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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Janakpur Jomsom

US-Saudi defence pact tied to Israel deal, Palestinian demands put aside

REUTERS
WASHINGTON, SEPT 29

Saudi Arabia is determined to secure a military pact requiring the United States to defend the kingdom in return for opening ties with Israel and will not hold up a deal even if Israel does not offer major concessions to Palestinians in their bid for statehood, three regional sources familiar with the talks said.

A pact might fall short of the cast-iron, NATO-style defence guarantees the kingdom initially sought when the issue was first discussed between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Joe Biden during the US president's visit to Saudi Arabia in July 2022.

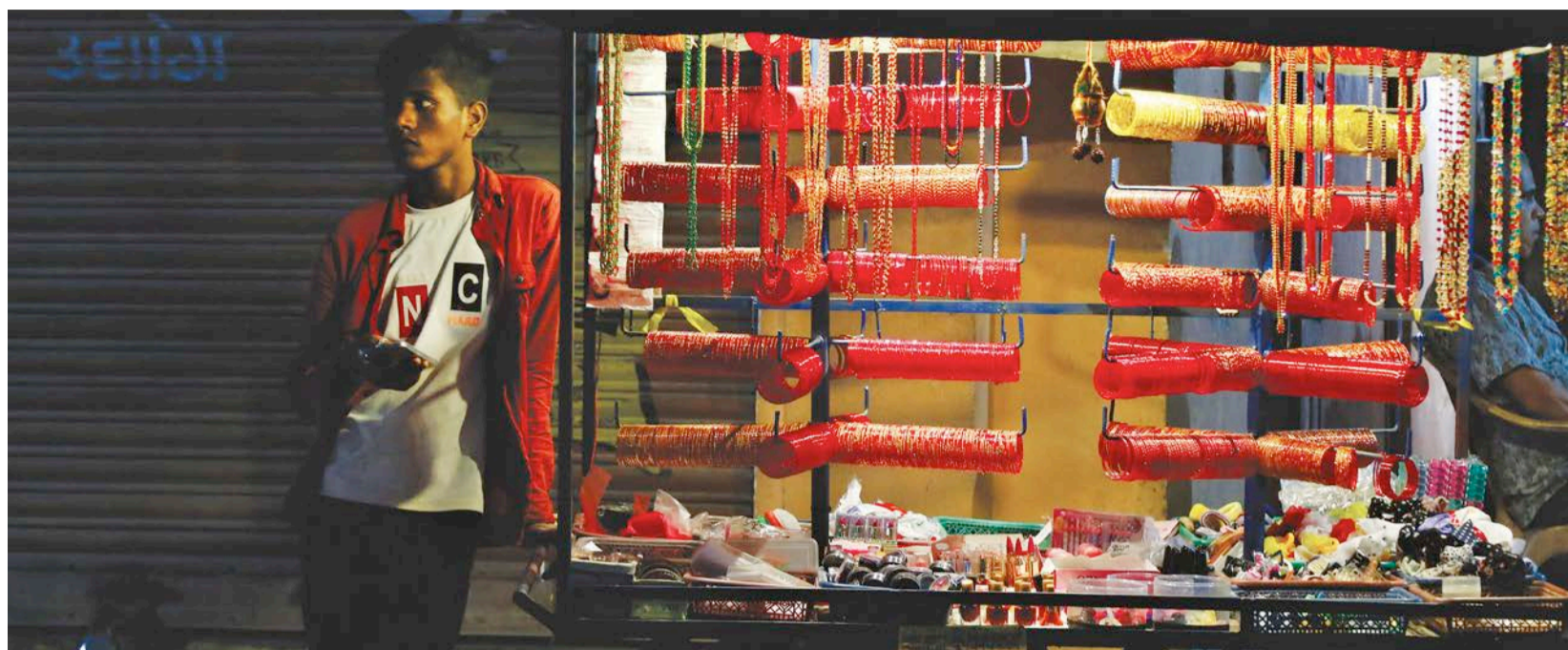
Washington could also sweeten any deal by designating Saudi a Major Non-NATO Ally.

Instead, a US source said it could look like treaties Washington has with Asian states or, if that would not win US Congress approval, it could be similar to a US agreement with Bahrain, where the US Navy Fifth Fleet is based. Such an agreement would not need congressional backing.

Washington could also sweeten any deal by designating Saudi Arabia a Major Non-NATO Ally, a status already given to Israel, the US source said.

But all the sources said Saudi Arabia would not settle for less than binding assurances of US protection if it faced attack.

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A vendor selling bangles and beaded necklaces waits for customers in Bhaktapur on Thursday evening.

POST PHOTO: KESHAV THAPA

PM Dahal tours on as Nepalis tackle crises

Ruling, opposition leaders consider prime minister's long absence inappropriate, as country is under economic pressure.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, SEPT 29

Completing his half-month-long visit to China and New York, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is returning home on Saturday from Chengdu.

This is probably the first time that a Nepali prime minister has been out of the country for two weeks, amid several crises including doctors' protests and teachers' agitation, price rises ahead of big festivals, a struggling economy and poor governance. Also, the regular House session remains adjourned until Sunday due to the government's failure to give business to the legislature.

The prime minister left the country on September 16 to attend the 78th session of the UN General Assembly on September 21 and participated in some side events and bilateral meetings with some foreign leaders. On September 22, he left for the Chinese city of Hangzhou, where he attended the opening ceremony of the 19th Asian Games and held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

In Beijing, the prime minister met his Chinese counterpart and witnessed the signing of 12 bilateral agreements and pacts.

He toured Tibet and visited the famed lake Manasarovar, a highly revered pilgrimage site for Hindus, Buddhists and Jains.

He visited Tibet after official engagements in Beijing during his trip to the US and China.

This makes him the first Nepali prime minister to visit Manasarovar, while in office. Earlier this year, during his India visit from May 31 to June 3, Dahal had prayed at the renowned Mahakaleshwar Temple in Ujjain.

While many of his critics find these pilgrimages by an avowed communist unusual, upon returning from India,

Dahal had told the media that he had offered prayers at the Mahakaleshwar temple to seek blessings for his wife, Sita, who was unwell at the time. She died on July 12.

Talking to reporters in Biratnagar on Friday, CPN-UML chair and former prime minister KP Sharma Oli said it does not bode well for the country when its prime minister spends time visiting foreign countries for 15 days in a row, disrupting the parliamentary process.

"It is not a dignified thing for the executive head to take such an extended leisurely trip," Oli told reporters.

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Poor development spending means low foreign loan uptake

Nepal met 50 percent of its foreign loan target in the fiscal year 2022-23.

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU, SEPT 29

The government has not been able to receive foreign loans as expected amid poor implementation of foreign-funded projects.

According to the Public Debt Management Office (PDMO), the government received 49.48 percent of the targeted foreign loans in the fiscal year 2022-2023. And, this is just not about the last fiscal year alone. Foreign loans have been below expected levels for several years.

Since the fiscal year 2020-2021, foreign loans received by the country have been less than 50 percent of the target, according to the PDMO.

The government received less than 50 percent of the targeted foreign loans in six fiscal years, while the country received more than 50 percent of the targeted loans for fiscal years 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2019-2020, according to the PDMO.

The country received as low as 29.64 percent of targeted loans in fiscal 2016-2017, according to the annual report (2022-2023) of the PDMO.

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NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Two juvenile inmates flee reform centre in Birgunj

BIRGUNJ: Two juvenile inmates fled a reform centre in Birta of Birgunj Municipality on Friday. According to the Parsa Police Office, the incident occurred at around 2am on Friday after the fugitives cut through a wired fence on the centre's roof. They jumped to the roof of the house attached to the correctional facility and escaped from there, said police. Of the two, one was serving time for murder while the other was imprisoned for rape. Search for the escapees is underway. Previously, one minor had died while 11 others were injured in a clash at the Jayandu Juvenile Correction Centre in Daduwa Rural Municipality of Banke district on September 22. All 254 inmates fled the centre, breaching boundary walls, railings and gates. The case was one of three incidents of violence that took place in correction centres within a span of one month. The first incident of such violence was reported on August 21 in the Bhaktapur-based correction centre operated by Underprivileged Children's Educational Programmes. As many as 297 juvenile inmates at the centre clashed with security personnel, an incident that left 20 police officials and 15 juvenile inmates injured. The juvenile delinquents clashed with the police after one of the minors lost his life under mysterious circumstances. Three weeks later, on September 12, inmates from a juvenile centre in Birta of Birgunj Metropolitan City clashed among themselves. A group of inmates transferred from the juvenile centre in Sanothimi, Bhaktapur had physically assaulted the leader of the inmates at the reform centre. Some of the minors from Bhaktapur were transferred to Birgunj after the incident. Twenty security personnel and 15 juvenile inmates were injured in the clash.

15,000 dogs vaccinated against rabies

KAILALI: As part of the week-long campaign launched on the occasion of World Rabies Day on September 28, 15,000 stray and pet dogs were vaccinated against rabies in nine districts of Sudurpashchim Province. According to Dr Naresh Prasad Joshi, head of the Veterinary Laboratory in Kailali, the campaign was launched by the Department of Livestock Services, Nepal, on September 22. Around 5,000 dogs were vaccinated against rabies in Kailali alone.

Five held with 7 kg of gold in a week



DOLAKHA: The Singati Area Office on Friday recovered an additional 3 kg of illegal gold from the house of Sita Tamang of Jamune in ward 3 of Bigu Rural Municipality in Dolakha district. Police had seized 4 kg of illegal gold that was smuggled in from China and arrested three people on Wednesday and two people on Thursday who were living in Tamang's house as tenants. All the arrested are from ward 1 of Bigu, and other people involved in the crime are absconding. A 'Be on the Lookout' (BOLO) has been issued for those on the run. Further investigation into the case is going on, said Khadka.

With electric fencing gone, elephant encounters rise

The animals destroy houses and crops making life difficult for residents of Baduwal village.



This recent photo shows a rice field that was raided by elephants at Baduwal village of Dodhara Chadani Municipality in Kanchanpur district. Footmarks of the animals are seen among the rice plants.

BHAWANI BHATTA
KANCHANPUR, SEPT 29

Mahabir Chhetri, a local of Baduwal village in ward 3 of Dodhara Chandani Municipality, lost his crops to a herd of wild elephants that entered his field three weeks ago. Chhetri had planted paddy, maize and sesame in five kattha [1 kattha is 338.63 sq metres] of land hoping for a good yield.

"Wild elephants have made our lives miserable. They have snatched our livelihood," said Chhetri. "Earlier we used to try and chase the elephants away by making loud noises but they retaliated and we had to run for our lives. These days we don't try to stop them."

Baduwal village, surrounded by the Jogbudha River and the Mayapuri community forest that fall inside the Shuklaphanta National Park buffer zone, also borders a national forest in Uttarakhand, India. The wild elephants enter the settlement from these forests.

According to Chhetri, seven years ago, the locals had installed electric fences to protect the fields from elephants with the help of Tarai Arc Landscape and Mayapuri Community Forest. For a couple of years, the

farmers were free of elephant terror, but due to the lack of maintenance the fences were soon breached by the elephants.

Chandrakala Magar, another villager, said that after the fences were gone, the elephants became more aggressive.

"Elephants usually come from the Indian forest and enter Mayapuri. They enter the village and wreak havoc. Just two weeks ago, a herd of elephants tore down the house of Tilsara Gharti Magar in the village," said Chandrakala. "Three years ago three women who had gone to the Mayapuri community forest to collect firewood were killed by an elephant."

"The locals who are dependent on the resources from the forest for their daily use have stopped entering the forest for fear of elephants. 'We have stopped going to the forests. We can't graze our cattle or collect firewood. It's becoming difficult to survive,'" said Chandrakala.

Locals of Baduwal village would frequently go to the Indian markets on the other side of the border to buy daily essentials but they have stopped going for fear of elephants.

According to Dodhara Chandani Municipality, there are 250 families living in Baduwal village.

Tilsara Gharti Magar, whose house was destroyed two weeks ago, said that the Shuklaphanta National Park distributes relief in cases of property damage and attacks, among other things, but in cases of agricultural damage, there are no compensations.

