



THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXXII No. 76 | 8 pages | Rs.5
Saturday, May 04, 2024 | 22-01-2081

32.8° C 4.4° C
Janakpur Jumla

TODAY

NATIONAL

Adoption of gender-inclusive toilets in Nepal is said to be slow. Blue Diamond Society members say they've been nudging representatives of schools and colleges to make the institutions more gender-inclusive. **Pg 4**

Department of Food Technology and Quality Control has asked food inspectors to collect samples of spices produced both domestically and abroad, with focus on those from India, for pesticide residue testing. **Pg 4**

MONEY

Nepal will likely experience above-normal rains this monsoon, according to South Asian meteorologists. This, experts say, could bring a huge relief for the farm-dependent economy with better crop yield. **Pg 5**

Xi Jinping heads to Europe on Sunday to defend China's "no limits" alliance with Russia, first to key Ukraine backer France, then to Serbia and Hungary, which have close ties to the Kremlin. **Pg 5**

SPORTS

Real Madrid host Cadiz on Saturday and if they win and Girona take any points off champions Barcelona immediately afterwards, Carlo Ancelotti's Los Blancos will earn a record-extending 36th La Liga title. **Pg 6**



CULTURE

For every artefact outside of Nepal identified by the Lost Arts of Nepal, there are a dozen, maybe even a hundred, objets d'art, and edifices languishing in-country for lack of funding. **Pg 8**



standard chartered

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

Download SC Mobile App now

*TSC Apply
*Payment facility available with Nepallpay

Scan to download



The setting sun is seen with the Dharahara as the backdrop in this view from Singha Durbar, Kathmandu, on Friday.

Minister Shrestha sets sights on India after China corridor proposal

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, MAY 3

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Narayan Kaji Shrestha said he is exploring ways to revamp economic and development ties with India and China by setting up economic and development corridors with the two neighbours. Earlier he had only talked about the idea with China, but now the deputy prime minister said he plans to push forward a similar approach with India. During his China visit from March 24 to April 1 and his meet-

ing with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing, Shrestha had proposed the creation of an economic and development corridor linking Nepal, Tibet, Sichuan and Chongqing of China. "Now we have received a proposal from China to add two more places—Xian in Shaanxi province and Guangdong province's capital Guangzhou, where most of Nepali traders are based and export Chinese goods," Shrestha said. According to the DPM Shrestha, he has also expedited discussions to develop similar corridors with bordering Indian states like Uttarakhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. **>> Continued on page 4**

Experts warn against hasty change in electoral system

As two major parties peddle the narrative of a flawed system that elects hung parliament, direct election is no panacea, observers say.

BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, MAY 3

The calls to amend the Constitution of Nepal to revisit the current electoral system have been growing over the months. It formally started with the Nepali Congress Central Working Committee meeting in July last year.

Over a dozen Congress central members advocated electing all members of the lower house through a first-past-the-post (FPTP) model by changing the mixed system that is currently in practice.

The largest party that is internally divided on several issues seems to have a consensus view when it comes to changing the electoral system. Though the agenda formally entered discussion in the party committee thanks to its chief whip Ramesh Lekhak, who is close to Sher Bahadur Deuba, the party president, Shekhar Koirala, a leader of the dissident faction in the Congress, has emerged as a true advocate of the agenda.

On several forums, Koirala has claimed that revision of the mixed electoral system is necessary for the country's stability. Over the months, those from outside the Congress also have started advocating a directly elected lower house arguing that no party can secure a majority under the existing system, thus perpetuating political instability in the country.

Not only leaders from political parties but also the head of the House of Representatives recently echoed them.

"It is necessary to revise the electoral system for stability. No party can get majority seats under the present system, which means instability will continue to prevail," said Devraj Ghimire, Speaker of the House of Representatives, at a programme on March 27.

The leaders from the CPN-UML have expressed similar views.

"Though the issue hasn't entered as a formal agenda in our party meetings, discontent over the present electoral system is growing," Mahesh Bartaula, the party's chief whip, told the Post.

"Adopting direct election is necessary to put an end to unnecessary bargaining of the parties with even two or three seats."

In the 275-member lower house, 60 percent (165) members are elected directly from the constituencies while the remaining 40 percent (110) are elected under the proportional representation system, as per Article 84 of the Constitution of Nepal.

The country adopted direct elections of lower house members until the Interim Constitution was put into force in 2007. Following strong opposition from the Maoist party and other regional forces, a mixed electoral system was adopted.


Many provisions of the 2015 constitution were introduced due to pressure from the Maoists and regional outfits.

As many as 60 percent of the members of the first and the second Constituent Assembly were nominated for proportional representation while 40 percent were directly elected. But the shares of the two types of representation were reversed while adopting the new constitution through the Constituent Assembly.

A mixed model was adopted to ensure that the proportional representation model will compensate for the lack of needed representation from a particular group or community through direct election. For instance, the constitution envisions at least 33 percent representation in the lower house. But when the representation is not met through direct election, the proportional category compensates for it.

Some legal experts fear representation of various marginalised groups might be severely curtailed with the change in the electoral system.

>> Continued on page 2



YAK & YETI

Capturing
TIMELESS ROMANCE
AT THE HEART OF ELEGANCE

LAL DURBAR CONVENTION CENTER

FOR RESERVATIONS: +977 9802352451/ 9823318903 | sales@yakandyeti.com.np

Missile defence successes in Gulf, Ukraine fuel global urgency to acquire systems

Incentives to invest in missile defence too attractive for countries to ignore, analyst says.



Servicemen around the Patriot air defence system during Polish military training on the missile systems at the airport in Warsaw, Poland, in February last year.

GERRY DOYLE/REUTERS
SINGAPORE, MAY 3

The success of ballistic missile defences facing their first complex, high-stakes combat scenarios in Israel, the Red Sea and Ukraine will encourage militaries globally to invest in the pricey systems, experts say—and

intensify missile arms races.

Iran launched as many as 120 intermediate-range ballistic missiles at Israel on April 13, US and Israeli officials say. US SM-3 and Israeli Arrow interceptors destroyed nearly all of them, leaving drones and smaller threats to the Iron Dome system.

In previous months, interceptors

fired from US Navy destroyers stopped Houthi anti-ship ballistic missiles, while in Ukraine, US-made MIM-104 Patriot batteries have shot down advanced Russian Iskander and Khinzal missiles.

Reuters spoke with six experts who said more militaries would look to invest in ballistic missile defence, a potential windfall for companies such as Lockheed Martin and Raytheon, which build those types of systems.

"It's undeniable that any wealthy country with the technological wherewithal will continue to invest in missile defence," said Ankit Panda of the US-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a defence and security think tank. "All of this is a recipe for a conventional arms race."

European countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and Poland already operate RTX subsidiary Raytheon's Patriot batteries, the most common Western advanced ballistic missile defence system.

Saudi Arabia has used its Patriots for years to defend against Houthi attacks; it and the United Arab Emirates also operate the Lockheed Martin Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system.

>> Continued on page 2

NATIONAL

Parties fault PR system, but experts blame corruption for instability

>> Continued from page 1

“The present system was adopted to ensure the representation of the marginalised and disadvantaged communities. The question is, how their representation will be ensured in the new system,” advocate Mohna Ansari, an ex-member of National Human Rights Commission, told the Post. “To me, replacing the existing system with the FPTP sounds like a regressive move.”

The political parties argue that there are several ways representation of different groups can be ensured under the direct electoral system. Making the National Assembly fully proportional and reserving some seats for people from particular communities are some ideas they have floated.

Talking to the Post after the party’s Mahasanti meeting in February last week, Min Bishwakarma, the chief of the Congress publicity department, had claimed that there are several ways to make the FPTP system representative.

But constitutional experts aren’t convinced. “Yes, even the FPTP can be representative but I doubt these parties mean well when they say they want direct elections,” senior advocate Bipin Adhikari, a professor at the Kathmandu University School of Law, told the Post. “If people in power are vile, no system works properly.”

Adhikari says the electoral system can be reformed if there is the need and political consensus but the pitfalls of changes must be properly evaluated.

“Amending the constitution at this point is like opening the Pandora’s box. It may plunge the country into another episode of instability. I don’t see the parties having political legitimacy or power to control that,” he said.

Nepal has held seven general elections ever since the restoration of democracy in 1990. The Nepali Congress got majority in the two elections held in 1991 and 1999 but even that couldn’t ensure stability because of factional disputes within the party. Some experts say when parties lack the right political culture, no electorate can ensure stability.

Senior advocate Purna Man Shakya says he opposes the idea of a change in the electoral system of the federal level. He, however, supports direct election of chief ministers as in presidential system. “Dirty politics has limited the roles of the provincial assemblies to making and unmaking a government. I am for directly elected chief minister at the provincial level for greater stability,” he told the Post. “If that works, we might think of replicating it at the federal level. But it won’t be right to change the electoral system at the centre at this point.”

People flock to Bajhang highlands for yarsagumba harvest

Local markets are buzzing with activity as people shop for stay in the mountains for months. Yarsagumba fetches up to Rs2 million a kilo in the district.



People with food and logistics pictured at Talkot area in Bajhang on their way to the mountains in the district.

□ BASANT PRATAP SINGH
BAJHANG, MAY 3

Anjana Bohara from Surma Rural Municipality in the mountain district of Bajhang had headed to the highlands on April 14 to collect yarsagumba (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*), a caterpillar fungus prized for its purported medicinal properties. But she returned home after a few days to cast her vote in the April 27 by-election in the district.

Yarsagumba is a parasitic fungus that grows within a variety of moth caterpillars in the Himalayan region. Locally called yarsa in short, the fungus kills the caterpillar and emerges from the dead body as a thin stem. Yarsagumba is in high demand in a number of countries in East Asia, particularly China.

Bohara said that typically during the yarsagumba collection season, people remain in the highlands searching and gathering the fungus for three months or more, but this year, the routine was interrupted by the by-election as people returned to show support for their election candidates.

After casting her vote on Saturday, Bohara stayed in Surma waiting for

the election results on Monday and then on Tuesday, along with her relatives headed for Dhanseri highlands to resume yarsa collection.

“All those who had returned for the election are going back to the highlands. Even the elderly and children, albeit in smaller numbers, climb mountains to collect yarsa. They will stay in the uplands until mid-July,” said Bohara. “Although the routes such as Part and Bhaisedar leading to Dhanseri Mountain are covered in several feet of thick snow, this does not deter the collectors because yarsa fetches good prices,” Bohora added.

Like Bohara, after voting in the by-election of the Sudurpaschim provincial assembly held on April 27, the residents of the northern parts of the district are returning to the highlands.

Almost all the villages of Talkot, Surma, Saipal, Masta, Chhabis Pathibhera, and Durgathali rural municipalities and, Bungal and Jaya Prithvi municipalities of the district look like deserted villages during the yarsa harvesting months.

