



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXXII No. 65 | 8 pages | Rs.5  
Tuesday, April 23, 2024 | 11-01-2081

40.9° C 4.5° C  
Bhairahawa Jumla

## Deepfakes of Bollywood stars spark worries of AI meddling in polls

ADITYA KALRA, MUNSI VENGATTIL & DHWANI PANDYA/REUTERS  
MUMBAI, APRIL 22

In fake videos that have gone viral online, two of India's A-listers Bollywood actors are seen criticizing Prime Minister Narendra Modi and asking people to vote for the opposition Congress party in the country's ongoing general election.

In a 30-second video that shows Aamir Khan and another 41-second clip of Ranveer Singh, the two Bollywood actors purportedly say Modi failed to keep campaign promises and failed to address critical economic issues during his two terms as prime minister.

Both AI-generated videos end with the Congress election symbol and slogan: "Vote for Justice, Vote for Congress".

The two videos have been viewed on social media more than half a million times since last week, a Reuters review shows.

Their spread underlines the potential role such AI (artificial intelligence)-generated content can play in the mammoth Indian election that started on Friday and will continue until June. AI and AI-generated fakes, or deepfakes, are being increasingly used in elections elsewhere in the world, including in the US, Pakistan and Indonesia.

Campaigning in India has long focused on door-to-door outreach and public rallies, but extensive use of WhatsApp and Facebook as campaigning tools started in 2019. This year's general election—in which Modi is expected to secure a rare third term—is the first in which AI is being used.

>> Continued on page 2



Depositors defrauded of their savings by various cooperatives in Kaski take to the streets in Pokhara on Monday, demanding the return of their money and action against those involved in the embezzlement. They accuse Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane of obstructing fair investigations into the scam. (Report on page 2)

## Nepal to test Indian spice brands for pesticides after Hong Kong, Singapore ban

Consumer rights activists demand immediate recall of the tainted products.

ARJUN POUDEL  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 22

After Hong Kong and Singapore banned the sale of Indian spice brands MDH and Everest Masala, Nepal's food regulatory body, the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control, has said it will test samples of the said products.

The two islands banned the sale of the products this month after allegedly detecting the carcinogenic pesticide

ethylene oxide beyond permissible levels in the spice mixes.

"We will test [the products] to determine the level of pesticides they contain," said Dr Matina Joshi Vaidhya, director general at the department. "Necessary action will be taken if the said products exceed acceptable pesticide limits."

The food regulatory agency of Hong Kong had allegedly found that three MDH products—Madras Curry Powder, Sambhar Masala Mixed Masala Powder,

Curry Powder Mix Masala Powder—and Everest's Fish Curry Masala contained the pesticide ethylene oxide, which is classified as a Group 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

The Singapore Food Agency has also ordered Everest's Fish Curry Masala to be recalled from the market as it contains the same pesticide, which is prohibited for use in food, beyond acceptable limits.

>> Continued on page 2

## Five MoUs to be signed during Qatar emir's visit

Nepal plans to raise migrant workers' concerns including full insurance coverage, and request a labour accord.

ANIL GIRI  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 22

Kathmandu is all set to welcome the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on Tuesday with the government announcing a public holiday. Many social media users have criticised the government decision to declare a holiday as unnecessary.

The government has, however, defended its decision. A senior official at the Ministry of Home Affairs said such a holiday is in line with a tradition Nepal has been observing for several years.

"At the invitation of President Ramchandra Paudel, the Emir of Qatar is paying a State Visit to Nepal and on this occasion, as per the Cabinet decision, a public holiday has been announced for Tuesday throughout the country," a notice issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs reads.

After the President receives the emir at Kathmandu airport, the emir will later call on President Paudel at the President's Office. The two leaders will then head to Hotel Soaltee for a state banquet hosted by the President in honour of the state guest.

The emir's delegation will have 80 members including 10 incumbent ministers. Several members of the Qatari security team are already in Kathmandu and are staying at two hotels where two major functions are being held, according to a senior security official.

This will be the first high-level visit to Nepal from the Gulf nation, which hosts approximately 400,000 Nepali migrant workers, and the government has accordingly decided to accord him high honour as per the set protocol, said the officials.

Prime Minister Dahal will seek Qatari funds for hydropower and infrastructure projects.

President Paudel and the emir will hold talks on Tuesday evening, followed by a state banquet.

Announcing the visit on Sunday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal will lead the Nepali delegation in the bilateral talks.

>> Continued on page 2



Scan, pay and go with QR Payments now using SC Mobile App

Download SC Mobile App now

\*TSC Apply  
\*Payment facility available with Nepalgunj

Scan to download



**Warm Welcome**  
to His Highness Emir of the State of Qatar  
**TAMIM BIN HAMAD AL THANI**  
&  
Distinguished Qatari Guests

**Long Live Nepal Qatar Friendship!**

**RAJENDRA KUMAR (R.K.) SHARMA**  
Founder/CEO

**PIGEON ENGINEERING GROUP OF COMPANY**  
Kathmandu, Nepal | Doha, Qatar




DISTRICT DIGEST

Drunken man sets fire to his own house

**GULMI:** On Monday, police arrested a 59-year-old man from Rajasthal in ward 6 in Dhurkot Rural Municipality on the charge of threatening to set fire to his neighbour's house. But the man, who was under the influence of alcohol, accidentally burned his own house down on Sunday night, according to Deputy Superintendent of Police Shankar Pokharel of Gulmi District Office. The man's wife who was trapped inside the house on fire was rescued by the local police. The man is in custody now, and action will be taken against him as per the law after further investigation, said Pokharel.

Sankhuwasabha moms, babies medevacuated to Kathmandu

**SANKHUWASABHA:** Two postpartum mothers and their two newborns were medevacuated to Kathmandu-based Paropak Maternity and



Women's Hospital from the Sankhuwasabha District Hospital by a helicopter of the Nepal Army on Monday. According to Bhawani Timsina, coordinator of the Safe Motherhood Programme of the District Health Office, under the federal government's President Women Upliftment Programme, a woman from ward 4 of Silichong Rural Municipality and her four-day-old baby, and a woman from Chichila Rural Municipality and her two-day-old baby were airlifted after their treatment was not possible at the district hospital. The women and their babies will be treated free of cost at the Maternity Hospital, said Timsina.

Driver dies in a road accident

**SANKHUWASABHA:** A tractor driver from ward 2 of Chichila Rural Municipality died on the spot, and the assistant driver got injured in a road accident near Chyangkute Hill in the rural municipality going from Khandbari to Chichila on Monday. According to the police, the accident occurred when the driver was over-speeding on a narrow rural road in bad condition. The vehicle fell some 200 metres down the road and killed the driver. The assistant driver from the same ward is receiving treatment at a local health facility in the rural municipality, said police.

# Victims of cooperatives scam take to streets in Pokhara

DEEPAK PARIYAR  
POKHARA, APRIL 22

People defrauded by various savings cooperatives staged a demonstration in Pokhara on Monday demanding action against those involved in embezzling public deposits. The protesters said they were compelled to hit the streets as the government did not take any concrete initiative to resolve the problems of cooperatives victims.

The depositors united under the banner of the Cooperative Depositors Victims Struggle Committee marched from the Kaski District Police Office in Gairapatan to Kaski District Administration Office, passing through the Pokhara Metropolitan City Office and New Road.

The victims marched carrying placards and banners with various slogans demanding action against cooperative operators who have failed to return money to depositors, and those on the run.

The protesters chanted slogans against Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane accusing him of protecting GB Rai, a prime accused in cooperatives frauds. "Rabi dai knows well where GB Rai is," a placard read. They accused

Lamichhane of protecting Rai and being reluctant in resolving the issues of the victims of cooperatives scam.

Depositors of six cooperatives of Kaski, whose operators have been chargesheeted in a fraud case filed at the district court, joined the protest march. The depositors of other cooperatives also participated in the demonstrations. Many nursing mothers carrying their babies and senior citizens were among those participating in the march, demanding return of their deposits and action against the guilty.

The depositors of Surya Darshan, Image, Mitra Milan, Balidani, Shiva Shikhar and Bindhybasini saving and cooperatives have formed the Cooperative Depositors Victims Struggle Committee and started launching a pressure programme.

Rai, who is on the run, has been accused of illegally transferring the deposits of thousands of people from various cooperatives to invest in his Gorkha Media Network. Home Minister Lamichhane, who is also the chairman of the Rastriya Swatantra Party, served as the managing director of the media company before joining politics.

The protesters submitted memorandums to the Kaski District Police Office, the Pokhara Metropolitan City

and the Kaski District Administration Office with their demands.

After going around Pokhara city, the protest march culminated into a corner meeting. Addressing the gathering, chairman of the struggle committee Kiran Shrestha said that Lamichhane had promised to return the victims' deposits even from state coffers.

A 10-member delegation of the cooperatives' victims from Pokhara had met with Minister Lamichhane at his ministry in Kathmandu on April 9.

"During the visit Lamichhane reiterated that he was not involved in the cooperative funds misuse, stating that he just worked at Galaxy TV. He assured that preparations were on to release Rs 1-2 billion from the state's treasury and to return the deposits of genuine victims," said Shrestha. According to him, Lamichhane had also expressed his commitment to nab GB Rai within three to four weeks.

Shrestha claimed that the police investigation into the cooperative frauds had been hindered since Lamichhane was appointed the home minister. "The regulatory bodies and police administration are unwilling to provide justice to the victims due to the influence of the ruling political parties," he said.

# Group urges Nepal to stress worker benefits with Qatar

>> Continued from page 1

The prime minister will host a luncheon in honour of the emir and the visiting delegation on Wednesday. After this the two countries will sign several memorandums of understanding. "Initially, we proposed to sign around nine to ten agreements, but they have been trimmed down to five," spokesperson at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amrit Rai, told the Post.

On Monday, the Cabinet approved two memorandums of understanding related to higher education and scientific research—a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of youth and sports, and another on higher education and scientific research. Three other MoUs are in other fields. Besides signing agreements, Nepal is also gifting two elephants to the Qatar emir.

"The visit will open more vistas of cooperation between the two sides. We hope that after the visit, more tourists will come to visit Nepal. The visit of the Emir of Qatar will for sure positively impact our tourism sector. During the talks, more issues of mutual interest will be discussed," said Rai.

According to the government officials privy to the visit, the Nepali side will raise the issues and plights of Nepali workers in Qatar, request the signing of a new labour agreement, and provision of a comprehensive insurance coverage for Nepali migrant workers in the Gulf nation.

Currently, Qatar provides insurance for Nepali migrant workers only during work hours, and we will make a case for extending this coverage round-the-clock, a senior official at the Ministry of Labour told the Post.

Early on Monday, the New York-based Human Rights Watch issued a press statement urging Bangladesh (where the Emir went first) and Nepal "to prioritise labour protections for migrant workers" during Al-Thani's visit. "It is important for Qatar, Bangladesh, and Nepal to go beyond exchanging diplomatic pleasantries over their longstanding labour ties and seize this moment to publicly commit to concrete, enforceable protections that address the serious abuses that migrant workers in Qatar continue to face," the statement quoted Michael Page, deputy Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch, as saying.

During the delegation-level talks in Kathmandu, Prime Minister Dahal will request the Qatari delegation to invest in various sectors like hydro-power, infrastructure and state-of-the-art stadiums in Nepal.

As Qatar is rich and has expertise

in building large infrastructure projects, we will ask them to invest in big projects in Nepal as well as in building a football or cricket stadium," said Nepali officials familiar with the visit agenda.