"Seeking compensation from the park is a tedious process. They ask us to show so much paperwork that most locals don't even apply for compensation," said Gharti Magar.

Hari Singh Dhanadi, the chairman of ward 3 of the Dodhara Chandani Municipality, said that they have collected the details of the affected farmers who are yet to receive compensation and submitted them to the disaster management committee of the municipality. Due to a lack of budget, the municipality is only able to pay a small amount compared to the damage incurred by the locals.

"Locals have demanded electric fences again, but the municipality does not have sufficient budget and resources to fund the fencing project," said Dhanadi. "Big fires, loud noises, and sirens, among other things, used to easily scare the elephants earlier, but now they are fighting back. They even attack people unprovoked. We have drawn the attention of higher authorities to this issue."

Saudi Arabia determined to secure defence pact with US

>>> Continued from page 1

On September 14, 2019 missile strikes on its oil sites rattled world markets. Riyadh and Washington blamed Iran, the kingdom's regional rival, although Tehran denied having a role.

Agreements giving the world's biggest oil exporter US protection in return for normalisation with Israel would reshape the Middle East by bringing together two longtime foes and binding Riyadh to Washington after China's inroads in the region. For Biden, it would be a diplomatic victory to vault before the 2024 US election.

The Palestinians could get some Israeli restrictions eased but such moves would fall short of their aspirations for a state. As with other Arab-Israeli deals forged over the decades, the Palestinian core demand for statehood would take a back seat, the three regional sources said.

"The normalisation will be between Israel and Saudi Arabia. If the Palestinians oppose it the kingdom will continue in its path," said one of the regional sources. "Saudi Arabia supports a peace plan for the Palestinians, but this time it wanted something for Saudi Arabia, not just for the Palestinians."

The Saudi government did not respond to emailed questions about this article.

A US official, who like others declined to be named because of the sensitivity of the matter, said the parameters of a defence pact were still being worked out, adding that what was being discussed "would not be a treaty alliance or anything like that ... It would be a mutual defence understanding, less than a full treaty."

The official said it would be more like the US relationship with Israel, which receives the most advanced US weapons and holds joint air force and missile defence drills.

A source in Washington familiar with the discussions said MbS had asked for a NATO-style treaty but said Washington was reluctant to go as far as NATO's Article 5 commitment that an attack on one ally is considered an attack on all.

The source said Biden's aides could consider a pact patterned on those with Japan and other Asian allies, under which the US pledges military support but is less explicit about whether US troops would be deployed. However, the source said some US lawmakers might resist such a pact.

Another template, which would not need congressional approval, would be the agreement signed with Bahrain on September 13, in which the US pledged to "deter and confront any external aggression" but also said the two governments would consult to determine what, if any, action would be taken.

The source in Washington said Saudi Arabia could be designated a Major Non-NATO Ally, a step which had long been considered. This status, which several Arab states such as Egypt have, comes with a range of benefits, such as training.

The second of the regional sources

said Riyadh was compromising in some demands to help secure a deal, including over its plans for civilian nuclear technology. The source said Saudi Arabia was ready to sign Section 123 of the US Atomic Energy Act, establishing a framework for US peaceful nuclear cooperation, a move Riyadh previously refused to take.

The Gulf source said the kingdom was prepared to accept a pact that did not match a NATO Article 5 guarantee but said the US had to commit to protecting Saudi Arabia if its territory was attacked. The source also said a deal could be similar to Bahrain's agreement but with extra commitments.

In response to emailed questions about details in this article, a US State Department spokesperson said: "Many of the key elements of a pathway towards normalisation are now on the table and there is a broad understanding of those elements, which we will not discuss publicly."

"There's still lots of work to do, and we're working through it," the spokesperson added, saying there was not yet a formal framework and stakeholders were working on legal and other elements.

MbS said this month his country was moving closer to normalising ties with Israel.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has hailed the possibility of a "historic" peace with Saudi Arabia, the heartland of Islam. But to secure the prize, Netanyahu has to win the approval of parties in his far-right coalition which reject any concessions to the Palestinians.

MbS said in a Fox News interview this month that the kingdom was moving steadily closer to normalising ties with Israel. He spoke about the need for Israel to "ease the life of the Palestinians" but made no mention of Palestinian statehood.

Nevertheless, diplomats and regional sources said MbS was insisting on some commitments from Israel to show he was not abandoning the Palestinians and that he was seeking to keep the door open to a two-state solution.

Those would include demanding Israel transfer some Israeli-controlled territory in the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority (PA), limit Jewish settlement activity and halt any steps to annex parts of the West Bank. Riyadh has also promised financial aid to the PA, the sources said.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has said any bargain must recognise the Palestinian right to a state within the 1967 borders, including East Jerusalem, and must stop Israeli settlement building. However, all the sources said a Saudi-Israeli deal was unlikely to address those flashpoint issues.

Leaders at home decry prime minister's foreign trip as long and unseemly

>>> Continued from page 1

Normally, prime ministers or heads of state conclude their visits once a joint communiqué is released.

"We should not question his visit to the United Nations," former foreign minister Prakash Chandra Lohani said.

"His going to China after completing his visit to New York did save some money. Besides, a big chunk of the cost of the prime minister's delegation to China, even though a jumbo one, was borne by the Chinese side," said an official in the Nepali delegation.

Added Lohani: "It would have been better had the prime minister returned after holding political talks in Beijing. Normally, no prime minister stays after completing official engagements. Probably, the Chinese side wanted to showcase their development, which is why the prime minister overstayed in China. But don't you also have to factor in what is happening back home?"

In China, Dahal failed to secure some of the signature deals he had talked about in Parliament and in public meetings. These included cross-border energy trade, loan waiver of the Pokhara International Airport and seeking a mega grant

project under the Belt and Road Initiative.

"Definitely, the twin visits took too long. That too at a time the country has been reeling from social, economic and other crises," said Shekhar Koirala, a senior leader of the Nepali Congress, the largest party in the ruling coalition.

He said Dahal's visit to the United Nations was okay but he left too early. "The prime minister is entrusted with expanding his country's external relations so we cannot see his China visit in a bad light. But the way he is seen touring seemingly less important places during what are tough times for his own country does not look

good," Koirala added.

Earlier the prime minister went to India in May-end for four days and later in July to Italy for three days.

"Yes, this visit was prolonged but there were some logistical issues too," said Bishnu Pukar Shrestha, Nepali Ambassador to China.

Shrestha said although the prime minister has been away from the country for 15 days, he was interested in visiting some Chinese cities and witnessing the country's achievements over the past two decades.

"Hence the long trip," Shrestha added.

Foreign loan utilisation continues to remain poor

>>> Continued from page 1

Setting targets without any solid basis, the trend of spending budget in the last four months of the fiscal year when disbursement does not take place in the same fiscal year, delays in the disbursement process and commencing projects without adequate preparation are among the factors responsible for poor utilisation of foreign loans, the PDMO said in its report for the fiscal year 2022-2023.

Usually, foreign loans are reimbursed to Nepal once the equivalent amount is spent with domestic resources. With government spending, particularly the capital budget, remaining poor, the country has not been able to receive foreign loans as targeted, according to

officials.

According to the Financial Comptroller General Office, the government's capital spending was just over 60 percent in the last fiscal year.

High turnover of key staff, issues related to land acquisition and forest clearance, and problems in contract management have been affecting the implementation of projects funded either domestically or with foreign aid.

Sushil Babu Dhakal, director general of the Department of Roads, said that foreign contractors are usually employed in foreign-aided projects and they struggle to work in Nepal as they are not familiar with the local work culture, leading to poor implementation of the projects.

"Donors also don't support any forceful measures to remove the illegal settlements along the rights of way, which also affect the implementation of the foreign-aided projects," said Dhakal.

In April, the Asian Development Bank said the overall portfolio performance (implementation of ADB-funded projects) in Nepal was lower than expected mainly due to insufficient project staff and high turnover, challenges in contract management, delays in environmental and land clearances, and the disruption in the construction supply chain.

As of 31 December 2022, ADB's active portfolio in Nepal stands at around \$3.2 billion, supporting a broad range of key sectors: energy, transport, agriculture, water and urban infrastructure and services, rural development and natural resources, health, and education, the multilateral lender said.

In the earlier years, the Covid-19 pandemic also affected the implementation of the development projects amid virus risk and failure to mobilise government staff and contractors on the ground.

The government's capital spending was just over 60 percent in the last fiscal year.

The World Bank said in its Nepal Performance and Learning Review in January 2022 that the Covid crisis compounded the pre-existing implementation challenges, which were driven by nascent and weak institutional capacity.

"As of June 30, 2021, three out of 24 investment projects in the World Bank portfolio were in problem status and seven in potential problem

status," it said in its report. "With Covid-19 lockdowns, field supervision and site visits were limited, affecting implementation."

According to officials, the red tape in implementation of foreign-aided projects also affect overall disbursement of foreign loans. At a press conference on June 18, Nepal Electricity Authority's Managing Director Kul Man Ghising criticised the donors for putting several "unwanted" conditions to sanctioning their loans.

"They threaten us to stop funding for another project if we don't settle a dispute regarding land acquisition with locals in the under-construction projects," Ghising had complained during the press meet.

Officials said it takes more time to implement the foreign-aided projects than those being implemented with domestic resources as the locals seek more compensation in foreign-aided projects.

For example, the World Bank had decided to discontinue its aid for two transmission line projects—400kV Hetauda-Dhalkebar-Inaruwa and 220kV Hetauda-Bharatpur-Bardaghat amid continued delays in their completion. That brought to the fore, once again, the challenges in constructing the energy infrastructure in the country.

हामीलाई सम्झनुहोस

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BRIEFING

Police arrest actor Anmol KC on fraud charge



KATHMANDU: Police on Friday arrested popular Nepali actor Anmol KC on the charge of fraud. A team of the Kathmandu Valley Crime Investigation Office arrested KC from Sangha in Bhaktapur. According to police, film producer Supriya Katuwal had filed a complaint against the actor, saying he didn't appear on the sets of the movie 'Rawayana' despite receiving Rs1 million as advance payment. The producer had lodged the complaint with the police saying KC didn't appear for the shooting, breaching the agreement. Senior Superintendent of Police Somendra Singh Rathore said KC was arrested after he failed to appear before the police despite a request from the law enforcement agency. "It was said that the shooting of the movie would start a few days ago," Rathore said. "For that, the producer has already paid Rs10.05 million to the actor, actress, technical team and others." The police had planned to hold discussions by summoning both sides. "But later, KC was detained after seeking an arrest warrant from a court as he threatened the police saying that he would not appear at the police office."

Acting Prime Minister Khadka calls for effective market monitoring

KATHMANDU: Acting Prime Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka has directed officials concerned to carry out market monitoring effectively to control exorbitant price hikes and black marketing. He issued the directive at a meeting he called to gather information on market monitoring from officials on Friday. Khadka reportedly told officials that people were complaining about abnormal price hikes of daily essential goods. The meeting saw the presence of Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Narayankaji Shrestha, Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supply Ramesh Rijal, Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, Secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, chief district officers of Kathmandu and Bhaktapur districts, and officers at Department of Commerce, and Department of Food Technology and Quality Control. The meeting reviewed the progress of market monitoring carried out so far. Speaking at the meeting, Khadka urged authorities concerned not to allow the artificial shortage of daily essentials and said the government was ready to provide further support to ensure the ongoing market monitoring is effective.

House panel directs government to address demands of agitating doctors through dialogue



KATHMANDU: A parliamentary committee on Friday directed the government to address the demands of agitating doctors through dialogue. The meeting of the Education, Health and Information Technology Committee of the House of Representatives also instructed the Ministry of Health and Population to prepare a conducive environment for the delivery of health services in a dignified, safe and fearless manner. Bhanubhakta Joshi, the chairperson of the committee, said the House panel was concerned about attacks and abuse on doctors and other health workers. "The representatives of the concerned organisations while airing their views at the committee meeting spoke about the abuse and unforeseen incidents against the doctors. The committee has drawn serious attention of the government to such incidents," said committee chair Joshi. "Expressing regret for incidents of assaults on doctors, the committee has decided to instruct the government to take action against the culprits as per the law and the Ministry of Health to create an environment for providing health services in a dignified, safe, fearless and non-violent manner." Speaking at the meeting, lawmakers demanded the government bring those involved in incidents of attack on doctors to book.

