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Trump confident, even when wrong, Biden halting, even with facts on his side

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, JUNE 28

The presidential debate was a re-run that featured two candidates with a combined age of 159, but it went especially poorly for one of them, President Joe Biden.

Already fighting voter concerns about his age, Biden, 81, was halting and seemed to lose his train of thought on Thursday night, sparking quick concerns among Democrats about the man they hope will keep former President Donald Trump from returning to office.

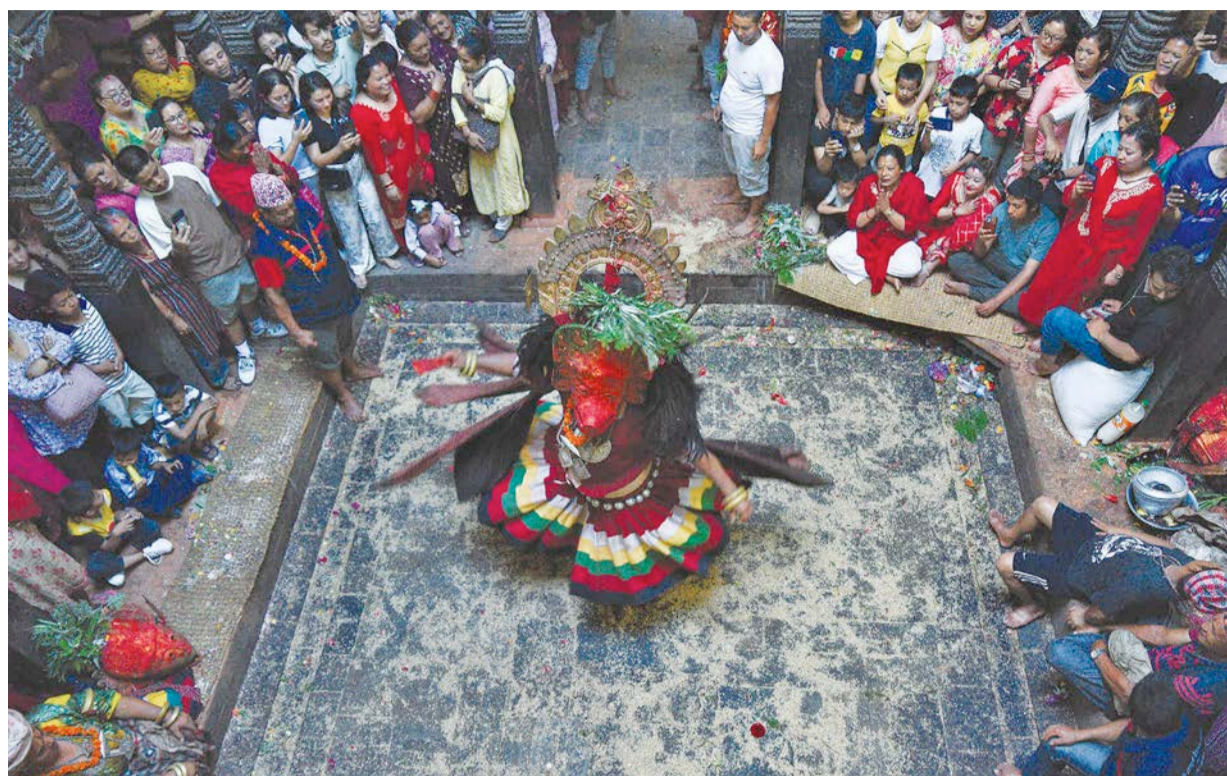


AP/RSS
This combination of photos shows Donald Trump and Joe Biden during a presidential debate hosted by CNN, on Thursday.

For his part, Trump made repeated false claims and provocative statements. But Trump seemed smoother and more vigorous than Biden, who is only three years older than the Republican ex-president.

The debate covered a wide range of topics and included a former president—Trump—not backing down from his vows to prosecute members of Congress and even the man he was debating. But the overarching theme was the difference between the candidates' performance. Here are some takeaways from the face-off.

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POST PHOTO: SAFAL PRAKASH SHRESTHA
A devotee dressed as Navadurga deity performs a dance at Navadurga Temple in Bhaktapur on Friday. The ritual depicts gods' death and fall on the temple yard as the divine tantrik energy leaves their body. The masks are then burnt on a pyre at Hanumanghat in the district.

Political parties resume talks on overdue transitional justice bill revision

On the agenda: Concerns of victims not directly involved, consensus on reduced sentencing

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JUNE 28

Cross-party discussions to amend the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act that had stalled after the changes in the ruling coalition in March first week, have resumed.

A meeting of top leaders from three

major parties, along with their chief whips, on Thursday agreed to finalise the amendment bill, which is being discussed in the Law, Justice and Human Rights Commission of the House of Representatives.

The meeting called by Prime Minister and CPN (Maoist Centre) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal also decided to task the chief whips of the

parties to find common ground on the contentious provisions in the bill. Dahal, Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba, who is also the leader of the main opposition, and ruling coalition partner CPN-UML chair KP Sharma Oli at the meeting decided to entrust the cross-party team with the responsibility.

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Nepal Airlines to make a third try to sell Chinese planes

There have already been two unsuccessful auctions to lease the aircraft and as many failed bids to sell them off.

SANGAM PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, JUNE 28

Trouble is brewing for Nepal Airlines after no bidders appeared to buy the Chinese planes in multiple round auctions.

The six condemned planes—four 17-seater Y12e aircraft and two 56-seater MA60 aircraft—were acquired between 2014 and 2018 and were worth Rs6.66 billion in grants and loans. One crashed in Nepalgunj.

The five planes have been grounded at the remote parking bay on the eastern side of Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu since 2020 and are gathering rust.

In July 2020, the board of directors of Nepal Airlines unanimously decided to stop flying the Chinese planes as they cost more money to operate than they brought in.

Nepal Airlines twice issued notices to lease them out on September 14, 2022, but no one was interested.

Then, Nepal Airlines decided to get rid of them permanently.

On January 19, the airline requested proposals for a full appraisal of the two MA60 and three Y12e aircraft.

An American company that did the appraisal valued the aircraft at Rs220 million.

But fearing selling the aircraft at junkyard price may attract the anti-graft body's interest, Nepal Airlines management decided to

do a separate internal assessment. As per the Nepal Airlines value, the asking price of the MA60s, with registration mark 9N-AKR, was \$8,225,501; for 9N-AKQ, it was \$4,922,235.

Similarly, the asking price for Y12e,

Five planes have been grounded at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu since 2020.

with registration mark 9N-AKV, was \$2,412,671, 9N-AKT was valued at \$2,358,860 and 9N-AKS at \$1,658,517.

In contrast to the valuation made by the American company, Nepal Airlines set the asking price of five Chinese planes at \$19,577,784 (Rs2.60 billion).

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NATIONAL

Rising gun use in elephant poaching in east Nepal alarms conservationists

They claim authorities' lax response to the crime has emboldened poachers.



