



THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXXII No. 71 | 8 pages | Rs.5
Monday, April 29, 2024 | 17-01-2081

42.2° C 4.5° C
Bhairahawa Jomsom

Neighbours India and China make tall promises at Nepal Investment Summit

Beijing plans to open flights to Pokhara and Bhairahawa airports, announces visa fee exemption for Nepali travellers.



Nepali politicians, officials and foreign delegates attend the inaugural session of the Nepal Investment Summit in Kathmandu on Sunday.

SANGAM PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, APRIL 28

China on Sunday announced exempting visa fees for Nepali travellers starting May 1 and launching of commercial flights to Nepal's two new international airports, which are marred by geopolitics, under Beijing's renewed economic diplomacy for Nepal.

India, on the other hand, said it would make Nepal prosperous through hydro energy trade.

Speaking at the 3rd Nepal Investment Summit in Nepal's capital Kathmandu,

Luo Zhaohui, the chairman of China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), said the Chinese government will continue to attach great importance to direct and indirect investment in Nepal to implement the Trans-Himalaya dimensional connectivity, which is the highest priority for countries.

"Air and road links and border checkpoints are going well. Feasibility studies of the cross-border railway and cross-border transmission lines are moving forward," he said.

"That's why, today's summit is of

very special significance."

The Chinese government is making arrangements to start new flights from China to Nepal's two new international airports—Pokhara and Lumbini. "In this regard, I have good news to share with you that from May 1, or after 3 days, there will be no visa fee for the Nepali people to [visit] China," said Luo.

Nepal's \$216 million international airport in Pokhara, the country's tourism capital, funded by Beijing opened in January last year.

Similarly, Nepal's second interna-

tional airport in Bhairahawa, constructed by Chinese contractors, started its operation in May 2022 after four years of construction delays. The objective of both projects is to decentralise economic activities in the new federal setup, to bring in more tourists, and stop Nepalis from going abroad.

But no single international flight is operating in the two new shiny airports, which critics say is due to the air route issue, which India is reluctant to provide to Nepal.

>> Continued on page 5

Supreme Court launches suo moto contempt case against news website

Fabricated content published by sidhakura.com aims to tarnish judiciary's image and integrity, petition claims.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, APRIL 28

In a rare move, the Supreme Court has launched a suo moto contempt of court case against the publisher and the editor of sidhakura.com, a Kathmandu-based news website, for allegedly publishing defamatory content against one of its justices.

Govinda Ghimire, a deputy registrar at the top court, filed the writ petition claiming that serious fabricated and illusionary audiovisual content published by the website was a malicious attempt to defame the judiciary. Thus it is a contempt of court, Ghimire has claimed.

"The series of illusionary content uploaded by the online is an attempt to tarnish the judiciary's image and an attack on judicial integrity," reads a part of the petition. It has demanded a maximum punishment against Yubraj Kandel and Nabin Dhungana, the publisher and the editor of the website, respectively, and against their team members.

The petition was filed as per Article 128(4) of the Constitution of Nepal, section 17(1) of the Judicial Administration Act and Supreme Court regulations. In case anyone causes obstruction in the dispensation of justice or disregards any order or judgment handed down by it or any of its subordinate courts, the court may, in accordance with the law, initiate proceedings of contempt, says the constitutional provision.

Similarly, the Act allows the court to initiate contempt of court proceed-

ings if it finds anything that is posing hurdles to discharging its duties.

The news website in its audiovisual content has claimed that the chairpersons of two leading media houses were a part of a meeting with the incumbent and former Supreme Court justices and senior advocates to dismiss over 400 corruption cases in the court.

The content, which the online claims is based on a sting operation, is nothing but a malicious move intended to defame the judiciary, the petitioner claims.

The audio is nothing but a malicious attempt to defame the judiciary, petitioner says.

The petitioner has demanded an order for immediate removal of the content from YouTube and other social media, and summoning the individuals involved in the production and dissemination of the defamatory content for their statements, to ensure that such acts do not recur.

Stating that production and publication of such content is a criminal offence, the petitioner has also sought an order against relevant government agencies for investigation into the content and regular reporting to the court. The hearing of the petition has been slated for Monday.

>> Continued on page 2

TODAY

NATIONAL

As many as 24 houses and 10 sheds were reduced to ashes when a forest fire entered Hadbas settlement in ward 7 of Rajapur Rural Municipality in Dang on Sunday. The incident occurred at around 3pm. Pg 2

Politicians on either side of the isle tried to assure potential investors with one voice on Sunday of the safety and return on their investments in Nepal as the government kicked off a two-day investment summit. Pg 3

OPINION

The Congress is in the business of pressing charges against Rabi Lamichhane now just because the government didn't heed its demand, writes Naresh Koirala. Pg 4

WORLD

Ukraine's army leader admitted on Sunday that Kyiv's position on the battlefield has worsened after Russian forces captured another village in the east, pressing their advantage in manpower and ammunition. Pg 6

Police detained 200 people at three US universities on Saturday as they cleared pro-Palestinian encampments, in the latest campus clashes triggered by protests over Israel's siege of Gaza in its war against Hamas. Pg 6

SPORTS

The Pakistan Cricket Board appointed Gary Kirsten and Jason Gillespie to two-year terms as head coaches in white-ball and red-ball cricket, respectively, on Sunday. Pg 7

African farmers look to the past and future to address climate change

Africa faces the worst effects of a warming planet.



Farmers sort out climate-smart beans in Machakos, Kenya, on March 18.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
HARARE, ZIMBABWE, APRIL 28

From ancient fertiliser methods in Zimbabwe to new greenhouse technology in Somalia, farmers across the heavily agriculture-reliant African continent are looking to the past and future to respond to climate change.

Africa, with the world's youngest population, faces the worst effects of a warming planet while contributing the least to the problem. Farmers are scrambling to make sure the booming population is fed.

With over 60 percent of the world's uncultivated land, Africa should be able to feed itself, some experts say. And yet three in four people across the continent cannot afford a healthy diet, according to a report last year by the African Union and United Nations agencies. Reasons include conflict and lack of investment.

In Zimbabwe, where the El Nino phenomenon has worsened a drought, small-scale farmer James Tshuma has lost hope of harvesting anything from his fields. It's a familiar story in much of the country, where the government has declared a \$2 billion state of emergency and millions of people face hunger.

But a patch of green vegetables is thriving in a small garden the 65-year-old Tshuma is keeping alive with homemade organic manure and fertiliser. Previously discarded items have again become priceless.

"This is how our fathers and forefathers used to feed the earth and themselves before the introduction of chemicals and inorganic fertilisers," Tshuma said.

He applies livestock droppings, grass, plant residue, remains of small animals, tree leaves and bark, food scraps and other biodegradable items like paper. Even the bones of animals that are dying in increasing numbers due to the drought are burned before being crushed into ash for their calcium.

Scientists researching the combination of traditional practices with new technologies.

Climate change is compounding much of sub-Saharan Africa's long-standing problem of poor soil fertility, said Wonder Ngezimana, an associate professor of crop science at Zimbabwe's Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology.

"The combination is forcing people to re-look at how things were done in the past like nutrient recycling, but also blending these with modern methods," said Ngezimana, whose institution is researching the combination of traditional practices with new technologies.

>> Continued on page 2

KATHMANDU WORLD SCHOOL
ISO 9001:2015 CERTIFIED SCHOOL

EDUCATION FOR A BETTER FUTURE
विशिष्ट श्रेणी कायम गरिएको शिक्षण संस्था

ADMISSIONS OPEN:
ELEMENTARY (GRADES 1 - 9)
CAMBRIDGE A-LEVELS

**FOR SCHOLARSHIP DETAILS, PLEASE CONTACT US, VISIT OUR WEBSITE OR VISIT OUR SCHOOL DIRECTLY.

Take a virtual tour

Visit our website

OUR OTHER PROGRAMS:
CLASS 11-12 (NEB)

READY FOR THE NEXT STEP IN YOUR EDUCATION?

Surya Binayak -7, Gundu, Bhaktapur Ph: +977(1)5090337 | 5090354
Mobile: +977 9801915374 | 9840256143 Email: info@kws.edu.np | www.kws.edu.np

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

NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Smuggled sal logs seized



HETAUDA: Police seized 217 cubic feet of smuggled logs from a tipper truck in ward 2 of Bagmati Rural Municipality in Makawanpur district on Saturday night. The security personnel impounded the vehicle and detained its driver Aitesingh Moktan for investigation. The vehicle was heading for Rautahat with the illegally felled Sal tree (shorea rubusta) logs. Sal, a hardwood known for its durability and strength, is widely used for construction. The seized logs, truck and the driver were handed over to the District Forest Office in Makawanpur for further investigation, said police.

Father, daughter injured in bear attack

BAJHANG: Two local residents were injured in an attack by Himalayan black bear in ward 8 of Thalara Rural Municipality in Bajhang district on Saturday. According to the District Police Office, Madan Raj Joshi, 60, and his 13-year-old daughter Devsara Joshi sustained injuries in the attack. The bear attacked the father and the daughter as they went to inspect their beehives near their residence. The injured are receiving treatment at the district hospital.

Absconding ward chair arrested

SINDHUPALCHOK: Rabi Tamang, the chairman of ward 7 of Jugul Rural Municipality, who was absconding after being convicted in a banking fraud case, was arrested by the police on Sunday. According to Police Inspector Sanjeev Yadav of the Sindhupalchok District Police, Tamang was found guilty by the Patan High Court on March 4, 2022, of withdrawing money from the account of the ward office by producing fake documents. Earlier, he was sentenced to serve three days in prison and a fine of Rs 990,000 by the high court. Preparations are being made to present Tamang in the district court, said Yadav.

Toxic air is giving young children asthma

Doctors say it could damage lungs, and urge prompt medical attention for symptoms like shortness of breath, wheezing.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, APRIL 28

A few weeks ago, an eight-month-old baby girl from Arubari in the Capital was rushed to the Chabahil-based Om Hospital and Research Center, as the child was experiencing shortness of breath.

The child's parents told the doctor that the baby didn't have a fever but would make a wheezing sound while exhaling.

"The baby was suffering from childhood asthma," said Dr Rita Hamal, a consultant paediatrician at the hospital. "We admitted her and provided oxygen therapy. It took three days for her condition to improve."

As the Capital's air quality continues to worsen, often reaching hazardous levels, this is a common refrain among hundreds of children brought to hospitals for treatment of childhood asthma.

The ongoing forest fires, vehicular and industrial emissions, and the burning of agriculture residue throughout the country have made the air toxic, exacerbating asthma problems in small children.

A recent report by Save the Children shows critical linkages between air pollution and multi-faceted hazards for children.

The report titled "Breathless Future: Unveiling the Impacts of Air Pollution on Children and Women in Kathmandu and Saptari" shows the systemic impact of air pollution on various aspects of children's lives. The report also explored the effects of air pollution on women and underrepresented groups.

"Deteriorating air quality, both outdoors and indoors, has exposed children and women to a multitude of health hazards—asthma, other lung conditions, coughing, skin disease, nausea, and headache," reads the report. "Alarming, these conditions have led to increased cases of pregnancy loss, child organ underdevelopment, and a general decline in life expectancy."

The study carried out in Kathmandu and Saptari, two of the most polluted districts in the country, highlights a significant knowledge gap related to air pollution, including its effects in indoor settings and associated health risks, particularly for women and children who spend extensive periods inside their homes.

Experts say the deterioration of

air quality seriously affects public health. Poor air quality causes both short- and long-term effects on public health.

Bad air quality can cause pneumonia, bronchitis, conjunctivitis, skin allergy, stroke and heart problems, among others, in the short term, ulcers and cancer of the lungs and intestine, kidney disease and heart problems in the long run.

People living in areas with high levels of air pollution are most likely to suffer from asthma, and small children are not immune to these problems, according to doctors.

"Earlier more children would suffer from pneumonia," said Dr Ganesh Rai, former director at the Kanti Children's Hospital, Kathmandu. "These days, cases of childhood asthma have surpassed pneumonia."

Child health experts say that in most cases childhood asthma can be cured by an appropriate and timely

treatment but uncontrolled asthma can lead to lung damage.

In many cases, parents mistake asthma for pneumonia. Some parents are unaware of the signs, and the children could suffer from asthma, although asthma is commonly associated with the elderly.

"Polluted air has exacerbated childhood asthma in our country, this fact should be understood by all," said Rai. "Oftentimes, when children do not show fever or other symptoms, parents unknowingly overlook asthma and do not take the children to hospital for too long. It is crucial to seek medical help if a child has shortness of breath, trouble sleeping, or wheezing while breathing out."

Apart from polluted air, several other triggering factors including allergies, family history of asthma, and frequent respiratory illnesses are also responsible for childhood asthma, according to doctors.

Studies show that polluted air has been shortening the lives of Nepali people. Polluted air has been cutting short the lives of Nepali people by around five years, according to a report by the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI), which converts air pollution concentration into an impact on life expectancy. AQLI is a metric produced by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago.

Toxic air is deadlier than tobacco use and high blood pressure, which reduce life by 2.8 years and 1.7 years, respectively.

The reduction in life expectancy depends on where one lives—7.5 years in Mahottari, 7.4 years in Rautahat and Dhanusha, and 7.2 years in Sarlahi and Bara districts, the AQLI report said.

Likewise, the pollution has been shaving 6.7 years off the lives of people residing in Siraha, and 6.2 years in Saptari and Rupandehi districts.



A recent report by Save the Children shows critical linkages between air pollution and multi-faceted hazards for children.

Fires continue to devour forests across various districts

Wildfires usually start from March in Nepal, when farmers burn the crop residue on the fields and the threat keeps growing until April-May.

MADHAV ARYAL IN PALPA & DURGALAL KC IN DANG
APRIL 28

There is no respite from fires—both forest fires and house fires—continue to wreak havoc across the country in recent days.

