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### 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 adifiace languiching in country for



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

# 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

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

Minister Shrestha sets sights on India after China corridor proposal

ANIL GIRI Kathmandu, May 3

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.



TIMELESS ROMANCE

lack of funding. **Pg 8** 



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\*T&C Apply \*Payment facility available with Nepalpay download 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-

"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 Uttrakhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. >> Continued on page 4

### 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, highstakes 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.

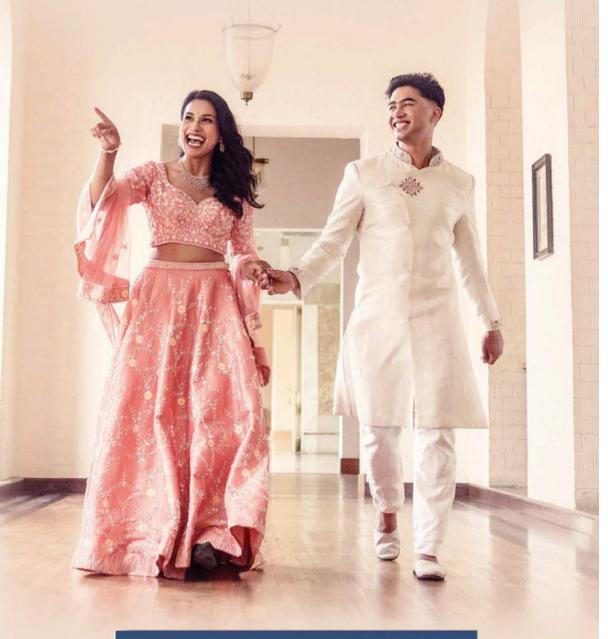
"It's undeniable that any wealthy country with the technological wherewithal will continue to invest in missile defence," said Ankit Panda of the US-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a defence and security think tank. "All of this is a recipe for a conventional arms race."

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

### AT THE HEART OF ELEGANCE



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### 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 rep resentation 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 Mahasamti meeting in February last Min Bishwakarma, the of the Congress publicity chief 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 elector ate 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 rep licating 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 Parti and Bhaiseodar 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 collected 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 offcials 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

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

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

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 increase ing 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

>> Continued from page 1

Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain

spotting an attacking weapon either at launch or in flight, then

investing in missiles. Japan's defence ministry said country needs to fundamen

Missile Defense System to expand

it "from the existing lower-level

defence concept," the country's

defence ministry said in a state-

ment. "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 mis-

announced a A\$500 million (\$328

million) contract with Lockheed

In mid-April, Australia

sile threats," the ministry said.

anti-missile capabilities.

More nations may want missile interceptors amid Gulf successes

Martin to deliver its Joint Air Battle Management System for acking and destroying aircraft and missiles. tally and swiftly reinforce its The cost of a ballistic missile is defence capabilities, including often much cheaper than the sysintegrated air and missile defence". It said it is investing in tem meant to stop it. improved Patriot missiles, better But that isn't the right way to radars and enhanced naval consider cost, said Yoji Koda, former commander in chief of In its latest defence budget, Japan's Self-Defense Fleet, and an advocate of stronger missile South Korea increased funding by 12 percent for its Korea Air and defences in his country.

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

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 Damakbased 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-vear-old man and a 67-vear-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.



ave Patriot batteries 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) programmedesigned 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

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

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".

Ballistic missile defence works by

surface-based radar to guide an interceptor to the target.

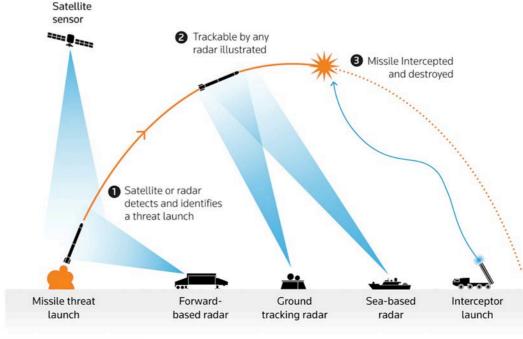
Interceptions can occur in the atmosphere or in space, and each domain requires different hardware. For instance, fins won't work outside the atmosphereinterceptors must have small steering rockets to function there.

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

#### Missile defence systems

How incoming missiles are intercepted by defence systems.



Source: Arms Control Association

Han Huang · April 30, 2024 | REUTERS

"In a war economy, the cheaper the better. But sometimes what is necessary is we need to protect infrastructure, or key kev 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,

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'.'









