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TODAY

□ NATIONAL

Over 3,000 girls aged 14 to 15 years who were given the first dose of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine did not take the second dose. The health ministry will be searching for them. Pg 3

Provincial governments particularly in Koshi, Gandaki and Sudurpaschim have been shaken. Also the governments in Bagmati, Madhesh, Lumbini and Karnali have failed to function smoothly. Pg 3

OPINION

One could argue that the security market in Nepal is driven neither by economic indicators nor individual performances of the listed firms, writes Jagadish Prasad Bist. Pg 4



MONEY

A panel formed by Nepal's central bank has suggested capping payments made via quick response code for Nepali nationals in India at IRs 100,000 per month, either in one go or cumulatively. Pg 5

□ WORLD

UN chief Antonio Guterres has painted a dark picture of the situation in the Middle East, warning that tensions over the Gaza war and Iran's attack on Israel could devolve into a "fullscale regional conflict." Pg 6

SPORTS

Antonio Rudiger stared down the alkeeper, took a deep breath, and drilled home the decisive penalty, proving once again there is no tougher task in club football than beating Real Madrid in the Champions League. Pg 7



A relative of a Nepali national serving in the Russian army wrestles with police during a demonstration in Kathmandu on Thursday. The kin been pressing the governments of Nepal and Russia to send back the illegal Nepali recruits and provide compensation for the dead.

Provincial heads proxies of Kathmandu to meddle in regional politics: Congress

The main opposition is unhappy with their roles in Sudurpaschim and Gandaki provinces.

minister based on the support of a

majority of provincial assembly mem-

"The provincial heads are violating

the constitution and working against

the spirit of the constitution. Our party

objects to the moves," said Congress

spokesperson Prakash Sharan Mahat

adding that the heads of the provinces

were favouring the five-party alliance

bers including the Speaker.

BINOD GHIMIRE KATHMANDU, APRIL 18

The Nepali Congress on Thursday claimed that the provincial heads were treading on unconstitutional grounds in favour of the current ruling alliance.

A meeting of the party's top leaders also asked its provincial committees to oppose the unconstitutional moves. The main opposition is particularly unhappy with the roles of the heads of the provinces in Sudurpaschim and

of the CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist Gandaki. It has even lodged a writ petition against the move of Dilliraj Centre) among others. Bhatta, head of Gandaki Province, to This is not the first time the roles of appoint Khagraj Adhikari the chief

the provincial heads have been questioned. And in some cases, even the top court has ruled against their unconstitutional moves

The Congress, which has been pointing fingers at the roles of the provincial heads, had last year used Province Head Parshuram Khapung to form an unconstitutional government in Koshi.

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Lamichhane seeks to discuss GB Rai with Malaysia minister

Foreign ministry sitting on home minister's request fearing he may influence the fugitive's deportation, says source.

tions.

is now defunct.

politics in 2022 by launching the

Rastriya Swatantra Party a few months ahead of the general elec-

The development coincides with

mounting pressure on Home

Minister Lamichanne from various

quarters to pave the way for an

investigation into allegations of his

involvement in the embezzlement of

funds of savings cooperatives based in

Pokhara and Butwal, and his

connection with Rai during the estab-

lishment of a television company

called Gorkha Media Network, which

Lamichhane and Rai are

accused of cooperative

cash misappropriation

while at Gorkha Media.

Lamichanne had also invited

Foreign Secretary Lamsal to his office

and asked her to arrange telephone

calls with his counterparts in

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

has, reportedly, withheld the request

over concerns that the home minister

may influence Rai's deportation

The government has already sent a

diplomatic note to the Malaysian gov-

ernment seeking Rai's deportation

based on his case in domestic courts

Malaysia, UAE, and Qatar.

from Malaysia.

🗆 ANIL GIRI KATHMANDU, APRIL 18

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Rabi Lamichhane has written to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressing his intent to speak with his Malaysian counterpart, Saifuddin Nasution Ismail, regarding Gitendra Babu Rai, a main suspect in the largescale embezzlement of cooperative funds who is said to be hiding in the East Asian country.

A senior home ministry official confirmed to the Post that Lamichhane wants to discuss deportation, drug, trafficking, and other issues, with his counterparts in Malaysia, Qatar, and the UAE.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister has sent a letter to Foreign Secretary Sewa Lamsal expressing Lamichhane's intent to hold telephone conversation with his Malaysian counterpart, Ismail, and two others, and requested arrangements for talks.

However, a member of Lamichhane's private secretariat talking to the Post denied any knowledge of any such communication and said they would need to verify with the minister and senior officials. Similarly, the information officer at the home ministry, Ekdev Adhikari, said he is unaware of such development.

Malaysia, the UAE and Qatar are the major destinations for Nepali workers, who often encounter various problems there. Before joining politics, Lamichhane, as a television journalist, championed the cause of migrant workers, and has a huge support base among them. He entered

and his status as a fugitive accused of embezzling billions of rupees in cooperative members. >> Continued on page 2

Once fringe ideology, Hindu nationalism is now mainstream, thanks to Modi

ASSOCIATED PRESS AHMEDABAD APRIL 18

Hindu nationalism, once a fringe ideology in India, is now mainstream. Nobody has done more to advance this rime Ministe than F Modi, one of India's most beloved and polarising political leaders.

Modi was a teenager. Like other young men—and even boys—who joined, he would learn to march in formation, fight, meditate and protect their Hindu homeland.

A few decades earlier, while Mahatma preached Hindu-Muslim unity



democracy, critics say, is faltering as the press, political opponents and courts face growing threats. And Modi has increasingly blurred the line between religion and state.

At 73, Modi is campaigning for a

cent of Indians are Hindu. "He is 100 percent an ideological product of the RSS,"in said Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, who wrote a Modi biography. "He has delivered their goals.'

>> Continued on page 2



And no entity has had more influence on his political philosophy and ambitions than a paramilitary, rightwing group founded nearly a century ago and known as the RSS.

"We never imagined that we would get power in such a way," said Ambalal Koshti, 76, who says he first brought Modi into the political wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in the late 1960s in their home state, Gujarat.

the RSS advocated for transforming India-by force, if necessary-into a Hindu nation. (A former RSS worker would fire three bullets into Gandhi's chest in 1948, killing him months after India gained independence.) Modi's spiritual and political

upbringing from the RSS is the driv-

ing force, experts say, in everything

he's done as prime minister over the

past 10 years, a period that has seen

India become the world's fifth-largest

economy. At the same time, his rule

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

has seen brazen attacks against minorities-particularly Muslimsfrom hate speech to lynchings. India's

third term in a generaı which starts on Friday. He and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party are expected to win. He's challenged by a broad but divided alliance of regional parties.

Supporters and critics agree on one thing: Modi has achieved staying power by making Hindu nationalism acceptable to a nation of 1.4 billion that for decades prided itself on pluralism and secularism. With that comes an immense vote bank: 80 per-



Nepal's safest bank. Five times in a row.



NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Woman and child found burnt to death in Janakpur DHANUSHA: A 23-year-old woman and a nine-year-old baby were burned to death in Kapileshwar in ward 16 of Janakpurdham Sub-Metropolitan City on Wednesday night. According to Superintendent of Police Bhuwaneshwar Tiwari of Dhanusha District Police Office, both victims, who were mothers and daughters, were found charred. The bodies have been sent to the Provincial Hospital in Janakpurdham for a postmortem. Further investigation into the matter is underway, Tiwari added.

Fire destroys three houses in Kalinchowk

DOLAKHA: Three houses in Bismure village in ward 4 of Kalinchowk Rural Municipality were completely destroyed by fire at midnight on Wednesday. According to the police, the fire started due to an electrical short circuit from the house of the local Khadga Bahadur, which destroyed two nearby houses. There are no human casualties. Based on the victims' claims, police have estimated property losses at around Rs5 million. Because the fire started at Bahadur's house, the neighbours have registered a complaint against him, demanding compensation, said

Man found dead under suspicious circumstances

KHOTANG: A 58-year-old man from Phaktang in ward 4 of Barahapokhari Rural Municipality was found dead on a nearby cliff on Wednesday night under suspicious circumstances. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Purushottam Khadka of the Khotang District Police Office, the man was returning from a family gathering in the nearby village. It has been suspected that the man was pushed by another person. The body has been sent to the district hospital for a postmortem, and further investi gation into the case is going on, said Khadka.

Malaysia has promised Rai's deportation, but date not yet set, officials say

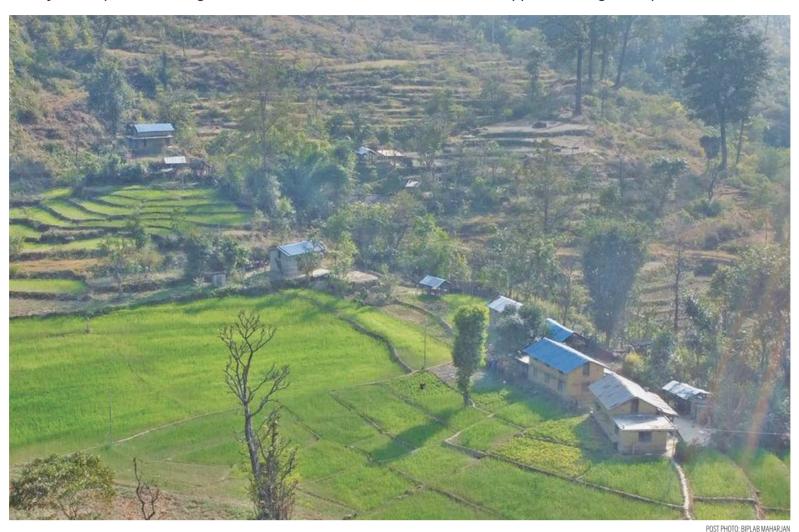
> Continued from page 1

After Narayan Kaji Shrestha became deputy prime minister and minister for foreign affairs, the foreign ministry has expedited negotiations with Malaysian authorities, a senior home ministry official said.

Nepali Ambassador to Malaysia Dilli Raj Poudel and other officials of the embassy have met Malaysian authorities and discussed Rai's deportation, according to the official. According to foreign ministry officials, they have received assurances from the Malaysian authorities, but no date has been fixed for the deportation.

Rising wildlife attacks forcing residents to flee villages bordering Banke National Park

In Salyan's Kaprechaur village of around 500 households, over 350 have applied for migration permission.



Kaprechaur village in Kalimati Rural Municipality bordering the Banke National Park has seen an exodus of residents in recent years due to increasing wild animal attacks.

BIPLAB MAHARJAN SALYAN, APRIL 18

Tila Rana, a 40-year-old woman from Ambas settlements in ward 7 of Kalimati Rural Municipality, is planning to migrate due to the constant threat of wild animal attacks.

"Despite no fatalities, more than 50 people have sustained injuries within a year. Also, nobody in the settlement rears cattle or livestock due to the threat of wild animals. Life here is very difficult as crops are damaged by monkeys and boars, and there is always the risk of being attacked by tigers and bears," said Rana.

Due to human-animal conflict, the locals of four settlements in ward 7 of Kalimati Rural Municipality, which borders the Banke National Park, are migrating to safer places.

Locals of Ambas, Bherikuti, Gahakhane, and Magare in ward 7 of the rural municipality are leaving due to increasing fears of attacks by wild animals such as tigers, bears, and wild boars from the nearby Banke National Park.

The Manakamana Basic School in Ambas remains closed due to a lack of students following the exodus of local residents. Wild animals often enter the settlements attacking livestock such as cows and goats, while wild boars and monkeys wreak havoc on seasonal crops.

According to Mitralal Rijal, the chairman of ward 7 of Kalimati Rural Municipality, the proximity of the four settlements to the national park exposes them to constant risk of animal attacks. The locals have long struggled to survive in the area due to continuous destruction of fields by wildlife.

"A couple of years ago, there were 80 households in the Ambas settlement, but now there are only four left; similarly, there are only five households in the Bherikuti settlement, compared to 60 previously. There were 27 households in the Gahakhane and Magare, but the whole settlement is empty now due to the fear of wild animals," said Rijal.

Before the Banke National Park was established in 2010, people used to travel to Nepalgunj by walking through the forest due to lack of motorable roads. At that time, even though there were wild animals, there were no tigers. But after the forest was declared a national park, a tiger conservation campaign started, resulting in terror in the vicinity.

Apart from the four affected settlements, Kaphrechaur, which lies in ward 7 of Kalimati Rural Municipality, has started to suffer from animal terror.

There are around 500 families in Kaphrechaur, and all are planning to migrate to someplace safe because cases of attacks by tigers and bears have increased in the past couple of years.

According to Rijal, there are around 500 families living in Kaphrechaur, and more than 350 have applied at the local unit seeking permission for migration due to the terror of wild animals, especially tigers and bears.

"Living and surviving near the national park has become extremely challenging these days because the government wants to boost the tiger population without ensuring human safety. More than a dozen people have been injured in Kaphrechaur in the past three years," said Rijal. Nandaram Oli, a local of Magare settlement, moved to ward 1 of Kalimati Rural Municipality five years ago after his house came under tiger attack twice.

