



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXXII No. 47 | 8 pages | Rs.5  
Friday, April 05, 2024 | 23-12-2080

40.8° C 4.5° C  
Bhairahawa Jomsom

## TODAY

### NATIONAL

The political aftershocks of the March 4 change in the federal alliance have finally reached Lumbini and Sudurpashchim provinces, forcing the incumbent chief ministers to step down. **Pg 2**

Amid a dispute, the Nepali Congress on Thursday picked its candidates for the upcoming bypolls—Dambar Khadka for the Ilam-2 House seat and Abhishek Singh for the Bajhang (A) provincial assembly constituency. **Pg 5**

### OPINION

Inherently, loans are neither good nor bad. All is well if the income generated from borrowed funds surpasses the repayment cost, write *Pragres Acharya* and *Shabda Gyawali*. **Pg 4**

### MONEY

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, confident of winning a national election, has set an ambitious target of roughly doubling the economy and exports this decade, according to a government document. **Pg 6**

### SPORTS



Kylian Mbappe's strike propelled Paris St Germain into the French Cup final with a comfortable 1-0 win over Stade Rennais on Wednesday, taking them one step closer to a 15th trophy. **Pg 7**

### GET A COPY

Subscribe to The Kathmandu Post via



kathmandupost.com



The first of the two A330s wide-body planes, Annapurna, was delivered in June 2018. The second, Makalu (pictured), arrived a month later.

## Rs1.47 billion extra paid in Airbus A330s deal, probe shows

After five-year study, CIAA files cases against 32 including sitting and former officials, and foreign suppliers.

SANGAM PRASAIN & BINOD GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 4

Nepal's anti-graft body on Thursday completed its five-year-long probe into the \$209.6-million Airbus deal, the largest ever in Nepal's aviation history, concluding that the procurement of two wide-body Airbus A330 jets by Nepal Airlines Corporation has caused a loss of Rs1.47 billion (\$13.38 million) to the government.

The loss was computed based on the exchange rate at the time of the payment of the last instalment in 2018.

On Thursday, the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) filed a case against 32 individuals at the Special Court for their alleged involvement in corruption in the April 2017 Airbus A330s deal, commonly known as the 'wide-body scam'.

The first of the two wide-body aircraft—Annapurna—arrived at the Tribhuvan International Airport in June 2018. The second, named Makalu, arrived a month later.

In a statement, the commission said it has filed the case against a former minister, high-level sitting and retired government officials, private sector representatives, and aircraft suppliers.

The accused are former tourism minister Jeevan Bahadur Shahi, former managing director of Nepal Airlines Sugat Ratna Kansakar, for-

mer tourism secretary Shankar Adhikari and former finance secretary Shishir Kumar Dhungana.

At the time of the deal, Adhikari and Dhungana were on the board of the national flag carrier.

As per the charge sheet, the minister and the Nepali officials had gone against the procurement law and accepted the supplier's escalation condition to purchase second-hand aircraft, a condition which came to \$6.78 million (Rs74.58 million) of the \$209.6 million valuation. Escalation condition is a rule in a contract that says if certain things change, like prices, then the terms of the contract can also change. Investigators suspect that the condition was included in the \$209.6 million deal to covertly generate kick-backs for the officials involved.

The charge sheet reads that while finalising the major technical specifications, the maximum takeoff mass (MTOM) of the aircraft was decreased to 230 tonnes from 242 tonnes. Investigators suspect financial embezzlement here.

Former tourism minister Jeevan Bahadur Shahi and ex-NAC managing director among accused. **>> Continued on page 6**

## As Covid lingers, Nepal asks Covax for 1.6 million vaccine doses

Shots are available at Sukraraj Hospital, Teku. Those in the risk group can get fresh jobs.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 4

Amid reports of an increase in the number of Covid cases, the Ministry of Health and Population has asked Covax to supply 1.6 million doses of coronavirus vaccine.

The vaccine doses are among the 2.5 million doses Covax, the United Nations-backed international vaccine

### COVID WATCH

sharing scheme, has committed to supply, officials say.

"We will administer the vaccine to the risk groups including the elderly and those having comorbidities," said Dr Abhiyan Gautam, chief of the Immunisation Section at the Family

Welfare Division of the Department of Health Services. "Further requests for vaccine doses will be made based on the demand in the country."

The facility supplied millions of doses of coronavirus vaccine, which were used to inoculate the majority of the population of the country. Of late, major hospitals in the country have reported coronavirus infections.

**>> Continued on page 2**

## How religions have responded to total solar eclipses over the centuries

The Muslim wisdom for eclipse is for the individual to seek refuge in God, requesting the lifting of the affliction.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
LOS ANGELES, APRIL 4

Throughout history, solar eclipses have had profound impact on adherents of various religions around the world. They were viewed as messages from God or spiritual forces, inducing emotions ranging from dread to wonder.

Ahead of the total solar eclipse that will follow a long path over North America on Monday, here's a look at how several of the world's major religions have responded to such eclipses over the centuries and in modern times.

### Buddhism:

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, it is believed that the energy of positive and negative actions is multiplied during major astronomical events such as a solar eclipse.

According to the late Lama Zopa Rinpoche with the Foundation for the Preservation of the



A partial solar eclipse seen from the Swayambhunath temple in Kathmandu on March 9, 2016.

Mahayana Tradition, both lunar and solar eclipses are auspicious days for spiritual practice. He has said that the merit—which represents the positive karmic results of good intentions and actions—generated on lunar eclipses is multiplied by 700,000 and on solar eclipses by 100 million.

Some of the recommended spiritual activities on these days include chanting mantras and sutras.

### Christianity:

Some Christians have believed that an eclipse portends the coming of the "end times" that will precede Christ's return to Earth as prophesied at various points in the Bible. One such passage is in the second chapter of Acts: "The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord."

There also has been a persisting belief among some Christians that an eclipse occurred during the crucifixion because three of the Bible's four Gospels mention a three-hour period of darkness as Jesus died.

"It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining," says Luke 23:44.

It's been noted that a three-hour period of darkness doesn't suggest a solar eclipse, which

produces only a few minutes of darkness.

But a recent commentary on ChurchLeaders.com—a website supported by numerous prominent evangelical pastors—said the darkness depicted in the three Gospels "represents a profound spiritual transition."

**>> Continued on page 2**



Experience

our 24x7 Client Care Centre  
at +977 1 4791800/5424198



# Be #TotallySorted with Colgate Total.

Health choices can be confusing. But your oral health need not be. Get the new Colgate Total, the **All-In-One\*** toothpaste.



- ✓ Cavities
- ✓ Plaque
- ✓ Enamel
- ✓ Gum Problems
- ✓ Staining
- ✓ Tartar
- ✓ Freshens
- ✓ Sensitive Teeth

Follow us

## NATIONAL

## DISTRICT DIGEST

## Two SEE examinees expelled

**KHOTANG:** Two students got expelled, and two exam invigilators also got fired from Jalpa Secondary School, located in ward 12 of Diktel Rupakot Majuwagadhi Municipality, which is one of the exam centres for the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) on Thursday. According to Nanda Bahadur Bishwakarma, acting chief of the Education Development and Coordination Unit in Khotang, two students were found to be sharing SEE question papers through social media, and the invigilators were helping them. The seized mobile phones will be returned to the students after the conclusion of the exam, and action will be taken against the invigilators, according to Bishwakarma.

## Man arrested on charge of raping a minor



**BARDIYA:** Police on Thursday arrested a 43-year-old man from Madhuban Municipality on charge of raping a nine-year-old girl. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Tulsiram Aryal, information officer at Bardiya District Police Office, the arrest was made after the parents of the girl filed a complaint saying the girl was raped by the man on Wednesday. The accused and the girl are relatives. The man will remain in judicial custody, and further investigation regarding the case is going on, said Aryal.

## Motorcyclist dies in Devchuli

**NAWALPARASI EAST:** A 24-year-old man died in a motorcycle accident at Gankikot of Devchuli Municipality in Nawalparasi East on Wednesday night. According to the District Police Office, John Mahato died after his motorcycle fell into a roadside ditch at around 11:30 pm. The victim, who sustained critical injuries in the crash, died while being rushed to Dumkauli Primary Health Centre.

## Religious interpretations of solar eclipse are varied

>> Continued from page 1

"The temporary obscuring of the sun, juxtaposed with the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, offers a powerful metaphor for the transient nature of despair and the eternal promise of salvation and rebirth," the commentary says.

## Hinduism

The origin of eclipses in Hinduism is explained in ancient legends known as puranas. In one legend, the devas and asuras, who symbolised good and evil respectively, churned the ocean to receive the nectar of eternal life. As one of the asuras, Svarbhanu, posed as a deva to receive the nectar, the Sun god (Surya) and Moon god (Chandra) alerted Mohini, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, who then used a discus to behead Svarbhanu.

## Eclipses were viewed as divine messages evoking emotions from fear to awe.

But because the asura had already consumed a portion of the nectar, his immortal but detached head and body lived on under the names Rahu and Ketu. Legend has it that Rahu occasionally swallows the sun and the moon because of the gods' part in his misery, causing solar and lunar eclipses. Hindus generally regard a solar or lunar eclipse as a bad omen. Some observe fasts before and many do not eat during the period of the eclipse. Observant Hindus ritually bathe to cleanse themselves during the first and final phases of an eclipse. Some also offer prayers to ancestors. Most temples are closed for the duration of the eclipse. Devotees gather for prayers along pilgrimage sites near holy rivers during the onset of an eclipse. The event is considered to be a good time for prayer, meditation and chanting of mantras—all believed to ward off evil.

## Islam

In Islam, a solar eclipse is a time to turn to God and pray. The eclipse prayer is based on narrations of sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad.

Kaiser Aslam, Muslim chaplain at the Center for Islamic Life at Rutgers University, said one narration cited the prophet as saying: "The sun and the moon are two signs amongst the signs of Allah and they do not eclipse because of the death of someone. ... Whenever you see these eclipses pray and invoke [Allah]."

The story was that "after the death of the Prophet Muhammad's son,

GHANSHYAM GAUTAM IN BUTWAL & ARJUN SHAH IN DHANGADHI  
APRIL 4

The political aftershocks of the March 4 change in the federal alliance have finally reached Lumbini and Sudurpaschim provinces, forcing incumbent chief ministers to step down.

Addressing the provincial assembly meeting of Lumbini Province on Thursday, Chief Minister Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary announced his resignation after his attempts to regain majority in the assembly failed. The Nepali Congress-led government had fallen into a minority after the formation of the four-party alliance in Kathmandu last month.

Chaudhary expressed his concerns regarding the ongoing political instability caused by frequent changes in government at both the centre and provinces. "We cannot steer the province to peace and prosperity if there is no political stability. People are immensely frustrated. We are unable to address the people's grievances but have been focussed on forming and toppling governments," said Chaudhary. "Chief ministers keep on changing. The question now is whether we can institutionalise federalism or not. I wish the new chief minister will work to protect the federal system of governance," he added.