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### NATIONAL

### 24 artefacts returned to Nepal from US



PHOTO: COURTESY OF NEPALI EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON DO

#### POST REPORT **KATHMANDU, MAY 3**

The Nepali Embassy in Washington DC has sent back 24 artefacts to the Department of Archaeology.

The embassy said the artefacts were received from a US citizen, Susan Bradford, on April 19 in Maui, Hawaii. These artefacts were once part of a private collection of the US citizen, who voluntarily reached out to the embassy to return them to Nepal.

Most of these artefacts date back to the 17th and 18th centuries, while a few can be traced back to the 13th century. Bradford herself sponsored the shipping of these artefacts to Nepal, the embassy said.

The embassy expressed gratitude to Bradford for returning these precious art pieces to the government.

As part of its efforts to recover and repatriate lost and stolen art heritages of Nepal, the embassy has been actively engaged with relevant agencies of the government of Nepal and the United States, art researchers, heritage recovery campaigners, media and private individuals, the embassy said. Together with these 24 pieces, the

embassy has so far sent 63 works of art to Nepal within a year.

### Forest fire kills a woman, 48 cattle in Ramechhap

#### **POST REPORT** RAMECHHAP & SANKHUWASABHA, MAY 3

A 32-year-old woman from ward 8 of Ramechhap Municipality in Ramechhap, died when a forest fire entered the settlement on Thursday evening

According to police, the fire started in Kaule Community Forest located in ward 8 of the municipality, and entered the nearby settlements. It killed a woman, 48 cattle, and destroyed two houses in the ward. The cause of the forest fire is

unknown, and the collection of details of the damage is going on, said the Similarly, two houses in Mudebazaar

# Activists call for gender-friendly toilets across cities

Creating gender-inclusive restrooms in existing facilities is a solution, one of them says.

#### MANUSHREE MAHAT KATHMANDU MAY 3

Abena Katwal avoided toilets in her high school as using them would subject her to discomfort from her peers. Katwal is a transgender woman. All the toilets in her school were labelled either 'Male' or 'Female' and she didn't feel comfortable using either of them as that would bring her unwanted scrutiny. And so, Katwal would have to go the whole day without relieving herself. Having experienced this discomfort for so long, Katwal wishes there were more gender-friendly toilets in the city, ones she could use without any inhibition and without having to fear for her safety.

"It's not just me—this is something that the entire [transgender] community experiences," says Katwal, who is 21.

Katwal, and most of the transgender community, want not just a separate transgender toilet. They want gender-friendly and disability-friendly toilets to be more common around the country.

"We want restrooms where all the queer people and those with disabilities feel safe and comfortable to use,' Katwal says. She has also been involved in awareness programmes regarding queer issues with various other organisations, including BDS.

It isn't that gender-inclusive toilets have not already made their way into the country. But they are an exception, rather than the norm. In 2012, Nepal's first gender-inclusive public toilet was launched at Bageshwari Park in Nepalgunj, Banke. The toilet was the first-of-its-kind in the country, to be installed with the initiative of LGBTIQ activist Sunil Babu Pant and the queer-rights group the Blue Diamond Society (BDS) that he founded. They aimed to ensure greater safety and equality for queer community. The gender inclusive toilet is still fully functioning in Nepalgunj, according to a representative of the ward committee concerned. But what about the rest of the country?

While the BDS has been continuously advocating for it, the adoption of gender-inclusive toilets in the country has been rather slow. BDS members say they have been nudging representatives from schools and colleges to make their institutions more gender-inclusive. But that has yet to yield the desired result.

"It seems like they [the representatives] are listening, but eventually nothing comes of it," says Katwal.

Anamika Chhetri, a non-binary individual, feels similar discomfort when it comes to toilets labelled 'male' and 'female'. They've had similar discomfiting experiences when using public restrooms in the country. Apart from the general discomfort of being looked



Transgender community wants gender-friendly and disability-friendly toilets across country.

at differently by people, they have also had an experience of being denied using a restroom at a bus station.

They also recall a time when they were stopped from using both the 'female' and 'male' restrooms

"I dress in neither fully feminine nor masculine attire—there's always a bit of cross-dressing involved, Chhetri says. "They looked at me and labelled me 'different'. They then just straight-up told me that I was not allowed to use the restrooms there."