POST PHOTO: PARBAT PORTEL

A male elephant killed by poachers using a musket and discovered at Bahuban in Mechinagar Municipality in Jhapa district on Thursday. Fifteen musket shrapnels were found in the body.

○ **PARBAT PORTEL**
BIRATNAGAR, JUNE 28

Conservationists have raised concerns over the unchecked poaching of wild elephants in the eastern Tarai districts. They suspect that an organised racket and smugglers might be behind these crimes.

On Thursday, a wild elephant was found dead in the Bahuban area in ward 3 of Mechinagar Municipality in Jhapa. The elephant was lying dead near the Dhardhare stream with deep injuries around its neck. A postmortem carried out by veterinarians and technicians from the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve confirmed that the elephant died of gunshot injuries. The slain elephant was a male of around 10 years of age.

"Fifteen musket shrapnels were found in the elephant's body during the postmortem. The tusker died of gunshot injuries," said Bed Prakash Bhandari, Jhapa chairman of the Federation of Community Forestry Users in Nepal. On April 16, another wild elephant was found dead in Kalika Community Forest situated in ward 13 of Mechinagar Municipality. Both tusks of the 45-year-old male elephant were missing.

The postmortem report had confirmed that poachers killed the tusker by using a musket. The poachers made off with the tusks, tail and hooves of the elephant.

Conservationists suspect that a group of trans-border poachers and smugglers is involved in the unchecked poaching of wild elephants in the area.

"The frequent poaching and death of wild ele-

phants are quite alarming. An organised group of poachers and smugglers might have been involved in these crimes. The tusks, tails and other body parts are taken away from almost all the killed elephants," said conservationist Shankar Luitel. He expressed his concerns about the increasing use of guns in poaching wild elephants.

On January 1, the poachers killed a wild elephant in Janajagaran Community Forest in ward 10 of Sundar Haraincha Municipality in Morang district. According to Lal Bahadur Majhi, officer at the Division Forest Office in Salakpur in the district, the dead elephant had sustained two gunshot injuries. It was suspected that the smugglers killed the animal as its tail was chopped off.

Besides tusks, the hairs on an elephant's tail fetch a high price on the black market. The tail hair is used alongside gold to make bracelets and other ornaments.

The nature of poaching in Mechinagar and Sundar Haraincha is almost the same. The assailants, however, could not take away the tusks and tail of the elephant killed on Thursday.

The human-elephant conflict is a longstanding problem in the eastern Tarai districts of Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari. Bahundangi in Jhapa is one of Nepal's hardest-hit settlements by human-animal conflict. In the past 10 years, wild elephants have killed more than 50 people and destroyed properties worth millions of rupees.

According to conservationists, Bahundangi and its surrounding areas serve as a corridor for elephant movement. Studies show that elephants from Assam and West Bengal in India migrate to Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve in Nepal through

Bahundangi. Experts say that instances of human-wildlife conflict are recurring because of the human encroachment on the bio-corridor over the years.

Many elephants were killed in the area by electric traps. But there have been recent reports of poaching using guns and muskets.

According to the Division Forest Office in Jhapa, four elephants were killed in Jhapa and two others were poached in Morang over the past three months. Three of them were electrocuted while as many others were poached by using guns and muskets.

"The elephants were mainly killed by using electric traps in the past. But the incidents of using muskets to poach the pachyderms have been on the rise lately," said Anjana Puri, officer at the forest office.

As per the data from the Division Forest Office in Jhapa, a total of 21 wild elephants have been killed over the past two decades in Jhapa alone. Among them, only one was a female elephant.

The local people in the area install electric fencing to protect their homes and crops from wild elephants. Most of the elephants were killed by these electric traps. Conservationists claim that the authorities concerned seem reluctant to take strong action against the ongoing poaching of the wild tuskers.

"The poachers feel encouraged because the authorities do not take strong action against the poaching of wild elephants. The authorities should take stringent initiative to control the ongoing poaching of wild elephants," said a conservationist preferring anonymity.

Previously stalled by UML, Congress now reluctant to advance transitional justice revision bill

>> Continued from page 1

"We have agreed to reach a consensus on the contentious issues in the bill," Nepali Congress Chief Whip Ramesh Lekhak told the Post. "We chief whips of the three parties have been tasked to resume dialogue to find common ground."

So long as the Maoist-Congress alliance was intact, the two parties unanimously advocated for the bill's endorsement. But the UML was not ready. Before endorsement, the bill needed to be revised, adhering to international standards and ensuring that it prohibited amnesty.

The two parties accused the UML of politicising the matter and creating barriers to its endorsement. But the dynamics changed with a change in the ruling coalition. Breaking his year-long ties with the Congress, Dahal, on March 4, joined hands with the UML and the Rastriya Swatantra Party. Since then, the Congress has been reluctant to proceed with the bill.

Since March 3, a day before the previous coalition broke, there had been no discussion on the bill.

Talking to the Post, Padam Giri, minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs who was present at Thursday's meeting, said the ruling and opposition parties have realised that the Act should be amended without further delay in order to bring the transitional justice process on track.

"Further delaying the process means making it more complex. All the parties realise that the long-pending process must be concluded at the earliest," Giri told the Post.

He said while the three chief whips will continue the discussion, the top leadership will also sit again for an agreement. "I expect that the next meeting, which will be held shortly, will make some breakthrough in order to resolve the contentious issues."

The amendment bill was registered in the lower house in March last year and sent to the House committee for finalisation. However, differences persist.

After over a year-long discussions, the parliamentary committee narrowed down the differences to four points. In March first week, it further reduced the differences to two points after the parties agreed to list arbitrary killings as serious violation of human rights (thus non-amnestiable), and to open the doors for the victims, who refuse to reconcile,



POST ILLUSTRATION

for prosecution.

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 settle what happens in case the victims of human rights violations refuse to reconcile. The issues were settled after the UML showed flexibility.

Now, the parties have two major issues to settle. They differ on how to address the concerns of those affected by the conflict even if they were not directly involved. They also have not found a meeting point on reduced sentencing.

The delay in amending the Act has left the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission for the Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons paralysed for around two years.

In July 2022, the Deuba government decided to extend the terms of the commissions without retaining their chairs and members. Despite the government's claim that the amendment bill would be endorsed by October 2022, which would also open the door for recruiting new office bearers, there has been no progress even after the latest extension.

The government is preparing to give a new lease of life to the commissions whose terms are set to expire on July 15. Though a task force led by former Chief Justice Om Prakash Mishra has been formed to nominate candidates for office bearers in the commissions, it has yet to start its work.

Conflict victims and human rights defenders are demanding that appointments be made only after amending the Act. "I am hopeful that the Act will be amended during the ongoing session of the federal parliament," said Giri, the law minister.

Three charge in court over Sidhakura 'fake content'

Kathmandu District Attorney's Office files a case against three persons who produced the audio content and aired it.

○ **POST REPORT**
KATHMANDU, JUNE 28

The Kathmandu District Attorney's Office on Friday filed a case at the Kathmandu District Court against three individuals in connection with the defamatory content published by sidhakura.com, a Kathmandu-based news website.