"My six goats and a cow were killed by tigers, and I also got seriously injured once. For the safety of my family, I migrated from ward 7 to ward 1. The terror of wild animals during the night is unimaginable. The government is focussed on increasing the tiger population, but has neglected human safety," said Oli.

Rijal said that people in ward 7 are living in terror because they feel powerless to prevent wild animal attacks.

"When a wild animal kills a human, it is called an accident, but when a human kills an animal, even in self-defence, they go to jail. The rural municipal office cannot help the locals due to the complex rules and regulations of the government aimed at protecting wild animals," said Rijal.

According to the 2021 national census, there are 25 tigers in Banke National Park.

Congress accuses provincial heads of unlawfully favouring the ruling alliance

>> Continued from page 1

Uddhav Thapa, the party's parliamentary party leader in the province, was appointed chief minister on July 6 last year based on the claim of the majority with the Speaker's support. The top court found it unconstitutional, subsequently sacking Thapa from the government.

Though the provincial head is a neutral position, supposed to act as prescribed by the statute, Nepal has long episodes of them acting in the partisan interest.

In May 2021, the Lumbini Provincial Assembly meeting was called to discuss the no-confidence motion against then Chief Minister Shankar Pokharel of the UML. As there was no possibility of him winning the trust vote, he resigned.

The Congress and the Maoist Centre, backed by the fringe parties, posted a claim for the government with the support of 42 lawmakers. They had presented Kul Bahadur KC as their chief ministerial candidate. Pokharel also presented a claim for the government claiming the backing of 41 lawmakers.

Dharma Nath Yadav, then provincial chief, acted in Pokharel's support. He appointed him as the chief minister the same day he resigned without even checking who among the two had the support of the major provincial assembly member.

His decision was met with widespread criticism saying how Pokharel, who couldn't face the assembly in the lack of majority, be reappointed the chief minister.

Legal experts see flaws in the appointment of the provincial heads to be the reason for repeated acts of breach of the constitution by the heads of provinces. Though they are the representatives of the federal government they are supposed to demonstrate impartial roles.

"The provincial heads are the beneficiaries of the changes in the federal government. This is why they act as asked by the parties who appointed them," said advocate Om Prakash Aryal, chairperson of the Constitutional Lawyers' Forum. "This is not what they should be doing."

Over the years, every time the federal government changes, the provincial heads the preceding government appointed are changed too. Those close to the parties in the government get the opportunities.

For instance on March 11, a week after the change in the ruling alliance, the government decided to change Hari Shankar Mishra in Madhesh Province, Prithviman Gurung in Gandaki and Dev Raj Joshi in Sudurpaschim. They were replaced by Sumitra Bhandari, Dilliraj Bhatta and Najir Miya, respectively. Mishra, Gurung and Joshi were close to the Congress.

Article 163 of the constitution envisions the head of the province as a representative of the federal government. The term of the head is five years except when the President removes him or her from the office earlier.

However, no province head has served their full term so far.

"The head of the province is a reputed constitutional position. Those holding the position should act as prescribed by the law, not by the parties they are appointed by," said senior advocate Dinesh Tripathi.

On the other hand, Lamichhane, who has been denying his role in the embezzlement of cooperative funds, has accused Rai of wrongdoings.

"Why should I bear responsibility for Rai's mistakes?" Lamichhane had said in his recent clarification.

According to the Nepal Police, they have information that Rai is hiding in Malaysia, and the process of his deportation is underway.

Rai, believed to be the kingpin of the large-scale embezzlement of cooperative funds, is under Interpol's surveillance.

At the request of Nepal Police, the Interpol on January 26 issued a diffusion notice against Rai, and later put out a red notice on February 12.

Rai has been accused of illegally transferring the deposits of thousands of people from various cooperatives to fund his Gorkha Media Network. Home Minister Lamichhane served as the managing director of the network. According to affidavits published by Post's sister publication, Kantipur, Lamichhane also held a 15 percent stake in Gorkha Media Network.

Following the issuance of diffusion notice against Rai, Malaysian authorities located Rai's whereabouts and communicated to the Nepali side that he was hiding inside their territory, a senior security official told the Post.

माइग्रेसन हरायो

मिति २०८०/१२/१३ गते सानेपाबाट भैसेपाटीसम्म जाँदा मेरो निम्न व्यहोरा भएको सिद्धान्त श्रेष्ठ माइग्रेसन सटिंफिकेट हराएको हुँदा पाउनुहुने महानुभावले फोन नं. ५८४७६८९३४८ वा नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालयमा खबर गरिदिनु हुन अनुरोध गर्दछु । नाम: सिद्धान्त श्रेष्ठ रजिष्ट्रेशन नं.: ७८३२३११०१००८२५ स्याम्बल नं.: २८१०००६८ वर्षा: बि.सं. २०७५

With over 70 percent approval, Modi's popularity has eclipsed that of his party

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Uniting Hindus

Between deep breaths under the night sky in western India a few weeks ago, a group of boys recited an RSS prayer in Sanskrit: "All Hindus are the children of Mother India ... we have taken a vow to be equals and a promise to save our religion."

More than 65 years ago, Modi was one of them. Born in 1950 to a lower-caste family, his first exposure to the RSS was through shakhas—local units—that induct boys by combining religious education with self-defense skills and games.

By the 1970s, Modi was a full-time campaigner, canvassing neighborhoods on bicycle to raise RSS support.

"At that time, Hindus were scared to come together," Koshti said. "We were trying to unite them."

The RSS—formed in 1925, with the stated intent to strengthen the Hindu community—was hardly mainstream. It was tainted by links to Gandhi's assassination and accused of stoking hatred against Muslims as periodic riots roiled India.

For the group, Indian civilization is inseparable from Hinduism, while critics say its philosophy is rooted in Hindu supremacy.

Today, the RSS has spawned a network of affiliated groups, from student and farmer unions to nonprofits and vigilante organizations often accused of violence. Their power and legitimacy—ultimately comes from the BJP, which emerged from the RSS.

"Until Modi, the BJP had never won a majority on their own in India's Parliament," said Christophe Jaffrelot, an expert on Modi and the Hindu right. "For the RSS, it is unprecedented."

Scaling his politics

Modi got his first big political break in 2001, becoming chief minister of home state Gujarat. A few months in, anti-Muslim riots ripped through the region, killing at least 1,000 people.

There were suspicions that Modi quietly supported the riots, but he denied the allegations and India's top court absolved him over lack of evidence.

Instead of crushing his political career, the riots boosted it.

Modi doubled down on Hindu nationalism, Jaffrelot said, capitalizing on religious tensions for political gain. Gujarat's reputation suffered from the riots, so he turned to big businesses to build factories, create jobs and spur development.

"This created a political economy he built close relations with capitalists who in turn backed him," Jaffrelot said.

Modi became increasingly authoritarian, Jaffrelot described, consolidating power over police and courts and bypassing the media to connect directly with voters.

The "Gujarat Model," as Modi coined it, portended what he would do as a prime minister.

"He gave Hindu nationalism a populist flavor," Jaffrelot said. "Modi invented it in Gujarat, and today he has scaled it across the country."

Big plans

In June, Modi aims not just to win a third time—he's set a target of receiving two-thirds of the vote. And he's touted big plans.

"I'm working every moment to make India a developed nation by 2047," Modi said at a rally. He also wants to abolish poverty and make the economy the world's third-largest.

If Modi wins, he'll be the second Indian leader, after Jawaharlal Nehru, to retain power for a third term.

With approval ratings over 70 percent, Modi's popularity has eclipsed that of his party. Supporters see him as a strongman leader, unafraid to take on India's enemies, from Pakistan to the liberal elite. He's backed by the rich, whose wealth has surged under him. For the poor, a slew of free programs, from food to housing, deflect the pain of high unemployment and inflation. Western leaders and companies line up to court him, turning to India as a counterweight against China.

He's meticulously built his reputation. In a nod to his Hinduism, he Unlike those before him, Modi paints a picture of a rising India as a Hindu one.

practices yoga in front of TV crews and the UN, extols the virtues of a vegetarian diet, and preaches about reclaiming India's glory. He refers to himself in the third person.

PK Laheri, a former senior bureaucrat in Gujarat, said Modi "does not risk anything" when it comes to winning—he goes into the election thinking the party won't miss a single seat. The common thread of Modi's rise, analysts say, is that his most consequential policies are ambitions of the RSS. In 2019, his government revoked the special status of disputed Kashmir, the country's only Muslim-majority region. His government passed a citizenship law excluding Muslim migrants. In January, Modi delivered on a longstanding demand from the RSS—and millions of Hindus—when he opened a temple on the site of a razed mosque.

The BJP has denied enacting discriminatory policies and says its work benefits all Indians.

Last week, the BJP said it would pass a common legal code for all Indians—another RSS desire—to replace religious personal laws. Muslim leaders and others oppose it.

But Modi's politics are appealing to those well beyond right-wing nationalists—the issues have resonated deeply with regular Hindus. Unlike those before him, Modi paints a picture of a rising India as a Hindu one.

Satish Ahlani, a school principal, said he'll vote for Modi. Today, Ahlani said, Gujarat is thriving—as is India.

"Wherever our name hadn't reached, it is now there," he said. "Being Hindu is our identity; that is why we want a Hindu country. ... For the progress of the country, Muslims will have to be with us. They should accept this and come along,"



A man loads hoardings of a Bharatiya Janata Party candidate on a ferry to take them across the Brahmaputra river ahead of the national parliamentary elections at Nimati Ghat in Jorhat, India, on Wednesday.

NEWS

Health workers to visit schools to jab over 3,000 girls, who missed second HPV vaccine dose

The girls between 14 and 15 years received the first dose but did not show up for the second shot.

POST REPORT KATHMANDU, APRIL 18

Over 3,000 girls between 14 and 15 years who were given the first dose of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine did not show up to take the second dose.

Due to the low uptake of the second dose, the Ministry of Health and Population has suspended the vaccination programme for now.

"We are preparing to send health workers to schools to administer the second dose of the vaccine to girls who got the first dose but did not show up to receive the second dose," said Dr Abhiyan Gautam, chief of the Immunisation Section at the Family Welfare Division of the Department of Health Services. "We know that those who have not yet sought the second dose will not come to hospitals for vaccination."

According to the health ministry's data, 9,980 girls between 14 and 15 years of age from all seven provinces were jabbed with the first dose of HPV vaccine under a pilot programme, launched in September last year.

WHO says HPV is responsible for over 70 percent of cervical cancer cases.

Human papillomavirus is a viral infection that spreads through skin contact. The virus causes cervical cancer, which is the second-most common cancer in the developing world and a major cause of death among Nepali women. Hundreds of women get diagnosed with cervical cancer every year in Nepal.

According to the BP Koirala Memorial Cancer Hospital in Bharatpur, more than 700 women suffering from cervical cancer seek treatment at the hospital every year.

HPV vaccination was also included in the government's policies and programmes for the fiscal year 2023-24.

Doctors say most cervical cancer cases are associated with the HPV, a sexually transmitted infection and that widespread immunisation could reduce the impact of cervical and other cancers caused like Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Maldives have introduced the HPV vaccine nationally while India and Indonesia have introduced it in some districts. In 2016, Nepal piloted HPV vaccination in Chitwan and Kaski districts. All girls aged 11 to 13 years were then given two doses of the vaccine.

the third quarter of 2024. The ministry plans to inoculate around 1.7 million girls between 10 and 14 years with HPV vaccine through nationwide drives, and also make it a part of regular immunisation.

According to officials, the Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunisation (GAVI) has agreed to provide HPV vaccine doses. They said that once the campaign is completed, the HPV vaccine will be included in the government's routine immunisation programme.

Nepal had submitted a proposal to GAVI in July last year requesting for HPV doses for free so that the vaccine could be included on the regular immunisation list. Ministry officials say they have proposed a budget for HPV vaccination campaigns in 2024.

Officials say that GAVI has already agreed to provide required doses of vaccine, but the problem is their availability.

The World Health Organisation says HPV vaccination is recommended as part of a coordinated strategy to prevent cervical cancer and other diseases caused by the virus.

The UN health body says HPV is responsible for more than 70 percent of the cervical cancer cases in women. Countries that have included the HPV vaccine in their regular immunisation list have successfully reduced cervical cancer cases in women, according to doctors.

Meanwhile, the health ministry has started the 'big-catch-up' campaign throughout the country, aiming to inoculate children under five years who have either missed scheduled doses or have not completed a vaccine series.

Under the programme, health workers including female community health volunteers will track children who have not completed all doses of routine vaccines.

Every year, the ministry launches a month-long campaign to boost the coverage of routine vaccines.

Childhood immunisation is the number one priority of the government, under which 13 types of vaccines are given against a range of diseases such as measles-rubella, pneumonia, tuberculosis, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, hepatitis B, rotavirus, Japanese encephalitis and typhoid under the regular immunisation programme,

free of cost. Regular immunisation is one of



Kathmandu district administration officials and plainclothes policemen lock and wax-seal Lainchaur Banquet, a party venue, on the Nepal Scouts property at Lainchaur on Thursday evening. Nepali Congress lawmaker Deepak Khadka is accused of illegally occupying the property.

Government formation in provinces getting knottier

Experts blame central leaders' interference and the electoral system for instability in all provinces.

