of the Nepal Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA). According to Manish Lal Shrestha, artist and curator of the show, the group exhibition aims to bring forward young talents and give them an opportunity to interact with senior artists and art enthusiasts in the valley.

The selection for the young artists began with an 'open call' where art students were encouraged to submit their best artworks. "The submissions received undergo a meticulous review and evaluation process by a panel of experts to ensure that only the most outstanding and promising artists are chosen," says curator Shrestha.

As part of its commitment to promoting new talent, the gallery will also award two participants—one female and one male—with a residency programme for the upcoming year. Shrestha says that awardees can use the gallery's studio space to create new artwork and receive mentorship and guidance from established artists, which will help them refine their artistic vision, expand their creative horizons, and develop a proper conceptual framework.

The exhibition will continue till August 6.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF GALLERY M-CUBE