The attorney's office filed the case against the news portal's publisher Yubaraj Kandel, executive editor Nabin Dhungana and Rajkumar Timilsina, who has been accused of producing the fake audio content.

The state prosecutor has demanded that the defendants be sentenced to five years in jail and pay a fine of Rs100,000 or face both.

According to Sandesh Shrestha, chief of the

Kathmandu District Attorney's Office, the case was filed in accordance with the Electronic Transactions Act 2008 and section 168 of the Criminal Code 2017.

On April 27, an audiovisual content, claiming that the chairpersons of two leading media houses—Kantipur Publications Limited and Annapurna Media Network—were part of a meeting with an incumbent and former Supreme Court justices and senior advocates to dismiss over 400 corruption cases in the court, was aired on sidhakura.com.

A division bench of Supreme Court justices Nahakul Subedi and Tek Prasad Dhungana, on April 29, rubbished the legitimacy of the published material, concluding that it was a malicious attempt to defame the judiciary, obstruct the judicial proceedings and scandalise the court.

The Central Investigation Bureau of Nepal Police was then asked to carry out forensic tests to check the authenticity of the audio-visual material. The police investigation team later confirmed that it was fabricated.

The case was then forwarded to the Supreme Court's extended full bench for a final hearing, stressing the need for a comprehensive judicial interpretation of freedom of expression and press freedom.

The police moved the district court per the top court's order that asked the security agency to investigate the factual and technical aspects of the audio-visual materials (forensic test) and to proceed with legal action and submit a report to the court, if it is found that the prevailing criminal law has been violated.

Debate performance deepens concerns over Biden's ability to compete against Trump

>> Continued from page 1

Biden doesn't allay fears about his age

Presidential debates are often scored on style and impression more than substance. Trump was confident and composed, even as he steamrolled facts on abortion and immigration with false assertions, conspicuous exaggerations and empty superlatives. Biden was often halting, his voice raspy, even when he had the facts on his side. He had difficulty finishing his arguments and marshalling his attacks.

Trump's supporters have seemed unconcerned about his relationship with the truth, and his performance and delivery helped him. Biden's supporters consistently express concern about the president's age and capacity and he did little to reassure them.

One of the first glimpses viewers got of Biden was when he lost his train of thought while making his case on tax rates and the number of billionaires in America—trailing off and looking down at his lectern before mumbling briefly and saying "we finally beat Medicare." When he tried to finish his point, he was cut off because of the time limits.

At other times, Biden made some puzzling non sequiturs that seemed to undercut what the campaign has said are his strong points, including the economy and abortion rights. As Biden critiqued Trump's economic record, the president suddenly pivoted to Afghanistan and how Trump "didn't do anything about that"—although the botched withdrawal of Afghanistan is widely considered one of the lowest points of

Biden's presidency.

Later, as Biden singled out state restrictions on abortion, he confusingly pivoted to immigration and referred to a "young woman who was just murdered" by an immigrant. It was unclear what point he was trying to make.

Trump won't condemn January 6 attackers, giving Biden an opening

Trump was cruising through the opening of the debate when he suddenly stumbled over the question of how he would reassure voters that he would respect his oath of office after the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol.

He continued to engage in denialism about the attack and refused to denounce those who attacked police and stormed the building by breaking doors and windows. He suggested that those charged will somehow be found one day to be innocent.

More than 1,400 people have been charged with federal offences stemming from the riot. Of those, more than 850 people have pleaded guilty to crimes, including seditious conspiracy and assaulting police officers. About 200 others have been convicted at trial.

Trump tried to avoid addressing the issue. He defended the people who stormed the Capitol, blaming Biden for prosecuting them. "What they've done to some people who are so innocent, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," Trump told Biden.

Trump warned that the members of the congressional committee that investigated January 6 could face criminal charges, as could Biden himself. Biden shot back: "The only

person on this stage who's a convicted felon is the man I'm looking at."

Trump didn't back down from his vow to seek vengeance. Coupled with his refusal to condemn the January 6 attackers, it made for a stark moment.

Asked if he would accept the results of the election, Trump said, "if it's a fair and legal and good election, absolutely," which notably is not an unqualified yes.

Biden hits Trump on conviction, allegation of sex with a porn star

In what may well be a first in a presidential campaign, Trump called the president, Biden, a "criminal" and said he could well be prosecuted after he leaves office. Biden then brought Trump's recent criminal trial in New York in which prosecutors presented evidence that Trump had sex with a porn actor. "I didn't have sex with a porn star," Trump said.

On abortion, Trump falsely says everyone is happy, and Biden misses an opportunity

Abortion is an issue Democrats think could help deliver a victory in November. Trump in 2016 campaigned on overturning Roe v. Wade, and as president appointed three Supreme Court justices who provided the deciding votes revoking the 49-year right to the procedure. In response to a question from the moderators, Trump vowed not to go further if he returns to the White House, where his administration would have the authority to outlaw the abortion pill mifepristone, which is widely used.

Overturning Roe is one of Trump's greatest political vulnerabilities, but

on Thursday the former president contended everyone was happy with what he did.

"As far as abortion's concerned it's back to the states," Trump said, contending the Founding Fathers would have been happy with the end of Roe. "Everybody wanted it brought back."

That's not true. Polls have shown significant opposition to overturning Roe and voters have punished Republicans in recent elections for it. "The idea that the founders wanted the politicians to be the ones making the decisions about women's health is ridiculous," Biden shot back.

In a unanimous decision this month, the Supreme Court preserved access to mifepristone, a pill that was used in nearly two-thirds of all abortions in the US last year.

Until Thursday, Trump had not detailed his position on access to the medication, but during the debate he indicated he supported the justices' decision, saying: "I will not block it."

But when it was his turn to speak, Biden stumbled through his explanation of Roe, which he said "had three trimesters"—a lost opportunity for the Democrat to make a strong rhetorical case on an issue vital for his party.

"The first time is between a woman and a doctor," Biden continued. "Second time is between a doctor and an extreme situation. A third time is between the doctor, I mean, between the women and the state."

Trump blunts Biden's border progress with dark rhetoric

In recent months, Biden has tried to reverse his poor public standing over his handling of immigration, first by

endorsing a bipartisan Senate proposal with some of the toughest border restrictions in recent memory and then, after that legislation collapsed, taking executive action to clamp down on migrants seeking asylum at the southern border.

But as Biden tried to tout the progress he's made, particularly the 40 percent drop in illegal border crossings since his border directive was implemented this month, Trump invoked his trademark dark and catastrophic rhetoric to paint a portrait of a chaotic border under Biden's watch.

For example, Trump argued that the migrants arriving at the US border are coming from "mental institutions" and "insane asylums"—a frequent refrain of his at rallies for which he has offered no evidence. He also claimed the US-Mexico border is the "most dangerous place anywhere in the world" and cited examples of immigrants in the US illegally who had committed violent crimes.

Though some immigrants do commit horrific crimes, a 2020 study published by the National Academy of Sciences found "considerably lower felony arrest rates" among people in the United States illegally than among legal immigrants or native-born. But Trump often benefits from his certitude.