Chaudhary expressed his concerns about the practice of changing provincial governments with a change in the political climate at the centre. He also claimed that the provinces lacked adequate resources to function and 'prove their worth' and have also failed to generate revenues on their own.

Chaudhary was appointed chief minister of Lumbini on April 27, 2023.

Earlier on Thursday, four coalition partners forged a five-point deal to form the provincial government under the leadership of Jokh Bahadur Mahara of the CPN (Maoist Centre). The CPN-UML, Maoist Centre, Janata Samajwadi Party and CPN (Unified Socialist) signed the agreement to

## Lumbini, Sudurpaschim chief ministers quit without facing votes of confidence

The provincial governments collapsed as a consequence of the shift in the federal coalition.



(Left) Sudurpaschim Chief Minister Kamal Bahadur Shah hands his resignation to Province Head Najir Miya in Dhangadhi on Thursday. (Right) Lumbini Chief Minister Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary speaking in the provincial assembly on Thursday.

form the Lumbini government under the Maoist leadership. Independent member of the assembly, Khadga Basnet, who was elected from Nawalparasi West 2(A) also signed the agreement.

In the 87-member provincial assembly in Lumbini, an assembly member is currently under suspension. The UML has 29 members, the Congress 27, the Maoist Centre 11, and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party and Nagarik Unmukti Party have four members each. Similarly, the Janata Samajwadi Party, Loktantrik Samajwadi Party and Janamat Party have three members each while the Unified Socialist has one and there is one independent member.

Mahara is likely to be appointed as new chief minister as 44 members, which is a majority in the presently 86-member provincial assembly, form the four ruling parties are on his side. Likewise in Sudurpaschim, Chief

Minister Kamal Bahadur Shah threw in the towel after his frantic attempts to get a vote of confidence failed. He tendered his resignation to Province Head Najir Miya on Thursday evening.

Shah was preparing for the floor test earlier on Thursday. The provincial assembly meeting called for 3:30 pm was postponed twice by the chief minister as Shah was attempting to get support of majority assembly members.

Chief Minister Shah expected that he would get support from all seven members of the Nagarik Unmukti Party. However, two members of the party—Kailash Chaudhary and Tika Thapa who are considered to be close to party chief Ranjita Shrestha—did not come to Dhangadhi from Kathmandu.

Nepali Congress provincial assembly leader Shah had been appointed Sudurpaschim chief minister as per Article 168(3) of the constitution after

CPN-UML's Rajendra Singh Rawal failed to get a vote of confidence in February last year.

Political uncertainty continues in Sudurpaschim due to longstanding dispute between the Nagarik Unmukti Party chair Ranjita Shrestha and her husband Reshmal Chaudhary on whether to support the provincial government led by Shah. Shrestha on Wednesday asked the provincial assembly secretariat to suspend her party's Indira Giri from the assembly. The party's central member Ramlal Dagaura Tharu, the mayor of Tikapur Municipality who is considered close to Shrestha, registered the request for suspension at the assembly secretariat in Dhangadhi amid tight security.

Of the seven Nagarik Unmukti provincial members, five are close to party leader Reshmal Chaudhary, who is in favour of supporting the incumbent Congress-led government. The two members considered close to

party chair Shrestha are against Shah's government. The Nagarik Unmukti Party, established in 2022, has made a mark in politics following the elections held later that year.

In the 53-member Sudurpaschim assembly, the Congress has 19 members, the Maoist Centre has 10, the UML 9, the Nagarik Unmukti Party 7, the Unified Socialist has three, and the RPP has one, besides an independent lawmaker. Any party claiming the government's leadership must secure the support of at least 27 assembly members.

Triggered by the March 4 political alliance in Kathmandu, the struggle to retain and change governments in the provinces has become intense in the last few days.

On Wednesday, Gandaki Chief Minister Surendra Raj Pandey of Nepali Congress and Karnali Chief Minister Rajkumar Sharma also put in papers due to the political changes.

## Doctors urge at-risk and unvaccinated to get Covid jab

>> Continued from page 1

Doctors say elderly people and those with underlying conditions have been getting severe from Covid. Some infected people, whose health conditions were severe, are being treated in intensive care.

Health authorities across Nepal have stopped active case findings including contact tracing and free testing for all after the second wave of the pandemic subsided in 2021. Hospitals have been carrying out tests only on those seeking polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing to go abroad or seriously ailing patients with respiratory illness. Those seeking test reports are healthy people and even some healthy people are getting tested positive for the coronavirus. Some people with fever and flu are also testing positive for the coronavirus.

Doctors say many people infected with Covid could be asymptomatic and they can pass the virus to others. Infected elderly and those with compromised immunity get severe from Covid. They ask people of the risk groups to get inoculated as soon as possible.

Currently Covid vaccine is being provided from the Teku-based Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital. The hospital administration said that anyone from risk groups or those, who have not taken the first dose, second dose or booster shots can visit for inoculation.



Officials in Kathmandu receive delivery of Covid jabs supplied by Covax, in this undated photo.

"We have been administering the coronavirus vaccine from our hospital," said Dr Yuba Nidhi Basaula, director at the hospital. "But the uptake has been very low. Only around 20 people have been coming for Covid vaccination daily."

The hospital administration said Pfizer-BioNTech's bivalent Covid vaccine is being administered between 10 am and 3 pm every day.

The Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine is the only bivalent jab that has got an emergency use approval from the drug advisory committee in Nepal.

The bivalent Covid vaccine includes a component of the original virus strain as well as a part of the Omicron variant to provide a broad protection against Covid.

Nepal had confirmed the spread of the JN.1 sub-variant of the coronavi-

rus in the country in January. The World Health Organisation classifies JN.1 as a separate 'variant of interest' given its rapid spread around the globe. The UN health body, however, said that based on available data, "the additional public health risk posed by JN.1 is currently evaluated as low".

Officials at the Ministry of Health and Population said of late people mostly returning from India have been testing positive for Covid.

Thousands of people from both countries enter each other's territories every day on top of the large number of those who use unregulated points along the porous border.

Though health authorities have not carried out whole-genome sequencing, experts say the sudden rise in infection rate and severity in the elderly and comorbid people could be the reason for the change in virus variant of seasonal flu and coronavirus.

Public health experts have urged authorities concerned to carry out whole-genome sequencing, which is a comprehensive method of analysing the entire DNA sequence of an organism's genes. Researchers believe that whole-genome sequencing of the coronavirus can help track the virus's severity and properties.

As cases in the hospitals keep rising, doctors suggest the public to avoid crowds and follow public health measures—washing hands and wearing face masks, among other things.



Residents of Khokana village in Lalitpur, dressed in special attire, pictured at Ekantakuna in the district on Thursday as they marched towards Kathmandu Durbar Square for worship as part of the Shikali Jatra tradition. The Jatra is celebrated in various parts of the Kathmandu Valley every 12 years.

# वीरगन्जको वाणी



मुख्य वक्ता  
सरोजकुमार यादव  
मुख्यमन्त्री,  
मधेश प्रदेश

## विषयहरू

## वक्ता

## प्रस्तोता

### पहिलो सत्र

उद्योग र व्यापार, खोइ पूर्वधार ?



दामोदर भण्डारी  
मन्त्री,  
उद्योग, वाणिज्य तथा  
आपूर्ति मन्त्रालय



प्रदीप यादव  
पूर्वमन्त्री,  
तथा प्रतिनिधिसभा सदस्य



कुलमान घिसिङ  
कार्यकारी निर्देशक,  
नेपाल विद्युत् प्राधिकरण



अनिल रौंटा  
संविधानसभा समासद,  
तथा उद्योगी



डा. सुष्मा तिवारी द्विवेदी  
प्राध्यापक,  
सिद्धार्थ इन्टरनेसनल  
कलेज, वीरगन्ज



रूपेश श्रेष्ठ  
नायव समाचार प्रमुख,  
कान्तिपुर टेलिभिजन

### दोस्रो सत्र

वीरगन्जको विरासत



राजेशमान सिंह  
नगर प्रमुख,  
वीरगन्ज  
महानगरपालिका



डा. ज्योतिर्मय अन्सारी  
अध्यक्ष,  
नेसनल मेडिकल  
कलेज तथा शिक्षण  
अस्पताल



रवि केशी  
उद्योगी



नीलम सिंह  
पूर्वउपाध्यक्ष,  
होटल एसोसिएसन, वीरगन्ज



चन्द्रकिशोर  
पत्रकार तथा  
स्तरमकार

### तेस्रो सत्र

अर्थतन्त्र उकारन स्थिर नीति



महाप्रसाद अधिकारी  
गभर्नर,  
नेपाल राष्ट्र बैंक



डा. रामप्रसाद घिमिरे  
राजस्व सचिव,  
अर्थ मन्त्रालय



अनिल अग्रवाल  
अध्यक्ष,  
वीरगन्ज उद्योग  
वाणिज्य संघ



सरिता यादव  
कोषाध्यक्ष,  
प्रजातिशील महिला कृषक समूह,  
वीरगन्ज



कृष्णा आचार्य  
प्रमुख संवाददाता,  
कान्तिपुर दैनिक

### चौथो सत्र

अर्थमन्त्रीलाई प्रश्नप्रश्न



वर्षमान पुन  
अर्थमन्त्री



उमेश चौहान  
प्रधान सम्पादक,  
कान्तिपुर दैनिक

शनिबार, चैत २४, २०८० । दियालो लईस प्लाजा, वीरगन्ज

● प्रत्यक्ष प्रसारण  
बिहान १०:४५ बजे देखि



www.kantipur.com



KNOWLEDGE PARTNER



NATIONAL MEDICAL COLLEGE

PARTNER

HOME APPLIANCE PARTNER

IN COLLABORATION WITH

VEHICLE PARTNER

VENUE PARTNER



OPINION



OUR VIEW

Knocking again

The slow but steady rise in Covid-19 cases should be a wake up call and make us all vigilant.

The winter days are behind us, afternoons are getting warmer, pollen is irritating our nostrils, and we are calling it a season of changing weather. The general perception in Nepali society is that changing weather brings with it *samanya rugha-khoki*, or common cold. It could very well be the common cold if we are sneezing and coughing, and a bit warmer than normal. But it could also be the unwanted guest we have learnt to live with, albeit uncomfortably. Yes, Covid-19 is back again, and we are re-opening our doors to the guest that has been coming in and going in recent years, often in different guises.

Health officials say Covid-19 is on the rise—beds in the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital in Teku, Kathmandu are filling up with its patients again—and we should take it seriously. A significant number of new patients are those above 65 years of age, meaning they are vulnerable to serious illnesses, and in rare cases, death. The virus in circulation in Nepal at the moment is thought to be JN.1, a subvariant of Omicron. The country had confirmed the spread of this variant in January. As the Nepal government has stopped actively scouting Covid-19 cases, there is no certainty as to whether other variants are circulating in the country at the moment. But what is certain is that a significant number of cases is being reported in patients returning from India.

But we are ill-prepared to deal with a possible spike in coronavirus infections. The absence of mass-scale infections and deaths in the past two years has made us complacent. We know from past cases, such as the onslaught of Delta and Omicron variants, that coronavirus strikes when we are the least prepared. As health professionals say, a pandemic of the Covid-19 kind never goes away—it lies dormant only to come roaring back. It is, therefore, time to be vigilant against the virus before it gets out of hand. The vigilance should begin with the government itself.