As many as 24 houses and 10 sheds were reduced to ashes when a forest fire entered Hadbas settlement in ward 7 of Rajapur Rural Municipality in Dang district on Sunday. The incident occurred at around 3pm.

There were 25 houses in the settlement. Only the tin-roofed house belonging to Man Bahadur Giri was spared from the inferno. "All 24 houses destroyed by the fire had thatch roofs. The wildfire in the nearby forest entered the settlement. The villagers left no stone unturned to prevent the forest fire from entering the settlement but to no avail," said Bhim Oli, a local. According to him, the forest fire is yet to be contained.

Massive fires have been raging across hectares of forest lands in more than a dozen places in Palpa, a hill district in Lumbini Province. The fire that broke out in the northern slopes of the Shreenagar hill in Tansen three

days ago is still out of control. According to local residents, the fire started from the forest area in Gorkhekot and has spread up to Kailashnagar areas.

According to the Division Forest Office in Palpa, wildfires continue in Tallo Shreenagar forest, Ukalepipal forest, and Shreenagar Paryaparyatan community forest of Tansen. Similarly, forest fires are continuing in Dharampani, Bandipokhara, Agahakhola and Ribdikot of Rambha Rural Municipality, Jhumsa, Dobhan and Koldanda among other places of Tinau Rural Municipality in the district. Similarly, forest fires are yet to be controlled in Rainadevi Chahara, Mathagadhi, Nisidi, Purbakhola rural municipalities and Rampur Municipality.

"The fires burnt around 2,368 hectares of forest in 95 different places this year. It is quite difficult to douse the fires as strong winds again spread the bushfires," said Samyog Basnet, the information officer at the Division Forest Office.

As per the data available at the District Police Office, 14 houses were destroyed by fires in Palpa over the past one week while two locals sus-

tained injuries while attempting to control fires. "Most of the fires in the district were ignited by cigarette butts or burning foliages," said Sugandha Shrestha, the information officer at the District Police Office. Awareness among the people is essential for controlling forest fires, he added.

Massive fires have been raging across hectares of forest lands in more than a dozen places in Palpa.

Wildfires usually start from March in Nepal, when farmers burn the crop residue on the fields and the threat keeps growing until April-May, depending on precipitation. Thousands of fire incidents occur throughout the country during this period and many of them go unreported.

Forest fires have been reported in Kanchanpur district of Sudurpashchim Province as well. The fires have been raging in forest areas in the northern

part of Brahmadev, Bedkot and Krishnapur municipalities. "Around 300 forest areas have been affected. The wildfires are continuing in the border areas of Kanchanpur and Dadeladhura districts," said Shivaraj Awasthi, the information officer at the Division Forest Office in Kanchanpur. "Forest fires are going on in the remote areas. It is not possible to reach there and control the fires," he added.

A week ago, ready-to-harvest wheat on 10 bigha of farmlands belonging to 19 families were destroyed by a fire in Babathan of Dodhara Chandani Municipality. The fire was caused due to a short-circuit in the electricity poles near the fields. According to the District Police Office, 57 fire incidents have been reported in the district so far this fiscal year.

In Dhankuta, property worth millions of rupees was destroyed in three fire incidents on Saturday. The fire broke out from the house of Mira Karki in ward 4 of Pakhribas Municipality on Saturday and completely destroyed the house, an eatery, and a shop in the house.

According to Shyamsin Chaudhary, the chief of the Dhankuta District Police Office, the fire started from the

room of a tenant in Karki's house while cooking, which caused property damage worth Rs 1 million. Similarly, the fire was brought under control with the help of the army, police, and local residents, along with two fire engines from Dhankuta Municipality.

Another fire started from Badhare Community Forest in Dhankuta at around 9 am nearly destroyed half the forest and nearly entered human settlement, but was brought under control with the help of security personnel. It took more than two hours for 25 soldiers of the Nepal Army from two different battalions and 11 police officers of the Nepal Police to control the forest fire.

Similarly, the forest fire started in Janga Community Forest in ward 2 of Chaubise Rural Municipality of the district and destroyed 180-metre pipelines of the Namkha River drinking water and irrigation project. Due to the damage, several settlements in different wards of Chaubise Rural Municipality are deprived of clean drinking water.

(Our local correspondents contributed reporting)

Hearing of Supreme Court suo moto contempt case today

>>> Continued from page 1

"Launching suo moto cases is a standard practice in the judiciary worldwide although it is not very common here," senior advocate Dinesh Tripathi, a former chairperson of the Constitutional Lawyers' Forum, told the Post. "The Supreme Court has rightly initiated the case since its senior justice has been accused in the so-called sting operation."

Amid criticism over the content, the Press Council on Friday had directed the news website to take down the 'malicious and fabricated' content and present a written clarification for broadcasting it. But its management refused to abide by the directive. It instead published another episode on Saturday.

The move of the news website has been condemned by the media and civil society organisations. The Nepal Media Society on Saturday condemned the content saying it was published with a malicious intent to defame members of the media and the judiciary and demanded immediate action against those involved.

Press Council orders sidhakura.com publisher and editor to appear before the council by 3 pm Monday.

The umbrella body of Nepal-based media organisations had called the video a condemnable attempt to attack the democratic system, media and judiciary without any basis and demanded that relevant authorities take action against all those involved in the act. It had also claimed that such irresponsible and 'propaganda mills' cannot be considered media.

"There has been a rising trend of misusing technology to attack democratic systems and independent media and the judiciary, motivated by blind public support, worldwide," read a statement issued by Shuva Shankar Kandel, chair of the society. "The latest incident is a similar attempt by some YouTube channels that are producing tasteless 'fake news', which is a serious issue."

Earlier, senior advocate Hari Prasad Upreti and advocate Kishor Bista also issued a joint statement denying the allegations levelled against them in the audio clip. The content in question and its publication is misleading and we believe that this is a deliberate attack on the judiciary and the media, they said. "We vehemently oppose anyone who shares and defends such content on social media."

Supreme Court Justice Ananda Mohan Bhattacharai, who is named in the clip, objected to the content saying that it was motivated by the intent of spreading disbelief not only against the media houses and individuals but also against professional journalism and the judiciary as a whole.

"I am shocked and surprised that my name has been linked with the news published by 'Sidha Kura.' My career, spanning almost 43 years, is an open book," Bhattacharai said.

Kantipur Media Group chairperson Kailash Sirohiya and Rameshwar Thapa, chairman of the Annapurna Media Network, who are also accused of being involved in the case, had filed separate complaints at the Press Council arguing that the online portal had attempted to undermine the pillars of the democratic system, therefore, needs to be investigated and held accountable for its action.

Meanwhile, the council has ordered the editor and presenter of sidhakura.com to appear before the council's office at Tilganga, Kathmandu by 3 pm on Monday along with evidence to substantiate the accusations made in the disputed content published by them.

Most people in Africa can't afford healthy diet. Conflict, lack of investment blamed

>>> Continued from page 1

Apart from being rich in nitrogen, organic fertilisers help increase the soil's carbon and ability to retain moisture, Ngezimana said. "Even if a farmer puts synthetic fertiliser into the soil, they are likely to suffer the consequences of poor moisture as long as there is a drought," he said.

Other moves to traditional practices are under way. Drought-resistant millets, sorghum and legumes, staples

until the early 20th century when they were overtaken by exotic white corn, have been taking up more land space in recent years.

Leaves of drought-resistant plants that were once a regular dish before being cast off as weeds are returning to dinner tables. They even appear on elite supermarket shelves and are served at classy restaurants, as are millet and sorghum.

This could create markets for the

crops even beyond drought years, Ngezimana said.

A greenhouse revolution in Somalia

In conflict-prone Somalia in East Africa, greenhouses are changing the way some people live, with shoppers filling up carts with locally produced vegetables and traditionally nomadic pastoralists under pressure to settle down and grow crops.

"They are organic, fresh and healthy," shopper Sucdi Hassan said in the capital, Mogadishu. "Knowing that they come from our local farms makes us feel secure."

Her new shopping experience is a sign of relative calm after three decades of conflict and the climate shocks of drought and flooding.

Urban customers are now assured of year-round supplies, with more than 250 greenhouses dotted across Mogadishu and its outskirts producing fruit and vegetables. It is a huge leap.

"In the past, even basic vegetables like cucumbers and tomatoes were imported, causing logistical problems and added expenses," said Somalia's minister of youth and sports, Mohamed Barre.

The greenhouses also create employment in a country where about 75% of the population is people under 30 years old, many of them jobless.

About 15 kilometres from the capital, Mohamed Mahdi, an agriculture graduate, inspected produce in a greenhouse where he works.

"Given the high unemployment

rate, we are grateful for the chance to work in our chosen field of expertise," the 25-year-old said.

Meanwhile, some pastoralist herders are being forced to change their traditional ways after watching livestock die by the thousands.

"Transitioning to greenhouse farming provides pastoralists with a more resilient and sustainable livelihood option," said Mohamed Okash, director of the Institute of Climate and Environment at SIMAD University in Mogadishu. He called for larger investments in smart farming to combat food insecurity.

A more resilient bean in Kenya

In Kenya, a new climate-smart bean variety is bringing hope to farmers in a region that had recorded reduced rainfall in six consecutive rainy seasons.

The variety, called "Nyota" or "star" in Swahili, is the result of a collaboration between scientists from the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization, the Alliance of Bioversity International and research organization International

Center for Tropical Agriculture.

The new bean variety is tailored for Kenya's diverse climatic conditions. One focus is to make sure drought doesn't kill them off before they have time to flourish.

The bean variety flowers and matures so quickly that it is ready for harvesting by the time rains disappear, said David Karanja, a bean breeder and national coordinator for grains and legumes at KALRO.

Hopes are that these varieties could bolster national bean production. The annual production of 600,000 metric tons falls short of meeting annual demand of 755,000 metric tons, Karanja said.

Farmer Benson Gitonga said his yield and profits are increasing because of the new bean variety. He harvests between nine and 12 bags from an acre of land, up from the previous five to seven bags.

One side benefit of the variety is a breath of fresh air.

"Customers particularly appreciate its qualities, as it boasts low flatulence levels, making it an appealing choice," Gitonga said.

Notice
Mr. Srayan Ghosh, holder of Indian Passport No. Z5178326, and Miss. Moheeta Tamrakar, holder of Nepalese Passport No. BA0008815, intend to get married at the High Commission of India, Level-1, Wisma HRIH Lotus, 442 Jalan Pahang, Setapak, 53000, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969 of India. Objections, if any, may be conveyed to the High Commission of India, Kuala Lumpur by email (fscscons.kl@mea.gov.in, attestation.kl@mea.gov.in) within 30 days.

मोटरसाइकल हरायो
मिति २०८१/०१/११ गते दिउँसो १:३० बजे बा.प्र.०२-०४६५ १४०३ नम्बरको पल्सर बाइक २२० सीसी, कालो/रातो रंगको पशुपति मन्दिरनाजिके नमस्कालीनाट हराएको हुँदा पाउनु हुने महानुभावले नजिकको प्रहरी चौकी वा निम्न ठेगानामा सम्पर्क गरिदिनु हुन अनुरोध छ।
नाम : हरिकृष्ण कार्की
ठेगाना : बन्धुवर्मा-१६, काठमाडौं
इन्सुरन्स नं. : DKXCNM/37851
ज्यासिस नं. : MD2A13EXONCM83515
सम्पर्क : ९८५१०३१५२२

सर्टिफिकेट हरायो
मिति २०८०/१२/२४ गते वानेश्वर देखि पुनर्तीसडकसम्म जीदा मेरो निम्न व्यहोरा भएकै व्याखलासंको कन्भोकेसन सर्टिफिकेट हराएको हुँदा पाउनु हुने महानुभावहरूले नजिकको प्रहरी चौकी वा फोन नं. ४८६००७०७६८ मा खबर गरिदिनु हुन अनुरोध गर्दछु।
नाम: सेलीना पाण्डे
रजिष्ट्रेशन नं.: २०११-०२-०३-१०४७
वर्ष: २०८० (२०२४)
ठेगाना: वानेश्वर, काठमाडौं।

Ruling and opposition parties close ranks to assure investors

Leaders stress that political instability is no threat to investments as policy stability creates an investor-friendly climate.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, APRIL 28

Politicians on either side of the isle tried to assure potential investors with one voice on Sunday of the safety and return on their investments in Nepal as the government kicked off the two-day Investment Summit.

Leader of the main opposition Nepali Congress, Sher Bahadur Deuba, supported Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's statement before foreign delegates that Nepal is an investment-friendly country.

Speaking at the opening session of the third Investment Summit in Kathmandu on Sunday, Prime Minister Dahal, who chairs the CPN (Maoist Centre), and Congress President Deuba tried to send a message across that the country's political instability won't impact their investments. Political instability is often blamed for the lack of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Nepal but the leaders stressed that policy stability ensures a suitable investment climate.

During his speech at the summit, Nepal's prime minister, who adheres to a communist ideology, reassured investors of the government's liberal investment policies. This was a considerable move on the part of the prime minister for Rameshore Khanal, a former finance secretary.

"Not only the prime minister and the opposition leader, but leaders of major parties who spoke at the event also vowed to maintain continuity of policy despite changes in the government," Khanal told the Post. "An unstable political situation is often denounced when it comes to the lack of foreign investment in our country, but leaders have tried to reassure the investors of the continuity of the policy despite the changes in government."

Leaders, ranging from the ruling coalition to the opposition party, who spoke on the occasion assured of policy continuity and urged investors to invest in Nepal. "The leaders tried to assure investors that they won't face any economic backlash should they invest in Nepal," Khanal said.

The Congress-Maoist Centre alliance governed the country until March 4, before Maoist Centre chair Dahal ditched the Congress and took UML on board. The third Nepal Investment Summit, announced by the Congress-Maoist government in November last year, was continued by the UML-Maoist Centre government.