PURUSHOTTAM POUDEL

KATHMANDU, APRIL 18

As parties intensely engage in forming coalitions in the provinces, formation of the sub-national governments has become knottier by the day.

Amid a dramatic turn of events, Sudurpashcim Head Najir Miya appointed Dirgha Sodari of the CPN (Unified Socialist) as chief minister of the province on Thursday, Sodari presented his claim to the position with the backing of the CPN-UML, the CPN (Maoist Centre) and the Nagarik Unmukti Party and an independent lawmaker. The extended deadline to lay claim to the position ended at 5pm Thursday.

When the UML-Maoist Centre coalition decided to support Nagarik Unmukti leader Kailash Chaudhary for the position earlier, the Unified Socialist, which is a partner in the ruling coalition at the centre, had joined the main opposition Nepali Congress to support another Nagarik Unmukti lawmaker as the chief minister.

The Sudurpaschim move of the Unified Socialist created ripples in Kathmandu earlier this week, prompting top leaders including UML chair KP Sharma Oli and Unified Socialist leaders to trade blame. Oli accused the Unified Socialist of showing a 'non-political' culture while the Unified Socialist leaders accused the UML and Maoist leaders of breaching an understanding reached with them.

On Thursday, Unified Socialist chair Madhav Nepal held a meeting with Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba, who reportedly expressed his readiness to support him to form the provincial government if needed. Jamkattel on April 1 only after the assurance from the UML and the Maoist Centre to help the party in leading the Sudurpaschim government. However, on April 14, the day before the deadline to appoint chief minister of Sudurpaschim Province, the UML-Maoist leadership allegedly backtracked

on its promise to assist the Unified Socialist in Sudurpaschim and decided to back the Nagarik Unmukti's Kailash Chaudhary as the chief minister of the province.

Laxman Kishor Chaudhary, a provincial assembly member of the Nagarik Unmukti from the Rashamlal Chaudhary faction, told the Post over the phone that they will go to the Supreme Court against Sodari's appointment.

"I already had submitted my claim for the position of chief minister, but Provincial Head Miya delayed the appointment by unnecessarily extending the deadline," Chaudhary told the Post. "We do not support Sodari as the chief minister and will rather file a petition in the Supreme Court."

Unified Socialist leader Prakash Jwala, however, claimed that Sodari still commands a majority even if some of the Nagarik Unmukti members move the Supreme Court against his appointment.

"Ranjita Shrestha is the legitimate leader of Nagarik Unmukti Party and two members of her party have supported our chief minister in Sudurpaschim Province," Jwala told the Post. "Sodari's appointment as chief minister is legal."

Sodari is supported by 10 members of the Maoist Centre, 10 from the UML, four from the Unified Socialist, 2 of the Nagarik Unmukti and one independent members which totals 27 members and Court on April 9 saying that Adhikari's appointment was unconstitutional as the Speaker was counted among the supporters to garner a majority in Adhikari's favour.

A similar case happened a year ago in Koshi Province where the Speaker cast his vote to former chief minister Uddav Thapa but it was later nullified as the Supreme Court ruled that the move was unconstitutional.

The UML that had challenged Gautam's move in the Supreme Court last year involved the Speaker to garner a majority in favour of Adhikari in Gandaki this time around.

The top court has already asked the Adhikari government not to make any decision having lasting implications. The hearing on the petition is scheduled for April 22.

The Koshi government is again in trouble. After the UML and the Maoist Centre withdrew their support, Chief Minister Kedar Karki lost the majority in the assembly. The two opposition parties in Koshi asked him either to prove his majority in the provincial assembly or resign. But he has been defying.

As the UML-Maoist coalition staked their claim to form the government in Koshi, Karki has been trying to stick to power. The opposition parties have demanded a special session of the assembly but Karki has written to the Speaker against that.

Experts said that such problems arose due to political leaders' tendency to control provincial affairs from the centre.

"Our political leaders are using provincial governments as a power-sharing platform, frequently inviting this kind of problems," former National Assembly member Khim Lal Devkota, who is also an expert on federalism, said. "If a new alliance forms again at the centre, the provincial governments will face the same problem immediately." alliance with the main opposition the CPN-UML and three other parties including the CPN (Unified Socialist).

Provincial governments particularly in Koshi, Gandaki and Sudurpaschim have been shaken. Also other provincial governments in Bagmati, Madhesh, Lumbini and Karnali have failed to function smoothly due to the wrangling between ruling parties over the sharing of ministerial portfolios.

Devkota believes that the present structure of governance should be reframed to make provincial governments stable. "Nepal need not have adopted federalism, but since we have already embraced federal governance, we now must make it sustainable," he added. "The current structure of provincial governments will not work in the long run," Devkota told the Post. "We had not envisioned provinces that would face problems with the change of alliance at the centre."

Krishna Pokharel, a professor of political science, says a direct implication of central politics is seen in the provincial governments due to the provincial leaders' inability to work on their own. He pointed out numerous instances of provincial leaders inviting central leaders to interfere when it suits their interest.

"Our problem is that politicians are still practising the centralised system against the spirit of the federal constitution," Professor Pokharel told the Post. "The problem is seen because the provincial leaders are not given the autonomy needed to run a province effectively."

Pokharel also blamed the fractured electoral mandate for the problems in rovincial governments. The pres ent electoral system has slim chances of giving a single party majority seats in both federal and provincial legislatures, he said. Devkota echoed Pokharel. For him, a directly elected chief minister answerable to the provincial assembly provides stability to the provincial government. He also claims to have advised senior leaders of major parties to change the electoral system to ensure stable governments.

Experts say early treatment prevents up to 80 percent of cervical cancer.

Meanwhile, health ministry officials said that a nationwide HPV vaccination drive is likely in the most successful programmes in Nepal, with a high coverage rate. The country has demonstrated remarkable progress in reducing the under-five mortality rate and the regular immunisation programme is credited with that. However, a report of the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey-2022 carried out by the Ministry of Health and Population showed that at least four percent of the children aged between 12 and 23 months have received no vaccine at all. This figure was one

percent in 2016.

Then, the UML became ready to support Sodari for the post. However, a faction of Nagarik Unmukti led by Reshamlal Chaudhary, who commands the support of five of the seven members of the assembly, stood against party chair Ranjita Shrestha's decision to support Sodari. Immediately after the appointment, five members of the Unmukti Party wrote to the province head, asking him not to validate the support of the party's other two lawmakers. Unified Socialist leaders said their party gave the vote of confidence to Bagmati Chief Minister Shalikram ed for the appointment, Jwala said.

The Sudurpaschim provincial assembly is 53-strong where the Congress is the largest party with 18 members. The Rastriya Prajatantra Party has one member that is in the opposition camp with the Congress.

Khagaraj Adhikari of the UML was appointed the chief minister of Gandaki on April 7. But the Congress immediately challenged his appointment as Speaker Krishna Prasad Dhital was also listed among the assembly members who supported his bid. Surendra Pandey, the Nepali Congress leader in Gandaki Province, filed a petition in the Supreme One and a half years since the November 2022 elections, the provincial governments have seen many ups and downs. The instability in central politics has made provincial governments unstable every time.

The changes in provincial governments was triggered by the March 4 move of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal when he ditched his coalition partner Nepali Congress to form a new

"There is no harm in abandoning the proportional electoral system and making the direct election inclusive to solve the instability problem," Devkota added.

Carbon financing could retire dozens of coal plants in South-east Asia by 2030

DAVID FOGARTY

SINGAPORE, APRIL 18

Dozens of coal-fired power plants, many of them in South-east Asia, could be retired early by 2030 by using a carbon financing initiative, a sustainability conference heard on April 17.

The Rockefeller Foundation-led Coal to Clean Credit Initiative (CCCI) guides power plant owners and their investors to use carbon offsets to fund early plant retirement. These transition credits are nascent but have strong support from Singapore's central bank and other financial institutions.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Transition credits aim to monetise the emissions savings from the early closure of coal plants. Revenue would come from the sale of high-integrity carbon credits to companies or governments, with each credit representing a tonne of emissions avoided by shutting a power plant early.

In many cases, the early closure of each power plant is likely to avoid millions of tonnes of emissions. The goal of CCCI is to retire 60 coal plants globally by 2030 and transition credit financing is a key lever for achieving that, said Ms Elizabeth Yee, the Rockefeller Foundation's executive vice-president of programmes.

She was speaking during Ecosperity Week 2024, a sustainability conference convened by Singapore's investment company Temasek, held from April 15 to 17 at Sands Expo and Convention Centre.

Many of the 60 coal plants she mentioned would be in South-east Asia, Dr Joseph Curtin, managing director of the power and climate team at the Rockefeller Foundation, told The Straits Times.

"When you take the whole subset of eligible coal plants, there could be a couple of thousand globally. So we think trying to get 50 or 60 across the line by 2030 is a realistic objective," he said.

Ms Yee said: "Coal is the single largest contributor to global emissions and it accounts for 20 per cent of global emissions and 70 per cent of power emissions. And it is the leading cause of premature death in the world—worldwide, 800,000 people perish early."

In South-east Asia, coal power plants are the main source of electricity and a major source of air pollution and carbon emissions driving climate change. Many of the plants are young, with an average age of less than 15 years. Coal plants have a lifespan of 40 to 50 years, and investors recoup their money via long-term power-purchase contracts with utilities. This means that closing them early is costly. Carbon finance can help bridge the gap by funding the forgone revenues and the costs of swopping coal power for renewable energy.

Also key to the transition is funding to retrain coal plant workers affected by early plant closures.

In December, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) launched the Transition Credits Coalition, or Traction, which is backed by nearly 30 members and will study the challenges and propose solutions to scale the early retirement of coal-fired power plants in Asia.

On the sidelines of the COP28 cli-

mate talks, MAS announced it was collaborating with the Philippines' ACEN Corporation, the listed energy platform of the Ayala Group, and the Rockefeller Foundation for a first pilot of the CCCI.

The partnership focuses on a 246MW coal plant owned by ACEN with the aim to retire the plant by as soon as 2030, which is 25 years ahead of the end of its technical life. It plans to use a mix of carbon credit revenues and low-cost climate finance to achieve this.

The plant is currently due to close by 2040. According to a study, closing it 10 years earlier could avoid up to 19 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions, said the Rockefeller Foundation on April 17.

The Rocky Mountain Institute in



The eight-unit Suralaya coal-fired power plant in Cilegon, Banten.

the United States led the CO2 reduction assessment. The goal is to replace the coal plant with clean power and battery storage, and provide financial support for workers affected by the early closure.

How does CCCI work?

CCCI is mainly a de-risking tool to provide an additional revenue stream and make a phase-out deal more appealing to other investors, the foundation said.

Not all power plants would be eligible. The CCCI methodology is very conservative in terms of calculating emissions reduction credits that could be issued. A key element is ensuring that power plant owners are committed to not building any new coal power plants anywhere else in the world.

The CCCI methodology has been developed over several years and is currently being reviewed by Verra, the world's leading organisation that verifies carbon credit methodologies, and projects and issues carbon offsets, Ms Yee said. The foundation has helped fund the development of the methodology and provide other technical support.

Dr Curtin said more projects are being considered under CCCI.

"We're exploring a portfolio of potential pilot projects, including in Indonesia. We're undertaking due diligence on one project in Indonesia at the moment," he added.

The Asian Development Bank

(ADB) is involved in a separate transition credit pilot in the Philippines.

The aim is to retire a 200MW coal plant in Mindanao five years early, in 2026. The current power-purchase agreement ends in 2031. The plant, commissioned in 2006, has a technical life up to 2046, ADB has said.

Mikkel Larsen, chief executive of carbon exchange Climate Impact X, told a panel discussion at the Ecosperity conference on April 16 that transition credits could cost at least US\$30 (S\$41) each when taking into consideration the needs for a just transition. The price would vary significantly depending on the specific project and the amount of concessional capital.

Blended finance—a mix of grants, concessional loans and commercial capital designed to lower the cost of capital—can cover some of the early shutdown costs.

But carbon finance will be needed as well and the US\$30 price reflects the cost of a socially just transition and larger infrastructural needs to support renewables, such as the use of battery storage solutions, Larsen said.

In order to ensure that there is demand for these credits at such high prices, "key anchor buyers" like governments must be willing to purchase them, or allow for them to be used in a way for countries to meet their national climate targets, he added.

- The Straits Times





Provincial bottlenecks The crises in provinces arise from the duplicity of political parties.

Nepal's adoption of federalism was never a wrong move. We needed it to devolve power to the periphery and democratise governance, and we have had a decent track record on these fronts. Despite the successes, we have also had some damning consequences of federalism—the devolution of coalition culture that is the hallmark of government formation at the federal centre. This has given an excuse to the critics of federalism to claim that it is an unsuitable and unsustainable governance model.

At a glance, their claim seems to be true: No provincial government is a stranger to coalition culture and the cycle of making and breaking governments. In this cyclical process, there is one province or another undergoing a coalition problem at any given point in time. The latest such provinces are Koshi and Sudurpaschim, and they are certainly not going to be the last.