Agitating teachers end their protracted protest

The strike ends as the government agrees to allow relief quota teachers to compete in internal tests for permanent postings.



Education Minister Ashok Kumar Rai (right) and representatives of the agitating teachers after signing the agreement on Friday.

BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, SEPT 29

The agitating relief quota and early childhood development (ECD) teachers ended their two-week-long protest on Friday after the government agreed to allow them to compete in internal tests for permanent postings. Relief quota teachers were also in the agitation led by the Nepal Teachers' Federation against several provisions of the School Education Bill registered in the House of Representatives on September 13. Though the federation called off its Kathmandu-centric agitation after sealing a six-point deal with the government on September 22, the relief quota and the ECD teachers refused to abide by the agreement and continued protesting.

They had accused the federation of betraying them by signing the deal, leaving their concerns aside.

The government and the federation had agreed that 75 percent of the temporary and relief quota teachers would be allowed to take part in internal competitions for a permanent posting against the 50 percent proposed in the bill. The relief quota teachers had been demanding that all

40,000 of them be allowed to compete in internal selection exams or to continue teaching until their retirement age of 60.

"We have withdrawn our agitation after the government agreed to our demands," Khem Raj Adhikari, chairperson of the Relief Quota Teachers' Association, told the Post. "We will return to our work from Sunday."

The government has agreed to create teacher jobs for grade 11 and 12 based on the number of students.

Relief quota and the ECD teachers are individuals employed on a contractual basis by the local units to address the shortage of teachers at community schools. There are around 40,000 such teachers.

After several rounds of negotiations, the government dialogue panel led by Minister for Education, Science and Technology Ashok Kumar Rai reached a five-point deal which includ-

ed allowing all the teachers under the temporary quota to sit in the internal competition for a permanent posting, one time. "Those who don't qualify in the internal competition will be given gratuity based on their service period," stated one of the points in the agreement.

The bill will be revised through amendment proposals after it is presented in Parliament. Talking to the media, Rai said there had been an agreement to address the teachers' demands through a revision in the bill. "The agreement will also be presented in the House," Rai told reporters.

If the vacant positions of teachers are filled through internal competition, it will block the entry of freshers in teaching. Talking to the Post, Bidy Nath Koirala, professor at Tribhuvan University, said there must be open competition in the teachers' hiring.

"The existing temporary teachers should be given a few years to prepare for the open competition if they want but hiring through internal competition is wrong," he said.

As per the agreement, the government has agreed to

create teacher jobs for grade 11 and 12 based on the number of students. So far, the government has paid for two teachers in each public school without permanent posts.

Though successive governments since the promulgation of the new constitution had been promising to pass a federal education law, it took eight years and several failed attempts for the new education bill to land in Parliament.

However, it has met with widespread controversy. Even as the teachers have withdrawn their protests with the deal, discontent continues. The local governments have deep reservations over the provision to revive district-level education offices. The Cabinet, in the first week of August, had approved the bill to be registered in Parliament. The bill met severe criticism, particularly from the private sector, as it envisioned turning private schools into trusts within five years.

In the face of strong opposition from the schools, the government decided not to send the bill to Parliament. It was then revised, specifically removing the provision that had attracted objections from the private sector. It was registered in Parliament earlier this month.

Two dead, 14 injured in Salyan jeep accident

The vehicle carrying revellers returning from a fair crashed, police say.

POST REPORT
SALYAN, SEPT 29

Two people died and 14 were injured in a jeep accident at Tirthapole of Salyan district on Friday evening.

According to police, the jeep carrying revellers returning to Kaagkhola in Sharada Municipality-12 after visiting a fair at Chhatreshwari Rural Municipality-5 crashed at around 5pm.

The deceased are a 52-year-old woman from Sharada-15 and a 70-year-old woman from Sharada Municipality-12.

They died while being rushed to Salyan District Hospital for treatment, said Deputy Superintendent of Police Nabin Karki at Salyan District Police Office.

He added the injured are being treated at different hospitals in the district.

SSP Rathore said that he will be prosecuted for fraud.

IBM to give free AI training for targeted 2 million people by 2026

According to IBM, the effort aims to plug gap in AI skills in the workforce, and it will collaborate with universities.

OSMOND CHIA
SINGAPORE, SEPT 29

Software company IBM aims to provide free training in artificial intelligence (AI) to two million people, including from Singapore, by the end of 2026.

It is targeting students and mid-career switchers who are keen to learn about chatbot technology, how to craft prompts for AI, and to grapple with the ethical issues that the industry faces, among other topics.

According to IBM, the effort aims to plug the gap in AI skills in the workforce and it will collaborate with universities worldwide to support the coursework. "Education doesn't stop after college, it has to continue through your career," said IBM chief executive Arvind Krishna.

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"Fifty years ago, when people came out of school, they likely thought that they could live with some professional job for 30 years with those skills," he said. "The half-life of skills is now... between five and seven years."

He said that AI will take over 30 percent of work that is repetitive in the next five years, such as in human resource management and coding.

Giving an example of human resource (HR) management, he said it is unlikely that AI can replace ideation and decision-making in the field, such as deciding the composition of teams and how to develop employees. But AI could come after more transactional roles, such as deciding on salaries and administrative tasks that come with the HR job.

"The bulk of that could be replaced by generative AI," he said. But jobs do not vanish from the market, he said, adding that new jobs previously unknown will sprout from the growth of AI.

Participants can register on IBM's website for a series of flexible online

courses, including lessons on generative AI and open-source technologies. Other participants under IBM's collaborations with universities and partner organisations may also attend lectures and other training programmes.

IBM said in a statement on September 19: "Participants will be able to earn IBM-branded digital credentials that are recognised by potential employers."

Its survey of executives around the world found that some 40 per cent of the workforce, especially those with entry-level positions, will have to learn new skills over the next three years in order for AI and automation to be implemented effectively.

This comes with the rising adoption of AI among companies, said IBM. Its studies found that more than a third of companies are using AI in their business, while 42 per cent are exploring the technology.

The focus on AI courses is part of IBM's goal to train 30 million people with tech skills by 2030 under SkillsBuild, its free education programme launched in 2019, designed to help adults and students find new jobs. There are more than 1,000 courses on SkillsBuild, including topics for cyber security and cloud computing.

The programme joins a slew of efforts to boost AI training in the workforce as demand for AI and data analytics continues to grow. For instance, banks and universities here came together to launch Aida (artificial intelligence and data analytics) Talent Development Programme in May to address the talent shortage in the financial sector.

Refuting reports that IBM stopped hiring for jobs that could be replaced by automation, Mr Krishna said it has continued to hire 5,000 new employees in the past quarter, with an emphasis on technical, sales and research roles as well as consultants for its clients.

"I had said that I believe that for work of a repetitive nature, (AI) will be able to do 30 per cent of that work," he said. He clarified that those in these roles at IBM are not being laid off and there is no hiring freeze in these positions, but AI will plug gaps in these roles over time.

— The Straits Times

WORLD

BRIEFING

Afghan embassy in India suspends operations

NEW DELHI: The Afghan embassy in India has suspended all operations after the ambassador and other senior diplomats left the country for Europe and the US where they gained asylum, three embassy officials said on Friday. India does not recognise the Taliban government, and closed its own embassy in Kabul after the Taliban took control in 2021, but New Delhi had allowed the ambassador and mission staff appointed by the Western-backed government of ousted Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to issue visas and handle trade matters. At least five Afghan diplomats have left India, the embassy officials said. The Indian government will now take over the diplomatic compound in a caretaker capacity, one of the Afghan officials said. Asked about the matter, an Indian foreign ministry official in New Delhi said they were looking into the developments, without giving any details.

Army will stop flying Taipan helicopters: Australia minister

CANBERRA: The Australian army will never again fly its fleet of MRH-90 Taipan helicopters following a crash in July that killed four soldiers, the defence minister said on Friday. Australia's fleet of more than 40 European-designed Taipans has been grounded since July 28 when one crashed into the Pacific Ocean during a nighttime training operation in the Whitsunday Islands. Defence Minister Richard Marles told Nine Network television that permanently ending Taipan flying operations was the "only decision that makes sense." "We're making this decision today. In many ways it was inevitable, but it's an important step to take so that we can get our Black Hawks in the air as quickly as possible," Marles said, referring to the US-built helicopters that will replace Australia's Airbus-manufactured fleet. (AGENCIES)

Dozens dead after blast in Pakistan at a rally celebrating birthday of Islam's prophet

Friday's bombing came days after authorities asked police to remain on alert, saying militants could target rallies.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
QUETTA, SEPT 29

A powerful bomb exploded in a crowd of people celebrating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday in southwestern Pakistan on Friday, killing at least 52 people and wounding nearly 70 others, authorities said. It was one of the deadliest attacks in recent years.

TV footage and videos on social media showed an open area near a mosque strewn with the shoes of the dead and wounded. Some of the bodies had been covered with bedsheets. Residents and rescuers were seen rushing the wounded to hospitals, where a state of emergency had been declared and appeals were being issued for blood donations.

The bombing occurred in Mastung, a district in Baluchistan province, which has witnessed scores of attacks by insurgents. However, the militants normally target the security forces. The Pakistan Taliban have repeatedly said that they do not target places of worship or civilians.

Around 500 people had gathered for a procession from the mosque to celebrate the birth of the prophet, known as Mawlid an-Nabi, an occasion marked by rallies and the distribution of free meals.

Some of the wounded were in a critical condition, government administrator Atta Ullah said. Thirty bodies were taken to one hospital and 22 were counted at another, Abdul Rasheed, the District Health Officer in Mastung, said.

A senior police officer, Mohammad Nawaz, was among the dead, Ullah said. Officers were investigating whether the bombing was a suicide attack, he added.

Friday's bombing came days after



In this photo provided by District Police Office, a boy injured in a bomb explosion receives treatment at a hospital, in Mastung near Quetta, Pakistan on Friday.

authorities asked police to remain on maximum alert, saying militants could target rallies for Mawlid an-Nabi.

Also Friday, a blast ripped through a mosque located on the premises of a police station in Hangu, a district in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, killing at least two people and wounding seven, said Shah Raz Khan, a local police officer.

He said the mud-brick mosque col-

lapsed because of the impact of the blast and rescuers were pulling worshippers from the rubble. Police say it was not immediately clear what caused the blast.

No one claimed responsibility for the blast in Hangu, and the cause was unclear. About 40 people were praying at the mosque at the time, most of them police officers.

Pakistan's President Arif Alvi condemned the attacks and asked authorities to provide all possible assistance

to the wounded and the victims' families.

In a statement, caretaker Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti denounced the bombing, calling it a "heinous act" to target people in the Mawlid an-Nabi procession.

The government had declared on Friday a national holiday. President Alvi and caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul-haq-Kakar in separate messages had called for unity and for people to adhere to the teachings of Islam's prophet.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for Friday's bombing, but Pakistani Taliban quickly distanced themselves from it. Known as Tehreek-e-Taliban, or TTP, the Pakistani Taliban is separate from the Afghan Taliban but closely allied to the group which seized power in neighbouring Afghanistan in August 2021 as US and NATO troops were in the final stages of their pullout from the country after 20 years of war.

The Islamic State group has claimed previous deadly attacks in Baluchistan and elsewhere.

Also Friday, the military said two soldiers were killed in a shootout with Pakistani Taliban after insurgents tried to sneak into southwestern district of Zhob in Baluchistan province. Three militants were killed in the exchange, a military statement said.

The gas-rich southwestern Baluchistan province at the border of Afghanistan and Iran has been the site of a low-level insurgency by Baluch nationalists for more than two decades. Baluch nationalists initially wanted a share of provincial resources, but they later launched an insurgency calling for independence.

Friday's bombing was one of the worst in Pakistan in the last decade.

Sikh group protests outside Golden Temple over killing in Canada

REUTERS
NEW DELHI, SEPT 29

Hundreds of Sikh activists on Friday staged a demonstration outside the Golden Temple in Amritsar, in the northern Indian state of Punjab demanding punishment for the killers of a Sikh separatist in Canada.