It's the economy, and Trump says Biden is stupid

The debate began with Biden defending his record on the economy, saying he inherited an economy that was "in a freefall" as it was battered by the coronavirus pandemic and that his administration put it back

together again. But after Biden touted his administration's accomplishments—such as lowering the cost of insulin and the creation of millions of new jobs—Trump boasted that he oversaw the "greatest economy in the history of our country" and defended his record on the pandemic.

Biden retorted: "He's the only one who thinks that." But Trump responding by attacking him on inflation arguing that he inherited low rates of inflation when he came into office in January 2021 yet prices "blew up under his leadership."

One of Biden's strongest moments is about veterans

Biden—whose deceased son, Beau, served in Iraq—had one of his most forceful moments when he went on the attack against Trump's reported comments in 2018 that he declined to visit a US military cemetery in France because veterans buried there were "suckers" and "losers."

It was an argument that Biden, then the Democratic challenger, made against Trump in their first 2020 debate and one that the incumbent president has regularly used against Trump, framing him as a commander in chief who nonetheless disparages veterans. "My son was not a loser; was not a sucker," Biden said. "You're the sucker. You're the loser."

Trump responded that the publication that initially reported this comments, The Atlantic, "was a third-rate magazine" and had made up the quotes. But undercutting Trump's retort is the fact that his former chief of staff, John Kelly, confirmed those private remarks in a statement last fall.

Son of ex-home minister Thapa arrested in connection with Bhutanese refugee scam

Prateek Thapa was among those listed as absconding in a case filed at the Kathmandu District Court last year.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JUNE 28

Police on Friday arrested Prateek Thapa, son of CPN-UML Vice-chair and former home minister Ram Bahadur Thapa, in connection with the fake Bhutanese refugee scam.

According to Assistant Inspector General of Police Deepak Thapa, he was taken into police custody from Bouddha, Kathmandu.

The junior Thapa was among those listed as absconding in a case filed by the Kathmandu District Attorney's Office at the Kathmandu District Court last year. Investigation had revealed that Prateek, during his father's tenure as the home minister, was involved in the crime in collusion with senior officials at the ministry and other middlemen.

He had been on the run since March 2015 after police started to take those accused of the crime into custody. On



Prateek Thapa

May 4 last year, Prateek issued a statement saying that he was ready to cooperate in the investigation but was still absconding.

In June last year, police arrested former home minister Balkrishna Khand of Nepali Congress, former deputy prime minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi of the CPN-UML, former home secretary Tek Narayan Pandey, former home minister Thapa's security adviser Indrajit Rai, Khand's personal secretary Narendra KC, former Nepali Congress lawmaker Aang Tawa Sherpa and Bhutanese refugee leader Tek Nath Rizal, among others. The case is sub judice in the court.

Police filed the cases against the politicians, top officials and middlemen on charges of swindling hundreds of people promising them to send them to the United States as Bhutanese refugees.

UML-Maoist Centre power struggle derails Sebon chief appointment

Applications for securities issuance worth billions pending as leadership position vacant for over three months.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JUNE 28

The process to appoint the chairman at the Securities Board of Nepal (Sebon) was cancelled on Friday.

The Ministry of Finance issued a notice on Friday stating that the recommendation process was cancelled. Back on January 17, the government formed a three-member committee led by the Vice Chairman of the National Planning Commission, Min Bahadur Shrestha, to recommend a candidate for chairman of the Sebon to the Cabinet. Two members of the committee were Finance Secretary Madhu Kumar Marasini and Prof Udaya Niraula.

As per the mandate, the Shrestha-led committee on February 28 invited applications from interested individuals. However, the Finance Ministry's notice on Friday announced that the entire recommendation process was cancelled.

Earlier, responding to the committee's call, 19 candidates had submitted their applications to lead the country's only security board. The recommendation committee later short-listed five candidates for

the interview.

The five shortlisted candidates were Nabaraj Adhikari, Chiranjivi Chapagain, Krishna Bahadur Karki, Mukti Nath Shrestha, and Santosh Shrestha. However, only two candidates, Mukti Nath Shrestha and Santosh Shrestha, appeared in the interview. Sources inside the Finance Ministry told the Post that both Shresthas were backed by the ruling party, CPN-UML, while Adhikari, Chapagain, and Karki were regarded as close to the CPN (Maoist Centre), the prime minister's party.

After only two candidates appeared in the interview, the recommendation committee informed the three candidates—Adhikari, Chapagain, and Karki—to reappear in the interview and set a new date.

Despite this, the three did not appear in the interview the second time. As per the Sebon Act, it is compulsory to recommend at least three names to the Cabinet for the final selection.

When the committee failed to recommend three names even after the second round, the Shrestha-led committee sought legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General. The

Office of the Attorney General communicated to the recommendation committee that the entire selection process would be invalid if three names were not recommended to the Cabinet.

Government formed a three-member panel led by NPC vice chair to recommend a candidate for Sebon chair.

"The Attorney General's office explained that it is not possible to recommend only two people who participated in the interview, then we, after consultation with Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun, decided to cancel the entire process," a member of the recommendation committee told the Post.

The finance ministry official said only two candidates were present in the interview and presentation, so the recommendation committee decided not to risk recommending only two

names to the cabinet, which ultimately led to the cancellation of the entire process.

"The process collapsed after a tussle between two ruling parties," an official at the Finance Ministry said adding that there is a confusion about what will happen next.

Sources inside the Finance Ministry said the selection process became the victim of the political power play between the UML and the Maoist Centre, leading to the cancellation of the entire process.

Sebon was established by the government of Nepal on June 7, 1993, as an apex regulator of securities markets.

It has been regulating the market under the Securities Act of 2006. The governing board of Sebon comprises seven members, including one full-time chairman appointed by the government for a tenure of four years. The term of Sebon chairman has been fixed for four years, but it has been over three months that the position has been vacant. Due to the government's failure to appoint a new chairman, security issuance applications worth billions of rupees are pending.

RSP seeks clarification from General Secretary Dhakal

Mukul Dhakal says he hasn't read the letter sent by the party's Central Discipline and Conduct Committee.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JUNE 28

The Rastriya Swantantra Party has sought clarification from its general secretary Mukul Dhakal regarding his recent statements to the media about the party's perception among the people.

The RSP Central Discipline and Conduct Committee wrote to Dhakal on Friday demanding clarification.

"I have received the letter, but I don't know who sent it to me because I haven't opened it. Nobody other than the party president can seek clarification from me. However, the chair denied having asked for a clarification on a call with me just a few minutes ago," Dhakal told the Post.

"The letter, however, has already been delivered to my secretariat."

General Secretary Dhakal, in his report prepared after a review tour of 32 districts, has claimed that the



Rabi Lamichhane



Mukul Dhakal

party is headed for an accident.

In his political report, Dhakal pointed out things the two-year-old party needs to rectify in order to avert such an accident.