“We used to stay for three months in the highlands, but due to the by-election, we stayed at home for a month; otherwise, we would have already col-

lected yarsagumba worth Rs200,000 to Rs300,000. My family has just started climbing the mountains, and we will stay there for two months,” said Asauji Bohara, a local of Saipal. People take along all necessary logistics including tarps, food and clothes. Some people also take their livestock along to lighten the load.

Local officials worry yarsa collectors staying in highlands harm environment.

Ran Bahadur Khadka from Khaptadchhanna Rural Municipality who operates an eatery in the yarsa collection area said people who reached the highlands early this season have already collected a fair amount of yarsagumba in a short period.

According to the Election Commission, there are a total of 61,748 registered voters in Bajhang, but only 30,337 people voted in the by-election. Surendra Bohara, the chairman of



Yarsagumba collectors are seen resting at Sunipatan area in Bajhang in this recent photo.

ward 2 of Surma Rural Municipality attributed the low voter turnout to the yarsa season. Also, many people employed in cities in other districts did not come to vote, he said.

Manbir Bohara, chairman of Saipal Rural Municipality, said many people reached the highlands as early as March. Traders said yarsagumba fetches between Rs 1.7 million and Rs 2 million per kilogram in the district.

“All the villages and settlements in the rural municipality are slowly emptying, and in a couple of days everybody will be gone except those who cannot travel and live in extreme cold and altitude. One can tell what the craze of yarsa is here just by looking at the crowds in the shops in the district headquarters in Chainpur and the local market where people are buying consumables to stay in the highlands,” said Manbir.

Laxmi KC, a local shop owner in Chainpur, said that every year during the yarsa harvesting season, all shops are packed with people, and in her shop, each person spends around Rs25,000 on clothes.

“Not only the clothes shops, but those selling dairy products, groceries, and pharmacies, among others, are bustling with people. The shop

owners here earn more in this season than they do all year long,” said KC.

Meanwhile, local officials have expressed concerns saying the large influx of people heading to the highlands to collect yarsa and living there for months has started to affect the environment and ecosystem of the mountain region.

Dolma Tamang, vice chairman of Saipal Rural Municipality, said that although the locals have found a way to earn and make a living out of it, at the same time, their activities have also been affecting the environment.

“It is important to control unnecessary human activities in the collection area in order to stop deforestation, forest fires, poaching, and the collection of protected herbs. Due to increasing human activities in the mountains, littering has become a major concern currently,” said Dolma.

“A joint team of rural municipal authorities and police has been formed, and surveillance has been started to stop and control the damage caused by humans in the mountains. Not only our rural municipality, but other local units are also making efforts to stop and control unnecessary human activities in the mountain,” Dolma added.

□ DISTRICT DIGEST

Man shots 12th grader student

JHAPA: An 18-year-old girl from Udayapur district studying in grade 12 was shot by a man in ward 5 of Damak Municipality in Jhapa, when she was returning to her rented apartment on Friday. The assailant is a 30-year-old man hailing from Siraha district. Police said the girl is a grade 12 student at Himalaya Secondary School in Damak. She is being treated for gunshot wound in the stomach at Damak-based Lifeline Hospital. The man fled the scene after opening fire, and police are searching for the suspect.

Three absconding fugitives arrested

SALYAN/KASKI: Salyan police arrested two absconding fugitives after 22 years of conviction in a drug-related case and sent them to prison after presenting them at the district court on Friday. Police in Salyan said the fugitives are a 70-year-old man and a 67-year-old man from ward 4 of Bangad Kupinde Municipality, and they were found guilty by the district court on February 9, 2003, in the same case. Another 28-year-old man, a fugitive from Lamjung who was sentenced to one year, 11 months, and 19 days of imprisonment and a fine of Rs100,000 in a drug-related case by Kaski District Court, was arrested by Kaski police on Friday. The fugitive has been sent to prison.

Extortionists posing as cops arrested

BARDIYA: Police arrested three people allegedly involved in extorting money from trucks and tractors transporting riverbed materials and other goods in ward 5 of Gulariya Municipality on Friday. They would extort posing as policemen. Police in Bardiya said the three were illegally taking money from passing vehicles by threatening them. The arrest was made after getting an anonymous tip about the crime. If found guilty, they will face legal action, police said.

More nations may want missile interceptors amid Gulf successes

>> Continued from page 1

Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain have Patriot batteries as well, and Oman has expressed interest in missile defence.

In the US, Lockheed Martin in April won a \$17.7 billion contract for a next-generation interceptor for the Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD) programme—designed to shoot down small numbers of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) aimed at the continental United States.

But the impact may be most acute in Asia, where China has invested heavily in conventionally armed ballistic missiles. A 2023 Pentagon report said the People’s Liberation Army Rocket Force has about 500 DF-26 missiles, designed to accurately strike targets thousands of kilometres away.

That puts US and allied bases in Japan and Guam within range of an attack that may only come with 20 to 30 minutes’ warning.

“In the Pacific, you’ll see further interest in missile defence, which will push the Chinese to build more systems,” said Jeffrey Lewis, director of the East Asia Nonproliferation Program at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in California. “Countries will want to acquire [offensive] missiles because they see other countries using them ... That will drive up demand for missile defences.”

US Indo-Pacific Command and China’s Ministry of Defence did not respond to requests for comment.

China rarely discusses its missile arsenal beyond statements that its forces are meant to preserve peace and are not aimed at any specific country.

Raytheon did not respond to a request for comment. A Lockheed Martin spokesperson referred questions to the company’s first-quarter earnings briefing in late April, in which it said it continued to lead the industry in “missile defence missions, which, given world events, are becoming more critical than ever”.

Dollar signs
Ballistic missile defence works by

spotting an attacking weapon either at launch or in flight, then using a surface-based radar to guide an interceptor to the target.

Interceptions can occur in the atmosphere or in space, and each domain requires different hardware. For instance, fins won’t work outside the atmosphere—interceptors must have small steering rockets to function there.

The necessary high-powered computers, far-seeing radars and missiles as large as telephone poles are not cheap, together stretching into the billions. In 2022, for example, the US approved the sale of both Patriots and THAAD systems to Saudi Arabia, in deals worth as much as \$5.3 billion.

In the Indo-Pacific region, wealthier countries such as Japan, Australia and South Korea are prime candidates for missile defence, Lewis said, while nearly every country in Asia is already

investing in missiles.

Japan’s defence ministry said the country “needs to fundamentally and swiftly reinforce its defence capabilities, including integrated air and missile defence”. It said it is investing in improved Patriot missiles, better radars and enhanced naval anti-missile capabilities.

In its latest defence budget, South Korea increased funding by 12 percent for its Korea Air and Missile Defense System to expand it “from the existing lower-level defence concept,” the country’s defence ministry said in a statement. “Cases such as the Israel-Hamas conflict and the Russia-Ukraine war have reaffirmed the importance of a ‘ballistic missile defence system’ to respond to increasingly sophisticated missile threats,” the ministry said.

In mid-April, Australia announced a A\$500 million (\$328 million) contract with Lockheed

Martin to deliver its Joint Air Battle Management System for tracking and destroying aircraft and missiles.

The cost of a ballistic missile is often much cheaper than the system meant to stop it.

But that isn’t the right way to consider cost, said Yoji Koda, former commander in chief of Japan’s Self-Defense Fleet, and an advocate of stronger missile defences in his country.

“In a war economy, the cheaper the better. But sometimes what is necessary is we need to protect key infrastructure, or key command centres, at any cost. Because without them we would lose.”

The China question
Most of China’s conventionally armed ballistic missiles are designed to hit targets on land.

But it also fields steerable warheads meant to hit ships at sea,

including the DF-21D and variants of the DF-26, developed by the state-owned China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation.

Such anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) had never been used in combat until late 2023, when Houthi forces in Yemen began firing Iranian-made models at ships in the Red Sea.

Between November—the first documented use—and April, US Central Command reported at least 85 ASBMs fired in the region, with 20 interceptions and one civilian ship reported sunk.

CENTCOM has declined to provide specifics about the effectiveness of Iranian ASBMs but has noted missiles posing no threat were not engaged and most that were not intercepted landed harmlessly.

The effectiveness of missile defences on land and at sea will catch China’s attention, said Tong Zhao, a senior fellow with the Nuclear Policy Program and Carnegie China.

“It raises the possibility that the US and its allies could depend on missile defence significantly against a ballistic missile attack,” Zhao said.

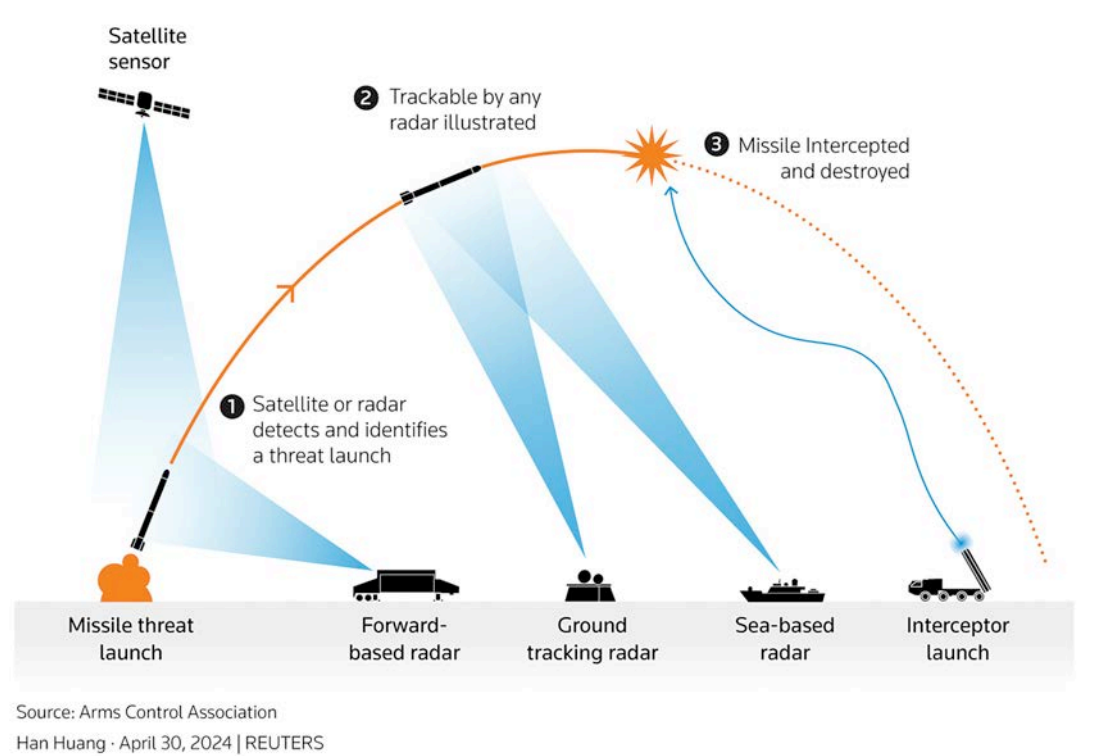
Although the technical specifics of China’s missiles are closely held secrets, the country’s heavy investment means they are likely to be more reliable, and are widely believed to use complex countermeasures to complicate interception.