Earlier this month, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told parliament that there may be a link between New Delhi and the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June in British Columbia.

India has denied any role in the killing and described the allegations as "absurd". The accusations have sparked tensions between the two countries, with each nation expelling diplomats, and New Delhi suspending visas for Canadians.

Holding posters of Nijjar, the protesters outside the holiest of Sikh shrines shouted slogans asking New Delhi to stop extrajudicial operations against separatists seeking Punjab as an independent state.

Nijjar, who worked as a plumber, left the north Indian state of Punjab a quarter-century ago and became a Canadian citizen. He has supported the formation of a Sikh homeland. India designated him a "terrorist" in July 2020.

"It is time and opportunity for New Delhi to talk with Sikh leadership," said Paramjit Singh Mand, a leader of Dal Khalsa, the group, which is advocating for a separate Sikh homeland and organised the protest.

Sikhs make up just 2 percent of India's 1.4 billion people but they are a majority in Punjab, a state of 30 million where their religion was born 500 years ago.

European Union's Mediterranean leaders meet on migration

So far this year, the number of arrivals in Italy has surpassed 133,000, almost double the number during the same period last year.



A file photo shows migrants arriving in the harbour of Italian island of Lampedusa.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
VALLETTA, SEPT 29

The leaders of nine Mediterranean and southern European countries met Friday in Malta with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for talks focused on the thorny issue of migration.

The summit comes a day after EU interior ministers finally made headway on new rules for how the bloc handles asylum seekers and irregular migrants.

Officials said they expected a deal in the coming days, although Italy has asked for more time to consider the text.

Long in the works, there was new impetus to reach agreement after a sharp rise in migrants landing on the tiny Italian island of Lampedusa earlier this month.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's hard-right government, elected a year ago on an anti-migrant ticket, has clashed with both France and Germany as she presses the EU to take greater responsibility.

So far this year, the number of

arrivals in Italy has surpassed 133,000, almost double the number during the same period last year, according to the interior ministry.

As thousands of migrants slept on cots in the open air in Lampedusa's overwhelmed reception centre two weeks ago, von der Leyen unveiled a 10-point plan to help Rome deal with the crisis.

Von der Leyen will hold talks with Meloni and French President Emmanuel Macron on the sidelines of the Malta summit to discuss implementing the plan, which includes the possible expansion of naval missions in the Mediterranean.

After sharp words in both Italy and France on how to handle the issue, Macron and Meloni have sought to ease tensions in recent days, and met Tuesday in Rome on the sidelines of a state funeral.

"There is a shared vision of the management of the migration question between France and Italy," a French presidential source said.

Some 90 migrants landed in three boats on Friday on Lampedusa, a tiny island located not far from the

Tunisian coast, the first port of call for many of those crossing from North Africa to Europe.

As well as tensions with France, Rome has criticised Germany for funding charity rescue ships operating in the Central Mediterranean, the world's deadliest sea crossing for migrants. At least 990 migrants died or went missing in the crossing between June and August this year, three times that recorded in the same period last year, the UN's agency for children, UNICEF, said Friday.

At least 289 children have died so far this year trying to make the crossing, with UNICEF warning the Med had become a "cemetery for children and their future".

Both Meloni and Macron also want to prevent boats from departing, by working more closely with Tunisia, despite questions over the country's human rights standards and treatment of migrants.

The European Commission said last week it was set to release the first instalment of funds to Tunisia—one of the main launching points for boats—under a plan signed this year to bolster its coastguard and tackle traffickers.

The bloc already signed a deal in 2017 with Libya, although critics say getting both countries to intercept and forcibly return boats makes the EU complicit in abuses.

The EU is also poised to agree a revamped Pact on Migration and Asylum, which will seek to relieve pressure on frontline countries such as Italy and Greece by relocating some arrivals to other EU states.

Those countries opposed to hosting asylum-seekers—Poland and Hungary among them—would be required to pay the ones that do take migrants in.

The "Med 9" brings together Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain.

India police say mob did not storm home of Manipur chief minister

REUTERS
GUWAHATI, SEPT 29

Indian police have dismissed as "false and misleading" reports that a mob attacked the private residence of Biren Singh, chief minister of the strife-torn northeastern state of Manipur, adding that it was protected by "adequate security".

Thursday's comments followed reports by media, including Reuters, as protests rocked the state capital of Imphal, injuring more than 80 people, before the return of an uneasy calm

on Friday. "News of the chief minister's personal residence being mobbed is false and misleading," the state police said on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter. "Adequate security is already in place."

Ethnic violence has plunged the state bordering Myanmar into what many security experts describe as an intense civil war fought over land, jobs and political clout between its majority Meitei and minority tribal Kuki communities.

There was no violence on Friday, despite some protesters defying cur-

few in parts of the city, as police and paramilitary troops stood on guard to keep the situation under control.

"With curfew, as mobile internet is not available, life is becoming complete hell," said college student Subhash Singh in Imphal, where only a few groceries and chemists were allowed to open to enable purchases of essential items and medicines.

Authorities declared indefinite curfew in Imphal and some areas after clashes on Wednesday following protests against the alleged abduction and murder of two students.



A protester burns tyres during clashes with Israeli forces following a demonstration against the expropriation of Palestinian land by Israel in the village of Kfar Qaddum, in the occupied West Bank on Friday.

Putin discusses Ukraine war with top Wagner commander Troshev



Vladimir Putin meets with senior former commander of the Wagner mercenary group Andrei Troshev and Deputy Defence Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov in Moscow, Russia on Thursday.

REUTERS
MOSCOW, SEPT 29

Russian President Vladimir Putin was on Friday shown meeting one of the most senior former commanders of the Wagner mercenary group and discussing how best to use "volunteer units" in the Ukraine war.

The meeting underscored the Kremlin's attempt to show that the state had now gained control over the mercenary group after a failed June mutiny by its boss Yevgeny Prigozhin, who was then killed with other senior commanders in a plane crash in August.

Putin was shown on state television meeting at the Kremlin with Andrei Troshev, a former Wagner commander known by his nom de guerre "Sedoi" - or "grey hair".

The Kremlin said the meeting took place late on

Thursday. Deputy Defence Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, who has travelled over recent months to several countries where Wagner mercenaries have worked, was also present, sitting closest to Putin. Addressing Troshev, Putin said that they had spoken about how "volunteer units that can perform various combat tasks, above all, of course, in the zone of the special military operation."

"You yourself have been fighting in such a unit for more than a year," Putin said. "You know what it is, how it is done, you know about the issues that need to be resolved in advance so that the combat work goes in the best and most successful way."

Putin also said he wanted to speak about social support for those involved in the fighting.

Troshev was shown listening to Putin, leaning forward and nodding, pencil in hand. His remarks

were not shown. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the RIA news agency that Troshev now worked at the defence ministry.

The fate of Wagner has been unclear since Prigozhin's failed June 23 mutiny and his death on Aug. 23, after which Putin ordered Wagner fighters to sign an oath of allegiance to the Russian state, which Prigozhin and many of his men had opposed.

Russia's Kommersant newspaper has reported that just days after the Wagner mutiny Putin had suggested that Troshev take over from Prigozhin.

The Putin meeting in the Kremlin appears to indicate that what remains of Wagner will now be overseen by Troshev and Yevkurov.

British military intelligence said that up to hundreds of fighters formerly associated with Wagner have likely started to redeploy to Ukraine as part of a variety of different units.

FOREX

US Dollar	133.17
Euro	141.11
Pound Sterling	163.23
Swiss Franc	145.92
Australian Dollar	86.42
Canadian Dollar	99.21
Singapore Dollar	97.68
Japanese Yen (10)	8.93
Chinese Yuan	18.24
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.51
Qatari Riyal	36.53
Thai Bhat	3.65
UAE Dhiram	36.26
Malaysian Ringgit	28.36
Korean Won (100)	9.90

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION

	PRICE PER TOLA
 Fine Gold	Rs 108,800
 Silver	Rs 1,395

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Apple, China met to discuss Beijing's crackdown on western apps, WSJ reports

NEW YORK: Apple staff met with Chinese officials in recent months to discuss concerns over new rules that will restrict the US tech giant from offering many foreign apps currently available on its app store in the country, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday. The officials told Apple that it must strictly implement the rules which ban unregistered foreign apps, the report said, citing people familiar with the matter. Apple did not immediately reply to Reuters' request for comment. Beijing has been expanding oversight of smartphone and mobile app usage over the past several years, and now requires mobile app stores and mobile apps to submit business details to the government. China's cyberspace regulator on Wednesday released names of the first batch of mobile app stores that have completed filing business details, signalling it has begun enforcing the new rules, but Apple's App Store was missing from the list. Apple has not disclosed how its app store in China will comply with Beijing's new rules. (REUTERS)

California minimum wage for fast food workers raised to \$20 an hour

CALIFORNIA: Fast-food workers in California will earn a minimum of \$20 an hour and have a greater say in setting workplace standards under a new bill signed into law on Thursday by Governor Gavin Newsom. "The future happens here first," Newsom said at an event in Los Angeles, with labour officials and fast-food workers flanking him. The legislation emerged as part of a broader compromise in which fast-food companies agreed to remove a 2024 ballot referendum asking voters to repeal a law aimed at improving wages and working conditions for employees. Labour unions, meanwhile, dropped their push to hold fast-food corporations liable for violations committed by their franchisees. The median fast-food worker in the US earned \$13.43 an hour in 2022, while those in California made an average of \$16.60 an hour, according to the Bureau of Labour Statistics. The new minimum, which takes effect in April, equates to an annual salary of \$41,600. There are more than 550,000 fast-food workers at 30,000 locations statewide, Newsom said. The majority are the primary providers for their families while 80 percent are minorities and two-thirds are women, he added. (REUTERS)

Sugar shortage likely due to delayed import process

On September 13, the Finance Ministry approved the import of 20,000 tonnes of sugar for the festive season.

□ KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, SEPT 29

Nepal may potentially face a sugar shortage during the year's main festival season as the two government firms tasked with importing the household sweetener got off to a slow start.

On September 22, Salt Trading Corporation invited international bids for the supply of 10,000 tonnes of white crystal cane sugar. The last date for submitting bids is October 6.

The company currently has 400 tonnes of sugar in its warehouses which will last less than a week.

Officials say that it will take at least two weeks for the sugar to arrive if the entire due process is followed, including shipping time.

This year, Ghatasthapana, the first day of Dashain, falls on October 15.

The other government firm, Food Management and Trading Company, called for bids to supply 10,000 tonnes of sugar on September 27. The last date for the submission of proposals is November 17.

The company has no sugar in its stock.

Officials say that delayed approval by the Finance Ministry has held up the whole import process.

"We received the ministry's go-ahead on September 15," said Sharmila Neupane, information officer at Food Management and Trading Company. "It took us a few days to prepare for the global call for tenders."

It may be difficult for private companies to import sugar this year as, according to Reuters, India is expected to ban mills from exporting sugar beginning in October.

The consumption of sugar both for household and industrial purposes increases ahead of festival time.

India is halting shipments of sugar for the first time in seven years as lack of rain has cut cane yields. India allowed mills to export only 6.1 million tonnes of sugar until September 30, after letting them sell a record 11.1 million tonnes during the last season.



The consumption of sugar both for household and industrial purposes increases ahead of festival time.

POST PHOTO

On September 13, the Finance Ministry approved the import of 20,000 tonnes of sugar for the festive season.

The Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies had asked to import 60,000 tonnes of sugar to meet the anticipated festival demand.

"If Indian companies participate in the bidding, there are chances that the sugar will arrive before the festival. But if the bids are won by companies other than India, there are fewer chances that the sugar will be delivered in time for the festival," said

Kumar Rajbhandari, information officer of Salt Trading Corporation.

Officials say that India may fix quotas for the exporters as it is preparing to ban sugar exports.

Rajbhandari said that the import will be assured once the Indian government determines the exporters.

Madhav Timalsina, president of the Consumer Rights Investigation Forum, said due to the negligence of the government, a sugar crisis is imminent during the prime festival season.

"Despite knowing that demand

increases sharply ahead of the festival—for both household and industrial purposes—the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies did not respond in a timely manner," said Timalsina.

