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People look at the royal throne of the 17th-century king of Patan Shrinivas Malla and the songs penned by his father Siddhi Narsingh Malla. The throne and the 32 songs written by King Siddhi Narsingh are on public display, in a once-a-year event on the occasion of Jya Punhi at Krishna Mandir in Lalitpur, on Saturday.

POST PHOTO: SAFAL PRAKASH SHRESTHA

Partisan interest in envoy picks tarnishes Nepal's image

The government laid out criteria for ambassador appointments in 2019, only to be ignored.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, JUNE 22

Ambassadorial appointments, mostly after the restoration of democracy in 1990, have not been free from controversy.

A kind of instability has been created in Nepali diplomacy as those appointed in political quotas are recalled after every government change. As per the recent practice, half the envoys are political appointees while the rest are recommended from among career diplomats.

The June 6 decision of the government to recall envoys from 11 countries and Friday's selection of new faces has yet again raised the question of how long governments will follow the practice that dents the country's image and makes the conduct of its foreign policy inconsistent.

Former foreign minister Narayan Khadka, who is a leader of the opposition Nepali Congress, argues that if an ambassador does not cooperate and support the government and if someone's performance is poor, the government can recall them, but they should not be recalled en masse.

The Cabinet meeting on Friday recommended ambassadors for eight countries while it has yet to pick envoys for three other countries.

According to sources in the Prime Minister's Office, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Narayan Kaji Shrestha was under pressure from Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and KP Sharma Oli, the chair of the major ruling partner CPN-UML, to recall the ambassadors and make new recommendations.

An official at the PMO said that Shrestha wanted to recall those who have poor performance and to send ambassadors with good profiles and strong careers. "But that wasn't meant to be and he eventually had to compromise with the prime minister and the UML chair," the official said.

The recommendation of Bijan Pant as ambassador to the United Kingdom

was a major bone of contention between Dahal and Shrestha, said the official. Shrestha did not want to send ambassadors who didn't have prior experience in diplomacy and international relations. The minister also wanted to avoid sending persons with controversial backgrounds and those who have gotten frequent opportunities in state affairs, sources said.

The low point of Nepali diplomacy was when the government recalled Ambassador Shankar Sharma from India two days before Prime Minister Dahal's visit to New Delhi to attend the swearing-in ceremony of his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, said Khadka. "Such decisions are made only by people with zero sense of diplomacy," he added.

Ex-envoy: Ambassadors appointed after House approval should not be recalled in haste.

Khadka believes that the decision was taken under Oli's pressure and that the prime minister should at least have avoided recalling the ambassador from India for a few days. The prime minister could have recalled Sharma after he returned from India, he said. "Some ambassadors were picked in 2021 were really good. They deserved continuity but the prime minister, whose own term is uncertain, has decided to recall them," said Khadka. "This shows the level of our diplomacy, a lack of common sense of our leaders as well as the ugly side of our politics and politicians."

The government on Friday recommended Lokdarshan Regmi, the former chief secretary and Nepal's ambassador to the United Kingdom, as Nepal's new envoy to India in place of incumbent ambassador, Sharma.

>> Continued on page 2



TODAY

NATIONAL

People of Kalakhola area in Baglung say around a dozen houses and ropanis of paddy fields will turn into a riverbank if a proposed embankment is built on the Kaligandaki river. Pg 2

Ten days after Upendra Yadav got reelected JSP-Nepal chair unopposed from the party's Janakpur general convention, he is yet to elect any other office bearers and central committee members. Pg 3

OPINION

Advocates of urban public spaces recommend open grounds to be available within a 400-metre radius, writes Ananda Manandhar. Pg 4



WORLD

A US aircraft carrier is in South Korea for three-way exercise involving Japan as they step up military training to cope with North Korean threats, which have escalated following a security pact with Russia. Pg 6

SPORTS

Patrik Schick chested home to earn the Czech Republic a 1-1 draw against debutants Georgia on Saturday in an entertaining match, but the result leaves both teams in a tricky spot in Euro 2024 Group F. Pg 7

Yet another term for transitional justice bodies amid uncertainties

Over nine years, their terms have been extended many times without expected results.

BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, JUNE 22

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons have remained defunct for two years. Not a single discussion has been held on the amendment bill to the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act since the formation of the new ruling coalition in March. And the committee formed to recommend the office bearers in the two transitional justice commissions has not held a single meeting.

Yet both the transitional justice commissions are getting one more extension. In January, the Pushpa Kamal Dahal administration extended the terms of the Truth Commission and the Disappearances Commission until mid-July. As the Act is yet to be amended, the government is using the authority to remove the difficulties as per the Act's section 42 to give term extensions to the commissions. As it is certain that Parliament will

not amend the bill in the next three weeks, the government will use the same authority to give one more extension. "The terms of the commissions are expiring soon. They will get an extension using the authority to remove the difficulties," Man Bahadur Aryal, joint-secretary at the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, told the Post.

Consensus has long eluded parties on the bill to revise the transitional justice law.

The Cabinet can decide to extend the terms, but the decision must be presented to Parliament within 30 days of its commencement.

As the commissions cannot make any decision other than running day-to-day administration without office bearers, they will remain defunct even

as they get a new lease of life. The two commissions were formed in February 2015 with a two-year deadline to investigate cases of atrocities during the war. But nine years since formation, their terms have been extended for around 10 times without any results.

The two commissions have been paralysed since July 2022 after the government decided to extend their terms without retaining their chairmen and members. Against the government's claim that the amendment bill would be endorsed by October 2022, which will also open the door for recruiting new office bearers, there has been no progress even in the latest extension.

"What is the point of having commissions that cannot work?" Gopal Shah, chairperson of the Conflict Victims' National Network, told the Post. "We want an amendment in the Act along with the term extension."

Despite several attempts, the major political parties have been unable to reach a consensus on the bill, though there has been some progress.

>> Continued on page 2

China and France launch satellite to better understand the universe

Gamma rays carry traces of the gas clouds and galaxies they pass through—valuable data for understanding evolution of the universe.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
XICHANG, CHINA, JUNE 22

A French-Chinese satellite blasted off on Saturday on a hunt for the mightiest explosions in the universe, in a notable example of cooperation between a Western power and the Asian giant.

Developed by engineers from both countries, the Space Variable Objects Monitor (SVOM) is carrying four instruments—two French, two Chinese—that will seek out gamma-ray bursts, the light from which has travelled billions of light years to reach Earth.

The 930-kilogram satellite "successfully" took off around 3:00 pm (0700 GMT) aboard a Chinese Long March 2-C rocket from a space base in Xichang, in southwestern Sichuan



A Long March 2-C rocket carrying a satellite jointly developed by China and France lifts off from a space base in Xichang, in China's southwestern Sichuan province on Saturday.

province, China's National Space Administration said.

Gamma-ray bursts generally occur after the explosion of huge stars—those more than 20 times as big as the sun—or the fusion of compact stars.

The extremely bright cosmic beams can give off a blast of energy equivalent to more than a billion billion suns. Observing them is like "looking back in time, as the light from these objects takes a long time to reach us", Ore Gottlieb, an astrophysicist at the Flatiron Institute's Center for Astrophysics in New York, told AFP.

The rays carry traces of the gas clouds and galaxies they pass through on their journey through space—valuable data for better understanding the

history and evolution of the universe. "SVOM has the potential to unravel several mysteries in the field of [gamma-ray bursts], including detecting the most distant GRBs in the universe, which correspond to the earliest GRBs," Gottlieb said.

>> Continued on page 3

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NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Birgunj Metropolis unveils
Rs2.89 billion budget

BIRGUNJ: Birgunj, the only metropolis of Madhesh Province, has unveiled a budget of Rs 2.89 billion for the upcoming fiscal year 2024-25. The annual budget was made public during the municipal council meeting on Saturday. The budget size has been reduced by Rs620 million in comparison to the current fiscal year's budget. A total of Rs2.4 billion has been allocated for recurrent expenditure and Rs811.8 million for capital expenditure.

Man held with two muskets

SALYAN: Police arrested a 35-year-old man in possession of two muskets from Bagchaur Municipality-7, Salyan, on Saturday. Acting on a tip-off, the security personnel raided a house of Sher Bahadur Wali and seized two muskets. "Two muskets, including a loaded one, were seized from his house. Investigation is underway after taking Wali into custody," said Deputy Superintendent of Police Nabin Karki.

Three arrested with marijuana

MAKAWANPUR: Police arrested three people in possession of 8.5kg of marijuana from ward 5 of Raksirang Rural Municipality in Makawanpur district. According to the District Police Office, Ashoklal Moktan, 21, Deepak Moktan, 31, and Buddhal Moktan, 35, were apprehended during a check-up at around 8pm on Friday. Further investigation into the matter is underway, said police.

Illegal extraction of riverbed materials in Kaligandaki leaves under-construction industrial village at high risk

Baglung Municipality's plan to establish the industrial village is almost foiled by the erosion.

PRAKASH BARAL
BAGLUNG, JUNE 22

An under construction 'industrial village' at Kalakhola area in Baglung Municipality-13 is at high risk of erosion by the Kaligandaki river.

The Gandaki provincial government had announced it'd set up 'one industrial village in each local unit' four years ago. As per the provincial government's plan, Baglung Municipality decided to establish the industrial village in around 100 ropanis of land in the Kalakhola area of Baglung-13.

Baglung Municipality had a plan to shift around 50 factories to the industrial village.

The municipality had leveled the ground and fenced the area. The municipality built infrastructures with a plan to establish some factories and industries in the industrial village immediately. However, the flooded river damaged the infrastructure during the monsoon season in 2021.

"The municipality had to postpone its preparation to set up factories and industries as the river continued eroding the industrial village area," said Basanta Kumar Shrestha, the mayor of Baglung Municipality. "The area is at high risk of erosion and landslide."

The river had already eroded around 30 ropanis of land of the industrial village. An approach road constructed in the area also caved in and it was later washed away by the river. The construction of the industrial village is now left in limbo after the municipality spent around Rs2 million.



The proposed site of the industrial village in Baglung Municipality-13 pictured recently.

Baglung Municipality had a plan to shift around 50 factories and industries to the industrial village. "There are several saw mills and furniture industries, grill workshops and motor workshops in Baglung bazar area. They pollute the area. Such factories and industries need to be relocated to the industrial village to make the resi-

dence area clean and peaceful," said Kumar Bikram Chhetri, ward chairman of Baglung-4.

The Kaligandaki river changed its course in the Kalakhola area apparently due to haphazard extraction of river bed materials in Sahasradhara area. The change in the river's course intensified erosion on the Baglung

side, mainly in the rainy season, leaving the industrial village and settlements at risk of floods.

In 2020, the Supreme Court had banned the extraction of riverbed materials from the Kaligandaki river, but illegal extraction remains unchecked in the river.

Baglung Municipality of Baglung,

Kushma Municipality and Jaljala Rural Municipality of Parbat, and Beni Municipality and Annapurna Rural Municipality of Myagdi lie on the banks of the Kaligandaki river and are therefore responsible for the conservation of the river. The local units, whose responsibility is to monitor and control exploitation, and collect revenue, have been found incapable of controlling the rampant exploitation of riverbed materials, causing threat of floods and erosion.

"After the Supreme Court's order, Baglung Municipality stopped the extraction of riverbed materials. But illegal extraction is going on in the area. And we have to bear the brunt of the illegal activity," said Shrestha.

Baglung Municipality's plan to establish the industrial village is almost foiled by the erosion. The remaining land of the industrial village and the local settlements are also at the risk of flood and erosion. The local people complain that around a dozen houses and ropanis of paddy fields will turn into the river bank if the authorities concerned build an embankment immediately.

"Our settlement is at risk," said Mahendra Roka, a local of the Kalakhola area. "We don't know when the river will sweep away our houses and paddy fields. The government should construct a concrete embankment to save the settlement and the industrial village."

The villagers complain that the illegal extraction of the riverbed materials goes unchecked which multiplies the risk of flood.

Chief District Officer Netra Subedi, District Coordination Committee's chief Amar Thapa and Mayor Shrestha made a field visit to the Kalakhola area a few days ago. After inspecting the area, Subedi assured that security would be tightened to curb illegal extraction of the riverbed materials.

Calls grow for appointing more career diplomats as envoys

>> Continued from page 1

Sharma was appointed under the Nepali Congress quota in 2021 by the Sher Bahadur Deuba government.

Similarly, the government has named former commerce and industry secretary Chandra Ghimire Nepal's new ambassador to the United States. The incumbent, Sridhar Khatri, appointed in the Congress quota in March 2022, has been recalled.

Bijan Pant has been named ambassador to the United Kingdom. Pant previously served as a social development adviser to the erstwhile Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, the late Congress leader, and until recently worked as an adviser to the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). However, this time, he was chosen as an envoy by the CPN (Maoist Centre) in the party's quota.