“For opponents such as China which have missile stockpiles an order of magnitude larger than that of Russia or Iran and which field more sophisticated systems ... it’s not clear that the lessons learned invalidate existing operational constructs,” said Sidarth Kaushal, a senior research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute. But the political and practical incentives to invest in missile defence will be too attractive for many countries to ignore, Lewis said.

“All defence procurement decisions are ultimately about politics,” he said. “The politics of this stuff is really simple: do you want to defend the country or not? And the winning answer is always ‘Yes’.”

Missile defence systems

How incoming missiles are intercepted by defence systems.



Correction

The caption for the front-page photo of jacaranda blossoms published on May 3, Friday erroneously mentioned the location as Kathmandu. The picture was taken at Mahalaxmishan, Ring Road in Lalitpur. The error is regretted. -Editor

N.O.C. हराएको सुचना

मिति २०८१।०१।०२ गते स्वस्मृ देखी मेडिकल चोक सम्म जीवा मेरो शिक्षा मन्त्रालय बाट जारी भएको No Objection Letter हराएकोले पाउनुहुने महानुभावले नजिकको प्रहरीचौकी वा निम्न ठेगानामा खबर गरिदिनुहुन अनुरोध गर्दछु ।

नाम थर :- अस्मिता तामाङ
ठेगाना :- ताहि गा.पा. ५, नुवाकोट
Letter No :- 793649821
सम्पर्क नं. :- ९७६६५२३९५६

WANTED

A well-reputed school in Baluwatar, Kathmandu requires the following:

Primary Level (Science)-1
Pre-primary (Grade teacher)-2

Contact No.
9851262000
9851281516



Half-Marathon 2024



SCAN TO
INSPIRE THE YOUNG

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



PAIN RELIEF PARTNER





FOOD PARTNER



PARTNERS



FOREX		
US Dollar	133.78	
Euro	143.79	
Pound Sterling	167.97	
Swiss Franc	147.51	
Australian Dollar	88.05	
Canadian Dollar	97.91	
Singapore Dollar	98.95	
Japanese Yen (10)	8.73	
Chinese Yuan	18.48	
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.67	
Qatari Riyal	36.69	
Thai Bhat	3.64	
UAE Dhiram	36.42	
Malaysian Ringgit	28.22	
Korean Won (100)	9.85	
Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank		
BULLION		
		PRICE PER TOLA
 Fine Gold		Rs 135,400
 Silver		Rs 1,645
SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA		
BIZLINE		

SAS, a new broker platform, receives overwhelming response



KATHMANDU: Stock Analytics Software (SAS), a platform developed by Source Code, which was launched recently has received an overwhelming response from the market, the company said. SAS, the first of its kind in Nepal, sets unprecedented international standards in financial technology, empowering investors and brokers with advanced tools and insights, according to the company’s statement. “Since its launch, SAS has garnered increasing acclaim among industry leaders and users, marking a significant milestone in Nepal’s financial sector.” Amod Bhattarai, CEO of Source Code, said, “The overwhelming response to SAS reaffirms our commitment to innovation and excellence in the Nepali finance sector. We are proud to bring world-class technology to our market, empowering investors and brokers with cutting-edge technology, which helps clients track their share portfolio, and broker transactions and get real-time share market information through a single platform.” SAS enables effortless tracking of receivable and payable balances with respective brokers, promoting transparency and timely payments, the company said.

Heatwave swells Asia’s appetite for air-conditioning

HONG KONG: A record-breaking heatwave is broiling parts of Asia, helping drive surging demand for cooling options, including air-conditioning. AC exhaust units are a common feature of urban landscapes in many parts of Asia, clinging like limpets to towering apartment blocks in Hong Kong or tucked in a cross formation between the windows of a building in Cambodia. They offer relief from temperatures that have topped records in recent weeks, with many countries in the region hitting 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) or higher. Scientists have long warned that human-induced climate change will produce more frequent, longer and more intense heatwaves. Only 15 percent of homes in Southeast Asia have air-conditioning, according to a 2019 report by the International Energy Agency (IEA). But that figure obscures vast variations: ranging from around 80 percent installation in Singapore and Malaysia, to less than 10 percent in Indonesia and Vietnam, the IEA said. (AFP)

Turkey inflation rises to 69.8 percent in April

ISTANBUL: Turkey’s annual inflation rate accelerated to 69.8 percent in April, official data showed on Friday, despite interest rate hikes aimed at taming soaring consumer prices. Inflation had reached 68.5 percent in March, also an increase from the previous month, as the country’s struggles to overcome a cost-of-living crisis. The central bank began to hike its key rate in June 2023, gradually taking it from 8.5 percent to 50 percent after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan loosened his objections to such monetary policies. It decided last week to keep borrowing costs steady but warned it could raise them again if inflation deteriorates. Erdogan long blamed inflation on high interest rates, even though it is the conventional policy at central banks worldwide to raise borrowing costs in order to lower inflation. But after winning re-election last year, he returned to economic orthodoxy and expressed full confidence in his economic team led by Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek. (AFP)

Nepal braces for above-normal monsoon this year

For Nepal, monsoon remains a major macroeconomic event that is closely watched by the government, farmers, businesses and consumers.

□ **SANGAM PRASAIN**
KATHMANDU, MAY 3

Most of Nepal will likely experience above-normal monsoon rains, according to South Asian meteorologists, which experts say could bring a huge relief for Nepal’s ailing, farm-dependent economy. According to a statement by the 28th Session of the South Asian Climate Outlook Forum released on April 29, above-normal rainfall is most likely during the monsoon season over most parts of South Asia except some areas over northern, eastern and northeastern parts of the region, where below normal rainfall is most likely.

“A normal or above normal monsoon results in a bountiful harvest, which lifts rural incomes and boosts spending on consumer goods,” said Hem Raj Regmi, deputy chief statistician at the National Statistics Office.

For Nepal, the monsoon remains a major macroeconomic event that is widely tracked by investors, the government, and consumers given its material impact on the economy.

“Nepal derives a significant portion of its earnings from rural areas and this has a direct impact on consumer spending patterns,” said Regmi.

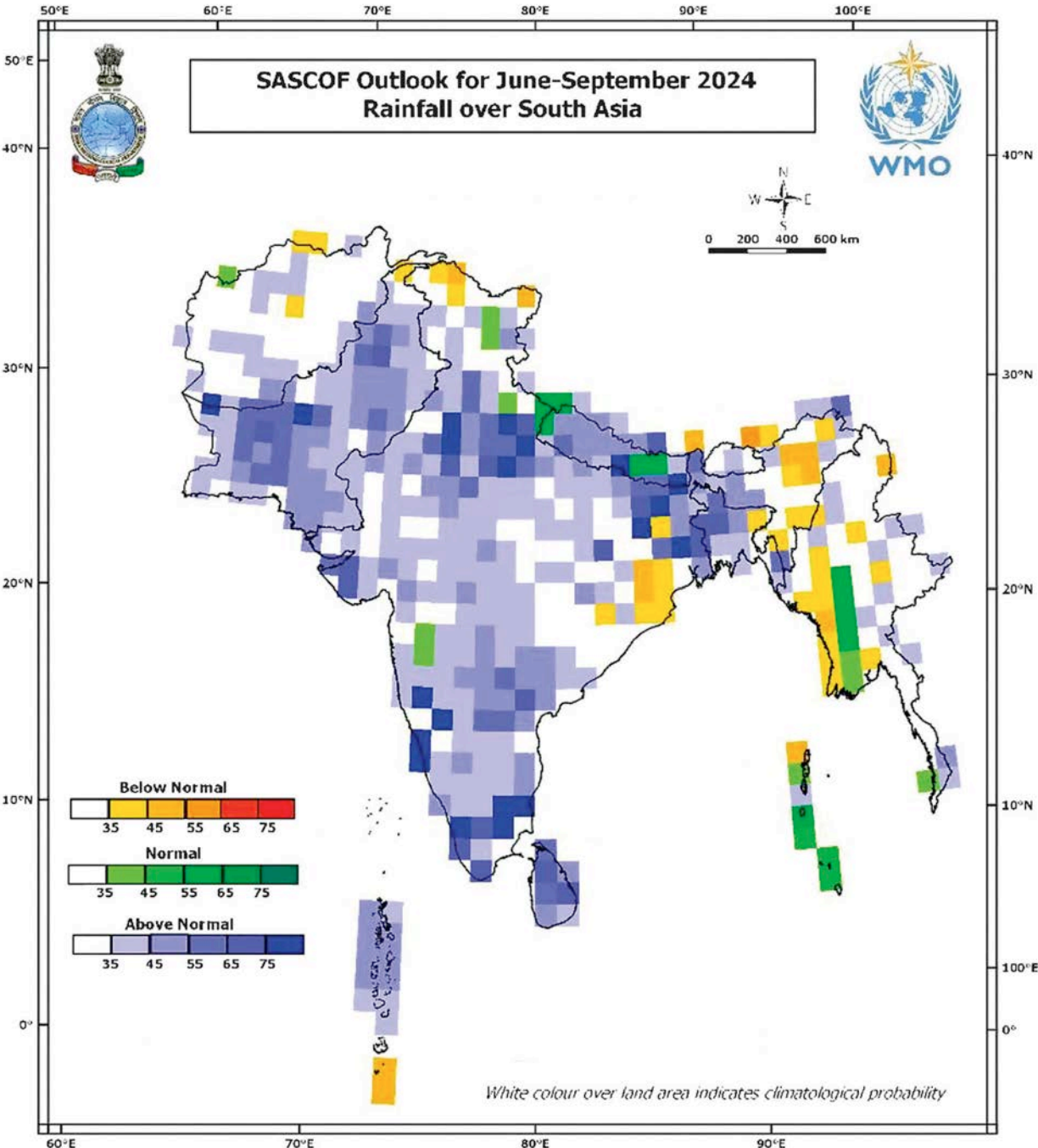
Monsoon rains are critical for the farm sector, which accounts for nearly 25 percent of Nepal’s GDP and employs over 60 percent of the country’s population.

Agro experts say that the above-normal monsoon speeds up the transplantation rate and this translates to high crop yields. If production rises, food inflation tends to drop due to the demand-supply mechanism in the market.

“Furthermore, the monsoon helps to recharge the groundwater level and water reservoirs, as well as the rivers which are pivotal to power generation,” said Regmi.

Sunil Pokharel, spokesperson at the Meteorological Forecasting Division, said if the monsoon is distributive, it’s good for all, including the farm sector. “There is no doubt that a good monsoon boosts the country’s output but if there is excess rain, it’s also a disaster for a country like Nepal.”