Similarly, Prime Minister Dahal has already stated that he will seek Qatar's support and intervention for the safe release of Nepali student Bipin Joshi, who has been held hostage by Hamas militants since October 7 last year.

**Prime Minister Dahal says he will ask Qatar to help release Bipin Joshi from Hamas captivity.**

Joshi, who had reached Israel under the 'learn and earn' programme was caught up in the war on October 7 when Hamas militants raided southern Israel and killed hundreds of Israelis. Joshi's whereabouts remain unknown. Ten Nepali nationals were killed and at least a dozen Nepali students were injured during the Hamas attack on Israel. Qatar has been trying to mediate a hostage release deal between Israel and Hamas.

Meanwhile, the two elephants to be gifted to the Qatar monarch are two and five years old, said Badri Raj Dhungana, spokesperson at the Ministry of Forest. The Cabinet has yet to make a formal decision regarding the gifting of the animals.

A proposal of gifting two elephants has reached the Cabinet via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"Since elephants fall under the category of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), no side can give and accept elephants without prior approval from CITES headquarters in Geneva. We have already obtained permission, but as far as I know, the Qatari side was waiting for Geneva's approval. As soon as the permission is obtained, we will present the elephants to the emir," said Dhungana. The two elephants Khagendra Prasad and Rudrakali have been bred in Chitwan. "Our people also visited the royal zoo of Qatar, and the Qatari officials visited the breeding centre in Chitwan," said Dhungana.

Khagendra is five years old and Rudrakali is three years old. Earlier Nepal used to gift only rhinos, crocodiles and other animals. Nepal has already given 26 rhinos as presents to foreign dignitaries and other offices.

# Nepal to lab test tainted Indian spice brands

>> Continued from page 1

MDH is an Indian spice producer and seller based in New Delhi. Everest Food Products Pvt Ltd (Everest Spices) is an Indian manufacturer, distributor and exporter of ground spices and spice mixtures.

Experts say the presence of ethylene oxide, which is a flammable colourless gas with a sweet odour, in the spices, is quite concerning, as varieties of the products of both the companies are easily available in Nepal and are popular among the people. Ethylene oxide is used primarily to produce other chemicals, including antifreeze. In smaller amounts, ethylene oxide is used as a pesticide and sterilising agent.

Lymphoma and Leukaemia are the cancers most frequently associated with occupational exposure to ethylene oxide. Stomach and breast cancers may also be lined with ethylene oxide



exposure.

Vaidhya said countries have their own acceptable limits of pesticide use and if the said products are found crossing limits set by the department, it will direct authorities concerned to recall the products from the market.

Consumer rights activists say that authorities concerned must take urgent action as the issue is related to public health.

"As the products that were found to be hazardous to public health in Hong

Kong and Singapore are widely available in Nepal too, it would be irresponsible to wait for a test report to prohibit their use," Jyoti Baniya, chairman of the Forum for Protection of Consumer Rights, said.

"A public notice should immediately be issued to prevent the sale of the products and to recall them from the market," Baniya added. "It will be too late to wait for the report—we should not forget that this is directly linked to public health."

# Indian authorities take on deepfake election campaign content on social media

>> Continued from page 1

A Congress spokesperson, Sujata Paul, shared actor Singh's video with her 16,000 followers on X on April 17 and by Saturday afternoon, her post had been reshared 2,900 times, liked 8,700 times and received 438,000 views.

Paul told Reuters by telephone she was aware the video was marked "manipulated media" by X, but she did not want to delete it as, while posting, she thought the person was a look alike of Singh and "it has creativity for sure".

The post was no longer visible on X on Sunday, hours after Reuters sent a request for comment to Congress' head of social media cell, who did not respond.

Both actors have said the videos are fake. Facebook, X and at least eight fact-checking websites have said they are altered or manipulated, which the Reuters digital verification unit has also confirmed.

Reuters could not ascertain who created the videos. Khan was "alarmed" by the viral "fake" video and Singh's team was looking into the matter, according to a spokesperson for both actors. Singh wrote on X on Friday: "Beware of deepfakes, friends". Modi's office, and the IT head of his Bharatiya Janata Party, did not respond to requests for comment.

Police probe

Nearly 900 million people in India have access to the Internet and a survey conducted by research organization Esya Centre and the Indian Institute of Management business school showed an average Indian spends over three hours a day on social media. The country has nearly one billion voters.

Some versions of the videos have been blocked on social media but at least 14 were still visible on X on Saturday. Facebook deleted two videos Reuters

flagged to the company but one other was still visible.

Facebook in a statement said it has "removed the videos" for violation of its policies. X did not respond to Reuters queries.

The videos have sparked one police investigation with Khan registering a case in Mumbai against unnamed persons on April 17 for alleged impersonation and cheating for creating the fake video.

Mumbai police did not return a request for comment, but two officers working on Khan's case, who declined to be named, said they wrote to Facebook and X to take down the video and the companies

had said it was done.

The officers said they were up until 2 am on Friday, refreshing pages to check if Khan's online videos were removed. Asked about progress in the case, one of them said: "Such technical investigations take time."

AI video of dead father

In this year's election, politicians are using AI in other ways.

In southern India, Congress leader Vijay Vasanth's spokesperson said his team has created a 2-minute audio-video clip using AI that was shared on social media platforms and shows his now dead but more popular politician father, H Vasanthakumar, seeking votes for him.

The late politician is seen saying "even though my body left you all, my

soul is still around."

In videos put out on YouTube by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM), Samata, an AI-generated anchor dressed in a traditional saree and speaking in a style that mimics regular news channels, criticizes the ruling party in West Bengal state.

In one clip, the anchor alleges the party does not care about the environment as many water bodies have vanished due to illegal construction.

A spokesperson for the ruling party denied the allegation and said the state government has ensured no such construction takes place. The CPM did not respond to requests for comment.

In the video, which has been seen 12,000 times, anchor Samata declares: "These are questions that we the citizens of this city need to ponder over."



Global IME Bank  
ग्लोबल इमे बैंक लि.  
The Bank For All



presents KANTIPUR

## Half-Marathon 2024



**RUN TO INSPIRE THE YOUNG**

HALF MARATHON 21.1 KMS  
CORPORATE RUN 5 KMS  
WHEELCHAIR RACE 3 KMS  
COLLEGE RUN 7 KMS



**JESTHA 5**  
18 MAY, 2024

**REGISTRATION IS OPEN**

TIME : 10AM - 5 PM  
CONTACT : 01-5135019 | +977-01-5135000  
LOCATION : CENTRAL BUSINESS PARK, THAPATHALI

HCCN presents Lumbini Conclave's message to Foreign Minister Shrestha

The event held in March saw presence of honorary consuls and consul generals from 45 countries.



POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 22

Honorary Consular Corps Nepal (HCCN) on Monday presented a 'message of peace' issued during the Lumbini Conclave on Global Peace and Prosperity to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Narayan Kaji Shrestha.

The message, issued following the conclave held in March, has been signed by Minister Shrestha, Foreign Secretary Sewa Lamsal and all honorary consuls and consul generals in Kathmandu.

Addressing the handover ceremony held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister Shrestha lauded the outcome of the conclave and added that the ministry is ready for further partnership. Speaking at the ceremony HCCN Dean Vishnu Agarwal said the conclave was successful in delivering the message of peace from the birthplace of Buddha.

Organised by HCCN in Lumbini on March 21-23 in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the event saw the participation of honorary consuls and consul generals from 45 countries. The conclave championed dialogue over discord, empathy over enmity, and compassion over conflict, stressing the imperative of collective efforts towards human progress, peace and development, HCCN said in a statement.

# Oli, Dahal against communist reunification in haste

During the Diamond Jubilee celebration of Nepal Communist Party, the two leaders hinted at the need for left unity, albeit cautiously.

PURUSHOTTAM POUDEL  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 22

When Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal kicked out Nepali Congress from his coalition and embraced the CPN-UML on March 4, many political pundits interpreted the development as a course correction by two communist leaders who had parted ways three years ago following bitter disputes.

The dramatic turn of events that led to the chairmen of the three communist parties—KP Sharma Oli of the CPN-UML, Dahal of the Maoist Centre and Madhav Kumar Nepal of the CPN (Unified Socialist)—coming together had many assume that the coalition was a prelude to communist unification.

The three leaders were in the Nepal Communist Party—formed after unifying the CPN-UML and Maoist Centre in 2018 following an electoral alliance in 2017. The unity among the two largest parties, however, didn't last for more than three years.

As there are speculations about communist unity, this time around, the leaders seem cautious while speaking on reunification.

Prime Minister and chair of the Maoist Centre Dahal and CPN-UML chair Oli on Monday expressed similar views on the reunification of communist parties.

While addressing the 'Diamond Jubilee' of establishment of the Nepal Communist Party, the two leaders said that this time around they wouldn't go for party unity in a haste.

In 2017, the two largest communist parties—the CPN-UML and the Maoist Centre—forged a pre-poll alliance and later unified the party. The parties together garnered almost a two-thirds majority in the federal parliament and Oli ran the first-ever communist majority government in the country. However, the party was embroiled in a feud between the factions led by the top leaders.

Possibly, learning from the experience, Prime Minister Dahal, while addressing the event on Monday, said that they are not in a mood for communist unity immediately.

"Now we are not in favour of communist unity, unlike in the past," Prime Minister Dahal said. "I feel like we were a little too enthusiastic when we unified the party last time, but this time around we are focusing on



Nepal's top political leaders pictured at the Diamond Jubilee of the establishment of Nepal Communist Party in Godavari, Lalitpur, on Monday.

cooperation to lay the ground for party unity."

Good cooperation among the communist bloc in the present government can pave the way for the party unity in the future, Dahal said.

However, earlier in the day, Dahal's message on the same issue was different while addressing a separate function in the presence of Madhav Kumar Nepal.

Inaugurating the third annual central assembly meeting held by the Nar Bahadur Karmacharya Memorial Foundation at Chyasal, Lalitpur, Prime Minister Dahal emphasised unity between the communist forces.

"The unity and cooperation among the communist parties of Nepal is necessary and the communist leaders should be ready even to take risks for that," Prime Minister Dahal said. "We must take a risk for the unity of the communist parties, for national integrity and for the future of the commu-

nists. And we are on that path."

Dahal, however, changed his tone in the event where Oli was present.

CPN-UML chair Oli is more cautious about making announcements about communist unity. "If the communist leaders express their

Council, party chair Oli expressed his reluctance to endorse the agenda of communist unity. Oli preferred alliance among like-minded forces over left polarisation.

"Cooperation among like-minded parties is what we need," Oli's political report read. "But it is neither necessary nor beneficial to have polarisation of the communist or the socialist forces."

Oli further highlighted the need to foster trust and cooperation among various ideological groups, suggesting unity should evolve naturally as trust deepens.

He, however, didn't rule out unity among like-minded forces. "As cooperation between the parties deepens and an environment of trust is built, those like-minded parties gradually can come together," he said.

On Monday, Oli repeated the same message on communist unity. "This is not a time for communist unity; rath-

CPN-UML chair Oli is more cautious about making announcements about communist unity.

desire for party unity not long after the split, a question will immediately be raised as to why we had split earlier," Oli said.

On April 20, while presenting his political report at a meeting of the CPN-UML's National Representatives

We Welcome  
HIS HIGHNESS  
**SHEIKH TAMIM BIN HAMAD AL THANI**  
Emir of the State of QATAR

A two-day historical state visit of Emir of the State of Qatar will strengthen Nepal-Qatar friendship to a new level. As a Nepali community in Qatar, we are proud and extremely happy with this visit.