According to a senior Maoist Centre leader, the sudden entry of Pant has sparked discontent in the prime minister's party.

Former member of the National Human Rights Commission, Sushil Pyakurel, has been recommended for South Korea, according to the Cabinet decision.

Pyakurel, who also served as an adviser to the second President of the country, Bidya Devi Bhandari, will replace Jyoti Pyakurel Bhandari. Sunnima Tuladhar, a noted child rights activist and Executive Director of Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWNN), has been recommended as Nepal's envoy to Denmark.

Of the 11 vacant posts, the government on Friday made recommendations for eight countries.

Similarly, Pushpa Raj Rajkarnikar will replace Sharmila Parajuli Dhakal as envoy to Spain. Rajkarnikar is a former member of the National Planning Commission and an expert in trade and financial management.

He was picked by the newly formed Ashok Rai-led Janata Samajbadi Party. The new party also got to pick an envoy for Saudi Arabia, where it chose to send Abu Sufayan Khan of Kapilbastu district.

In Malaysia, Netra Prasad Timilsina, a long-time NGO activist, has been nominated under the UML quota. He replaces Dilli Raj Poudel, who was appointed under the CPN (Unified Socialist) quota.

Among others, Pyakurel, Tuladhar and Timilsina have the background of working in the NGO sector.

Of the 11 vacant posts, the government on Friday made recommendations for eight countries. Recommendations for Qatar, Israel, and Portugal are pending.

Those recommended get appointed only after parliamentary hearing.

Ruling partner Rastriya Swatantra Party will have its say in the appointment of two envoys. But party leaders said they are still unclear which country they will get to recommend the envoys for. "We are still clueless about the countries, but we are nonetheless preparing to find envoys for our quotas," said an RSP leader.

A joint-secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs argued how the latest episode has again underscored the need for the appointment of

more career diplomats. "Political parties may still appoint ambassadors to countries like India, China, and the US, but we must send career diplomats to destinations other than the three countries," he said.

At present, out of 30 Nepali embassies and three permanent missions, 16 are headed by career diplomats. The career diplomats are leading the Nepali missions in Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Egypt, France, Germany, Kuwait, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates. All three Nepali permanent missions in New York, Geneva, and Vienna are also led by career diplomats.

The joint-secretary said the career diplomat pie should increase from the current 50 percent to 80 or 90 percent, or the instability Nepal currently sees would continue. "The appointment of those with controversial backgrounds and despite their conflict of interest have further eroded Nepal's image abroad. Unfortunately, this couldn't be avoided in the appointments this time around as well," rued the foreign ministry official.

After 1990, there was the practice of recalling ambassadors after government change but the frequency of such changes greatly increased after 2006, said Yuba Nath Lamsal, former ambassador to Denmark.

"If we properly screen ambassadorial candidates before their nomination and send them only after parliamentary hearing, there is no need to recall them so frequently. After all, they have been vetted in the country and have also gotten the required approval, known as 'agreement' in diplomatic terms, from the countries hosting them," he said.

Lamsal stressed the need to stop the frequent chopping and changing of the country's envoys, in order to boost Nepal's diplomatic credentials.

The government in 2019 also came up with the criteria for ambassadorial appointment, but that was not followed by successive governments. Point 5 of the criteria, a copy of which was obtained by the Post, states: In view of the principle of inclusiveness, national welfare and the state's representation, an experienced candidate with an excellent academic record and diplomatic capability will be appointed the ambassador.

Point 6 further states: ambassadors must be capable and have the experience of Nepal's foreign policy and international relations, and be informed on the dynamics of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy.

Both of these criteria were ignored this time, just like they were in the past. Very few nominees have any kind of diplomatic experience or credentials.

They meet only a few criteria such as being above 35 years of age, holding a bachelor's degree, not having criminal records and not having been convicted of corruption. However, little attention is paid to avoid the conflict of interest and to meet the criteria of experience in international relations and expertise in the field of diplomacy.

The criteria also states that ambassadorial appointees should hold "country-specific knowledge". But hardly any of the nominees have relevant experience—professional or academic—on issues related to their host countries.

Lamsal called for making the selection process transparent so that the host country takes Nepal's ambassador seriously. "No doubt, envoys should be appointed on merit and they should be allowed to work for some time. Changing them frequently only tarnishes the country's image," he said. "This corrosive practice must stop."

Satellite data could help to improve understanding of the composition of space



Zhang Yonghe, project manager of the French-Chinese Space Variable Objects Monitor satellite mission.

>> Continued from page 1

The most distant bursts identified to date were produced just 630 million years after the Big Bang -- when the universe was in its infancy.

"We are... interested in gamma-ray bursts for their own sake because they are very extreme cosmic explosions which allow us to better understand the death of certain stars," said Frederic Daigne, an astrophysicist at the

Paris Institute of Astrophysics.

"All of this data makes it possible to test the laws of physics with phenomena that are impossible to reproduce in the laboratory on Earth."

Once analysed, the data could help to improve understanding of the composition of space, and the dynamics of gas clouds or other galaxies.

The project stems from a partnership

between the French and Chinese space agencies as well as other scientific and technical groups from both nations.

"It's a great success. We've managed to work well with our Chinese colleagues," Philippe Baptiste, CEO of France's CNES space agency, told AFP after the launch.

Space cooperation at this level between the West and China is fairly uncommon, especially since the United States banned all collaboration between NASA and Beijing in 2011.

"US concerns on technology transfer have inhibited US allies from collaborating with the Chinese very much, but it does happen occasionally," said Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in the United States.

In 2018, China and France jointly launched CFOSAT, an oceanographic satellite mainly used in marine meteorology.

Several European countries have also taken part in China's Chang'e lunar exploration programme.

So while SVOM is "by no means unique," it remains "significant" in the context of space collaboration between China and the West, said McDowell.

Once in orbit 625 kilometres above the Earth, the satellite will send its data back to observatories.

The main challenge is that gamma-ray bursts are extremely brief, leaving scientists in a race against time to gather information.

Once it detects a burst, SVOM will send an alert to a team on duty around the clock.

Within five minutes, they will have to rev up a network of telescopes on the ground that will align precisely with the axis of the burst's source to make more detailed observations.

Kapilvastu jailbreak fugitive detained after 14 years

Nine prisoners had escaped the Kapilvastu District Jail by digging a tunnel on January 16, 2010.

MANOJ PAUDEL
KAPILVASTU, JUNE 22

Police on Friday arrested a man who had escaped prison by digging a tunnel some 14 years ago.

According to Superintendent of Police Navaratna Paudel, who is also the chief at the district police office, the security personnel detained Iskul Miya Ansari, also known as Mohammad Iskul, from Shivaraj Municipality-7 in Kapilvastu district. Ansari is from Chilya Thana of Sidharthanagar district in Uttar Pradesh, India.

The court had sentenced him to 6 years 5 months 9 days imprisonment and Rs450,000 fine on charges of robbery.

Along with Ansari, eight other prisoners had escaped the Kapilvastu District Jail on January 16, 2010.

They had dug a 21-foot-long tunnel from their room inside the cell and escaped through the eastern wall of the prison.

Paudel said they planned the arrest after receiving information about his hiding. Seven others who escaped by digging a tunnel had already been arrested.

"Escaping by digging a tunnel is a serious



Iskul Miya Ansari was arrested on Friday.

crime," he said. "Ansari was arrested after a continuous effort for a long time."

After digging a tunnel of two and a half feet diameter throughout the night, they managed to escape in the morning, said police.

After Paudel was transferred to Kapilvastu as district police chief, he stepped up a search operation in the past nine months and succeeded in arresting 126 fugitives.

Upendra Yadav reclaimed party chair. Then he paused general convention

Analysts and leaders blame Yadav's tendencies. More obvious reason is lingering court case of party split.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JUNE 22

It's been 10 days since Upendra Yadav got reelected Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal (JSP-Nepal) chair unopposed from the party's general convention held in Janakpur.

Nearly two weeks since the inauguration of the convention and the election of the party chairman, the JSP-Nepal, however, hasn't elected any other office bearers and central committee members so far.

Incumbent chief Yadav was declared the party chair unopposed after no one threw their hat in the ring.

After Yadav's reelection on June 12, the process to elect the office-bearers and central committee members, scheduled for June 13, was halted saying that all other leaders would be chosen in consensus.

Before the party decided to halt the election process, 23 candidates—17 men and six women—had filed their candidacies for the five positions of vice chairpersons; six candidates were vying for two posts of general secretary. Twelve aspirants—nine men and three women—filed their candidacies for the three posts of deputy general secretary.

Besides, three leaders were in the fray for a treasurer position; and 34 leaders had filed their candidacies for seven positions of secretary.

To the question of whether the leaders had deferred the election finding it difficult to pick individuals for available positions, party insiders gave multiple answers.

A leader linked the leadership election deferral to the party split in the first week of May.

A group of JSP-Nepal leaders split the party and formed the Janata Samajbadi Party under the leadership of Ashok Rai. The Election Commission registered the new outfit on May 6.

The JSP-Nepal led by Yadav on May 13 moved the Supreme Court, accusing the commission of recognising its splinter group as a party without the legal basis.

Yadav, in his petition, claimed that the commission had registered the party even without the required 40 percent central members on its side. The top court has ordered the relevant authorities to stall the process until the verdict and the case is still sub judice.

The uncertainty prevents the newly formed Rai-led party from expediting its activities in a formal way. Seven of the 12 JSP-Nepal lawmakers in the federal parliament and 30 of the 406 party central committee members are with Rai.

The new outfit's plan to build its organisation at the provincial and local levels is in limbo due to the delayed court process.

Leaders from the new party claimed that a large number of leaders and cadres are waiting to join the new



Incumbent chief Yadav was declared the party chair unopposed after no one threw their hat in the ring.

organisation. Moreover, they are planning to embrace those aspirants of top positions when they are denied posts in central bodies.

Observers of Madhesh politics claimed that the JSP-Nepal was unable to complete its election process with the splinter faction vying to lure its members.

However, Manish Kumar Suman, one of the aspirants for general secretary in the JSP-Nepal, denied it. He claimed that the stalled general convention process, including the selection of leaders for office bearers positions, would be completed within a week.

"As per the election commission deadline, we have to complete the whole general convention process within 35 days," Suman told the Post. "We will complete the process before the timeframe."

Some political observers say the JSP-Nepal went for the general convention only out of the constitutional compulsion. If the party really wanted to follow the democratic process, it should have allowed the election process to go forward.

Article 269 (4) (B) of the constitution mandates the political parties to hold the general convention at least once in five years.

"Upendra Yadav has made himself the JSP-Nepal patron," Shiva Chandra Chaudhary, a Madhesh political observer, told the Post. "He can select leaders loyal to him, having been reelected the party chairman. So he stalled the democratic process."

On the other hand, the new outfit—Janata Samajbadi Party—too has failed to give momentum to the party building process in the six weeks since its inception.

The new outfit has gained prominence apparently with the support of the ruling coalition. The Election Commission swiftly registered the new party on May 6 with the name similar to the mother party despite legal ambiguities in the process.

The JSP joined the ruling coalition immediately after its formation and supported the Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led government. The Rai-led party has been given a Cabinet minister and a state minister.

A party leader links the leadership election deferral to the party split in the first week of May.

On Saturday, when the Cabinet made recommendations for ambassadors to eight countries, two nominations went to the new outfit's supporters. Ambassadors for Saudi Arabia and Spain were appointed in the JSP quotas.

Days after the JSP-Nepal withdrew its support to the government, the Rai-led JSP gave its trust vote to Dahal and it supported the government in its policies and programmes.

Lawmaker Sushila Shrestha of the JSP tried to downplay the difficulties saying that they were carrying out the party's activities quietly.

"We are engaged in several activities to strengthen the newly formed party, but we are not visible in the

media," Shrestha claimed. "Next Saturday and Sunday, our party's central committee is meeting."

Shrestha claimed that her party is stronger than the JSP-Nepal in the provinces except for Madhesh. "We have been holding the meetings of provincial committees and are working to make our presence felt in Madhesh Province too."

Though Shrestha claims there are a number of activities within the party, political observers believe that its activities are stagnant due to the case sub judice in the court.

"A writ petition in the Supreme Court related to the party split has stalled the new party formation," Tula Narayan Shah, a political analyst, told the Post.

Yadav has claimed the commission registered the party despite its failure to fulfil the required 40 percent support of central members for a party split. JSP-Nepal had 406 central committee members at the time of the party split, but the splinter group only had 30 central members with it.

The newly formed JSP was registered amid a legal void as the Political Parties Act 2017 was replaced by an ordinance but not revived afterwards.