As the spread of the virus came down the number of vaccinations began to decline too. Of late, there has been little effort from the government to provide booster doses to the people. What's more, the government has closed down vaccination and testing centres in many places. Accordingly, people have become disinterested in vaccination, choosing not to bother with the hassle of travelling to the vaccination centres. And it is precisely during these gaps that the virus strikes back. With the number of people experiencing coronavirus-like symptoms increasing, it is time for the government to dust off its Polymerase Chain Reaction machines and spring back into action.

Meanwhile, people must remain vigilant and mask up again when gathering in public spaces. At the peak of the Delta virus, when patients gasped for oxygen and slept on hospital corridors, the political parties, many of which are either in the government or the opposition even today, feigned helplessness. As we could again be left to fend for ourselves in the future, we may want to take care of ourselves at present.

THEIR VIEW

A health complex

Rural government health facilities are suffering from staff shortages.

It's alarming to learn of the critical shortage of doctors at the Baniachong Upazila Health Complex in Habiganj district, which once again highlights the persistence of a key challenge within Bangladesh's public health sector—lack of medical staff in rural areas. According to a report by this daily, this lone, 50-bed government facility in Baniachong serves about 350,000 residents across 15 unions. However, it operates with only four doctors, which is significantly fewer than the estimated minimum requirement of 17.

The crisis extends beyond physicians, however. Reportedly, there are vacancies in crucial positions like gynaecologist and assistant surgeon as well as nurses, medical officers, administrative staff, and technicians. Notably, all pharmacist, lab technician, and radiographer positions remain unfilled, leaving essential equipment like the X-ray machine inoperable for over a decade. It goes without saying that this lack of personnel has had severe consequences. For the patients, particularly those in remote haor areas, critical medical emergencies necessitate a taxing 100-kilometre journey to Sylhet.

It was only the other day that we wrote on the woeful state of another government health facility—the 250-bed district hospital in Bagerhat—that is also suffering from a similar staff shortage, among other problems. The hospital caters to about 17 lakh people but is running with less than half of its required human resources, resulting in many patients being deprived of essential care. Understaffing in public healthcare facilities in rural areas is clearly restricting access to medical care for underprivileged communities and poorer households. Moreover, the concentration of amenities in major cities creates a geographical disparity in healthcare access. Rural families, deprived of treatment in their own localities, struggle to afford the high costs associated with seeking it in urban centres.

Healthcare is a fundamental right of every citizen, and ensuring equal and unrestricted access, especially for rural patients, is paramount. We, therefore, urge the government to address the shortages of staff at the Baniachong Upazila Health Complex and other similarly understaffed and struggling facilities. The authorities must prioritise allocating more resources in these facilities, ensure timely and proper recruitment, and improve access for rural patients.

— The Daily Star (Bangladesh)/ANN

Nepal's financial odyssey

We should negotiate double taxation avoidance with countries that have investors with deep bond pockets.

PRAGRES ACHARYA & SHABDA GYAWALI



In the first part of this article, titled "Tapping into foreign debt markets", published on March 28, we highlighted the necessity of tapping into foreign debt markets to secure funding for Nepal's energy ambitions. We delved into the obstacles of needing an issuance history. In this piece, we lay out the strategies for initiating the pivotal first step, while also addressing the elephant in the room: Will the rise in commercial foreign public debt and private sector bond borrowing, influenced by the country's credit rating, exhaust foreign currency reserves or plunge the nation into a debt trap?

Looming concern

As the fresh memories of the Sri Lankan crisis loom large, this concern becomes even more straightforward when we consider that the total payments on a loan will always exceed the amount received due to interest. However, loans are inherently neither good nor bad—their value lies in how they are utilised. All is well if the income generated from borrowed funds surpasses the repayment cost. This principle applies to nations and individual businesses alike. Yet there's an additional consideration to foreign currency borrowing—we must ensure the availability of enough foreign currency. Simply put, paying in dollars while earning in the Nepali currency may not be sustainable. While individual businesses needn't fret, it's the aggregate surplus that matters. Fortunately, the export potential of renewable energy alleviates the concerns in this case.

With that matter addressed, let's focus on resolving the obstacles hindering Nepal's entry into international bond finance.

The perceived high investment risk in Nepal and the absence or potential lowness of credit ratings could result in either a lack of interest in lending by international bond investors or inflated pricing. However, there's a silver lining: Guarantees stepping in as the cavalry. These guarantees may originate from development finance institutions or other guarantee-providing entities involved in the issuance process. However, this peace of mind comes with a price tag. Therefore, the issuer must strike a delicate balance between the higher coupon payments due to perceived higher risk and the premium paid for the issuance.

Pooling together smaller hydroelectric projects to create a larger issuance



POST ILLUSTRATION

could provide an initial step in establishing a track record for bond issuance in Nepal. This diversified pool helps mitigate overall default risk. These initial steps mustn't be overly radical, as building a yield curve requires careful progression.

The government guarantee mentioned earlier is essential for the Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs). It can be incorporated while signing the PPA with Project Development Agreements (PDAs). While similar guarantees are already commonplace in PDAs for large hydroelectric projects, extending such provisions to smaller projects is essential.

To make the first step even more cushioned, initial issuances can focus on refinancing operating hydropower. The construction risk associated with greenfield projects may be too significant and so can drive the price of bonds higher. This enables the experienced local Nepali lenders to undertake new projects with freed-up funds.

In such cases, traditional PDAs may not be suitable for the projects already developed. Regardless of the terminology, implementing the guarantees—whether through addendums to PPAs or government letters—is necessary. The government should explore offering these facilities on a conditional basis to facilitate projects and funds to proceed with bond raising. It's crucial to avoid the pitfall of requiring international bond financing as a prerequisite, thus preventing a "chicken versus egg" dilemma.

Nepal should consider blending finances at the source or issuing multiple tranches, provided they're sizable enough to attract investors. This will bring the costs down. International development finance institutions (DFIs) or the Nepal Government could opt for junior equity-esque tranches. Alternatively, the government could

proactively establish mechanisms to procure such capital, given Nepal's lag in leveraging blended finance. In 2023, Nepal participated in only seven out of 167 transactions worth \$23.5 billion, surpassing only Afghanistan and Bhutan.

Currencies

Let's now delve into the realm of currencies. On average, the Nepali Rupee (NPR) has depreciated by 3 percent annually against the dollar. For international bond raises, the deepest currency is generally the US dollar. We need development finance institutions and multilateral development banks (MDBs) to offer products and programmes with concessional exchange rate guarantees, especially for developing nations like Nepal grappling with currency depreciation. After all, currency depreciation isn't unique to Nepali rupee alone.

In the short term, we can focus on INR-denominated issuances. With India's recent inclusion in the GBI-EM index, bond investors are drawn to the allure of INR exposure. In collaboration with the central bank, the government could implement mechanisms to mitigate de-pegging risks, thereby facilitating INR bond issuances from Nepal. Although the INR market is shallower than the USD, for now, this strategic move would circumvent the prohibitive costs associated with hedging against the US dollar in the case of USD issuances.

The high taxes (15 percent) deducted at source on the interest payments increase the price of the bonds. These taxes are baked into the interest rate as the lenders seek to ensure they earn their target return net of tax. Tax waivers on such bonds in the initial days will help lower the cost and start the momentum. DTAA's could also be handy in such cases. The Nepal Government

should proactively negotiate double taxation avoidance agreements (DTAAs) with countries where investors with deep bond pockets are domiciled. However, to ensure the credibility of these agreements, Nepali tax authorities must consistently uphold existing DTAAs signed with various nations.

Projects should explore opportunities to leverage the voluntary carbon credit market by claiming avoidance credits, albeit priced less favourably than removal credits. They can bolster the projects' ability to service bonds sustainably. This, in turn, improves their creditworthiness and reduces the default risk premium associated with bond issuance, making the bonds cheaper.

The projects and their developers should also strongly focus on meeting the Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) standards, especially for greenfield projects. International bond investors are unlikely to associate with projects that aren't environment-friendly or have weak governance structures. Such associations would defeat the purpose of green investing for international bond investors.

Supporting initial bond issuances will build momentum, making international bond markets more accessible in favour of Nepal and Nepali projects. Green bonds offer financing for an array of environment-friendly projects beyond energy, including waste management, pollution control and biodiversity conservation. However, due to the high demand for energy resources and growing interest in green investments, starting with energy sector issuances appears to be the logical first step.

Acharya is a finance professional at Dolma Foundations and Gyawali is the head of investment at Dolma Foundations.

Europe must prepare for a Trump presidency

Trump's desire to withdraw US support for Ukraine goes beyond his aversion to extended military conflicts.

MARK LEONARD



Waiting for the US Congress to pass an aid package for Ukraine feels like waiting for Godot. On a recent visit to Washington, I met with officials from President Joe Biden's administration, Republican senators, House members, and various think-tank experts. They all assured me that congressional approval of the supplemental funding bill was only a matter of time. Some speculated that House Speaker Mike Johnson might split the \$95 billion aid package for Ukraine and Israel into separate parts, while others expected it to pass as a single package, with most forecasts pointing to April or May.

These assurances would carry more weight if similar promises had not been made in November, December, January, and February. Adding to the uncertainty, Republican Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene has filed yet another motion to vacate the speaker's chair, potentially leading to Johnson's ouster just six months after his predecessor, Kevin McCarthy, was removed. The infighting among Republicans could paralyze the United States' political system, already crippled by partisan divisions.

And all this is happening under an internationalist president keen on supporting Ukraine. One can only imagine what might happen if former US President Donald Trump wins November's presidential election. Trump's recent speeches, including his 90-minute diatribe at February's Conservative Political Action

Conference, have underscored his desire for retribution against individuals, countries, and institutions he perceives as having wronged him. European NATO members appear to be at the top of this list, which does not bode well for Europe's security.

Trump's desire to withdraw US support for Ukraine goes beyond his aversion to extended military conflicts. Trump holds Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky personally responsible for his first impeachment and views many of America's top Russia experts, even those who worked for him, as complicit in this debacle. Trump's stance on NATO is equally

NATO," whereby the US would keep the nuclear umbrella over Europe but withdraw ground forces from the continent, is a prime example.

To be sure, Trump is not the first US president to criticise America's European allies for not contributing sufficiently to the alliance. But the "dormant NATO" proposal goes beyond mere "burden-sharing" to advocate a new policy of "burden-shifting," calling for a transfer of responsibility from the US to its European allies. Under this plan, a European general would become the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR), the US would commit to halting NATO enlargement, and

Washington are frustrated with the Ukrainians, particularly with Zelensky's failure to pivot from offensive to defensive tactics and his reluctance to draft men under the age of 27.

American policymakers also seem bewildered by the divisions within Europe. Last month's European Council summit underscored the European Union's contradictory approach. While European governments are finally serious about defence and how to finance it, self-indulgent squabbles—particularly between France and Germany—persist, and leaders display a baffling lack of urgency.