**RAMESH BHATTA**  
President  
Non-Resident Nepalese Association, NCC, Qatar

We Welcome  
HIS HIGHNESS  
**SHEIKH TAMIM BIN HAMAD AL THANI**  
Emir of the State of QATAR

A two-day historical state visit of Emir of the State of Qatar will strengthen Nepal-Qatar friendship to a new level. As a Nepali community in Qatar, we are proud and extremely happy with this visit.

**MAHENDRA PRASAD CHAMLAGAI**  
President  
Nepal Business Association Qatar LLC (G)

## OPINION



## OUR VIEW

## Not how it works

The undue involvement of province heads and speakers in provincial politics is most troubling.

Nepal's unitary politics was badly ridden with anomalies. The same can be said about its provincial politics under a federal system today. Political parties and leaders, who endlessly bicker over power sharing, have now started involving province heads and speakers in their plans to unconstitutionally grab power. The emergence of repeated controversies involving speakers and province heads is concerning as the holders of these two positions are expected to play neutral roles in provincial assemblies and governments. The federal system cannot function if province speakers and province heads act as no more than stooges of politicians at the centre.

Cases accusing provincial speakers and province heads of the breach of the constitution are queuing up in the Supreme Court. They are accused of violating the constitution to help leaders from the political parties close to them to form governments. On Sunday, Laxman Kishore Chaudhary of Nagarik Unmukti Party moved the apex court to challenge the appointment of Dirgha Sodari as Sudurpaschim chief minister. Chaudhary accused Province Head Najir Miya of preventing him from becoming chief minister despite him having a clear majority in his favour. A petition against the formation of the Khagaraj Adhikari-led government in Gandaki Province was filed at the top court earlier this month. The case is sub-judice too.

Last year, the role of Speaker in Koshi Province was questioned in the course of forming the Uddhav Thapa-led government. It was challenged in the Supreme Court, which eventually adjudicated the speaker's involvement as unconstitutional, as the Speaker was involved in the voting process to put together a majority in favour of Thapa of the Nepali Congress. The then CPN-UML challenged the act in the top court. This year, the UML resorted to similar tactics and Congress moved the court against that. The province, as a result, is headed for another bout of constitutional complications. These are representative cases. Similar controversies were seen even in previous years.

No doubt the Supreme Court is the final interpreter of the constitution. While the judiciary's involvement should be rare and the last resort to arbitrate political issues, Nepal's court has been routinely invited to settle them. And the politicians often deride the judiciary when the verdicts don't favour them. The federal government appoints provincial heads. It might seem normal for the federal government to place its representative in the provinces in order to ensure a level of harmony between the two tiers of government. Yet trying to use them as the henchmen of top politicians at the centre is a grave betrayal of the new constitution.

The constitution envisions provincial heads and speakers as neutral positions. The province heads work in a way the President functions at the centre. The constitution has entrusted them with other vital roles as well. It states that in case there is no provincial executive because of the enforcement of federal governance, the provincial head shall exercise the executive power of the province as directed by the federal government. It is the first duty of the province heads and speakers to work as key officials of the state agencies, not as leaders' yesmen. In order to preserve their sanctity, they should refuse to be top politicians' partners in crimes. Only if the respective federal actors honestly act their roles will the system function and the provinces thrive.

## THEIR VIEW

## Heatwave impacts

Destruction of nature is worsening the situation.

Given the intensity of the ongoing heatwave, we remain concerned about the health and wellbeing of the people. According to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, a very severe heatwave is sweeping over Jashore and Chuadanga, while a severe one is occurring in Dhaka division, parts of Khulna division, and Rajshahi and Pabna districts. As per a report in this daily, Jashore overtook Chuadanga with the highest temperatures in the country, recorded at 42.6 degrees Celsius at 4:00pm on Saturday. Chuadanga, of course, was not far behind at 42.3 degrees Celsius recorded around the same time.

With scorching heat disrupting life all across the country, the Met issued a 72-hour nationwide heat alert, which has been extended till April 22. Meanwhile, all primary and secondary schools as well as National University-affiliated colleges are thankfully to remain closed till April 27 due to the heatwave. As we can imagine, those who must be outside for the sake of their livelihoods even during this intense weather, such as farmers, rickshaw pullers, traffic police, are getting the worst of it. And the impacts of the heatwave on people in general are already visible as more patients are reportedly going into hospitals with issues such as diarrhoea, headache, sore throat, shortness of breath, etc.

By now it is obvious that extreme weather events such as untimely heatwaves may become the new norm the world over. Therefore, it is essential that our policies and future planning be framed according to this new reality. Our cities in particular should be designed to provide plenty of shade to those working outside. We need to expand green spaces, cover heat-producing pavements and build roofs with green canopies. Unfortunately, however, we continue to see trees being mindlessly cut down all across the country, when it is trees that can provide us the best shelter from these events. The prime minister herself has repeatedly urged citizens to plant more trees to shield the country from the varied impacts of climate change. Yet, at the same time, we see the authorities failing to prevent the felling of trees, as well as fell trees themselves in the name of development.

We must keep in mind that the severe discomfort being faced by people due to the ongoing heatwave could have been better mitigated. Regions like Sylhet, for example, are facing a milder heatwave and experiencing rain daily because of having wider tree cover overall than, say, Dhaka. This should serve as an important lesson for the authorities, and bring an end to mindless environmental destruction that simply adds to the severity of extreme weather events and their overall damage. Moving forward, we must prepare for such weather conditions and plan our cities accordingly to shelter people from the heat, not bare them further to extreme elements. Additionally, rehydration facilities for people should be set up wherever possible.

— The Daily Star (Bangladesh)/ANN

## Costs of missing construction code

A strong "code of conduct" on public construction can help improve the socio-economic life of Nepal.

ACHYUT WAGLE



The road network is pivotal for moving goods and people across the hinterlands in Nepal, more so because the landlocked country lacks water transport and has a limited stretch of railways. The United States Congressional Research Service defines infrastructure as "physical networks (systems and facilities) that provide functions and services to the community". It further says that the codes related to transportation, energy, communications and water infrastructures ensure "the safe operation of and uninterrupted services, as well as resiliency, efficiency, environmental protection, and other aspects of infrastructure performance."

Nepal has the lowest road density in the world, with 47 km of road per 100 square km and 2.5 km of road per 1,000 people. Even more critical is the "performance" of the existing road infrastructure. One key bottleneck is road service efficiency in terms of travel time, passenger comfort and value for money.

## Always under construction

These days, it takes at least 10 hours to cover the 200 km distance from the national capital, Kathmandu, to the recently declared tourism capital, Pokhara. The 114-km Narayangadh-Butwal section of the East-West highway takes five hours of travel. An hour is the minimum bet to cover a 15-km length of the Suryabinayak-Dhulikhel section of the Arniko highway. The authorities' excuses are simple: These roads are under improvement/expansion! But, literally for years?

Along the Kathmandu-Pokhara road, an underpass Nagdhunga tunnel is under construction at the western outlet from the Kathmandu valley, with simultaneous expansion of the Nagdhunga-Naubise road for the last two years. On the other stretch, the Mugling-Pokhara road expansion has been underway for the last three years. The Narayangadh-Butwal road expansion should have been completed by now, but only 38 percent of the work has reportedly been completed in the contract period of the last three years.

These are only a few glaring exam-



POST PHOTO: RAMESH KUMAR POULDEL

ples. Generally speaking, it has become impossible to imagine travelling even a two-km stretch of road anywhere in the country without a pothole, unexpected bumps or even a disfigured fresh blacktop. As such, the principle of "uninterrupted service" while major highways go for expansion or renovation is blatantly compromised across the entire policy space, at a massive cost burden on the national economy and people's social lives.

Chronic underinvestment and poor management of road systems, coupled with the absence of a comprehensive code to regulate road development, repair, expansion, and improvement, have become hindrances to commuters' and transporters' rights to safe and efficient travel.

## Regulatory framework

What is lacking strikingly is the mandatory provision for unhindered and uncompromised movement of vehicles to be complied with by the contracting parties while repairing and expanding the key highways. While developing the detailed project reports, the cost is invariably added to make arrangements for appropriate diversions or alternative routes where quality and time are comparable to the original roads. However, to save this cost, the contractors force the vehicles to ply through dugout roads and the regulators turn a blind eye to the plight of millions of travellers in obvious vested interests.

The Department of Roads is the pivotal central agency governing the roads. Also in existence is the Road Board Nepal, with a repair and maintenance mandate. The main guiding law for the sector is the Public Roads Act 1974. Section 14(b) of the Act implicitly

conceives the idea of building "a separate road of a temporary kind as required to continue the traffic or movement", but it fails to make it unequivocally mandatory for the parties involved in the construction to ensure uninterrupted and timely flow of traffic.

After restructuring the state, several provinces have replicated the same Act but without much improvement given the increasing public nuisance created by the roughness of roads "under construction" for years.

## Coordination missing

Another shade of regulatory failure is evident in the absolute lack of coordination among the government entities responsible for providing public utilities. They are competing in flouting the laws. Section 29 of the same Act states, "If any office of the Government of Nepal has to dig a public road or road border for any work, it has to dig by obtaining approval of the Department of Roads, and such an office has also to observe the method (norms) or terms, if any, prescribed by the Department of Roads in relation to so digging the road or road border".

Similarly, Section 20 states that in the case of a person, "the Department of Roads... may give permission by taking a deposit of the expenses that may be incurred in maintaining and restoring into its original form of the public road or road border to be so dug or demolished". But the provision falls short of a similar degree of requirement with regard to state-owned enterprises.

## Implications

These provisions, though, are barely followed. For instance, the city roads

indiscriminately dug by the Melamchi Water Supply Project are never properly restored. Adding to this is the Nepal Electricity Authority, currently digging the roads to lay the 1,147-km underground cable in the Kathmandu Valley for electricity supply. In addition to unexpected traffic congestion due to unplanned and haphazard work, the roads dug by the Authority are far from repaired. Worst, the Department of Roads and the Authority are at loggerheads on non-cooperation allegations in each other's works.

The economic and social costs of such neglect, both direct and indirect, are massive. Time and cost overrun in almost every major road project add a multi-fold burden on the national exchequer. The repair and maintenance cost of the vehicles plying on these roads rises exponentially. The added fuel consumption and pollution from fumes and dust incessantly for years have taken a heavy toll on public health, particularly along the construction sites.

The prolonged construction period of roads leading to popular tourist destinations like Pokhara and Lumbini has severely affected the tourism industry. Abnormal delays in project completion have raised serious concerns about Nepal's project implementation capacity and contract enforcement practices.

State apathy to these recurrent and pervasive "potholes" in policies and unabated public anxiety put the very existence of the functional government under a gigantic interrogation mark. A strong "code of conduct" on public construction and its proper implementation, which is already long overdue, can make a substantive difference towards improving the socio-economic life.

## Standing deposit facility in monetary policy

The money market is expected to remain vibrant under the interest rate corridor framework.

RAM SHARAN KHAREL



The Nepal Rastra Bank introduced a standing deposit facility (SDF) in February this year, enabling banks and financial institutions to deposit their excess liquidity at the central bank to earn a 3 percent interest rate.

Excess liquidity of a bank is the money left after extending loans and maintaining regulatory requirements out of total financial resources, mainly deposits. It is the balance after settling all transactions, including deposits inflows and credit outflows.

Previously, banks and financial institutions with liquidity surplus used to keep it idle at their vaults or NRB in interest-free accounts if not borrowed by other banks. Generally, every day, banks compete to borrow and lend to each other to manage their liquidity. Banks with liquidity deficit try to borrow by paying minimum interest from banks having liquidity surplus. The interbank rate goes down when lending pressure increases, and it goes up when borrowing pressure increases in the interbank market.