The current series began with Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal changing his government bedfellows just a year after settling down with the Nepali Congress. While the new coalition is now up and running at the centre, the provinces are now showing the ripple effects. This adoption of the coalition culture of the centre was never the intent of federalism. This arises from a paucity of political morality among the contemporary political parties in Nepal, especially those at the centre. Each of the three main parties—the Nepali Congress, the CPN-UML and the Maoist Centre—is working behind closed doors to outdo the other. Coming to the fray is the small fish—Madhav Nepal's CPN (Unified Socialist), punching above its weight.

On Thursday, the Unified Socialist, with just four members in the 53-strong Sudurpaschim provincial assembly, took home the chief ministerial post. Dirgha Sodari was appointed the chief minister with the support of various parties: Maoist (10), UML (10), Nagarik Unmukti (2) and Independent (1). Such a travesty of democracy is unthinkable in political culture with even a paraphernalia of morality. But since a party with just 32 members leads the government in a 275-strong government, Socialist's greed does not appear an anomaly. The Socialist using Sudurpaschim as a new bargaining chip at the centre also does not look out of place considering the lack of morality among contemporary political players in Nepal.

In the Koshi provincial assembly, Chief Minister Kedar Karki is using all possible means to stick to the post even after he has been relegated to the minority. Lately, he has written to the Speaker requesting him not to allow the opposition's resolution motion against him. Interestingly, he had won the chief ministerial position by joining hands with the dissident forces within his party and the opposition UML. Now that the UML has joined hands with the Maoists at the centre, he has fallen between the cracks. But his minority position has not stopped him from trying to crawl back to power. Such duplicity would be considered deplorable in a democratic political system led by morality. At the risk of sounding repetitive, the *Post* maintains that the bottlenecks at the centre and the provinces result from duplicity and deceit among political parties and not an inherent problem of federalism.

THEIR VIEW

Measures against stalking

Decoding NEPSE's surprise moves

We are comparing the current performance with its index during Covid-19, which is irrational.

JAGADISH PRASAD BIST



The Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE) is as dramatic and misleading as Nepali politics. Following a sudden change in the government and the emergence of a new coalition on March 4, NEPSE made some unnatural moves on its already random track. It soared up and closed with three consecutive bull circuits as quickly as the market opened on March 4 and reached 2,100 points on March 14. With these came the arguments that the unusual movement was a positive gesture towards the leftist coalition. However, it started losing momentum and has plunged consistently since.

The stock market's reaction to political changes is always irrational. Changes in government and political ideology inevitably influence the market due to shifts in policies and regulations. However, this is not the case in Nepal. Though Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal reshuffled the cabinet, his ideologies remain unchanged. So, what is wrong with NEPSE? Despite the government's claim and some macroeconomic indicators showing a rosy picture of the economy and stock markets in the world booming, why has the capital market remained bearish? Or is it really bearish?

Before understanding what is happening with NEPSE, one must identify the relations between stock markets, politics, economics, and investor sentiments. Generally, stock markets are accepted as the barometers of an economy: They reflect how individual firms are performing on the micro level and the overall economy on the macro level. The better the firm's performance, the higher the valuation on the stock market, as investors expect higher dividends and returns on their investments. Similarly, in a conducive economic environment, firms have better growth prospects with lower interest rates, controlled inflation, increased government and private investment, and political stability. Under these con-



ditions, a rise in the stock market is considered justified. However, unusual, sudden changes in stock markets due to political upheavals are a short-term misleading risky game.

NEPSE has no relation whatsoever with political and economic ideologies, political leaders, the performance of the listed firms, or the economy's performance. If anything, its behaviour is inversely correlated with the economy. In fact, NEPSE has never reflected the actual economy. Whenever Nepal's economy was devastated, NEPSE hit record-high performances. Be it the 2015 mega earthquake-induced economic crisis or the 2020 Covid crisis, NEPSE made historical records. Just a month after the mega earthquake in April 2015, NEPSE began to rise, further fueled by the monetary policy of 2015/16, which mandated commercial banks to maintain a paid-up capital of Rs8 billion, NEPSE hit an all-time high record for that period in July 2016. During that period, Bank and Financial Institution (BFI) shares were considered cash cows, trading at over Rs3000 per share. Taking that advantage, BFIs flooded the market with their right shares and further offerings to meet the required capital, which devastated the market and dragged their prices below Rs1000, causing naïve investors to lose their investments. During that period, the economy was growing negatively.

In hindsight, one could argue that the security market in Nepal is not driven either by economic indicators or individual performances of the listed firms. Instead, it was/is driven by irrationality, asymmetric information, and the absence of alternative investment opportunities. It is also said that NEPSE is controlled by a handful of major players who influence the market through misinformation and their investment modus operandi. Particularly, they buy and sell their holding in bulk to motivate the market and other naive investors in their intended direction. Small and not-sowell-informed investors make decisions based on misleading information on social media such as Facebook, YouTube, and Clubhouse.

These naive investors anticipate rapid price increases and seek overnight capital gains, leading them to purchase stocks at peak prices with hopes of further appreciation. Data show that some companies performing well in the market exhibit price-earnings ratio(PE) as high as in the four-digit range. Thanks to such misleading information, companies that have been at a loss for years are trading above the Rs1000 mark.

There are only two explanations for such irrational investments. It is either an intentional move from major players to divert fragile investors, create demand and increase prices, or irrational investment behaviour of small investors with high return expectations. Further, recent developments in technologies such as online transactions, easiness in opening Demat and TMS accounts, and internet access have made it easier to increase market coverage, and gullible investors have started treading based on misinformation on social media platforms. If not, how did prices hit a record high when Covid pulled the rug from under the economy by turning the companies balance sheets and income statements red, heating inflation and interest rates, and driving the economy into negative growth?

Even in the current macroeconomic scenario, characterised by record-breaking remittances, decreasing interest rates, and high liquidity in the financial market, the firms' performances aren't satisfactory. It is just a matter of hours before any avid investor can uncover the trend of decreasing earnings per share and increasing PE ratios among most listed companies over the past years. No rational investor would take a long position when price-to-earnings ratios are excessively high and per-share earnings are declining—unless they are either speculating or have a strong understanding of price movement.

Therefore, the current fate of NEPSE is not bearish; it is simply correcting the market. There is no foundation to compare the current performance with and claim a bearish NEPSE. The problem is that we are comparing the cur rent performance with the NEPSE index during the Covid period, which is irrational and statistically nonsensi cal. Unless the economy has a solid foundation and companies have good income statement returns, the asymmetric information-induced market doesn't sustain. The same thing is happening in the capital market of Nepal. Investors have started realising their irrational investment decisions and decreasing investment returns. As a result, investors are afraid to make further investments, if anything, supplying shares to earn whatever they have in their portfolio.

Similarly, large investors and associations of listed companies still blame policymakers for hiding their weak financials. There are always policy issues when it comes to doing business in any economy, but short-term policies such as tweaking margin lending, allowing banking institutions to make direct involvement in shares, and decreasing interest rates and proportion on share purchase loans will only create shortterm upheavals. For instance, the current bullish trend in world stock markets is not due to any such short-terms upheavals but due to the high performances of AI-based and tech firms in the world economy. Yet, what is important now is to control market misconduct and misinformation, which are not only detrimental to naive investors but also to the economy. Of course, some may gain in the present condition by investing in such a dramatic market, but this is solely because of the loss of fragile investors, not because of the concerned company's performance. This is no less than winning money in gambling. After all, what is the point of having a security market that is no less than a gambling house?

Bist leads the Research Division at the British College and writes on finance, economics and sociopolitical issues.

Bollywood's supporting role in India's elections

The use of Indian popular cinema for political ends has a long history—one that predates Indian independence. Mobilising film fans for electoral campaigns

Viewing movies in theatres is an eventful and enjoyable experience that draws a mass audience. As sociologist Lakshmi Srinivas describes in her 2016 book "House Full," the release of highly anticipated blockbusters is much Most striking is the excitement of audiences as they recite the dialogue, dance to the lyrics and hail stars as they appear on the screen. In an Indian context, cinema's impact extends from the movie theatre to the street in the form of advertisements, fashion and film music that dominate public spaces. Art historian Shalini Kakar argues that the spectacle of cinema brings forth passionate responses from viewing masses that are much like religious emotion. She discusses case studies of film fans who even worship their favourite celebrities as deities by creating temples for these stars within residential and commercial spaces. These fans conduct religious ceremonies and organise public festivities for their favoured stars.

powerfully communicated through entertainment films. Often, the personalities associated with these films were physically present alongside politicians at party meetings.

In my research, I found that the alignment of cinema and politics in Tamil Nadu was helped by the use of dentical advertising media. Political parties regularly commissioned advertisers to produce "star images" of politicians. A favoured publicity medium of both the cinema industry and party members was the hand-painted plywood cutout. These full-length portraits, 20 feet to 100 feet in height, featured charismatic leaders of Tamil nationalist parties such as M. Karunanidhi, a prolific and influential scriptwriter, and J. Jayalalithaa, a famous film star turned politician.

icons in their advertising.

Cinema's role in divisive politics Under Modi's leadership, three themes emerge in a cluster of films that favour the BJP's goals and policies and are endorsed by the party: claiming credit for welfare initiatives, instilling Hindu nationalist beliefs in socie ening tensions between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority communities. For example, a film released in 2017. "Toilet: Ek Prem ki Katha," or "Toilet: A Love Story," tells the story of a couple whose marriage starts to fall apart over the lack of a toilet within the home. At the beginning of the film, which is an entertaining musical melodrama, viewers are informed that while Mahatma Gandhi championed for a clean environment, it is Modi who is making that dream a reality through budgeting for the construction of toilets nationwide. Another series of films in the biopic genre showcases the historical legacy of right-wing Hindu nationalist organisations and their leaders. "PM Narendra Modi," which reminded voters of the prime minister's rise from poverty, was scheduled for release just before the 2019 elections. But the Election Commission of India, an independent body charged with ensuring free and fair elections, ordered that the film could be released only after the elections. A third and more troubling genre is politically polarising films. Drawing on ethnically charged actual events in which communities of Hindus and Muslims clashed, the scripts for these films dramatise highly biased narratives in which Hindus are cast as the victims while Muslims are the villainous perpetrators. Widely viewed examples of this genre include "Kashmir Files," which shows the mass exodus of Hindus from the north Indian state of Kashmir in the early 1990s when they were targeted by a pro-Pakistan armed uprising of Kashmiri Muslims. The film, which demonises Muslims and shows them committing extremely barbaric and cruel acts, is among those publicly endorsed by the prime minister himself. Film producers and distributors I interviewed for my research were unanimous that it was impossible to accurately predict whether a film would succeed at the box office, as are the results of the elections. Should the BJP succeed, however, it would be fair to conclude that one element in the hat trick was a clever endorsement of cinema as a vehicle for party propaganda.

It is essential to check on the psychological state of perpetrators, among other factors.

There is no end to the harm done by relentless stalkers. Some cases lead to even more serious incidents, including murder. In addition to strengthening enforcement against stalkers, treatment should be promoted to help perpetrators become less obsessed with their victims.

Based on the Anti-Stalking Law, police nationwide issued orders to perpetrators to immediately stop stalking or lying in wait for their victims in a record-high 1,963 cases last year.

The law was enacted in 2000 in response to the murder of a female university student in Okegawa, Saitama Prefecture. A 2017 amendment to the law made it possible to issue such orders in emergencies even without prior warning.

However, there are cases in which perpetrators do not stop even after a ban order is issued. Last year, a man stabbed his former girlfriend to death with a knife in front of JR Hakata Station two months after he received a ban order.

It is essential to regularly check on the behaviour and psychological state of perpetrators, among other factors, rather than simply issuing an order and taking no further steps.

Since last month, the police have begun to check with all perpetrators who received ban orders about their current status through phone calls and interviews. If the police find that the perpetrators are still strongly attached to the victims, they contact the victims to provide a warning.

Also, the police said they will actively encourage perpetrators to consult psychiatrists and counsellors. This is because medical measures are believed to be effective in weakening perpetrators' abnormal obsession and desire for control.

It is hoped that the police will strive to make perpetrators understand the importance of treatment when dealing with them. It would be advisable to call counsellors at police stations to meet with the perpetrators there.

It would also be effective if lawyers for both victims and stalkers get the perpetrators to promise to see a doctor as part of negotiations to resolve the stalking problem.

If the perpetrators do not see a doctor of their own accord, it will be necessary to contact the families of the perpetrators and ask for cooperation.

In recent years, it has become noticeable that perpetrators send the victims large numbers of messages on social media or track their whereabouts by concealing GPS devices on their belongings without consent.

As the development of information devices has made the tactics of perpetrators more sophisticated and diverse, there is a limit to what victims can do to protect themselves. Along with getting perpetrators into treatment, measures to prevent stalking must be considered.

Perpetrators unilaterally amplify their anger toward others when their feelings are not well conveyed. They need to deepen their self-reflection by reading books and writing regularly so as not to fall into such feelings. It is necessary to reaffirm the importance of emotional education at school and home.

— The Japan News/ANN

PREMINDA JACOB



As the largest electorate in history goes to the polls in India from April 19 to June 1, 2024, political parties are seeking to influence voters' decisions through cinema.