Landslides triggered by heavy rains in Nepal cause tremendous damage to life, property, infrastructure and environment.



In Tarai, tens of thousands of people are affected by floods every year. In the hills, landslides are the main natural hazards occurring very frequently, mostly during monsoon.

“Major disasters are associated with high-intensity rain. So, we have to be more cautious this year if there is above-normal rainfall,” said Pokharel.

The normal monsoon onset and withdrawal dates are June 13 and October 2 respectively. Last year, monsoon entered eastern Nepal on June 14 and withdrew from

eastern Nepal on October 15, delayed by thirteen days.

Monsoon is crucial for the Rs5.70-trillion economy, as it brings nearly 80 percent of the rain needed by farms, besides replenishing reservoirs and aquifers.

Only a third of Nepal’s farms have round-the-year irrigation and the rest depend on rain.

This fiscal year, Nepal’s agriculture sector has been projected to grow by 3.05 percent, according to the National Statistics Office. And the economy, which is at the mercy of agriculture output, would grow by 3.87 percent this fiscal year ending mid-July.

Summer crops, mainly paddy, are the major income source for more than half of the population. Rice is a major contributor to the economy and the planting season starts next month.

Only a third of Nepal’s farms have round-the-year irrigation and the rest depend on rain.

According to Regmi, paddy alone accounts for 5 percent of Nepal’s GDP. Last year, despite the El Niño phenomenon, Nepali farmers harvested a record 5.72 million tonnes of paddy, up 4.33 percent, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.

This year, South Asian meteorologists say, there is a strong consensus among the experts that La Niña conditions are likely to develop over the equatorial Pacific during the second half of the southwest monsoon season. It is also recognized that the La Niña conditions are generally associated with the normal to above normal southwest monsoon rainfall over most parts of South Asia.

El Niño and La Niña are two opposing climate patterns that break these normal conditions. Global temperatures typically increase during an El Niño episode and fall during La Niña. El Niño means warmer water spreads further and stays closer to the surface. This releases more heat into the atmosphere, creating wetter and warmer air.

Apple profit ebbs as iPhone sales under pressure

□ **AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**
SAN FRANCISCO, MAY 3

Apple on Thursday said its quarterly profit ebbed but topped market forecasts as it announced an unprecedented \$110 billion share buyback.

The iPhone maker reported a profit of \$23.6 billion on \$90.8 billion in revenue in the first three months of this year. “Given our confidence in Apple’s future and the value we see in our stock, our Board has authorized an additional \$110 billion for share repurchases,” chief financial officer Luca Maestri said in the earnings release.

Shares were up nearly 6 percent to \$183.20 in after-market trading, buoyed by the epic buyback program.

Apple took in a record high amount from digital goods and services sold to fans of the iPhone-maker’s gadgets, chief executive Tim Cook said in an earnings release. As expected, iPhone sales dropped with pressure growing from China and increased competition from Huawei.

The Silicon Valley giant reported \$45.7 billion in revenue from iPhone sales, its main money maker, versus \$51.3 billion in the same period a year earlier, a ten percent drop.

In the key Greater China market, sales of iPhones shrank to \$16.4 billion from \$17.8 billion in a year-over-year comparison, earnings figures showed.

“It’s been a tough year for Apple, no longer the world’s most valuable company nor the top smartphone provider,” Emarketer analyst Jacob Bourne said in a note to investors.

“Waning iPhone demand in China has notably dented revenues.”

Tech giant Huawei recently reported that its first-quarter profits surged over fivefold year-on-year, as the US-sanctioned firm continues to bite into competitor Apple’s sales.

“Apple’s sales were subdued during the quarter as Huawei’s comeback has directly impacted Apple in the premium segment,” Counterpoint senior research analyst Ivan Lam said.

Xi heads to Europe to defend Russia ties

□ **AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**
BEIJING, MAY 3

Xi Jinping heads to Europe on Sunday to defend China’s “no limits” alliance with Russia, first to key Ukraine backer France, then to Serbia and Hungary, which have close ties to the Kremlin.

The world’s second-biggest economy is seeking to deepen political and economic ties in Europe to counterbalance difficult relations with rival Washington.

But analysts say that if France and other Ukraine allies in Europe believe that Xi can be coaxed into abandoning his friendship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, they will be disappointed. Despite French President Emmanuel Macron’s red carpet welcome for Xi when he arrives on Sunday, their talks will be far from straightforward.

In Paris on Monday, Xi and Macron will hold talks with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who has urged Beijing to play a greater role in ending the Ukraine war.

“If the European side expects China

to impose sanctions on Russia, or to join the United States and Europe in imposing economic sanctions on Russia, I think it’s clearly unlikely to happen,” said Ding Chun, director of the Centre for European Studies at Shanghai’s Fudan University.

Xi is seeking to push back on recent European Union probes into China’s industry, but France has made clear that “first and foremost” on the agenda will be Russia’s war in Ukraine.

China claims to be a neutral party in Ukraine but has never condemned Russia’s invasion, while the United States has said Moscow would struggle to sustain its war without Beijing’s support.

Beijing is “the international player with the greatest leverage to change Moscow’s mind,” a French diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity.

“Paris will put China’s support to Russia at the core of the discussion,” said Abigael Vasselier, at the Mercator Institute for China Studies.

“This will certainly not be conducive to a feel-good moment, despite the optics.” Xi’s visit to Europe will be the first since the end of China’s Covid

isolation. It also comes a year after Macron conducted a state visit to China in April 2023, during which he said he was counting on Xi to “bring Russia to its senses” over Ukraine.

At the time, Macron exasperated European allies by saying the bloc should not be dragged into a conflict between China and its main rival the United States over Taiwan—while earning praise in Beijing over the comments. In February this year, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited France and told Macron that Beijing appreciated its “independent foreign policy.”

“We will see how far Xi Jinping will go to please Emmanuel Macron,” said Valerie Niquet, from the Foundation for Strategic Research.

After he ends his European trip, Xi will return to China, with Putin expected to visit later in May.

“China will not budge on Ukraine,” Niquet said.

While Macron and von der Leyen will seek to focus on Ukraine, Xi will want to fight a series of probes launched by the bloc into alleged unfair trade practices by China.

Luxury brands lure Chinese shoppers despite slowdown

□ **AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**
SHANGHAI, MAY 3

Sipping champagne and nibbling fried dumplings, Shanghai’s rich and influential posed by Louis Vuitton signs at a runway afterparty—a lavish affair designed to win customers in China’s crucial market.

China is the world’s biggest spender in the luxury sector, accounting for half of global sales. But as its post-pandemic recovery falters, consumption has flagged, sending jitters through the industry.

For years, wealthy Chinese tourists had travelled to Europe to shop at its boutiques, but when the Covid-19 pandemic struck, the country introduced draconian restrictions that stopped them from leaving the country.

The measures also threw the world’s second largest economy into a slowdown that it is struggling to recover from, with consumer confidence hit and attitudes towards high-end purchases starting to shift.

Now, as China emerges from its coronavirus haze, luxury brands are trying to woo its shoppers back. Shares in Gucci owner Kering tumbled in April after it reported sales in the first quarter had fallen by 11 percent, citing tough market conditions in China.

“Gucci will... not be alone here as



A woman poses for a picture next to a Louis Vuitton logo before the start of the Louis Vuitton Voyager Show with the upcoming Women’s Prefall 2024 collection at the Long Museum West Bund in Shanghai on April 18.

other brands have also been feeling the pinch from China’s domestic spending,” Fflur Roberts, head of luxury at Euromonitor International, told AFP.

Brands with a strong presence in China like Louis Vuitton are staging special events and handing out perks to VICs—an acronym for Very

Important Clients. Louis Vuitton described its “Voyager” show in Shanghai last month as the “next chapter in a strong, longstanding relationship” with China.

Its leading pieces—boldly coloured dresses marked with large cartoon-like animals—were a collaboration with contemporary Chinese art-

ist Sun Yitian, with the brand hailing “the tremendous stylistic vitality” of the country’s youth.

Hollywood A-listers Cate Blanchett and Jennifer Connelly strode down the runway to their seats before the show began, as did Chinese megastars and brand ambassadors Liu Yifei and Jackson Wang.

At the afterparty, influencers and VICs, many dressed head-to-toe in Louis Vuitton, mingled under flashing neon street signs, sampling fancified Chinese street food from stalls bedecked with the brand’s logo.

Louis Vuitton’s parent company LVMH is among the fashion houses so far proving fairly resilient in the face of China’s economic headwinds.

While its first quarter results showed its slowest rate of growth in years, the brand said that sales to domestic and overseas Chinese customers increased by about 10 percent.

Prada and Hermes’s first quarter results both beat analysts’ expectations, posting 18 and 17 percent rises in sales, respectively. Overall, however, the market has slowed down, with consultancy firm Bain & Company forecasting single-digit growth in the Chinese luxury market in 2024 compared to 12 percent last year.

“The economic downturn is impacting Chinese luxury consumers’ confi-

dence,” said Lisa Nan, correspondent for Jing Daily, which reports on the Chinese luxury sector.

“We are facing much more cautious and value-driven consumers, that also check the handbag’s second-hand market value before making a purchase.”

Post-pandemic, there has also been a shift in consumer tastes and priorities. Near Shanghai’s Wukang Mansion, a landmark regularly swarmed by influencers, a woman surnamed Liu said that while she occasionally bought designer items, she would never go line up for a bag. “I like travelling a bit more,” she said. “I’m not so crazy about brand names.” That’s a trend evident in a report on high net-worth individuals’ preferences compiled by research firm Hurun.

“There is a significant shift towards experiential luxury rather than luxury goods,” said Nan of Jing Daily.

During the pandemic, the absence of high-spending Chinese tourists hit Europe’s luxury goods sector hard.

Some of that spending transferred to China, as global brands focused on organising events and creating goods more tailored to their biggest market.

Euromonitor International’s Roberts said the outlook for the luxury market remained “challenging,” and that brands should “err on the side of caution.”

SPORTS | MEDLEY



Members of Nepal national men's cricket team pose for a group photo during a farewell function in Kathmandu on Friday. Nepal will leave for the West Indies and the United States following their fifth and final T20 match against the visiting West Indies A on Saturday to participate in a high-performance camp for their ICC Men's T20 World Cup, which is set to take place in the West Indies and the United States in June. Nepal begin their World Cup campaign against the Netherlands on June 4.