According to the Act, a group of dissidents can split a party and form a new one if they can prove the support of at least 40 percent of the central committee members and at least 40 percent of the party's lawmakers.

However, this provision was nullified through an ordinance three years ago, leaving no legal basis for a party split.

On June 9, the Supreme Court referred the dispute related to the party to the full bench.



POST PHOTO: ANGAD DHAKAL

Tourists go on elephant safari around the Baghmara area in Chitwan National Park recently.

TJ bodies, which have failed to yield any result, set for yet another term extension

>> Continued from page 1

After over a year of discussions, the Law, Justice, and Human Rights Committee of the House of Representatives has narrowed down the differences in the bill. However, the House panel had been struggling to decide whether to categorise arbitrary killings or all killings except those that occurred in clashes as serious violations of human rights.

It has also been unable to determine what happens in case the victims of human rights violations refuse to reconcile and demand punishment for the perpetrators.

The government has been reiterating that it is committed to expediting the transitional justice process and concluding the remaining task of the peace process without delay. "We are working with a commitment to conclude the transitional justice process as early as possible," said Narayan Kaji Shrestha, deputy prime minister and minister for foreign affairs, at a programme in the Capital on Saturday.

However, amendment to the Act, which is a prerequisite for the transitional justice process, is still uncertain.

The House committee has yet to

decide when to resume the discussions on the amendment bill. Conflict victims claim that reluctance to discuss the bill is a conscious strategy of the political parties to delay the process. "It is clear that the parties don't want to conclude the process as their leaders would be dragged in the prosecution," said Shah. "Their goal is to delay the process for as long as they can."

Records at the Disappearances Commission show as many as 3,223 complaints of enforced disappearances implicating either security forces or the Maoists have been lodged at the commission. The commission has identified 2,494 cases falling under its jurisdiction for investigation. Similarly, 63,718 complaints have been registered with the Truth Commission.

As parties have agreed to allow an additional three months to file complaints, mainly targeting war-era victims of sexual violence, the number of complaints is sure to increase. Rights advocates say thousands of victims of rape and sexual violence are yet to lodge their complaints at the commissions.

The House committee has agreed to allow four years for the commissions to complete the investigation.

Home gardening for healing, companionship

Referred to as 'plant butlers', growing number of Koreans indulge gardening as therapeutic method in competitive society.

LEE JUNG-JOO
SEOUL, JUNE 22

Lee Won-young, a 26-year-old graduate school student, has recently added a new routine to her busy life—taking care of a potted plant that she called "Chris."

Chris sits by Lee's desk in her room. Lee's routine every Monday is to water her potted plant to make sure it survives another week.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
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ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Throughout the rest of the week, Lee spends time moving her plant in different locations around the house to make sure it gets enough sunlight and putting it under an LED light to boost its growth.

"My affection towards taking care of potted plants grew after receiving a 'sprout kit' from a friend for my birthday two years ago," she said. A sprout kit is a set of seedlings that are sold in South Korea for those who wish to get the full gardening experience—from covering them with new soil and moving them into new pots and to watching the plants grow from a small seed into a fully grown plant.

"It was exciting to watch something so small become something much bigger, and I found myself looking forward to how much it'd grow as time passed," mentioned Lee.

In addition to Chris the potted plant and her sprout kit, Lee has recently added another potted plant to her plant family—a snake plant that she named "Steve."

Lee is just one of the many Koreans who have shown a keen interest in home gardening.

According to a 2023 survey conducted by Trend Monitor, 58 percent of respondents aged between 19 and 59 answered that they took up home gardening, an increase from 49 percent in the 2017 survey.

Koreans' interest in home gardening peaked around 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this interest didn't wane, even after the pandemic and isn't expected to, either.

According to a study conducted by the Korea Invention Promotion Association, the value of the Korean indoor farming market was recorded at 500 billion won (\$362 million) in 2023, a significant increase from 121.6 billion won in 2021. By 2026, the association anticipates the market to grow up to 1.75 trillion won by 2026, with a growth rate of 75 percent.

Gardening as therapy

Another significant trend is that a growing number of young Koreans in their 20s and 30s began to show interest in home gardening.

According to a 2023 survey released by Daehak Naeil, up to 56 percent of 900 individuals in their 20s and 30s answered that they grew plants at home.

Referring to themselves as "plant butlers" and their plants as "pet plants," these young Koreans enjoy home gardening as another hobby for home decorating purposes, self-therapy and to feel a sense of accomplishment and joy.

Oh Ji-hyeon, a 27-year-old preschool teacher, told The Korea Herald that her plants give her "a positive start to her day."

"The first thing I do when I wake up in the morning is watering my plants," said Oh. "I find it soothing to look at the plants that have grown overnight. Since plants are a living species, the process of it growing and changing as I take care of them gives me a great sense of accomplishment and boosts my self-esteem."



PHOTO: LEE WON-YOUNG VIA THE KOREA HERALD

Lee Won-young repots her plant, one of her favourite gardening activities.

Oh, who currently grows basil plants and cherry tomatoes at home, said proudly that she has grown more than nine plants over the last few years, including sunflowers, mari-

golds, wild beans and chili peppers.

Lee said that growing plants feels like "a form of meditation."

"I find that the entire process of taking care of my plants' well-being

and watching them grow is extremely rewarding and soothing," mentioned Lee. "It's a nice change of pace from my fast-paced, hectic life, and helps me relax to see them grow at their own pace."

As for the reason why more young Koreans begin to seek home gardening as a new hobby, professor Kwak Keum-joo from Seoul National University's Department of Psychology mentioned Korea's competitive society.

Koreans' interest in home gardening peaked around 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Young Koreans constantly search for a therapeutic, 'healing' element that can help them set aside Korea's competitive society," Kwak said. "The home gardening craze can be seen as a search for happiness, enjoyment, and a way to distress."

Professor Kwak added that gardening has positive effects on mental well-being, as it can help gardeners "feel a sense of stability, happiness, and accomplishment."

"There is always a great sense of accomplishment and happiness that is accompanied by one growing or building something of their own and reaping the rewards or outcomes from such efforts, and the same is applied to gardening," added Kwak.

Gardening classes, clinics

Several local governments and businesses have introduced services catered toward home gardeners as well as gardening classes.

One such service includes plant clinics operated by the Seoul

Metropolitan Government, which offer care services and free consultations with plant experts to heal sick plants. Some sick plants may be treated on the consultation day, while some could be taken in for a maximum period of three months if needed.

There are currently five such clinics in operation at Seocho-gu, Jongno-gu, Dongdaemun-gu, Eunpyeong-gu and Yangcheon-gu.

Up to 20 plant clinics are also operating in Daegu, in partnership with flower shops around the city. The clinics offer free repotting services and one-day consultation and treatment services for sick plants.

In addition to its plant clinic services, the Seoul Metropolitan Government also introduced "After Work Gardening Classes," which will commence every Thursday until Nov. 14 for a fee of 10,000 won per person. During the classes, participants will learn about the basics behind gardening while planting plants and flowers featured in famous films.

While the city government's summer semester classes have no available slots, it will commence its fall semester classes after August.

Separate from local governments, a private-run plant kindergarten is also in operation in Mapo-gu, western Seoul. After picking up abandoned house plants from the street or in run-down homes, the kindergarten sets up a flea market with plants ready to take home. Potential owners can only take the plants home after taking part in a two-week lesson that teaches them how to grow them successfully.

Artificial intelligence-based applications for plant aficionados are also available for use on the application market. "Groo" is a popular app among gardeners as the AI service provides a diagnosis for sick plants upon a photo of it is uploaded on the app. It also provides care tips on how to grow and care for the plant.

— The Korea Herald

OPINION

Higher education up the creek

This year's budget has more bad news for the higher education sector.

FAISAL BARI



If memory serves me right, the following is from one of Mushtaq Yousufi's books, possibly Zargazisht. He says that every time he went to his boss, who was a Scotsman, to ask for a raise, his boss would say, as soon as Yousufi entered the room, 'Yousufi, it is good you are here, we have to fire some people'. Ten minutes later, Yousufi would leave the office very grateful that he was not one of those who was fired.

When the government first announced that it was cutting the budget for higher education, and later, with great magnanimity, announced it would restore it to last year's level, it reminded me of this story. And the government also expects us to be thankful.

The number of universities keeps going up as provincial and federal governments bestow new charters and upgrade colleges. But the Higher Education Commission's funds have not been increased for several years. This despite the inflation. It is not surprising that many

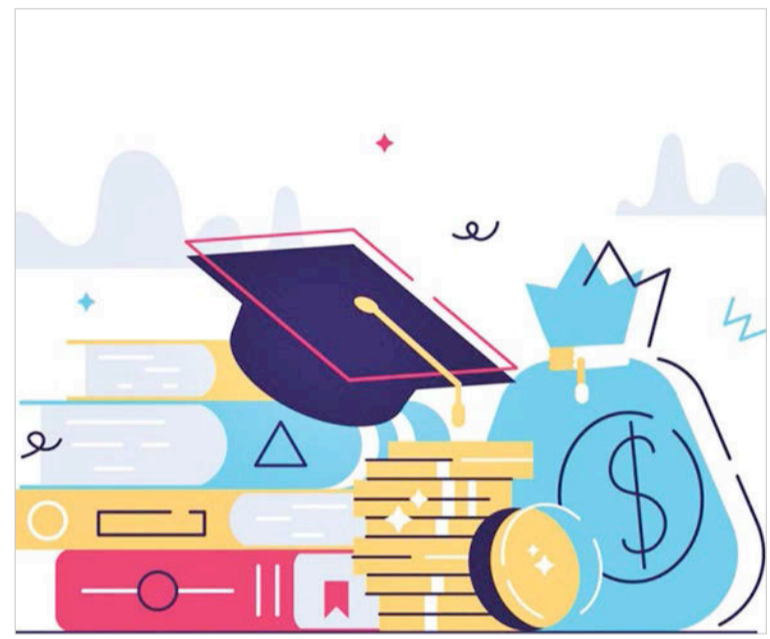
it will have a big impact on individuals who have been hit and on universities and their budgets.

Another taxation proposal is also set to strike not-for-profit universities. Currently, the tax commissioner is empowered to issue exemption certificates in cases where a person's income is exempt from tax as is the case with not-for-profit universities. These universities rely on this certificate to ensure that no tax is withheld on their behalf by withholding agents.

The Finance Bill 2024 proposes to withdraw the commissioner's power to issue exemption at 100pc and allows him/her to only issue exemptions at a lower rate. This will hurt in two ways. For not-for-profit universities this means that tax will be held in their name but they will not be able to adjust this tax as they will not have any tax liability to adjust against at the end of the year. And getting refunds from the FBR is not easy and everyone knows that it will not happen. So, the working capital needs of universities will be hurt and a liability will be created against the FBR for no reason.

This change will also create opportunities for nepotism, favouritism and rishwat where commissioners will be lobbied to issue exemption certificates at a higher percentage rate. It is a harsh proposal that will not give the government any revenue and will not raise tax income but will open the door for lobbying for refunds as well—again, leading to more graft and nepotism.

If all of this were not enough, the government, in its belief that the



universities, even the more established, older ones, are under grave financial stress.

This year, too, while the HEC budget did not go up, salaries went up by 20 percent and inflation has been around 15pc. Public-sector universities, which the agency funds, will continue to hurt and the hurt will keep getting deeper. Some might face default on salary or pension payments as well.

But this year's budget has more bad news for the higher education sector. Teachers and researchers had a 25pc income tax rebate (it was 50pc for the first few years) that had been given a couple of decades back. This has been taken away in this budget. This implies even if universities give a 15pc raise this year, with the removal of the rebate and with the income tax slab adjustments that have been imposed on salaried teachers/researchers, the latter will have less take-home than they did last year. And these are times of high inflation!

This year's budget has more bad news for the higher education sector.

We have a shortage of teachers in Pakistan. At the higher education level, it has been hard to find or hold on to faculty. Our application pools have dwindled. Those with PhD degrees do not want to come back to Pakistan, and many of those who are here want to leave. Many have left, and many others continue to look for opportunities abroad.

Hitting the salaries of teachers and researchers in this manner and in these times clearly shows that the government does not attach much priority to education despite all the rhetoric about an education emergency. It is not as if this measure is going to give the government any sizeable amount of revenue. But

Pakistani people read too much and should be doing other things, has raised the general sales tax on books. Books have become a lot more expensive over the last two to three years due to a) an increase in the price of paper and b) devaluation. As it is, the local book business is not a huge one and the recent price hikes have hit it badly.

The rise in GST will hurt even more. Imported books have become expensive and retailers have been seeing the impact. Raising GST on books will make it even more difficult to sell books. Educationists were already very concerned about the lack of a reading culture vis-à-vis our youth. On the one hand and as part of the education emergency, the government has been introducing 'reading' hours in schools to improve foundational learning, and on the other, GST on books has been raised.