Over the next six months, European countries must figure out how to secure essential ammunition and bolster their defence funding. They must also devise a plan to strengthen Ukraine's position, because Russian President Vladimir Putin is unlikely to negotiate if he believes that Ukraine is on the verge of defeat and that its Western backers are losing their resolve. Europeans pushing for a ceasefire now are effectively shooting themselves in the foot.

Against this backdrop, many fear that June's European elections could catalyze a global shift toward the far-right. But a recent report by the European Council on Foreign Relations suggests that while far-right parties are rising in polls across Europe, this trend does not necessarily herald the emergence of a global Trumpian movement. Even in Hungary, just 28 percent of respondents said they would welcome a second Trump term.

The most compelling case that mainstream European parties can make in the lead-up to the elections is the urgent need for a geopolitically oriented EU. Regardless of the fate of the US aid package, Europeans' future should be determined by their own electoral and political processes, not by American political dynamics. This is the only way to prevent Europe's political theatre of the absurd from becoming an outright tragedy.

Leonard is the director of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

— Project Syndicate



SHUTTERSTOCK

personal, as evidenced by his recent threat to allow Russia to "do whatever the hell they want" to "delinquent" member countries.

Over the past three years, in preparation for a second Trump presidency, a sophisticated ideological ecosystem has focused on transforming his personal grievances into actionable policies. The Center for Renewing America's concept of "dormant

the US military would shift its focus from Europe to China.

Despite the real possibility of a Trump victory, European governments have been slow to acknowledge this agenda's ominous implications. But with Ukraine struggling to defend itself, the difficulties of getting a supplemental funding bill through Congress have compelled US policymakers to face reality. Many in

# Investment Board approves Rs99.18 billion investment for energy projects

The board extends tenure of panel to study modalities of Nijgadh International Airport Project until July 16.



Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal (centre) chairs a meeting of the Investment Board Nepal on Thursday.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF IBN

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 4

Investment Board Nepal has approved proposed investments of Rs99.18 billion for four energy projects.

An IBN board meeting chaired by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Thursday approved an estimated investment of Rs34.59 billion for the 166 megawatt Super Tamor Hydroelectric Project based in Taplejung; Rs10.08 billion for the 42MW Upper Modi-A Hydroelectric Project in Kaski; Rs21.10 billion for the 250MW solar energy project based in Kohalpur and Banganga; and Rs33.41 billion for the 139.2MW Lower Manang Marsyangdi Hydroelectric Project,

## Meeting approved an investment of Rs34.59 billion for the 166MW Super Tamor Hydro Project in Taplejung.

The IBN said in a statement. Of them, the 250MW solar energy project and the Lower Manang Marsyangdi are being funded by foreign investors.

The meeting formed a task force led by a joint secretary of the IBN with a mandate to study the additional investment in the HuaXin Cement Narayani Pvt Ltd and

submit a report within 15 days, the IBN said.

"The meeting also formed a committee led by IBN Chief Executive Officer Sushil Bhatta to hold talks with the developers of the 327MW Upper Marsyangdi-2 Hydroelectric Project and the 250MW solar energy project based in Kohalpur and Banganga to reach project development agreement with them."

Also, the meeting decided to forward the report submitted by the high-level committee formed to study the issues concerning land acquisition for the Chhyangkuti to Diding access road of the under construction 900MW Arun III hydro project to the Cabinet for a decision, said IBN spokesperson Pradyumna Prasad Upadhyay.

Besides, the meeting gave permission to repatriate the money of foreign investors as per the share purchase agreement approved for Dang Cement Project. The board extended the term of the committee to study the Tamor Reservoir Hydroelectric Project and the other panel to study the project development and investment modality of the Nijgadh International Airport Project until July 16.

The meeting—attended by several ministers including those heading finance, energy, irrigation, industry, commerce and supply ministries, and other top officials—decided to direct officials to promote the culture of developing projects based on public-private partnership, said Upadhyay.

## Police detain singer Rajesh Payal Rai briefly



Rajesh Payal Rai

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 4

Police released renowned singer Rajesh Payal Rai on Thursday after detaining him for a few hours.

According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Navaraj Adhikari, spokesperson for Kathmandu District Police Range, a few individuals, including Rai, were arrested in the early hours of Thursday from New Baneshwar. Their arrest followed complaints from residents about disturbances to public peace.

Locals had informed police that some intoxicated individuals were making noise.

They were detained at around 2am and later handed over to their families, said police.

## Consular department launches new 'module' to facilitate services for Nepalis abroad

To use this module, service seekers don't need separate, user ID, password and email.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 4

The Department of Consular Services has launched a new "module" to streamline consular-related support systems. Inaugurating the module on Thursday, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Narayan Kaji Shrestha said the government was trying to provide consular-related service from home.

Using the module, any Nepali citizen working and living abroad can register their consular-related problem to the Nepali embassy concerned, the department said in a statement.

Service seekers will just need their passports and date of birth to register their complaints through the module that will directly reach the relevant embassy. They can log in by inserting their passport number and track their case through the module.

During the inauguration function, Deputy Prime Minister Shrestha said the government is committed to providing better facilities to Nepali citizens from anywhere inside the country or abroad.

### They can log in by inserting their passport number and track their case through the module.

"We have launched this service to provide government services to the people in a prompt, efficient and flawless manner at their homes using the information technology," Shrestha said. "With the service, Nepali citizens living abroad will be able to express their problems and complaints from

home, and also be able to acquire information online regarding the initiatives to address their complaints and problems."

According to Shrestha, the department has made arrangements to obtain the police report online.

At the programme, the department's Director-General Prakash Mani Paudel gave a rundown to the services available under the new module.

"A new folder is created in the module once the service seeker enters his/her passport number and date of birth," Paudel said. "The folder has features in which one can write one's problems and complaints and also get information on measures to address them."

To use this module, a service seeker does not need a separate user id, password and email. The module saves Nepali citizens the hassle of going to the embassy for the service.

## Congress picks Dambar Khadka and Abhisek Singh as bypoll candidates

Maoist Centre decides to back UML candidate Suhang Nembang in Ilam-2 constituency. RSP has fielded Milan Limbu for the seat.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 4

Following deliberations over three days amid a tug of war between two rival factions, Nepali Congress on Thursday finally picked its candidates for the upcoming bypolls—Dambar Khadka for the Ilam-2 House of Representatives seat and Abhisek Singh for the Bajhang (A) provincial assembly seat.

The by-elections in both the constituencies are scheduled for April 27.

On Thursday, party president Sher Bahadur Deuba came out of the main opposition's parliamentary board meeting, which decided on the candidates, a victor, getting the contenders of his choice to fight the by-elections.

The party's work execution committee later endorsed the decision, said Min Bishwakarma, head of the party's publicity division. "Since Dambarji had lost the 2022 elections by a thin margin, the meeting decided to give him the ticket this time as well," he said. The party will seek support for its candidates from other parties too, Bishwakarma added.

Ahead of the decision, the parliamentary board listened to all seven aspirants of the party whose names were recommended by the party's provincial committee.

During the discussion, all seven aspirants committed that they will support anyone who gets the ticket from the party.

faction of the party argued that Khadka should be given another chance, the opposition faction opted for a fresh candidate instead of a 'tested and failed' candidate. Khadka is the party's Ilam district president.

The Ilam-2 House of Representatives seat has remained vacant since the demise of former Speaker and Constituent Assembly chairman Nembang in September last year. The UML leader had continuously won the constituency since the 1999 general elections.

### Ilam-2 House of Representatives seat has remained vacant since the demise of Subas Nembang.

The Bajhang seat remains vacant after Prithvi Bahadur Singh, an assembly member and provincial minister for internal affairs and law, died in a road accident in June last year. The new candidate, Abhisek, is the son of the late Prithvi Bahadur.

Meanwhile, the CPN (Maoist Centre) has decided not to field its candidate for the federal parliament seat. The party has announced to back CPN-UML's candidate



Suhang Nembang



Dambar Khadka



Milan Limbu

Party president Deuba was in favour of both Khadka and Singh since the beginning of the discussions and faced strong opposition from general secretaries, Gagan Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma, and other key leaders Shekhar Koirala and Shashank Koirala, among others, who were in favour of Bhesh Raj Acharya in Ilam-2. Deuba refused to budge from his position until the end, party leaders said, getting his preferred candidate, Khadka, to contest the election.

Khadka had also contested the 2022 parliamentary election and lost it by a razor-thin margin of 114 votes to CPN-UML leader Subas Nembang. While Nembang garnered 30,020 votes, Khadka, who was a common candidate of the Congress-led alliance, managed to get 29,906. While the establishment

Suhang Nembang in the April 27 bypoll. The UML and the Maoist Centre are two major partners of the ruling coalition formed on March 4.

Haribol Gajurel, the Maoist party in-charge for Koshi Province, issued a circular on Thursday directing leaders and cadres not to file a candidacy for the Ilam-2 seat, following instructions from the party's top leadership.

"A circular has been issued directing us to support the UML candidate," Dharendra Sharma, who was recommended as a candidate from the party's local chapter, told the Post. "We will not file a nomination for the seat."

The fourth largest party in Parliament, Rastriya Swatantra Party, has already fielded Milan Limbu as its candidate in Ilam-2.

## Ways to better manage Biska Jatra discussed

**BHAKTAPUR:** The District Administration Office, Bhaktapur on Thursday held a discussion with agencies concerned and stakeholders to better manage the Biska Jatra procession.

A multi-stakeholder meeting held under the coordination of Chief District Officer Roshani Kumari Shrestha of Bhaktapur took various decisions for the proper management of Biska Jatra. The meeting was attended by police personnel, government office chiefs, representatives from Guthi Sansthan, procession operators, political leaders, and local clubs, among others. Metropolitan Police Range has decided to completely shut liquor shops during the procession period. CDO Shrestha said CCTV cameras are installed along the main roads and intersections where the jatra is being held. The administrative and police officials will jointly work to maintain peace and security during the period. (RSS)

**राहदानी हरायो**  
मिति २०८०/११/०३ गते घरबाट विगतनगरको पुष्पलाल चौक सम्म जाँदा मेरो निम्न व्यहोरा भएको राहदानी हराएकोले पाउनुहुने महानुभावले नजिकैको प्रहरी कार्यालय वा निम्न ठेगानामा बुझाई दिनुहुन अनुरोध गर्दछु।  
नाम: रमेश कुमार कर्ण  
ठेगाना: विगतनगर-१३, मोरङ  
राहदानी नं.: ०९९४२९९६  
सम्पर्क नं.: ९८०२३०९२२

## Hyatt Regency Kathmandu HUMAN CARE, HUMAN SPIRIT

Publication Date: 05/04/2024

We are looking for highly motivated, self-driven and result-oriented personnel with excellent interpersonal, customer service, and communication skills, as well as an outgoing personality, for the position listed below.

The candidates will be responsible for assisting in the efficient and smooth operation in the areas concerned, in line with Hyatt Hotels Corporation's strategies and brand standards. The successful applicant will be required to ensure an excellent and consistent service to customers, while meeting the expectations of associates, guests and owners.