He said that sugar was available in the market but consumers had to pay high prices. "This shows that traders are creating an artificial shortage."

Sugar was available for Rs88 per kg a few weeks ago, but now it costs Rs140 per kg, he said.

The government levies taxes totaling 43 percent on sugar—30 percent

Millions of Chinese to travel in first big autumn holiday since end of zero-Covid

□ ASSOCIATED PRESS
HONG KONG, SEPT 29

Many millions of Chinese tourists are expected to travel within their country, splurging on hotels, tours, attractions and meals in a boost to the economy during the 8-day autumn holiday period that began on Friday.

This year's holiday began with the Mid-Autumn Festival on Friday and also includes the October 1 National Day. The public holidays end on October 6.

Typically hundreds of millions of Chinese travel at home and overseas during such holidays. The eight-day-long holiday is the longest week of public holidays since Covid-19 pandemic restrictions were lifted in December. Outbound tourism has lagged domestic travel, with flight capacities lagging behind pre-pandemic levels.

Big cities like the capital, Beijing, Shanghai, and southern cities like Shenzhen and Guangzhou are favoured destinations. Smaller cities, such as Chengdu and Chongqing in southwest China also are popular.

All that travel is a boon for the world's number 2 economy: During the week-long May holiday this year, 274 million tourists spent 148 billion yuan (\$20.3 billion).

"Over the last few years with the pandemic, there's been really strong pent-up demand," said Boon Sian Chai, managing director at the online travel booking platform Trip.com Group. Both domestic and outbound travel have "recovered significantly,"



Travellers prepare to catch their trains at the crowded Hankou Railway Station in Wuhan, central China's Hubei Province on Thursday.

XINHUA VIA AP/REUTERS

but travel within China accounted for nearly three-quarters of total bookings, Chai said. China Railway said it was expecting about 190 million passenger trips during the September 27-October 8 travel rush, more than double the number of trips last year and an increase from 2019, before the pandemic started.

In Guangzhou and Shenzhen, extra overnight high-speed trains will operate for 11 days to cope with a travel surge during the long holiday, according to the China Railway Guangzhou Group Co Ltd. Another 21 million passengers are expected to travel by air during the holiday, with an average of about 17,000 flights per day, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China. More than 80 percent of those flights are domestic routes.

Jia Jianqiang, CEO of Liurenyou International Travel Agency, said Chinese are splurging on more luxurious travel. "Many people are now also inclined towards more customised, high-end tours compared to the large group tours that were popular [before the pandemic]," Jia said.

For many Chinese, long public holidays such as Golden Week are the best time to travel, since paid vacation can be as few as five days a year.

"Most Chinese don't have long holidays, so this time of the year is when everyone can take the longest break and the only time to travel for fun," said Fu Zhengshuai, an IT engineer and photography enthusiast who often travels alone to remote areas in China such as far western Qinghai and Xinjiang.

Nepal, ADB, World Bank review progress of projects

□ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, SEPT 29

Nepal government, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the World Bank on Friday held a joint tripartite portfolio review meeting to assess the progress of projects supported by the two multinational funding agencies.

The meeting was chaired by Nepal Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat.

Participants shared the current progress and engaged in discussions about the constraints and challenges that, if left unaddressed, could potentially impede the overall portfolio performance.

Mahat, in his remarks, expressed appreciation to ADB and the World Bank for their support in Nepal's development over the years.

"Today's meeting was important in terms of identifying collective issues that require improvement and correction. This entails interdepartmental coordination to expedite tasks, ensuring that development projects stay on track to achieve their intended outcomes for the people of Nepal and contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development," said Mahat.

"The ministry is committed to allocating the budget in a timely manner."

Arnaud Heckmann, ADB officer-in-charge for Nepal, commended the finance ministry's proactive role in addressing issues to ensure portfolio success.

"Timely project implementation is essential for maximising the positive

import duty and 13 percent VAT.

But to provide relief to consumers, the government has halved the import duty for the sugar being imported by the two government companies.

"But it appears they won't be able to import sugar on time and it will be expensive this season," said Timalsina.

With the festival season approaching, irregularities are appearing in the market.

"During our joint inspection with the District Administrative Office last Thursday, we found a huge quantity of sugar, around 70 tonnes, stored in a warehouse in Kuleshwar," said Ananda Raj Pokharel, information officer at the Department of Commerce, Supplies and Consumer Protection.

"The sugar bags were found damaged, and there were no labels on some bags," he said.

"We have sent a sample of the sugar for examination after finding that it has not been stored properly. The warehouse has been sealed," he said.

Pokharel said that they couldn't say whether the enterprise was hoarding the sugar. "We are studying their invoice."

The government should have started the process of importing the essential household sweetener through a government-to-government arrangement a month and a half ago, said Timalsina.

"The two government entities need to follow the Public Procurement Act, and following due process means that the sugar will not arrive in time," he said. Nepal's annual sugar requirement is around 270,000 tonnes.

The country faces a deficit of about 100,000 tonnes of the sweetener annually which is fulfilled through imports by the private sector and sometimes by the two government companies.

Nepal used to produce 155,000 tonnes of sugar annually till a few years ago, which has now declined to 120,000 tonnes after sugar mill owners failed to pay sugarcane growers on time, according to the corporation.

impact of development projects, ensuring efficient resource utilisation, and delivering development results on the ground. We will continue to collaborate with implementing agencies to mitigate potential delays and ensure that our projects remain on track," said Heckmann.

"We appreciate the government's efforts towards expediting project implementation and ensuring timely delivery of externally and domestically financed projects on the ground," said World Bank Country Director for Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka Faris Hadad-Zervos.

The government is committed to allocating budget on time, says finance minister.

"We are committed to working together to enhance project performance and prioritise tangible development results for the betterment of the Nepali people, particularly those who are marginalised and vulnerable. Nepal has been able to do this in the past, and there is no reason why we cannot optimise performance again."

The Ministry of Finance, relevant ministries, implementing and executing agencies, ADB, and the World Bank have agreed on specific actions to overcome the challenges and help project implementation and disbursement pick up pace.

Chinese tourists enter Nepal after Tatopani border reopening

□ ANISH TIWARI
SINDHUPALCHOK, SEPT 29

Chinese tourists have started to enter Nepal via the Tatopani border following the reopening of the point on September 1, after eight and a half years.

According to the Tatopani immigration office, 820 Chinese tourists from various provinces of China have entered Nepal from the border point, till September 25.

"The number of visitors in the initial week was very low. Now, 40-50 tourists enter Nepal every day," said Rabindra Pokharel, chief of the immigration office.

The majority of the visitors are from Lhasa and Shigatse.

Tatopani border point is 124 kilometres from Kathmandu whereas Rasuwagadhi-Kerung, the other closest border point, is 164 kilometres far. Therefore, Tatopani is a preferred choice for travellers from Lhasa and other Tibetan cities to Kathmandu.

In addition to the tourists, eight Nepalis working in China and 204 Chinese working in Nepal have also crossed the Tatopani border point till September 25.

"More than 300 locals are crossing the Miteri bridge to shop in Khasa bazaar," Pokharel said.

The residents of Sindhupalchok are issued travel passes with a year of validity by the Chinese authority.

According to the immigration office, 5,918 locals have travelled to the Chinese side for trading by obtaining a new entry pass and 500 individuals have renewed their pass till the beginning of this week.

Before the border point shut down in 2015, more than 50,000 foreigners used to travel through it annually, mostly Chinese.

A large number of Indian tourists also used to enter China via this border point to travel to Kailash Mansarovar—a Hindu pilgrim destination in Tibet.

Similarly, the Tatopani hot water

spring, which used to be another tourist destination has not reopened. It was also closed due to the earthquake and subsequent floods in the Bhot Koshi River. Kumar Shrestha, chief of Bhotekoshi Rural Municipality-2, said that the local economy is gradually reviving due to the movement of tourists and traders at the border point.

"The hotels and shops that had remained closed since the 2015 earthquakes have gradually started reopening."

Raj Kumar Basnet, president of the Sindhupalchok Chamber of Commerce and Industry, added that the locals are optimistic about the border point and nearby trade centres returning to their former glory gradually.

"However, at present only seven containers are passing via the border point each day which is far less than what it used to be before the earthquake. The government must prioritise increasing the number of containers as well."

Tatopani has bustled as a transit point from ancient times. Porters bought merchandise from Kathmandu which was transferred to mule caravans and transported over the Himalayan passes to various points in Tibet. After the 2015 earthquake turned the border point into rubble, Tatopani and nearby places like Liping Bazaar wore a deserted look.

On the Chinese side of the border, the infrastructure was soon rebuilt. But little work was done on the Nepal side, and visitors to Tatopani were surprised by the poor state of the infrastructure.

Apart from Miteri Bridge and Tatopani dry port built by a Chinese company, all other essential structures like the immigration office, gates and security posts on the Nepal side are in a dilapidated condition.

The final 26-km stretch of Kodari highway to the border is yet to be repaired, and traders say it is dangerous to drive goods-laden containers on it.



POST PHOTO

According to the immigration office, 5,918 locals have travelled to the Chinese side for trading by obtaining a new entry pass.

SPORTS | MEDLEY

Ratna Rajya, Blue Bird secure victories

SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, SEPT 29

Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus and Blue Bird College emerged victorious in the Apex ICC Cup inter-college T20 cricket tournament at the Mulpani Cricket Ground on Friday.

Ratna Rajya defeated Kathmandu School of Law by 48 runs in D/L method despite the KSL's Bimal Acharya returning a match figure of 5-22. Krishna Pariyar top-scored for Ratna Rajya with 33 and Sandeep Airee collected 17 as Ratna Rajya posted 132-9 in the allotted 20 overs.

In reply, Yaman Joshi's 3-6, Aasharaj Ranjit's 2-7 and Krishna Pariyar's 2-11 helped Ratna Rajya restrict KSL to 72 in 14.4 overs. Their innings was reduced to 18 and a new target of 121 was set after rain briefly interrupted the match.

In the other game, Blue Bird beat Phoenix by 5 wickets, thanks to a half-century by Nirvik Pathak. Pathak smashed 51 off 46 balls to help his side chase down the 101-run target in 16.5 overs. Sachin Lekhak contributed 31 for Blue Bird. Kiran Chand and Raj Kumar Shah pocketed two wickets apiece for Phoenix.

Phoenix posted 100-9 in 17 overs, with Krish Ayer top-scoring with 35 runs. Bipin Acharya and Subash Khatri took two wickets each for Blue Bird.

Williamson to miss World Cup opener

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE HYDERABAD, SEPT 29

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson will miss the opening match of the ODI World Cup next week to recover from a knee injury, the country's cricket board said Friday.

Williamson was part of the team's Friday warm-up match against Pakistan in Hyderabad but only as a batsman and will aim to bat and field in the second warm-up fixture on Monday.

New Zealand cricket said in a statement that the captain would "continue to progress his knee rehabilitation".

Tom Latham is leading New Zealand against Pakistan.

Williamson was included in the team despite concerns over his injury from this year's Indian Premier League. He comes off a six-month lay-off as New Zealand look to build on their runners-up finish in the last edition of the 50-over World Cup in 2019, when they lost a dramatic final to England.

The Black Caps will play their second and final warm-up against South Africa in Thiruvananthapuram before the tournament opener on October 5 in Ahmedabad.

Risk-taker Postecoglou has given Tottenham new hope

Revitalised this season, unbeaten Spurs have already defeated Manchester United and drawn with Arsenal to move into fourth place in the Premier League.



Ange Postecoglou's Tottenham face Liverpool in the English Premier League on Saturday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE LONDON, SEPT 29

Inspired by Bill Shankly and Ferenc Puskas, Ange Postecoglou is the risk-taking trailblazer reviving Tottenham Hotspur with his no-fear philosophy.

Postecoglou has been a breath of fresh air for Spurs, banishing the bitter cycle of failure and recrimination that haunted the north London club before his close-season arrival from Celtic.

The 58-year-old is the first Australian to manage a Premier League team.

And when Tottenham host top-four rivals Liverpool on Saturday, Greece-born Postecoglou will fulfill a dream more than half a century in the making.