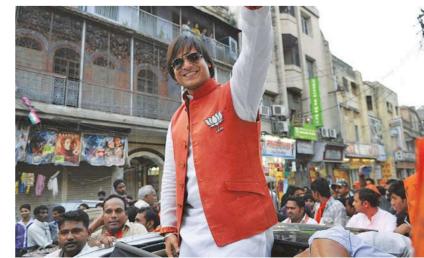
The incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, seeking a third term in office under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has deployed the medium of cinema, more than others, to spread the party's goals and ideas.

The BJP claims India as a Hindu nation. The Modi government openly supports films that promote the BJP ideology by providing tax breaks and removing regulatory restrictions, especially when such films are strategically timed to be released in theatres ahead of the elections. "Swatantrya Veer Savarkar," a biopic on an ardent advocate of a purely Hindu nation, was released a few weeks before polling begins for the 2024 elections.

India's entertainment film industry is a complex behemoth with an output of about 1,500 releases per year and a base of fans that extends around the world. Fabulously choreographed dance routines, catchy lyrics, memorable dialogue and historical and religious imagery make it a favoured medium of communication—even for political parties.

The use of Indian popular cinema for political ends has a long history one that predates Indian independence. As an art historian, I documented how cinematic imagery was used to produce a heroic aura around political figures in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu in my 2009 book "Celluloid Deities: The Visual Culture of Cinema and Politics in South India."

The connection between cinema and politics made it the primary vehicle for the lengthy careers of numerous charismatic politicians some of them screenwriters and film producers, others leading actors and actresses. Since the 1980s, it also set in motion a nationwide trend of using cinematic means to capture the attention of voters. But more often, fans are part of a large and vocal collective. Media theo-



rist S.V. Srinivas found that film fans can make or destroy the careers and lives of stars. If a star decides to venture into politics, these film fans can become active participants in the star's political campaigns. But if the star does something that the fans disapprove of, they will as easily boycott his films and even destroy the star's career.

An alignment of cinema and politics The cinema industry in Tamil Nadu, more than any other in India, has evolved closely with political and social developments in the region since the 1940s. The ideals of Tamil nationalism, a political movement that changed the course of history in Tamil Nadu, were Though these political portraits were meant to be realistic rather than melodramatic, the style and scale of these portraits resembled the cinematic star image. In this way, they helped to transfer the power of the cinematic star image to the image of the leader.

I argued that these advertisements played an important role in visual-

ising, and shaping, the identity politics of Tamil nationalism. The audience for these images num-

SHUTTERSTOCH

bered in the millions. When these vibrantly coloured portraits of film stars and political leaders appeared side by side in public spaces, they soared above the skyline like celestial beings. Often, the images became the focus of adulation. They were feted and garlanded, people danced, burst crackers, cheered and crowded around these images, and posed next to them for photographs.

The charismatic politicians of the Tamil nationalist movement set the trend of combining the sheen of the star image, the power of political portraiture and the divine aura of

Jacob is an Associate Professor of Art History and Museum Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. – The Conversation

MONEY

FOREX

IORLA	
US Dollar	133.97
Euro	142.96
Pound Sterling	167.1
Swiss Franc	147.38
Australian Dollar	86.28
Canadian Dollar	97.35
Singapore Dollar	98.5
Japanese Yen (10)	8.67
Chinese Yuan	18.51
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.71
Qatari Riyal	36.73
Thai Bhat	3.65
UAE Dhiram	36.48
Malaysian Ringgit	28.01
Korean Won (100)	9.75
	Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

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BIZLINE

British airline EasyJet cuts losses despite Gaza fallout

LONDON: EasyJet said on Thursday it expected first-half losses to be cut by more than £50 million (\$62 million) as strong holiday demand offset higher fuel prices and disruption from the Gaza war. The no-frills carrier forecast pre-tax losses of between £340 and £360 million in its six months to the end of March, which would be an improvement on the equivalent period a year earlier. EasyJet, which flies mainly in Europe, paused flights to and from Israel after the Gaza war started in October. It resumed flights to and from Tel Aviv at the end of March but following Iran's weekend attack on Israel, EasyJet on Tuesday said it would again pause services until October 27. (AFP)

Taiwan chip giant TSMC's profits surge on AI demand **TAIPEI:** Taiwanese semiconductor

SMC announced Thursday

Central bank panel proposes monthly QR code payment limit at IRs100,000 for Nepalis in India

But the limit does not apply for payments to be made for services in hotels, hospitals and chemist shops in India.

🗆 KRISHANA PRASAIN KATHMANDU APRIL 18

A panel formed by Nepal's central bank has suggested capping payments made via quick response (QR) code for Nepali nationals in India at IRs 100,000 (Rs160,000) per month, either in one go or cumulatively.

However, there will be no limits for making payments through quick QR codes at hotels, hospitals (hospital and research centres) and medicine shops, according to a draft report prepared by the panel which has been published on the Nepal Rastra Bank's website to collect suggestions from the public.

Likewise, to allow Nepalis to make online purchases of goods and services from third countries (whose currencies are convertible in Nepal) via QR code, the limit has been proposed at \$2,000 a year. For making such purchases, the buyer must have a US dollar account in a Nepali bank, and the purchased goods or services should be used in Nepal. The panel has also suggested a separate provision for those without a US dollar account-such individuals can make online purchases of up to \$500 only, per year. However, such account holders have to request their banks to convert the currency.

The panel has proposed that the charges for the QR code services should be determined by the market. However, the central bank can inspect the charges and limitations as needed, according to the draft report titled 'Provisions related to international retail payments to be made through mobile and internet banking and inter-bank transactions through QR code.

The panel made the draft public on Tuesday asking for suggestions and feedback.

These provisions are in line with the existing rules related to foreign exchange services.

On March 1, India launched the payment system through QR codes in Nepal. Payments for purchases made through mobile

phones have been seen as a milestone in cross-border digital payment between Nepal and India, addressing numerous hassles faced by citizens of both countries who rely on banknotes.

Although India implemented the system swiftly from March 1, the Nepali side has been dilly-dallying as the central bank said it would take time to set transaction limits for digital wallets.



The central bank draft report says that after the 'personal payment transfer' system is implemented, the 'merchant payment transfers' will be implemented in the second phase

The bank then constituted a task force to set the transaction limits. The task force produced the draft report on Tuesday, subject to an approval by the Nepal Rastra Bank.

"We have kept the draft in the public domain seeking suggestions and have provided a month to give feedback. Once we receive suggestions and feedback, we will review the draft and implement the provisions, which will enable Nepalis to make payments using QR codes in India and other countries," said Gunakar Bhatta, executive director at the Payment Systems Department of Nepal Rastra Bank.

He said that the proposed transaction limits for QR codes-based cross-border payment transactions are the same as payment in card systems. Another central bank official said that if things go as planned, the cross-border payment service in India will begin by June.

On June 1 last year, Nepal and India signed a memorandum of understanding for cross-border digital payment to ease digital transactions for business people, students, and tourists from both countries

On February 15 this year, Nepal Rastra Bank and Reserve Bank of India signed and exchanged Terms of Reference for interlinking the Unified Payment Interface (UPI) of India and the National Payment Interface of Nepal.

The integration is aimed at facilitating cross-border remittances between India and Nepal by enabling users of the two systems to make instant fund transfers at low costs.

According to the proposed draft report, all types of retail payments to be made through QR codes should be done through the National Payment Switch

Payment service operators or banks and financial institutions using their own switches will have to acquire and issue QR codes accordingly to ensure that the payments are made through the National Payment Switch.

As per the memorandum of understanding between Nepal Clearing House and NPC International Payment Limited of India, and the conditions enforced by two regulators-Nepal Rastra Bank and Reserve Bank of India-the personal payment transfer is the first phase of the cross-border electronic payment system between Nepal and India.

The central bank draft report says that once the 'personal payment transfer' system is implemented, the 'merchant payment transfers' will be implemented in the second phase

According to the draft report, licensed organisations will not need to obtain permission from the central bank to hold preliminary discussions with foreign payment transaction companies for the use of retail payment equipment and integration for mobile banking and QR code transactions.

However, the licensed organisation will have to obtain a no-objection letter from the central bank for signing a memorandum of understanding with foreign companies to integrate retail pay ments through QR code.

According to Diwas Kumar Sapkota, chief executive officer of Fonepay, 600 transactions take place per day on average through QR codes from Indian visitors. He said that in terms of value, the transactions total Rs1.30 million daily.

"The transactions mostly increase during Indian holidays and have been mostly concentrated on the border areas."

QR code display stands are now seen every where-from vegetable shops to department stores and private business houses to government agencies. The central bank data shows that transactions through QR codes have been growing at a faster pace each passing month.

In Nepal, according to the central bank data, in the month of mid-February to mid-March, the transactions made through QR codes amounted to Rs42.56 billion, the highest amount on record. Compared to the QR code transactions made from mid-January to mid-February, it has increased by 12.80 percent.

At IMF, Brazil and France renew push for 'fairer' international taxation

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE WASHINGTON, APRIL 18

The international community must do more to make the world's richest companies and individuals pay their "fair" share of taxes, Brazil and France's

finance ministers said on Wednesday. Brazil, which is chairing the G20 this year, has been pushing for the group of nations which together account for 80 percent of the world's preventing tax-dodging by billionaires by the summer "Fair international taxation is not just a topic of choice for progressive economists, but a key concern at the very heart of macroeconomic management today," Brazilian finance minister Fernando Haddad said during an IMF event in Washington. "Without international cooperation, there is a limit to what states can do, both rich and developing ones," he added. Haddad called on countries to "enhance revenue mobilization through fair, transparent, efficient and more progressive tax systems" to

make the system "fairer."

Sitting alongside Haddad at the IMF event, French finance minister Bruno Le Maire renewed his calls for a global minimum tax-and backed calls for a crackdown on tax avoidance.

France is among the world's advanced economies that have thrown their support behind a 15 percent global minimum tax rate, and has already implemented a minimum tax

on the world's tech giants.

The United States said Wednesday it will snap back sanctions on Venezuela's crucial oil industry after President Nicolas Maduro's government continued its repression of opponents.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON APRIL 18

President Joe Biden's administration suspended some sanctions after Maduro's government and the opposition agreed in Barbados last October to hold a free and fair vote in 2024 under the watchful eye of international observers

But the thaw ended when Maduro's opponents were not allowed to run against him in elections, and the said Caracas failed to make progress ahead of an April 18 deadline.

restrictions or delay."

Oil companies would have a winding-down period until May 31 to com-

US to reimpose oil sanctions on Venezuela

SHUTTERSTOCK

ply with the sanctions, Miller said. However Washington would "continue to assess sanctions policy" based on the Maduro government's actions leading up to the election, the State Department said.

Venezuela has the largest proven oil reserves in the world, but production has plummeted after years of mismanagement and crushing sanctions. Caracas vowed its oil sector would

keep going regardless of US policy. "We will not stop, with or without a

license," Petroleum Minister Pedro Tellechea told reporters ahead of Washington's announcement.

The Barbados agreement collapsed after state institutions loyal to the regime disqualified Maduro's main challenger Maria Corina Machado, and a proxy candidate, from running

economy.

polls show that US voters are not buy-

ing Biden's sunny messages about the

in the elections due on July 28 In comments to AFP, Machado said the reimposition of sanctions was the

result of "a brutal wave of repres sion" under Maduro. "This is the consequence of having

failed to fulfill their part of the agreement," Machado said.

Maduro, the anointed heir of the late firebrand anti-US leader Hugo Chavez, will be seeking a third sixterm after 11 years in offic marked by sanctions, economic collapse and accusations of widespread repression. Dozens of countries including the United States rejected the results of 2018 elections that were won by Maduro and boycotted by the opposition.

nearly 9 percent increase in net profits in the first quarter of 2024, buoyed by global demand for its microchips used to power everything from mobile phones to AI technology. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company-whose clients include Apple and Nvidia—controls more than half the world's output of silicon chips, which have been called the "lifeblood" of the modern world. The company said Thursday its net profit increased 8.9 percent on-year in January-March to NT\$225.4 billion (\$6.97 billion) compared to NT\$206.9 billion in the same period last year.

Cost-cutting boosts Nokia earnings in first quarter

HELSINKI: Cost-cutting helped Finnish telecoms equipment maker Nokia on Thursday report a 52-percent rise in first-quarter net profit to 438 million euros even though sales plunged nearly 20 percent. Nokia posted sales of 4.67 billion euros, down by a fifth from a year ago in a "challenging environment". It mobile networks activity was hit by operators' declining investments in North America and India. The firm announced in October it would cut up to 14,000 jobs out of 86,000 employees due to weakening demand for 5G equipment in the two key markets. "As expected, the ongoing market weakness drove a 19 percent year-on-year constant currency decline in net sales in the first quarter", Nokia chief executive Pekka Lundmark said in a statement. (AFP)

Markets rise as traders consider US rate outlook

HONG KONG: Stock markets in Asia and Europe rose Thursday with traders mulling the outlook for US interest rates as Federal Reserve officials questioned the need for a cut anytime soon. Oil extended the previous day's losses, fuelled by data indicating softer demand in the United States and fading fears of a regional war in the Middle East. Investors brushed off a sell-off on Wall Street where tech firms were hit by worries that borrowing costs will be kept elevated longer than expected. (AFP)

The future of the v race to the bottom," Le Maire said. "This is true also of taxation."