More taxes are needed. But it cannot be a policy that we just impose taxes blindly wherever we see an opportunity to be able to extract or extort taxes. We have to realise that taxes have consequences. We are doing poorly in education already. We have been cutting funding for higher education and funding for school education is barely keeping up with inflation. Parents are hurting due to rising tuition fee and other costs.

To hit the education sector through the various tax measures mentioned seems very unfair. One hopes that the Senate and House debate on the budget will take these issues into consideration.

The writer is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, and an associate professor of economics at Lums.

— Dawn (Pakistan)/ANN

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— Editors

Diverse idioms of Nepali paintings

|| WORDS & ECHOES ||

The right idioms to express the motifs of paintings continue to be the thrust of artists.

ABHI SUBEDI



Nepali art exhibitions held in May-June 2024 at Kathmandu's major galleries represent the diversity of the idioms of Nepali paintings executed in traditional, ethnic and modern forms. Visiting the exhibitions, closely observing the artworks, and interacting with the curators and some artists, I realised that the quest for the right idioms to express the major motifs of paintings continues to be the main thrust of the artists.

In this article, I am alluding to the genre of paintings exhibited in galleries. I have attempted to review the paintings displayed at the exhibitions and briefly discuss the diverse modalities and practices of exhibitions, as well as the impact of audience-oriented activism. Though I have been writing on the diverse genres and forms of Nepali art like sculpture, architecture and installation-oriented works mainly curated in Nepal by Sangeeta Thapa through major events under such rubrics as "biennale and triennale", I have mostly produced reviews of paintings over the decades. I have put my review writings in catalogues and journals.

In recent years, I have been writing articles on art for the academic journal Sirjana of the Sirjana College of Fine Arts. Navindra Man Rajbhandari, an artist, art teacher, curator, and pedagogue, has been working earnestly to edit and publish this journal.

I visited the painting exhibitions in the major galleries—two at the Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal and one each at the Nepal Academy of Fine Arts and the Siddhartha Art Gallery. Interestingly, all these exhibitions are audience-oriented. The painting exhibition practice often follows the rituals of cataloguing the works with simple



POST FILE PHOTO

introductions and price tags written somewhat half-heartedly. They also mention the mediums used by the painters, like oil, water, gouache and, very commonly, acrylic. From the early artists who were exposed to Western art to those of contemporary times in Nepal, all use the same mediums as artists anywhere in the world. These mediums are the universal shapers of the idioms of paintings.

Nepali painters use the above-mentioned mediums and other admixtures according to their modern training and indigenous painting traditions. The evolution of colour paintings, especially oil, marks the presence of the audience or the clientele of paintings; it has become a commonly recognised subject. All came through modern education in art. Artists' emotions and the consonance of cultural and aesthetic factors are commonly represented in such paintings.

One eloquent example was seen at an art exhibition, "Deities of Nepal II", held at the Nepal Art Council in May-June 2024. This exhibition, principally curated by the art academic Swosti Rajbhandari Kayastha, presented some remarkable paintings and their projection modalities. The diversity of the paintings executed according to the overt and covert themes of sacrality had one common element. Their choice of colours and hues and their delineation to create the exquisite beauty of the mythopoetic figure of the characters in the paintings was one eloquent feature. Modern painters also treated the divine figures and

their aura in their non-figural works. I especially liked the modern techniques in these paintings about the deities. The thrust was experimental.

Some artists, comparatively, made very good paintings; others were just cliché works, naturally. However, the common strength and feature of all the paintings that featured the iconography was what the brief brochure text says: The composition of "the deities intricately woven into a tapestry of philosophical and spiritual beliefs." The other was the search for an appropriate style for projecting the spiritual motifs. The paintings appeared to establish a covenant with the audience, this time through a pricing pattern. Paintings were liberally priced; some were priced up to Rs4 million. And the remarkable matter was that some of these expensive paintings were "sold" to Nepali buyers.

We should remember that the paintings were sold as works of art, not as pictures of religious iconographies. The entry of the modern audience into Nepali paintings is what matters here. John Berger, a great art critic, says that the painting itself should generate the buyer's desirability through its touchable and visual attraction. I saw this covenant at this exhibition.

The next display was the "National Exhibition of Fine Arts 2024". This one presents a different perspective in my collection several decades' glossy catalogues of the Nepal Academy of Fine Arts. This exhibition, curated by

Enhancing urban public spaces

Creative strategies are required to transform unconventional spaces into appealing public spaces.

ANANDA MANANDHAR



Overhead bridges often become hangout spaces where people spend time observing the hustle and bustle of the city. Even in the small and noisy traffic island of Koteswor junction, one can observe people resting and killing time. Similarly, plenty of people visit the open land of Koteswor-Tinkune to play sports, and many more are there as spectators.

These examples indicate the growing demand and potential for public spaces in Kathmandu.

However, according to a report published by the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority, only 2.29 percent of the land was available as open space in 2012, and the condition has not improved.

The irregular distribution of public spaces has also reinforced their unavailability. Advocates for urban public spaces recommend the availability of open spaces within walking distance, a 400-metre radius. However, many places in our cities do not have public spaces nearby, and even when they are available, they are usually gated and inaccessible.

Public parks are confined within high boundary walls and gates. Shielding public spaces from the public is a paradox, although it is supported by common reasonings such as possible vandalism, waste littering and maintenance difficulty. As a result, we are undermining the value of public spaces.

Similarly, unfunctional and exclusive planning approaches have also compromised the effectiveness of public spaces. Public parks designed for specific demographics, such as elderly

superficial approach to public space management.

In addition to these issues, open spaces constantly threaten encroachment. Sometimes, encroachments seem like an act of conservation but end up with the controlled ownership of some individuals or groups. The Nepal Army's occupation of part of Tundikhel is one such example. At other times, public spaces are intruded by building construction and infrastructural development.

Despite all such challenges, urban public spaces can be enhanced in many ways.

First and foremost, existing and potential open spaces should be identified; larger parks, *khyas* (culturally significant open lands), urban pockets, riverfronts, traditional ponds, courtyards and other potential spaces should be mapped out and planned for. Encroached public lands should be reclaimed. As for new urban areas, the government should provide open spaces beforehand.

After that, identified public spaces should be managed, with due consideration of their typology and context.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Having public spaces in urban areas has multiple benefits. Open spaces improve public health by providing space for physical activity and refreshment. They make places socially and economically vibrant by attracting people and activities. They serve as emergency shelters during disasters like earthquakes. If planned well, open spaces help in biodiversity conservation and groundwater recharge.

However, the situation of open spaces in Kathmandu Valley is miserable. UN-Habitat recommends 15-20 percent of urban land for open public spaces.

people's and children's parks, have become a new trend. When this is not the case, the spaces still lack provisions for a diverse population: Women, children, differently abled and so on.

Furthermore, ecological dimensions are rarely considered during the development of public spaces. Local hydrology, geology, biodiversity, and natural ecosystems are disregarded. Approaches like the plantation of non-native vegetation for mere beautification, a large proportion of hardscape, and the absence of storm-water management systems show a

Larger parks can be developed with a significant proportion of native greenery and diverse spaces such as sports areas, recreational areas, water bodies, and gardens. Basic services like public toilets and drinking water services should be arranged.

Smaller spaces can be designed as urban green pockets. Machhindra Park near Jawalakhel is one good example. Cultural-communal lands such as *Khyas* should be managed with minimal interventions.

Riverside landscape can also be capitalised as urban public spaces. Some

Devendra Kumar Kafle, aka Thumkeli, its member secretary, and other departmental academy members, presents a unique view of Nepali art. Kafle guided me through the variety of artworks and described the collection methods. The collection is based on the modality of sampling artworks of Indigenous and regional features and bringing them out to the national exhibition, which is a remarkable activity.

The Academy has published small glossy catalogues for them. In his note the Chancellor of the Academy Naradmani Hartumchali, says this is a culmination of such exhibitions in all seven states. He stresses the need to bring art to a level where indigenous forms could be made a topic of political significance by evoking such features as representation and social transformation. I don't know of any well-researched discussions on this important topic initiated by any authentic institutions. But the exhibition speaks for itself.

The current exhibition, "Threads of Simultaneity", organised by 'Sirjana 2024' and mainly curated by Navindra Man Rajbhandari, exhibits 200 pieces of artwork executed by 28 artists at the Arts Council. Artist Rajbhandari revealed that the exhibition was an attempt to project a historicity of a combined nature of art activity shared entirely by the academic cohort of the institution. The exhibition features some works of the erstwhile principals Sashi Shah (2001-11), Krishna Manandhar (2011-17) and Madan Chitrakar (2018-22), and members of the Sirjana College of Arts like Vatsa Gopal Vaidya and other senior artists associated with the college one way or the other. Works of the young and senior artists are on display.

I also want to recall yet another unique exhibition organised by Siddhartha Art Gallery, "Sawari Kathaharu: Art in Motion", in May 2024. The concept of motion in art is presented by creating the art of motion, as in Ralph Lily Turner's "Storms", Hokusai's "Great Waves", Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" and Sashi Shah's "Darting Horses", to take a few examples. Capturing the fixed images mounted on darting objects like vehicles and exhibiting them in a reputed gallery is designed to showcase experimental works and their appeal.

May and June 2024 were eventful in the realm of Nepali art. I was struck by the variety of motifs and styles that show the performative mode of Nepali paintings.

riverside parks, such as Sankhamul Park, have already demonstrated the use value of riverfronts. However, the custom of retaining wall boundaries and ornamental landscape disassociates the river's relationship with the land and people. Therefore, riverside development that promotes biodiversity and ecological sustainability and strengthens people's physical and spiritual relationship with water is essential.

Next, we can capitalise on traditional open spaces like ponds and courtyards. For instance, ponds can be revitalised with proper pavements, seating spaces, and safety. Pim Bahal Pukhu at Patan and Nigu Pukhu at Thimi are perfect examples of traditional pond-based revitalisation that boosted the place's socio-economic activities.

Furthermore, creative strategies are required to transform unconventional spaces such as overhead bridges, sidewalks, bus stops, and traffic islands into appealing public spaces. For instance, a pedestrian bridge, beyond its functional use of crossing roads, can act as a lively space if upgraded with public space amenities. Greenery addition, shed, carved-out spaces for interaction, seating spaces, and artworks are a few strategies. Likewise, wide sidewalks can be transformed into green infrastructure networks constituting rest spaces, kiosks and drinking water fountains.

Lastly, the most important step in public space management is to embrace the 'Make it Simple' design approach. This will significantly help tackle the issues of maintenance challenges, budgetary limitations and environmental degradation. Barrier concepts should be replaced with design and management solutions to resolve public space maintenance issues. Too many interventions and high-maintenance elements such as fountains, extravagant lighting and furniture can be intentionally avoided. Simple open ground composed of local vegetation, seating platforms, and minimal hardscape with durable materials like stones can also make beautiful parks.

Providing open spaces is not enough in itself, though. For example, the Dhara-hara complex, although designed as a landmark public space, isolates itself from the surrounding context. Ultimately, public spaces should be physically well interconnected with existing urban networks to make them more accessible, practical, and contextual.

Manandhar is a community architect at Lumanti Support Group for Shelter, Berlin.

FOREX	
US Dollar	133.96
Euro	143.15
Pound Sterling	169.27
Swiss Franc	150.10
Australian Dollar	89.20
Canadian Dollar	97.85
Singapore Dollar	98.91
Japanese Yen (10)	8.43
Chinese Yuan	18.45
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.71
Qatari Riyal	36.75
Thai Bhat	3.66
UAE Dhiram	36.47
Malaysian Ringgit	28.42
Korean Won (100)	9.64

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION		PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold	Rs 144,700	
Silver	Rs 1,865	

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

US restarting avocado, mango checks in Mexico after week-long pause

MEXICO CITY: US health safety inspectors are gradually restarting inspections of avocados and mangos in Mexico needed to export the farm commodities to the United States, the US ambassador said in a statement on Friday. Ambassador Ken Salazar stressed that more work needs to be done to ensure the safety of inspectors, after a security incident in Michoacan state last weekend caused US authorities to pause the safety checks. "It's still necessary to make progress to guarantee the safety before we can achieve full functioning," said Salazar, pointing to recent aggressions they faced. The ambassador did not go into further detail, but he did express optimism more progress can be made at meetings scheduled for next Monday with government and private sector representatives. **(REUTERS)**

RedBird IMI opens bids for its sale of UK's Telegraph newspaper

LONDON: Abu Dhabi-backed RedBird IMI said on Friday it had opened bids for its sale of the Telegraph and Spectator, having reversed its decision to acquire the right-leaning newspaper group after the government intervened. "We can confirm that prospective owners are now able to submit their initial bids from today (June 21)," a RedBird IMI spokesperson said. "This has been a thorough process which involved speaking to interested parties from around the globe and it is no surprise that interest has remained extremely strong." RedBird IMI effectively took control of the Telegraph and the Spectator magazine in December when it repaid a debt owed by its then-owner, the Barclay family, to Lloyds Bank, including a 600 million pound loan against the titles. But the acquisition, which already faced a lengthy regulatory inquiry, was dealt a blow in March when Britain said it would stop foreign governments owning newspapers. RedBird IMI's sale of the titles is expected to conclude later this year. Potential bidders, according to previous reports, include hedge fund owner Paul Marshall; DMGT, which owns the Daily Mail; Belgian Group Mediahuis; and National World. **(REUTERS)**

The slowdown lowdown: Why are Nepalis spending less?