Leverkusen's record unbeaten run continues

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ROME, MAY 3

An imposing stadium in a major foreign capital did nothing to stop Bayer Leverkusen's record unbeaten march across Europe. The freshly crowned first-time Bundesliga champion silenced the Stadio Olimpico with a 2-0 win at Roma in the first leg of the Europa League semi-finals on Thursday to extend their unbeaten streak to 47 matches across all competitions. No club from Europe's five biggest leagues—in Germany, England, Italy, Spain and France—has had a longer unbeaten streak. Leverkusen's last loss across all competitions was a 3-0 defeat to Bochum in the final round of last season's Bundesliga nearly a year ago—on May 27, 2023. Roma were dangerous with an early header off the crossbar from Romelu Lukaku. But then Leverkusen scored on the counterattack seven minutes later: A failed back pass from Roma right back Rick Karsdorp under pressure from Alex Grimaldo on



Xabi Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen extended their unbeaten streak to 47 matches with a 2-0 Europa League semi-final first leg win at Roma. the left flank resulted in a 3-on-1 for Leverkusen. Grimaldo then passed to Florian Wirtz, who calmly slotted in from the center of the area. Midfielder Robert Andrich added another goal for Leverkusen in the 73rd with a long-range shot. Leverkusen have won only one European trophy: the 1988 UEFA Cup, which was then predecessor to the Europa League. Their only other European final came in the 2002 Champions League, won by Real Madrid.

Real Madrid can seal La Liga title with help from Girona

If Madrid beat Cadiz on Saturday and Girona take any points off Barcelona immediately afterwards, Los Blancos will earn a record-extending 36th Spanish title for four games left.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BARCELONA, MAY 3

La Liga leaders Real Madrid have their first chance to be crowned champions this weekend, although they require a helping hand from this season's shock challengers Girona to make it happen. Madrid host Cadiz on Saturday and if they win and Girona take any points off champions Barcelona immediately afterwards, Los Blancos will earn a record-extending 36th Spanish title. It seems fitting for Michel Sanchez's side to have a say on a potentially decisive day, after they were Madrid's main contenders for pole position for much of the season. The wheels came off Girona's bandwagon after Carlo Ancelotti's side thrashed them 4-0 in February, but they composed themselves and are on the verge of Champions League qualification for the first time in the club's history. Girona, in only their fourth season in Spain's top flight, can make club history with a Catalan derby victory over second-place Barcelona, who trail Madrid by 11 points. Even though La Liga could be theirs this weekend, the Cadiz match is not Madrid's biggest concern, as it falls



Even though La Liga could be theirs this weekend, the Cadiz match is not Real Madrid's biggest concern, as it falls between the two legs of their Champions League semi-final battle with Bayern Munich.

between the two legs of their Champions League semi-final battle with Bayern Munich. Los Blancos earned a creditable 2-2 draw in Munich thanks to Vinicius

Junior's brace and host the German giants on Wednesday. Ancelotti will likely shuffle his pack, as he did in their narrow win over Real Sociedad in La Liga last week.

The coach's second string, including the likes of 2018 Ballon d'Or winner Luka Modric, who is poised to depart at the end of the season, target-man Joselu, and veterans Nacho

and Lucas Vazquez, has not let him down when called upon. French defensive midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni is set to miss the game with a knock, while goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois could make his first appearance of the season. Ancelotti said the Belgian was ready to return against Cadiz after two knee injuries have kept him sidelined since pre-season. The coach may also rest top scorer Jude Bellingham, who has struggled with various physical issues in the second half of the season. "He hasn't been at his best, but he'll be back very soon and by Wednesday he'll be at 100 percent," said Ancelotti. Cadiz travel to the Bernabeu still clinging to slim hopes of survival. The Andalusians are 18th, five points from safety behind Celta Vigo. "The situation is very tricky and I understand the tension... but there are five games to go," said Cadiz goalkeeper Jeremias Ledesma. "It's true we're going to a very tricky place, but we will try and get the three points to stay in the fight to be in La Liga. "We have to show that we want to save ourselves and that's what we want the fans to see, that we really want to do it."

LA LIGA FIXTURES			
PLAYING SATURDAY			
Real Sociedad	14:45	Las Palmas	
Real Madrid	20:00	Cadiz	
Girona	22:15	Barcelona	
PLAYING SUNDAY			
Mallorca	00:45	Atletico Madrid	
Osasuna	17:45	Real Betis	
Celta Vigo	20:00	Villarreal	
Valencia	22:15	Alaves	
PLAYING MONDAY			
Rayo Vallecano	00:45	Almeria	
Sevilla	00:45	Granada	
INSIGHTS			
Led by Jude Bellingham, Vinicius and veteran midfielder Toni Kroos, Carlo Ancelotti's Real Madrid have lost only once in 33 league games in this campaign.			
With only five games left, Madrid sit top of the standings on 84 points, 11 ahead of Barcelona in second and 13 clear of third-placed Girona			
Madrid are also in contention to reach their 18th Champions League final as they bid for a record-extending 15th European Cup triumph.			

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

The day sweeps you away into a world of softness and fantasy. Lean into these vibes by going within, exploring your creative mind and deep subconscious. Your popularity increases mid-afternoon, snapping you back into the present. Instant bonds could form.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

The morning connects you with the outside world in intuitive and mentally stimulating ways. Use this to connect with your local or online communities and causes that are important to you. You'll float through social situations as afternoon creeps in.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Your Saturday kicks off to a dreamy start, darling Gemini, revealing new creative potential from the depths of your soul. Use this energy to get serious about any personal or professional goals you've been holding back on.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

You may be inspired to shed enlightenment upon your community today. Don't hesitate to offer sage advice when the opportunity arises, feeling proud of the experiences that lead you toward a greater understanding of this world. The energy shifts mid-afternoon.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

You should feel strong and secure in the path ahead, dearest Leo. These conditions are perfect for dissolving boundaries, both real and imagined, taking control of destiny as you lean into transformation. The universe is on your side mid-afternoon.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

A rush of spiritually charged energy finds you early this morning, dearest Virgo. This energy could lead to lucky breaks, relationship fulfillment, and plenty to feel grateful for, especially when you have faith in something larger than yourself.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

The day, sweet Libra, asks you to take a relaxed yet consistent approach toward transformation. Use this to alleviate any unrealistic expectations you've put upon yourself, focusing instead on small steps as you ease into the journey that lies ahead.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Love swirls within and around you, dearest Scorpio, setting you up for a dreamy and emotionally fulfilling day. Follow fun and creative whims under these cosmic conditions and invite along loved ones to experience life at its fullest.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Stay busy as a way to nurture the heart this morning, dear Archer. This energy is ideal for reinvesting in your home by catching up on chores, spending some time in the kitchen, or hosting friends for brunch.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Give your loftier thoughts a chance to grow, dearest Sea-goat. This energy brings a softness to your psyche, making it easier to explore new topics, unleash creative potential, and stoke confidence. Spend the second part of your afternoon at home.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Look for opportunities to align your emotions with the healing powers of nature, dear Aquarius. This climate acts as a therapeutic salve for all members of the zodiac, though you're cosmically poised to gain the most when grounding is a priority.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Use the day's energy to your advantage, finding dreamy ways to socialise and connect. Now is also the perfect occasion to soften up your image while showcasing your visionary mind, as people willingly soak up your unique perspective and ideologies.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Tight closure

5 Fine violin

10 "Mamma Mia" group

14 Goad

15 Hirsute

16 Letter start

17 — vital

18 Church instrument

19 No-sleeves garment

20 Ridiculed

22 Disinterest

24 On — street

25 Egyptian god — -Re

26 Insipid

29 Recoiled

33 Word on a road sign

34 Baby powder

35 Continental currency

36 Possessive pronoun

37 — Grande

38 Farm denizen

39 "On the double!"

41 Store

42 Ordinary language

44 Choice morsel

46 Sharpened

47 Heart

48 Postal matter

DOWN

1 Took to court

2 — Stanley Gardner

3 Food thickener

4 Lax

5 Footwear

6 Like latecomers

7 Fix fraudulently

8 Football's — Parseghian

9 Active

10 Cash loan

11 Shade of red

12 Big party

13 Dilettantish

21 Miami- — County

23 Groan-making joke

25 Apportion

26 Extensive

27 Lowdown guy

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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

4-11-24 © 2024 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS

28 Of hearing

29 Sprite

30 North American lake

31 Efface

32 Like the Capitol

34 Draw a certain way

40 In brine

41 Abandons

42 Punxsutawney groundhog

43 Jagger's — Stones

45 Bird sound

48 Small rodent

49 Intended

50 Sets an upper limit

51 Russian river

52 Mention

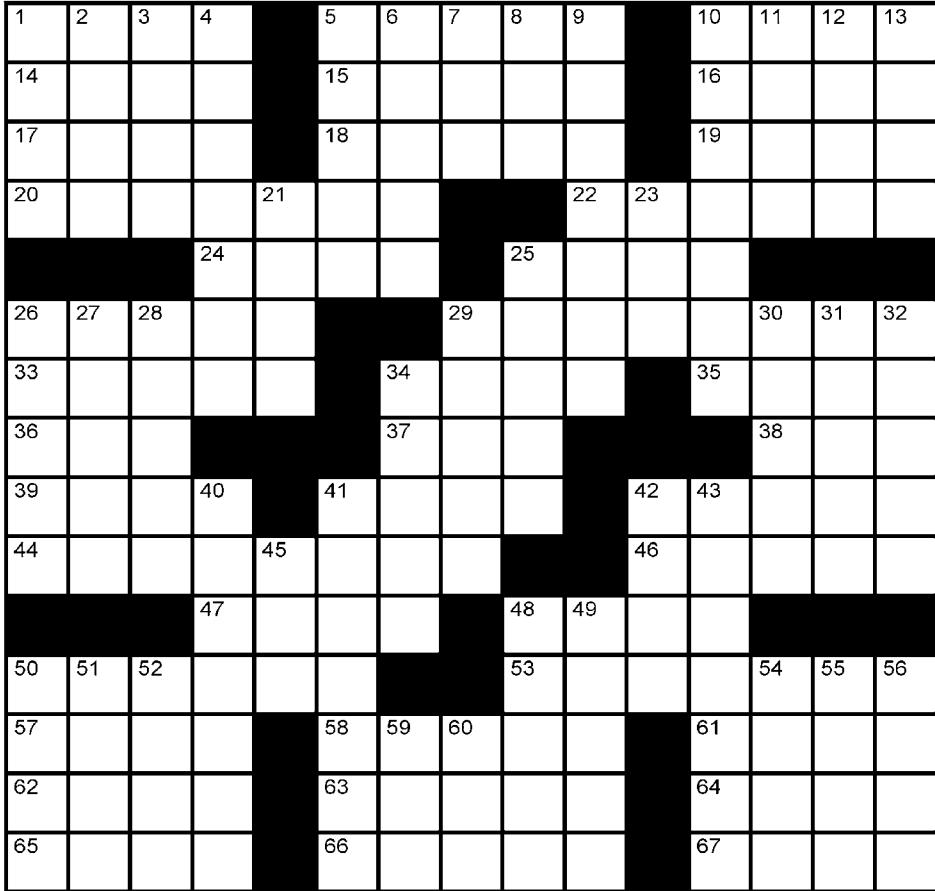
54 Genesis man

55 Fashion

56 Blueprint

59 Burst

60 Provoke



SUDOKU

4 7 6 3 5 9 1 8 2

8 3 2 4 7 1 9 5 6

1 5 9 2 6 8 7 4 3

6 9 1 5 4 7 2 3 8

3 4 7 9 8 2 6 1 5

5 2 8 1 3 6 4 9 7

7 6 4 8 1 5 3 2 9

2 8 3 6 9 4 5 7 1

9 1 5 7 2 3 8 6 4

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

In ‘Knife’, Salman Rushdie uses words to challenge the physical attack on him

The book’s power lies in its personal stories, which resonate more than political commentary.