After handing over the 32-page report to party president Rabi Lamichhane on Wednesday, Dhakal told the Post: "After the review tour, I have come to the conclusion that if the party continues to run as it does now, it will crash within a short period."

The report Dhakal submitted to Lamichhane, who is also the deputy prime minister and minister for home affairs, claims that the popularity of the party which emerged by winning 20 seats in the 2022 election has nosedived. Additionally, the report argues that Lamichhane's popularity has also dipped. Dhakal had demanded that the party make the report public.

He also claimed that the party's decision to join the government and work with traditional parties such as the CPN-UML and the CPN (Maoist Centre) could prove counterproductive for the new party—RSP—in the long run. He said the party should ally with emerging independent figures such as Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah and Dhangadhi Mayor Gopi Hamal.

KMC intensifies dengue mosquito eradication efforts

Volunteers to visit households every Wednesday hunting for mosquito larvae breeding grounds.



Dengue-transmitting mosquitoes breed in clean water and bite people in daylight.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, JUNE 28

In a bid to lessen the spread of the dengue virus during the ongoing monsoon season, the Kathmandu Metropolitan City has decided to continue the drive to destroy mosquito larvae and breeding grounds.

Officials at the health department of the city office said on Friday that they have just completed a week-long drive in all 32 wards of the metropolis and plan to continue these efforts in the coming days as well.

"Every Wednesday, our health volunteers will visit households and open spaces to destroy mosquito breeding grounds," said Rishi Bhusal, epidemic prevention and control focal person at the metropolis.

"Decisions on preventive measures including launching search and destroy drives will depend on the spread of virus and intensity of rainfall in the coming days."

Dengue is a viral disease transmitted by female Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus mosquitoes. The same vectors also transmit chikungunya, yellow fever, and Zika virus, according to the World Health Organisation.

According to data provided by the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division, at least 1,268 people from 72 districts have been infected with the dengue virus since January this year. Among the 72 districts that reported dengue outbreaks, Kathmandu has the highest number of cases: 141.

Public health experts say reported cases could be just the tip of the iceberg, as around 80 percent of those infected are asymptomatic. Many people infected with dengue show mild symptoms and can be treated with paracetamol at home.

Dengue symptoms include mild to high fever, severe muscle pain, rashes, severe headache, and pain in the eyes. Patients with these symptoms are advised to seek immediate treatment. While there is no specific cure for the disease, early detection and proper medical care can prevent death.

Nepal reported its first dengue case in a foreigner in 2004 in the Chitwan district. Since then, an increasing number of dengue

infections have been reported from many districts, including major dengue outbreaks.

Last year, at least 20 persons died, and more than 52,000 were infected by the virus, which had spread to all 77 districts.

In 2022, a total of 88 people died, and over 54,000 were infected by the virus across the country. During that period, hospitals in the Kathmandu Valley were overwhelmed with dengue patients, and pharmacies ran out of paracetamol, the most widely used medicine to treat fever.

In 2019, the disease killed at least six people and more than 16,000 were hospitalised across the country. The virus had spread to 68 districts at the time.

Though the post-monsoon period is considered the dengue epidemic season, the deadly disease has already become endemic in Nepal, as outbreaks of the virus are reported every month, including in the winter months.

Officials at the health department said that 654 health workers, including female community health volunteers, were deployed in the week-long campaign, which concluded on Friday.

"Volunteers and health workers who were deployed to the door-to-door campaign checked the mosquito breeding grounds and the larvae, made people aware about the risks and destroyed the breeding grounds," said Bhusal.

Health workers reported that storage places for scrap materials, discarded cups, and plastic in open spaces, and unused lands as potential hotspots for the dengue virus in the coming days. Health workers have warned owners of these sites that action will be taken if mosquito larvae are found against the owner of the storage place if mosquito larvae were found.

Dengue-transmitting mosquitoes breed in clean water and bite people in daylight. Uncovered water tanks and discarded objects, such as plastic cups and bottles, could be breeding grounds for these mosquitoes.

Public health experts say now is the right time to prepare for and prevent possible outbreaks. Health ministry officials said they have alerted all related agencies to the risk of a dengue outbreak.

Yangon parties on in war-torn Myanmar despite tough circumstances

THE STRAITS TIMES
YANGON, JUNE 28

It was close to midnight in Yangon, about one hour before the start of the military-mandated curfew. The car workshops had long gone silent in this eastern industrial estate. But the party was just starting.

Youth clad in hoodies and sneakers thronged the narrow lane in front of a nightclub where security staff escorted patrons from their taxis to the entrance. A casually parked Mercedes coupe added to the traffic snarl.



Inside, the dance floor was heaving. In a swirl of tobacco and cannabis smoke, a deejay in a baseball jersey and baggy trousers worked the crowd to a frenzy. At a 400,000 kyat (\$258) "VIP" table, a young woman with a plastic straw in hand giggled as she bent over to snort one of the five rows of white substance on a mobile phone screen.

Life in Myanmar's economic capital thrums to a rhythm starkly different from the war-torn corners of the country. In the borderlands of Rakhine, Kachin and Shan states, the military that ousted Myanmar's civilian government in 2021 is defending a shrinking territory against ethnic armed groups and resistance forces that have emerged in response to its coup.

Some three million people have been forced to flee their homes, and poverty now afflicts one-third of its 55 million population – a level not seen since 2015. Inflation in the year to March 2024 was 26.5 per cent, according to the World Bank.

The exodus of talent and labour has been worsened by the military's bid to conscript civilians to shore up its depleted ranks.

In Yangon, however, new eateries and nightspots continue to sprout and at least one art gallery has opened, defying the gloom brought on by the military power grab three years ago.

In Sanchaung, a vibrant neighbourhood in north-central Yangon even before the coup, diners crammed into whitewashed interiors of cafes offering 6,000 kyat caramel lattes and 15,000 kyat salmon salads. There, requests to use the Wi-Fi were met by waiters who whipped out their mobile phones to

offer a QR code to scan. Nightspots and restaurants hosted sell-out Pride parties.

At People's Park, a green sanctuary near the famous Shwedagon Pagoda, lovers canoodled in weathered seats. Claw machines did a roaring trade while the creaky roller-coaster thrilled the odd teenager or two. Meanwhile, make-up artists, mattress companies and gemstone dealers taking part in a wedding exposition nearby vied for the attention of deal-seeking couples.

At the five-star Sedona Hotel Yangon, which Singapore's Keppel Group fully divested in 2023, smartly dressed locals descended upon the lobby lounge, which offered a 60,000 kyat high-tea deal that included access to its swimming pool. They took selfies with their towers of pastries, ignoring the pool.

Myanmar's moneyed and military-linked classes have long been able to insulate themselves from larger economic pressures, even during earlier periods of military rule that drew Western sanctions.



Students streaming out of a Yangon school on a weekday recently.

Still, in the affluent bubble of Yangon, signs of Myanmar's deepening crisis are visible.

There are few tourists on the streets today. In 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic closed borders worldwide, Myanmar welcomed more than 4.3 million tourists. The number shrank to 1.28 million in post-pandemic 2023, according to the regime's statistics.