The interbank market remains inactive when the banking sector faces liquidity overhang or liquidity drain for a long time. For instance, banks do not borrow from each other when they have enough liquidity. In this case, the interbank transaction rate remains negligible or very low. On the other hand, they do not get liquidity from the interbank market or transact at a very high rate when they face liquidity problems. In this way, the interbank rate becomes volatile with a small change in liquidity, if the central bank does not intervene in the money market.

The new provision allows banks to keep their excess liquidity at NRB as SDF for a three percent interest rate if they are not getting more from inter-

bank transactions. Thus, it ensures that banks do not require transacting with each other for a below three percent interest rate even during liquidity overhangs.

The ultimate objective of introducing SDF is to maintain the lower bound of the interest rate corridor, as the current monetary policy has set the SDF rate equivalent to the lower bound of the interest rate corridor. The upper bound of the corridor is set at 6.5 percent, for which monetary instruments are already in place to maintain the rate. At present, the optimal monetary policy choice is to keep the interbank rate around the policy rate, which is currently fixed at 5.5 percent.



SHUTTERSTOCK

The money market is expected to remain vibrant and dynamic under the interest rate corridor framework. Banks knock on the NRB door to place excess liquidity as SDF if not getting more from interbank transactions. On the other hand, banks having liquidity shortfall, borrow from NRB, paying interest equivalent to policy rate or bank rate depending on the duration of liquidity need if they are not getting cheaper rate from the interbank market. In this way, the interbank transaction rate is expected

to remain between the corridors.

The main reason for adopting the interest rate corridor policy is to maintain the interbank rate low and stable so as to stabilise the deposit and credit interest rates. This promotes saving mobilisation, enables the business environment and improves banking practices.

On the saving side, NRB does not allow banks and financial institutions to offer interest rates on savings accounts below the SDF rate. As a result, interest rates on savings accounts cannot go below SDF rate even at a time of liquidity overhang. So, it protects savers' interests. On the credit side, when short-term and sav-

ing interest rates become more stable, credit interest rates become more stable. This encourages creditors to borrow more. It generally persuades creditors with fixed interest rates. Finally, financial institutions do not reverse interest rates massively as the central bank remains the doorkeeper to provide liquidity and accept deposits when needed. Thus, interest rates become more stable under the interest rate corridor policy.

However, maintaining an interest rate corridor is challenging and also

expensive. Banks and financial institutions bear the cost of sustaining the upper-bound corridor, which pays interest on borrowings from NRB. The Nepalese banking sector experienced this situation for a couple of years until the beginning of Covid-19.

On the other hand, the central bank has to bear the cost of maintaining the lower-bound corridor, thereby paying interest expenses on SDF or deposit collection. It happens at a time of liquidity overhang owing to credit slackness. The Nepalese banking sector has experienced adequate liquidity in the last few months due to credit slowdown compared to deposit growth. As a result, average saving and credit interest rates have reduced substantially compared to the previous year, while the average interbank rate has been recorded below three percent in recent months.

It is unlikely for the interbank rate to remain below three percent under the interest rate corridor mechanism where unlimited SDF is available for banks and financial institutions to park their excess liquidity. This calls for further reforms in monetary policy operation to maintain the corridor effectively.

NRB currently offers SDF only twice a week. As banks do not have the opportunity to park their excess liquidity on other days, they may transact liquidity below three percent rather than keeping idle. To maintain the lower bound of the corridor effectively, it is desirable to allow them to utilise the SDF every day. Moreover, banks and financial institutions must maintain some regulatory requirements to become eligible for SDF to relax gradually.

Finally, monetary policy should be forward-looking and more dynamic under the interest rate corridor framework. If liquidity overhangs continue owing to a weak credit demand at a low level of interest rates, monetary tightening, such as increasing CRR, maybe a policy option to protect savers. The policy should address credit bottlenecks through different measures rather than continuing an accommodative policy stance. On the other hand, monetary policy should be relaxed to encourage credit expansion when borrowing from the central bank remains persistent during low credit growth.

Kharel is the Director at Nepal Rastra Bank.

FOREX

US Dollar	133.69
Euro	142.21
Pound Sterling	164.67
Swiss Franc	146.61
Australian Dollar	86.03
Canadian Dollar	97.43
Singapore Dollar	98.09
Japanese Yen (10)	8.64
Chinese Yuan	18.46
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.64
Qatari Riyal	36.65
Thai Bhat	3.61
UAE Dhiram	36.40
Malaysian Ringgit	27.98
Korean Won (100)	9.60

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES

Nepse (in percent) **1,969.02pts** **-0.77%**

HIGHEST LOSERS					
DOLTI	NICLSSL	HLBSL	MHCL	SHLB	GJFL
-7.37	-7.24	-4.74	-4.25	-4.25	-4.08
MODERATE LOSERS					
NICSF	NMB50	LBLD88	SGHC	USHEC	HIDCL
-0.11	-0.1	-0.09	-0.09	-0.08	-0.06
MODERATE GAINERS					
JBLB	AKPL	PCBL	KBLD89	NHDL	PEO85
0.08	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.02	0.01
HIGHEST GAINERS					
PPL	PRSF	KDBY	PBLD86	MLBS	WNLB
6.91	5.8	5.33	4.9	4.27	4.25

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 138,200
Silver	Rs 1,705

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Tesla shares tumble on price cuts in run-up to earnings

**CALIFORNIA:** Tesla, opens new tab tumbled 4 percent on Monday, as its latest global price cuts fanned Wall Street concerns about dwindling margins at the electric-vehicle maker in the run-up to its earnings report later this week. The company slashed prices by up to \$2,000 on its vehicles such as the Model 3 and Model Y in several markets including the US, China and Germany over the weekend, in its latest effort to boost demand slowed by high interest rates. The cuts come ahead of its quarterly earnings on Tuesday, with the world's most valuable automaker expected to post its first revenue drop and lowest gross margin in nearly four years, according to LSEG data. Investors are awaiting clarity from CEO Elon Musk on Tesla's strategy after he cut 10 percent of the company's staff last week and said focusing on autonomous driving was a "blindingly obvious" move. Musk had earlier this month announced an event in August to unveil its "Robotaxi", after a Reuters report on April 5 said Tesla had scrapped its plan to develop its long-awaited affordable EV in favor of robotaxis. Musk said after the report that "Reuters is lying", without citing any inaccuracies. Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives wrote in a preview note last week that the earnings would be a "moment of truth" and "one of the most important moments in the company's history". Tesla is slashing prices in key markets including China and Germany, as it faces increasingly stiff competition in the market for electric cars. (REUTERS)

Japan's anti-monopoly body orders Google to fix ad search limits affecting Yahoo

**TOKYO:** Japan's antitrust watchdog said on Monday that US search giant Google must fix its advertising search restrictions affecting Yahoo in Japan. The Japan Fair Trade Commission said in a statement that its recent study of Google's practices showed it was undermining fair competition in the advertising market. Yahoo Japan Corp., which has since merged with the Japanese social media platform Line, began keyword-targeted search advertising services using Google's technology after the two companies formed a tie-up in 2010. The FTC alleges that Google had imposed restrictions in its search advertising agreement with Yahoo Japan that for more than seven years hindered its ability to compete in targeted search ads. An FTC investigation into whether that violated the Anti-Monopoly Law led Google to drop the restrictions. Google said in an emailed statement that it has cooperated fully with the commission's probe, and stressed the commission has not found it had outright violated anti-monopoly laws. It promised to carry out the commission's directives to offer "valuable" search functions to Japanese users and advertisers. (AP)

# Rice prices hit record high amid Indian ban

Food inflation continues to simmer in Nepal largely due to higher rice prices and other food items.

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 22

Rice prices surged to their highest by Rs800 per kg per 25 kg of bag over a year in the Nepali market, according to the market analysis report of the National Consumer Forum.

The record price rise has been attributed to India's restriction on exports of non-basmati white rice. India is the world's largest rice exporter, accounting for up to 40 percent of rice in the world market.

The forum said that food inflation continues to simmer in Nepal largely due to higher rice prices and other food items. In July last year, the Indian government banned the export of non-Basmati white rice to keep its food reserve intact amid the threat of El Nino disruptions.

Before the ban, the price of pearl jeera masino and other varieties was Rs1,600 per 25kg bag, which now costs Rs2,400. Similarly, other varieties, too, have gone up significantly, according to retailers. Again in August, the southern neighbour imposed a 20 percent duty on parboiled rice exports.

According to the forum, the price of sugar, which declined to Rs90 per kg immediately after the Tihar festival in November, has again reached Rs110 per kg in retail. In November last year, New Delhi allowed the export of 25,000 tonnes of sugar to Nepal on a quota basis until September 30, 2024. However, the Nepal government has not been able to import the sugar.

Similarly, the prices of wheat flour and refined flour have increased by around 30 percent in the market.

"The domestic production of food items like rice, wheat, and sugar doesn't fulfil the country's requirement so we depend on imports from India. If India imposes a ban, prices in Nepal will go up under different pre-



SHUTTERSTOCK

The record price rise has been attributed to India's restriction on exports of non-basmati white rice.

texts," said Prem Lal Maharjan, president of the National Consumer Forum. Government intervention is much needed to control the increasing prices, he said.

"Also Nepal's government failed to negotiate with India to import food commodities on a quota basis," Maharjan said. Despite India allowing

the export of food items on a quota basis, the Nepal government has failed to respond promptly."

"Such weakness makes the market volatile and impacts the economy largely."

Nepali traders attributed the recent food price hikes to the ongoing general elections in India.

India is Nepal's key trading partner and imports most food items from the southern neighbour. Traders said that given Nepal's dependency on India, any protectionist policy adopted by New Delhi has a significant impact on Nepal's market.

India will not remove export bans on rice, wheat, onion and sugar any

time soon as the priority of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is to cool domestic prices, Indian media reported.

"On top of everything, with frequent changes in governments and their preoccupation with political maneuverings, their involvement in the consumer market is zero," Maharjan said.

"We have been writing to the relevant ministries to take these issues seriously," he said. No matter how many times the government changes, the rising inflation and anomalies in the market never seem to bother anyone, he said.

On Sunday, the forum wrote to the Office of the Prime Minister requesting its intervention to tame market prices as they have affected the lives of every individual, especially people in the low-income bracket.

In a memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister's Office, the forum said, "We would like to draw the attention of the prime minister that if the price hikes in the market are not taken seriously, they will greatly trouble the common man."

According to Nepal Rastra Bank, the country's central bank, the year-on-year consumer price inflation moderated to 4.82 percent in mid-March 2024, compared to 7.44 percent a year ago. However, food prices are staggeringly high.

Under the food and beverage category, the price index of the spices sub-category increased by 28.17 percent, vegetables by 14.07 percent, pulses and legumes by 11.22 percent, cereal grains and their products by 7.35 percent and milk products and eggs by 7.11 percent in the review month.

The price index of the ghee and oil sub-category decreased by 11.79 percent in the review month.

## US travel sector faces long wait for China tourism to hit 2019 highs

REUTERS  
CALIFORNIA, APRIL 22

The US travel sector will have to wait at least two more years for lucrative Chinese tourism to recover to pre-pandemic levels as slow growth and high costs in the Asian country keep its tourists away from America.

The slower-than-expected China travel rebound may further pressure earnings for hotel operators in the US even as they grapple with normalizing domestic travel driven by persistent inflation.

"There was an expectation that as Covid restrictions eased, travel between the US and China, especially tourist travel, would show large demand growth and a return at least to the pre-Covid levels. No such rebound has occurred," said Ryan Yonk, senior research faculty at American Institute for Economic Research.