Chhetri often themselves grapple with the dilemma of having to choose the toilet they can go to. 'Male' and 'Female' categories do not specify their identity and gender-inclusive toilets would have a positive psychological impact on them.

"Gender-inclusive toilets are very important to us, as people often judge us by the way we look," Chhetri says. "If these toilets were common in the public space, we'd feel less comfortable with having to question ourselves on which toilet to use, and avoid people's judgements.'

Although Bhumika Shrestha of Blue Diamond Society agrees that gender-neutral bathrooms could significantly increase the quality of life among the queer community, she also believes that separation of these toilets could fuel existing disparities. Categorising restrooms as 'for third-gender', for instance, may lead people to further ostracise queer people, Shrestha says.

The bottom line, therefore, is to create gender-inclusive restrooms in already existing restrooms, Shrestha adds

When Balen Shah became the mayor of Kathmandu, he announced the construction of new toilets for the LBGTIQ community and for those with disabilities. Shrestha says that while discussions have taken place with both the mayor and deputy mayor regarding gender-inclusive restrooms, the talks have been centred around remaking the existing toilets to be gender inclusive.

"I don't think it's possible to wholly

construct new toilets for the community," Shrestha says. "Just having gender-inclusive bathrooms would be helpful and make things a lot more convenient.

According to the spokesperson for the Kathmandu Metropolitan City, due to lack of enough land, constructing new toilets was not possible. But the office has been revising the old ones to be both queer-friendly, as well as disability-friendly.

"We have also been renovating restaurants, petrol pumps, and other public spaces to have inclusive toilets," Nabin Manandhar says.

Gender-friendly and disability-friendly toilets have already been renovated around Baneshwar and the Department of Passports at

Gender-neutral toilets have been installed in the country to a certain extent. The UNDP office in Lalitpur has one on its grounds that is both gender- and disability-inclusive. According to Simrika Sharma, Head of UN information centre, with this, the organisation aimed to foster equality.

"One of our significant works is to encourage equality, and this was one of our initiatives to do so," Sharma says.

ry individual, there is also one in the FPAN clinic, Pulchowk

that have opted to install one restroom

With existing prejudice in the country regarding transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, gender-inclusive toilets could go a long way in easing the discomfort and lessening harassment directed towards the community, say activists.

"I still have to hear stories from the LGBTIQ community about how they refrain from drinking water just to avoid using public restrooms," Shrestha says. "Gender-inclusive toilets ensure they won't have to carry that unnecessary weight around.'

# Nepal regulator to test Indian and Nepali spice brands for pesticides

An official at the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control says pesticide residue has been found in spices of Nepali brands as well.

#### ARJUN POUDEL KATHMANDU, MAY 3

The Department of Food Technology and Quality Control has instructed its food inspectors to collect samples of spices produced by both domestically and abroad, with a particular focus on those from India, for pesticide residue testing

The department's move comes amid news reports of several countries recalling Indian spice brands MDH and Everest Masala.

A source at the department informed that a foreign embassy in Nepal has also written to them about pesticide residue found in spices produced by Nepali companies.

Along with spices, Nepal also exports pickles to several countries. Products exported from Nepal were examined in the foreign country, which showed pesticide residue levels exceeding the permissible limit, according to an official at the department.

"We have directed our food inspectors to collect samples of spices produced by both Nepali and foreign companies," Dr Matina Joshi Vaidhya, director general of the department said, "Spices produced by domestic companies too have been found problematic. As they obtain raw spices from the same sources, spices produced by our national companies may also contain pesticide residue."

Officials at the department said that spices, especially chilli powder are found problematic.

Earlier, the food regulatory body had decided to carry out testing on the spice of Indian companies-MDH and Everest Masala-after Hong Kong and Singapore banned their sale.

The two islands banned the sale of the products last month citing the detection of carcinogenic pesticide ethylene oxide beyond permissible levels in the spice mixes.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is gathering information on products of Indian spice makers MDH and Everest. Australia's food safety agency is collecting information on the possible contamination of spice mixes sold by Indian companies MDH and Everest, according to media reports.

New Zealand Food Safety is monitoring overseas recalls of Indian packaged spice products manufactured by MDH and Everest following concerns over a cancer-causing pesticide.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has commissioned quality checks on MDH and Everest products following complaints leading spice brands contained more traces of ethylene oxide than the permissible levels

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has commissioned quality checks on MDH and Everest products. This follows complaints that several popular spice mixes of the two leading brands contained traces of ethylene oxide more than the permissible levels, official sources said.