Normally, traders order foreign goods, particularly apparel, three months before the festival season starts based on demand. The market is downbeat.

○ KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, JUNE 22

In Nepal, the festivals measure the economy. Last Dashain, the cash crunch forced consumers to trim purchases.

After a year, the situation seems unimproved.

"We are not in the mood to place orders for goods for upcoming festivities," said Ram Hari Karki, president of Nepal Trans Himalayan Border Commerce Association. "There is no demand at all. It looks like a deep economic slowdown."

Usually, traders place orders for foreign goods, particularly apparel, three months before the start of Nepal's key festival season.

Even though traders bring some amount of goods, it may be costlier.

Due to the appreciation of the US dollar and increased customs duties, the prices of goods and commodities may rise, causing difficulties for many ordinary Nepalis.

"Goods are becoming costlier day by day. That is why traders are cautious this year about placing orders," said Karki. "The demand for festivities has not returned to the pre-pandemic level."

There are no statistics about consumption during the Dashain, Tihar, and Chhath festivals, but analysts say it grows manifold compared to the normal time.

Kumar Karki, president of the Nepal National Traders' Federation, said due to subdued demand, they may see a business decline by 15-20 percent. In comparison, prices may rise by 20 percent in the upcoming festivals. Even during the summer, traders say the market has slowed down.

"Despite the rising heat, the demand for summer garments and shoes has not picked up," said a trader in New Road, the country's central shopping hub. "The footfall of shoppers has declined compared to last year's season, reflecting the decline in people's incomes."

Kumar Karki, president of the Nepal National Traders' Federation, said due to subdued demand, they may see a business decline by 15-20 percent. In comparison, prices may rise by 20 percent in the upcoming festivals. Even during the summer, traders say the market has slowed down.



In the past, China fulfilled 80 percent of Nepal's need for readymade garments. Now the market seems flooded with Indian goods, traders say.

"Nowadays, only a handful of traders are planning their trip to China to order goods. We don't see demand recovering from last year's drop," said Kumar Karki.

Some traders say there is a shift in the trade. In the past years, China fulfilled 80 percent of Nepal's need for readymade garments.

However, according to three top traders who spoke to the Post, the market seems flooded with Indian goods, which are relatively cheaper.

Currently, traders said, an average of 15-20 loaded trucks are entering from Kerung and Tatopani customs points to the north, carrying garments, shoes and slippers, raincoats, and umbrellas, among other items. Before the Covid pandemic, 50-60 loaded trucks used to enter Nepal from the Chinese border at this time of the year.

Cost is the key factor in subdued demand. On Friday, the Nepali rupee plunged to an all-time low of Rs134.15 against the dollar. A strong US dollar

has advantages and disadvantages. It has negative impacts on an import-based economy like Nepal.

"While importing goods, we must pay 30 to 40 percent as customs duty. The high customs duty has made imported goods expensive," said Kumar Karki.

The government needs to ease customs through the coming fiscal year's budget and further tighten it, he said. Importing goods through legal channels is becoming more difficult day by

German economy minister says EU open for talks on China tariffs

○ REUTERS
SHANGHAI, JUNE 22

Germany's Economy Minister Robert Habeck said during his visit to China on Saturday that the European Union's door is open for discussions regarding EU tariffs on Chinese exports.

"What I suggested to my Chinese partners today is that the doors are open for discussions and I hope that this message was heard," he said in his first statement in Shanghai, after meetings with Chinese officials in Beijing.

Habeck's visit is the first by a senior European official since Brussels proposed hefty duties on imports of Chinese-made electric vehicles (EVs) to combat what the EU considers excessive subsidies.

Habeck said there is time for a dialogue between the EU and China on tariff issues before the duties come into full effect in November and that he believes in open markets but that markets require a level playing field.

Proven subsidies that are intended to increase the export advantages of companies can't be accepted, the minister said. Another point of tension between Beijing and Berlin is China's support for Russia in its war in Ukraine. Habeck noted Chinese trade with Russia increased more than 40 percent last year.

Habeck said he had told Chinese officials that this was taking a toll on their economic relationship. "Circumventions of the sanctions imposed on Russia are not acceptable," he said, adding that technical goods produced in Europe should not end up on the battlefield via other countries.

The technologies will enable, still, all of us to enjoy fashion because isn't that at the end of the day everyone wants to be looking good.

Proven subsidies that are intended to increase the export advantages of companies can't be accepted, minister says.

The EU's provisional duties of up to 38.1 percent on imported Chinese EVs are set to apply by July 4, with the investigation set to continue until November 2, when definitive duties, typically for five years, could be imposed. "This opens a phase where negotiations are possible, discussions are important and dialogue is needed," Habeck said.

Proposed EU tariffs on Chinese goods are not a "punishment", Habeck

told Chinese officials earlier in Beijing. "It is important to understand that these are not punitive tariffs," he said in the first plenary session of a climate and transformation dialogue.

Countries such as the US, Brazil and Turkey had used punitive tariffs, but not the EU, he said. "Europe does things differently."

Habeck said the European Commission had for nine months examined in detail whether Chinese companies had benefited unfairly from subsidies.

Any countervailing duty measure that results from the EU review "is not a punishment", he said, adding that such measures were meant to compensate for the advantages granted to Chinese companies by Beijing.

Zheng Shanjie, chairman of China's National Development and Reform Commission, responded: "We will do everything to protect Chinese companies." Proposed EU duties on Chinese-made EVs would hurt both sides, Zheng added. He told Habeck he hoped Germany would demonstrate leadership within the EU and "do the correct thing".

He also denied accusations of unfair subsidies, saying the development of China's new energy industry was the result of comprehensive advantages in technology, market and industry supply chains, fostered in fierce competition.

US official says no decision yet on whether to prosecute Boeing

○ REUTERS
NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, JUNE 22

The US Justice Department has made no decision yet on whether to pursue a prosecution of planemaker Boeing, for violating the terms of a 2021 settlement related to two fatal 737 MAX crashes in 2018 and 2019, a top DOJ official said in an email seen by Reuters.

Glenn Leon, chief of the Justice Department's fraud section, said in an email on Friday to lawyers representing family members of victims of the crashes: "The department has not made a decision on how to proceed or whether to pursue prosecution of Boeing." The Justice Department and Boeing both declined comment.

In May, the Justice Department said Boeing had violated a 2021 agreement with prosecutors that shielded it from criminal prosecution over the fatal crashes. The 2021 DPA required the US planemaker to overhaul its compliance practices. Boeing has said it complied with the agreement.

Earlier on Friday, the New York Times, citing anonymous sources, reported that the Justice Department "is expected to allow Boeing to escape criminal prosecution" for violating the DPA. Leon's email said, "The

reporting was simply not correct."

The Times later revised its story to say that the Justice Department is "considering allowing" Boeing to avoid criminal prosecution.

A New York Times spokeswoman, in an emailed statement sent after the story was revised, said: "We are confident in the accuracy of our reporting." The Justice Department said in May it determined that Boeing had violated a 2021 deferred prosecution agreement that shielded the company from a criminal charge of conspiracy to commit fraud arising from the two fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019, which killed 346 people.

In beef-loving Argentina, people are eating less beef than ever.

Boeing in January 2021 reached an agreement with the DOJ to pay \$2.5 billion to resolve a criminal investigation into the company's conduct surrounding the fatal crashes.

Boeing last week told the government it did not violate the agreement. Federal prosecutors have until July 7 to inform a federal judge in Texas of their plans, which could be to proceed with a criminal case or negotiate a plea deal with Boeing. The Justice Department could also extend the deferred prosecution agreement for a year.

LGBTQ+ librarians grapple with attacks on books—and on themselves

○ ASSOCIATED PRESS
BOISE, IDAHO, JUNE 22

Idaho librarian June Meissner was closing up for the day at the downtown Boise Public Library when a man approached her asking for help.

As an information services librarian, answering patrons' questions is part of Meissner's day-to-day work, and serving the community is one of her favorite parts of the job.

But when the man got close enough, "he took a swing at me and tried to punch me in the head," said Meissner, a transgender woman. "I blocked it and he started yelling slurs and suggesting that he was going to come back and kill me."

Worldwide Pride Month events are well underway to celebrate LGBTQ+ culture and rights. But it is coming at a time when people who identify as LGBTQ+ say they are facing increasing difficulties at work, ranging from being repeatedly misgendered to physically assaulted.

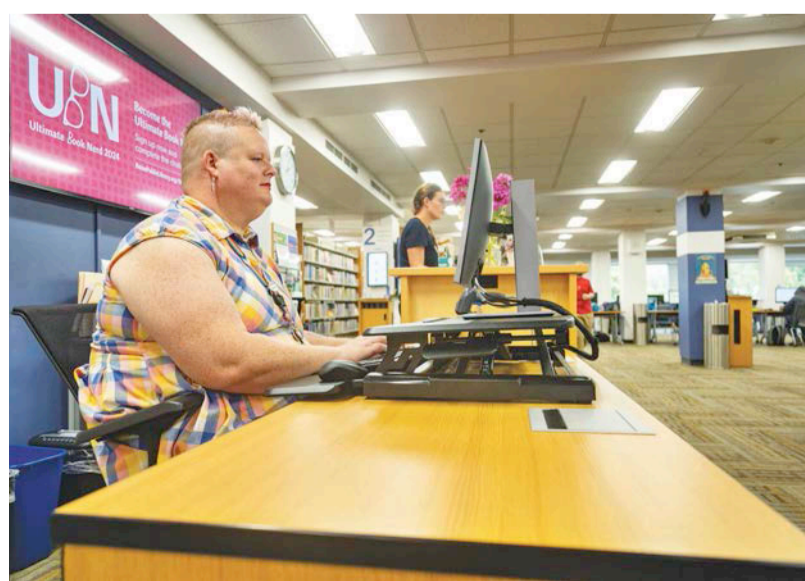
Gender nonconforming library workers in particular, like Meissner, are also grappling with growing calls for book bans across the US, with books about gender identity, sexual orientation and race topping the list of most criticized titles and mak-

ing the attacks all the more personal.

"When we see attacks on those books, we have to understand that those are attacks on those kinds of people as well," said Emily Drabinski, who is the president of the American Library Association and is gay. "To have my identity weaponized against libraries and library workers, the people and institutions I care about the most, has made it a difficult and painful year."

The ALA said it documented the highest-ever number of titles targeted for censorship in 2023 in more than 20 years of tracking—4,240. That total surpassed 2022's previous record by 65 percent, with Maia Kobabe's coming-of-age story "Gender Queer" topping the list for most criticized library book for the third straight year.

Lawmakers are increasingly considering lawsuits, fines, and even imprisonment for distributing books some regard as inappropriate, including in Meissner's home state of Idaho. Lawmakers there passed legislation that empowers local prosecutors to bring charges against public and school libraries if they don't keep "harmful" materials away from children. The new law, signed by Idaho Gov. Brad Little in April, will go into effect on July 1.



June Meissner uses a computer at a workstation on the second floor of the Boise Public Library in Boise, Idaho on June 6.

"I do think that a lot of that political speech around it does make things more dangerous and worse for me," Meissner said. "It is so much politicking and getting the general public riled up."

Meissner's own attacker was arrested and convicted, and she says that while the vast majority of her interactions at work are positive, she still struggles to let her guard down and is constantly assess-

ing whether a situation could turn unsafe.

"As somebody who is working face to face with the public and trying to help people as much as possible, that really does get in the way," she told The Associated Press, describing how she waits to make eye contact with a patron "and then, based on what I see when they look at me, that'll tell me whether or not I should just be on edge, be wary."

Florida-based conservative non-profit Moms for Liberty, which describes itself as a parental rights organization and refers to its members as "joyful warriors," has been at the forefront of a nationwide push to remove books that deal with race and gender identity.

But co-founder Tiffany Justice says the organization—which she says has more than 300 chapters in 48 states and more than 130,000 active members—is not anti-LGBTQ+, although Justice herself told the AP she thinks that the Q in the acronym, which stands for queer or questioning, "needs to go into the trash bin."