China gradually began lifting travel-related restrictions from January 2023 and fully lifted group tour restrictions in August last year, but the resultant rise in Chinese arrivals to nearly 1.1 million remains 60 percent below 2019 levels, according to data from the US National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO).

Advertisement · Scroll to continue



REUTERS

A group of tourists walk on Hollywood Boulevard during an ongoing rain storm in Los Angeles, California, US on February 5.

That's largely because Chinese tourists are still grappling with an uncertain economy, prioritizing savings and turning to domestic travel or visiting nearby countries to save money.

The Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA), which represents about 20,000 US hoteliers, said the decline in Chinese tourism has decreased revenue and profitability.

"This, in turn, has led to job losses and financial strain for employees and related workers who rely on interna-

tional tourism for their livelihoods," the AAHOA said in a statement to Reuters. US stocks ended mixed on Friday, with the tech-heavy Nasdaq posting its biggest weekly decline since October 2022.

Chinese tourists in the US spent a whopping \$15 billion in 2019, more than any other market, according to the US travel association.

International Trade Administration (ITA) data for 2023 shows that Chinese tourist spending, which stands at an aver-

## Second development finance investment mission begins today

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 22

The Invest for Impact Nepal is organising the second edition of Development Finance Institutions (DFI) mission in Kathmandu on Tuesday with the aim to promote private investment in Nepal.

As many as 30 delegates from 14 institutions will take part in the three-day event in Kathmandu, Bibek Shrestha, chief executive officer of Invest for Impact Nepal, said during a press meeting on Monday.

The second mission aims to update DFIs on the latest policy developments, their collective investments and their impact. It will also discuss ways to promote more impactful and transformative investments in the financial services industry.

Speaking at the event, Ambassador of Switzerland to Nepal Danielle Meuwly said the mission can catalyse private sector activities through the mobilisation of private investment, she said.

Similarly, the mission will also showcase a pipeline of investable financial institutions, including Class B, microfinance institutions, and fintech for potential transformative investment opportunities, among others. The event will focus on different investment topics with presentations and panel discussions.

Invest for Impact Nepal is promoted by British International Investment (BII), the Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank (FMO), and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) in collaboration with the Swiss Investment Fund for Emerging Markets to complement existing efforts to promote and attract DFI and foreign investment.

The Invest for Impact Nepal initiative commenced in February 2021 to research and understand the investment market and ecosystem constraints. In August 2022, it translated these findings into implementation. This phase of the programme will run until July 2025.

**We extend our heartiest welcome and greetings to**

**His Highness**  
**Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani**  
**Emir of the State of Qatar**

**Long live Nepal-Qatar relation**

MULTIVERSE INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT

**Hearty WELCOME TO His Highness SHEIKH TAMIM BIN HAMAD AL THANI**

**the Emir of the State of Qatar, here in KATHMANDU, NEPAL.**

**May the bond between Qatar and Nepal last a lifetime.**

**Rajendra Bhandari** President  
**Meghnath Bhurtel** General Secretary

**Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies, Family**  
Tilganga-8, Kathmandu, Nepal

WORLD

BRIEFING

Kyiv warns situation on front will worsen in May

**KYIV, UKRAINE:** The situation for Ukraine on its front line is likely to steadily deteriorate in coming weeks, Ukraine's head of military intelligence said in an interview published on Monday. His assessment comes as outgunned and outmanned Ukrainian forces struggle to hold back Russian troops, who have gained ground in recent months and are expected to soon step up their offensive. "In our opinion, a rather difficult situation awaits us in the near future," Kyrylo Budanov told the BBC's Ukrainian service. "But it is not catastrophic and we need to understand that. Armageddon will not happen, as many people are now saying," he said. "But there will be problems starting from mid-May. I am talking about the front in particular... It will be a difficult period in mid-May, early June," Budanov said. Russia has in recent weeks regularly claimed new gains in eastern Ukraine. On Monday, Russia's defence ministry said its troops had seized the village of Novomykhailivka, some 20 kilometres away from Vugledar, which Russian forces have been trying to capture. (AFP)

Ex-Japan PM Aso to meet with Trump today, TV Tokyo says

**TOKYO:** Former Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso, who currently serves as vice president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, will meet Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump on Tuesday evening, TV Tokyo reported on Monday, without citing sources. Aso left for the United States on Monday. Japan has been trying to connect with people close to Trump ahead of the November 5 presidential election that could see him return to office and resurrect protectionist trade measures and other contentious policies that had threatened to strain relations between the allies. (REUTERS)

North Korea fires ballistic missiles: South Korea, Japan say

**SEOUL:** North Korea fired "several" short-range ballistic missiles on Monday toward the sea off its east coast, South Korea's military said, drawing a swift condemnation from Seoul, which called it a grave threat to stability on the Korean peninsula. A Japanese government alert and its coast guard also said North Korea had fired what appeared to be a ballistic missile. The projectile appeared to have landed outside Japan's exclusive economic zone area, the NHK broadcaster said. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the North launched what it suspected to be several short-range ballistic missile from near its capital, Pyongyang. The missiles flew about 300 kilometres (186 miles) and landed in the sea. The US Indo-Pacific Command said on Monday in a statement that it was aware of the ballistic missile launch, adding that it has assessed no immediate threat to US personnel, territory, or allies from the missile launch. The reports of the launch came as South Korea said its top military officer, Admiral Kim Myung-soo, had hosted the commander of US Space Command, General Stephen Whiting, on Monday to discuss the North's reconnaissance satellite development and growing military cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow. (REUTERS)

# Review identifies 'neutrality-related issues' in UN agency for Palestinians

In the weeks that followed, numerous donor states suspended or paused some \$450 million in funding.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
UNITED NATIONS, UNITED STATES, APRIL 22

An independent review group on the UN agency for Palestinians found "neutrality-related issues" but noted Israel had yet to provide evidence for allegations that a significant number of its staff were members of terrorist organizations.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) remains "irreplaceable and indispensable to Palestinians' human and economic development," added the report, which was headed by former French foreign minister Catherine Colonna.

The review group was created following allegations made by Israel in January that 12 UNRWA staff may have participated in the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks. In the weeks that followed, numerous donor states suspended or paused some \$450 million in funding.

Many have since resumed funding, including Sweden, Canada, Japan, the EU, France and more—while others, including the United States and Britain—have not. Congress passed a law last month preventing the US from funding UNRWA until March 2025.

Those pauses to the main aid organ in Gaza come as months of Israeli military operations have turned the territory into a "humanitarian hellscape," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said recently, with its 2.3 million people in desperate need of food, water, shelter and medicine.

Colonna's team was tasked with assessing whether UNRWA was "doing everything within its power to ensure neutrality," while Guterres activated a second investigation to probe Israel's allegations.

The review noted that "neutrality-related issues persist," including instances of staff sharing biased political posts on social media and the use of a small number of textbooks with "problematic content" in some UNRWA schools.

But it added "Israel has yet to provide supporting evidence" for a recent claim that UNRWA employs more than 400 "terrorists."

"Most alleged neutrality breaches relate to social media posts" which



Palestinians walk on a road lined with destroyed buildings in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday amid the ongoing conflict in the Palestinian territory between Israel and the militant group Hamas.

often follow incidents of violence affecting colleagues or relatives, the review found.

"One preventive action could be to ensure that personnel are given space to discuss these traumatic incidents," added the report, which was co-authored with three Nordic rights groups. The report praised the progress made by UNRWA in preventing biased texts from being used in its schools, which are critical to educating hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children.

But it cited a recent assessment that

found 3.85 percent of textbook pages contained content of concern.

These included "the use of historical maps in a non-historical context, e.g. without labeling Israel" referring to Israel as the "Zionist occupation" and "naming Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine."

The authors also identified concerns over the politicization of staff unions, which have "resisted management disciplinary actions" including on neutrality, and are male-dominated, despite the agency itself being gender-balanced.

They offered a number of recommendations including expanding the review of school texts and enhancing transparency with donors in order to tackle the trust deficit. But dismantling UNRWA, as sought by Israel, would accelerate Gaza's slide into famine and doom generations of children to despair, the organization's head Philippe Lazzarini warned last week.

UNRWA began operations in 1950 and provides services to nearly 6 million people across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

## Pro-China party wins Maldives election in landslide: Reports

REUTERS  
MALE, APRIL 22

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's party earned a landslide victory in parliamentary elections, local media reported on Monday, a result set to move the Indian Ocean archipelago closer to China and away from traditional partner India.

Muizzu's People's National Congress (PNC) won 71 of the 93 seats available on Sunday, preliminary results from the Maldives Elections Commission and media projections showed.

The PNC together with its coalition parties holds 75 seats in total while the main opposition Maldives Democratic Party (MDP) dwindled to only 12 seats from 65 previously.

Jubilant voters celebrated with party poppers and cut cakes in their constituencies. Official celebrations by the PNC are scheduled to start tonight with a rally in Male.

Both Beijing and New Delhi have wooed the Maldives as they vie for influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Elected last year, Muizzu has pledged to end the country's "India First" policy, straining ties with New Delhi.

His government has asked dozens of Indian military personnel to leave the Maldives, a move critics say could hasten its shift towards China.

Muizzu has also said his government is keen to explore partnerships under China's Belt and Road Initiative, including the expansion of the country's central airport and

Chinese firms have invested \$1.37 billion in the Maldives in the last decade making it the largest bilateral creditor, World Bank data showed.

## Russia-Ukraine war: What difference will \$61 billion US aid package make?

REUTERS  
KYIV/NEAR KUPIANSK, UKRAINE, APRIL 22

For the exhausted Ukrainian artillery gunners holding off Russian forces near the eastern town of Kupiansk, the US aid package expected to finally pass this week is a lifeline and, potentially, a gamechanger, although that could take some time.

"If they'd passed it (earlier), it would have changed the situation dramatically," said one soldier, call sign "Sailor", who said a shortage of shells had reduced their covering fire for infantrymen, costing lives and territory.

After six months of congressional wrangling, the \$61 billion aid package is now expected to be approved this week by the US Senate and signed by President Joe Biden, replenishing Kyiv's critically low stocks of artillery shells and air defences. The influx of weapons should improve Kyiv's chances of averting a major Russian breakthrough in the east, said two military analysts, an ex-Ukrainian defence minister and a European security official.

But Kyiv still faces manpower shortages on the battlefield, while questions linger over the strength of its fortifications along a sprawling, 1,000-km front line ahead of what President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said could be a Russian summer offensive.

"The most important source of Ukrainian weakness is the lack of manpower," said Konrad Muzyka, director of the Rochan military consultancy in Poland. After months of debate, a law signed by Zelenskyy on April 16 to overhaul the rules governing how Ukraine mobilises civilians into the army enters force in May with the aim of making the process faster, more transparent and effective.

But new drafts will require months of training before they can be deployed, which in turn creates a "window of opportunity" for Russia to exploit, Muzyka said.

"I would expect the situation to probably continue to deteriorate over the next three months, but if mobilisation goes according to plan and the US aid is unblocked then the situation should improve from autumn onwards," he said.

The Kremlin said the US aid would not alter Russia's upper hand on the front lines and would simply result in more Ukrainian deaths.