The food regulatory agency of Hong Kong had allegedly found that three MDH products—Madras Curry Powder, Sambhar Masala Mixed Masala Powder, Curry Powder Mix Masala Powder-and Everest's Fish Curry Masala contained the pesticide ethylene oxide, which is classified as a Group 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

The Singapore Food Agency has also ordered the recall of Everest's Fish Curry Masala from the market saying it contains the same pesticide (ethylene oxide) beyond permissible limits

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

Experts say the presence of ethylene oxide, which is a flammable colourless gas with a sweet odour, in the spices, is quite concerning, as varieties of the products of both companies are easily available in Nepal and are popular among the people.

Ethylene oxide is used primarily to produce other chemicals, including antifreeze. In smaller amounts, ethylene oxide is used as a pesticide and sterilising agent.

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

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

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

Tripureshwar, among other places, says Manandhar.

According to Chhetri, the non-bina-

There are also restaurants and cafes

for all instead of limiting it to 'male' and 'female'.

POST FILE PHOTO

ard 3 of Dharmadevi Municipality Sankhuwasabha, were completely destroyed in a fire suspected to be caused by an electrical short circuit on Thursday night.

According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Ghanashyam Shrestha of Sankhuwasabha District Police Office, there were no human casualties in the fire, but property worth millions and important documents were destroyed in the fire.

"It took around five hours to control the fire with the help of locals, security personnel, and fire engines from two local units of the neighbouring Tehrathum district," said Shrestha.

Similarly, on Thursday night, police and locals also extinguished the fire that broke out in the Kattike Community Forest in Khadbari Municipality of the district, Shrestha further added.

### Three Kantipur journalists, other media persons felicitated

#### POST REPORT KATHMANDU, MAY 3

The Federation of Nepali Journalists has felicitated three journalists of Kantipur Media Group (KMG) for reporting the Israel-Hamas War from the Middle East last year.

Senior Sub-editor Hom Karki of the Kantipur daily, photo editor Prakash Chandra Timilsena of the publications and Kantipur Television's video chief Shyam Shrestha were facilitated by Minister for Communication and Information Technology Rekha Sharma during the 27th general assembly of the FNJ, the umbrella organisation of Nepali journalists,

held in Kathmandu on Friday.

On October 7 last year, a surprise attack by the Palestinian militant group Hamas on Israel left 10 Nepali students, who had reached the West Asian country under a 'Learn and Earn Programme', dead and four others injured.

Eight days after the war began, Kantipur Media Group sent the three-member team to the war-torn nation for convering the fight.

The trio was among 2,050 reporters who had travelled to Israel in the first week after the attack to cover the war, according to the Government Press Office of Israel.

Bipin Joshi of Kanchanpur was



Prakash Chandra Timilsena and Hom Karki

also one of the 17 Nepali students who were living at Kibbutz Alumim in southern Israel, close to the Gaza Strip

The Israel Defence Force (IDF) had earlier confirmed that Joshi was held hostage by the Hamas militants. However, his whereabouts are still unknown.

The FNJ also felicitated many other journalists under various clusters and categories. They include Govind Chandra Chhetri, Shatrudhan Nepal, Gunakhar Sharma, Ramesh Tufan, Kulchandra Wagle, Nirmala Acharya, Om Sharma (Syangja), Om Sharma (Lalitpur), Gajendra Budhathoki, Rabindra Bastola, Kanaiyalal Keshari, Balkrishna Chapagai, Shridhar Paudel, Basudev Shrestha, Bheshraj Paudel, Umid Bagchand, Shyam Chitrakar and Hari Lamsal.

Mohan Chapagai, Jhapendra Gairhe, Balaram Thapa, Govind Bhattarai, Ganesh Lamsal, Smita Niraula, Debram Yadav, Kalpana Bisural, Padam Regmi, Rajeshchandra Rajbhandari, Narayan Sharma, Bhawani Aier, Kedar Gautam, Nabaraj Subedi, Pramod Dahal, Tanka Panta, Nabaraj Lamsal, Prakash Khatiwada, Basantraj Khanal, Maheshwar Dahal, Sachin Roka, Tikaram Regmi, Balkrishna Prasad, Shambhu Shrestha, Pratap Bista, Dhirendra Chataut, Khim Ghale, Gopal Chhangchha, Ramesh Khadka, Giriraj Acharya, Gopal Baral, Manrishi Dhital and Ramesh Paudel were also honoured during the function.