In January this year, the European Union introduced a 15 percent minimum tax for multinational companies active in the 27-member trading bloc.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a global minimum tax could bring in an additional \$200 billion in revenues per year.

Le Maire also called on the world's richest individuals to pay more in tax, outlining a series of steps to boost transparency and information-sharing between countries.

"We are concerned that Maduro and his representatives prevented the democratic opposition from registering the candidate of their choice, harassed and intimidated political opponents, and unjustly detained numerous political actors and members of civil society," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement.

"We again call on Maduro to allow all candidates and parties to participate in the electoral process and release all political prisoners without

nctions move is no risk for Biden as he makes his own bid for reelection this year.

Venezuelan authorities have previously threatened to hit Biden in the sensitive area of migration. More than seven million Venezuelans have fled over the past decade, with many coming to the United States.

Caracas has previously warned it will cancel migrant repatriation flights which started under the October deal if Washington continues with its "economic aggression."

Sanctions could also hit oil prices just as Americans face growing costs at the pump and rising inflation, and

Most Western and Latin American countries switched recognition to then opposition leader Juan Guaido.

But years of sanctions and other pressure failed to dislodge Maduro, who enjoys support from a political patronage system, the military and from Cuba, Russia and China

cy landing after a fuselage panel blew

The incident revived major ques-

tions around Boeing's safety practices

that had initially arisen following two

fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019, but

which had subsided following a

In late March, Boeing announced

a leadership shakeup that included

the retirement of Chief Executive

Dave Calhoun at the end of 2024 and

the replacement of Chair Larry

Kellner with former Qualcomm CEO

In a recent message to shareholders,

out in mid-flight.

Steve Mollenkopf.

Going 'backwards'? Whistleblowers slam Boeing safety culture

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE NEW YORK, APRIL 18

Witnesses at a US Senate hearing on Boeing drew a disturbing picture on Wednesday of an aviation giant that blows off safety questions and sidelines critics as it chases faster production and bigger profits.

"The attitude from Boeing from the highest level is just to push the defective parts, regardless of what it is,' Boeing engineer Sam Salehpour told lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

Salehpour, who has worked at Boeing for 17 of his 40 years in aerospace, said he became a whistleblower after he was punished for raising safety questions about the top-selling 787 Dreamliner and 777.

He testified that he was blackballed by company higher-ups and feared for his personal well-being after raising concerns about safety.

He maintains that the Dreamliner could show premature signs of fatigue, resulting in a catastrophic accident because of excessively large gaps in the plane's assembly. He likened it to a paper clip that is bent repeatedly.

"You do it once or twice, it doesn't break, but it breaks at some time,' said Salehpour, who has said the entire 787 fleet should be grounded for investigation.

Boeing acknowledged imperfections, but said it was making progress. 'We know we have more work to do



AFP/RSS

essary steps to regain the trust lost in recent times." "Boeing must commit to real and

profound improvements and we will hold them accountable every step of the way," the FAA said in a statement, reiterating the need for aviation employees to be able to speak up without fear of reprisal.

The agency also pointed to a recent audit by an FAA advisory panel that found employee skepticism that safety complaints by workers would not result in retaliation.

Former pilot Shawn Pruchnicki now at Ohio State University, said a reporting culture was critical to improved safety, along with a chain of accountability all the way up to the CEO.

(Left to right) Boeing engineer, Sam Salehpour; Foundation for Aviation Safety Executive Director, Ed Pierson; Foundation for Aviation Safety engineer, Joe Jacobsen; and Ohio State University Professional Practice Assistant Professor Shawn, Pruchnicki are sworn in before the US Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Investigations during a hearing on 'Examining Boeing's Broken Safety Culture: Firsthand Accounts,' at Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on April 17.

and we are taking action across our company," the company said after the hearing, pointing to an uptick in its "Speak Up" portal to field employee input. Boeing has pushed back against Salehpour's allegations about the 787, pointing to extensive testing that shows no signs of fatigue.

It also said that it had addressed the gap issue during a period when it slowed production and suspended deliveries-a process tightly overseen the Federal Aviation by Administration.

The FAA said in response to Salehpour's claims that the 787s currently flying are in compliance.

The aircraft also received an endorsement Wednesday from United Airlines Chief Executive Scott Kirby, who told CNBC he was "totally confident the 787 is a safe airplane.'

Lawmakers expressed alarm at testimony about alleged widespread manufacturing and quality control problems throughout Boeing's fleet, as well as the overly deferential approach of the FAA, which one witness described as "captive" to Boeing.

"This requires a full-blown investigation," said Republican Senator Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, calling for future hearings to hear from pilots, the airlines and other witnesses.

Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, who chaired the hearing, said representatives of Boeing and the FAA were already scheduled to appear. The hearing comes as regulators

escalate scrutiny of Boeing in the wake of a near-disastrous January 5 Alaska Airlines flight, in which a 737

WORLD

UN chief warns Mideast on brink of 'full-scale regional conflict'

The region is on a precipice, says Guterres. Recent days have seen a perilous escalation.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES, APRIL 18

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday painted a dark picture of the situation in the Middle East, warning that spiralling tensions over the war in Gaza and Iran's attack on Israel could devolve into a "fullscale regional conflict."

Guterres also said Israel's military offensive on Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip, in retaliation for their unprecedented October 7 attack on Israel, had created a "humanitarian hellscape" for civilians trapped in the besieged Palestinian territory.

"The Middle East is on a precipice. Recent days have seen a perilous escalation—in words and deeds," Guterres told a high-level Security Council meeting, with several foreign ministers present, including from Jordan and Iran.

"One miscalculation, one miscommunication, one mistake, could lead to the unthinkable—a full-scale regional conflict that would be devastating for all involved," he said, calling on all parties to exercise "maximum restraint."

Iran unleashed a barrage of missiles and drones on Israel over the weekend, after an attack on its consulate in Damascus widely blamed on Israel. Israeli officials have not said when or where they would retaliate, but the country's military chief has vowed a response.

Guterres condemned both the consulate attack and the flurry of drones, saying that the latter constituted a "serious escalation."

"It is high time to end the bloody



United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks during a Security Council meeting at the United Nations headquarters on Thursday.

cycle of retaliation," he said. "It is high time to stop."

"The international community must work together to prevent any actions that could push the entire Middle East over the edge, with a devastating impact on civilians. Let me be clear: the risks are spiralling on many fronts."

For Guterres, de-escalation of the situation would begin by ending fighting in Gaza, where at least 33,970 people have been killed, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

The militants' October 7 attack resulted in the deaths of 1,170 people

in southern Israel, mostly civilians, according to official Israeli figures.

Hamas also took about 250 hostages. Israel estimates 129 of them remain in Gaza, including 34 who are presumed dead.

"I reiterate my calls for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the immediate release of all hostages held in Gaza," Guterres said.

"In Gaza, six and a half months of Israeli military operations have created a humanitarian hellscape," he lamented, and while he said Israel had made "limited progress" on allowing more aid into the territory, he called for more to be done.

"Our aid operations are barely functional. They cannot operate in an organized, systematic way; they can only seize opportunities to deliver aid whenever and wherever possible," he said.

"Delivering aid at scale requires Israel's full and active facilitation of humanitarian operations."

Guterres's speech came as the Security Council was poised later in the day to vote on a Palestinian bid for full UN membership—an initiative that seemed destined for failure in the face of opposition from the veto-wielding United States.

The UN secretary-general also called on Israel to put a stop to settler violence in the occupied West Bank, after the killing of a 14-year-old Israeli boy sparked Israeli attacks in dozens of Palestinian villages.

"I call on Israel, as the occupying power, to protect the Palestinian population of the occupied West Bank against attacks, violence and intimidation," he told the Security Council.

US, UK unveil sweeping sanctions on Iran's drone programme

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE WASHINGTON, APRIL 18

The United States and Britain announced widespread sanctions against Iran's military drone programme on Thursday, in response to its weekend attack against Israel.

Washington is targeting "16 individuals and two entities enabling Iran's UAV production, including engine types that power Iran's Shahed variant UAVs, which were used in the April 13 attack," the Treasury Department said in a statement, referring to Iran's unmanned aerial vehicle program.

Tehran launched its first ever direct military attack on Israel late Saturday in retaliation for an April 1 air strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus—widely blamed on Israel that killed seven members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, including two generals.

The large-scale attack involved more than 300 drones and missiles, most of which were shot down by Israel and its allies including Washington and London, causing little damage.

In response to the attacks, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his country reserves the right to protect itself.

"Today, we are holding Iran accountable—imposing new sanctions and export controls," US President Joe Biden said in a statement.

"As I discussed with my fellow G7 leaders the morning after the attack, we are committed to acting collectively to increase economic pressure on Iran," he continued.

Gaza children yearn for their school days before conflict

GAZA, APRIL 18

Traumatised 10-year-old students stare at their destroyed schools in Gaza, a grim reminder of the education and time with friends in the playground lost since the war erupted over

six months ago. "We would go out during recess. We would go to the classroom and walk around. The principle would come to the classrooms," said fifth grader Abed al-Qara, who was inspecting the damage with his friend Muhammed al-Fajem in Bani Suhaila, located in the east of Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip.

"He would give us the books. We would go there and see who is coming and going; we would stand at the school gate. We were living."

Bullet-riddled buildings. Papers scattered in a gutted classroom. Posters ripped off of walls. Damaged books.

It's all a grim reminder of the education and dreams those who represent the future of Gaza—a densely packed strip of land with severe shortages of water, food, medicine and healthcare—have lost since the conflict erupted on October 7.

Hamas militants attacked Israel, killed 1,200 people and took over 200 hostages according to Israeli tallies, in a surprise operation that pointed to major Israeli intelligence failures.

Israel retaliated with an air and ground offensive that has killed over

33,000 Palestinians according to local health authorities and reduced much of Gaza to rubble and wastelands, including schools which have a critical place in a society where children make up about half of Gaza's 2.3 million population.

Young students who were hungry to learn now wonder if they will ever be able to pack their books and go back to school again. Gazans—young and old—are desperate for signs that the fighting will end. But there are none.

Mediators have failed to narrow differences enough between both sides to secure a ceasefire as proposals are passed back and forth. Teacher Muhammad al-Khudari sat

on rubble and wrote on a piece of paper, reflecting on the wide-scale ruins of the education system, at all levels, from kindergartens to universities.

"We call on everyone to pay attention to the education process [in Gaza], and for the return of education as it was before the war," he said.

Still, some like fifth grade student Muhammed al-Fajem, have not lost hope.

"I was one of the top. I used to get 98 percent. I used to get 100 percent. I was one of the top," he said.

"We will set up tents and we will study in the tents. No matter the cost, we will study in them. This was our classroom. See the room of the principle. He used to bring us books and sweets. He would give us everything. He would give us toys."



Mount Ruang volcano is seen during the eruption from Tagulandang island, Indonesia, on Thursday.

Indonesia evacuating thousands after volcano erupts; tsunami threat

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MANADO, APRIL 18

Indonesian rescuers raced to evacuate thousands of people on Thursday after a volcano erupted five times, forcing authorities to close a nearby airport and issue a warning about falling debris that could cause a tsunami.

Mount Ruang's crater flamed with lava against a backdrop of lightning bolts overnight after erupting four times on Wednesday, pushing an ash column more than a mile into the sky and forcing authorities to raise its alert level to the highest of a fourtiered system.

Taka, a local fisherman who only gave one name, was at sea helping people to safety by boat when the crater unleashed a fiery orange column.

"There was a mix of fire and rocks. Lava flowed in various directions," he told AFP.

The volcano, which sits on a remote island in Indonesia's outermost region with a peak 725 metres above sea level, was still billowing a column of smoke up to 800 metres high on Thursday morning, officials said.

Houses on the neighbouring remote island of Tagulandang were riddled with holes from falling volcanic rocks on Thursday, rescuers said, and residents were preparing to leave at least temporarily.

"The current condition, particularly the road condition, is covered by volcanic material," local rescuer Ikram Al Ulah told AFP by phone from the Tagulandang seaport.

Such calls fall on fertile ground.

According to predictions by the

European Council on Foreign

Relations, the radical right Identity

and Democracy group could become

the third biggest overall in the next

European Parliament, behind the

Christian Democrats and the

Socialists, but edging out the Liberals

and Greens. The farm protests are

One farmer sidestepping militant

demonstrations is Bart Dochy in west-

ern Belgium. As the Christian

Democrat mayor of the farming town

of Ledegem and a regional parliamen-

tarian in Flanders, he represents the

traditional forces in European farm-

ing communities: Christianity and

conservativism. When Socialism took

the big cities, the countryside and its

farmers remained staunchly Christian

providing vital leverage.

A spade is a spade

"Currently, many people are still wandering around. Maybe to evacuate precious goods from their house."

There were no reports of deaths or injuries but authorities said they were rushing to evacuate more than 11,000 residents from the area around Tagulandang, home to around 20,000 people.

Some residents were already trying to flee in a panic, according to officials.