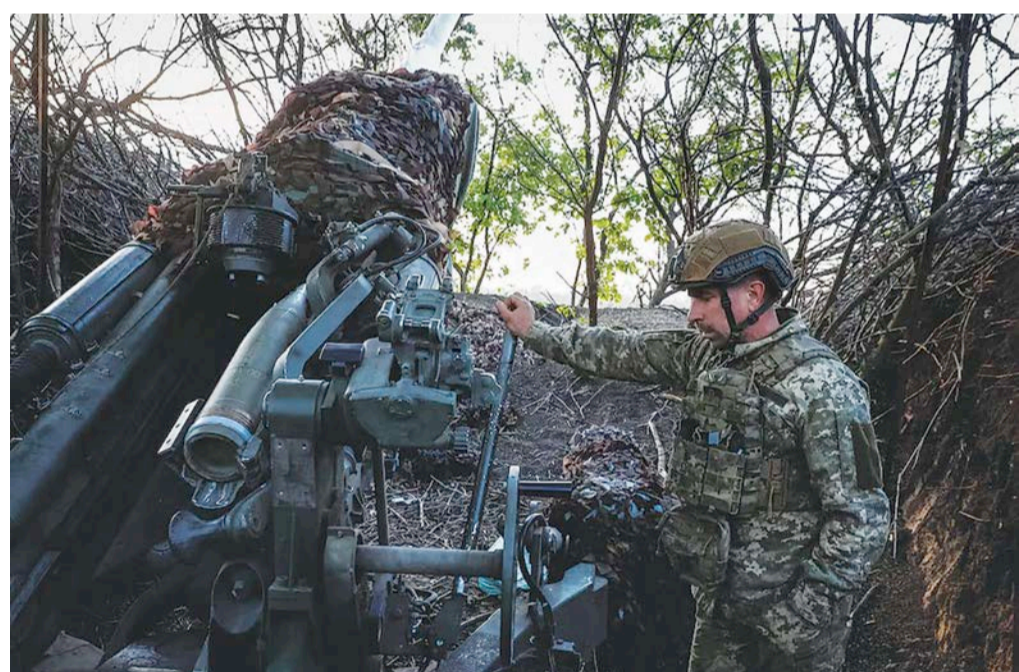
### Narrow the shell gap

Moscow has had the battlefield advantage since capturing Avdiivka, a long-time bastion town in the eastern Donbas region, in February, and its forces have been slowly advancing, using greater numbers of troops and artillery shells.

They are now bearing down on the town of Chasiv Yar, located on high ground that, if captured, would bring Moscow closer to the remaining Kyiv-held Donbas cities of Kostiantynivka, Kramatorsk and Sloviansk.

Zelenskyy said last week that Russia was now able to fire 10 times more artillery rounds than Ukraine's troops. Russian forces outnumber Kyiv's troops 7-10 times in the east, a Ukrainian general said this month.

Andriy Yusov, Ukraine's military intelligence



A serviceman of the 1148th separate artillery brigade of Air Assault Troops of Ukraine prepares a M777 howitzer to fire towards Russian troops, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Donetsk region, Ukraine on April 20.

spokesman, said Moscow was focused on the full capture of the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions—the Donbas.

Russia, he added, was attacking on three fronts there—west of Avdiivka, from Kupiansk to Lyman and west of Bakhmut. In the south, it was pressing on Robotyne, the village retaken by Kyiv during last year's offensive, he said.

Ukrainian positions have been pounded this year by thousands of glide bombs fired by warplanes taking advantage of Russian air superiority and dwindling Ukrainian air defences.

Andriy Zagorodnyuk, a former Ukrainian defence minister, said an influx of ground-based air defences would help, while US-produced F-16 fighter jets, which Kyiv expects to receive later this year, would force Russian warplanes back entirely. Replenished stocks of artillery shells should bring the gap in rounds fired down to several Russian rounds for every one Ukrainian round, he added. "We don't need to have one-to-one. Three to one would still do the job," he said, citing Kyiv's more "calculated" approach versus Russia's reliance on quantity.

In addition to US aid, European Union assistance includes a Czech-led initiative that will begin supplying Ukraine some 300,000 rounds of 155 mm artillery shells beginning in June.

A senior European security source told Reuters that if Ukraine received the new US and EU assistance, the likelihood of averting a major Russian breakthrough over the next 12 months was "quite high".

### Losing more ground

The Ukrainian military needed a "massive" influx of personnel to stall Russian forces across

## Southern China storms kill four, force mass evacuations

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BEIJING, APRIL 22

Four people are dead and 10 others missing following storms that battered southern China, state media said on Monday, with tens of thousands evacuated from areas hit by torrential downpours.

Heavy rain has descended upon the vast southern province of Guangdong in recent days, swelling rivers and raising fears of severe flooding that state media said could be of the sort only "seen around once a century".

"Three deaths were reported in Zhaoqing City while the remaining one is a rescuer in Shaoguan City," state news agency Xinhua reported, citing local authorities. Ten others remain missing as search and rescue efforts in the area continue to be carried out, said Xinhua.

China is no stranger to extreme weather but recent years have seen the country hit by severe floods, grinding droughts and record heat.

More than 110,000 people have been relocated across Guangdong, according to Xinhua. Of those, more than 45,000 were evacuated from the northern city of Qingyuan, which straddles the banks of the Bei River, a tributary in the wider Pearl River Delta, state media reported Sunday.

Heavy rain is expected to continue on Monday, with meteorological authorities forecasting "thunderstorms and strong winds in Guangdong's coastal waters"—a stretch of sea bordering major cities including Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

Neighbouring provinces, including parts of Fujian, Guizhou and Guangxi, will also be affected by "short-term heavy rainfall", the National Meteorological Centre said.

"It is expected that the main impact period of strong convection will last from daytime until night," it added.

Authorities on Monday issued a yellow alert for rainstorms—the second-lowest in its four-tier system—with high levels of precipitation expected to continue across large swathes of the country. Guangdong province is China's densely populated manufacturing heartland, home to around 127 million people.

**मोटर्ससईकल हरायो**  
मिति २०८०/०१/०८ गते राती ११:००  
बजे ओखरपोवा-१, नुवाकोटबाट बा.प्र.  
०२ ०४७ प ७९३० नं. को 149CC  
को कालो रंगको FZ मोटरसाइकल  
हरायोको हुँदा पाउनु हुने महानुभावहरूले  
फोन नं. ८२६१५०३०८९ वा नजिक को  
प्रहरी चौकीमा बुझाईदिनु हुन अनुरोध  
गर्दछु ।  
नाम: समीर फ्याँल  
इन्जिन नं.: G3JE0586654  
चेसिस नं.: ME1RG441BP0103153

Kathmandu Upatyaka Khanepani Limited, (KUKL) Board  
Project Implementation Directorate (PID)

Anamnagr, Kathmandu

Notice of Intend to Award of Contract

(Publication Date: 23 April 2024)

Pursuant to Clause 43.1 of Instruction to Bidder (ITB), this is to notify all the concerned bidders for the Contract No: KUKL/WW/TP/R-02: Construction of Remaining Works of Wastewater Treatment Plants at Sallaghari, Kodku & Dhobighat. As per the Invitation for Bid published in the national daily newspaper "The Kathmandu Post" on 16 July 2023 that the PID has intended to award the contract to the Lowest Evaluated Substantially Responsive Bidder as mentioned below. Any inquiries related to this notice can be directed to the Project Director, on or before 29 April 2024.

S.N.	Name of the Bidder	Address	Evaluated Bid Price (Inclusive of O&M fee, Provisional Sum, and 13% VAT)
1.	M/S VA TECH WABAG Limited	Chennai, India	USD 23,529,996.20 NPR 3,412,387,348.27

# Kathmandu Open golf commences today

SPORTS BUREAU  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 22

The seventh event on the Surya Nepal Golf Tour 2023-24, Surya Nepal Kathmandu Open, will tee off at the Royal Nepal Golf Club on Tuesday.

A total of 32 professional and nine amateurs will take part in the event, which will be played over 72 holes.

Cut will be applied after 36 holes. Twenty-one top scoring professionals with the ties (if any) and amateurs who make the professional cut will make it to the final 36 holes.

The event carries a total purse of Rs703,500. The winner will bag a

cheque of Rs120,000. The runner-up will take home Rs82,000, while third-placed golfer will earn Rs66,000.

Others in the top 21 will also receive their share of cash prizes.

Subash Tamang will be tournament favourite along with top ranked players Bhuwan Nagarkoti, Rabi Khadka and Dinesh Prajapati.

Professional golfers will face strong challenge from amateur Sadbhav Acharya, who won the two events on Surya Nepal Golf Tour 2023-24.

Sukra Bahadur Rai, the number one professional, will miss the tournament due to a wrist injury.

The tournament will conclude on Friday.

# Liverpool keep title bid alive in England

Liverpool are second, behind leaders Arsenal on goal difference and one point ahead of Manchester City.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LONDON, APRIL 22

Liverpool got back on track after a miserable week as a 3-1 win at Fulham kept their Premier League title bid alive on Sunday.

Jürgen Klopp's side crashed out of the Europa League quarter-finals against Atalanta on Thursday after suffering a damaging Premier League defeat at home to Crystal Palace last weekend.

The Reds' hopes of giving Klopp a glorious farewell were dwindling but they climbed back into the title race with a much-needed first win in three league games.

Liverpool are now in second place, behind leaders Arsenal on goal difference and one point ahead of third placed Manchester City, who have a game in hand on their two title rivals.

Next for Liverpool is the Merseyside derby at Everton on Wednesday, while Arsenal host Chelsea on Tuesday and City travel to Brighton on Thursday.

Klopp responded to signs of fatigue from his team in recent weeks by dropping Mohamed Salah to the bench among five changes.

Trent Alexander-Arnold put Liverpool ahead in the 32nd minute with a superb free-kick that flashed into the top corner.

Fulham defender Timothy Castagne levelled from close-range after Liverpool failed to clear in first half stoppage-time.

Ryan Gravenberch restored Liverpool's advantage in the 53rd minute with a swerving blast from the edge of the area for his first Premier

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE							
STANDINGS (TOP FIVE)							
Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	PT
Arsenal	33	23	5	5	77	26	74
Liverpool	33	22	8	3	75	32	74
Man City	32	22	7	3	76	32	73
Aston Villa	34	20	6	8	71	50	66
Tottenham	32	18	6	8	65	49	60

League goal. Diogo Jota wrapped up the points in the 72nd minute, drilling a clinical low finish into the far corner.

**Villa eye Champions League**  
Aston Villa tightened their grip on Champions League football next season with a 3-1 win over Bournemouth.

Villa shrugged off the exertions of having to go to extra-time and penalties in midweek to book their place in the Europa Conference League semi-finals against Lille.

Unai Emery's men even had to come from behind after Dominic Solanke opened the scoring from the penalty spot.

Morgan Rogers' fine finish just before half-time proved to be the turning point.

Moussa Diaby slotted in from Ollie Watkins' pass to put Villa in front.

Watkins was the provider once more for Leon Bailey to tap in to seal the points 12 minutes from time.

Victory takes Villa six points clear of fifth-placed Tottenham.

Spurs have two games in hand but still have to play all of title challengers Manchester City, Arsenal and Liverpool in their final six matches.

# Real Madrid on brink of La Liga title

It was the third straight win for the Los Blancos over Catalan giants Barcelona this season. Carlo Ancelotti's men are unbeaten in 26 league games, since losing at Atletico Madrid in September.

AP/RS  
A late strike by Jude Bellingham (5) sealed Real Madrid a 3-2 victory over Barcelona.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MADRID, APRIL 22

With a late strike by Jude Bellingham, Real Madrid took a huge step toward winning the La Liga title.

Bellingham, who quickly became one of Madrid's most important players after his transfer last year, likely sealed the title on Sunday by scoring a stoppage-time winner in a 3-2 victory over Barcelona in the final "clasico" of the season.