Addressing the inaugural session of the summit, Congress President Deuba also said that all major parties of Nepal are committed to uniting to promote foreign investment and have consensus on major investment issues of the country.

Deuba presented Nepal as a country with a great potential for development but also acknowledged that it lacks sufficient capital and appropriate technology to achieve the benefits of development. Reiterating Nepal as an attractive investment destination, Deuba appealed to foreigners to invest here.

"Nepal is willing to enter into bilateral investment protection agreements with various countries to promote Nepal as an attractive investment destination," Deuba said.

"International and domestic investors can leave a transformative impact on major sectors such as agriculture, tourism, infrastructure development, mining and minerals, hydropower and information technology."

Prime Minister Dahal stressed that Nepal is a suitable destination for investment and called upon investors to take advantage of this opportunity. Expressing his government's commitment to liberal policies, he spoke of efforts made to build an investment-friendly climate.

The prime minister said that Nepal was moving steadily towards creating a friendly environment for investors, industrialists, and entrepreneurs. As part of the effort, eight laws related to business and investment have been amended. The government revised some crucial laws related to investment through an ordinance.

President Ramchandra Paudel on Sunday issued the ordinance amending some Nepal acts related to investment facilitation. The President issued the ordinance on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers in accordance with Article 114 (1) of the Constitution of Nepal.

A day before the third Nepal Investment Summit, the main opposition Congress had expressed its serious reservations over the government's approach to amending important laws through ordinance. However, the Congress reservation over the ordinance did not reflect in the summit hall. The remarks made by Congress leader Deuba and Prakash Sharan Mahat, who was the finance minister when the summit was announced, also suggest that.

Internally, the political parties of Nepal might have differing opinions on various things, but the diversity of political views won't affect foreign investments in Nepal, Mahat said.

Yubaraj Khatriwada, another former finance minister and UML leader, and Swarnim Wagle, vice-chair of Rastriya Swatantra Party and an economist, also expressed views supportive of investments.

Before this, Nepal had hosted two Investment Summits back in 2017 and 2019.

Vote counting in Ilam, Bajhang continues



A poll official empties a ballot box at Gautam Buddha Conference Hall in Ilam on Sunday.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, APRIL 28

The counting of votes of the by-elections held on Saturday in Ilam and Bajhang continued till late night on Sunday.

The election commission conducted the bypolls to elect a lawmaker to the House of Representatives in Ilam-2 and a provincial member in Bajhang (A) for the seats that were vacant after deaths of the two representatives last year.

Suhang Nembang of the CPN-UML was leading in Ilam-2 as the Post went to press.

As of 11:30pm on Sunday, Nembang received 4,413 votes while Dambar Khadka of the Nepali Congress was trailing with 3,258 votes. Initially, Khadka of Congress had led the vote count.

Independent candidate Dakendra Singh Limbu was third in the race garnering 963 votes.

Likewise, Milan Limbu of the Rastriya Swatantra Party was fourth.

Around 60 percent of votes were cast in the constituency in the Saturday by-election. In Ilam-2, a total of 115,889 individuals were eligible to vote, but only around 69,287 took part in the voting.

As many as 19 candidates have contested the Ilam-2 bypolls.

During the 2022 federal election, UML's Subas Nembang beat Khadka by a narrow margin of 114 votes. The CPN (Maoist Centre) had supported Congress candidate Khadka then but now the Maoist Centre has allied with the UML.

The Ilam-2 House seat has been vacant after Subas Nembang died of a heart attack in September last year. The UML leader had continuously won the constituency since the 1999 general elections.

The CPN-UML fielded Suhang, son of the former Speaker Subas Nembang, as the party's candidate in the constituency.

Meanwhile, in Bajhang (A), the UML's Daman Bahadur Bhandari was leading the vote count as well.

Bhandari received 4,158 votes while Abhishek Bahadur Singh of the Nepali Congress garnered 3,590 votes.

Janak Bahadur Budha of the CPN (Maoist Centre) is third in the race with 2,096 votes. As many as 11 candidates have contested the by-polls for the provincial assembly seat.

The Bajhang (A) bypoll was conducted for a seat in the Sudurpaschim Assembly which remains vacant after Prithvi Bahadur Singh, a member and provincial minister, died in a road accident in June last year.

Global IME Bank presents KANTIPUR

Half-Marathon 2024

KMG
KANTIPUR MEDIA GROUP

JESTHA
5
18 MAY, 2024

**RUN TO
INSPIRE
THE YOUNG**

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



REGISTRATION IS OPEN

SCAN TO REGISTER

VISIT OUR REGISTRATION DESK

LOCATION : CENTRAL BUSINESS PARK, THAPATHALI

TIME : 10AM - 5 PM

CONTACT : 01-5135019 | +977-01-5135000

FORMS AVAILABLE AT ALL

GLOBAL IME BANK BRANCHES.



CELEBRATION PARTNER



TECHNICAL PARTNER



PARTNERS



OPINION



OUR VIEW

Alternative investment

Investing in LGBTIQ tourism will benefit Nepal in multiple ways.

The ongoing Nepal Investment Summit hopes to attract much-needed investment to the country. Taking part are over 1,700 potential investors from 55 countries. A total of 150 public and private projects are being showcased at the gathering. After two previous rather disappointing summits (in terms of realisation of pledged investments), we will have to wait a bit to see the outcome of this one. But there is one more promising avenue for Nepal's economy. A week ago, Kathmandu hosted another vital gathering: The country's first international LGBTIQ tourism conference. Whether or not Nepal can pull in big investments, it can certainly welcome more queer tourists and make big bucks: According to one estimate, the global spending power of the queer segment is around \$4.7 trillion. Nepal is increasingly seen as a safe travel destination for LGBTIQ folks. This image has only been boosted by the successful marriage registration of Surendra Pandey and Maya Gurung, the first same-sex couple to be legally recognised in Nepal, in November 2023. It was only the latest in a series of legal interventions recognising the rights of people of all genders and sexual orientations.

As stakeholders have pointed out, 'pink tourism' will not just bring in foreign currency, it will also promote further inclusion and empowerment of the queer community. They will get good jobs too. Many such worthy initiatives are already underway. For instance, in order to cater to the tourists of the segment, the Nepal Tourism Board recently organised a trekking guide training for 25 individuals from the community. More queer-friendly businesses are opening up, and members of the community now head dozens of restaurants, travel agencies and hotels. All this makes Nepal easily the most LGBTIQ-friendly destination in South Asia. This is why it may be worthwhile for the country to explore multiple levels of engagement with the community, including in medical tourism. With no such facility available in Nepal, members of the Nepali transgender community are struggling to fund their gender affirmation surgeries abroad. If such surgeries could be arranged in Nepal, not only would it benefit the native transgender community but also attract other trans folks who want to undertake such procedures at a friendly location.

It's not just a matter of economics or the rights of the queer community either. With each progressive step of government agencies, NGOs and the private sector, Nepal is at large have also been forced to confront their prejudices and to widen their outlook on gender and sexuality. This opening up of our minds will further boost the country's democratic culture. The prolonged economic slump has bred a kind of cynicism among us, which is also reflected in the over 1,500 people who are leaving the country to work and live abroad every single day. Yet in a world where parochialism has become the norm, Nepal is proud of the growing openness to new ideas and views, their homeland a welcome refuge for everyone. Nepal has the basics covered to welcome many more queer tourists. Now it is a matter of promoting the country right and building the facilities to cater to the community.

Congress's gamble against Rabi

The NC's obstruction of Parliament and muzzling of Lamichhane will not help get their votes back.

NARESH KOIRALA



For weeks now, the Nepali Congress (NC) has been demanding that Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane resign or be investigated by a parliamentary committee for his alleged involvement in embezzling funds from a cooperative, even as the government continues to defend him. On March 27, Basant Kunwar, the Inspector General of Nepal Police, said that a complaint regarding the matter had been logged, but their investigation yielded no evidence, falling outside the preview of the law (*Onlinekhabar*, March 27, 2024). The NC argued Kunwar's comments could not be relied upon because he reports to the home ministry.

The NC also rejected Lamichhane's offer to address Parliament and answer their concerns. In response, Swarnim Wagle, a Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) lawmaker, challenged all political parties to support a "grand public inquiry" into all corruption cases, including in the cooperatives. No wonder none of the major parties took his bait. They are all believed to have been parties to several major past corruption cases. Having failed to resolve the impasse, the Speaker on April 14 prorogued the winter session of Parliament.

Obstruction of proceedings

Halting the parliament has become a routine in our political culture. When in opposition, the CPN-UML used obstruction as its primary tool to oppose the government. The party obstructed the house for eight months, between September 2021 and May 2022, because the Speaker refused their demand to revoke the membership of 14 lawmakers who had defected from the UML. In May last year, the UML obstructed the House protesting an allegation by a lawmaker that the party chair, KP Sharma Oli, was involved in a corruption scandal.

The NC is in the business now just because the government didn't concede to their demand. Sharp disagreements



SCREENGRAB FROM PARLIAMENT LIVE STREAM

between the government and the opposition are common in every democracy. Take the schism between the Republicans and the Democrats in the United States Congress. Despite the differences, the parties let the process work. In extreme cases, the opposition may walk out of Congress for a short period, but blocking the proceedings and suspending the House for an extended period is unheard of.

Lamichhane's financial past is known to be murky and questionable. IGP Kunwar's comments notwithstanding, a recent report from the Nepal Police's Rupandehi District Office implicated Lamichhane in a scandal of unpaid loan from the Supreme Saving and Credit Cooperative in Butwal. It is within the NC's rights to ask for an investigation into Lamichhane's dealings. However, there are other options to force the investigation than obstructing Parliament.

Since Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal brought Lamichhane to the cabinet, it would have been more sensible for the NC to go after Dahal than Lamichhane. The concern with conflict of interest could be addressed by requiring Lamichhane to recuse himself from the investigation and by ensuring his separation from the investigation is diligently followed.

Parliamentary debates are key to the legislative process. To ensure that the debates happen without fear of prosecution, every MP is endowed with the

privilege of freedom of speech, which guarantees his/her complete immunity from prosecution or civil liability for any comment he/she makes in Parliament. Considering this, obstructions by the NC and the UML are profoundly unparliamentary.

Consequences

The RSP came into existence because of the non-performance of the older parties and the widely held belief that politicians in old parties are involved in pervasive corruption. The party's anti-corruption and efficient public service delivery agenda made it the fastest-growing political party in the country. All three major parties lost their votes in the last election, but the NC lost almost 11 percent, according to a long-time NC leader, Arjun Narshing KC. Most of the support for the RSP came from traditional NC voters.

The newbie claims to have joined the government on the condition that it be allowed to work on its agenda without any interference. On March 13, Swarnim Wagle said his party would withdraw from the government if it failed to deliver. Lamichhane has already taken steps to resurrect some of the old corruption cases buried by the previous governments before a satisfactory conclusion. If these investigations continue, they will likely attract senior leaders of all three major parties.

As the investigation proceeds, the prime minister will come under intense pressure from the UML and the NC leadership to intervene and terminate the investigation. If he does not intervene and the RSP delivers its agenda even partially, voters will see them as a better option than older parties. The non-intervention will be beneficial for the RSP. Even an intervention will work. If the prime minister intervenes, the RSP will accuse him of creating hurdles in its pursuit of corruption and leave the government. They will go to the next election with "anti-corruption investigations obstructed by the older parties" as their main slogan—a vote catcher for people fed up with political corruption! The RSP is in a win-win position as long as it does not waver from its present anti-corruption and service delivery agenda.

Joining the government on the condition of delivering their agenda was a clever move by the RSP. Whether Dahal intervenes or not, it will work in RSP's favour. The NC's obstruction of Parliament and muzzling of Lamichhane is indefensible and will not get their votes back. The NC had already lost its image as a party anchored in democratic ideals and political integrity. By blocking Parliament, it has diminished further.

Naresh Koirala is a political observer.

MONDAY INTERVIEW ANIL POKHREL

Next two months will be challenging due to fire incidents

Portable fire pumps are quite helpful in putting out fires in rural areas as well as cities of Nepal.

People lost their loved ones and incurred huge losses in fire incidents in various districts in the past weeks. At least 110 houses were gutted in Mahottari last week as fast-spreading fires engulfed an entire settlement. Just before that, several settlements were destroyed in Gulmi, Rupandehi and Arghakhanchi. The *Post's* Thira Lal Bhusal sat down with Anil Pokhrel, chief executive of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA), for insights on why fire incidents this year have become so common and alarming.

the litter piled up on the forest floor this time, there was not enough rainfall to dampen it. Rising temperatures and wind gusts added fuel, helping fires spread faster.

Thus, the wildfires became more disastrous this time. Nine people have already lost their lives since Nepali New Year (April 13). The death toll of the two weeks is concerning. Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane convened an emergency meeting on Friday where secretaries of the ministries concerned and security chiefs, among other senior officials, joined the discussions. We presented this scenario there and drew their attention to the fact that we still have another two months of dry season until the pre-monsoon rainfall. The next two months are going to be challenging.

Besides that, there is an increasing trend of stubble burning mainly because youths aren't available in villages to work in the fields. Due to acute shortage of labour and high cost of clearing fields, people are resorting to burning stubbles, weeds and other remains. There is a perception among the farmers that the ashes work as manure. So, we need massive awareness and training to tackle the situation. People need to be educated about the wider effects of such acts in society. We have also seen unprecedented levels of damage to houses and settlements. When large swathes of forests are burnt, a long-developed ecosystem is destroyed. There are also indirect impacts on human health. In 2019, an estimated 42,100 deaths were attributed to air pollution in Nepal. Besides, the movement of bad quality air from our southern neighbour India is also causing problems. So, this is also a regional problem.

You said the ministry convened several meetings in and outside Kathmandu, held discussions among stakeholders and authorities concerned were also alerted. But why have our agencies failed to stop and contain fire incidents?