And according to the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, about 38 percent of book challenges that "directly originated" from Moms for Liberty activity have LGBTQ+ themes.

Justice said Moms for Liberty challenges books like Gender Queer—a graphic novel about a young person's struggle with gender identity that contains illustrations of sexual contact, masturbation and a sex toy—because they view the material as sexually explicit, not because they cover LGBTQ+ topics.

"The least interesting thing about a child should be their sexual orientation," Justice said. "Why are we flooding them with sexual content?"

Despite the thousands of petitions to censor books about gender and sex, legal standards for deeming materials obscene or harmful to minors—and therefore not protected speech under the First Amendment—are very specific and high, and courts have historically sided with libraries, according to Vera Eidelman, a staff attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union who focuses on rights to free speech in the digital age.

"The mere fact that something is describing sex, describing nudity, even depicting those things, is not enough to make it qualify as obscenity," she said. Regardless, the book banning movement has in many cases successfully restricted access to materials in which LGBTQ+ youth can see themselves depicted.

WORLD

Gaza health officials: At least 24 killed in Israeli air strikes in Palestinian enclave

Witnesses report gun battles in Gaza City between Hamas militants and Israeli forces backed by helicopter fire.



A Palestinian woman grieves as she bids farewell to a relative, killed in a strike on the al-Mawasi area in the Palestinian city Rafah on Saturday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GAZA STRIP, PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES, JUNE 22

Health officials in Gaza said Israeli air strikes on Saturday killed at least 24 people in the territory's north, a day after the International Committee of the Red Cross said 22 people were killed in shelling that damaged its office.

The Gaza City strikes added to at least 120 deaths over the previous 48 hours which the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza reported earlier Saturday.

Dr Mahmud Aliwa of Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza City said his facility received 24 bodies after the strikes, which left smoke rising over the city.

Gaza civil defence agency spokesman Mahmud Basal told AFP that at least 20 were killed in a strike on a house in Al-Tuffah neighbourhood,

while a strike in Al-Shati refugee camp claimed the lives of four others.

Against a grey backdrop of destruction, men used a donkey cart to remove some of the dead in Al-Tuffah.

Earlier on Saturday, Israel's military said its fighter jets were striking "two Hamas military infrastructure sites in the area of Gaza City".

The European Union's foreign affairs chief, Josep Borrell, on Saturday called for a probe into the shelling that damaged the ICRC office.

"An independent investigation is needed and those responsible must be held accountable," Borrell wrote on social media platform X.

Late Friday the ICRC said 22 dead and 45 wounded were taken to a Red Cross field hospital after shelling with "heavy calibre projectiles" near its southern Gaza office.

"Firing so dangerously close to

humanitarian structures puts the lives of civilians and humanitarian workers at risk," the ICRC said on X.

Gaza's health ministry blamed the shelling on Israel, saying 25 were killed and 50 wounded in the coastal Al-Mawasi area, where thousands of displaced Palestinians have been sheltering in tents.

An Israel military statement on Saturday said an initial inquiry found "there was no direct attack carried out by the IDF against a Red Cross facility", but the incident was still under review and "findings will be presented to our international partners".

On Saturday witnesses reported gun battles in Gaza City between militants and Israeli forces backed by helicopter fire.

The deadliest-ever Gaza war began with an unprecedented October 7 attack by Hamas militants on south-

ern Israel. That attack resulted in the deaths of 1,194 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures.

The militants also seized hostages, 116 of whom remain in Gaza although the army says 41 are dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 37,551 people, also mostly civilians, Gaza's health ministry said on Saturday. Exchanges of fire across the Lebanese border between Israel and the powerful Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah have also escalated, raising fears of wider war.

On Saturday a security source said a leader of the Lebanese Islamist group Jamaa Islamiya, a Hamas ally, was killed in an Israeli strike on a vehicle in eastern Lebanon.

Israel's military said an aircraft carried out a "precise strike" in Lebanon's Bekaa area "to eliminate the terrorist" Ayman Ghotmeh, who they said supplied weapons to Hamas and Jamaa Islamiya in Lebanon.

In southern Lebanon, Israeli warplanes struck Hezbollah targets, the military said.

Experts are divided on the prospect of a wider war, almost nine months into Israel's campaign to eradicate Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the cross-border hostilities must not turn Lebanon into "another Gaza". Citing "bellicose rhetoric" on both sides, he warned: "One rash move—one miscalculation—could trigger a catastrophe that goes far beyond the border, and frankly, beyond imagination."

Violence has also soared in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The Israeli military said on Saturday that an Israeli civilian died after being shot near Qalqilya city.

Months of negotiations towards a truce and hostage release have failed to make headway, but mediator Qatar on Friday said it was still working to "bridge the gap" between Israel and Hamas.

The war has destroyed much of Gaza's infrastructure and left residents short of food, fuel and other essentials.

In a show of force against nuclear-armed North Korea, US aircraft carrier arrives in South Korea

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA, JUNE 22

A nuclear-powered US aircraft carrier arrived on Saturday in South Korea for a three-way exercise involving Japan as they step up military training to cope with North Korean threats, which have escalated following a security pact with Russia.

The arrival of the USS Theodore Roosevelt strike group in Busan came a day after South Korea summoned the Russian ambassador to protest a major deal between Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un this week.

The agreement pledges mutual defense assistance in the event of war. South Korea says the deal poses a threat to its security and warned that it could consider sending arms to Ukraine to help fight off the Russian invasion as a response—a move that would surely ruin its relations with Moscow. Following a meeting between their defense chiefs in Singapore earlier in June, the United States, South Korea and Japan announced the Freedom Edge drills.

The Roosevelt strike group will participate in the exercise that is expected to start within June. South Korea's military didn't immediately confirm specific details of the training.

Rear Admiral Christopher Alexander, commander of Carrier Strike Group Nine, said the exercise is aimed at sharpening tactical proficiency of ships and improving interoperability between the countries' navies "to ensure we are ready to respond to any crisis and contingency."

South Korea's navy said in a statement that the arrival of the carrier demonstrates the strong defense posture of the allies and "stern willingness to respond to advancing North Korean threats."

The carrier's visit comes seven months after another US aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, came to South Korea in a show of strength against the North.

The Roosevelt strike group also participated in a three-way exercise with South Korean and Japanese naval forces in April in the disputed East China Sea, where worries about China's territorial claims are rising.



The Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71), a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, is anchored in Busan, South Korea, on Saturday.

BRIEFING

Death toll rises to 54 in India liquor tragedy

NEW DELHI: The death toll has climbed to 54 from consumption of tainted liquor in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu, with more than 100 people still in hospital, a government official said on Saturday. Nearly 200 people have been treated since Wednesday for vomiting, stomach aches and diarrhoea, after drinking liquor spiked with methanol in the district of Kallakurichi, about 250 km from Chennai, the state capital. Law enforcement officials investigating the incident have arrested seven people, said MS Prasanth, a senior district official, adding that follow-up action was being taken against liquor sellers and brewers in the district. Deaths from illegally produced alcohol, often called country liquor, are a regular occurrence in India, where few can afford branded spirits, despite public demands for a crackdown on the vendors. (REUTERS)

Vatican names China's Hangzhou bishop via accord with Beijing

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis has appointed Giuseppe Yang Yongqiang as bishop of Hangzhou, the capital of China's eastern province of Zhejiang, Vatican said on Saturday as it strives to strengthen relations with Beijing. The prelate will be relocating from Zhoucun, in northern Shandong province, it added. The appointment follows a landmark accord the Vatican first struck with China in 2018, renewing it for a further two years in 2022, over the appointment of Roman Catholic bishops in the communist country. The deal was an attempt to ease a longstanding divide across mainland China between an underground flock loyal to the pope and a state-backed official church. (REUTERS)

Boeing Starliner's return to Earth delayed again

WASHINGTON: NASA said on Friday the Boeing Starliner's return to Earth from the International Space Station, which was scheduled for next week, has been delayed again. The delay of the rescheduled June 26 return will allow more time for the review of the thruster malfunctions and helium leaks that caused the first delay, it said. Starliner's first crewed mission to the ISS, which had initially been scheduled to last about eight days, has been extended to a date yet to be determined. The spaceship blasted off from Florida atop a United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket on June 5 following years of delays and safety scares, as well as two aborted launch attempts that came as astronauts were strapped in and ready to go. (AFP)

India boosts defence ties with Bangladesh in bid to become a counterweight to China

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW DELHI, JUNE 22

India and Bangladesh on Saturday moved to bolster their defence relationship and signed agreements for expanding cooperation in maritime security, ocean economy, space, and telecommunication sectors, as New Delhi tries to present itself as a regional power and a counterweight to China.

The agreements were signed during Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India, the first foreign leader to visit New Delhi since Narendra Modi became the country's prime minister for a third term two weeks ago.

Modi welcomed Bangladesh's decision to join his Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative to expand and facilitate regional cooperation of India's maritime neighbours. He said the deals with Dhaka were part of his country's pursuit of a neighbourhood-first approach. Bangladesh also enjoys good ties with China, its major trade

partner mostly for raw materials. But maintaining a close relationship with Beijing is challenging for Bangladesh, which also balances diplomatic and trade relationships with India and the United States, China's main rivals.

Bangladesh's garment industry, which brings in more than 80 percent of foreign currency from exports, is heavily dependent on China for raw materials. Hasina told reporters in New Delhi that the two countries decided to boost the sharing of river waters and cooperation in the power and energy sectors.

She also met Indian industry leaders and invited them to invest in Bangladesh which plans to develop bigger ports, waterways, rail, and road connectivity. India loaned Bangladesh \$8 billion in the last eight years, to help expand that infrastructure.

Since Sheikh Hasina's Awami League party came to power in 2009, she has acted to address New Delhi's concern about Indian militant groups taking shelter in Bangladesh.

Scramble for rescue in flooded Iowa town as much of US toils again in heat

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CITY OF ROCK VALLEY, IOWA, JUNE 22

The governor of Iowa sent helicopters to a small town to evacuate people from flooded homes on Saturday, the result of weeks of rain, while much of the United States longed for relief from yet another round of extraordinary heat.

Sirens blared at 2 am in Rock Valley, Iowa, population 4,200, where people in hundreds of homes were told to get out as the Rock River could no longer take rain that has slammed the region. The city lacked running water because wells were unusable.

"We've got National Guard helicopters coming in where people are on their roofs—literally on their roofs or the second floor because their first floor is completely flooded," Mayor Kevin Van Otterloo said.

"We've had so much rain here," he said. "We had four inches last night in an hour and a half time. Our ground just cannot take anymore."

Gov. Kim Reynolds declared a disaster for Sioux County, which includes Rock Valley. Drone video posted by the

local sheriff showed no streets, just roofs and the tops of trees above water.

Elsewhere in the US, the miserable grip of heat and humidity continued. The National Weather Service said roughly 15 million people were under a heat warning—the highest warning—while another 90 million were under a heat advisory. Millions of residents across the country have had their lives disrupted by days of unusually high temperatures.

The US last year experienced the most heat waves since 1936, experts said. An Associated Press analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data found that the excessive heat contributed to more than 2,300 US deaths, the highest number in 45 years of records.

Temperatures around 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius) were predicted for Washington, DC, and Richmond, Virginia—while Philadelphia; Newark, New Jersey; Columbus, Ohio; and Detroit were bracing for the high 90s.

Heat-related hospital visits in New York state were 500 percent higher than the average June day, according

to the Department of Health.

"We still have this prolonged heat wave across portions of the Ohio Valley and into the Northeast," weather service meteorologist Marc Chenard said. "We get a little bit of relief by early in the week, at least in the eastern US, the Northeast, but in general above-normal temperatures are going to cover a large portion of the country even into next week."

In southeastern Michigan, DTE Energy said 8,300 customers still lacked power Saturday morning from storm-related outages, compared to 75,000 homes and businesses earlier in the week.

Flooding from rain was South Dakota's problem. Several highways were closed, including a key stretch of Interstate 29, south of Sioux Falls, where there were no alternate routes. Sioux Falls, the state's largest city, had more than 7 inches (17.7 centimetres) of rain in three days.

In New Mexico, heavy rain and flash flood warnings prompted officials to order some mandatory evacuations, with shelters set up for displaced residents.

Three dead in Kharkiv attack, Russia launches new barrage of missiles on Ukrainian energy facilities

Two energy workers injured in Zaporizhzhia when a fire broke out at an energy facility, according to regional governor.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KYIV, UKRAINE, JUNE 22

At least three people were killed in a Russian bomb attack on Ukraine's second city, Kharkiv, on Saturday afternoon, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

Another 25 people were wounded in the attack, in which a guided aerial bomb hit a residential building, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said. According to Syniehubov, 16 people—including two children—were hospitalized. Russia has also continued to target Ukraine's energy infrastructure. Russia launched a new barrage of missiles and drones in an overnight attack on Ukraine, officials in Kyiv said Saturday, damaging energy facilities in the southeast and west and injuring at least two workers.