Barcelona twice took the lead at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium but Madrid rallied to win for a comfortable 11-point cushion over their second-placed rivals entering the final six rounds.

Bellingham scored the winning goal from a difficult angle one minute into stoppage time with a left-foot strike into the top of the net after a cross toward the far post by Lucas Vazquez, who also scored and set up a goal by Vinicius Junior.

"He hadn't scored in a while but scored a goal that could be crucial for us winning the Spanish league," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said of the 20-year-old midfielder.

Bellingham hadn't found the net in his last six appearances for Madrid in all competitions. The England international had scored both goals for Madrid when they won 2-1 at Barcelona in the first league clasico of the season.

It was the third straight win for Madrid over Barcelona this season.

Madrid are unbeaten in 26 league games, since losing at Atletico Madrid in September.

"The title is a lot closer now. It was a vital match, we had to win it, and we did it," Ancelotti said. "It was an even game, against strong opponents who were doing all it could to get back into the title race again."

The clasico came four days after Madrid eliminated Manchester City on penalties in England to advance to the Champions League semi-finals. Barcelona had been eliminated a day earlier by Paris Saint-Germain after a loss at home, leaving the league as the Catalan team's only title opportunity for the season.

Goalkeeper Andriy Lunin, the hero for Madrid in the shootout against City, miscalculated a cross into the area in Barcelona's first goal and failed to fully clear a ball in front of the goal in the second.

Barcelona, the defending league champions, came to the Spanish capital looking to revive their title chances and took an early lead with a header by Andreas Christensen six minutes into the match.

The hosts equalised with Vinicius converting an 18th-minute penalty kick before Barcelona went ahead again with Fermin Lopez's goal from close range in the 69th. Vazquez, who was fouled after a run inside the area to prompt the penalty converted by Vinicius, evened the match again after a cross by the Brazil forward in the 73rd.

Vazquez was one of the changes made to the squad by Ancelotti after the match against City. He also used Luka Modric alongside Toni Kroos in midfield, and Aurelien Tchouameni in the defence.

Barcelona loudly complained about the penalty awarded to Madrid and wanted one for themselves after a challenge on Lopez in the second half. They also complained over a potential goal in the first half when it wasn't clear if the ball crossed the goal line before Lunin batted it away. It took several moments before video review determined that it was not a goal.

LA LIGA							
STANDINGS (TOP FIVE)							
Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	PT
Real Madrid	32	25	6	1	70	22	81
Barcelona	32	21	7	4	64	37	70
Girona	32	21	5	6	67	40	68
Atletico	32	19	4	9	59	38	61
Athletic	32	16	10	6	52	30	58

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez, likely making his last clasico appearance after saying he will leave the club at the end of the season, said his team played better and deserved to win.

"I said yesterday that I hoped the referee wouldn't make any mistake and that he would go unnoticed, but none of that happened," Xavi said. "It's a shame. It was not a fair result. Everyone saw it"

Xavi said Barcelona would not give

up on the league just yet but recognised that it was all-but-over and that Madrid had to be congratulated for their campaign.

Barcelona midfielder Frenkie De Jong left the field on a stretcher late in the first half after hurting his right leg in a clash with Madrid midfielder Federico Valverde.

The match marked the debut of the new state-of-the-art 360-degree video scoreboard at the renovated Bernabeu.

**Atletico struggle**  
Atletico Madrid followed up their Champions League elimination with a 2-0 loss at Alaves, missing a chance to strengthen their hold on fourth place.

The defeat against 13th-place Alaves kept Atletico only three points ahead of fifth-place Athletic Bilbao in the fight for a Champions League spot next season. Athletic had been held to a 1-1 draw against relegation-threatened Granada at home on Friday.

Atletico failed to advance in the Champions League after losing to Borussia Dortmund 5-4 on aggregate following a 4-2 loss in Germany on Tuesday.

Alaves, who had lost three league matches in a row, won with goals by Carlos Benavidez in the 15th minute and Luis Rioja in second-half stoppage time.

In other results, sixth-place Real Sociedad were held 1-1 at Midtable Getafe, while ninth-place Villarreal won 2-1 at last-place Almeria.

## HOROSCOPE

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

You may come to the realisation that friendship groups aren't supporting your best interests, while tensions could brew on social media. The day acts as one of the most powerful times of the year for you to let go.

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

Reconnect with those who matter most, but consider pulling back this afternoon, bringing a temperamental and stoic energy to the table. Rethink certain long-term goals, though you should consider how you can cultivate more balance before throwing.

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

Spiritual reinforcements make it easier to cut bad habits, though it could be difficult to convince others to follow suit. The day will cause you to take on more work than you can handle, so be mindful.

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

You may feel more extroverted than usual this morning. Use the energy to shine within creative fields and personal interests, but consider pulling back this afternoon, which could trigger jealous eyes. Find empowerment by working from behind the scenes.

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

Your emotions lift to the surface this morning exacerbating your need to nurture and be nurtured. Though you'll crave more time from the comfort of home, this afternoon suggests you'll get caught up catering other's needs.

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

Your emotional intelligence benefits unleashing your intuitive, empathic, and critical thinking skills. Use this energy to analyse your connections and current situations, looking for solutions to problems you've been battling socially or personally. Don't lose track of time.

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

You'll sense a shift this afternoon putting you in tune with your surroundings while heightening your sense of gratitude. Unfortunately, tension rolls in, and insecurities could lead to unforeseen ego clashes. Do your best to stay centred.

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

Carve out a few moments for quiet introspection and meditation this morning, Scorpion. You won't have much privacy putting your attention in high demand. Though you'll be eager to connect, be mindful to check in with your mood.

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

Handle your social responsibilities first thing in the morning. Your introverted nature takes over pushing you toward solitude and quiet. Watch out for obsessive thoughts this afternoon which could bring out possessive or jealous behaviours within us all.

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

Your role within society comes into focus this morning putting you in a communal headspace. Try not to lose your footing thinking of others this afternoon, and stay on guard for manipulative characters who might take your advantage.

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

Connect with your spirituality this morning, dear Aquarius. Watch out for conflict with authority figures this afternoon, especially within your professional field. Choose your battles wisely, as crossing the wrong person could be slightly self-destructive for you.

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

You will feel refreshed and optimistic today bringing the sense that exciting changes are on the horizon. Lean into these vibes by reconnecting with your spirituality and personal wishes, asking your higher power for guidance or help.

## CROSSWORD

**ACROSS**

- 1 Guy
- 5 Family guys
- 9 Fastener
- 13 Wash against
- 14 Fracas
- 15 Catch sight of
- 16 "If - I Would Leave You"
- 17 Cordial flavoring
- 18 Ground grain
- 19 Ardent
- 21 Quarantine
- 23 Line of rotation
- 24 Snake eyes
- 25 Grow weak
- 27 Bleached
- 32 "Lady Sings the ..."
- 33 Paddle
- 34 Metric weight
- 35 Brain wave reading
- 36 Is apparent
- 38 Caviar
- 39 - ex machina
- 41 Actor - Somerhalder
- 42 Stages
- 44 Great effort
- 46 Take cover
- 47 - dried tomatoes
- 48 Surprise
- 50 Early photograph
- 54 Connection

58 Word on a sneaker

- 59 Bygone
- 61 Perjurer
- 62 Indian noblewoman
- 63 Icy rain
- 64 "East of -"
- 65 Put - - act
- 66 Sew loosely
- 67 Proofer's order

**DOWN**

- 1 Symbol on a staff
- 2 "... and what - you"
- 3 Affirm
- 4 Be omnipresent
- 5 Dimples
- 6 Boxing great
- 7 Lucy's ex
- 8 Be in a daze (2 wds.)
- 9 Deadly herb
- 10 On the water
- 11 Young oyster
- 12 "Gomer -", U.S.M.C."
- 14 -pedi spa treatment
- 20 Old flames
- 22 Have
- 25 Swift
- 26 Presage
- 27 Frontiersman
- Daniel -

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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

3-29-24 © 2024 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS

- 28 "There ought to be a -!"
- 29 Chartered
- 30 Run off to wed
- 31 "Easy - it!"
- 32 Cots
- 36 Roadside guide
- 37 Actor - Holbrook
- 40 Keep up
- 42 Eschew
- 43 Made bell-like sounds
- 45 Director - Ritchie
- 48 Smooth
- 49 Dye
- 50 Poi source
- 51 - the Terrible
- 52 Ship of 1492
- 53 Jazz great
- 55 -de-camp
- 56 Highlander
- 57 Sea eagle
- 60 Calendar abbr.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13				14				15			
16				17				18			
19				20			21		22		
			23				24				
	25	26				27	28		29	30	31
32						33			34		
35					36	37			38		
39			40		41			42	43		
44				45				46			
				47				48	49		
50	51	52			53		54		55	56	57
58					59		60		61		
62					63				64		
65					66				67		

## SUDOKU

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

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★



SHUTTERSTOCK

## Why it is difficult to overcome addiction

Addictive substances or behaviours flood the brain with unnaturally high levels of dopamine.

□ DIPESH TANDUKAR

When we hear about addiction, our minds often jump to images of individuals dependent on drugs or cigarettes. We tend to associate addiction with those from less privileged backgrounds, picturing someone needing substances just to function. But addiction isn't confined to drugs alone; it's far more intricate.

According to the APA, addiction encompasses both psychological and physical dependence on substances like alcohol, as well as activities such as sex, exercise and gambling.

It's easy to point fingers at those struggling with addiction, assuming they lack willpower or competence. But is it fair to place the blame solely on them? Can we confidently say we would never fall into the same trap? Consider this: addiction isn't limited to substances. Spending excessive time on social media or constantly checking our phones can also be forms of addiction. Even that daily cup of coffee to kickstart our mornings or the compulsion to always keep busy can signal addictive behaviour.

These habits might seem harmless, like browsing shops without intending to buy or working tirelessly, but they can still be addictive patterns. After all, addiction isn't just about substances—it's about any behaviour or activity that hijacks our lives and becomes difficult to control.

The challenge with behaviours like excessive social media use or relying heavily on caffeine or overworking is that they don't show obvious physical signs. As a result, we often consider them normal, but they can actually have negative effects on our mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Even when individuals realise they're addicted, breaking the cycle can be incredibly tough. So why is addiction so hard to shake, even when we know it's harmful?

One major reason is how addiction alters our brain's reward system. Normally, enjoyable activities like eating good food or spending time with loved ones trigger the release of neurotransmitters like dopamine, which makes us feel pleasure. But addictive substances or behaviours mess with this system, flooding the brain with unnaturally high levels of dopamine.

Over time, the brain gets used to this flood, leading to tolerance—meaning we need more of the substance or behaviour to get the same effect. This artificial boost in dopamine also diminishes the pleasure we get from other everyday activities, making us rely on the addictive substance or behaviour to feel good.

Coupled with this is the cycle of cravings, triggers and relapses that often accompany addiction. Strong urges to engage in addictive behaviour are usually triggered by environ-

mental cues, stress or emotional states. These cravings can be overpowering, and resisting temptation is tough, especially when that behaviour has been our coping mechanism for a long time. Even the most determined among us find it challenging to break free.

The simplest example is cigarettes. Initially, one might provide a sense of euphoria, but as time passes, the number smoked often increases. We've all seen people chain-smoke, finding it increasingly tough to stop. This scenario worsens significantly with hard drugs like heroin or cocaine. Once addicted, breaking free becomes a monumental challenge due to constant urges and relapses.