# Shrestha says proposed corridors with neighbours will be tailored to Nepal's priorities

#### >> Continued from page 1

"The modality will be the same as with China, but aligning with our priorities and interests. We will use those corridors for different purposes," he told the Post.

"The Chinese are interested in taking forward this concept and have expressed readiness to cooperate with us. Considering our longstanding relations with Tibet, Sichuan's historical significance as the place of origin of the ancient Silk Road and Chongqing being the old capital city of China, connecting with these three places will enable us to attract more tourists, investment, foster trade relations, and explore new vistas for cooperation in information technology and agriculture," Shrestha said.

And as per China's peripheral diplomacy, officials said, Tibet is the key province directly overseeing various relations with Nepal as it shares a border with Nepal. Likewise, Sichuan and Chongqing city have intensified their engagements and relations with Nepal.

Whenever Nepali leaders and officials travel to China, visiting these three provinces and cities is always the priority.

The corridors aim to enhance engagement with the provinces, which will be instrumental in attracting Chinese investments in various sectors, boosting trade, bringing in more Chinese tourists from these provinces, seeking more investment in areas like informa-

tion technology, agriculture, mining and several other industries, the deputy prime minister said

"By creating dedicated corridors, we will boost our relations with Chinese provinces that are adjacent to us, are familiar with us, and have been trading with us for a long time. Once we set up such corridors and connections, we will have more focused cooperation and partnership between Nepal and the Chinese provinces and cities. Other issues and mutually beneficial proposals will be discussed in the future," said Shrestha.

Upon his return from China on April 1 after a nine-day visit, Shrestha told reporters at the Tribhuvan International Airport that he had proposed setting up Nepal-China economic and development corridors with Chinese officials.

The objective, he said, is to boost economic growth, trade, tourism, and connectivity between Nepal and three Chinese provinces that oversee and engage in various bilateral activities.

Of late, Nepal has seen a series of back-toback high-level visits from these provinces, and when Nepali leaders visit China, their first destinations are Tibet, Sichuan, and Chongqing.

"The focus of my visit was economic diplomacy. Nepal has been thinking about this new concept [the idea of corridors] after China introduced the Trans Himalayan Multi-



#### Deputy Prime Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha

Dimensional Connectivity Network (THMDCN), which comprises economic and connectivity corridors to be developed under the Belt and Road Initiative," Shrestha told reporters on April 1.

The THMDCN is more focused on connectivity related projects like rail, road, tunnels, air connectivity and expansion of the cross-border projects and the idea of setting up the corridors between Nepal and Chinese cities is to boost investment, trade, tourism, technology transfer and cooperation in agriculture and other sectors, a foreign ministry official said.

"The corridor starting from the Nepal-Tibet border will reach Chongqing through Sichuan province," said the official.

The deputy prime minister said that as per his discussion in Beijing, China has waived visa fees for Nepali nationals. Soon, more border points with China will come into operation as agreed during the visit.

Shrestha also said that the border points would reopen in a manner similar to the pre-Covid arrangements.

"The issue of Chinese containers delivering cargo inside the Nepali border in Tatopani has also been resolved. Now our [Nepali] containers can go to the Nepal-China border, load goods onto the containers and return," Shrestha told the Post.

Earlier, the Chinese did not allow Nepali containers and vehicles to enter China to transport Nepal-bound cargo brought by the Chinese containers and vehicles.

Likewise, according to Shrestha, he is considering discussing the idea of advancing a similar concept with India. "But as Indian leaders and officials are busy in their elections, I have not had a chance to propose the idea. I will do so as soon as the Indian elections are over."

Shrestha pointed to the civilizational, historical, religious, cultural and trade relations with India, with most of the engagements

taking place with adjoining states like West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

"We should boost the age-old ties by building corridors with the Indian states that share borders with us," said Shrestha. "The scope of cooperation between Nepal and India is much higher than with China due to similarities between the people of the two countries, something which I also communicated to some young Indian foreign service officials recently."

Four young officials of the Indian Foreign Service who were in Kathmandu recently had held interactions with different personalities to understand the status of the Nepal-India ties, the evolution of Nepali foreign service, and other major policy-related issues. During an orientation visit as part of their ongoing training, they met Deputy Prime Minister Shrestha on April 30 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

"During my interaction with them, I conveyed our intent to build dedicated corridors between Nepal and northern Indian states that have close engagements with Nepal because the two sides have not been able to take advantage of these deep engagements. I told the visiting Indian officials that we want to take forward our multifaceted relations with India on the basis of sovereign equality, and mutual benefit and will not refrain from addressing the genuine concerns of India," said Shrestha.