He fell in love with football as a child, idolising the all-conquering Liverpool teams of the 1970s managed by the charismatic Shankly.

"I always wanted to be a manager. I was a massive Liverpool fan. I loved Bill Shankly. I loved the boot room stories," he told the BBC.

Despite his boyhood admiration for Liverpool, Postecoglou is no wide-eyed stargazer, as his impressive impact with previously moribund Spurs has proved.

The club finished a lowly eighth in the Premier League last season following a miserable campaign in which Postecoglou's predecessor Antonio Conte launched scathing attacks on the culture of a club without a major trophy since 2008.

Revitalised this season, unbeaten Tottenham have already defeated Manchester United and drawn with Arsenal to move into fourth place, two points behind second-placed Liverpool ahead of this weekend's showdown.

In an echo of the way Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp hauled his club out of a deep depression with the power of his magnetic personality, Postecoglou's positive vibes have been restorative for Tottenham.

The most visible evidence of his persona has come in his team's determination to play out from defence with bravery

and precision.

Even when James Maddison nearly gifted a goal to Arsenal's Gabriel Jesus during last weekend's 2-2 draw, Postecoglou had no qualms about backing his player.

"I gave it away but the manager makes me feel so good that I can get it again and if I give it away, it's OK because that's how he wants us to play," Maddison said.

The way Tottenham twice battled back from behind to take a hard-fought point from the north London derby offered further proof of Postecoglou's ability to unify his club.

"He is bringing us together like a family. He is more like a dad or something," said Tottenham defender Micky van de Ven.

"We are like brothers together and we have to do this for each other. We fight for each other. He is building that."

Family has always been a driving force for Postecoglou, whose parents moved with him to Australia when he was five after losing their business following a Greek military coup.

Aside from his football-loving father, the biggest influence on Postecoglou's managerial style came during his playing career with South Melbourne Hellas (now South Melbourne FC), where he was coached by Real Madrid great Puskas.

"He just didn't like defending at all. His attitude was they score four, we score five," Postecoglou said.

"We ended up winning the league. It stirred something inside me and I thought, 'why not?'"

It was a philosophy that served him well during successful spells as coach of Brisbane Roar, Australia, Yokohama F Marinos and Celtic.

Searching for a coach capable of lifting the gloom left by the intense Conte, Tottenham flirted with Julian Nagelsmann, Vincent Kompany and Arne Slot before settling on Postecoglou, who won two Scottish titles with Celtic.

He may not have been Tottenham's first choice but after taking a circuitous managerial path that felt destined to end in frustration, Postecoglou is relishing his late-blooming career.

Nepal's Asiad swimming tour ends in heat stage

Hussain's elimination from the men's 400m freestyle heat bookends Nepali swimmers' dismal showing at the Games.



Nasir Yaha Hussain finished 21st out of a field of 25 the men's 400m freestyle heat on Friday.

SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, SEPT 29

ASIAN GAMES 2022

3x3 BASKETBALL

WOMEN'S ROUND ROBIN POOL B

Table with 2 columns: Team, Points. Nepal 2, Chinese Taipei 22.

BADMINTON

MEN'S TEAM QUARTER-FINALS

Table with 3 columns: Player, Points 1, Points 2. Includes Prince Dahal (Nepal), Lakshya Sen (India), Sunil Joshi (Nepal), Nammalwar Srikanth (India), Bishnu Katuwal (Nepal), Mithun Manjunath (India).

BOXING

WOMEN'S 54-57KG PRELIMINARIES ROUND OF 16

Table with 2 columns: Player, Points. Chandrakala Thapa (Nepal) 0, Prontip Buapa (Thailand) 5 WP.

HANDBALL

WOMEN'S PRELIMINARY ROUND GROUP B

Table with 2 columns: Team, Points. Nepal 18, Hong Kong 27.

finished sixth in the women's 10,000m final, which was won by Bahrain's Violah Jepchumba Kilonzo Motosio completing the distance in 31:43.73. Shrestha took 38:40.15 to complete the distance.

Som Bahadur Kumal exited from the men's 400m heat after he timed 48.68 to finish in the 17th position out of 20 athletes.

In men's badminton, Prince Dahal lost to Lakshya Sen 21-5, 21-8 and Sunil Joshi suffered a 21-4, 21-7 defeat by Nammalwar Srikanth to lose the team quarter-finals to India 3-0.

Nepal also lost their women's 3x3 Basketball to Chinese Taipei 22-2 and women's handball 27-18 to Hong Kong.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Challenging vibes will be smoothed out, encouraging you to look on the lighter side of life through an artistic outlet. Meanwhile, a sweet exchange will help you feel more connected to your body, mind, and the present moment.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

The vibe may feel a little tense, bringing moodiness to your home and the people that fill it. Luckily, Venus steps in to help you ground and set healthy boundaries, giving you the grace to walk away from agitated housemates.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

The ambience will be charged when you awaken this morning, sweet Libra. This cosmic climate will amplify differences within your relationships, making it important not to take the bait when others attempt to initiate conflict.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Try not to bring work stress into the weekend, dearest Capricorn. This cosmic climate could also trigger your irritability, making it important to maintain a respectful demeanor with family and friends. Luckily, Venus offers a graceful and cleansing merry.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

If you've been burning the candle at both ends, the cosmic climate warns you not to push yourself any further. Sweetness fills your home, encouraging you to recharge in peace. You'll feel elevated this evening, smoothing out any rough edges.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

Resist the temptation to follow through with every idea that lands in your mind this morning. Though you'll feel optimistic about your dreams and what it takes to reach them, putting too much on your plate could lead to burnout.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Try not to put too much on your plate this morning, dearest Scorpion. This cosmic climate could unleash the perfectionist within, though it could come at a cost to your mental health. These vibes are also great for embracing wellness.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Give yourself permission to dream, dear Aquarius. Pay attention to your ideas, which could lead you to your next great adventure. You'll sense a shift this evening, asking you to slow down from the comfort of your home.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Personalities may clash in the early hours, dearest Gemini. You'll need to be selective of who you interact with, avoiding anyone with negativity. This cosmic climate also brings flirtatious energy to the air, encouraging you to peruse people.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

The vibe will be intense, making it more important than ever that you move slowly and choose your battles wisely. Lean into your favourite divination and spiritual practices to make the most of these vibes this evening, furthering your connection with the universe.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

A competitive energy manifests this morning, dear Archer. Try not to take the bait if your peers begin egging you on, as tensions could rise unexpectedly. These vibes are also great for working on passion projects.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Watch out for stubborn behaviors this morning, sweet Pisces. Power struggles could manifest if you don't choose your battles wisely, making it important that you take the high road when possible. Do something to support your health, conjuring themes around wellness.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Cumberbund
5 Chimney dirt
9 Actress — Blanchett
13 Hawaiian dance
14 "To — own self be true"
15 Smell
16 Cheese variety
17 Clever tricks
18 Buddhist monk
19 Uncomplicate
21 All — (clumsy)
23 Bridge seat
24 Smile broadly
25 Walk with great pride
27 Fit as food
30 Pay- — -view
31 Postpone
34 Archaeologist's find
36 Disorderly pile
38 Bellows
40 — — precedent
41 Dehydrated
43 Bit of sand
45 Jewel
46 Leash for a kite
48 Crowbar
50 Put in stitches
51 Entreaty
52 Pertaining to mysticism
55 Justice

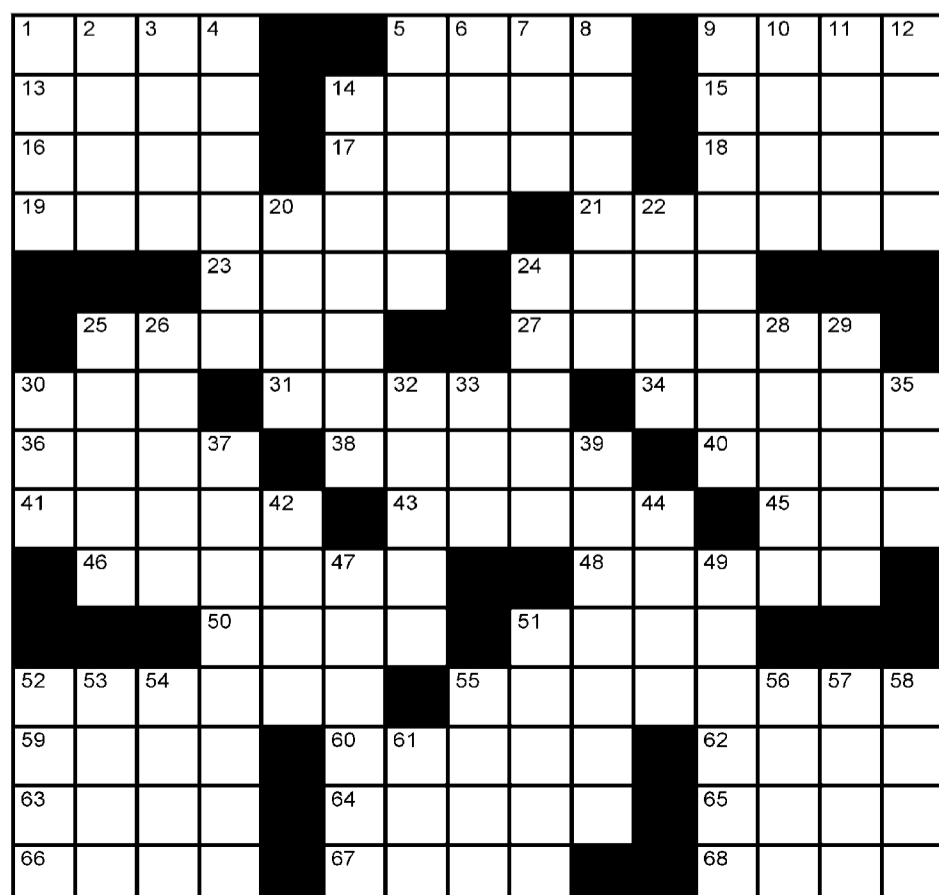
DOWN

- 1 "— a Lady"
2 Luxury car brand
3 Criticize
4 Get in the way of
5 Move a little
6 Unctuous
7 "— if by land..."
8 Tried
9 Ohio's capital
10 Genesis name
11 Place of burial
12 Notable times
14 Tornado
20 Speak well of
22 Tiny bit
24 Yogi of baseball
25 Crystal-gazers
26 Quality
28 City in Belgium

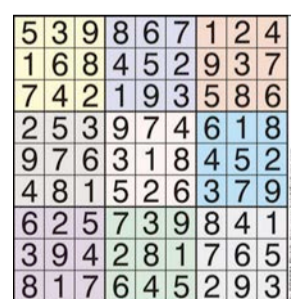
PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



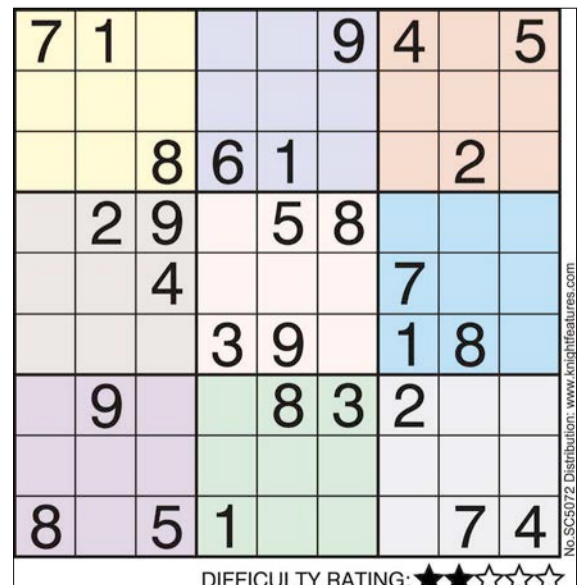
- 29 Stage direction
30 Scholar's degree
32 Cloudy
33 Lend an —
35 American uncle
37 Coax
39 More ridiculous
42 Pickle spice
44 — -do-well
47 Great outdoors
49 Property destroyer
51 Beeper
52 In the twinkling — — eye
53 Designer — Chanel
54 Jam
55 Ticket price
56 Therefore
57 Acidic
58 Went very fast
61 Adage