Yes, we have convened a series of dialogues on fire incidents. We also organised events for specific municipalities. The most recent one was in Madhesh Province, where chief district officers of all eight districts in the province, among other officials,



Anil Pokhrel, chief executive, NDRRMA

were invited. Home minister chaired the meeting. We are taking such initiatives to expedite preparatory measures.

In fact, our forest coverage increased drastically in the past three decades. Globally, Nepal is taken as a success story in growing forests. This is positive but it also increases the risk of fires. We don't have adequate human resources, training and equipment to protect these forests from fire. Also, the increasing trend of youths leaving the country and people migrating from the villages has exacerbated the situation. Women and the elderly who are left behind are more vulnerable to fire incidents. Homesteads of deserted houses are covered by bushes. We also find totally empty settlements. There is no gap between forests

and settlements. These factors are causing disastrous fires.

What is the government doing to tackle the problem in view of this changed context?

We have introduced some new technologies based on our ground reality. Usually, we find people in our context go to the fire incident sites without any equipment and gear. There is also a lack of trained people across the country. So, we are focusing on training members of community forest groups. We now prioritise certain areas identified as hotspots. We are giving three types of training. We are training local volunteers who are working with palikas [local units] and other agencies at the local levels. We

give orientation on how to put off fires in grasslands and bushes and how to do it when it spreads as crown fire. When trees start to burn people shouldn't go there. Only fire brigades are useful in such cases. But fire trucks can't go to difficult terrains. So, we have introduced portable fire pumps. We learned this from Japan's national disaster management authority. These pumps are handheld. People can carry them on their own and use them in difficult terrains as well.

Can they effectively put off big fires?

They are quite effective. For that, you need a pond, a well or other source of water. Since last year, we have already used these water pumps in over 120 places and found them quite effective in dousing fires. At Friday's meeting we decided to invest more in such pumps. I suggested every ward of local units need to have at least one such portable fire pump. They can't replace fire trucks but are quite useful for us given our geographical features and even for narrow streets of a city like Kathmandu. You need Rs10 million to buy a fire truck, whereas around 20 portable pumps can be bought for the same amount. The cost ranges from Rs300,000 to around Rs1 million. So each ward can easily afford it. They can pump water from a distant pond or river in hill areas and it can be carried along with water tanks in narrow streets in towns. Maintaining a fire truck and fire brigade is difficult as we need drivers, firemen and their assistants. So, palikas may not be able to afford that. Therefore, we are planning to promote portable fire pumps.

In addition, we are designing a training curriculum mainly targeting three sections of people—volunteers of community forest users groups, security agencies including the forest guards and the disaster responders and district level officials who should understand its nuances. We are also running campaigns through various types of awareness materials. In the meantime, we have added search and rescue equipment mainly for security agencies and other personnel deployed in the tasks. Likewise, we have started adopting advanced systems such as helicopters to put off forest fires. First time, we doused forest fires from heli-

copters through the 'bambi bucket operations' in Pathibhara of Taplejung and then in Shivapuri and Tanahu as well.

Are palikas and other local agencies effective in tackling these cases?

We have found local community forest groups quite active in tackling fire incidents. They may not be able to handle big fires. So they coordinate and work with security agencies. Our legal system has given palikas the lead in such cases. So, our role is to equip the local governments. We handed over 100 portable fire pumps to them while around 14 have been sent to district emergency operation centres. Our focus is on equipping local governments. Of them, some do really well. Some others have average performance while yet others do really poorly. We need to form a group of volunteers in each local unit, train them and equip them with gears.

What about the role of provinces? Are they working effectively in disaster management?

Provinces are critical especially for undertaking risk assessments and determining which palikas have higher, moderate and lower levels of risks. They can help enhance the capacity of local governments and in reconstruction as well. Some provincial authorities are working as per that spirit, such as in Koshi and Bagmati. Karnali has introduced a new concept of insurance for humans as well as property loss.

In recent years, we have seen a rapid increase in the number of big business complexes in Kathmandu and other cities. But they don't seem prepared to tackle fire incidents or other disasters. How do you see this trend?

This is a serious issue. We discussed this matter in Friday's emergency meeting as well. We need to devise a system to assess risk in such buildings. These buildings need to be inspected and checked for whether there is a fire fighting system in place, adequate exits and evacuation systems. We will work on these issues with local governments as it falls under their jurisdiction.

FOREX

US Dollar	133.65
Euro	142.93
Pound Sterling	166.94
Swiss Franc	146.18
Australian Dollar	87.32
Canadian Dollar	97.76
Singapore Dollar	98.07
Japanese Yen (10)	8.44
Chinese Yuan	18.44
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.64
Qatari Riyal	36.66
Thai Bhat	3.62
UAE Dhiram	36.39
Malaysian Ringgit	28.03
Korean Won (100)	9.70

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES

Nepse (in percent) **1,980.27** pts **0.72%**

HIGHEST GAINERS						
PFL	PROFL	SIFC	BFC	KLSBL	NFS	
9.02	7.62	6.8	6.78	5.93	5.79	
MODERATE GAINERS						
MBLDS	SBL	MNBL	GLBSL	USLB	RBB083	
0.1	0.09	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.02	
MODERATE LOSERS						
CBBL	JALPA	NABIL	RIDI	UPPER	USHL	
-0.11	-0.08	-0.07	-0.06	-0.06	-0.02	
HIGHEST LOSERS						
RFPL	NICGF2	GBB085	CHL	NICSF	KDBY	
-4.63	-4.17	-3.63	-3.61	-3.22	-3.06	

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 137,600
Silver	Rs 1,660

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Dubai begins construction of 'world's largest' airport terminal

DUBAI: Dubai announced on Sunday that work had begun on a new terminal at Al Maktoum International Airport, which the Gulf emirate's ruler said will become "the world's largest" at a cost of almost \$35 billion. "We approved the designs for the new passenger terminal at Al Maktoum International Airport, and (are) commencing construction of the building for \$34.85 billion," Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai and prime minister of the United Arab Emirates, said on X. Once fully operational, the airport will "handle a passenger capacity of 260 million annually", the government said in a statement. (AFP)

Watch of richest Titanic passenger sells for £1.17 million

LONDON: A gold watch found on the body of the richest passenger on the Titanic was auctioned in England for £1.17 million (\$1.46 million) on Saturday. It was a record sum for an object linked to the notorious 1912 shipping disaster, said auctioneers Henry Aldridge & Son. A US buyer won the bidding war, smashing the auctioneer's pre-sale estimate of between £100,000 and £150,000. The watch, engraved with the initials JJA, belonged to the US business magnate John Jacob Astor. Astor was 47 when he died as the Titanic sank in the early hours of April 15, 1912. He was reputed to be one of the richest men in the world at the time. (AFP)

Russia extends mandatory FX conversion for major exporters

MOSCOW: Russia on Saturday said it would require major exporters to carry on converting the bulk of their foreign currency earnings into rubles for another year to help support the national currency. Moscow has used strict capital controls to prop up the value of the ruble in the two years since the West levelled sweeping financial sanctions in response to Russia's military offensive on Ukraine. The Russian government said Saturday it had agreed to extend rules requiring 43 major Russian commodities groups to convert at least 80 percent of their foreign currency earnings into rubles until the end of April 2025. "The decision will contribute to maintaining the stability of the exchange rate and the resilience of the Russian financial market," it said in a statement. (AFP)

China offers nearly \$1,400 for car trade-ins

BEIJING: Drivers in China who trade in an old car for a newer model are eligible for a subsidy of up to 10,000 yuan (\$1,380), the commerce ministry has announced. China is the world's biggest market for cars, and the most competitive in the electric vehicle sector, with more than 100 home-grown companies racing to make the clean car of the future. But an economic slowdown has weighed on consumer spending and fuelled a price war between manufacturers, denting their profitability. (AFP)

Beijing to Nepal: Build a good nest to attract the phoenix

>> Continued from page 1

Without entry routes from the southwestern points, these airports have higher operating costs for any airlines entering Nepal from the west. Nepal has been prodding New Delhi for over a decade to open new air corridors but to no avail.

The air route issue, however, does not affect Chinese airlines as they enter and exit Nepal from the northern and eastern border points of Nepal.

Luo said that one of the major achievements between the two neighbours is the agreement to build the Trans Himalaya All-dimensional Connectivity Network. "Last September, Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal paid an official visit to China. Our leaders have reached an important consensus guiding our future cooperation. All these fruits are in the process of implementation."

"I'm satisfied to note that more than 350 entrepreneurs from China participated in today's function. It shows how the Chinese government and Chinese entrepreneurs show their strong interest in Nepal."

One of the important policies the Chinese entrepreneurs are quite interested in is to have a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) arrangements between our two countries, he said.

An FTA reduces barriers to imports and exports between countries by eliminating all or most tariffs, quotas, subsidies, and prohibitions.

"That will be a key to improving Nepal's investment environment to attract more Chinese investment," said Luo ending his speech with a Chinese saying, "Build a good nest to attract the phoenix."

The third edition of the Nepal Investment Summit brought together more than 1,100 foreign participants in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, mostly from two immediate neighbours India and China. To mark the beginning of the summit, the Investment Board Nepal, on Sunday, invited Expressions of Interest (EOI) for 12 projects from potential investors.

The government has offered 148 potential projects, with nearly Rs900 billion worth of ready-to-go projects, to foreign and domestic investors. Most of the projects, according to the Investment Board Nepal are hydro-power and officials are hopeful that the sector will attract investment from energy-hungry India.

While China claimed that it currently is the top source of FDI for Nepal, India said it has the highest FDI stock in Nepal.

Naveen Srivastava, ambassador of India to Nepal, said currently India is the biggest cumulative FDI investor in Nepal, with more than 33 percent of Nepal's FDI stock, which amounts to about Rs89 billion.

"This investment trend continues its positive trajectory, and in recent times, we've seen new investments coming in sectors such as construc-



The third edition of the Nepal Investment Summit brought together more than 1,100 foreign participants in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu.

tion, automobiles, or FMCG [fast-moving consumer goods]. This is apart from the huge investment that India and Indian companies are making in the hydropower sector. As we look to the future, the government of India will continue to encourage Indian industry to invest further in Nepal."

"The large presence of the Indian delegation today is a reflection of that commitment. We would also be launching a new investment guide for investment by Indian companies in Nepal in collaboration with the Nepal India Chambers of Commerce and Industry," he said.

"We've launched cross-border digital payments to facilitate an ever greater number of Indian tourists coming to Nepal. Indian tourists already constitute the largest number of foreign visitors to Nepal. In the last few years, hydropower exports from Nepal to India have added a new dimension to our ties. Last year alone, Nepal exported about 650 MW of power to India, earning a considerable revenue, which constituted about 10 percent of Nepal's total export to India or 7 percent of Nepal's global exports."

To further foster this, Nepal and India have also concluded a long-term agreement on power trade.

"At present, we are also discussing a trilateral power trade between India, Nepal and Bangladesh. The vast demand for clean energy in South Asia with a combined population of close to 2 billion people provides an opportunity for Nepal to further boost its hydropower potential and economic development," said Srivastava.

In his video messages, Piyush Goyal, India's Minister of Commerce and Industry, said Nepal is a key partner in India's Neighbourhood First policy. "We will continue to invest in

Nepal. We will continue to expand our trading and business relationship." "I urge Indian investors across the globe to invest in Nepal, to seize the opportunity, and become a part of emerging Nepal."

Sushil Sharma, chairman and managing director of SJVN Limited, an India-based company engaged in the power generation, said SJVN started its journey in Nepal in 2008 by signing a memorandum of understanding for the 900 MW Arun III Hydroelectric Project. "And since then, we have moved a long way developing three hydro projects of around 2,000 MW, which are under different stages of implementation."

He said that the enactment of the Public-Private Partnership and Investment Act in 2019 was one such major initiative of Nepal. "The expeditious clearance of Lower Arun detailed project report [DPR] in a record time of 90 days, which has not happened in India itself."

SJVN Limited is developing 57 gigawatts of power projects in the fields of hydro, solar, wind, thermal energy, and out of these, 2,200 MW are hydro-power projects in Nepal, and investments of more than Rs330 billion will be drawn to implement the Nepal-based projects, said Sharma.

"I would like to highlight that SJVN is committed to generating more than 5,000 MW of hydropower in Nepal by 2030," he said.

"India has signed an agreement for importing 10,000 MW of electricity from Nepal. However, we know the electricity market has now converted from a seller's market into a buyer's market, especially concerning India. Therefore, the development of hydro projects in Nepal requires time-bound and cost-effective completion so that the power generated in Nepal remains

competitive in the export market," said Sharma.

"I would also like to draw the attention of the government on their part towards areas where improvement is still required, especially laws regarding the acquisition of private and forest land for timely completion of ongoing projects."

As such, all necessary regulations in transmission infrastructure need to be framed at the earliest to achieve this ambitious target for which, the government of Nepal is humbly requested to delegate more powers to the Investment Board Nepal."

The two-day summit was inaugurated by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. In his remarks, Dahal said that Nepal provides several incentives to foreign investors, including a robust regulatory framework, provision for the avoidance of double taxation, protection of intellectual property rights, and competitive corporate taxation, among others, and urged foreigners to invest in Nepal.

"Nepal has recently approved the Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIA) framework, which aims to protect and promote bilateral investment. I encourage all our friendly nations to consider signing the BIA at the earliest." The prime minister said that the skilled workforce and low labour costs make Nepal an attractive proposition for international investors. "Provisions of national and non-discriminatory treatment for all FDIs and guaranteed repatriation in foreign currency further enhance the attractiveness of investing in Nepal."

Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun said that the main objective of the summit is to project Nepal as an emerging destination for private sector investment and to highlight recent reforms in enhancing the investment

Host Saudi warns of economic fallout from Gaza war at global summit

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE RIYADH, APRIL 28

Saudi Arabia on Sunday called for regional "stability", warning of the effects of the ongoing Israel-Hamas war on global economic sentiment at the start of a summit attended by a host of Gaza mediators.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Palestinian leaders and high-ranking officials from other countries trying to broker a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas are on the guest list for the summit in Riyadh, capital of the world's biggest crude oil exporter.