FOREX

**US** Dollar

Pound Sterling

Australian Dolla

Canadian Dollar

Singapore Dollar

Japanese Yen (10)

Chinese Yuan

Qatari Riyal

Thai Bhat

**UAE** Dhiram

Malaysian Ringgit

Korean Won (100)

**BULLION** 

Silver

🔈 Fine Gold

p total

(E) \*\*\*\*

Saudi Arab Riyal

Swiss Franc

Euro

### MONEY

#### Nepal braces for above-normal monsoon this year 133.78 143.79 For Nepal, monsoon remains a major macroeconomic event that is closely watched by the government, farmers, businesses and consumers. 167.97 SANGAM PRASAIN eastern Nepal on October 15, delayed 147.51 **KATHMANDU, MAY 3** by thirteen days. 100°E 88.05 Monsoon is crucial for the Rs5.70-Most of Nepal will likely experience trillion economy, as it brings nearly 97.91 80 percent of the rain needed by above-normal monsoon rains, accord-SASCOF Outlook for June-September 2024 farms, besides replenishing resering to South Asian meteorologists, 98.95 **Rainfall over South Asia** which experts say could bring a huge voirs and aquifers. relief for Nepal's ailing, farm-depend-Only a third of Nepal's farms have 8.73 round-the-year irrigation and the rest ent economy According to a statement by the 28th Session of the South Asian 18.48 depend on rain. This fiscal year, Nepal's agriculture 35.67 Climate Outlook Forum released on sector has been projected to grow by April 29, above-normal rainfall is 3.05 percent, according to the National 36.69 most likely during the monsoon sea-Statistics Office. And the economy, son over most parts of South Asia which is at the mercy of agriculture 3.64 except some areas over northern, eastoutput, would grow by 3.87 percent 36.42 ern and northeastern parts of the this fiscal year ending mid-July. region, where below normal rainfall is Summer crops, mainly paddy, 28.22 most likely. are the major income source for 30% "A normal or above normal more than half of the population. 9.85 monsoon results in a bountiful har-Rice is a major contributor to the vest, which lifts rural incomes economy and the planting season Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank and boosts spending on consumer starts next month. goods," said Hem Raj Regmi, deputy PRICE PER TOLA chief statistician at the National Only a third of Statistics Office. Rs 135,400 For Nepal, the monsoon remains a Nepal's farms have major macroeconomic event that is widely tracked by investors, the gov-Rs 1,645 round-the-year ernment, and consumers given its 20°N irrigation and the SOURCE: FENEGOSID material impact on the economy. "Nepal derives a significant portion rest depend on rain. of its earnings from rural areas and this has a direct impact on consumer **BIZLINE** spending patterns," said Regmi. Monsoon rains are critical for the According to Regmi, paddy alone farm sector, which accounts for nearly accounts for 5 percent of Nepal's GDP. SAS, a new broker platform, 25 percent of Nepal's GDP and Last year, despite the El Niño pheemploys over 60 percent of the counnomenon, Nepali farmers harvested a receives overwhelming response try's population. record 5.72 million tonnes of paddy, up **Below Norma** Agro experts say that the above-nor-10% 4.33 percent, according to the statistics mal monsoon speeds up the transplanof the Ministry of Agriculture and Q tates E tates 6 - O tation rate and this translates to high Livestock Development. This year, South Asian meteorolocrop yields. If production rises, food gists say, there is a strong consensus inflation tends to drop due to the 0 among the experts that La Niña condidemand-supply mechanism in the tions are likely to develop over the market. Above Normal "Furthermore, the monsoon helps equatorial Pacific during the second KATHMANDU: Stock Analytics Software to recharge the groundwater level and half of the southwest monsoon sea-55 65 (SAS), a platform developed by water reservoirs, as well as the rivers son. It is also recognized that the La Source Code, which was launched which are pivotal to power genera-Niña conditions are generally associrecently has received an overwhelmtion," said Regmi. ated with the normal to above normal ing response from the market, the Sunil Pokharel, spokesperson at the southwest monsoon rainfall over most company said. SAS, the first of its Meteorological Forecasting Division, parts of South Asia. kind in Nepal, sets unprecedented said if the monsoon is distributive, it's El Niño and La Niña are two oppos-White colour over land area indicates climatological probability international standards in financial good for all, including the farm sector. ing climate patterns that break these technology, empowering investors 'There is no doubt that a good monnormal conditions. Global temperaand brokers with advanced tools and soon boosts the country's output but if tures typically increase during an El insights, according to the company's there is excess rain, it's also a disaster Niño episode and fall during La Niña. statement. "Since its launch, SAS has for a country like Nepal.' In Tarai, tens of thousands of peo-"Major disasters are associated The normal monsoon onset and El Niño means warmer water spreads garnered increasing acclaim among Landslides triggered by heavy ple are affected by floods every year. In with high-intensity rain. So, we withdrawal dates are June 13 and further and stays closer to the surface. industry leaders and users, marking rains in Nepal cause tremendous damthe hills, landslides are the main natuhave to be more cautious this year October 2 respectively. This releases more heat into the a significant milestone in Nepal's age to life, property, infrastructure ral hazards occurring very frequently, if there is above-normal rainfall,' atmosphere, creating wetter and