SUDOKU



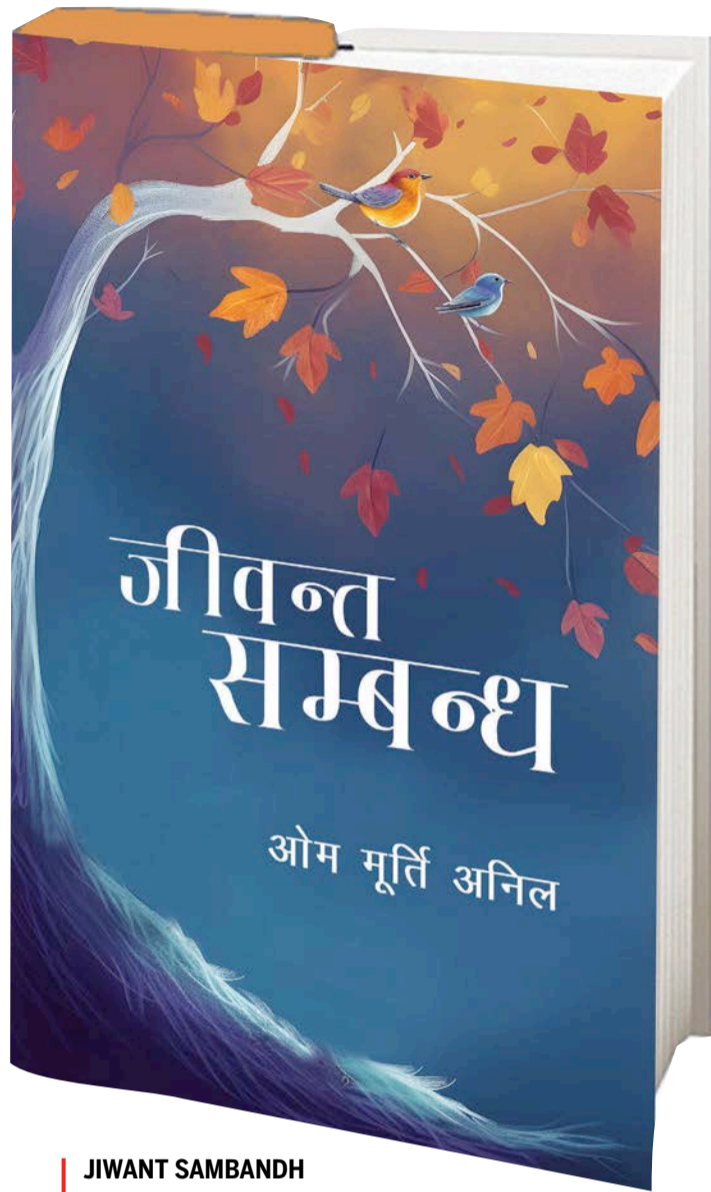
YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Nurturing relationships in a changing world

Dr Om Murti Anil journeys through shared vulnerabilities of humans and the transformative power of empathy in his new book 'Jiwant Sambandh'.



JIWANT SAMBANDH
Author: Dr Om Murti Anil
Year: 2023
Publisher: Dr Om Foundation

SUMIT SHARMA SAMEER

I want to begin by acknowledging the challenge of reviewing the work of someone you know. I've known Dr Om Murti Anil for the past two decades since he started his career in a small clinic in Kathmandu. My father was his patient, and we've stayed in touch. I've seen his professional growth and success due to his expertise and humility. His goal has always been to support society. I'm pleased he released his book, 'Jiwant Sambandh', emphasising the importance of relationships. This book is timely, addressing the loss of deep connections in Nepali society. With 53 chapters and 240 pages, it takes us on a heartfelt journey.



BOOK REVIEW

In 'Jiwant Sambandh', Dr Anil explores the complex aspects of life, like family bonds, regret, and enduring love. Chapters like 'The Defeated Doctor', 'Tears of the Heart', and 'Beyond Medicine' reflect our shared human emotions. Dr Anil blurs the lines between life and death and science and spirituality. He discusses the cosmic plan that shapes our lives in 'Conversations of Astrology', reminding us of our shared stardust origins.

In 'Tears and Affection', he invites readers to witness the catharsis of a heart laid bare, reminding us of our shared vulnerability and

strength. 'When One Becomes a Patient' explores mortality, revealing the empathy born from shared experiences. 'Small Joys' illuminates the beauty in life's simplicity.

'Jiwant Sambandh' transcends the temporal and the tangible, delving into our emotional reservoirs. Through the lens of relationships, we glimpse into the essence of our purpose, finding that the true measure of life lies not in its duration but in the depth of its connections.

It is in 'The Defeated Doctor' that Dr Anil lays bare the vulnerabilities of the healer. Through the lens of his own experiences, he implores us to recognise the frailty that lies beneath the veneer of expertise. In those moments of defeat, where the limits of science meet the boundless expanse of the human condition, he discovers a wellspring of humility that enriches his practice.

In 'Tears of the Heart', he explores the deep sadness we all feel. He shows us that tears are more than just drops of water; they're expressions of love and memory. This chapter reveals how pain, while tough, can bring people closer together, even as it hurts inside.

'Beyond Medicine' urges us to move beyond clinical boundaries, recognising that healing isn't confined to the realm of pharmaceuticals and procedures. Dr Anil reveals that medicine is a blend of science and spirit, found in moments of compassion, not just heartbeats.

'Tears and Affection' reveals the vulnerabilities of beauty. In the crucible of tears, Dr Anil asks us to shed the armour of stoicism and embrace our emotional selves. The chapter speaks to the universal truth that we discover our greatest strength in our most fragile moments.

In the chapter, 'When One Becomes a Patient',

Dr Anil reflects on mortality. He shares insights from the perspective of a patient, revealing the vulnerability and surrender that come with illness. These moments, where the healer experiences being healed, teach the deep truth that real empathy arises from shared experiences.

'Small Joys' reveals life's bliss in simple acts: a smile, a quiet moment. Dr Anil explains how in these gestures lie profound treasures often overlooked.

When one finishes reading 'Jiwant Sambandh', the words written by Dr Anil stay with us as a reminder of the strength of human connection and how it unites us all.

In chapters like 'Good Parenting', 'Inactivity', and 'Praise Doesn't Spoil Children', Dr Anil navigates the intricate pathways of parent-child connections in a changing world. He believes in rebuilding these vital links with compassion, fostering emotions that bind families and society.

These chapters are a good guide for parents, showing ways we can nurture empathetic children. 'Transmission of Culture' and 'Home: Human's First School' stress passing values, ensuring our cultural legacy continues.

'Grandparents' Influence and its Effect' stresses the importance of intergenerational relationships in shaping a child's worldview. Dr Anil emphasises the importance of tapping into the wisdom of our elders and acknowledging their invaluable contributions to the upbringing of the younger generation.

Similarly, 'Father's Interest in Health' and 'Family Atmosphere' provide insight into the role of fathers and the overall familial environment in children's emotional well-being. The writer encourages fathers to engage in their children's lives actively, which aids in their holistic development.

The book transcends the temporal and the tangible, delving into our emotional reservoirs.

The ever-present 'Generation Gap' is dissected in a manner that bridges the divide between different eras. Dr Anil urges parents to navigate this gap with patience and understanding, recognising that it is within their power to foster harmony within the family unit.

In 'Handover of the Seed', Dr Anil mentions how it is the parents' responsibility to instill the right values and principles in their children. This chapter serves as a reminder that the seeds we plant today will grow into the trees of tomorrow.

In a similar vein, 'The Right Imprint in Success' explores the delicate balance between ambition and character. Dr Anil advocates inculcating selfless values in our children to ensure their success is not just measured by external achievements but by their character.

'Selfless Advice' calls for nurturing emotional strength and strengthening children's connection to both their parents and society.

The book helps readers understand parent-child bonds and how to nurture them. Dr Anil shows us how these connections shape generations, enriching families, communities, and nations.

In today's world full of distractions, 'Jiwant Sambandh' offers hope and Dr Anil's words encourage parents to embrace their roles with love, empathy, and wisdom. He aptly describes parenthood as a journey of rediscovering and strengthening connections, guiding us to build a better future based on the deep bonds that unite us all.



Sameer is an award-winning author. He also runs a podcast titled 'Ink & Insights'.

EVENTS



PHOTO: COURTESY OF FOOD & BEVERAGE AND HOSPITALITY/FACEBOOK

Food, Beverage and Hospitality Exhibition

Century Group is hosting the ninth edition of their annual Food & Beverage and Hospitality Exhibition next month. About 250 exhibitors will participate in the event. Visitors can take part in various live events and contests, including 'Best Bartender Contest', 'Best Barista Contest', 'Master Baker Challenge' and 'Wine Tasting Workshop'.

Where: Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu
When: October 5 to 8
Time: 11:00 am to 6:00 pm
Entry: Free



PHOTO: COURTESY OF FARM RUNNING FESTIVAL

Farm Running Festival: Autumn Edition

The autumn edition of the Farm Running Festival is happening today. Participants will run the 7k, 15k, or 35k trails during the event. The race for all categories begins at Tokha Urban Farm and then moves to Shivapuri National Park.

Starting point: Tokha Urban Farm, Tokha, Kathmandu
When: September 30
Time: 6:00 am onwards
Entry: Rs2,625

Trio No Treble Musical Evening

Trio No Treble, a string trio based in Trondheim, Norway, are holding several concerts in Nepal. The three band members play viola, cello and double bass. They will perform the works of classical musicians, including Beethoven, Piazzolla and Grieg.

Where: Moksh, Lazimpat; Ramada Encore, Thamel; Dhokaima Cafe, Lalitpur; Rooftop at Lazimpat, Kathmandu
When: October 1 to 8
Entry: Free

Dress It Up Dashain Pop-Up

Meghzpick is hosting a Dashain pop-up event at Cafe Imago, showcasing its festive ethnic collection. The curated collection will feature exclusive handpicked attire, bags, accessories and footwear from international and local labels.

Where: Cafe Imago, Nagpokhari
When: September 30
Time: 11:30 am to 6:30 pm
Entry: Free

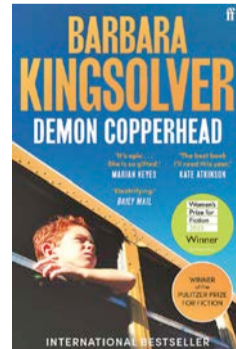
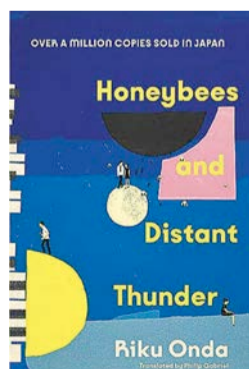


PHOTO: COURTESY OF MEGHZPICK

BEST-SELLERS | NEW RELEASES

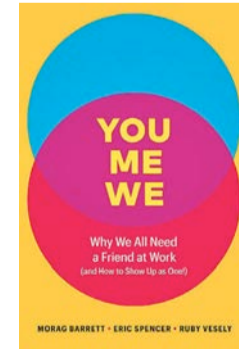
Fiction

1. Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver
2. Honeybees and Distant Thunder by Riku Onda
3. A Long Petal of the Sea by Isabel Allende
4. If He Had Been with Me by Laura Nowlin
5. Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens



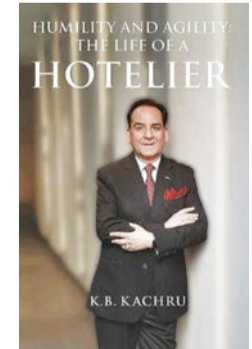
Demon Copperhead
Author: Barbara Kingsolver
Price: Rs958.40
Publisher: Faber & Faber

'Demon Copperhead', winner of the 2023 Women's Prize for Fiction, tells the gripping tale of Demon, a boy born into poverty in the southern Appalachian Mountains of Virginia. Raised by a single mother in a trailer, Demon relies on his looks, wit, and survival skills to make his life less miserable than it already is. The story delves into the harsh realities of poverty and addiction, of this rugged landscape, highlighting Demon's relentless misfortune. Barbara Kingsolver, inspired by Charles Dickens, channels anger, compassion, and storytelling's redemptive power in this contemporary American narrative. This book voices the struggles of a new generation, those born in captivating yet cursed places they can't easily abandon.