"People evacuated on their own but without direction due to the volcano's eruption and... small rocks that fell," local search and rescue agency official Jandry Paendong said in a statement on Thursday.

"The people scattered to find evacuation routes."

He said 20 staff were helping evacuate residents along the coastline near the volcano on rubber boats.

Authorities also evacuated a prison on Tagulandang island, ferrying 17 inmates along with 11 officials and 19 residents by boat to Likupang seaport in northern Sulawesi island, according to Ikram.

The evacuation was requested by the prison chief because the facility sits directly across from the volcano, said the rescuer.

Tourists and residents were warned to remain outside a six-kilometre exclusion zone.

More than 800 people were initially taken from Ruang to Tagulandang after the first eruption on Tuesday evening, before four more eruptions on Wednesday prompted evacuations from that island.

Farmers are rebelling against EU rules. The far right is stoking the flames

Across much of the 2/-nation EU, farmers' discontent is gathering momentum as June EU parliamentary elections draw near.

RAF CASERT/ASSOCIATED PRESS ANDEREN, NETHERLANDS, APRIL 18

Inside the barn on the flat fields of the northern Netherlands, Jos Ubels cradles a newborn Blonde d'Aquitaine calf, the latest addition to his herd of over 300 dairy cattle.

Little could be more idyllic. Little, says Ubels, could be more

under threat. As Europe seeks to address the

threat of climate change, it's imposing more rules on farmers like Ubels. He spends a day a week on bureaucracy, answering the demands of European Union and national officials who seek to decide when farmers can sow and reap, and how much fertilizer or manure they can use.

Meanwhile, competition from cheap imports is undercutting prices for their produce, without having to meet the same standards. Mainstream political parties failed to act on farmers' complaints for decades, Ubels says. Now the radical right is stepping in.

Across much of the 27-nation EU, from Finland to Greece, Poland to Ireland, farmers' discontent is gathering momentum as June EU parliamentary elections draw near.

Ubels is the second in command of the Farmers Defense Force, one of the most prominent groups to emerge from the foment. The FDF, whose symbol is a crossed double pitchfork, was formed in 2019 and has since expanded to Belgium. It has ties to similar groups elsewhere in the EU and is a driving force behind a planned June 4 demonstration in Brussels it hopes will bring 100,000 people to the EU capital and help define the outcome of the elections.

"It is time that we fight back," said Ubels. "We're done with quietly listening and doing what we are told."

Has he lost trust in democracy? "No. ... I have lost my faith in politics. And that is one step removed."

The FDF itself puts it more ominously on its website: "Our confidence in the rule of law is wavering!"

'Don't let up!'

In March, protesting farmers from Belgium ran amok at a demonstration outside EU headquarters in Brussels, setting fire to a subway station entrance and attacking police with eggs and liquid manure. In France, protesters tried to storm a government building.

In a video from another protest, in front of burning tires and pallets, FDF leader Mark van den Oever said two politicians made him sick to his stomach, saying they would "soon be at the center of attention." The FDF denies this was a threat of physical violence.

Across the EU, over the winter, tractor convoys blockaded ports and major roads, sometimes for days, in some of the most severe farm protests in half a century.

Farmers and the EU have had a sometimes testy relationship. What's new is the shift toward the extreme right.

Destitute after World War II and with hunger still a scourge in winter, Europe desperately needed food security. The EU stepped in, securing abundant food for the population, turning the sector into an export powerhouse and currently funding farmers to the tune of over 50 billion euros a year.

Yet, despite agriculture's strategic importance, the EU acknowledges that farmers earn about 40 percent less than non-farm workers, while 80 percent of support goes to a privileged 20 percent of farmers. Many of the bloc's 8.7 million farm workers are close to or below the poverty line.

At the same time, the EU is seeking to push through stringent nature and agricultural laws as part of its Green Deal to make the bloc climate-neutral by 2050. Agriculture accounts for more than 10 percent of EU greenhouse gas emissions, from sources such as the nitrous oxide in fertilizers, carbon dioxide from vehicles and methane from cattle.

Cutting these emissions has forced short-notice changes on farmers at a time of financial insecurity. The Covid-19 pandemic and surging inflation have increased the cost of goods and labour, while farmers' earnings are down as squeezed consumers cut back.

And then there's the war next door. After Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, the EU granted tariff-free access for agricultural imports from Ukraine, many of them exempt from the strict environmental standards the bloc enforces on its own producers. Imports surged from 7 billion euros in 2021 to 13 billion euros the following year, causing gluts and undercutting farmers, particularly in Poland.

"Don't let up," Marion Maréchal, the lead candidate for France's extreme right Reconquest! party in the June elections, exhorted farmers at a protest earlier this year. "You have to be in the streets. You have to make yourself heard. You have to—" she tried to finish the sentence but was drowned out by shouts of "Don't Let Up! Don't Let Up!"

Fertile ground

Farming in Europe is about more than just food; it touches on identity. In France, the far right taps into the love of "terroir," that mythical combination of soil, location, culture and climate. "The French realise that the farmers are the roots of our society," said Maréchal.

Such sentiments echo across Europe. In Ireland, where more than a million people died in the famine of 1845-1852, farming "is deep in our culture, in our psyche," said Environment Minister Eamon Ryan, a Green Party lawmaker.

The far right has used farming as a way to attack mainstream parties. In Italy, the far right has mocked the EU's efforts to promote a low-carbon diet, playing on farmers' fears that labgrown proteins and insects could one day replace meat.

"Revolt is the language of those who are not listened to. Now, back off," warned far-right Italian lawmaker Nicola Procaccini in February. In a few months, he said, the European elections "will put people back in place of ideologies."



Protesting farmers dump a load of produce onto a main boulevard during a demonstration in Brussels, on March 26.

Democrat.

That's now changed. Once, billboards with the cry, "Save our farmers!" would have come from his party; now, they bear the logo of the far-right Flemish Interest, predicted by polls to become the biggest party in Belgium in June.

"In a sense it is only logical that the extreme parties have specialized in capturing that discontent. They call a spade a spade. And that is good," he said. But farming is complicated, he warned: nature, trade, budgets, commodity prices and geopolitics are all involved. Solutions will have to come from common sense, "not from the extremes."

Dochy's Christian Democrats are part of the biggest group in the EU parliament, the European People's Party, once a strong proponent of the EU's Green Deal. Farmers, after all, are among the biggest losers from climate change, affected at different times by flooding, wildfires, drought and extreme temperatures.

But ever since the demonstrations started, EU politics on agriculture and climate have shifted rightwards, outraging many of the centre right's old allies with whom it set up the Green Deal. Measures to reduce pesticide use and protect biodiversity have been weakened, while the protesters' demands to cut regulation have been heard.

But as the rhetoric heats up, so too does the climate. Data for early 2024 shows record-breaking temperatures in Europe. In Greece—where an estimated 1,750 square kilometres burned in 2023, the worst fire in EU records wildfires are already breaking out, weeks earlier than expected.

The far right offers no detailed solutions to the climate crisis but it has proved adept at tapping into farmers' frustrations. In its programme for the June elections, the Dutch far-right party, the PVV, is short on details but big on slogans about "climate hysteria" and its "tsunami of rules". Nature and climate laws, it said, "should not lead to whole sectors being forced into bankruptcy."

Ubels made the case for farmers' realpolitik.

"The government doesn't listen to us, but the opposition does," he said.

Arteta urges Arsenal to use Bayern 'pain' to fuel title bid

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE IUNICH, APRIL 18

Mikel Arteta has urged Arsenal to use the "pain" of the Champions League quarter-final exit against Bayern Munich to fuel their Premier League title bid

Arteta's side failed to clinch a first semi-final appearance since 2009 as Joshua Kimmich's second half header gave Bayern a 1-0 second leg win and a 3-2 aggregate success.

It was a bitter evening in Munich for Arteta and his players, who had dreamed of leading Arsenal to their maiden Champions League crown.

After a blistering run carried them to the top of the Premier League and into the Champions League last eight, Arsenal have endured a nightmare week. They were below their best in the 2-2 first leg draw with Bayern, then surrendered pole position in the Premier League after conceding two late goals in a 2-0 home defeat against Aston Villa on Sunday.

After producing another underwhelming display in Germany, Arteta has to find a way to lift his team's shattered morale in time for a last push for the English title.

"We were very close, that is the reality. It's painful, but we have to learn from this," Arteta said.

Arsenal have little time to lick their wounds, with the title race approaching a gripping conclusion.

Arteta's side are in second place, two points behind leaders Man City. Third placed Liverpool trail Arsenal on goal difference, with all three clubs having six games left.

With City playing Chelsea in the FA Cup semi-finals this weekend, the Gunners have a chance to return to first place if they win at Wolves on Saturday

Real Madrid adapt to Champions League needs: Shock and awe one week, armadillo defence the next

Carlo Ancelotti's team reached a record 17th semi-final and are on the course to add to their unequaled haul of 14 European Cups.



Andriy Lunin was Real Madrid's saviour on Wednesday night after stopping penalties by Manchester City's Bernardo Silva and Mateo Kovacic.

ASSOCIATED PRESS BARCELONA, APRIL 18

Antonio Rudiger stared down the goalkeeper, took a deep breath, and drilled home the decisive penalty, proving once again there is no tougher task in club football than beating Real Madrid in the Champions League.

Madrid's victory over Manchester City after a penalty shootout on Wednesday sent them to a record 17th semi-final appearance and kept them on course to add to their unequaled haul of 14 European Cups. It was fitting that Rudiger finished

off City after he anchored a spirited defensive effort by Madrid that weathered wave after wave of attacks by Pep Guardiola's side

For Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti, it was a question of survival.

"There was only one way to get out of here alive. We had to dig in and fight hard," Ancelotti said. "We showed the attitude and commitment demanded by this jersey. This is a very special competition for us and we always deliver something that people are not expecting us to produce. Everyone was writing us off but we're still here.

Those football purists who delight in Guardiola's passing-and-pressure game (think Barcelona fans) like to say Madrid lack a distinctive style. But as Ancelotti has said, he doesn't want his team to have a "set philosophy" that would make it predictable; his team must be chameleonic so it can adapt to each rivals, each game, each moment. Madrid's top scorer Jude

Bellingham credited Ancelotti with letting his players expose their individual talents in order to make the

team versatile. "I think our biggest strength is that he finds a way to let our boys play with freedom," Bellingham said.

City completely dominated the ball in the away leg of their quarter-final Manchester—even though they never led and needed Kevin De Bruyne to cancel out Rodrygo's opener-and hemmed mighty Madrid into their box for most of the match and extra time.

But Madrid showed that their strength lies in their ability to do whatever is needed to get a win. Ancelotti's bunch matched City's scoring prowess last week in the 3-3 draw in Spain's capital, and then at Etihad Stadium they had no qualms packing their area and hanging on for dear life.

Rudiger solidified his status as Madrid's sheriff at the back. The Germany player has also helped Madrid lead the Spanish league after fellow central defenders David Alaba and Eder Militao went down with injury earlier in the season.

Last season, when City beat Madrid in the semi-final on their way to winning the title, Rudiger was left on the bench at the start of a 4-0 loss in Manchester. This time, he played both legs that ended 4-4 on aggregate.

De Bruyne's equaliser came after Rudiger's only blemish of an otherwise superb outing when the City midfielder fired in a ball the defender failed to clear. Otherwise, Rudiger bossed the area and again kept Erling Haaland scoreless.

And when City's talented passers did manage to create a rare opening in Madrid's box, there was Andriy Lunin to stop them.

The Ukrainian goalkeeper entered the preseason as the backup to the injured Courtois Thibaut and had to

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE											
QUARTER-FINALS, SECOND LEGS											
In Munich, Germany											
Bayern Munich 1-0 Arsenal											
Bayern Munich w	in 3-2 o	n aggregate.									
In Manchester, England											
Man City 1-1 Real Madrid											
After extra time, 4-4 on aggregate;											
Real Madrid win 4-3 on penalties.											

earn the starting job after Kepa Arrizabalaga's arrival. Lunin was the team's saviour on Wednesday night after stopping penalties by Bernardo Silva and Mateo Kovacic. His saves tilted the shootout in Madrid's favour after Luka Modric missed their first kick.

Rudiger may have even played a part in Lunin's save of Kovacic's try Rudiger gestured to Lunin that Kovacic, who Rudiger played with at Chelsea, would shoot to Lunin's right—and he was right.

Lunin said he was "exhausted" after helping to defend 18 corners-to one for Madrid-and absorb 34 goal attempts by City.

"You can't always play with the ball or be the best team on the pitch,' Lunin said. "It was an amazing experience for me and the team put in an incredible effort for the 120 minutes.'

Guardiola praised his team's effort and recognised that to best Madrid, who also knocked his team out two years ago when Rodrygo sparked a late comeback, required more than just a good game.

"To beat Real Madrid, we had to perform our best," the Catalan coach said. "We were our best but it was not enough.'

Kantipur Half Marathon on May 18

SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU. APRIL 18

The 12th edition of the Kantipur Half Marathon is set to ignite the streets on May 18

Kantipur Media Group first organised the road-running event on February 19, 2011 to commemorate its 18th anniversary. The event has been continued annually since, establishing itself as one of the premier events in the country.