# Apple profit ebbs as iPhone sales under pressure

#### AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE SAN FRANCISCO, MAY 3

and environment.

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

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

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

# Xi heads to Europe to defend Russia ties

#### AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BEIJING, MAY 3

said Pokharel

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 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 Macron conducted a state visit to China in April 2023, during which he said he was counting on Xi to "bring

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 in Beijing earning praise 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.

ne maker i ted a prom

mostly during monsoon.

earlier, a ten percent drop.

Last year, monsoon entered eastern Nepal on June 14 and withdrew from

> isolation. It also comes a year after Russia to its senses" over Ukraine.

warmer air.

#### appetite for air-conditioning

financial sector." Amod Bhattarai,

CEO of Source Code, said, "The over whelming response to SAS reaffirms our commitment to innovation and excellence in the Nepali finance sec-

tor. We are proud to bring world-class technology to our market, empowering investors and brokers with cut-

ting-edge technology, which helps cli ents track their share portfolio, and

broker transactions and get real-time

share market information through a

single platform." SAS enables effort-

less tracking of receivable and paya-

ble balances with respective brokers,

promoting transparency and timely

payments, the company said.

Heatwave swells Asia's

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 toppled 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)

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.

"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.

balance 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

and foremost the agen da 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

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 SHANGHAL 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 artist 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' confidence," 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".

### THE KATHMANDU POST 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.

HOROSCOPE

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.

midfielder French defensive 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 Andalucians 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									
PLAY	ING MOI	NDAY									
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

**CAPRICORN** (December 22-January 19) Give your loftier chance to grow thoughts a 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.

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

CANCER (June 22-July 22) You may be inspired to shed enlightenment LIBRA (September 23-October 22)



weeps you away into a world of soft rne day ness 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.

### CROSSWORD

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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 vourself.

Fhe 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.



#### 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. ASTROLOGY COM

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# 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

irst, 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 neardeath experience without anything supernatural about it. No tunnel of light or a "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, " 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 Rachel, for instance, he with 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,

When: May 8

Entry: Free

Time: 3:00 pm onwards

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

Where: Hostel Nextdoor, Kupondole,



Meditations After an Attempted Murder

# SALMAN RUSHDIE

Knife: Meditations after an **Attempted Murder** 

Author: Salman Rushdie Year: 2024 Publisher: Penguin Random House he continues and "also an

The story is shot through with literary and cultural references. Rushdie recalls attacks on Naguib Mahfouz and Samuel Beckett;

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 young-er-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 Assignation". 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'

· 42

Entry: Rs500 to Rs900 Where: Taragaon Next, Bauddha, Kathmandu

#### 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

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

#### 'In Search' Exhibition



'eye' story".



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.

When: May 9 Time: 5:30 pm onwards Entry: Free

and more can be played.

#### **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 Pahenlo Batti Muni

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



dents 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.