Myanmar has remained under a state of emergency since the coup. While junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has pledged to hold fresh elections to replace what he claims was a fraudulent one in 2020, when and how this can be done remains a question.

Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, the 79-year-old leader of the ousted National League for

Democracy party, is serving a 27-year jail sentence over charges that are widely considered to be politically motivated.

Many countries have warned their citizens against visiting Myanmar since the coup. Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs advises Singaporeans to defer all travel to Myanmar. The Australian government warns of the risk of "arbitrary detention", adding that "violence, including explosions and attacks, can occur anywhere and any time, including in Yangon".

Staff at a major hotel in the city centre have advised guests to stay indoors after 8pm.

The nearby Kyauktada Police Station, displaying a large sign declaring "May I Help You", was surrounded by barbed wire barricades to deter insurgent attacks.

It was the same picture at Yangon City Hall, where a surly police officer clutching an umbrella in the driving rain shooed away pedestrians who strayed into a once-bustling adjacent street now closed to traffic.

Soldiers and police officers stood guard outside the premises of companies with close ties to the military. Meanwhile, beggars approached cars waiting at traffic junctions. "There are hardly any tourists, only Russians," one tour guide was overheard lamenting. Shunned by many countries after the coup, the junta has leaned into existing ties with Russia for political, economic and military support. This has, in turn, brought a steady stream of Russian delegations, including a business delegation in May, seeking investment opportunities in Myanmar.

The World Bank, which has noted a "significant decline" in the military regime's fiscal transparency, estimates

PHOTO: THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN

WORLD

Iran votes in snap poll for president after hard-liner's death amid Mideast tensions

Voters face a choice between hardline candidates and the little-known reformist Masoud Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, JUNE 28

Iranians voted on Friday in a snap election to replace the late hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi, with the race's sole reformist candidate vowing to seek "friendly relations" with the West in an effort to energize supporters in a vote beset by apathy.

Voters face a choice between hard-line candidates and the little-known reformist Masoud Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon. As has been the case since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, women and those calling for radical change have been barred from running, while the vote itself will have no oversight from internationally recognized monitors.

The voting comes as wider tensions have gripped the Middle East over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. In April, Iran launched its first-ever direct attack on Israel over the war in Gaza, while militia groups that Tehran arms in the region—such as the Lebanese Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels—are engaged in the fighting and have escalated their attacks.

Meanwhile, Iran continues to enrich uranium at near weapon-grade levels and maintains a stockpile large enough to build—should it choose to do so—several nuclear weapons. The remarks by Pezeshkian come after he and his allies were targeted by a veiled warning from the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, over their outreach to the United States.

Pezeshkian's comments, made after he cast his ballot, appeared to be aimed at boosting turnout as public apathy has grown pervasive in the Islamic Republic after years of economic woes and mass protests.

He seemed to hope that invoking the possibility of Iran emerging from its isolation would motivate people otherwise disillusioned with Iranian politics. A higher turnout typically aids those like Pezeshkian in the reformist movement that seeks to change its Shiite theocracy from within.

While Iran's 85-year-old Khamenei has the final say on all matters of state, presidents can bend the country's policies toward confrontation or negotiation with the West. However,



Iranian women wait to cast their votes during the presidential election at a polling station inside the Iranian embassy in Baghdad, Iraq, on Friday.

given the record-low turnout in recent elections, it remains unclear just how many Iranians will take part in Friday's poll. Pezeshkian, who voted at a hospital near the capital, Tehran, appeared to have that in mind as he responded to a journalist's question about how Iran would interact with the West if he was president.

"God willing, we will try to have friendly relations with all countries except Israel," the 69-year-old candidate said. Israel, long Iran's regional archenemy, faces intense criticism across the Mideast over its grinding war in the Gaza Strip.

He also responded to a question about a renewed crackdown on women over the mandatory headscarf, or hijab, less than two years after the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, which sparked nationwide demonstrations

and violent security force response. "No inhuman or invasive behaviour should be made against our girls, daughters and mothers," he said.

A higher turnout could boost Pezeshkian's chances, and the candidate may have been counting on social media to spread his remarks, as all television broadcasters in the country are state-controlled and run by hard-liners. But it remains unclear if he can gain the momentum needed to draw voters to the ballot.

There have been calls for a boycott, including from imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi. Mir Hossein Mousavi, one of the leaders of the 2009 Green Movement protests who remains in house arrest, also has refused to vote with his wife, his daughter said.

There's also been criticism that

Pezeshkian represents just another government-approved candidate. One woman in a documentary on Pezeshkian aired by state TV said her generation was "moving toward the same level" of animosity with the government that Pezeshkian's generation had in the 1979 revolution.

Analysts broadly describe the race as a three-way contest. There are two hard-liners, former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili and the parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf. A Shiite cleric, Mostafa Pourmohammadi, also has remained in the race despite polling poorly.

Pezeshkian has aligned himself with figures such as former President Hassan Rouhani, under whose administration Tehran struck the landmark 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Peace in Taiwan Strait benefits whole world, Taiwan president says



Taiwan President Lai Ching-te

REUTERS
TAICHUNG, TAIWAN, JUNE 28

Peace in the Taiwan Strait benefits the whole world and the international community believes that without it, there can be neither prosperity nor security, Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said on Friday.

China, which views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, has ramped up its pressure against Lai, whom it views as a "separatist", and staged two days of war games around the island after he took office last month.

Over the past four years, China's military has massively increased its activities in the narrow strait, a major international waterway for trade, and regularly flies warplanes there and operates warships.

Speaking to new recruits at an army base in the central Taiwanese city of Taichung, Lai said every drop of their sweat was to protect Taiwan's security. "The international community believes these days that peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait is a necessary component for global security and prosperity," he said.

"No matter whether it's the United States, Japan, South Korea or the European Union, and the heads of state or prime ministers of many nations, they all agree on this point, opposing any country using force to change the status quo in the Taiwan Strait," Lai added.

"Our efforts are all for the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait, for Taiwan's security, and our democratic, free system and continued economic development," he said. "Peace in the Taiwan Strait benefits global peace."

Russia warns US of measures in response to drone flights over Black Sea

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MOSCOW, JUNE 28

Russia's Defence Minister ordered officials to prepare a "response" to US drone flights over the Black Sea, the ministry said on Friday, in an apparent warning that Moscow may take forceful action to ward off the American reconnaissance aircraft.

The Russian Defence Ministry noted a recent "increased intensity" of US drones over the Black Sea, saying they "conduct intelligence and targeting for precision weapons supplied to the Ukrainian military by Western countries for strikes on Russian facilities."

"It shows an increased involvement of the US and other NATO countries in the conflict in Ukraine on the side of the Kyiv regime," the ministry said in a statement.

It noted that "such flights significantly increase the probability of incidents involving Russian military air-

craft, which increases the risk of direct confrontation between the alliance and the Russian Federation."

"NATO members will bear responsibility for that," it added.

The ministry said that Defence Minister Andrei Belousov has directed the General Staff to "make proposals on measures of operative response to provocations."