The Gaza war along with conflicts in Ukraine and elsewhere put "a lot of pressure" on the economic "mood", Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan said at one of the first panel discussions of the two-day World Economic Forum (WEF) special meeting. "I think cool-headed countries and leaders and people need to prevail," Jadaan said. "The region needs stability."

The war in Gaza, which has sent regional tensions soaring, began with an unprecedented attack on southern Israel by Palestinian militant group Hamas on October 7.

The attack resulted in the deaths of about 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Israel estimates that 129 hostages seized by militants on October 7 are still being held in Gaza, including 34 the military says are dead.

Vowing to destroy Hamas, Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 34,454 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry. Speaking in Riyadh, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said the United States "is the only country capable" of preventing Israel's long-feared invasion of Rafah city in southern Gaza.

"We appeal to the United States of America to ask Israel to stop the Rafah operation," Abbas said, warning it would harm and displace civilians, and be "the biggest disaster in the history of the Palestinian people".



Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman Al-Saud speaks to a panel during the World Economic Forum Special Meeting in Riyadh on Sunday.

Saudi planning minister Faisal al-Ibrahimi told a press conference on Saturday, previewing the summit, that the world is "walking a tightrope right now, trying to balance security and prosperity".

"We meet at a moment when one misjudgement or one miscalculation or one miscommunication will further exacerbate our challenges."

WEF president Borge Brende said there was "some new momentum now in the talks around the hostages, and also for... a possible way out of the impasse we are faced with in Gaza".

However there will be no Israeli participation at the summit.

"This is more an opportunity to have structured discussions" with "the key players" including mediators Qatar and Egypt, he said.

"There will be discussions, of course, on the ongoing humanitarian situation in Gaza" as well as on Iran, which backs Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah group, he added.

The US State Department said Blinken will "discuss ongoing efforts to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza that secures the release of hostages".

Hamas said on Saturday it was stud-

ying the latest Israeli counterproposal regarding a potential ceasefire in Gaza, a day after media reports said a delegation from mediator Egypt arrived in Israel in a bid to jump-start stalled negotiations.

From the outset Saudi Arabia has worked with other regional and global powers to try to contain the war in Gaza and avoid the type of conflagration that could derail its ambitious economic reform agenda known as Vision 2030.

The kingdom also remains in talks about a landmark deal under which it would recognise Israel for the first time while strengthening its security partnership with the United States, though analysts say the war has made it more difficult.

Meanwhile the conservative Gulf kingdom, home to the holiest shrines in Islam, is trying to open up to the world, luring business leaders and non-religious tourists.

Hosting international events such as the WEF meeting allows the kingdom to showcase social changes including the reintroduction of cinemas and the lifting of a ban on women driving.

Tesla CEO Musk meets China's number two official in Beijing

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BEIJING, APRIL 28

Tech billionaire and Tesla CEO Elon Musk met in Beijing on Sunday with China's number two official, Premier Li Qiang, who promised the country would "always" be open to foreign firms.

Musk—one of the world's richest people—arrived in China earlier the same day on his second trip in less than a year to the world's biggest market for electric vehicles.

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said that during their meeting, Li had promised the country would do more to help foreign firms.

"China's very large-scale market will always be open to foreign-funded firms," Li was quoted as saying.

"China will stick to its word and will continue working hard to expand market access and strengthen service guarantees."

Beijing would also provide foreign companies with "a better business environment" so "that firms from all over the world can have peace of mind while investing in China", Li added.

Musk has extensive business interests in China and his most recent visit was in May and June of last year.

Tesla did not respond to AFP's requests for confirmation of Musk's visit, or share his itinerary for the trip. CCTV quoted him as praising the "hardworking and intelligent Chinese team" at his Tesla Gigafactory in Shanghai during his meeting with Li.

"Tesla is willing to take the next step in deepening cooperation with China to achieve more win-win results," Musk reportedly added.

Earlier in the day, the billionaire met with the head of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, Ren Hongbin, "to discuss next steps in cooperation and other topics", CCTV said.

The mercurial magnate is a controversial figure in the West, but in China, Tesla's electric vehicles

climate and ensuring regulatory frameworks that support foreign as well as domestic investment.

"To improve the business environment and boost investors' confidence, we have initiated various policy reforms. These reforms include improving regulatory processes, reducing the time and cost of business, and ensuring transparency and accountability in public sector governance. Reform is an ongoing process, it will be continued in the days to come," said Pun.

President of the Nepali Congress and former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said, "Nepal is still a least developed country. We confront huge development challenges. While our country has huge potential for development, we lack adequate capital and appropriate technology to realise development benefits. In this context, the convening of this high-level event assumes a particular significance."

Deuba said that flexible labour laws, a demographic dividend with a substantial share of the young and energetic population, a reliable supply of electricity, and the availability of local raw materials also contribute to making production costs low compared to other high-wage countries in the region.

"Moreover, all major political parties remain committed to promoting foreign investment in Nepal and come together to foster consensus on key investment-related issues. We do not pursue discriminatory policies towards foreign investors. They are treated on par with national investors. We welcome foreign investors as our valued guests."

Atul Keshap, senior vice president for South Asia at the United States Chamber of Commerce, said that the commitment made by Nepal to lasting reforms would enable Nepal's business environment and private sector to truly flourish and generate sustainable, inclusive, and resilient growth for Nepal's citizens.

"This Investment Summit presents the opportunity to further enact economic reforms that will truly open Nepal to global markets and world-leading businesses. Creating a more level playing field for foreign companies, building regulatory predictability and mechanisms for stakeholder inputs, and focusing on ease of doing business will generate further investment interest in Nepal."

President of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) Chandra Prasad Dhakal urged investors from around the world to seize the opportunity and invest in Nepal's burgeoning economy.

Dhakal highlighted Nepal's strategic location between the economic powerhouses China and India, underscoring its significance as a gateway to vast markets. He emphasised the abundant opportunities across various sectors, including tourism, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, technology, and ICT.

Musk has extensive business interests in China and his most recent visit was in May and June of last year.

China's local car giant BYD—"Build Your Dreams"—beat out Tesla in last year's fourth quarter to become the world's top seller of EVs.

Tesla reclaimed that title in the first quarter of this year, but BYD remains firmly on top in its home market.

His visit also comes as Beijing hosts a massive auto show, which held press events from Thursday and opened to the public over the weekend.

Comments under posts about Musk's arrival on the social media site Weibo were full of speculation that the celebrity tycoon would attend Auto China while in Beijing.

One user suggested Musk's visit was motivated by a desire to test drive an SU7, the first car model released earlier this year by Chinese consumer tech giant Xiaomi.

WORLD

Ukraine warns battlefield situation 'worsened' as Russia claims fresh gains

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
VOZHDVYZHENKA, UKRAINE, APRIL 28

Ukraine's army leader admitted on Sunday that Kyiv's position on the battlefield has worsened after Russian forces captured another village in the east, pressing their advantage in manpower and ammunition.

Russia's troops are advancing in the eastern Donetsk region as Kyiv awaits the arrival of much-needed US weapons that it hopes will stabilise the fragile front lines.

"The situation at the front has worsened," Ukrainian commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky said in a Facebook post Sunday. Ukrainian troops had "retreated" westwards to new defensive lines in a section of the front that runs past the city of Donetsk, controlled by pro-Russian forces since 2014. Russia has "a significant advantage in forces and means" and had been able to notch up advances amid "heavy fighting," Syrsky said.

"In some sectors the enemy had tactical success, and in some areas our troops managed to improve the tactical position," he added. Russia's defence ministry earlier on Sunday claimed its troops had captured the village of Novobakmutivka in the eastern Donetsk region—around 10 kilometres (six miles) north of Avdiivka, which they seized in February. The stark assessment of the

picture facing Ukrainian troops comes at the end of week of ups and downs for Kyiv.

The United States finally approved a \$61 billion package of financial aid after months of political wrangling, unlocking much-needed arms for Ukraine's stretched troops.

But on the battlefield Russia chalked up more successes. Its troops managed to make rapid advances in a narrow column to the northwest of Avdiivka.

In the village of Vozhdvyzhenka, some eight kilometres (five miles) from the fighting in Ocherytne, AFP reporters saw civilians loading a small truck with furniture and belongings on Sunday.

"We're going a long way from here. ... I don't have time to talk because of the shelling," one of them told AFP, before climbing into the vehicle and speeding out of the village.

Soldiers on the side of a road in the woods said they had originally been sent to build defensive lines.

"But the situation has changed. We were told not to take the shovels but to stay and wait for orders. The Russians are attacking and advancing," one told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Syrsky confirmed on Sunday that Russia had made some "tactical" progress in that part of the front, but said Moscow had not yet achieved what he called an "operational advantage."



Ukrainian servicemen rest at a side of a road leading towards Ocherytne area in the Donetsk region, on Sunday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Key mediator Qatar urges Israel and Hamas to do more to reach a cease-fire deal

An Israeli delegation is expected in Egypt in the coming days to discuss the latest proposals in negotiations.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TEL AVIV, ISRAEL, APRIL 28

A senior Qatari official has urged Israel and Hamas to show "more commitment and more seriousness" in cease-fire negotiations in interviews with Israeli media, as pressure builds to reach a deal that would free some Israeli hostages and bring a cease-fire in the nearly seven-month-long war in Gaza.

Qatar, which hosts Hamas' headquarters in Doha, has been a key intermediary and was instrumental, along with the US and Egypt, in helping negotiate a brief halt to the fighting in November that led to the release of dozens of hostages. But in a sign of frustration, Qatar this month said that it was reassessing its mediator role.

An Israeli delegation is expected in Egypt in the coming days to discuss the latest proposals in negotiations, and senior Hamas official Basem Naim said in a message to The Associated Press that a delegation from the militant group will also head to Cairo. Egypt's state-owned Al-Qahera TV said the delegation would arrive on Monday.

The interviews with Qatar's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari by liberal daily Haaretz and Israeli public broadcaster Kan were published and aired Saturday evening. They came as Israel vows to invade Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah despite global concern for more than 1 million Palestinians sheltering there.

Al-Ansari expressed disappointment with Hamas and Israel, saying each side has made decisions based on political interests and not with civilians' welfare in mind.

He didn't reveal details on the talks other than to say they have "effectively stopped," with "both sides entrenched in their positions."

Relations between Qatar and Israel have been strained as some politicians in Israel, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have criticized Qatar for not putting enough pressure on Hamas. Qatar has no formal diplomatic ties with Israel.

Al-Ansari's remarks came after an Egyptian delegation discussed with Israeli officials a "new vision" for a prolonged cease-fire in Gaza, accord-



Mourners pray over the bodies of Palestinians who were killed in an Israeli airstrike in Nuseirat, at the Al Aqsa hospital in Deir al Balah, Gaza Strip, on Saturday.

ing to an Egyptian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to freely discuss developments.

The Egyptian official said that Israeli officials are open to discussing establishing a permanent cease-fire in Gaza as part of the second phase of a deal. Israel has refused to end the war until it defeats Hamas.

The second phase would start after the release of civilian and sick hostages, and would include negotiating the release of soldiers, the official added. Senior Palestinian prisoners would be released and a reconstruction process launched.

Negotiations earlier this month centered on a six-week cease-fire proposal and the release of 40 civilian and sick hostages held by Hamas in exchange for freeing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

A letter written by US President Joe Biden and 17 other world leaders urged Hamas to release the hostages immediately. Hamas in recent days

has released new videos of three hostages, an apparent push for Israel to make concessions.

The growing pressure for Hamas and Israel to reach a cease-fire deal is also meant to avert an Israeli attack on Rafah, the city on the border with Egypt where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population is seeking shelter. Israel has massed dozens of tanks and armored vehicles. The planned incursion has raised global alarm.

"Only a small strike is all it takes to force everyone to leave Palestine," Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas asserted to the opening session of the World Economic Forum on Sunday in Saudi Arabia, adding that he believed an invasion would happen within days.

But White House national security spokesman John Kirby told ABC that Israel "assured us they won't go into Rafah until we've had a chance to really share our perspectives and concerns with them. So, we'll see where

that goes." The Israeli troop buildup may also be a pressure tactic on Hamas in talks. Israel sees Rafah as Hamas' last major stronghold. It vows to destroy the group's military and governing capabilities.

Aid groups have warned that an invasion of Rafah would worsen the already desperate humanitarian situation in Gaza, where hunger is widespread. About 400 tons of aid arrived Sunday at the Israeli port of Ashdod—the largest shipment yet by sea via Cyprus—according to the United Arab Emirates. It wasn't immediately clear how or when it would be delivered into Gaza.

Also Sunday, World Central Kitchen said that it would resume operations in Gaza on Monday, ending a four-week suspension after Israeli military drones killed seven of its aid workers. The organization has 276 trucks ready to enter through the Rafah crossing and will also send trucks into Gaza from Jordan, a statement said.