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

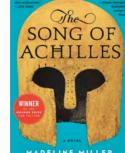
#### **NEW RELEASES BEST-SELLERS**

#### Fiction

- The Song of Achilles by 1. Madeline Miller
- $\mathbf{2}$ Fourth Wing by Rebecca Yarros
- The Guernsey Literary & 3
- Potato Peel Pie Society by Mary



Carrie Soto Is Back by Taylor 5 Jenkins Reid



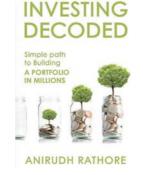




#### Non-Fiction

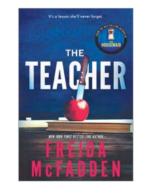
- A Monk's Guide to a Clean House 1. and Mind by Shoukei Matsumoto
- $\mathbf{2}$ . The Diary of a CEO by Steven Bartlett
- 3. The Age of AI by Daniel Huttenlocher, Eric Schmidt and Henry Kissinger
- 4. 8 Rules of Love by Jay Shetty
- Blue Ocean Strategy by Renée 5. Mauborgne and W Chan Kim

Ekta Books



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

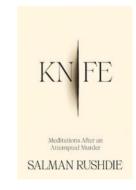
'Investing Decoded' by Anirudh Rathore offers a beginner-friendly guide to navigating the stock market and building wealth through strategic investing. Drawing from personal experiences and insights from classic investment literature, Rathore simplifies complex financial concepts in this comprehensive 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)



### CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

# 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.

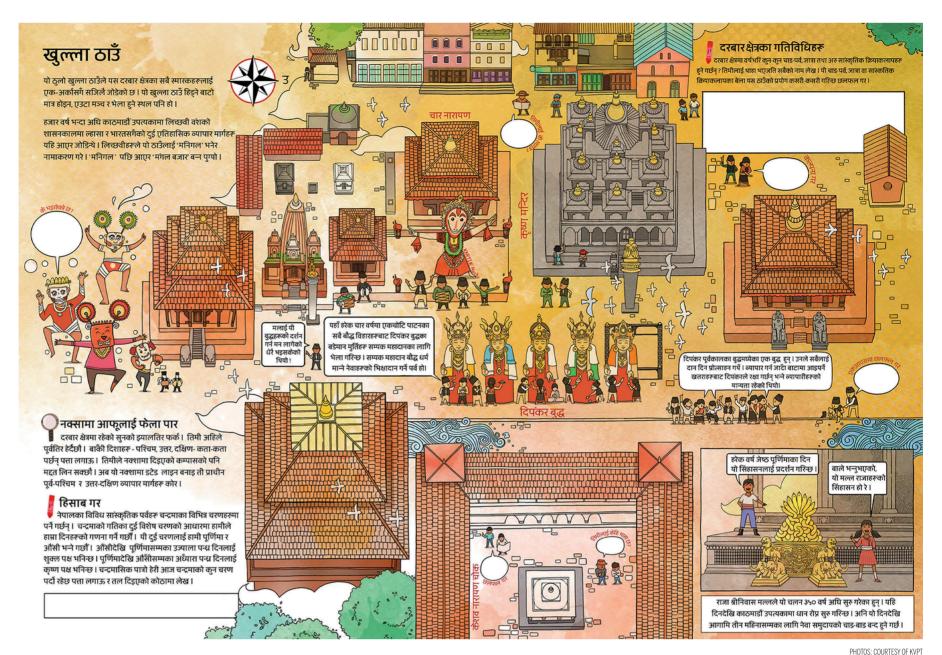
#### 🗆 SOPHIA L PANDÉ

ver 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.

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.

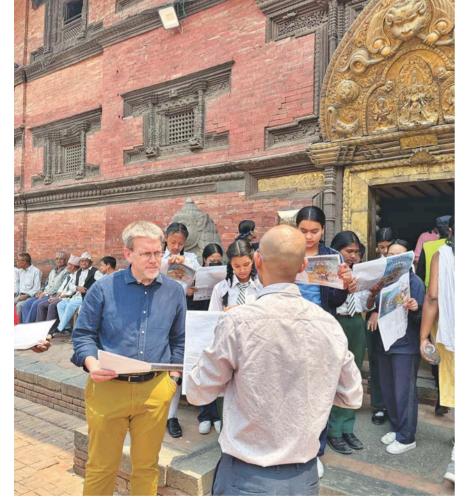
Over the years Rishi Amatya, writer and researcher extraordinaire has provided reams of painstakingly detailed material to sift through to construct each map, and thoughtful, experienced education specialist Sharareh Bajracharya has shored up the maps' activities, ensuring that while each task is engaging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

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



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

earn 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 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

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.

# Ryan Gosling and Emily Blunt are great fun in 'The Fall Guy'

#### **LINDSEY BAHR**

ne 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-lister 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-thescenes 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 waits 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 Jodytrying 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 а script from Drew ('Hobbs & Pearce Shaw'), Leitch packs the film with wall-towall 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