### Chef De Cuisine-Thai

- Minimum 6 years' work experience as Thai Sous Chef in a five star hotel with good knowledge of large volume production and preferably international exposure.
- Strong hands on experience in Thai regional cuisine.
- Comprehensive knowledge of HACCP and occupational health and safety standards will be essential.
- Mandatory Professional education qualification in culinary arts.
- Advance Computer skills in MS Office and Recipe Maintenance System.
- Good practical, operational and People Management skills, with a flair for creativity, are a must.

Applications are invited from Nepalese citizens to incorporate curriculum vitae, a photocopy of citizenship with relevant documents (including name & contact details of three referees) and a recent passport-size photograph by Thursday, 18 April 2024. Salaries and benefits will be in line with the Hotel policy. Only short-listed candidates will be invited for tests/interviews.

If you are interested, please send your application to:  
Human Resources Division  
Hyatt Regency Kathmandu  
E-MAIL: hr.kathmanduhr@hyatt.com





Ncell presents

# निर्भीक नारी

Powered by



WINGS FOR EMPOWERMENT

**मिडियो प्रतियोगिताका लागि सूचना**

महिला मुद्दालाई अझै माथि उठाउन र महिला नै महिलाका प्रेरक र पथप्रदर्शक बन्न मन्ने उद्देश्यले कान्तिपुर मिडिया ग्रुपको सहप्रकाशन नारी मासिकले विगत ४ वर्षदेखि "निर्भीक नारी" कार्यक्रमको आयोजना गर्दै आइरहेको छ। "निर्भीक नारी" लाई हामीले केन्द्रमा मात्रै सिमीत नराखी देशभरि आवाज बुलन्द पार्ने उद्देश्यका साथ यसपटक "निर्भीक नारी" प्रदेश विशेष संस्करण कोशीमा समेत सम्पन्न गरिसकेका छौं। यसै सन्दर्भमा आगामी चैत २९ गते (अप्रिल १९ तारिख) बिहीबारका दिन काठमाडौंमा हुन गइरहेको "निर्भीक नारी" को चौथो संस्करणका लागि **वववृत्वकला लेखन प्रतिस्पर्धा**को आहवान गरेका छौं। देशभरका विभिन्न स्कूल, कलेज तथा विश्वविद्यालयका विद्यार्थीहरूले यस प्रतिस्पर्धामा भाग लिन सक्नेछन्। यसका लागि निम्न विषयमध्येबाट छनौट गरी क्यामेरा वा आफूसँग भएको मोबाइलबाट पनि २ मिनेटसम्मको मिडियो तयार पारी हामीलाई पठाउन अनुरोध गर्दछौं।

उत्कृष्ट ४ जनालाई पुरस्कारका साथै वक्ताका रूपमा छनौट गरिनेछ।

विषयहरू

- १ नेतृत्वका नारी
- २ नयाँ युगको नयाँ आचाम : सूचना प्रविधि
- ३ आमा
- ४ सुन्दरताको मापन

ईमेल : events@kmg.com.np

MONEY

FOREX

US Dollar	133.81
Euro	145.32
Pound Sterling	169.40
Swiss Franc	147.64
Australian Dollar	88.46
Canadian Dollar	99.12
Singapore Dollar	99.32
Japanese Yen (10)	8.82
Chinese Yuan	18.50
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.67
Qatari Riyal	36.69
Thai Bhat	3.65
UAE Dhiram	36.44
Malaysian Ringgit	28.23
Korean Won (100)	9.93

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES

Nepse (in percent) **2,004.05pts** **-0.13%**

HIGHEST LOSERS					
PPL	SARBTM	RFFL	ENL	TPC	PRSF
-9.05	-5.85	-4.09	-3.46	-3.31	-3.11
MODERATE LOSERS					
ALICL	PCBL	UNL	SCB	CLI	MEN
-0.11	-0.05	-0.05	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02
MODERATE GAINERS					
STC	TVCL	NGPL	VLLCL	SPL	NRIC
0.05	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01
HIGHEST GAINERS					
MLBS	MKLB	GLBSL	TRH	WNLB	LLBS
10	9.99	9.97	9.9	9.21	8.26

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 134,000
Silver	Rs 1,650

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Stocks rise on eve of US payrolls; gold shines

**LONDON:** US and European stock markets rose Thursday on the eve of key US data, while gold set another record peak on the back of geopolitical tensions and hopes of interest-rate cuts. Markets were buoyed after US data released on Wednesday provided a fresh indicator that inflation was easing and Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell soothed worries around the central bank's plans to cut rates this year. Frankfurt, London and Paris stocks ticked higher, despite a mixed performance in Asia and with Hong Kong and Shanghai shut for holidays. Wall Street's main indices advanced as trading got underway. (AFP)

US trade gap grows in February to highest level since April 2023

**WASHINGTON:** The US trade deficit expanded in February by more than analysts expected to reach its highest level since April 2023, as imports once again exceeded exports, according to government data published Thursday. The overall trade gap grew to \$68.9 billion, up \$1.3 billion from a month earlier, the Commerce Department said in a statement. This was above market expectations of a slight decrease in the trade deficit, according to Briefing.com. The February increase reflected a \$7.1 billion rise in imports from a month earlier, which was counteracted by export growth of just \$5.8 billion, meaning the overall trade gap rose. (AFP)

Alstom mulls 'hundreds' of UK job cuts

**LONDON:** French train maker Alstom is considering sacking "hundreds" of staff at Britain's biggest train factory after running out of work, media reported Thursday. The Daily Telegraph newspaper said the job cuts would fall at Alstom's central England plant in Derby, citing the impact of stalled government talks over new contracts for suburban rail stock. The Telegraph, which did not cite its source, added concerns were also growing over more possible delays to Britain's long-planned high-speed railway HS2. An Alstom spokesperson indicated to AFP that "there was no decision taken" over the Derby site's future, but added that talks with the UK government were "still ongoing". (AFP)

German electric car sales 'very weak' in March

**FRANKFURT:** Sales of new cars in Germany fell in March, official data showed Thursday, dragged down by plummeting demand for electric vehicles following the phaseout of government incentives. A total of 263,844 new cars hit roads in Europe's largest economy last month, the KBA federal transport authority said, down 6.2 percent from a year earlier. The decrease could be partly attributed to fewer working days compared with March 2023. But analysts said new registrations were also hit by an ongoing slump in the market for battery-powered electric vehicles, after the government withdrew incentives at the end of last year. (AFP)

# CLAA charges 32 persons in Airbus purchase scam

>> Continued from page 1

The maximum takeoff mass (weight) affects an aircraft's takeoff distance, rate of climb, payload capacity, and range.

The probe found that the Nepali officials made payment for 242 tonnes, but ordered the aircraft with a capacity of only 230 tonnes, with a cost difference of \$6.6 million (Rs72.5 million).

Kansakar, the former chief of Nepal Airlines, has been labelled as the kingpin of the scam.

In August 2015, under the leadership of Kansakar, Nepal Airlines began the process of acquiring two wide-body aircraft from the European plane maker. On September 11, 2016, the Finance Ministry agreed to act as a guarantor on a loan Nepal Airlines took to procure the two wide-body jets.

On September 24, 2016, the board of Nepal Airlines unanimously approved its management's plan to procure two Airbus A330-200 wide-body jets. Subsequently, on September 26, 2016, the national flag carrier invited sealed requests for proposals (RFP) from aircraft manufacturing companies, airlines, aircraft leasing companies and bankers for the purchase of two A330-200 jets.

The bid documents said the minimum age of the proposed aircraft cannot be more than 1,000 flight hours and the date of manufacture should not be before January 2014.

It was informed that the board's move to allow Nepal Airlines to buy the jets from the European aviation giant followed the management's recommendation to switch from Boeing to Airbus as a one-family aircraft strategy would reduce maintenance and crew training costs.

But there was a catch.

The 55th annual report of the Office of Auditor General questioned the very procedure adopted by the Nepal Airlines and the prices of the aircraft.

It pointed out the mismatch in the manufacturer's serial numbers assigned to Nepal Airlines jets. Initially, the numbers "1840" and "1842" had allegedly been issued. But Airbus later assigned "1845" and "1854" after receiving a commitment fee.

However, at the Airbus' manufacturing plant in Toulouse, France, the aircraft serial numbers were "1872" and "1878". The "1845" and "1854" that Nepal Airlines had claimed to be its own actually belonged to Tibet Airlines and Spain's Iberia Airline,



POST FILE PHOTO

Sugat Ratna Kansakar, a former chief of the Nepal Airlines Corporation, has been labelled the kingpin of the aircraft purchase scam.

respectively, the audit report explained.

As per Clause 236(1) of Nepal Airlines' financial bylaw, the national carrier is required to invite proposals only from aircraft manufacturers to purchase brand-new aircraft. However, the corporation went with Clause 236 (2) of the bylaw, which allows it to procure an old plane from a leasing agency, banker or airline operator besides manufacturers.

Thursday's charge sheet reads: "The corruption was committed by Nepal Airlines former chief in collusion with other Nepali officials and Hi Fly X Ireland Limited appointed by a consortium of the aircraft suppliers, which includes AAR International Inc., German Aviation Capital GMBH and Hi Fly-Transporte Aeroes SA (Hi Fly Airlines)."

In 2019, Nepal's parliamentary Public Accounts Committee also questioned the motive of Nepal Airlines and Hi Fly Portugal for forming a special purpose vehicle—Hi Fly X

Ireland—to specifically handle the procurement process.

The committee has termed Hi Fly X as a "fictitious" company and has suspected "massive financial irregularities" in the deal. Stating that Ireland is the biggest tax haven in the world used by multinationals to shelter profits, the lawmakers suspected Nepal Airlines might have reached the deal with the company to evade taxes.

While advance payment was released to the Portugal-based Hi Fly Transporte Aeroes, the rest of the payment was released to an Ireland-based company, according to the report of the parliamentary committee at that time.

The anti-graft body has also implicated AAR International and its president and chief executive officer John M Holmes; German Aviation Capital and its managing director Ana Topa; Hi Fly Airlines Portugal and its president Paulo Mirpur; Hifly X Ireland Limited and its directors Gerald Thornton and Christian Nuehlen and

Markuss Radbruch, head of aviation.

Ralf Springer, senior consultant of Norton Rose Fulbright LLP Germany, has also been implicated.

Deepak Sharma, president of International Supply Chain at AAR Corp Inc. US, and Oleg Calistru, finance director of German Aviation Capital, Germany, have also been implicated in the corruption case.

In the charge sheet, the commission has sought to recover the embezzled amount and imposition of fines and imprisonment as per the Corruption Prevention Act.

Shahi, a provincial assembly member from Karnali, has been automatically suspended with the registration of the graft case at the Special Court. He is also a Central Working Committee member of the Nepali Congress.

Other officials who have been automatically suspended are Buddhi Sagar Lamichhane, sitting joint secretary of the tourism ministry; Janak Raj Kalakheti, deputy managing director

## Modi sets ambitious India economic goals for probable third term

REUTERS NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, confident of winning a national election starting this month, has set an ambitious target of roughly doubling the economy and exports this decade, according to a government document seen by Reuters.