BRIEFING

China confronts Japanese politicians in disputed East China Sea area

BEIJING/TOKYO: China's coast guard confronted Japanese lawmakers in waters claimed by both countries in the East China Sea, China's embassy in Tokyo and Japanese media said on Sunday, the latest in a series of maritime disputes involving China and its neighbours. Chinese vessels took unspecified law enforcement measures, the embassy said in a statement, adding that it had lodged solemn representations for what it called "infringement and provocation" by Japan near tiny, uninhabited islands that Beijing calls the Diaoyu and Tokyo calls the Senkaku. The Japanese group, including former Defense Minister Tomomi Inada, was on an inspection mission organised by the city of Ishigaki in Okinawa prefecture, according to the Chinese embassy and Japanese public broadcaster NHK. Japan and China have repeatedly faced off around the Japan-administered islands. China also has escalating run-ins with the Philippine navy in disputed areas of the South China Sea, where Beijing's expansive maritime claims conflict with those of a number of Southeast Asia nations. Inada's group spent three hours near the islands on Saturday, using drones to observe the area, and the Japanese coast guard vessel sought to fend off the Chinese coast guard, NHK said. (REUTERS)

Russia threatens West with severe response if its assets are touched

MOSCOW: Russian officials threatened the West on Sunday with a "severe" response in the event that frozen Russian assets are confiscated, promising "endless" legal challenges and tit-for-tat measures. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Russia would never cede territories seized from Ukraine in exchange for the return of frozen assets. "Our motherland is not for sale," Zakharova wrote on the Telegram messaging app. "An Russian assets must remain untouched because otherwise there will be a severe response to Western thievery. Many in the West have already understood this. Alas, not everyone." In response to Russia's war in Ukraine, the United States and its allies prohibited transactions with Russia's central bank and finance ministry and blocked about \$300 billion of sovereign Russian assets in the West, most of which are in European not American financial institutions. (REUTERS)

Police clear pro-Palestinian camps at three US universities

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BOSTON, APRIL 28

Police detained nearly 200 people at three US universities on Saturday as they cleared pro-Palestinian encampments, in the latest campus clashes triggered by protests over Israel's war against Hamas.

On the East Coast, police in Boston detained about 100 people while clearing a protest camp at Northeastern University, with social media posts showing security forces in riot gear and officers loading tents onto the back of a truck.

The action was taken after some protesters resorted to "virulent anti-Semitic slurs, including 'Kill the Jews,'" Northeastern University said in a statement on social media platform X.

On the opposite side of the country, Arizona State University police arrested 69 people for trespassing after the group set up an "unauthorized encampment" on campus.

Arizona State officials said a protest group—"most of whom were not ASU students, faculty or staff"—had set up a camp Friday and then ignored repeated orders to disperse.

And in the US heartland, police at Indiana University arrested 23 people as they cleared a campus protest

camp, the Indiana Daily Student newspaper reported. Police with shields, batons and other riot gear broke through a line of protesters who had linked arms, tackling those who did not move, the paper said.

The campus activists are calling for a ceasefire in Israel's war with Hamas, as well as for colleges to sever ties with the country and with companies they say profit from the conflict.

Police have carried out large-scale arrests at universities in recent days.

The protests have posed a major challenge to university administrators who are trying to balance commitments to free expression with complaints that the rallies have veered into anti-Semitism and hate speech.

Police have carried out large-scale arrests at universities in recent days, at times using chemical irritants and tasers to disperse demonstrators.

In a statement on X, Northeastern said the area on campus where the protests were held was now "fully

secured" and "all campus operations have returned to normal."

The school said it made the move after "what began as a student demonstration two days ago was infiltrated by professional organizers with no affiliation to Northeastern."

It added that detained individuals who produced a valid school ID have been released and will face disciplinary proceedings, not legal action.

"Those who refused to disclose their affiliation were arrested," the school said.

Dozens of students remained encamped Saturday at the University of Pennsylvania, despite the college president ordering disbandment after what he said were "credible reports of harassing and intimidating conduct."

Meanwhile, Columbia University in New York, where the protests originated, was relatively calm. Officials there announced Friday that they would not be calling police back to campus after more than 100 people were arrested last week.

"To bring back the NYPD at this time would be counterproductive, further inflaming what is happening on campus, and drawing thousands to our doorstep who would threaten our community," school leaders said in a statement, referring to the New York Police Department.

Pope holds mass in Venice's St Mark's, first trip in months

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
VENICE, APRIL 28

Pope Francis presided over mass in Saint Mark's Square in Venice on Sunday, warning of environmental damage and over-tourism in a closely watched visit, the first for the ageing pontiff outside Rome since last year.

Fragile health has prevented the 87-year-old leader of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics from travelling in recent months, his last trip being a visit to the French city of Marseille in September.

But under sunny skies on Sunday, the pope appeared in high spirits as he addressed more than 10,000 faithful seated in the vast St Mark's Square, following an earlier visit to a women's prison and an address to young Venetians.

Citing the "enchanting beauty" of Venice, Francis listed the many dangers facing it—climate change, mass tourism and "frayed social relations, individualism and loneliness."

"Venice is one with the waters upon which it sits. Without the care and safeguarding of this natural environment, it might even cease to exist,"

said the pope in his homily. "Similarly, our life is also immersed forever in the springs of God's love," he said.

Venice, he said, "which has always been a place of encounter and cultural exchange, is called to be a sign of beauty available to all, starting with the last—a sign of fraternity and care for our common home."

The pope's visit came during the same weekend that Venice launched a new five-euro (\$5.35) entry fee for day trippers, aimed at easing the pressure of tourism on the UNESCO World Heritage site.

Francis said one of Venice's main challenges was "the difficulty of creating an environment that is fit for human beings through adequate tourism management"—along with "climate change... the fragility of constructions, of cultural heritage but also of people."

Tourists were prevented from accessing the square during the papal mass, which required a ticket to attend.

Earlier on Sunday, Francis arrived by helicopter on the island of Giudecca, which houses a women's prison.

20 Cambodian soldiers killed in ammunition base explosion

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CHBAR MON, CAMBODIA, APRIL 28

A funeral was held on Sunday for 20 soldiers who died at an army base in southwestern Cambodia in a huge explosion of stored munitions that also wounded several others and damaged nearby houses.

There has been no public explanation of what caused the Saturday afternoon blast at the base in Kompong Speu province, though there were no suggestions it was triggered deliberately.

Defense Minister Tea Seiha, representing Prime Minister Hun Manet, presided over the Buddhist funeral ceremony, which was attended by relatives of the victims and fellow soldiers. Cambodian flags covered the wooden coffins. A villager living nearby told The Associated Press on Sunday that he trembled after hearing the blast because he had never before experienced such a loud explosion.

"When the explosion happened, I

was fixing my house with some construction workers," said Chim Sothea. "Suddenly there was a loud explosion, causing my house to shake and breaking tiles on my roof. They fell down but luckily they didn't fall inside the house." Images showed several badly damaged buildings on the base, at least one with its roof blown off, and soldiers receiving treatment in a hospital. Other photos showed nearby houses with holes in their roofs.

Four buildings on the base—three for storage and one work facility—were destroyed and several military vehicles damaged. Col. Youeng Sokhon, an army officer at the site, said in a report to army chief Gen. Mao Sophan.

Another villager, who asked to be named only as Sophal, said the military closed the road to the base and "villagers were in a panic, seeking a safe place." He moved his family to his parent's home, farther away from the base. When he returned to his own house hours later, he found it undam-



In this image from a video, smoke rises above a distant base, seen from Chbar Mon district in Kompong Speu province, Cambodia on Saturday.

aged but other villagers' houses had broken windows, doors and roofs, he said. Cambodia, like many countries in the region, has been suffering from an extended heat wave, and the province where the blast took place registered a high of 39 C (102 F) on Saturday. While high temperatures normally can't detonate ammunition, they can degrade the stability of explosives over a period of time, with the risk that a single small explosion can set off a fire and a chain reaction.

In March 2005, a nighttime blast at an arms depot in the northwestern provincial town of Battambang triggered an hourslong spray of shrapnel and bullets, killing at least six people and causing panic.

A 2014 report by the Swiss-based group Small Arms Survey highlighted the dangers of poorly stored or mishandled munitions, calling it a "global problem." It noted that from 1979 through 2013 there were more than 500 incidents involving unplanned explosions at munitions sites.

West Indies A defeat Nepal by 10 runs

The visitors set a 161-run target for Nepal and restrict them to 150-9.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, APRIL 28

West Indies A defeated Nepal by 10 runs in the second of the five-match T20 series at TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur, Kathmandu on Sunday.

The visitors set a 161-run target for Nepal and restricted them to 150-9.

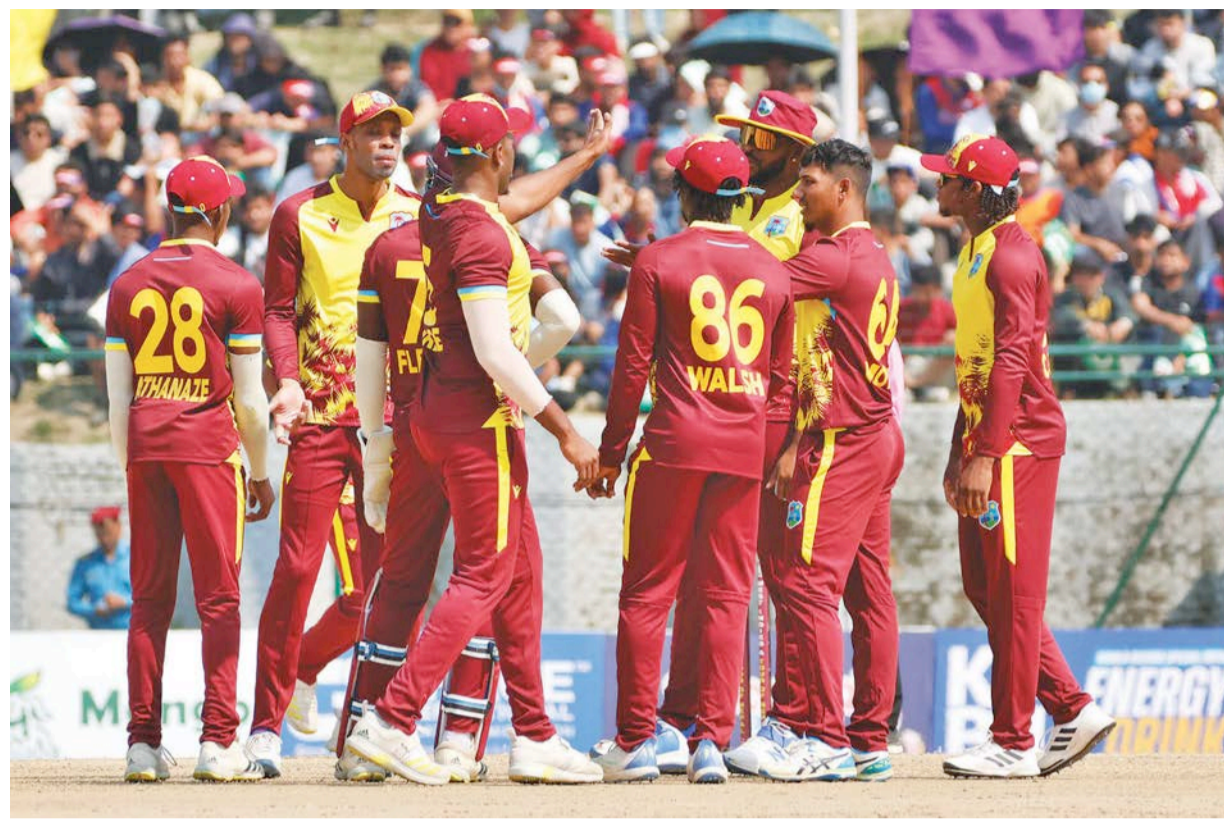
Electing to bat first after winning the toss, West Indies A had a shaky start to the innings as they lost openers Johnson Charles and Alick Athanaze early at 11 and six runs, respectively.

However, Andre Fletcher steadied the innings with a composed knock of 43 runs off 36 deliveries with three sixes before losing his wicket to Dipendra Singh Airee in 17.5 overs. Roston Chase contributed 23 runs as Gudakesh Motie's blazing innings of 33 runs off just eight balls helped the visitors set a decent target for the Rhinos.

For Nepal, Sagar Dhakal and Kushal Bhurtel took two wickets each in their four-over spell as Sompal Kami and Dipendra Singh Airee grabbed a wicket apiece.

In the run chase, Nepal lost opener Kushal Bhurtel for two runs in 3.4 overs. Anil Sah was sent back to the pavilion for one run in 4.4 overs. Opener Lokesh Bam looked promising with his fluent stroke play but failed to convert his start into a substantial score. Bam lost his wicket to Gudakesh Motie for 17 runs in 5.5 overs.

Rohit Paudel put in a heroic effort, playing a captain's innings with an unbeaten 71 off 48 balls. Gulsan Jha's



With the victory, West Indies A have levelled the five-match series 1-1.

brief cameo of 25 runs off 11 balls injected some excitement into the crowd. But they were restricted to 150-9 on the board at the end of the stipulated 20 overs.

For West Indies, Gudakesh Motie and Obed McCoy took two wickets each while Oshane Thomas and Roston Chase took a wicket apiece.

With the victory, the visiting team

have leveled the five-match series 1-1.

With skipper Rohit Paudel's blistering century, Nepal had defeated West Indies A by four wickets in the first T20 on Saturday.

POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Arsenal survive Spurs fightback to boost title charge

After the despair of a damaging home defeat against Aston Villa and a Champions League quarter-final exit to Bayern Munich, the Gunners have bounced back impressively.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON, APRIL 28

Arsenal held on for a pulsating 3-2 win over arch rivals Tottenham in the north London derby to keep their grip on top spot in the Premier League on Sunday.

Bidding to stay one step ahead of Manchester City in the title race, Mikel Arteta's side silenced the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium with a three-goal blast before half-time.

Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg's own goal put Arsenal ahead before Bukayo Saka and Kai Havertz netted to leave Arsenal in complete control.

Cristian Romero and Son Heung-min struck for Tottenham after the interval to set up a nervous finish, but Arsenal clung on by their finger tips.

Arsenal sit four points clear of second placed City, who face struggling Nottingham Forest later on Sunday in the first of two games in hand over the Gunners.

City will clinch an unprecedented fourth successive English title if they win their last five matches.

But Arsenal are doing all they can to make Pep Guardiola's team sweat as they try to make amends for blowing an eight-point lead in last season's title race.