SANJAY SIPAHIMALANI

First, a look at the statistics. Almost 33 years and six months after Ayatollah Khomeini’s notorious fatwa, Salman Rushdie was stabbed 15 times during an attack that lasted 27 seconds. He spent 18 days in hospital and a further three weeks in rehab. He lost sight in one eye and the partial use of one hand. These numbers are harrowing enough, but in the pages of Knife, Rushdie’s account of the incident and its aftermath, he goes beyond them to deliver a powerful, intimate account of trauma and recovery.

This book is full of wry ironies. Take the first sentence: “At a quarter to eleven on August 12, 2022, on a sunny Friday morning in upstate New York, I was attacked and almost killed by a young man with a knife just after I came out on stage at the amphitheatre in Chautauqua to talk about the importance of keeping writers safe from harm.” As dramatic a way as any to kick off proceedings.

He doesn’t shy away from the gory details. “Violence came running at me” that day, he recalls. “Blood began to pour out of my neck...There was a deep knife wound in my left hand, which severed all the tendons and most of the nerves [and] deep stab wounds in my neck...and another farther up my face, also on the right”. The “cruellest blow” was the knife in the eye, which went in all the way to the optic nerve, eliminating the possibility of restoring sight. Later in hospital, the eye is described as “hanging down on my face like a large soft-boiled egg”.

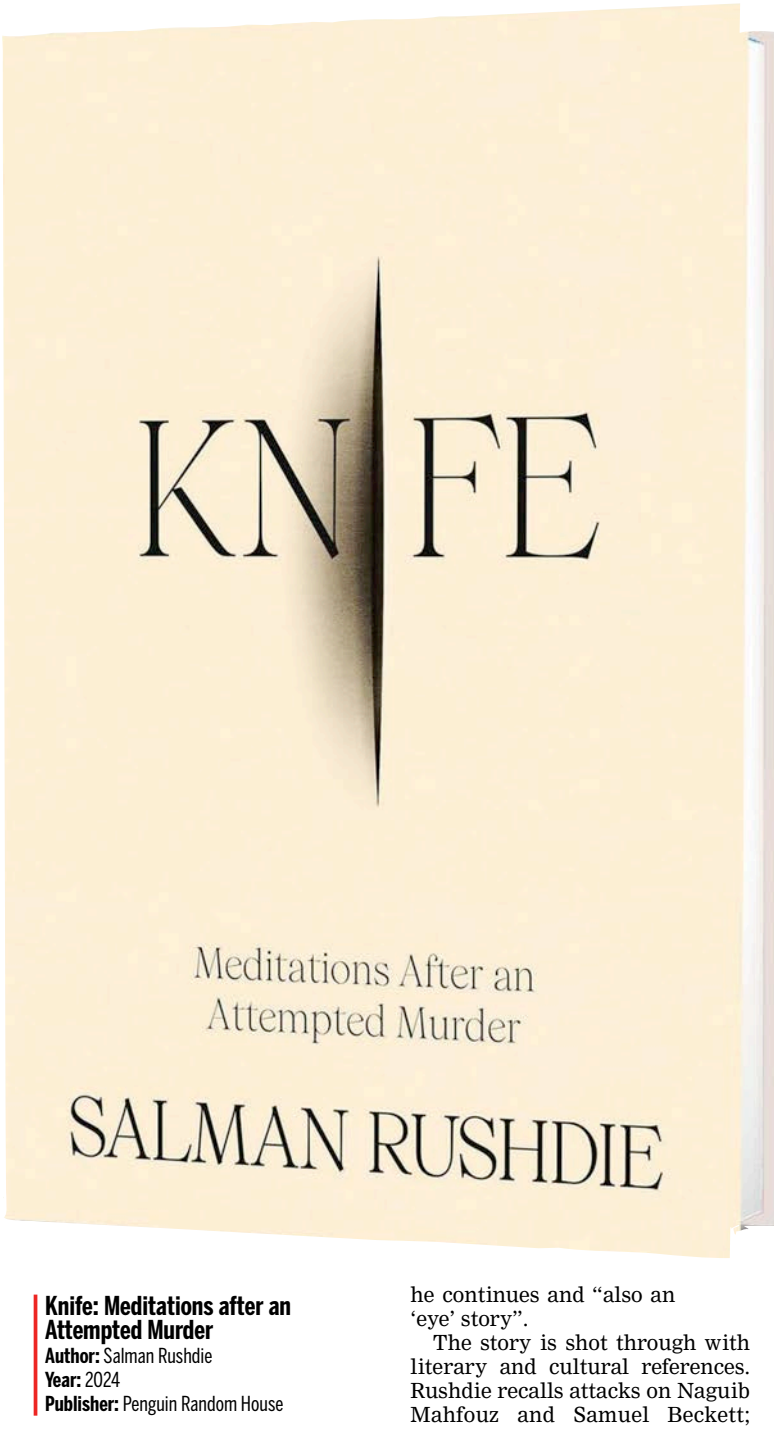
It felt, he writes, like a near-death experience without anything supernatural about it. No tunnel of light or “feeling of rising out of my body”. What occupied his thoughts was the idea that “I would die far away from the people I loved, in the company of strangers”.

Fortunately, due to the heroic actions of others around him, the attack was cut short. What came after was arduous and painful. Hours of surgery and being on a ventilator were followed by days of being poked, prodded and otherwise treated by “Dr Eye, Dr Hand, Dr Stabbings, Dr Slash, Dr Liver, Dr Tongue”. Finally, “I emerged from the long tunnel of hospital visits and was returned to the general population”.

Then came “the rehab of the mind and spirit”. This is the other pole of the book, a tender acknowledgement of the part played by his wife, the poet and visual artist Rachel Eliza Griffiths. Rushdie writes movingly about their relationship and her unstinting support, as well as of their families, during his convalescence. This makes his memoir a tale “in which hatred—the knife as a metaphor of hate—is answered and finally overcome, by love”.

The narrative gains resonance with foreshadowing and premonition. During his first meeting with Rachel, for instance, he walked smack into a full-length glass door; blood streamed down his face as he “fell dramatically to the floor” and she accompanied him home to make sure he was all right. Years later, two nights before the incident at Chautauqua, he has a dream about being attacked by a gladiator. This is reminiscent of a dream about lethal blackbirds that he wrote about in Joseph Anton, his earlier memoir.

Fortunately, the attack doesn’t seem to have diminished his drollery. He says that he was pleased with the amount of weight he lost because of his hospital stint, though “it was not a diet plan to be recommended”. During the process of writing Knife, he realises that it shouldn’t be in the third person, as Joseph Anton had been, because “when somebody wounds you fifteen times it definitely feels very first-person”. That’s an “I” story,



works by writers from Franz Kafka to Philip Pullman; and scenes from Bergman’s The Seventh Seal and Luis Buñuel’s Un Chien Andalou. There are moving accounts of the last meetings with Martin Amis, conversations with a cancer-diagnosed Paul Auster, and the convalescence of “my younger-brother-in-literature,” Hanif Kureishi.

A bit unexpectedly, he doesn’t mention Hitoshi Igarashi, the slain Japanese translator of The Satanic Verses; William Nygaard, the Norwegian publisher who was shot at but survived; and Italian translator Ettore Capriolo, who also survived a knife attack. Presumably, this is because he has already written about them in Joseph Anton.

Charmingly enough, Rushdie also finds inspiration in the career of the Nawab of Pataudi. “I decided that the Tiger would be my role model,” he writes. “If he could face up to the ferocious speed of Hall and Griffith, I should be able to...succeed at being functional as a one-eyed man in a two-eyed world”.

The stark title of this work is not simply a reference to the failed assassin’s blade. For Rushdie, language, too, is a knife capable of cutting open the world to reveal its inner workings, its secrets, and its truths. This is his tool to “remake and reclaim my world”, a task he tackles with gumption and panache.

The purpose of writing Knife, then, is to reckon with the assault and answer violence with art. As a part of this process, he confronts the attacker on the page in a chapter which imagines a conversation with “my Assailant, my would-be Assassin, the Asinine man who made Assumptions about me, and with whom I had a near-lethal Assnigation”. However therapeutic, this section fits incongruously into the overall account: though visceral, it is, understandably, more tendentious than the rest.

More to the point, he writes of the dangers of weaponising faiths such as Hinduism and Islam and the important distinction between “private religious faith and public, politicised ideology”. Sadly enough, when he was told of messages of support from the world and its leaders, “India, the country of my birth and my deepest inspiration, on that day found no words”.

There are other changes of tone, during which Rushdie makes sweeping statements about the state of the world: “America torn in two by the radical right, the UK in dreadful disarray, India sinking fast into authoritarianism, freedom everywhere under attack from the bien-pensant left as well as book-banning conservatives...” The power of Knife, in contrast, lies in its personal stories, which resonate more than political commentary.

For Rushdie, language, too, is a knife capable of cutting open the world to reveal its inner workings.

One of the consequences of the horrific incident was that it turned him again into a writer defined by the fatwa. When his last few books were published, he writes, people finally stopped asking about the attack on The Satanic Verses, but now, “here I am, dragged back into that unwanted subject”. Circumstances have turned him “into a sort of virtuous liberty-loving Barbie doll, Free-Expression Rushdie,” a fate he is determined to make the best of. That, too, is a form of closure.

Published in special arrangement with TheWire.in



‘Shaping Forms Shifting Futures’



PHOTO: COURTESY OF TARAGAON NEXT/FACEBOOK

An exhibition opening will be inaugurated on Wednesday at Taragaon Next, with a presentation from Fulbright Researcher Sarah Burack followed by a panel discussion covering the topic of traditional metal crafting in Nepal.

Where: Taragaon Next, Baudha, Kathmandu
When: May 8
Time: 3:00 pm onwards
Entry: Free

Game Night Thursdays

The Hostel Nextdoor is organising a game night where many board games such as Carcassonne, Keyflower, Azul, Wingspan, Catan, Bang, Coup, Dead of Winter, Blokus and more can be played.