Ukraine is struggling with a new wave of rolling blackouts after relentless Russian attacks on energy infrastructure that started three months ago took out half the country's power

generation capacity. In its eighth major attack on energy facilities overnight, Russia fired 16 missiles and 13 Shahed drones, the Ukrainian air force said.

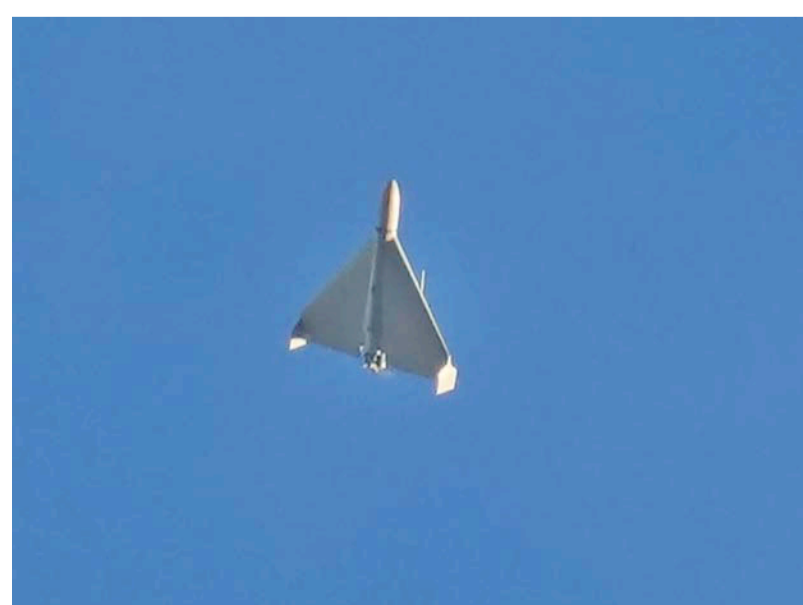
Ukraine's air defenses intercepted 12 of the 16 missiles and all 13 drones launched by Russia, the air force said.

State-owned power grid operator Ukrenergo said the strikes damaged equipment at facilities in southeastern Zaporizhzhia and the western Lviv region.

Two energy workers were injured in Zaporizhzhia when a fire broke out at an energy facility, according to regional Gov. Ivan Fedorov.

With no major changes reported along the 1,000-kilometre front line, where a recent push by the Kremlin's forces in eastern and northeastern Ukraine has made only incremental gains, both sides have taken aim at infrastructure targets, seeking to curb each other's ability to fight in a war that is now in its third year.

Moscow's overnight attack on



A drone is seen in the sky before it fired on buildings in Kyiv, Ukraine, on October 17, 2022.

Zaporizhzhia and Lviv follows Ukrainian military strikes on three oil refineries in southern Russia overnight into Friday.

Air defenses destroyed five drones over the Sea of Azov and the country's western Bryansk and Smolensk regions, the Russian Ministry of Defence said. A man was killed in shelling of Russia's Belgorod region, which borders Ukraine, according to regional Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov. The governor of eastern Ukraine's partly occupied Donetsk region said Saturday that Russian attacks had killed five people and wounded seven the previous day.

In the Russia-controlled part of the region, Moscow-installed Gov. Denis Pushilin said three people were killed and four were injured in shelling by Ukrainian forces Saturday morning.

A policeman was killed in the partly occupied region of Kherson as a result of a Russian drone attack on a checkpoint, the Ukrainian National Police said.

Hope guides West Indies to crucial victory

Windies, beaten by England in their opening Super Eight game, will reach the last four if they beat South Africa on Monday.



West Indies' Shai Hope hits a six against the United States at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown on Saturday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BRIDGETOWN, JUNE 22

Shai Hope struck a magnificent unbeaten 82 from 39 balls as West Indies crushed the United States on Saturday, winning their T20 World Cup Super Eights encounter by nine wickets and with 9.1 overs to spare.

The Caribbean side bowled out the US for 128 in the clash of the tournament co-hosts at Kensington Oval and then rattled off the target in 10.5 overs with local boy Hope smashing eight sixes as West Indies finished on 130-1.

The win keeps West Indies in the hunt for a place in the semi-finals and leaves the US, with defeats in both their Super Eights games so far, on the brink of elimination.

Spinner Roston Chase did the main damage with the ball for West Indies with 3-19 in his four overs while Andre Russell also chipped in with three wickets.

But, aware of the need for a strong run-rate in the qualification scenarios, Hope went on the attack from the outset, reaching his half century in just 26 balls.

West Indies, beaten by England in their opening Super Eights game, now have their destiny in their own hands—if they beat South Africa in their final Group 1 game on Monday they will make it to the last four.

West Indies have a better net run rate than South Africa meaning they would advance with a win over the Proteas regardless of the outcome of England's final game against the US.

Hope's aggressive stroke play helped the home side reach 58-0 in the six over powerplay with the opener, who was not in the side in the early group stage games, scoring 42 of them.

It was merciless hitting from Hope who struck 12 boundaries and was helped at the end by Nicholas Pooran who joined in the fun

Kante stars but France lose shine without Mbappe magic

Kante's return has made the French team solid enough to shut opponents but they had to settle for a 1-1 with the Dutch in a game which Mbappe missed.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE LEIPZIG, JUNE 22

N'Golo Kante was the unlikely star of the show in the absence of a frustrated Kylian Mbappe as France and the Netherlands edged towards the last 16 of Euro 2024 after a 0-0 draw in Leipzig.

Recalled from a two-year international exile, Kante has rolled back the years in Germany with back-to-back man-of-the-match awards to become the fulcrum of Didier Deschamps' midfield once more.

A star of France's World Cup winning team in 2018, Kante's time with Les Bleus appeared spent after he departed Europe to join Saudi side Al-Ittihad 12 months ago.

Injuries had blighted the end of his spell at Chelsea and cost him a place at the World Cup two years ago. Deschamps' decision to bring back the 33-year-old has proven inspired despite some initial scepticism.

"N'Golo is still out there running," Deschamps quipped in his post-match press conference on Friday. "But he doesn't only run. He also has a capacity to carry the ball up the field, which is important to complement our other players in midfield so we have variety and we are not always predictable."

Questions have been raised over how big European names lured by the riches of the Saudi Pro League would fare when thrust back into the intensity of an international tournament.

But Kante has shown that a less demanding Saudi campaign could even be beneficial in comparison to those players worn out by gruelling seasons in Europe's top-five leagues.

As impressive as his ball-winning and boundless energy has been against Austria and the Netherlands, the fact the diminutive midfielder has been France's star so far tells its own story.

The 2022 World Cup finalists have managed just one goal in their opening two games and even that came via Austria defender Maximilian Wober.

Mbappe's broken nose against Austria, which ruled him out on Friday, has not helped.

But more is expected of a forward line that also boasts Antoine Griezmann, Olivier Giroud, Marcus Thuram, Ousmane Dembele and Kingsley Coman.

Thankfully for France's hopes of becoming European champions for a third time, Mbappe looks set to be able to return with the aid of a mask.

The Dutch stalemate continued a worrying trend for Deschamps without their star man.

Over the past two years, France have not won any of the seven games that Mbappe has not started.

"Obviously the team is on a different plane when Kylian is in it," added Deschamps.

The France boss conceded his caution with the Real Madrid forward would have been different had it been a knockout game. The French have been here before under Deschamps and know underwhelming group games are easily forgotten—as long as they click in time for tougher tests in the knockout stages.

France have reached three finals in their last four major tournaments. The exception came at Euro 2020 when an out-of-form Mbappe failed to score and missed the crucial penalty in a shock last-16 exit to Switzerland. This time it is injury that threatens to ruin his Euros and France can ill-afford for their masked captain to be under par when he does return.

Despite France having an abundance of talent, Mbappe remains the inspiration to complement Kante's perspiration that would make them the team to beat at Euro 2024.



Recalled from a two-year international exile, Kante has rolled back the years with back-to-back man-of-the-match awards.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE ARLINGTON, JUNE 22

Table with match results: Georgia 1-1 Czech Republic, Netherlands 0-0 France.

Table with match results: Switzerland 00:45 Germany, Scotland 00:45 Hungary.

Table with standings for Group D: Netherlands, France, Austria, Poland.

Schick saves Czechs

Patrik Schick chested home to earn the Czech Republic a 1-1 draw against debutants Georgia on Saturday in an entertaining match, but it leaves both teams in a tricky spot in Euro 2024 Group F.

They have a point after two games.

Georgia coach Willy Sagnol said his players' disappointment at their opening defeat showed how far his team has come, and they gave everything in Hamburg to earn their first Euros point.

Goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili made a string of superb saves to keep his team in the game and they took the lead just before the break through Georges Mikautadze's penalty.

However Schick reprised his Euro 2020 goalscoring heroics with an improvised finish to leave honours even at the end of a pulsating clash.

Paudel, Airee and Lamichhane to play Global T20 Canada

SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, JUNE 22

Nepal captain Rohit Paudel, all rounder Dipendra Singh Airee and leg spinner Sandeep Lamichhane are all set to participate in the 2024 Global T20 Canada League.

Lamichhane and Airee were drafted by Vancouver Knights alongside Pakistani cricketers Babar Azam, Mohammad Amir, and Mohammad Rizwan.

Vancouver also features star associate players Paul van Meekeren of the Netherlands, Namibia's Ruben Truempelmann, and Canada's Jeremy Gordon.

Lamichhane previously played for Montreal Tigers and Nationals.

Airee won the title with Montreal last edition.

Paudel will be playing his first franchise league outside Nepal as he was signed by Toronto Nationals, which also signed New Zealand's Colin Munro, Pakistan's Shaheen Afridi and South African Rassie Van Der Dussen.

The fourth edition of the Global T20 Canada will take place from July 25 to August 11 this year.

Chile and Peru share spoils

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE ARLINGTON, JUNE 22

Two-time Copa America champions Chile opened their bid for a third title with a hard-fought 0-0 draw against Peru in Arlington on Saturday.

A scrappy encounter at the Texas home of the Dallas Cowboys NFL team saw neither side manage to get on top before a result that boosts Argentina's hopes of winning Group A.

Chile were left ruing a golden missed chance from veteran Inter Milan forward Alexis Sanchez in the 16th minute.

Sanchez, one of the heroes of Chile's back-to-back Copa America victories in 2015 and 2016, was teed up in the six-yard box after a low pass from Victor Davila. But with plenty of time and space, the 35-year-old somehow scooped his shot over the bar as Peru were given a huge let-off.

Peru's best chance came near the hour mark when Gianluca Lapadula volleyed over from close range.

The result leaves Argentina, 2-0 winners over Canada in the tournament's opening game on Friday, two points clear at the top.

Chile face Argentina in their second match on Wednesday in New Jersey in a replay of the 2016 Copa Centenario final at the same venue.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Boundaries will be your friend, dearest Aries, encouraging you to focus on healing. Use this energy to connect with your priorities, ensuring you're not making sacrifices that will be difficult to recover from later. Strokes of genius could lead to your next bold move.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Forge social engagements to focus on your deepest needs this morning, dear Taurus. Unexpected twists could bring you out of your shell this afternoon when Uranus activates, putting you in the mood for adventure. You may also manifest blessings.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Seek solitude while meditating on ways to reinvent yourself, unleashing igneous ideas that can propel you forward. Visualise your goals for the work week ahead, asking you to dream big within professional aspirations. You'll benefit from extra luck.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Don't let pragmatic thinking cut you off from spiritual beliefs, dearest Cancer. Unexpected plans could emerge this afternoon, encouraging you to embrace love while exploring your community. This energy could also lead to unexpected romantic connections.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

Focus on any items remaining on your weekend to-do list this morning, dearest Leo. Just remember to carve out time for adventure as well. You'll have the power to break free from cycles or habits you're ready to outgrow.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Acknowledge if you've been putting off personal goals, dearest Virgo. Look closely at how your closest relationships have impacted your ability to grow, setting boundaries if you need to pull back and focus on yourself. The stars shine fondly upon you.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

You may feel emotionally off balance, sweet Libra, marking the perfect excuse to lay low from home. Consider hosting an impromptu lunch at your place this afternoon, putting you in the mood to connect with and nurture loved ones.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Get your creative affairs in order this morning, Scorpio, especially if your passion projects have been collecting dust recently. Excitement fills the air, especially when you take time to nurture friendships or pursue romantic interests.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Battle insecurities by reciting positive mantras and surrounding yourself with supportive friendships, dearest Sagittarius. Embrace wellness by treating yourself to healthy foods and activities this afternoon, urging you to live healthily without restricting yourself.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

The moon takes its final steps through your sign, dearest Capricorn. Choose company and activities that put your mind at ease, giving yourself space to fully relax before another work week rolls in. Creative breakthroughs find you.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Be mindful of how you communicate with yourself and others, dearest Aquarius, or you may hurt yourself and those you love most. Luckily, you'll have a chance to chase away the blues or any tension that may have arisen earlier.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Steer clear of people, situations, or electronics that cause you to pull away from the present, sweet Pisces. If you've struggled to find your gratitude recently, consider spending time in nature to recharge. Exciting news could land in your lap.