Yet, we often overlook reliance on substances like caffeine or activities like social media, gambling or exposure to illicit content. These can all become problematic if not kept in check. The crux of the matter is that the consequences of our actions, behaviours and addictions aren't immediately apparent; they unfold over time. By the time we realise what's happening, breaking free becomes exceedingly difficult.

Furthermore, addiction frequently intersects with underlying psychological issues such as trauma, anxiety or depression, further complicating matters. Many individuals turn to addictive substances or behaviours to cope with emotional pain or numb uncomfortable feelings. However, these coping mechanisms only serve to perpetuate the cycle of addiction, trapping individuals in a self-destructive pattern.

Breaking free from addiction requires both physical detoxification and psychological healing. We must develop healthier coping mechanisms to replace addictive behaviours. This could mean finding new ways to manage stress, anxiety or emotional pain, such as mindfulness, exercise, or creative activities like art or music.

Building a strong support network is vital in breaking the cycle of addiction. Surrounding ourselves with positive influences, be it supportive friends and family or others in recovery, can offer encouragement and a sense of belonging.

Recovery isn't a straightforward path; setbacks are inevitable. But every bit of progress, whether it's eating healthily, learning something new or getting proper sleep, is a victory worth celebrating. Along the journey, it's important to pause occasionally and acknowledge how far we have come and how much we have improved during the healing process.



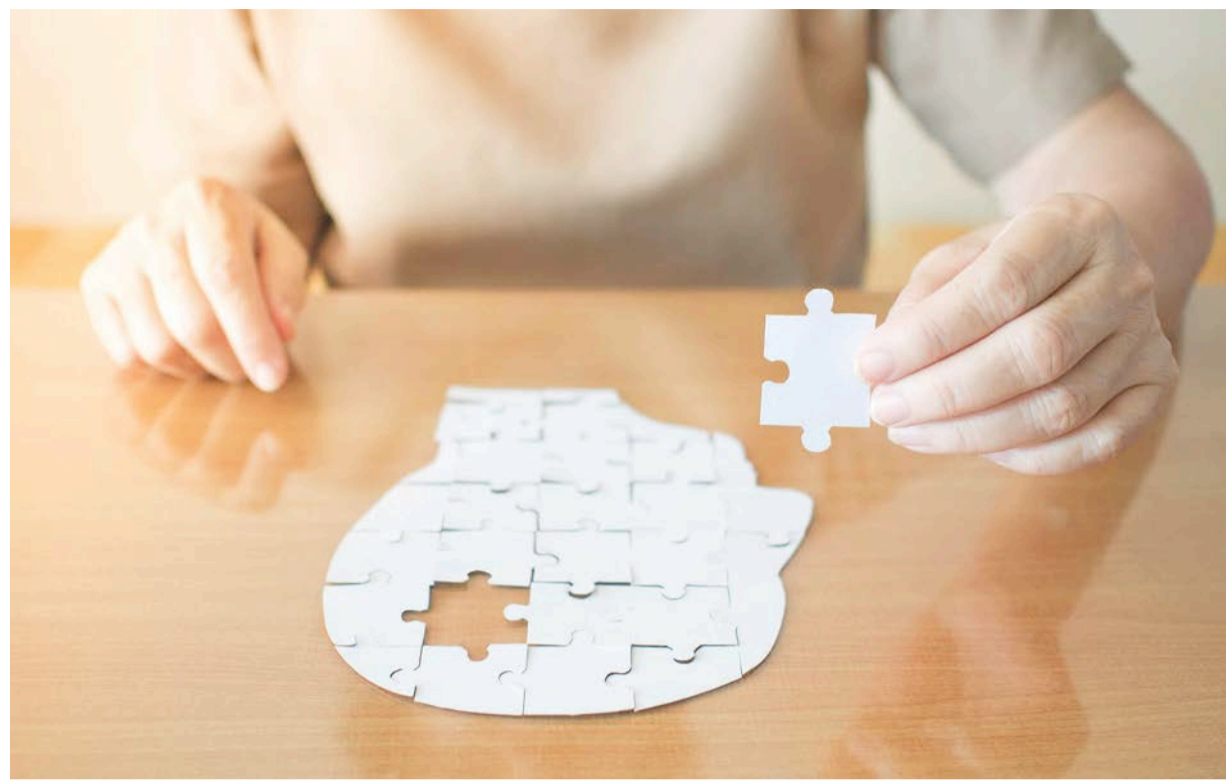
Tandukar is a mental health professional. He is the organisational psychologist and project manager at The Revolution Project.



— MENTAL HEALTH —

## Understanding Alzheimer's

Dr Raju Poudel explains how to care for someone with the neurological disease and the social and moral guidelines a caregiver has to follow while looking after the patient.



SHUTTERSTOCK

□ ANUSHA DHAKAL  
KATHMANDU

Alzheimer's is a neurological disease associated with forgetfulness and a progressive decline in memory and cognition. It is degenerative and affects the nerve cells in the brain.

Families often find it extremely challenging to cope with loved ones suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Many struggle with understanding and adhering to the appropriate social etiquette when interacting with these patients.

Dr Raju Poudel who specialises in internal medicine and has a doctorate in neurology explains how to care for someone with Alzheimer's and the social and moral guidelines a caregiver has to follow while looking after the patient.

Poudel is the head of the neurology department and consultant neurologist at Grande International Hospital. Additionally, he also works at Nepal Army Institute of Health Sciences' faculty of neurology.

**How is the patient's stage of Alzheimer's determined? At what progression does it worsen in each stage?**

The stage of Alzheimer's is determined based on when the patient seeks medical evaluation. If the family is well-informed, the patient is typically brought in during the early stage when symptoms like forgetfulness, particularly in short-term memory, are just starting to manifest.

However, in our society, not everyone knows much about Alzheimer's, so patients often seek help when forgetfulness has progressed. The worsening depends on factors like family support and when the patient seeks care.

**Is it hereditary? Can it be prevented?**

Alzheimer's can run in families, but most cases occur without a clear genetic link. Approximately 10 percent of cases have a genetic link.

While there's no foolproof method to prevent the disease, adopting a healthy lifestyle can be beneficial. Regular exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, following a proper diet, and avoiding alcohol and smok-

ing all contribute to reducing the risk to some extent. These habits may not directly prevent Alzheimer's, but they certainly make a difference.

**What are the social etiquette guidelines for interacting with a loved one diagnosed with Alzheimer's?**

Navigating social interactions and family dynamics when a loved one is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease requires careful consideration and understanding. It's not just the patient who is affected, but the entire family, as caring for the patient becomes a collective effort.

It is essential to distinguish between Alzheimer's and the general forgetfulness that accompanies old age. Educating ourselves about the disease is key to effectively supporting our loved ones.

Empathy and patience should be paramount when engaging with the patient. Providing attentive care and involving the whole family in the caregiving process is essential. It's common for patients to repeat questions, so responding with patience and understanding is important. Family members must resist feeling annoyed and instead empathise with the patient.

**What is the appropriate etiquette when you meet someone with Alzheimer's in public? To what extent should bystanders intervene?**

As Alzheimer's disease becomes more prevalent, it is increasingly common to encounter elderly individuals who may appear lost in public. In such situations, it is important to consider the appropriate public etiquette. One helpful approach is for family members to ensure the patient wears a bracelet or name tag, which can help individuals they encounter in public to assist them when the patient becomes disoriented.



Dr Raju Poudel

POST PHOTO: ANUSHA DHAKAL

If you come across someone with Alzheimer's in a public setting and they seem disoriented, taking them to the nearest police station is a suitable course of action. Police stations are equipped to handle such situations effectively and can assist in reuniting the individual with their family or caregivers.

**What are the ethical guidelines for using CCTV to monitor a loved one with Alzheimer's? How can we balance their privacy and dignity while ensuring their safety?**

When considering the use of CCTV to monitor a loved one with Alzheimer's, ethical guidelines must be carefully followed to balance their privacy and dignity. Obtaining consent from the individual and adhering to ethical and legal procedures is paramount. CCTV can serve as a useful modality for monitoring parents, especially when caregivers cannot be present round-the-clock.

However, it's crucial to ensure that the footage remains private and does not extend beyond the family circle. Additionally, relying solely on CCTV is not sufficient. Patients should always have supervision; there should always be someone present at home to provide immediate assistance if required.

**How can caregivers maintain their mental health while looking after someone with Alzheimer's?**

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's can place a significant strain on caregivers' mental health, leading to burden and burnout. It's crucial for caregivers to prioritise their own well-being to ensure they can continue providing effective care.

One strategy is for caregivers to take regular breaks from their caregiving duties. Family members can take turns caring for the patient, implementing shift-based schedules to distribute the responsibility. Additionally, families can enlist the help of professional caregivers or family nurses when needed.

Listening to the experiences of other caregivers and providing them with emotional support and comfort is also essential. Caregivers should not neglect their own needs and should schedule regular breaks to focus on self-care activities. By prioritising their own mental health and well-being, caregivers can effectively manage the challenges of caregiving and prevent burnout.

## Mary J Blige and Foreigner get into Rock Hall

□ ASSOCIATED PRESS  
NEW YORK, US

Mary J Blige, Cher, Foreigner, A Tribe Called Quest, Kool & The Gang and Ozzy Osbourne have been inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, a class that also includes folk-rock-

ers Dave Matthews Band and singer-guitarist Peter Frampton.

Alexis Korner, John Mayall and Big Mama Thornton earned the Musical Influence Award, while the late Jimmy Buffett, MC5, Dionne

Mary J Blige during the MTV Video Music Awards in September 2023.

Warwick and Norman Whitfield will get the Musical Excellence Award. Pioneering music executive Suzanne de Passe won the Ahmet Ertegun Award.

The induction ceremony will be held October 19 at the Rocket Mortgage Fieldhouse in Cleveland, Ohio. It will stream live on Disney+ with an airing on ABC at a later date and available on Hulu the next day.

Four of the eight nominees—Cher, Foreigner, Frampton and Kool & the Gang—were on the ballot for the first time.

Cher—the only artist to have a No 1 song in each of the past six decades—and Blige, with eight multi-platinum albums and nine Grammy Awards, will help boost the number of women in the hall, which critics say is too low.

Nominees were voted on by more than 1,000 artists, historians and music industry professionals. Last year, Missy Elliott, Willie Nelson, Sheryl Crow, Chaka Khan, 'Soul Train' creator Don Cornelius, Kate Bush and the late George Michael were some of the artists who got into the hall.

## Applications open for NITFEST

The third edition of the Nepal International Theatre Festival is happening next year.

□ POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU

Mandala Theatre Nepal has announced that applications for actors to participate the 3rd edition of Nepal International Theatre Festival (NITFEST) are open.

Mandala Theatre states that it aims to provide a platform for artists and theatre enthusiasts to come together and celebrate the power of theatre as a tool for social transformation through the festival.

Interested individuals can apply for the festival via the NITFEST website, where they will find detailed information about the application process and submission guidelines. Applicants are also required to fill a Google form and provide a video



PHOTO: COURTESY OF MANDALA THEATRE/FACEBOOK

The festival will run from March 16 to 27, 2025.

clips of themselves acting. The deadline for the submissions is May 31.

One addition to this year's festival is the introduction of a special section dedicated to children's theatre. In this section, plays targeted towards children will be showcased.

Besides the plays, the festival also has a variety of events, including workshops, panel discussions, dance performances, musical showcases, seminars, literary works and other cultural celebrations. Those interested in participating in workshops, panel discussions and cultural celebrations, have to fill in a separate Google form by June 30.

The theme of the 3rd NITFEST is 'Theatre for Social Transformation: Light of Indigenous Wisdom', and is scheduled for March 16 to 27, 2025.