You, Me, We: Why We All Need a Friend at Work
Author: Eric Spencer, Morag Barrett, and Ruby Vesely
Price: Rs958.40
Publisher: Page Two

In today's age of Zoom calls and hybrid workplaces, how can leaders foster relationships that allow everyone to succeed? A trio of bestfriends and leadership consultants at SkyeTeam have the surprising answer in this book. In the world of work and life, having allies is key to success. This remarkable book, backed by their work with Google, Microsoft, and more, reveals the five essential elements of an Ally Mindset: abundance, connection, courage, candour and action. Discover how embracing the Ally Mindset by fostering enduring and supportive relationships.



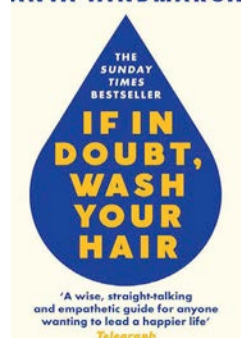
Humility and Agility: The Life of a Hotelier
Author: KB Kachru
Price: Rs1,272.00
Publisher: Allied Publishers

With a career spanning five decades, KB Kachru is a living legend in the hospitality industry. In this captivating memoir, Kachru shares his remarkable journey through five decades of the hospitality industry, offering insights and leadership lessons drawn from encounters with world leaders and luminaries. This book is a masterclass in how to lead a successful, fulfilling life while maintaining one's humility and adaptability, proving it a must-read not only for professionals in the hospitality sector but for anyone looking to lead a successful life. His story is a testament to the power of humility, and adaptability in achieving success.

ANYA HINDMARCH

Non-Fiction

1. If In Doubt, Wash Your Hair by Anya Hindmarch
2. Broken Open by Elizabeth Lesser
3. Why We Sleep by Matthew Walker
4. Better Than Before by Gretchen Rubin
5. Skin in the Game by Nassim Nicholas Taleb



Ekta Books

Reading in the age of instant gratification

Reading is one of the easiest ways to understand the complexities of the world, but why aren't more people doing it?

ANISH GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU

When I was in college, I was a regular library visitor. I liked reading, and the smell of books, plus the peace and quiet that came with it, was a bonus. I picked one book and sat down on the chair—trying to understand more about life. When I looked up, I found the library fairly deserted. This is something I still don't understand. Reading is one of the easiest ways to understand more about the complexities of the world, but why aren't more people reading?

When asked about this problem, Manjushree Thapa, essayist, translator, and author of books like 'Forget Kathmandu', 'The Tutor of History', and 'All of Us In Our Lives', says it is troubling that people aren't reading more. "For me, reading has always been a way to enhance the experience of being alive, of being human," she adds.

Thapa's sentiments will resonate with readers universally. Books evoke many emotions, enabling us to connect with our humanity. She also shares that reading isn't merely about learning; it's a pathway to imagine, enjoy, and lead a meaningful life.

I've noticed through conversations with fellow readers how books, with their transformative power, shape perspectives. Some texts stir intense emotions, while non-fiction broadens our understanding of the world. Through words, the distance between us and someone living thousands of miles away shrinks. Despite this profound impact, we aren't reading much.

During my college years, the library was often empty as students preferred to hang out at cafes—probably because you can be as loud as you want there, and when they aren't talking, students are on their phones—sharing memes and texting. While phones are convenient, I think



SHUTTERSTOCK

we rely on them too much. If we spend more of that time reading, it would be more beneficial for us.

Pragati Rai, the author of 'Lekhaki Ki Swasni', 'Thangra' and 'Birsyeko Mritu', points out how our addiction to short-form entertainment results in us analysing and contemplating the world less-and-less. Smartphones inundate us with a barrage of notifications, pop-ups, and an overload of information. This feels similar to instant gratification, which makes

A challenge in the age of Instagram reels and Tiktok videos is our ever-decreasing attention span.

reading feel slow and frustrating in comparison. "To read, one has to be patient and be willing to labour their brain to understand some complex things. With these many entertainment devices around, it has become a challenge," adds Rai.

The other challenge in the age of Instagram reels and Tiktok videos is the ever-decreasing attention span. Some studies claim that in this day and age, our attention span is worse than that of a gold-

fish. We struggle to focus, perpetually seeking more entertainment. Reading, once a cherished pastime, has become a challenge amidst constant interruptions.

Poet, playwright and literary critic Abhi Subedi views the decline in reading culture as a global trend. He believes it is happening because there are many alternative ways to access knowledge. Something Subedi is weary about is the decrease in reading culture due to a lack of awareness about its importance.

Additionally, Subedi is concerned that people today are excessively engaged in sensationalism and political activism. "This lifestyle has taken up a lot of time of today's youth, making them unfamiliar with reading and its benefits," he says.

Besides the aforementioned reasons, Rai believes the education system of Nepal also doesn't encourage the students to read outside their curriculum. "The standard for a good student is maintained by the marks they score, and the focus is always on who can remember the content more or, as we call it, *ghokera padhne*." The system pressurises students to compete and get better grades; thus, they read only when exams are around. Such reading is laced with a fear of failure. So, the reading culture isn't strongly set in our education landscape.

Rai advocates for a shift in reading priorities, urging authorities to promote reading. She adds, "In developed nations, central libraries serve as community hubs, fostering a culture of reading—something that is noticeably absent here."

In essence, the decline in reading culture is a complex issue. While technology offers diverse knowledge channels, it also distracts us from the richness of books. Our waning attention spans further compound the problem. Coupled with an education system that prioritises grades over genuine learning, we aren't all that motivated to read. We must acknowledge these hurdles and work collectively to overcome them. Only then can the joy of reading permeate our society once more.

Flavours of Nepalgunj

The city has a vibrant street food scene. Locals enjoy a variety of dishes—from chickpea gravy and *puri* to biryani and *ghamanja*.



POST PHOTOS: RUPA GAHTRAJ

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NEPALGUNJ

Nandalal Baishya of Nepalgunj Ward 8 begins his day with a simple yet satisfying breakfast. Every morning, he heads to the street cart at Tribhuvan Chowk, where he's been enjoying chickpea gravy and *puri* from the same vendor for the past thirty years. For just Rs30, this breakfast ritual never fails to delight his heart.

For thirty years now, Baishya has made it a daily routine to enjoy a snack from the same street vendor. He has a fondness for not only chickpeas and *puris* but also *pakodas* and *ghamanja*. He runs a wholesale clothing store in the local market and insists that missing his morning snack leaves him with an unsatisfied stomach. "In Nepalgunj, chickpeas, *puris*, and *ghamanjas* make up our breakfast," he reveals.

Often dubbed the 'city of taste', Nepalgunj attracts travellers eager to savour its unique dishes. Bijaykumar, another local business operator, emphasises the popularity of *rawadi* among the locals. "Residents here even send this dish to their relatives living far away," he notes. While one can get *rawadi* at Rs20 at most local shops, it is sold at a higher price in some of the more upscale eateries.

The fusion of diverse flavours is a defining trait of the culinary scene in Nepalgunj. The influence of Indian cuisine, because of the city's proximity to the border, is also evident in its flavours.

A popular eatery in the city is

Mubarak Biryani. The restaurant manager, Mubarak Ali, revealed this to the establishment of Rahim Hotel by Abdul Rahim. Currently, Rahim's sons run the establishment, and their biryanis are as popular as ever.

The influence of Indian cuisine, because of the city's proximity to the border, is evident in its food.

food during his visit last year. "We haven't received a single complaint about the taste of our food in all our years of operation," says Ali.

Biryani has been gaining popu-

larity in the city over the past decade in general. Some locals credit this to the establishment of Rahim Hotel by Abdul Rahim. Currently, Rahim's sons run the establishment, and their biryanis are as popular as ever.

Pahunaji is another long-running eatery in Nepalgunj. Located near the Radhakrishna Temple, the thirty-year-old food hub is known for its *rawadis* which is a must-try when one visits the city. Krishna Bhog Sweets, located in Tribhuvan Chowk, is also renowned for its *rawadis*. The owner of the sweet shop, Rakesh Kumar Gupta, believes using his grandfather's recipe—which stresses the importance of using high-quality milk—is the reason why their *rawadis* are so tasty. He reveals that the shop buys between 20 to 50 kilograms of

dairy products to make different sweets every day.

Other dishes popular among Nepalgunj locals include *halwa paratha* and *suji halwa*. One of the more popular eateries selling these local delicacies is located in Chaulika Chowk and bustling with customers from 5 o'clock in the morning until 8 o'clock in the evening.

The nearby Tribhuvan Chowk is also home to another local eatery renowned for its *chaats* and *panipuri*. Dharmendra Lakher, who runs the *chaat* shop, says he tailors the dishes to each customer's preference and makes them more tangy or sweet according to their taste. "That is why people like my *chaats* and *panipuri*," he states, adding that some of his regular customers have as many as 10 plates of *panipuri*.

Ghamanja, which is an assortment of snacks including potato *pakoda*, bread *tikia*, spicy chilli peppers, potatoes, and cauliflower *tikia*, is another popular breakfast dish in Nepalgunj. 72-year-old Santosh Kanoudia, who has been living in the city for over five decades, reveals that many residents prefer having these dishes at local eateries over cooking breakfast at home. Roadside stalls in the city buzz with activity every morning, and after indulging in these treats, locals often conclude their meal with a refreshing lassi.

Businessman Krishna Shrestha thinks the diverse cuisines of Nepalgunj can be utilised to promote the city and attract tourists. Shrestha is currently working to launch a 'Street Food Lane' in Tribhuvan Chowk with his team. Shriram Sigdel, the coordinator of Nepalgunj Food Lane Byabasthapan Samiti, underscores the importance of unity and cooperation of locals for this endeavour. The aim is to showcase Nepalgunj's culinary delights, but Sigdel emphasises the need for health standards. "First, we must organise the city and establish health standards to elevate our food businesses," he says.



Dumbledore actor Michael Gambon dies at age 82



AP/RSS

SYLVIA HUI
LONDON, UK

Michael Gambon, the Irish-born actor knighted for his illustrious career on the stage and screen and who went on to gain admiration from a new generation of moviegoers with his portrayal of Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore in six of the eight 'Harry Potter' films, has died. He was 82.

The actor died on Wednesday following "a bout of pneumonia," his publicist, Clair Dobbs, said Thursday.

"We are devastated to announce the loss of Sir Michael Gambon. Beloved husband and father, Michael died peacefully in hospital with his wife Anne and son Fergus at his bedside," his family said in a statement.

While the Potter role raised Gambon's international profile and found him a huge audience, he had long been celebrated as one of Britain's leading actors. His work spanned TV, theatre, film and radio, and over the decades, he starred in dozens of movies from 'Gosford Park' and 'The King's Speech' to the animated family film 'Paddington'. He recently appeared in the Judy Garland biopic 'Judy', released in 2019.

Gambon was knighted for his contribution to the entertainment industry in 1998.

The much-loved Professor Dumbledore was initially played by another Irish-born actor, Richard Harris. When Harris died in 2002, after two of the films in the franchise had been made, Gambon took over and played the part from 'Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban' through to 'Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows Part 2'.

He once acknowledged not having read any of JK Rowling's best-selling books, arguing that it was safer to follow the script rather than be too influenced by the books. That didn't prevent him from embodying the spirit of the powerful wizard who fought against evil to protect his students.

Co-stars often described Gambon as a mischievous, funny man who was self-deprecating about his talent. Actress Helen Mirren fondly remembered his "natural Irish sense of humour—naughty but very, very funny."

Gambon retired from the stage in 2015 after struggling to remember his lines in front of an audience due to his advancing age. He once told the Sunday Times Magazine: "It's a horrible thing to admit, but I can't do it. It breaks my heart."

Gambon was always protective when it came to his private life. He married Anne Miller, and they had one son, Fergus. He later had two sons with set designer Philippa Hart.

— Associated Press

Correction

The food feature on Nook Restaurant of the hotel Aloft Kathmandu published on page 8 of the Post on September 29 was incorrectly headlined. The correct headline should have been 'An ensemble of flavours'. The error is regretted.

— Editor