Where: Hostel Nextdoor, Kupondole, Lalitpur
When: May 9
Time: 5:30 pm onwards
Entry: Free

Rota Prom Night

Rota Prom Night is being organised by Rotaract Club of Dakshinkali in collaboration with Eventique Nepal on Friday. The event will have games, food stalls, dance and a performance by the band Pahlenlo Batti Muni.

Where: Fahrenheit Club, Thamel, Kathmandu
When: May 10
Time: 8:00 pm onwards

Entry: Rs500 to Rs900

Water Kingdom Park Musical Journey

Bands The Elements and Purna Rai and the DajuBhai Haru are performing at the Water Kingdom Park Musical Journey on Friday.

Where: Water Kingdom Park, Jhilhile, Jhapa
When: May 10
Time: 5:00 pm onwards
Entry: Rs500

Mother’s Day Dinner



PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARRIOTT KATHMANDU/FACEBOOK

A special buffet dinner is being organised by Marriott Kathmandu honouring mothers around the world with a buffet of special moments and heartfelt celebrations.

Where: Hotel Marriott, Kathmandu
When: May 8 to May 12
Time: 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm

Kathmandu Chorale Sings Broadway

The British School is organising a spring concert that will feature a chorale of students singing the Broadway on Saturday.

Where: The British School, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur
When: May 4
Time: 5:30 pm onwards
Entry: Free

‘The Big Hit’ Movie Screen

KTM Film Club is organising a screening of the Hollywood action comedy ‘The Big Hit’. The Club curates and presents unique selection of films from around the globe, featuring films that audience will typically not see in local cinemas, every Tuesday and Thursday.

Where: Oscar International College, Suredhara, Kathmandu
When: May 4
Time: 3:00 pm onwards
Tickets: Rs600 (regular), Rs300 (students)

‘In Search’ Exhibition



PHOTO: COURTESY OF DAVU GALLERY/FACEBOOK

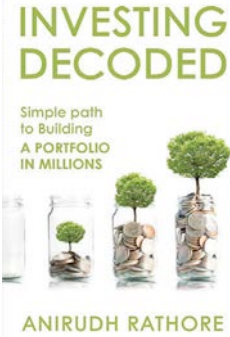
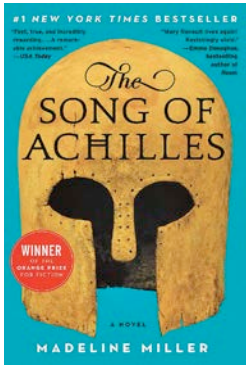
From bold adventures into the unknown to introspective reflections, ‘In Search’ exhibition, currently on display at Davu Gallery, promises to ignite your imagination and increase cultural enrichment and intellectual stimulation.

Where: Davu Gallery, Bhimsensthan, Kathmandu
When: May 4 to May 16
Time: 11:00 pm to 6:00 pm
Entry: Free

BEST-SELLERS | NEW RELEASES

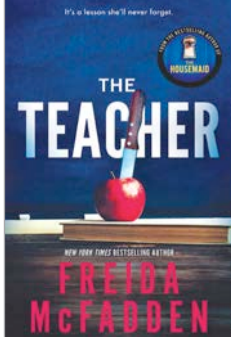
Fiction

- The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller
- Fourth Wing by Rebecca Yarros
- The Guernsey Literary & Potato Peel Pie Society by Mary Ann Shaffer & Annie Barrows
- I Kissed Shara Wheeler by Casey McQuiston
- Carrie Soto Is Back by Taylor Jenkins Reid



Investing Decoded: Simple Path to Building a Portfolio in Millions
Author: Anirudh Rathore
Price: Rs798
Publication: Penguin Enterprise

‘Investing Decoded’ by Anirudh Rathore offers a beginner-friendly guide to navigating the stock market and building wealth through strategic investing. Drawing from personal experiences and insights from classic investment literature, Rathore simplifies complex financial concepts in this comprehensive overview. Divided into three sections, the book covers Rathore’s investing journey, critical evaluation tools for stock selection and the psychological aspects of investing. What distinguishes ‘Investing Decoded’ is its ability to simplify intricate concepts while providing practical strategies for building a diverse portfolio, including sectors like multibagger stocks, mutual funds and cryptocurrencies.



The Teacher
Author: Freida McFadden
Price: Rs798
Publication: Poisoned Pen Press

Freida McFadden’s ‘The Teacher’ is a gripping mystery thriller set in the aftermath of a taboo student-teacher affair at Caseham High. Protagonist Eve grapples with a web of secrets and lies, especially concerning the enigmatic student, Addie, who stops at nothing to protect herself.

Through expert tension-building and intricate plot twists, McFadden navigates the complexities of human nature and the lengths individuals go to safeguard their secrets. As Eve digs deeper, moral dilemmas challenge her perceptions, heightening suspense. The book’s vivid imagery and sharp dialogue create an immersive reading experience, marking it as a standout in psychological thrillers.



Knife
Author: Salman Rushdie
Price: Rs1,118
Publication: Hamish Hamilton

Salman Rushdie’s riveting memoir ‘Knife’ recounts his harrowing experience of surviving a near-fatal attack three decades after a Fatwa was issued against him. With raw honesty, Rushdie delves into the graphic details of the assault and its aftermath, exploring both the physical and psychological journey to recovery. Amidst the intimate narrative, he highlights the unwavering support of loved ones, medical professionals and readers worldwide. Urgent and emotionally charged, Rushdie’s work illustrates the transformative power of literature in processing trauma and fostering healing. ‘Knife’ serves as a poignant tribute, emphasising themes of love, resilience and the profound impact of art on overcoming adversity. (Read the book’s review above)



Non-Fiction

- A Monk’s Guide to a Clean House and Mind by Shoukei Matsumoto
- The Diary of a CEO by Steven Bartlett
- The Age of AI by Daniel Huttenlocher, Eric Schmidt and Henry Kissinger
- 8 Rules of Love by Jay Shetty
- Blue Ocean Strategy by Renée Mauborgne and W Chan Kim

Ekta Books

Palimpsests of history: New ways of seeing, learning, giving

Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust’s restoration endeavours and innovative education outreach programmes are revitalising Nepal’s heritage, one monument at a time.

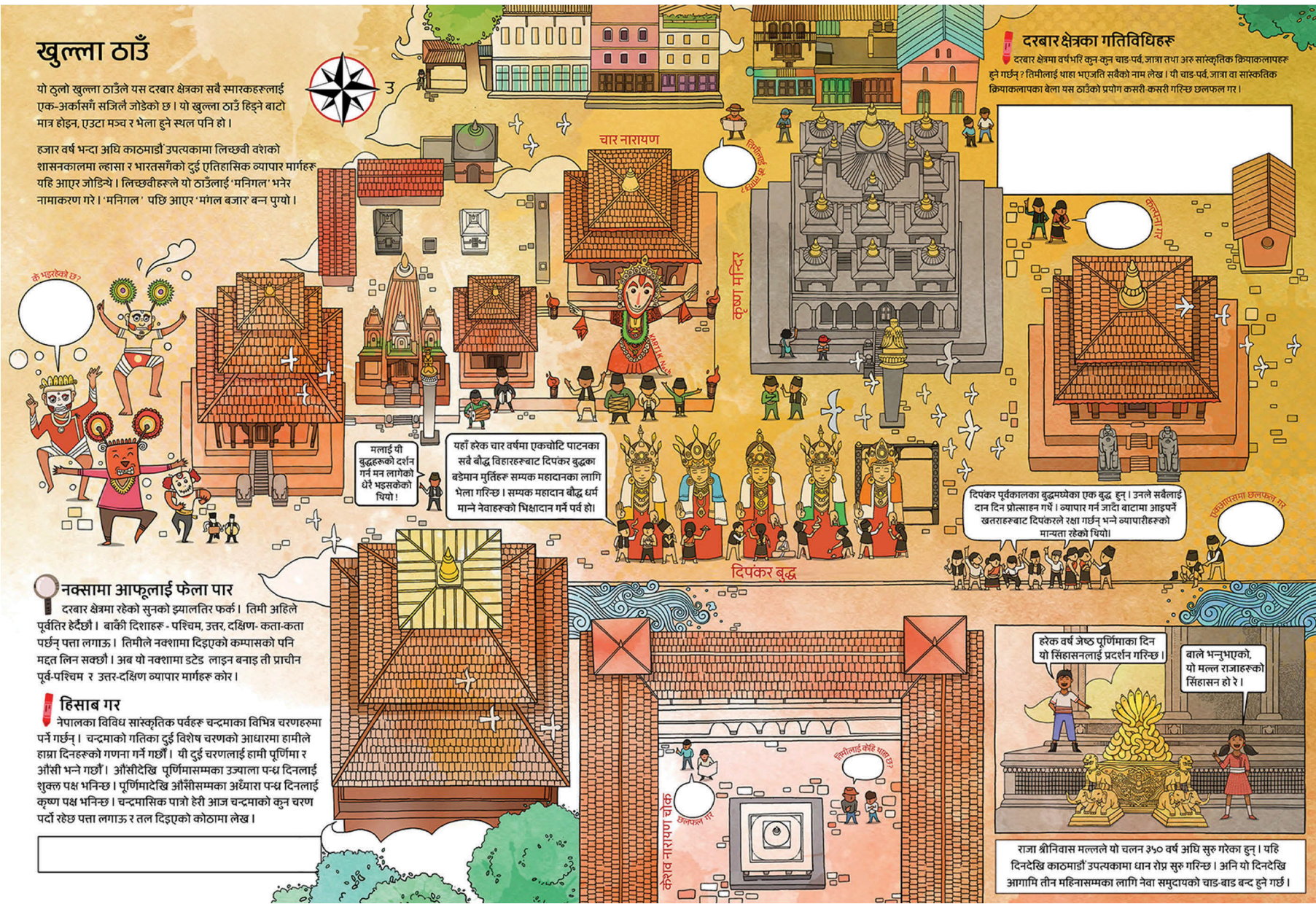
SOPHIA L. PANDÉ

Over the 33 years that the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) has been working on the ground, it has restored more than 87 monuments and temples, some 36 after the 2015 earthquake. The Trust has many long-term donors, institutional and across countries and embassies, but domestic donors, the truest stakeholders, are fewer and far between. Aside from the odd corporate donor or wealthy individual domestic funding is hard won, and not at all in proportion to our priceless World Heritage Site status, which includes the rare aspect of a living heritage component; we still worship at these places.