After the despair of a damaging home defeat against Aston Villa and a Champions League quarter-final exit to Bayern Munich, the Gunners have bounced back impressively.

Aware they have little margin for error with City chasing them, Arteta had called on his players to show their hunger for success and they responded to his challenge.

Thrashing old foes Chelsea 5-0 on Tuesday was merely the appetiser ahead of the main course Arsenal served up for 3,000 of their jubilant fans packed into one corner of the stadium.

Arsenal famously won the league twice at Tottenham's old White Hart Lane stadium, in 1971 and 2004.

The Gunners could not clinch silverware on enemy territory this time, but their fifth win in the last seven north London derbies kept them in the hunt to win the title for the first time in 20 years.

Defeat was a bitter blow for fifth-placed Tottenham, who are seven points behind fourth-placed Aston Villa with two games in hand to keep alive their fading hopes

of qualifying for the Champions League.

Playing for the first time since a 4-0 defeat at Newcastle 15 days ago, Tottenham should have been fresher than an Arsenal team in action four times over that period.

But it was Arsenal who emerged from the frenzied fray to snatch the lead thanks to a welcome gift from Hojbjerg.

Arsenal survive

Saka's corner curled into the six-yard box, where Hojbjerg tried to head clear in front of Arsenal's Takehiro Tomiyasu but instead diverted the ball into his own net.

Romero should have equalised when Arsenal keeper David Raya misjudged James Maddison's free-kick, allowing the defender to rise for a close-range header that he somehow guided against the post rather than into the empty net.

Mickey van de Ven thought he had drawn Tottenham level when he slammed home after Pedro Porro's shot deflected into his path, but VAR intervened to rule the centre-back was marginally offside.

Arteta's men celebrated the decision as though they had scored themselves and they were doing exactly that in the 27th minute.

Havertz floated a superb long pass to Saka on the right flank and the winger drove at Ben Davies before cutting inside to beat Guglielmo Vicario with a clinical low strike from 12 yards. Arsenal were ruthless in front of goal and Havertz grabbed their third with a well-worked corner routine in the 38th minute.

As Tottenham adopted zone-marking positions, a group of Arsenal players including Havertz were unmarked as they made late runs into the area, giving the German space to finish off Rice's corner with a close-range header.

But Tottenham refused to throw in the towel and Romero reduced the deficit in the 64th minute, seizing on Raya's comically bad pass to fire home from the edge of the area.

Rice set up the needlessly tense finale for Arsenal with a rash foul on Davies, conceding a penalty that Son drilled past Raya in the 87th minute.

In Sunday's other early kick-off, Bournemouth beat Brighton 3-0 through goals from Marcos Senesi, Enes Unai and Justin Kluijvert.

Pakistan appoints Gary Kirsten and Jason Gillespie as cricket coaches

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LAHORE, APRIL 28

The Pakistan Cricket Board has appointed Gary Kirsten and Jason Gillespie to two-year terms as head coaches in white-ball and red-ball cricket, respectively, on Sunday.

Azhar Mahmood, who was the ad-hoc head coach for the five-match T20 series against New Zealand, was named assistant coach in all three formats — tests, ODIs and T20s.

Kirsten will take charge of the Pakistan team immediately after completing his assignment in the Indian Premier League where he is serving as batting coach and mentor to 2022 champion Gujarat Titans.

Pakistan is scheduled to play seven Twenty20s next month—three against Ireland and four against England—ahead of the T20 World Cup in US and the Caribbean in June. Kirsten is

hoping to join the Pakistan team in England.

Pakistan had been looking for a long-term coach after last year's 50-over World Cup in India where the team was coached by Mickey Arthur. Mohammad Hafeez briefly took charge of the team for the tours of Australia and New Zealand before Mahmood coached the team during the drawn T20 series against the Black Caps.

"My goal is to unite the Pakistan men's white-ball team, harnessing their considerable talents towards a common objective, and achieving success together on the field," Kirsten said in a statement issued by the PCB on Sunday.

Kirsten, 56, played 101 test matches and 185 ODIs for South Africa scoring 14,087 runs with 34 centuries. He played in three World Cups between 1996-2003 before coaching the World

Cup winning India team in 2011.

Kirsten has also coached the South Africa team from 2011-13 and led them to the No. 1 position in the ICC's test rankings.

Pakistan will play seven T20s next month—three against Ireland and four against England.

He has also coached several IPL franchises including Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Delhi Daredevils, now known as Delhi Capitals.

Gillespie will take charge of Pakistan's red-ball team in August when the team will play home

matches for the World Test Championship against Bangladesh. The series will be followed by test matches against England in October before the team tours South Africa for WTC matches in December.

"I love test cricket and being able to focus on that is something I like very much," Gillespie said. "I like to think that I can help in some way to grow and develop the players. I want to win tests — that is why I am taking this role. I love winning and I know we have got the skill to make that happen."

Gillespie, 49, played 71 test matches and 97 ODIs for Australia between 1996-2006 and took 402 wickets. He was part of Australia's 2003 World Cup winning squad in South Africa.

Gillespie coached Yorkshire to back-to-back County Championship titles in 2014 and 2015 and has also coached Zimbabwe from 2010-2012.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

The morning activates a period of gratitude while unleashing your manifestation skills. Use this to move more slowly, taking the scenic route toward your heart's desires. Lay low to avoid distractions that could throw you off course.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Today marks an era of extreme charisma and manifestation of miracles. Use this energy to ramp up the charm, using your powers of persuasion and natural grace to get ahead. You may also gain more attention from potential mates.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Reflect on the love you have for yourself and give freely to others, dearest Gemini. This energy is perfect for healing wounds and becoming a better companion while gaining a deeper understanding of what you need to feel supported.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Your social prospects benefit from some celestial aid, helping you establish friendships in high places. However, you should also focus on making this world a better place, dearest Cancer, as you'll have the ability to manifest meaningful change.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

Direct some extra love toward your highest ambitions, sweet Lion, unleashing your professional savvy and occupational charisma. Focus on gaining responsibilities to make headway within your career path, and don't be afraid to demand your worth without abandoning grace.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

You should feel elevated and optimistic this morning, dearest Virgo, amplifying your luck and manifestation skills throughout the coming weeks. Don't be surprised if your thoughts and dreams come to fruition in beautiful ways. Maintain reasonable boundaries.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Invest further in what your heart desires while moving toward change. It may be necessary to compartmentalise certain elements of your existence in order to focus on your own well-being without abandoning tasks lingering on your to-do lists.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Get ready for an era of romance, sweetness, and increased charisma, darling Scorpio. Prioritise healthy relationships under this planetary placement, investing in dynamics that are balanced and uplifting. Be true to yourself, but remember to play nice with others.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

You'll have much to gain today. However, the universe won't be giving handouts, rewarding your hard work above all else. It'll be important to elevate your wellness through consistent routines. Invest in products that offer organisation without sacrificing healthy living.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

You'll feel increasingly comfortable in your skin, dearest Capricorn, propelling you toward new levels of creativity while amplifying your allure. This encourages free artistic expression, so don't hold back when you've got something to say. Good vibes flow this evening.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

You'll feel like nesting throughout the coming weeks, dearest Aquarius. Maintaining strong familial ties will also become a priority, and you'll gain much satisfaction when nurturing yourself and your loved ones. The day could put you in a conflicted headspace.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Your romantic side comes out today, shifting your thoughts toward love, grace, and gratitude. Take more time to indulge in the beauty, enjoying your surroundings with a newfound sense of peace. The day brings a bustle to your social sphere.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Software version
- 5 Bolivia capital (2 wds.)
- 10 Head of hair
- 13 Even once
- 14 Blazing
- 15 Levee
- 16 Actor — Hemsworth
- 17 Severe
- 18 Cooking pot
- 19 Close but no cigar
- 21 Slicker
- 23 Have confidence
- 25 Dele's undoing
- 26 Ring pull
- 29 Greenish-blue
- 31 Hurt
- 35 Like a bungler
- 37 Bounder
- 39 — — Janeiro
- 40 Coat of arms animal
- 41 Managed care gp.
- 42 Stockings color
- 43 Failed Ford
- 45 — o'clock
- 48 Dungaree
- 47 Hold
- 49 Wetlands bird
- 51 — Moines
- 52 — Mix for cats

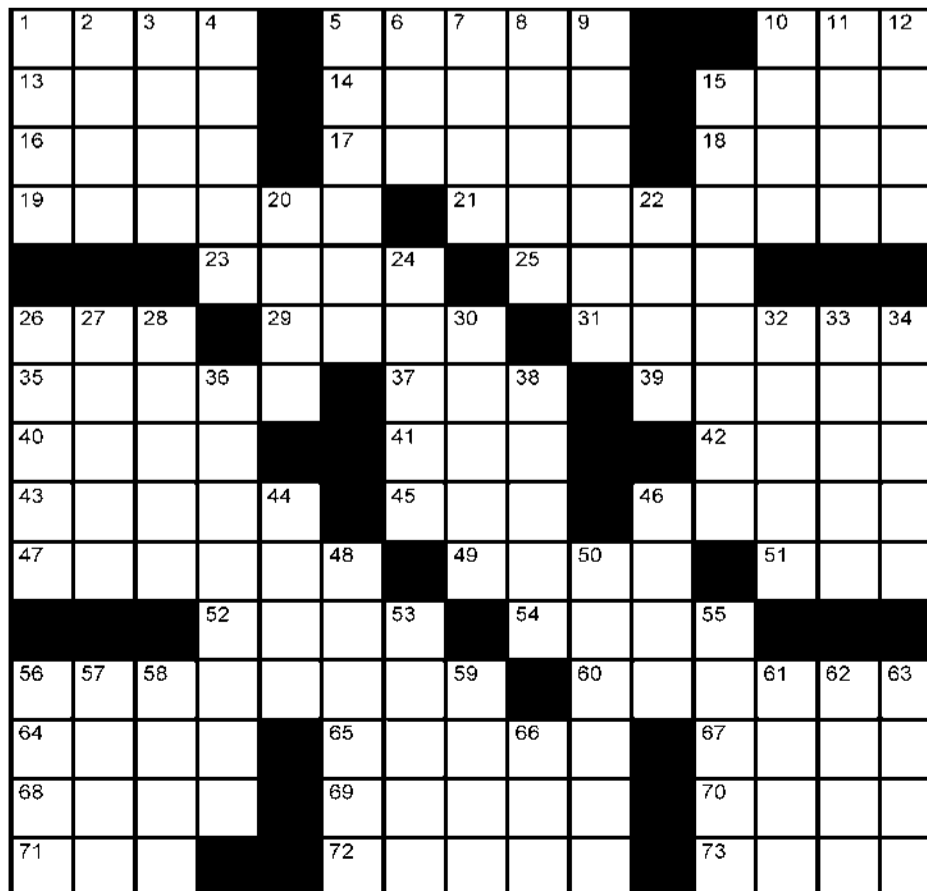
DOWN

- 1 Actor — Lugosi
- 2 "Midnight in the Garden of Good and —"
- 3 Players
- 4 Chain mail
- 5 In conclusion
- 6 To the back
- 7 Landing place
- 8 Wall hanging
- 9 Peak
- 10 Venus de —
- 11 State near Ark.
- 12 — moss
- 15 Dogma
- 20 Religious
- 22 Close to
- 24 Racing vessel
- 26 River in Italy
- 27 Battery terminal
- 28 — of burden

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



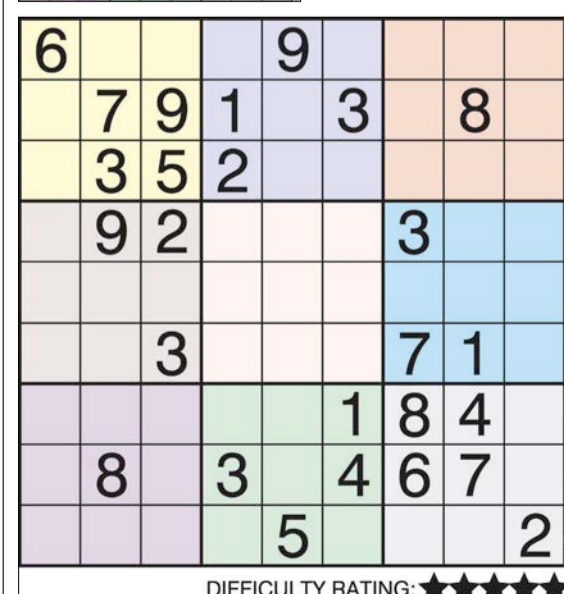
- 30 Appoints
- 32 Knoll
- 33 Rock's — Van Halen
- 34 Considers
- 36 Introductory remarks
- 38 Giver
- 41 Place
- 44 Numbers to be crunched
- 48 Some dairy items
- 50 Conundrum
- 53 Forgo
- 55 Tape deck button
- 56 Hammer-wielding god
- 57 Rustic
- 58 Eye part
- 59 List
- 61 — and void
- 62 Cheese variety
- 63 "— that touch liquor..."
- 66 Fleur-de- —



SUDOKU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Art for social change

Ranju Yadav has overcome many personal and social obstacles to become a celebrated artist, with a focus on Mithila art.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF RANJU YADAV

□ AARATI RAY
KATHMANDU

Artist Ranju Yadav believes she has grown a lot—both in her career and as a person. She remembers being nervous to even attend art exhibitions and converse with people about a decade ago, but now she is flying across Europe for a solo exhibition, representing Nepal in Germany, Denmark and Finland.

Founder of Mithila Hastakala Udyog in Rajbiraj and the recipient of the National Fine Art Award at the National Fine Arts Exhibition 2019, Yadav has participated in over two dozen exhibitions. She has exhibited her works at events like the Karnaphuli Folk Triennale in Bangladesh, the International Art Exhibition in Myanmar, the Nepal Art Fair in Bangladesh, and the SAARC exhibition in Maldives.