Modi has highlighted economic growth as one of his biggest achievements in election rallies and has "guaranteed" making the economy the third largest in the world from fifth now if he wins a third term in a row as polls predict.

He has already asked officials to finalise plans by around May to expand the economy to \$6.69 trillion in nominal terms by 2030, from around \$3.51 trillion currently, according to the October document. Though short on concrete details of how to achieve that, it has been a basis for officials' meetings.

When he took office for a second term five years ago, Modi promised to take the economy to \$5 trillion by the current fiscal year, but partly due to Covid-19 related disruptions, meeting that target is virtually impossible now.

For the next six years, Modi's goal is to raise per capita income to \$4,418 from around \$2,500, the document says, without specifying the spending or reforms needed to achieve that. Modi's office and the finance ministry did not reply to requests seeking comment.

Independent economist Saugata Bhattacharya said doubling the economy by the end of the decade would be a "very difficult feat" requiring 6 percent-6.5 percent growth for the next seven years along with inflation of 4.5 percent.

The economy is, however, expected to have grown by around 8 percent in the last fiscal year ended March 31, the fastest among major countries, on the back of strong manufacturing and construction activity driven by government spending.

A former senior finance ministry official, Subhash Chandra Garg, said growth projections like those in the document are mostly based on "backward arithmetical calculations" and lack any "reform and investment plan".

"Usually such mental gymnastics based on arithmetic calculations and assumptions are meaningless unless there is serious reform and investment plan to test it for real economy



REUTERS

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi

dynamics," said Garg, the Modi government's finance secretary until 2019. The main opposition Congress party says India's economic growth in the past few years under Modi has done little to create jobs and alleviate rural distress, while the disparity between rich and poor has widened.

The document says Modi's government wants exports of goods and services to jump to \$1.58 trillion by 2030 from around \$700 billion, which could double the share of Indian exports in global trade to more than 4 percent.

The government also plans to focus on 70 areas of improvement including workforce skills and vocational training, critical demands of industry leaders who often complain about the skill levels of the labour force.

It wants the literacy rate to rise to 82 percent by 2030 from about 78 percent now, unemployment to fall to less than 5 percent from 8 percent, and labour force participation rate to jump to more than 50 percent from 46 percent now. Modi has said in rallies he needs to remain in power to implement measures to take India towards a developed economy by 2047, the 100th year of independence, from mid-income levels now. He has not spelt out the measures.

Opinion polls show he will win big in the elections starting on April 19 and ending after seven phases on June 1, with vote counting on June 4.

A coalition led by Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) could win nearly three-fourths of parliamentary seats in the nation of 1.42 billion people, according to a survey on Wednesday, while Congress could hit a record low.

He would be the first person since India's post-independence Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to win three consecutive terms.

## Oil prices hit fresh five-month high

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE NEW YORK, APRIL 4

Oil prices scored fresh five-month peaks Wednesday on unrest in the crude-rich Middle East and an OPEC+ call for its members to maintain its strategy of reducing output.

Eurozone stocks advanced as a drop in inflation raised hopes of a rate cut by the European Central Bank, while Wall Street stocks finished little changed following mixed US data.

Asian stocks mostly sank, with a massive earthquake in Taiwan rocking sentiment.

Gold zoomed to an all-time pinnacle at \$2,230.15 per ounce before pulling back slightly. The yellow metal has been boosted by haven demand amid geopolitical tensions and the prospect of rate cuts.

Oil prices continued to advance with Brent crude closing in on \$90 per barrel, as OPEC experts met to discuss extending supply cuts.

## Asian stocks mostly sank, with a massive earthquake in Taiwan rocking sentiment.

"Heightened geopolitical risks linked to escalating conflict in the Middle East, OPEC supply cuts and better data out of China are helping to drive bullish sentiment currently," said James Harte of TickMill Group.

The Paris stock exchange gained 0.3 percent and Frankfurt rose 0.3 percent after investors seized on data showing the eurozone's annual rate of inflation decelerated to 2.4 percent last month from 2.6 percent in February thanks to a continued slowdown in food and drink price increases.

Cooling inflation and a deepening downturn in the manufacturing sector "are cementing expectations that the ECB will start cutting interest rates in June, lifting stocks," City Index analyst Fiona Cincotta told AFP.

Traders have pushed global equities higher for months, driven by optimism that the Fed will begin easing its monetary policy as soon as June as US inflation comes back towards officials' two percent target. But forecast-busting US data on a range of indicators including inflation, factory activity and jobs has dimmed those hopes.

But Tom Cahill of Ventura Wealth Management said he was encouraged that Wednesday's US services report showed a retreat in prices in March, a better inflation picture than some recent data points.

## Tech Peak Nepal 2024 kicks off in Kathmandu



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CNI

Participants stress the need to attract investments to Nepal's flourishing IT sector that can help in jobs creation and economic growth.

POST REPORT KATHMANDU, APRIL 4

Tech Peak Nepal 2024, an event dedicated to Nepal's IT sector, kicked off in Kathmandu on Thursday, bringing together more than 200 national and international experts, professionals and government officials in a single platform.

Participants at the event jointly organised by the Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI), NAS-IT, and the American Chamber of Commerce in Nepal (AMCHAM), stressed the need to attract investments to Nepal's burgeoning IT sector that can play a pivotal role in generating jobs and help the country's economy to grow.

"In 2022, Nepal's export of IT services experienced an extraordinary surge, reaching a remarkable figure of \$515.4 million. That IT services have emerged as the country's top exportable product is a significant achievement," said Rajesh Kumar Agrawal, the CNI president.

"The exponential growth witnessed in software development and digital services, particularly through offshore outsourcing, was a testament to exceptional talents and capabilities that thrive within our borders.

It underscores the resilience and ingenuity of Nepali professionals who have showcased their progress globally, positioning Nepal as a key player in the international IT arena. This monumental leap in IT signifies economic progress and symbolises the growing recognition of Nepal as a hub of technological innovation and expertise.

"Together, we aim to elevate Nepal's

at Nepal Airlines; and senior captains of Nepal Airlines—Subash Rijal, Rabindra Sherchan and Shrawan Rijal.

Similarly, other senior sitting officials of Nepal Airlines, Upendra Paudel, Paras Paudel and Brihat Man Tuladhar, have also been suspended.

The \$209.6-million Airbus purchase deal had met with controversy even before the aircraft arrived in Nepal.

The parliamentary Public Accounts Committee took up the case and formed a subcommittee to investigate the matter.

The sub-committee submitted its report to the committee on January 3, 2019, concluding that the procurement of the two wide-body aircraft by Nepal Airlines had caused the government a loss of Rs4.35 billion.

It had recommended immediate suspension of three then secretaries, Prem Kumar Rai and Krishna Prasad Devkota, and Shankar Prasad Adhikari, who had acted as chairperson of the Nepal Airlines during their respective tenures as tourism secretary. The report had implicated then-tourism ministers Rabindra Adhikari and Shahi. Shahi was accused of sending the commitment fee to purchase the jets through a ministerial-level decision.

But on January 7, 2019, the committee endorsed the sub-committee's report by making some changes that included giving a clean chit to Rai while legal action was recommended against former tourism ministers Rabindra Adhikari, Shahi and Jitendra Dev.

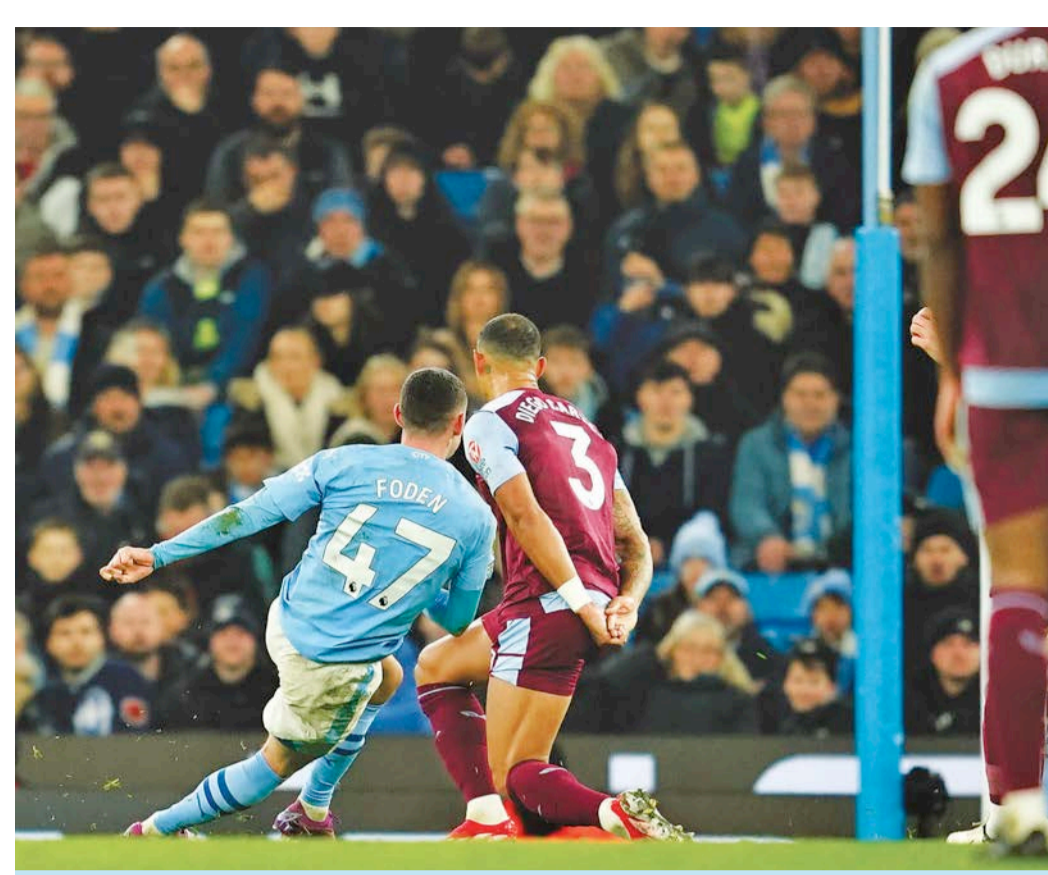
Rai was acquitted after it was found that he only formed a sub-committee to buy new aircraft and not initiated the process to purchase the old aircraft for Nepal Airlines.

Adhikari died in a helicopter crash on February 27, 2019.

Rai is the sitting CIIA chief commissioner who concluded the probe into the notorious procurement deal.

The corporation had deposited \$79 million into the escrow account held by Norton Rose Fulbright as an advance payment for the two jets.

The audit report said that Nepal Airlines was required to invite proposals only from aircraft manufacturers to purchase brand-new aircraft as per Clause 236 (1) of its financial bylaw. Now the Special Court will conduct the hearing on the case and pass its verdict which could take at least a few months, according to the CIIA officials.