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS: 1 Hard to get, 5 Golden-touch king, 10 Recipe amount, 14 Picture, 15 Speechify, 16 Writer — Stanley Gardner, 17 Vaunt, 18 Modest eatery, 19 Burn the surface of, 20 Solemn, 22 Tropical fruit, 24 Humorist poet, 25 Animal fluids, 26 Car parker, 29 Most ornate, 33 "I'm at — for words!", 34 Promote, 35 Rajah's mate, 36 Actress — Tyler, 37 Mere show, 38 Young woman, 39 On the rocks, 41 Hint, 42 Lethargic, 44 Wishful for, 46 Painful spots, 47 Transgressions, 48 Tranquil, 50 Runway surface, 53 Anti, 57 Genus of olives

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED grid with words like MONO, TRIP, EMIT, EVER, RODEO, MASH, SARAI, INERT, BILE, SLOGAN, ATTORNEY, I L K, HERA, GRAND, RECAPS, RED, ATTAR, MEDAL, ALOT, APE, DATE, CABOT, HINGE, PIE, EYELET, DOORSTOP, LARA, USE, OVER, RUNS, LENGTH, MILO, ENOLA, SARA, ALL, ROLLS, OMEN, READ, YEAS, REED, Raring to go, Split, Catch, Cape in Alaska, Field, Notice, Ankle bone, Try, Queen of the Plains, Disheartens, 59 — Plains, Curved inward, Table scrap, "La — Bonita", Small, as a fee, Estuary, Chili con —, Moorehead of "Bewitched", Weighty volume, Actor —, Rickman

13x13 crossword grid with numbers 1-67 indicating starting points for clues.

SUDOKU

9x9 Sudoku grid with numbers and empty cells. Includes 'YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION' and 'DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★'.

This summer, I saw the Everest up-close

The journey was not only about the physical climb, but also an inner discovery.

○ **MEDIHA DIDEM TÜREMEN**

How much oxygen do you have for the summit?" I think this is the kind of question a film producer would ask. But when you're on the mountain, the answer is never clear.

I have worked for a long time in the film industry and in different areas of art, especially photography and engraving.

Working in various fields and drawing inspiration from them has become a new normal for me. Without even realising it, I have made this approach my way of life.

I took responsibility for producing the last movie I worked on and shot the behind-the-scenes footage for a documentary. By doing so, I witnessed the entire shooting process and the journey of a movie.



TRAVEL

In the snowy highlands of Turkey, we had to endure the consequences of the changing climate to shoot 'About Dry Grasses', directed by Nuri Bilge Ceylan. The highlands used to be snowy in January, but by the time we got there in the same month, there was no snow. Nature was changing. It was responding to what was happening—to what humanity had done to it.

In the end, it snowed, and we shot the intense snow scenes we wanted. But since most of our days were sunny, unlike what the director wanted, we had to shoot in the sunset and sunrise hours.

As crew members, we spent many days waiting for the sun to set.

Production requires creating opportunities, finding solutions, and being creative for a work of art to come true. For this, patience, endurance, calmness, and timing are necessary. On the other hand, nature wanted us to listen to it and wait for the right time.

During that time, I witnessed many of nature's lessons. For example, I experienced extreme cold for the first time. We endured temperatures ranging from -33 degrees to +55 degrees. By listening to nature, surrendering to its forces, and working within its limits, we managed to persevere.

No matter how much you prepare or plan during the pre-production phase, if you are working in nature, remember that nature will always have the final say.

The film was completed, released, and connected with audiences. Its success at Cannes 2023 was followed by my trip to the North Pole for my own project. I returned with a mix of wonderful developments,



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MEDIHA DIDEM TÜREMEN

On the way to Everest Base Camp.

joys, and challenges. During this process, I experienced life and death, happiness and sadness, losses and awards.

I realised the value of being able to breathe comfortably a few days after my father's chemotherapy ended. Just a few days earlier, he had said, "Well done, my daughter. I'm glad you went!"

All the anxiety and hard work, filled with fears at the beginning, were finally behind me.

Before going to Everest, when I was on the verge of giving up, defeated by my fears, I remembered my father's words. Everest reminded me of what he said while struggling to breathe, adding a turning point to my life.

What does it mean to say 'life's turning point'? How many turning points can there be in life?

Who am I, and what am I doing in this world? How well do I know my own limits? Can I find answers to these big questions?

These thoughts sparked my dream of journeying to Everest. Now, after returning, I can say that it turned my life around.

"How much oxygen do you need for the summit?" sounds more like "How much do you need to hold on to life?"

How many reasons do you find that give meaning to your life, keep you alive, and allow you to breathe? How much can you endure in the face of obstacles, and can you keep believing that a solution will eventually come your way?

Can these questions really be separated from the idea of measuring and assessing something, from learning its quantity and financial value? Can everything be known with certainty? Should the journey be fully understood in advance, with all its promises laid out? Should it be viewed like a purchase with a price tag, asking, "Is this journey worth this much?"

I had never trekked before and had no climbing experience. I had lived at sea level my entire life and had never been to a high altitude.

However, this journey was not only about the physical climb but also an inner discovery. After losing my father to lung cancer, his breathing difficulties taught me the fragility of breath, life, and existence.

I also mentally prepared myself for the physical challenges I might face. Despite all my concerns, could this journey help me understand the cycle of life and the resilience of the soul?

So, how could I make this trek possible? How could I land in Nepal? Despite all the economic difficulties and the many things I felt needed organising, I did my best and believed in it.

Since I was embarking on this journey, I felt I should share about my travels and inspire others.

Starting with photography, cinema, and engraving, which are already integral parts of my life, I dreamed of documenting and sharing the inspiring aspects of this journey.

After months of correspondence and dreaming, it all came true. Finally, I embarked on the journey with the goal of creating photographs, engravings,

and documentaries.

I learned a great deal from my travels in Nepal, from the people I met, and from every moments I witnessed. I felt incredibly fortunate to have been able to honour my father's memory with the peace and serenity I experienced in the Himalayas.

During my 15-day journey to Everest Base Camp, I encountered nature's masterpieces at every turn. As concerns like "How will I endure?" and "How will I finish?" started to weigh on me, the mountains suddenly parted with the clouds and gazed down at me.

The appearance of 'Gods' that I had never seen before, in such immense size and in such a close, awe-inspiring manner, beside me during that silent walk, was amazing to witness.

On my way back home after 21 days, I celebrated my birthday on the plane.

As someone who came from one of the most crowded cities in the world, Istanbul, while I struggled with my daily questions and uncertainties, trying to control everything, they stood there calmly, as if answering me.

They were just there—before and after. My guide, Lakhpa Sherpa, always reminded me not to worry about how high we were, how long it would take to reach our accommodation, or what the weather would be like. He encouraged me to live in the moment, and he was right.

He advised me to focus on my breathing, not to get thirsty, to eat enough, and to appreciate the extraordinary beauty of the journey. In the mountains, plans dissolve and each moment is embraced as it comes.

All the good wishes, prayers, and everything encountered along the way were for the journey itself. The mountain was full of life, secrets, and everything I had wondered about.

This 15-day journey to Everest Base Camp was a solo adventure, yet I wouldn't have been able to complete it without my guide, Lhakpa, and my porter. Additionally, I was fortunate enough to experience the hospitality, generosity, and honesty at Trekkers Paradise, which organised the entire journey and provided guidance.

I witnessed how dedication and sincerity are crucial in completing a journey safely and healthily. Ghanshyam Sharma, from Trekkers Paradise and Sauraj Jhingan, a climber who summited the Everest in 2018, shared their experiences with me during the journey.

They experienced the 2015 earthquake while they were at the Everest Base Camp.

As a filmmaker, their role as actors, and attention to detail played a significant role in bringing my dream photography and documentary project to life.

The sponsors of my journey were Turkish Airlines, The North Face, Apple, Canon, and Stanley. My supporters include Oscar International College and Nepal Film Campus. Throughout the journey, I shared many experiences, memories, and countless photos and images with my students.

On my way back home after 21 days, I celebrated my birthday on the plane. From the right window, the Himalayas bid me farewell. I felt like I had opened a new chapter in my life, and I was certain that I would return.

I had made many friends and memories in Nepal.

For now, I will be working on a documentary and preparing for a photography and engraving exhibition titled 'My Soul Beyond the Mountain'.

To the Himalayas: This summer was spent with you, but we will meet again soon.

Türemen is a Turkish artist specialising in film, photography, and engraving. She has worked as a producer, production designer, and actress.



In the mountains, plans dissolve and each moment is embraced as it comes.

UK fans wonder if Taylor Swift will say 'So long, London' after Eras Tour

London is the only city on the tour where Swift is stopping twice. Some worry the arrangement may represent a swan song of sorts.

○ **LISA LEFF**
LONDON

Taylor Swift fans enjoy parsing the singer-songwriter's lyrics for references to her romantic life and insights into her state of mind.

But the pop superstar's fans in the UK didn't have to listen closely to her latest album, 'The Tortured Poets Department,' to get the sense that Swift had soured on the country's capital city after long making it a regular hangout and then her second home. The record's fifth track is titled 'So Long, London.'

The capital is putting on quite a show to make sure Swift and her fans feel appreciated.

As Swift brings her blockbuster Eras Tour to London's Wembley Stadium, some Swifties therefore are wondering if they are witnessing the beginning of an extended goodbye. She is performing three nights

starting Friday and is scheduled to return to Wembley for six nights in August to close the tour's European leg.

London is the only city on the tour where Swift is stopping twice. Some worry the arrangement may represent a swan song of sorts, while others think it just reflects a new era in Swift's bond with the Big Smoke. Whether 'So Long, London' turns out to be a final chapter or a bookend to her valentine to the city, the song "London Boy," Eras is arriving as an emotional milestone.

"Her relationship now kind of assumes London won't be somewhere she will be. It's not like there is an American football player living here," said Maggie Fekete, 22, a Canadian graduate student who credits the London references in Swift's music with orienting her when she moved to the city three years ago. "I think there will be a lot less London in her music, which is sad."

For those who haven't been paying attention, Swift had a series of romances with famous British citizens, starting with Harry Styles in 2012 and ending last year when she started dating Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce. The speculation surrounding "So Long, London"



Swift performs at the Tokyo Dome, in February in Tokyo.

and a mournful companion song that mentions a London pub, "The Black Dog," stems from the 2023 breakup of Swift and English actor Joe Alwyn, who were together for over six years.

Alwyn is assumed to have inspired 'London Boy', a song from her 2019 album 'Lover'. A special-edition 'Lover' CD included what appeared to be a January 2017 diary entry in which Swift talked about being "essentially based in London" but trying to lay low. British tabloids later reported that Swift spent much of the COVID-19 pandemic sheltering with Alwyn in north London.

The Sun newspaper reported in December that the multiple Grammy winner had bought a large property in the area and was remodelling it to be her base in Europe. After Swift released 'The Tortured Poets Department' last month, however, a writer for the British edition of ELLE magazine observed that Londoners had an opening "for an all-American A-lister who can slot into her place in our collective consciousness." "We had Swift before we lost her to her

record-breaking, box office-breaking Eras Tour and now, it would appear that her vacant position has been filled by Zendaya," writer Naomi May playfully posited before listing the various locations the American actor had been spotted with her longtime boyfriend, British actor Tom Holland.

Either way, the capital is putting on quite a show to make sure Swift and her fans feel appreciated. Guides are offering walking, bus, and taxi tours that retrace her footsteps, including a kebab shop whose owner says his establishment will supply sandwiches for the singer and her crew on Friday.

Before the end of August, Swifties can partake in a full diet of Swift-themed brunches and dance parties or ride the London Eye Ferris wheel accompanied by a string quartet playing her music. Souvenir stalls in Camden Market, one of the places mentioned in "London Boy," have stocked up on Swift-specific caps, T-shirts, bags, and stickers in preparation.

"We're very proud that London is hosting more shows than any other city on Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour, a real testament to her love for London," Laura Citron, CEO of tourism agency London & Partners, said.

— Associated Press