Yadav was born in Thalha, Saptari, and learned Mithila art from the female members of her family. Even as a kid, she loved painting and often played around with colours. She moved to Rajbiraj when she was 15, right after her father passed away. Later, when she was in college, she moved to Kathmandu and began painting professionally.

In 2011, over dinner, Ajit Shah, a friend of her husband, who is also a Mithila artist, noticed Yadav's drawings and paintings. Impressed, he urged her to consider painting professionally. With a background in Mithila art, she quickly learned to paint on canvas. She wanted to use Mithila art as a tool for social change and activism.

When she was in ninth grade, she witnessed a tragic incident near Rajbiraj, where a girl was killed by her in-laws over dowry. In eleventh grade, she saw a man driven to madness by dowry pressure after marrying off his daughters. These events left a deep impact on her. She started questioning the reason behind such injustices and why no one took action to eradicate them.

Since then, she has fostered a desire to effect positive change through her work. She views paintings as a potent means to address social issues and instigate change. "I strongly believe that art has the power to transform society," she states.



WHY DO IT

She addresses issues like dowry, child marriage, caste discrimination and social disparities through her work. Yadav believes that many girls and women struggle to combat gender violence and discrimination because of their lack of independence and financial autonomy. She wants to raise awareness about these issues and contribute to the fight (against them).

At her first solo exhibition, 'Colours of Change' in 2019, Yadav's painting of a groom's head on a bull's body drew a lot of attention. She wanted to show how people who accept dowry are foolish, akin to bulls. The then Swiss ambassador to Nepal, Elisabeth von Capeller, was so impressed with it that she invited Yadav to exhibit it at the Swiss Embassy.

Four years later, in 2023, Yadav received a heartening call from two individuals from Madhesh, who shared that they had married without dowry after being inspired by her paintings.

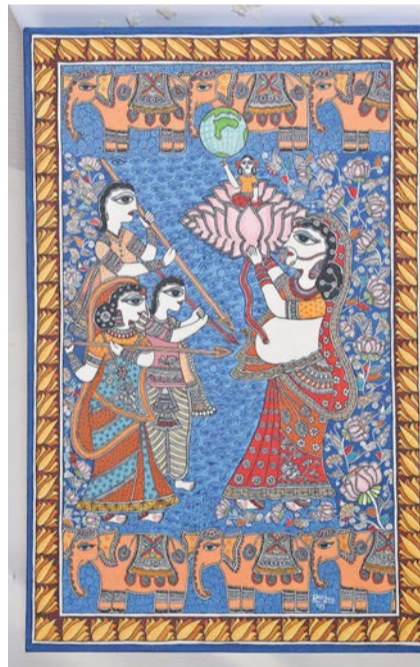
Yadav has been painting professionally for thirteen years now and she shares that it's moments like these, where she can see how her work is impacting people, even if it is just a little, that keep her motivated despite the challenges.

She started participating in group exhibitions in 2017, which was initially daunting for her. She remembers feeling intimidated and nervous about attending exhibitions when she first

moved to Kathmandu.

Yadav calls her husband her "biggest supporter", who has encouraged her to create her own identity beyond traditional roles and insisted she be known as Ranju rather than "Amarendra's wife". He also helped her overcome her anxiety about conversing with others.

To date, the biggest challenge for Yadav has been balancing her home life and work, particularly due to the social expectations placed on women. In the art industry, attending events and networking is essential. However, when she visited Bangladesh in 2018 for an exhibition, many close to her criticised her for traveling alone and not taking her husband with her.



(Left) Yadav's painting 'Save Daughters' reflects the bitter reality of gender bias, forcing women into sex-selective abortions. (Right) A painting from Yadav's collection 'Colors of Change' that depicts people who accept dowrys as bulls.

Currently, she is in Europe for her a solo exhibition, representing Nepal in Germany, Denmark and Finland.

Consequently, she took a three-year hiatus to raise her second child, amid the Covid-19 pandemic. She says she felt anxious about falling behind in her career at the time. When she shared her worries with her friends and family, they completely dismissed them and thought she should be grateful about having children and getting to raise them, instead of worrying about her career.

Yadav, however, believes that women should have identities beyond being mothers or wives.

Similarly, when she faced financial struggles at the start of her career, many of her relatives urged her to quit, but she couldn't bring herself to do so. "I felt like I wouldn't be able to live if I left art," she says. So she persisted.

Coming from a middle-class background in Madhesh, Yadav had a difficult time establishing herself in Kathmandu's art scene where Madheshi representation is scarce. She notes that the prevalent misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding Madheshi individuals are about dowry, violence and traditionalism.

To confront and change these unfair stereotypes, Yadav chose to pursue Mithila art to highlight and celebrate the rich culture of the region. "Every community has social issues. We should work on eliminating them together, not othering individuals for them," she says.

When Yadav returns to her village, she actively encourages marginalised communities like the Musahar to explore art and develop skills.

In Janakpur, she has facilitated formal training sessions for numerous girls and women through her organisation, Mithila Hastakala Udyog. In Tarai, where many aspire to secure government jobs, Yadav

advocates for broadening horizons. She believes that the younger generation should focus on acquiring skills and exploring entrepreneurship, particularly in Mithila handicrafts and art.

The Madheshi community boasts a rich tradition of handicrafts utilising local materials and wool, alongside Mithila art. Yadav is convinced that with proper support from local government, the promotion of these crafts and cultural heritage could generate numerous job opportunities.

Looking ahead, Yadav envisions a global expansion of Mithila art. She aims to bring together artists from diverse backgrounds, with a particular emphasis on highlighting marginalised communities, widowed and single women, and mothers. "My goal is to create job opportunities for them while promoting Mithila culture and art," she says.

Yadav's message to aspiring artists is clear: "Pursue the skills that interest you. If art is your passion, embrace it."

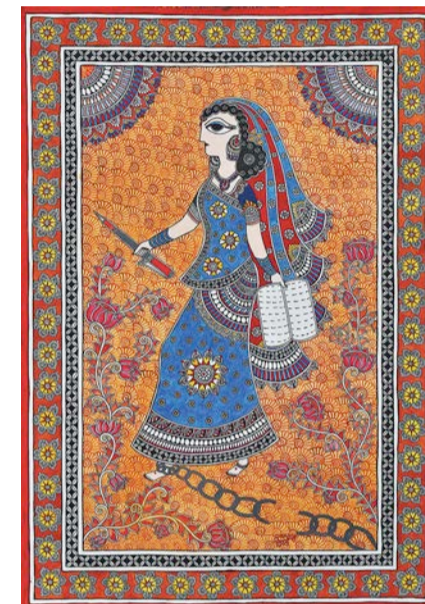
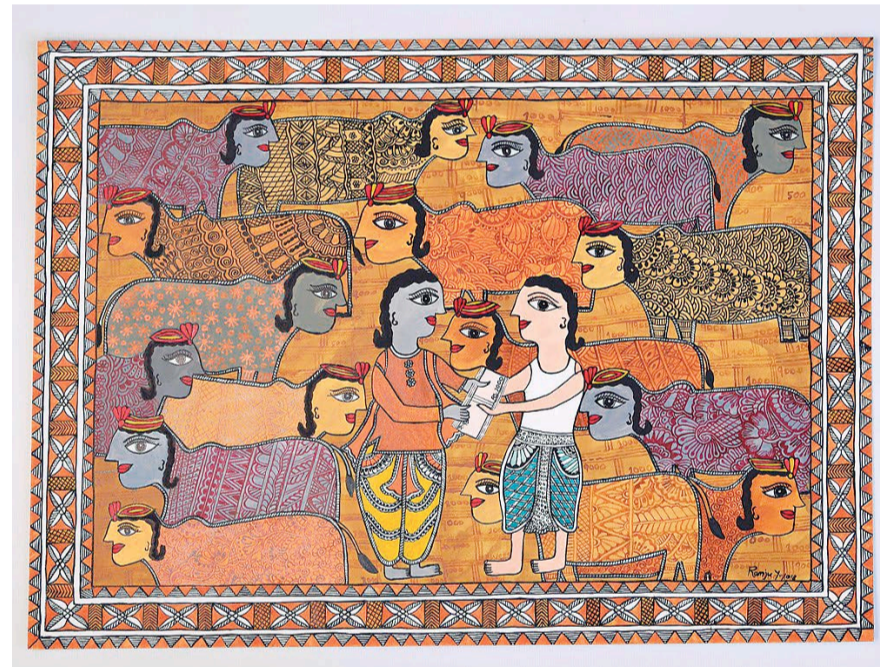


PHOTO: COURTESY OF SUJAN GURUNG

Yadav's painting portraying a woman breaking social shackles and moving towards change and revolution through education.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CHYANGBA LAMA

(Left) Yadav's painting 'Save Daughters' reflects the bitter reality of gender bias, forcing women into sex-selective abortions. (Right) A painting from Yadav's collection 'Colors of Change' that depicts people who accept dowrys as bulls.



'It's metaphor!'

Mandala Theatre's 'Ticket to Hollywood' is entertaining, albeit not exceptional.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF MANDALA THEATRE

Monty (left) and Momo Man in a scene from the play.

Ticket to Hollywood

Director: Sagar Khatri Kami

Cast: Sudip Khatiwada, Milan Karki, Santosh Giri, Diggaj Khatri, Anup Timilsina

Language: Nepali

Duration: 1 hour 18 minutes

□ ANUSHA DHAKAL
KATHMANDU

Pathetically endearing, Monty, the main character of 'Ticket to Hollywood' embodies a classical comedy protagonist. He is quirky, incompetent, persistent, and above all, likeable.

Monty (played by Sudip Khatiwada), enters the stage, and the whole theatre erupts into laughter. Renowned in the Nepali film industry and nicknamed 'Metaphor Monty', he is quite the opposite of a metaphor—shallow and easy to see through. Despite being immensely successful in his country, Monty strives to work in Hollywood, his true dream. The play follows Monty and his journey toward obtaining his ticket to Hollywood, showcasing the hindrances that stand in his way as he strives to realise his dream.

There are many obstacles for poor Monty: his chipped tooth, lack of a wisdom tooth, his deprived wife, a protest and his ambition, in some ways, is his biggest obstacle. If his ambition is the biggest obstacle, what is the real prize? The absurdity of the events happening to Monty perhaps represents, quite evidently, that it is leading up to something absurd—something that is the exact opposite of the outcome he envisions.

Or perhaps, Monty is a mirror to the audience, representing the human need to strive towards something, juxtaposed with the worldly truth that there is something absurd about it all, something that feels cartoonish, yet discernible.

This is why breaking the fourth wall feels like such a tasteful choice for the play. The actors communicate with the audience from the start, immediately transporting them into the world of the play. As the characters go about their circumstances, the audience interacts with the actors, enhancing the immersive experience, and inviting introspection.

However, as the play progresses, its charisma declines. Some scenes feel overly farcical, while others seem out of place, unnecessary, or even overdone. Monty develops a split personality through his newly planted

wisdom tooth, which guides him through his circumstances in his quest to obtain his ticket to Hollywood. But as the play comes to an end, the audience is left without any explanation of the intentions behind the wisdom tooth, either as a plot device within the play or as a stylistic choice outside of it. I speculated that perhaps the lack of explanation is a metaphor, but honestly, to me, this absence feels more like a plot hole than a deliberate choice.

What saddens me is that this play, as a whole, holds incredible promise, and a few adjustments could have truly elevated it to exceptional heights. For instance, one of the most noticeable limitations is that the 'moral lesson' at the end of the play falls flat. There is a lot of buildup leading up to this moment, but despite its intention to be deep and evocative, it ultimately feels

Having more musical elements would have made the play more entertaining.

disappointing. Three sequences led to nowhere; these moments also felt boring and detracted from the earlier established charm of the play. At this point, much of the audience felt somewhat lost, whispering to each other about what certain elements might mean or how they fit into the narrative. I shared this experience, as I too began to feel lost, contemplating the potential significance of various elements.

A crucial scene in the play captures thematic elements resonant with our society, portraying a protest initiated for a seemingly trivial reason. This scene demonstrates the susceptibility of the youth to drama, mirroring aspects of contemporary societal dynamics.

This era of Nepali society is no stranger to silly antics for trivial reasons; after all, we are a generation shaped by 'Nepal banda'. It is a little disappointing that such a crucial scene failed to effectively commu-

nicate its intended message. This scene was meant to tie everything together and highlight the sheer absurdity of Monty's aspirations, potentially leading to a more satisfying conclusion.

However, it fell short, relying too heavily on physical comedy and leaving the audience with too little to grasp in terms of understanding the intended moral lesson.

It is not too difficult to infer that perhaps the intended moral lesson was about embracing our own identity and investing in our own industry. However, due to the excessive and unintelligent buildup, this grand lesson failed to resonate effectively with the audience.

Despite its narrative shortcomings, it's important to acknowledge the exceptional musical elements that enriched the experience of 'Ticket to Hollywood'. Anup Timilsina, the play's music director, elevated the production by adding depth, vibrancy, and a sense of fun to the overall performance. The hook song 'Ticket to Hollywood' has been stuck in my mind for three days now; it is infectious and catchy. Having more musical elements would have made the play a more entertaining watch.

Besides the music, Milan Karki's portrayal of Monty's assistant is incredibly entertaining. His stage presence and charisma are truly undeniable. The outfits, particularly those of the two main characters and Monty's wife, are also impressive. Had the actor portraying Monty's wife in drag worn makeup, it would have elevated the overall look.

'Ticket to Hollywood' is hilarious, whimsical and amusing. It provides an antidote to Monty's ambition by offering him closure that encourages embracing tradition. But do absurd ambitions require stringent antidotes? Or is ambition itself the antidote to the absurd abyss of human life? Guess you'll need to watch the play to find out.

'Ticket to Hollywood' will be shown at Mandala Theatre in Thapagaun, New Baneshwar, Kathmandu, until May 5. Show times: 4:00 pm everyday except Monday, Additional 7:30 pm show on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.