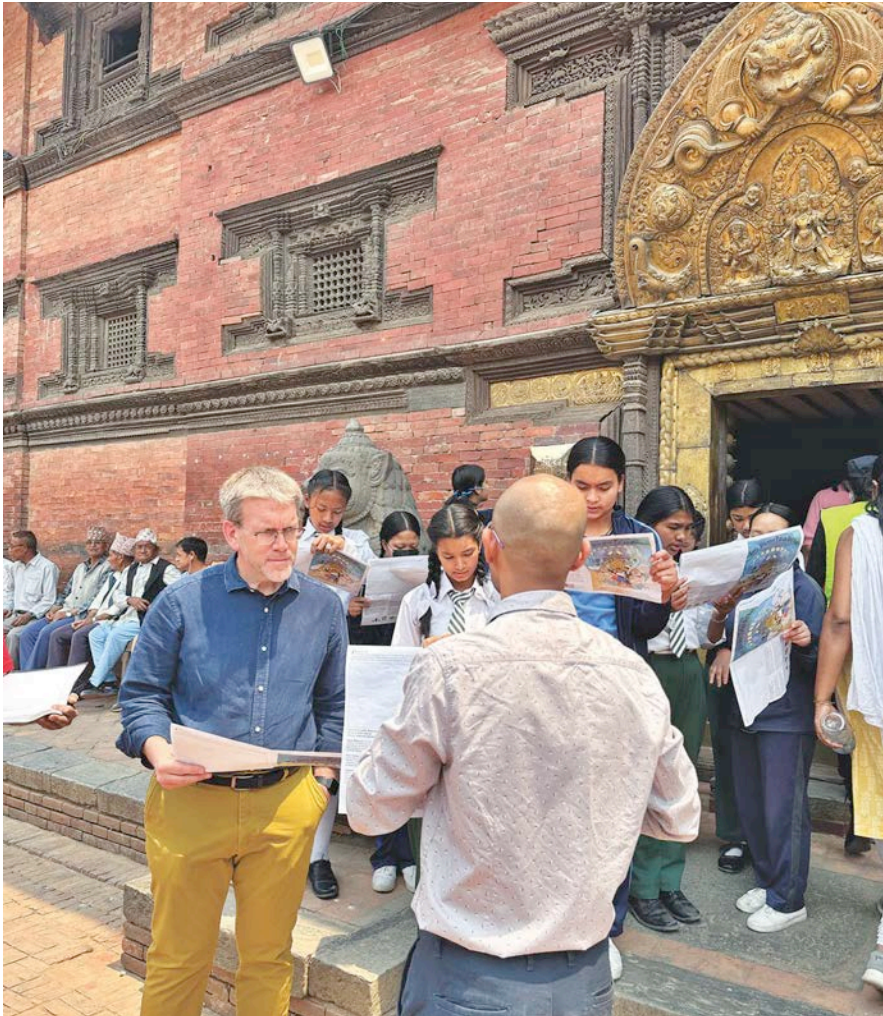
For every artefact outside of Nepal identified by the Lost Arts of Nepal, there are a dozen, maybe even a hundred, objets d’art, and edifices languishing in-country for lack of funding. Stolen heritage rightly causes a furor, but much can be done, more immediately, for the immeasurable, inestimably valuable public inheritance still here at home with support from local donors and crowd-sourced funding.

For this to succeed, civic and cultural education, starting at a school level, from the very smallest child, is essential. Without respect for everything (property, private or public) and everyone around us, across gender, ethnicity, age and class, and a nuanced understanding of the tangible cultural heritage that encompasses us, transcending our differences, compounded by the inextricable link between our living monuments and our intangible cultural heritage, Nepal as a whole will continue to struggle to restore and preserve its cultural wealth, not just in the Valley, but also across its length and breadth, in Mustang, Tilaurakot, Janakpur, Palpa, Sinja Valley, the list goes on.

With this in mind, the KVPT’s education outreach programme was founded in 2017, and free school tours began for the first Let’s Discover Patan map, in Nepali and in English. Even in its first iteration, funded from within the organisation itself, and covering the three main, grand Chowks of the Patan Durbar complex, the



Let’s Discover Patan map in Nepali.



US Ambassador Dean R Thompson (left) participates in the map tour.

map was unique in the way it used a conversational, back and forth, immersive method of teaching the user how to observe and think about the history underscoring the exquisite detail and elegant structures of these stunningly beautiful Chowks, demonstrating, visually, how such locations have been built up over generations and centuries by diverse sets of hands. Participants across the board, young and old, Nepali and foreign, have been captivated by the information in the map, and the way it is presented, beautifully illustrated by the talented artist and illustrator Suman Maharjan.

Over the years Rishi Amatya, writer and researcher extraordinaire has provided reams of painstakingly detailed material to sift through to construct each map, and thoughtful, experienced education specialist Sharareh Bajracharya has shored up the maps’ activities, ensuring that while each task is engaging and fun, it is also honed to show the user how to learn things anew.

Each map has provided learning for the subsequent one, carefully guided by the vast historical and architectural experience of KVPT’s Programme Director, Dr Rohit Ranjitkar. The success of every map determines the funding for the next, and the Trust aims to cover all of the Patan Square and palace grounds and then move on to other important sites in the Valley, for a comprehensive effect.

These maps and the programming surrounding them show that much can be done with creative, careful planning, even on a small budget. The Trust conducts outreach, targeting those schools and students that may not have had a chance to engage first-hand with these venues. As a valuable programme partner, the Patan Museum staff are trained by the Trust as

guides to help conduct the map tours, when students come en masse; the Museum thoughtfully provides free entry to all students. To date, the maps have reached over 7,000 users, most of whom are government school-children.

The current architects of Nepal’s education system are aware of its lack in terms of the incorporation of unconventional learning techniques, arts education, the study of culture, acceptance of diversity, civic-mindedness and its corollary: conservation, and with it, the importance of intangible cultural heritage. Attempts are being made to address these gaps, but in the meantime, the school-children of today and yesterday have already lost their chance at a different, inclusive kind of learning.

Each map has provided learning for the subsequent one, and the success of every map determines the funding for the next.

Anyone with a decent education knows that critical thinking and problem solving are essential life skills, that rote learning doesn’t serve, and that a good teacher is willing to answer even the most precocious questions, but helplessness, apathy and inertia are all present in an education system that resists progressive evolution.

However, with a real will to give Nepali children, from east to west, north to south, a chance at competing in an ever globalising world, one needs-must create careful, sensitive programming, in whatever way

possible. Anyone who has ever taken the interactive tour, teacher, student, or lay-person, has walked away with a completely altered sense of the importance of diversity, responsibility, history, culture, art and architecture and the new possibilities and invigoration that comes from a truly thoughtful, inclusive learning module.

For instance, the second map, funded by the New Zealand High Commission, covers among others, the ancient, historic Mani Dhara, teaching users about the Valley’s vital water systems and traditional building materials even as they learn and reflect on the importance of public infrastructure. This third map, so generously funded by the American Embassy, examines, in detail, the layers of history that have gone into the making of the Keshav Naryan Chowk, just inside the entry to the Patan Museum, as well as the iconic Krishna Mandir and the Char Narayan Temple, the oldest temple in the Square.

Despite the impact of each map, and the cutting edge learning tools developed for each, donors domestically are non-existent. The Trust hopes that each user, child, tourist and teacher reached via the maps will be engendered with a sense of deep connection to culture and heritage that will eventually circle back, in whatever kind and that the exposure to new learning techniques will open up horizons on what can be possible with a creative, innovative, cross-disciplinary approach.

Pandé is director of development at KVPT. She founded its education outreach programme in 2017. She has consulted with IFC and UNESCO, and has been a long running columnist for the Nepali Times and The Post.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF KVPT

Ryan Gosling and Emily Blunt are great fun in ‘The Fall Guy’

LINDSEY BAHR

One of the worst movie sins is when a comedy fails to at least match the natural charisma of its stars. Not all actors are capable of being effortlessly witty without a tightly crafted script and some excellent direction and editing. But Ryan Gosling and Emily Blunt seem, at least from afar, adept at that game. Just look at their charming press tour for ‘The Fall Guy’. Theirs is the kind of fun banter that can be a little worrisome—what if their riffing is better than the movie?

It comes as a great relief, then, that ‘The Fall Guy’ lives up to its promise. Here is a delightful blend of action, comedy and romance that will make the audience feel like a Hollywood insider for a few hours (although there are perhaps one too many jokes about Comic-Con and Hall H).

Loosely based on the 1980s Lee Majors television series about a stuntman who made some extra cash on the side bounty hunting, Gosling takes up the mantle of said stunt guy, Colt Seavers.

Colt is a workaday stunt performer and longtime go-to for a major movie star, Tom Ryder (Aaron Taylor-Johnson). Tom is the kind of deeply egotistical and self-conscious A-listener who tells everyone he does his own stunts and worries out loud about Colt’s jawline being distractingly softer than his. I think the word “potato” is thrown around as a descriptor. Taylor-Johnson has quite a bit of fun playing up all his eccentricities that you hope, and fear, are at least somewhat inspired by real horror stories of stars behaving badly.

The film comes from director David Leitch, the Brad Pitt stuntman and stunt coordinator who helped bring ‘John Wick’ to the world and directed ‘Atomic Blonde’ and ‘Bullet Train’. He’s a guy who not only has the vision and know-how to bring the best in stunts to films and make them pop, but also has a vested interest in putting them in the spotlight. Forget the Oscar, how about just any acknowledgement? Perhaps ‘The Fall Guy’ is just one tiny step on the path to making audiences more aware of some of the behind-the-scenes people who really make movies better and risk it all to do so.

It’s revealing that the movie starts with Colt suffering a terrible injury on a set. The stunt that goes wrong is one he’s just done and doesn’t seem remotely nervous about. The film cuts to his recovery and semi-reclusive retirement until he gets a call from Tom’s producer Gail (a delightfully over-the-top Hannah Waddingham) begging Colt to come back for a new film. They need him, she pleads, as does his longtime crush Jody (Blunt), who is making her directorial debut. She wants to inform him that Tom is missing and he’s the one who has to find him. On the quest, Colt encounters tough-guy goons, enablers, a sword-wielding actress, and a dead body on ice that all lead up to something big and rotten. And like a selfless stunt guy, he does it all out of sight of Jody—trying his best to save her movie without giving her something extra to worry about. Nothing about it is particularly plausible, but it’s not hard to get on board for the ride, and much of that is because of Gosling.

While he’s not quite underappreciated for his comedic timing, especially after ‘Barbie’, it’s fun to get to

see him really embrace and lean into the goofiness—whether it’s crying and singing along to Taylor Swift’s ‘All Too Well’ or quoting movie lines to his stunt coordinator pal (Winston Duke, always a good addition) in the midst of an actual fight.

There is something very juvenile and sweet about Jody and Colt’s will-they-won’t-they romance, with its mix of attraction, banter, misunderstandings and hurt feelings. It was a genius stroke to cast these two opposite each other and it leaves you wanting more scenes with the two.

Working with a script from Drew Pearce (‘Hobbs & Shaw’), Leitch packs the film with wall-to-wall action, in both the film’s movie sets and its real world. And with the self-referential humor, the industry jokes and the promise of a little romance, it feels like one of those movies we all complain they don’t make anymore.



– Associated Press Emily Blunt (right) and Ryan Gosling in a scene from ‘The Fall Guy’.

AP/RSS