Washington and Moscow have clashed before over US drones in the Black Sea. In a 2023 incident, a Russian fighter jet damaged an American drone there, causing it to crash. A repeat of such a confrontation could further fuel tensions over the war in Ukraine.

On March 14, 2023, a Su-27 fighter jet of the Russian air force intercepted and damaged a US MQ-9 Reaper drone, causing it to crash into the Black Sea. The incident marked the first direct clash between the Russian and US forces since the Cold War.

The Pentagon and US European

Command said after the incident that two Russian Su-27 aircraft dumped fuel on the MQ-9, which was conducting a routine surveillance mission over the Black Sea in international airspace.

The Russian Defence Ministry said then that the US drone was flying near the Russian border and intruded into an area that was declared off-limits by Russian authorities.

Russia has declared broad areas near Crimea off-limits to flights. Ever since Russia's 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea and long before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Moscow has accused US surveillance planes of flying too close to its borders while ignoring the notices issued by Russia.

Friday's Russian statement follows a Ukrainian attack on Sevastopol over the weekend with US-made ATACMS missiles, which killed four and injured about 150, according to Russian authorities.

Roof collapse at Delhi airport kills one, as heavy rain disrupts Indian capital

REUTERS
NEW DELHI, JUNE 28

Heavy rainfall and winds brought down a roof at the main airport in New Delhi on Friday, killing one person and disrupting flights from a domestic terminal, while flooded streets and traffic snarls threw daily life out of gear in India's capital.

The airport area received about 148.5 millimetres of rain over three hours in the early morning, more than the average for all of June, according to India's weather office. Experts blame climate change for extreme heat followed by heavy rain.

The city of 20 million people, who faced searing heatwaves earlier this month, received 228.1 mm of rainfall at its main Safdarjung weather station in the 24 hours ending 8:30 am on Friday, a 266 percent departure from normal. A portion of the canopy and supporting beam at the departure area of Terminal 1 collapsed and flight operations were shut down until 2 pm, India's aviation minister told reporters.

The entire terminal, one of three at the country's biggest and busiest airport, was evacuated and an inquiry ordered into the collapse, said the minister, Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu. Rescue work had been completed and eight injured people were taken to hospital, Atul Garg, the director of Delhi Fire Service, said.

At least eight flights were cancelled and 47 were delayed while departures from Delhi airport were running late by an average of 40 minutes, according to data from flight tracking platform Flightradar24.

Arrivals and departures of flights scheduled from Terminal 1 after 2 pm were diverted through the other two terminals, Naidu said, adding that passengers would receive full refunds or have the option of booking on alternate flights and routes.

Visuals from Indian TV channels showed a taxi crushed under a wrecked metal pillar at the entrance area of the terminal, which is mostly used by low-cost carriers IndiGo, operated by Interglobe Aviation and SpiceJet for domestic flights. Around 10-12 cars were damaged in the incident, said one of the workers at the airport.

"I first missed my flight in the morning due to floods. Then my 2:10 pm



Parked vehicles are damaged by the collapse of a departure terminal canopy at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport following heavy pre-monsoon rains in New Delhi, on Friday.

A father who lost 2 sons in a Boeing Max crash waits to hear if the United States will prosecute the company

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DALLAS, TEXAS, JUNE 28

As they travel around Alaska on a long-planned vacation, Ike and Susan Riffel stop now and then to put up stickers directing people to "Live Riffully."

It's a way for the California couple to honour the memories of their sons, Melvin and Bennett, who died in 2019 when a Boeing 737 Max jetliner crashed in Ethiopia.

The Riffels and families of other passengers who died in the crash and a similar one in Indonesia a little more than four months earlier are waiting to learn any day now whether the US Justice Department, all these years later, will prosecute Boeing in connection with the two disasters, which killed 346 people.

Ike Riffel fears that instead of putting Boeing on trial, the government will offer the company another shot at corporate probation through a legal document called a deferred prosecution agreement, or DPA. Or that prosecutors will let Boeing plead guilty and avoid a trial.

"A DPA hides the truth. A plea agree-

ment would hide the truth," Riffel says. "It would leave the families with absolutely no idea" of what happened inside Boeing as the Max was being designed and tested, and after the first crash in 2018 pointed to problems with new flight-control software.

"The families want to know the truth. Who was responsible? Who did what?" the father says. "Why did they have to die?" Ike is a retired forestry consultant, and Susan a retired religious educator. They live in Redding, California, where they raised their sons.

Mel was 29 and preparing to become a father himself when Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 went down six minutes after takeoff. He played sports in school and worked as a technician for the California Department of Transportation in Redding. Bennett, 26, loved performing arts while growing up. He worked in IT support in Chico, California, and clients still send cards to his parents.

"They were our only two sons. They were very adventurous, very independent, loved to travel," Riffel says.

In early 2019, Mel and his wife, Brittney, took a "babymoon" to

Australia. Brittney flew home while Mel met his brother in Taiwan to start what they called their world tour. He and Bennett were headed toward their last stop, South Africa, where Mel planned to do some surfing, when they boarded the Ethiopian Airlines flight in Addis Ababa.

Brittney flew home while Mel met his brother in Taiwan to start what they called their world tour.

Back in California, Susan Riffel answered the phone when it rang on that Sunday morning. On the other end, someone from the airline told them their sons had been on a plane that had crashed.

"When you first hear it, you don't believe it," Ike Riffel says. "You still don't believe after you see that there was a crash. 'Oh, maybe they didn't get on.' You think of all these scenarios."

The next shock came in January 2021. The Justice Department charged Boeing with fraud for misleading regulators who approved the Max, but at the same time, prosecutors approved an agreement that meant the single felony charge could be dropped in three years.

"I heard it on the news. It just kind of blew me away. I thought, what the hell?" Riffel says. "I felt pretty powerless. I didn't know what a deferred prosecution agreement was."

He and his wife believe they were deceived by the Justice Department, which until then had denied there was a criminal investigation going on. Boeing has never contacted the family, according to Riffel. He assumes that's based on advice from the company's lawyers.

"I have no trust in [Boeing] to do the right thing, and I really lost my confidence in the Department of Justice," he says. "Their motto is to protect the American people, not to protect Boeing, and it seems to me they have spent the whole time defending Boeing."

The Justice Department reopened the possibility of prosecuting Boeing

last month, when it said the company had breached the 2021 agreement. The DOJ did not publicly specify the alleged violations.

Boeing has said it lived up to the terms of the deal, which required it to pay \$2.5 billion, most of it to the company's airline customers, and to maintain a program to detect and prevent violations of US anti-fraud laws, among other conditions. The pending decision in Washington matters to family members around the world.

The 157 passengers and crew members who died in the Ethiopian crash came from 35 countries, with the largest numbers from Kenya and Canada. Nearly two dozen passengers were flying to attend a United Nations environmental conference in Nairobi.

The March 10, 2019, crash came just months after another Boeing 737 Max 8, operated by Indonesia's Lion Air, crashed into the Java Sea, killing all 189 people on board. The vast majority of passengers on the October 29, 2018, flight were Indonesians.