# Premier League title race going down to the wire

### Arsenal beat Luton 2-0 and Man City routed Aston Villa 4-1.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MANCHESTER, APRIL 4

The three-way race for the Premier League title looks likely to go down to the wire after wins for Arsenal and Manchester City made it even tighter at the top.

Arsenal beat Luton 2-0, while City routed Aston Villa 4-1.

The title race is shaping up to be the most compelling title fight in recent history.

But it is three-time defending champions City who have the pedigree.

"If we are in and around it with 10 games to go then we know we are capable," said City forward Phil Foden, who scored a hat-trick against Villa. "We are in and around it again now so it is still possible. We have to keep believing. That was what the manager was big on today, believe and fight until the end."

The question for Arsenal is whether they can go the distance after falling away so badly at the end of last season.

The Londoners led the table for 248 days before eventually being overtaken by City who won their third title in a row and completed a treble of trophies which also included the Champions League and FA Cup.

Mikel Arteta's players have already improved head-to-head against City—winning and drawing against the defending champions. But it remains to be seen how they handle the pressure with just eight league games to go.

While Arsenal were expected to beat relegation-threatened Luton at home, there was always the potential for a slip.

That never looked likely after Martin Odegaard opened the scoring in the 24th minute and an own goal from Daiki Hashioka in the 44th made it 2-0 by halftime.

A fuss-free three points without Bukayo Saka and with Declan Rice named as a substitute was just the type of performance that suggests Arteta's team is better prepared to complete the job this time around.

Arteta, though, is taking it one step at a time. "It is a busy month, we have started well again after an international break and next is Brighton," he said.

#### Foden thrills

No Erling Haaland, no problem. Foden justified Guardiola's decision to leave his leading scorer on the bench by netting a stunning hat-trick as City powered to a 4-1 win against Villa.

Guardiola had described Haaland as the best striker in the world after he had been criticised by former Manchester United captain and now TV analyst Roy Keane. So it was a surprise to see the league's top scorer left out of City's starting lineup in a game of such importance.

But in his absence, Foden provided the goals with three supremely taken strikes.

"His work ethic is amazing," Guardiola said. "He plays in central positions and has an incredible sense of goal—he has goals in his



Phil Foden (pictured) justified Pep Guardiola's decision to leave Erling Haaland on the bench by netting a stunning hat-trick against Aston Villa.

veins and we have to use him."

With the score at 1-1 in first-half stoppage time, the England forward curled a low free kick into the bottom corner from the edge of the box.

He rolled in his second with another exquisite finish in the 62nd and rifled a third into the top corner seven minutes later.

City's win extended their unbeaten run to 24 games in all competitions.

#### Winless runs

Brentford's winless run extended to eight games after a 0-0 draw against Brighton.

The Bees have only won two in their last 19 games in all competitions but still moved a point further away from the relegation zone after Luton's loss at Arsenal.

Brentford in 15th are six points ahead of the drop zone.

# Saudi Arabia scoops up WTA Finals tennis

### Formula One, heavyweight boxing, horse-racing and some of football's biggest stars now appear regularly in the desert nation.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
RIYADH, APRIL 4

Saudi Arabia will host the WTA Finals for the next three editions, the Women's Tennis Association said on Thursday, following widespread speculation and criticism from some of the game's greats.

In just the latest high-profile Saudi sporting acquisition, the capital Riyadh will first hold the season finale featuring eight singles players and doubles teams from November 2-9.

"Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, will host the next three editions of the WTA Finals from 2024-2026," the WTA posted on X, formerly Twitter, on its official account.

The widely anticipated deal comes just weeks after Saudi's Public Investment Fund, a sovereign wealth vehicle, announced a "strategic partnership" with the Association of Tennis Professionals, which runs men's tennis.

It also follows criticism from legends Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova, who slammed the prospect of holding the WTA Finals in Saudi in a Washington Post opinion piece.

"We did not help build women's tennis for it to be exploited by Saudi Arabia," the players wrote in January, in a nod to the "sportswashing" allegations often levelled at Saudi owing to its human rights record. "The WTA's values sit in stark contrast to those of the proposed host," they added.

The Saudi ambassador to Washington, Princess Reema bint Bandar al-Saud, accused Evert and Navratilova of repeating "outdated stereotypes", while Tunisian player Ons Jabeur urged critics to be "more informed".

#### Growing links

The season-ending tournament joins a list of major sports events hosted by the world's biggest oil exporter as it tries to diversify its economy. Formula One, heavyweight boxing, horse-racing and some of football's biggest stars now appear regularly in the desert nation, which will be rubber-stamped as hosts of the 2034 World Cup later this year.

Saudi's PIF is also responsible for the LIV Tour, which has shaken up the world of golf, and took a majority stake in English football club Newcastle United in 2021.

At the start of its transformation, from 2018 Saudi Arabia, which hosts Islam's two holiest sites, allowed women to drive, reopened cinemas and started issuing visas to non-Muslim tourists. However, despite rapid social change, critics argue that legal discrimination remains in place in areas like divorce and child custody, and that women are frequently ensnared in an ongoing crackdown on dissent.

Saudi has quickly established links with tennis. In February, the PIF announced its multi-year tie-up with the ATP, in which it becomes the naming partner of the men's rankings. PIF will also partner with ATP Tour events in Indian Wells, Miami, Madrid, Beijing and the ATP Finals, in addition to the Next Gen ATP Finals, hosted in Jeddah until 2027.

Last year, the Next Gen ATP Finals became the first ATP event in Saudi, which also hosted exhibition matches featuring Novak Djokovic, Carlos Alcaraz, Aryna Sabalenka and Jabeur.

And in January Rafael Nadal, winner of 22 singles Grand Slams on the men's side, was named ambassador for the Saudi Tennis Federation.

# Mbappe sends Paris St Germain into French Cup final

REUTERS  
PARIS, APRIL 4

Kylian Mbappe's strike propelled Paris St Germain into the French Cup final with a comfortable 1-0 win over Stade Rennais on Wednesday, taking them one step closer to a 15th trophy.

A dominant PSG looked set to take the lead early in the game but goalkeeper Steve Mandanda thwarted their attempts and saved a penalty from Mbappe in the 37th minute.

However, the 25-year-old striker opened the scoring three minutes later, latching on to a pass from Fabian Ruiz for his eighth goal of the tournament as the Parc des Princes erupted.

PSG will face Olympique Lyonnais in the cup final on May 25 after they beat 3-0 Valenciennes FC on Tuesday.

Rennes were desperate for an equaliser in the second half to force a penalty shootout but a Martin Terrier effort was the best they could

muster, while Mandanda denied PSG a further advantage.

"It was a difficult first half but we completely dominated the game. Rennes were very good. We had a lot of pace in the first half and in the second half we had the chance to make it two but Mandanda was impressive," PSG boss Luis Enrique said.

"Cups in any country are particularly important and this has been one of our objectives since the start of the season."

PSG, who are top of the Ligue 1 standings, face Clermont Foot on Saturday and host Barcelona in the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final on Wednesday.

"Before we think about the Champions League, we have to think about Clermont. It's important for the team to perform at a high level in all competitions," Luis Enrique added.

"Playing against my former team (Barca) will be nice but I want us to be competitive and play a great game."

## HOROSCOPE

**ARIES** (March 21-April 19)  
The day is ideal for dissolving stress and grief, riding through work and to-do lists. Once you've clocked out for the day, consider what offers the most relaxation, directing your energy accordingly. Prioritise peace in life.

**TAURUS** (April 20-May 20)  
Today is perfect for cultivating a sense of community, taking the reins by promoting togetherness and leaning toward friendships, both old and new. You'll also find it easier to connect with strangers in meaningful ways, Taurus.

**GEMINI** (May 21-June 21)  
Give your mind space to dream when it comes to the path that lies ahead, setting your signs on just how high you hope to climb. Build yourself up, taking your experience and knowledge. Follow your instincts tonight.

**CANCER** (June 22-July 22)  
Trust that you are being guided and supported, opening up to signs from beyond by watching for patterns and coincidences. Your heart will be in a generous mood, making it easier to connect with kindred spirits.

**LEO** (July 23-August 22)  
You'll have a chance to open up emotionally making it easier to intensify bonds and discuss commitment. You'll crave intimacy with those you adore most, though it'll be important that you focus on yourself as well.

**VIRGO** (August 23-September 22)  
You'll find sweetness and love with ease. Be mindful of letting down your guard when dealing with loved ones, opening up the door for meaningful exchange without putting pressure on yourself to delve into serious topics.

**LIBRA** (September 23-October 22)  
Listen to your body, noticing how certain situations, people, or subjects impact you physically. Find ways to guard against anyone or anything that conjures stress, focusing on how you can better support yourself and others, dear Libra.

**SCORPIO** (October 23-November 21)  
Allow your most vibrant and creative self to shine through in all that you do. It is perfect for donning dramatic looks, chipping away at passion projects, and cultivating fun by gathering your loved ones, dear Scorpio.

**SAGITTARIUS** (November 22-December 21)  
You'll feel strangely satisfied when you allow your nurturing side to shine through, though you should be mindful of how generous you are and with whom. Seek people and environments that cultivate a sense of ease.

**CAPRICORN** (December 22-January 19)  
You'll find that it's easier to bond with others, especially when you maintain an open heart. Use this energy to lower any guards that have made it difficult to connect or forge friendships, understanding its importance.

**AQUARIUS** (January 20-February 18)  
Gratitude work will fill your heart while providing you with a sense of emotional security. If you're overdue for an excursion into the great outdoors, use the energy as an excuse to plan an outing before the weekend.

**PISCES** (February 19-March 20)  
Step into your power under this luminary placement, understanding how gaining attention can help you inch closer toward the dreams you've been harbouring internally. You'll have a chance to win over others who can influence your path.

## CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- Soapy mineral
  - Road map abbr.
  - Break
  - Arab ruler
  - World
  - and coo
  - Merely OK (hyph.)
  - Work by Chopin
  - Greek mountain
  - Emotional upset
  - Fig — cookie
  - Diplomacy
  - Fad
  - Oz visitor
  - Prep school
  - Think
  - Grew pallid
  - "Norma —"
  - Lots
  - Played charades
  - Type of lamp
  - "Able was I —"
  - ...
  - Desert plants (var.)
  - Coaches
  - Wine with fruit drink
  - Wearable thing
  - Corridor
  - Stack
  - Composure
  - Edible bivalve
  - Actor — Bridges
- DOWN**
- Trial
  - Love god
  - Simpsons girl
  - Crusty bread cubes
  - Soak flax
  - Greek letter
  - Old times
  - Essence
  - Plus
  - Make arrangements
  - Extend to
  - Threatened
  - Bent
  - Term in chess
  - Minced oath
  - Run-of-the-mill
  - Tar Heel State capital
  - Cupolas
  - "Carmen" is one
  - Gone up
  - Format a disc
  - Pro

### PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

F	A	R	M		R	E	F		B	A	Y	S
E	B	A	Y		B	I	B	L	E	U	R	S
A	L	M	S		E	M	B	E	R	T	I	E
R	E	P	T		I	L	L	E	D	U	L	L
S	T	A	R		L	E	T		D	I	O	R
T	R	A	Y		S		W	R	I	T		T
E	A	R			P	A	U	S	E			T
E	D	O			R	I	N	K		S	P	I
D	E	N			I	Z	E	N		S	C	A
S	N	I			P	E	T		A	G	I	L
T	A	R			A	N	I	E	C	E	U	V
E	V	I			L	D	E	L	A	Y	D	A
M	E	S			A	D	I	D		E	N	D

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11				12			13		14
15				16					17
18				19			20	21	
				22			23		24
25	26	27					28		29
30	31								
32						33	34		35
36									38
39								41	
42									
43									
44									
45									
46									
47									
48	49	50						52	53
54									
55						56	57	58	59
60									
61						62			63
64									66

## SUDOKU

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

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

# Shades of nature and traditions

Artist Leo Jhankar's exhibition 'Ink Trails' explores the importance of our connection to the earth and cultural roots.