The one-day event features men's and women's half-marathons, a corporate run, and a wheelchair race, and sees participation of thousands of runners-including foreign nationals-every year.

The KMG has roped in Global IME

Bank as its chief sponsor for the event. Kantipur's Marketing Manager Sagar KC and Global IME Bank's Marketing Chief Dilip Pokharel signed a Memorandum of Understanding amid a function on Thursday.

"Kantipur Half Marathon has become a brand after more than a decade long journey. This event has been one of the top choices for numerous athletes," said KC.

"Runners eager to participate in the event can fill out a registration form from Kantipur Office in Thapathali and Global IME Bank's branch office in the capital," KC shared.

The registration will open on Sunday. The form can also be filled out through the Kantipur Half Marathon's official website, according to the KMG.

Global IME Bank's Marketing Chief Pokharel said he expects this year's Kantipur Half Marathon to be as grand as previous editions

Tournament's director and Nepal Athletics Association Member RK Bista highlighted that the Kantipur Half Marathon has drawn interest from all quarters of the society due to its distinct identity.

The event is organised with the technical assistance of the association.

Last year, Tribhuvan Army Club's Mukesh Pal and Nepal Police Club's Rajpura Pachhai won the men's and women's titles of the 21.1 km race respectively.



Kantipur Media Group's Marketing Manager Sagar KC (second right) and Global IME Bank's Marketing Chief Dilip Pokharel (second left) exchange an MoU during a function in Kathmandu on Thursday

HOROSCOPE

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LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) You'll feel more extroverted, this day elevates

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

CANCER (June 22-July 22)



Fune into your financial goals. This day you to make serious moves from behind the scenes, especially when it comes to investing in your sense of emotional security. Expand your horizons, don't be afraid to deviate from the norm.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)



Get ready to shine from the inside out. Networking opportunities could emerge in unexpected ways, though you should also take care to search for new avenues of connectivity. Be mindful to maintain composure this afternoon.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)



Go easy when mapping out social engagements for the next few weeks.Reconnect with yourself before another candle lands on your birthday cake.Think practically about your deepest desires, finding a healthy balance between logic and optimism.

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stablish new footing within your social sphere throughout the coming month. Use this energy to refine your public image, considering how to use the material realm to give you an edge when standing out.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

Climb steadily toward new heights throughout the coming month.e mindful to maintain patience as milestones appear on the horizon. New commitments, partnerships, or renegotiates could alter your trajectory, so don't be afraid to lean on your expertise.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Get ready for the most horizon expanding, opportunity granting, and spiritually enlightening time of the year for you, Virgo. The wheel of fortune spins in your direction. You'll find that it's easier to maintain balance while taking risks.

begin to feel slightly more serious Now is the time to stand firm in your quest for divine happiness, digging your roots deeper into people or situations that offer support while unapologetically cutting off that which does not.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

You may notice extra attention from new admirers and potential mates. Fully embrace your effortlessly magnetic aura, using charisma to help you move forward when it comes to love. Finding personal balance will come more easily.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)



Your wellness quests ramp up throughout the coming month. Don't hesitate to invest in classes, tools, or councils that offer more connivence and opportunities to live your best life, as long as they're healthy.



your social skills, confidence, and creativity. Put action behind your boldest and most artistic ideas.New friendships could be made, especially when obscure topics or interests are shared.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)



You'll be reminded of the importance of family and home today. Use this energy to connect with your intuitive and compassionate side, and consider returning to music, movies, or activities that unleash the child within.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)



Your mind should feel increasingly at ease. Use this energy to hold conversations you've been avoiding or finally pull the trigger on any passion projects your psyche has been nursing. Be wary of the tension that could brew midafternoon. AUSTROLOGY COM

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CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

Video games ushering in a new era of storytelling

From roleplaying to open world games, the evolution of gaming culture in the recent times has shifted perspectives on the ways of how stories can be told on screen.



An older video game player setup.

DR SAMUNDRA GURUNG

you're like me and grew up in the early 2000s, you'll remember the video game craze vividly. Back then, just the mention of video games conjured images of those square, bulky consoles, complete with AV jacks and the classic green cartridges often showing signs of wear and tear. These consoles were our gateway to entertaineekenas, much chagrin of our parents. I have many cherished memories of playing video games with my brother after school and on weekends. We'd eagerly trade cartridges with other kids in the neighborhood, each one holding the promise of exciting new adventures behind its distinctive green exterior Reflecting on those times and comparing them to today, it's striking how much video gaming has evolved. In the

now invest when developing a game. Today people understand its power and relevance in digital culture and thus also have dedicated sites in which people can access its content. Gaming sites like Twitch and YouTube Gaming give access to players to stream their gameplay with their audience. On these sites, even some of the no-commentary gameplay videos rake in millions of views! Gone are the days when story-SHUTTERSTOCK telling was confined to books or the silver screen. In this digital defeating enemies with straightage, video games have emerged as forward storylines. How, then, has a powerful medium for narrative the allure of video games trans-

exploration, offering experiences that captivate, challenge, and immerse players in unprecedented ways. Some might even argue that video games surpass film and cinema in digital storytelling prowess

weaving intricate narratives that

rival the depth of novels and the

spectacle of blockbuster films.

The power of the videogames as

an effective and immersive story-

telling medium can also be proved

by the cost and time companies

With the march of technology into the digital realm, video games have undergone a complete transformation over the years. Today's video games boast pi graphics, characters brimming with personality, and interactive environments that set them apart from their pixelated predecessors. The most thrilling aspect of video game storytelling lies in its boundless potential for innovation and experimentation. The future of storytelling holds immense promise, with technological advancements pushing the boundaries of what is achievable. Virtual reality (VR) allows users to step into narratives, immersing themselves in fully-realised worlds with unprecedented levels of presence. Augmented reality (AR) blurs the lines between the digital and physical realms, turning our surroundings into interactive storytelling canvases.

But it's not just technology that sets modern video games apart; the very way stories unfold within them has evolved. Linear plots and one-dimensional characters are relics of the past. Nowadays, players are treated to branching storylines, moral quandaries, and dynamic characters whose arcs develop based on player choices. Each dialogue option, every action taken, and every consequence faced weaves together to craft a unique narrative reflective of the player's own journey.

Video games have transcended mere entertainment; they stand at the forefront of storytelling, offering immersive experiences that go beyond passive observation and invite active participation. The immersive and interactive nature of video games places them firmly

at the vanguard of storytelling mediums. Looking ahead, it's evident that the narrative landscape is being reshaped by the dynamic interplay of technology, interactivity, and boundless creativity. In video games, the only limits to creation are those of our imagination, providing a level of immersion and agency unmatched by any other medium. Central to this evolution is the concept of player agency-the idea that the user's actions hold genuine sway within the game environment. This fundamental aspect of interactive storytelling transforms players from passive spectators into active participants, empowering them to shape the narrative according to their desires and moral compass. Whether it's determining a character's fate, forming alliances with unlikely allies, or grappling with the consequences of tough decisions, the player holds the reins, steering the story in thrilling and unexpected directions.

Consider the critically acclaimed game 'Resident Evil 2: Remake' as an example. It retells the story of Racoon City, set in a detailed world tinged with apocalyptic themes drawn from modern science, pharmaceutical companies, and government. The game follows the journey of Leon Scott Kennedy, a rookie cop on his first day, and Claire Redfield, a young woman searching for her missing brother. They navigate through a viral outbreak, transforming ordinary citizens into bloodthirsty zombies and mutated creatures known as BOWs (biological weapons), all within a morally ambiguous universe teeming with political intrigue, nightmarish creatures, and complex characters. This narrative encapsulates the essence of the "survival horror" genre, weaving a tale of rebellion, resistance, and resilience.

One of the most striking aspects of video game storytelling is its ability to foster empathy and emotional connections in ways previously thought unattainable. Games such as 'The Last of Us' and 'Life is Strange' have moved players to tears with their poignant narratives exploring themes of love, sorrow, and the human condition. These games immerse players in the shoes of the characters, eliciting emotional investment that surpasses passive consumption. This creates a profound link between player and character, one that is visceral and deeply meaningful.

Video games also act as a platform for representing countries or regions; even Nepal has found its place in video games. One notable example is 'Far Cry 4', which tells the story of Ajay Ghale, a young man returning to his homeland of Kyrat—a Himalayan region on the brink of chaos and revolution-to fulfil his mother's last wish. Upon his arrival, Ajay is drawn into a violent conflict between the oppressive regime of self-appointed king, Pagan Min, and the rebel forces striving to overthrow him. Caught in the middle, Ajay faces a series of difficult choices that will shape the destiny of Kyrat and its people. The game explores his struggle to honour tradition or embrace change and forge a new future for his homeland.

These games immerse players, eliciting emotional investment that surpasses passive consumption.

In video games, anything is possible! It's not just a story you witness-it's a story you live. This immersive experience defines modern video game storytelling, blurring the lines between player and protagonist, and breaking free from the confines of traditional narrative. Video games today offer not just escapism, but immersion; not just observation, but participation. As technology advances and boundaries are pushed, one thing is certain: the era of video game storytelling is just beginning. The stories yet to unfold are bound to be epic in every sense of the word. So, the next time you think about video games, get ready to lose yourself in a world where imagination knows no bounds!

Dr Gurung, who identifies as queer, is a doctor, artist, freelance writer and plant hobbyist based in Nepal.





past, it was all about navigating pixelated landscapes, jumping over obstacles, and

form of storytelling, albeit one where you're actively involved by pressing buttons or keys. Storytelling is ingrained in human nature; it's how we've communicated since time immemorial. Before the advent of film and cameras, stories were told through various mediums: books, songs, dance, and acting.

formed from simple pixels and

repetitive actions to the immer-

sive experiences we have today,

with realistic graphics and com-

found with a quick Google search,

video games are games played by

manipulating images on a comput-

er monitor or display. At their

unique

ore, video games offer

According to the definition

plex narratives?

In today's digital era, storytelling has adapted to suit the evolving population. While cinema and film often come to mind when we think of storytelling on screen, we mustn't overlook video games as a potent medium for digital narrative. Video games have evolved into captivating storytellers,

'The Last of Us' is a popular action-adventure video game series and media franchise created by Naughty Dog.

Henry Cavill's new film amps up a true-tale WWII heist

'Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare is based on the nonfiction book of the same name by Damien Lewis.

JAKE COYLE

he latest Guy Ritchie flick 'The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare' has a spine of true story to it, even if it does all it can to amplify a long-declassified World War II tale with enough dead Nazis to make 'Inglourious Basterds' blush.

The result is a jauntily entertaining film but also an awkward fusion. Ritchie's film, which opens in theaters Friday, takes the increasingly prolific director's fondness for swaggering, exploitation-style ultraviolence and applies it to a real-life stealth mission that would have been thrilling enough if it had been told with a little historical accuracy. In 2016, documents were declassified that detailed Operation Postmaster, during which a small group of British special operatives sailed to the West African island of Fernando Po, then a Spanish colony, in the Gulf of Guinea. Spain was then neutral in the war, which made the Churchillapproved gambit audacious. In January 1942, they snuck into the port and sailed off with several ships-including the Italian merchant vessel Duchessa d'Aosta-that were potentially being used in Atlantic warfare.

Sounds like a pretty good movie, right? The story even features James Bond author Ian Fleming, giving it more than enough grist for a WWII whopper. 'Operation Postmaster' makes for a better title, too, than the ungainly 'The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare'. Ritchie, however, already has an operationlast year's 'Operation Fortune: Ruse de Guerre'—in his filmography.

Ritchie, who turned Sherlock Holmes into a bulked-up action star, has always preferred to beef up his movies. It's a less-noted side effect of the superhero era that regular ol' heroes have been supersized, too, as if human-sized endeavours aren't quite enough anymore. And 'The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare', in which a handful of operatives kill approximately a thousand Nazis, has a fine, brawny duo in Henry Cavill and Alan Ritchson.

In the movie's opening scene, they're relaxing on a small ship in the Atlantic when Germans rush aboard. After a few laughs and a Nazi monologue that plays like a poor man's

version of Christoph Waltz's masterful oration in 'Inglourious Basterds', the duo makes quick mincemeat of them, leaving blood splattered across the henley shirt of Anders Lassen (Ritchson, a charming standout).

Not much has changed in Ritchie-land, though he's swapped tweed for skintight tees and cable-knit sweaters in a rollicking highseas adventure. As in the director's previous movies, everyone-and, as before, nearly all male-seems to be having a good time. Likewise, Ritchie revels in his characters' debonair nonchalance while meting out all manner of savagery.

The assembled group of operatives are said to be delinquents and misfits, though they steadfastly adhere to the polite manners of past Ritchie protagonists. They may kill with bloodthirsty impunity but what really matters is upholding an old-school sense of style. When the undercover agents Marjorie Stewart (Eiza González, who silkily cuts like a knife through the film) and Mr Heron (Babs Olusanmokun, excellent) ride a Nazicontrolled train on their way to Fernando Po, they look in disgust at the German sausages they're served. Later, someone will say, "I hate Nazis not because they're Nazis but because they're so gauche.'

- Associated Press

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AP/RSS

Eiza Gonzalez in a

scene from the film