ANISH GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU

Artist Leo Jhankar grew up in Khotang and the influence of the Eastern way of life is evident in his works, especially in 'Fragments of My Wall'. He has painted everyday objects red and on the backdrop, there are traditional homes, which can be spotted in Kathmandu.

At a time when we are completely engulfed in modernism, Jhankar highlights how our traditional and cultural utensils, often built using locally sourced materials, are being endangered. Jhankar reveals that he used the colour red because it is a deep and bright hue that stands out and because of its symbolic use to signify danger.

Things like *pira* (a hay-woven mat), *haadi* (a clay pot used for cooking) and *nanglo* (a flat bamboo tray made with bamboo) are drawn over traditional dwellings of the Valley. "I have tried to mix the culture of the Capital and my birthplace," he says.

When he first came to

Kathmandu he remembers being fascinated by the architecture of traditional homes. This fascination gave birth to the 'Fragments of My Wall' series.

Jhankar's concern over the gradual disappearance of traditional utensils is palpable in his work. "I grew up using these utensils, but many have already vanished due to modern technology," he says.

In his pen and ink drawings, the artist celebrates the farming traditions of the hills. With great attention to detail, he captures the essence of farm life, showcasing tools like the *halo*, *kutto* and *kodalo*—varieties of spades used through agricultural history. These tools, often forgotten in busy city life, represent the strength and creativity of farmers who work the land. He has incorporated detailed images of items necessary for cooking and rituals, as well as

agricultural tools into his canvas.

Through his art, Jhankar encourages viewers to take a moment and think about the significance of farming in supporting communities. By highlighting these traditional tools, he encourages us to recognise the hard work and commitment of farmers who strive to ensure food security and sustenance for society. In a world where rural life can be overlooked in favour of modernity, Jhankar's artwork reminds us of the lasting importance of farming practices and the invaluable role of those who cultivate the land.

"My body of work is a way to highlight the memories of the village where I was born, where ink was and is still produced from local flowers to prepare images of *naags* (snakes) during Naag Panchami," he says.

Jhankar has also fit trees into his canvases. He has portrayed big trees in his paintings just as they are in his hometown.

In 'Abandoned', many traditional utensils can be seen left behind. They lie on the bottom and in the background, a forest can be seen.

In 'Let Me Worship My Land', Jhankar illustrates a *sansari*

*puja*, a ceremonial act of worshipping nature. He combines the social and natural worlds, encouraging viewers to consider how nature and humanity are intertwined.

In 'A Day Without Rain', Jhankar has depicted deforestation. At a glance, the work might not excite the eye, but a closer look opens up details and a bitter truth. "There used to be a huge forest but now half of it has been cut down," he tells me. And this can be seen in the painting. A part of the dense forest remains while the other part is urbanised and industrialised. Jhankar has drawn remains of the cut-down trees to indicate rapidly increasing urbanisation.

"Cities are built by killing the trees, so instead of showing the city, I've decided to show what we've cut down," he says. He has drawn each tree intricately and says he based this piece on an actual deforestation he saw happen around his settlement.

By reconnecting with nature and embracing ancestral practices, we can find a sense of belonging and fulfilment.

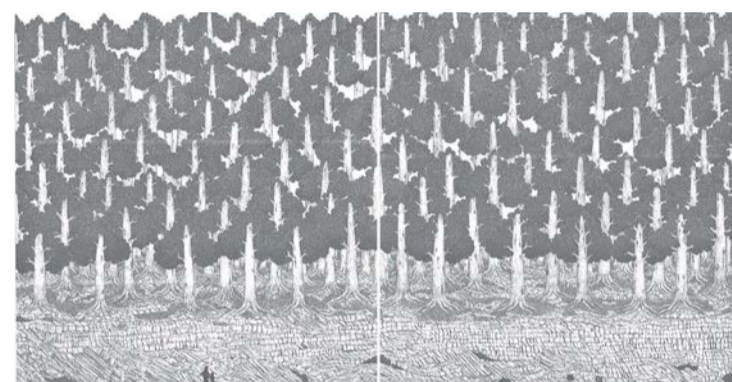
Another artwork titled 'Memory of the Trees' offers viewers a unique and intriguing perspective of the natural landscape. This piece presents a hemispherical viewpoint, drawing viewers into an immersive experience of the forest. Jhankar's attention to detail while crafting this piece imbues it with a surreal quality, transforming an ordinary woodland scene into a subject of intrigue and curiosity.

One captivating aspect of 'Memory of the Trees' is how the intricate lines and shapes resemble cross-sections of tree trunks. These lines, often used to determine a tree's age, add depth and complexity to the artwork. This dual interpretation invites viewers to contemplate not only the beauty of nature but also its rich history and the passage of time.

Jhankar says this work is an homage to all the trees that have been cut down. He dedicated this piece to the trees in a particular area in his locality in which a lot of



Artist Leo Jhankar



'Abandoned' series where many obsolete everyday utensils are depicted.

trees have been cut down recently.

"I present the dense and virgin jungles of Eastern Nepal in some of my spherical compositions. I also depict rituals like the *sansari puja*, which involves the worship of trees and the god of rain with *saal taparis* (leaf plates)," he says.

Departing from his usual style of painting, Jhankar also delved into pop art, with the traditional utensils becoming the focal point of his work. Dubbed 'Celebration of My Culture', this series bursts with vibrant colours, injecting life and energy into the subjects. In each piece, the utensils exude a newfound vitality, as if infused with the essence of the cultural heritage they represent. Through his exploration of pop art, he breathes new life

**Ink Trails**  
Where: Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Kathmandu  
When: Till April 6  
Timings: 11:00 am to 5:00 pm, On Saturday: 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm

into age-old objects, inviting viewers to rediscover the beauty and significance of their cultural roots.

Jhankar's message resonates deeply in a society where the pursuit of progress sometimes comes at the expense of our connection to the earth and our cultural roots. Through his art, Jhankar prompts city dwellers to reconsider their relationship with the environment and the cultural heritage they may have lost touch with. By reconnecting with nature and embracing ancestral practices, individuals can find a sense of belonging and fulfilment that goes beyond the fast-paced urban lifestyle.



A piece from 'Fragments of My Wall' series, where the artist has painted everyday objects with traditional Kathmandu homes as background.

# Beyoncé's Cowboy Carter reinforces her dedication to Black reclamation—and country music

MARIA SHERMAN  
LOS ANGELES, US

First, Beyoncé arrived at the 2024 Grammy Awards in full cowboy regalia—making a statement without saying a word. Then, during the Super Bowl, she dropped two hybrid country songs: 'Texas Hold 'Em' and '16 Carriages'. All of that heralded her latest album, 'Act II: Cowboy Carter', out last week.

As a Black woman reclaiming country music, she stands in opposition to stereotypical associations of the genre with whiteness. 'Cowboy Carter' was five years in the making, a direct result of what Beyoncé has called "an experience that I had years ago where I did not feel welcomed ... and it was very clear that I wasn't," most likely a reference to a 2016 CMA performance that resulted in racist backlash.

Fast forward eight years, and last month, she became the first Black woman to ever top Billboard's country music chart. The 'Cowboy Carter' doesn't shy away from country: the track list has teased potential collaborations with Dolly Parton and Willie Nelson and included a mention of the 'Chitlin' Circuit', a Jim Crow-era network of Black entertainment venues. One song is titled 'The Linda Martell Show', after the performer who became the first Black woman to play the Grand Ole Opry.

Nevertheless, she declared on social media, "This ain't a Country album. This is a 'Beyoncé' album"—in 10 words separating herself from the industry while still identifying herself as someone working in and with the genre.

**Beyoncé, Texas and 'Daddy Lessons'**  
Beyoncé hails from Houston, a city with a rich musical interplay of "blues and country and hip-hop," says Francesca T Royster, a DePaul University professor and author of 'Black

Country Music: Listening for Revolutions'.

"The iconography of Texas as a place of freedom and boldness, those ideas have definitely been part of Beyoncé's ongoing star image," Royster says.

Houston is also home to the rodeo, the country's oldest Black trail ride, and Black cowboy culture—in 1800s Texas, one in four cowhands were Black. Royster says Beyoncé has inherited this history by exploring country sounds, as evidenced on the country-zydeco-R&B barn-burner 'Daddy Lessons' from 2016's groundbreaking 'Lemonade'.

The songs that have been released preserve the best of country and take country to places it has never been.

At the time, though, the Recording Academy rejected its inclusion in the Grammys' country categories. 'Daddy Lessons' was also kept off country radio, says Alice Randall, author of 'My Black Country' and the first Black woman to write a country No 1 hit in Trisha Yearwood's 'XXX's and OOO's (An American Girl)'.

The hybridized approach of 'Daddy Lessons' came two years before Lil Nas X's 'Old Town Road' would raise similar questions of what kind of artists are embraced by the country music industry when they experiment with different styles.

**Country music is Black music**  
If 'Lemonade' established Beyoncé's dedication to Black empowerment, and her last album, 'Act I: Renaissance' is viewed as an

exercise in reclaiming House music, on this album, "she is reclaiming the Black roots of country music," says Martinez. That's evidenced in the inclusion of banjoist Rhiannon Giddens, whose music and scholarship highlights the contributions of Black Americans in folk and country.

Martinez sees Beyoncé's direct predecessors in Martell, The Pointer Sisters and Tina Turner's 1974 country album—and a present one in up-and-comer Tanner Adell, who sings, "looking like Beyoncé with a lasso," on her 2023 single 'Buckle Bunny'.

'16 Carriages', which pulls from gospel country and Beyoncé's own rich ballad repertoire, functions "in conversation with (Johnny Cash's) '16 Tons,'" Randall says.

In Randall's view, the impossible-to-define origins of country music center on three forms: Celtic ballad storytelling, African influences and evangelical Christianity.

"Country music can't be country music without Black influences," she says, pointing out that Hank Williams' mentor was a Black musician from Alabama named Rufus 'Tee Tot' Payne and that the American folk group The Carter Family learned from Lesley Riddle.

Black musicians' lack of visibility, too, in the genre is a factor for prevailing stereotypes: Martell's 1970 landmark record 'Color Me Country' was incredibly influential and successful—only for her label to divest from her, instead funneling resources into a white performer.

—Associated Press



AP/RSS