In both crashes, software known by the acronym MCAS pitched the nose of the plane down repeatedly based on faulty readings from a single sensor.

FOREX

US Dollar	133.72
Euro	143.12
Pound Sterling	169.10
Swiss Franc	148.56
Australian Dollar	89.00
Canadian Dollar	97.62
Singapore Dollar	98.62
Japanese Yen (10)	8.32
Chinese Yuan	18.41
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.64
Qatari Riyal	36.68
Thai Bhat	3.64
UAE Dhiram	36.41
Malaysian Ringgit	28.35
Korean Won (100)	9.71

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION

PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 141,800
Silver	Rs 1,790

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Australia clears ANZ, Suncorp banking merger

SYDNEY: Australia's government on Friday cleared a US\$3.3 billion merger between the country's ANZ and Suncorp banks, describing the decision as a close call. Treasurer Jim Chalmers said he approved the merger after "much deliberation" following nearly two years of review by state and federal regulators. Chalmers said it was an "on-balance call" but he received clear advice that "it would not be in the national interest to prohibit this transaction". The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission had blocked ANZ's proposed takeover of Queensland-based Suncorp Bank, saying it would significantly harm competition. But the firms managed to overturn the decision on appeal. ANZ, already one of Australia's big four banks, will significantly boost its position as a mortgage provider through the Aus\$4.9 billion (US\$3.3 billion) merger. (AFP)

Global watchdog adds Monaco to money laundering 'grey list'

PARIS: Global anti-money laundering watchdog the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) said Friday it had added Monaco to a "grey list" of countries subject to increased monitoring. At a plenary meeting in Singapore it also added Venezuela to the list of nations considered to have "strategic deficiencies" in countering money laundering and terrorist financing, while however cooperating with the FATF to correct the problems. Jamaica and Turkey were removed from the list after resolving the deficiencies identified by the FATF, which monitors efforts by more than 200 countries and jurisdictions to prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorism. (AFP)

Toyota to launch first EV with advanced self-driving system

SHANGHAI: Toyota is planning to launch the first electric car model equipped with an advanced autonomous driving system similar to Tesla's Full Self-Driving for the Chinese market next year, one of its Chinese joint ventures said. The JV with state-owned Guangzhou Automobile Group (GAC) aims to restore the Japanese automaker's market share in China by catching up with Chinese rivals on technologies in hybrids, batteries and intelligent vehicles. (REUTERS)

Chinese planes strain Nepal Airlines financially

>> Continued from page 1

Now, Nepal Airlines is determined to give one last try to auction the Chinese planes. Officials are working tirelessly, and they believe a successful third attempt is possible, despite the challenges. Failing to get the bidders on the third attempt would put the national carrier under pressure to sell them at scrap value, but the team is not giving up.

"We are in the process of starting a fresh auction. This will be the third attempt," said Devendra Pun, spokesperson (technical) for Nepal Airlines.

"There will be a new evaluation of the aircraft rates, and we are hopeful of a positive outcome," said Pun. The sale of these planes could mark a new beginning for the airline, reducing some financial burden they are responsible for.

After spending \$20,000 on the international appraisal report, there will be little appetite for another appraisal. Pun said he is unsure whether Nepal Airlines would hire another international appraiser or do it internally.

The management had tabled the proposal to auction the planes for the third time at the board on April 2. The board, however, is yet to decide. "The management is carefully considering all options and is committed to making the best decision for the future of Nepal Airlines," said Pun.

Nepal Airlines officials say the grounded planes have been more trouble than they are worth.

Operating the aircraft was a massive financial strain, exacerbated by breakdowns and a lack of pilots.

The company is in great distress, saddled with a debt totalling nearly Rs50 billion.

Officials said the Chinese-made aircraft had turned into white elephants right after they arrived. They doubt anyone will buy them.

The national flag carrier put the Chinese planes up for lease on September 14, 2022. Prospective bidders were given an October 31 deadline. As there were no bids, the deadline was extended until November 16. There were still no takers, and the management decided to sell them off.

The MA60 is a turboprop-powered airliner produced by China's Xi'an



Officials said the Chinese-made aircraft had turned into white elephants right after they arrived. They doubt anyone will buy them.

Aircraft Industrial Corporation. Both manufacturers are subsidiaries of the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC), a government undertaking.

The Y12e is a twin-engine turboprop utility aircraft built by Harbin Aircraft Industry Group, previously Harbin Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation.

Except for flying to a few airports in the Tarai, these aircraft spent more time on the ground than in the air, even during operating hours.

Before the planes were grounded, the total accumulated losses of these planes came to Rs1.9 billion, nearly half of their cost.

A brief report submitted to the tourism ministry shows that the airline is paying insurance, parking and regular check-up charges for the grounded planes.

Nepal Airlines signed a commercial agreement with China AVIC in November 2012 to procure six aircraft—two MA60s and four Y12es.

China provided grant and concessional loan worth 408 million Chinese yuan (Rs6.67 billion) to purchase the six aircraft.

Of the total aid, a grant of 180 million yuan (Rs2.94 billion) went to pay for one MA60 and one Y12e aircraft, and a 228 million yuan (Rs3.72 billion) loan was used to purchase an MA60 and three Y12e aircraft.

As per the agreement, the Nepal government has to pay 1.5 percent annual interest, a service charge, and management expenses amounting to 0.4 percent of the overall loan taken by the Ministry of Finance.

The ministry, in turn, would charge Nepal Airlines an annual interest of 1.75 percent on the disbursed loan

amount. As per the November 2012 agreement, China gave Nepal Airlines a seven-year grace period during which it would not have to pay interest or instalments. The planes have completed the seven-year grace period.

The loan's payback period is 20 years or by March 21, 2034.

Nepal received the first batch of planes in 2014. However, due to issues with the first batch, the delivery of the rest was stalled for years.

The second batch of MA60 and Y12e aircraft arrived in January 2017 as part of the six-aircraft deal between Nepal and China.

The corporation received the final two Y12e aircraft in February 2018. The finance ministry owns the planes, and Nepal Airlines operates them.

In 2014, marking the beginning of what was supposed to be a new era for

Nepal Airlines after acquiring the planes, it had even changed its classic red and blue stripes livery, opting for a more modern design.

But these planes never brought happiness and money, said officials.

Nepal Airlines—known more for its poor service, planes being grounded most of the time and frequent management changes—has been eviscerated by politicking.

Every time a new management team or tourism minister comes in, the process of replacing the Chinese planes with new Western-made regional turboprops begins.

A few months ago, a committee headed by the former governor of Nepal Rastra Bank Deependra Bahadur Kshetry suggested selling Nepal Airlines' Rs4.5 billion worth of shares in Soaltee Hotel to buy new planes for domestic use.

UK economy improves as vote looms



Britain's Prime Minister and Conservative Party leader, Rishi Sunak delivers a speech in Leeds, northern England on Friday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE LONDON, JUNE 28

The UK economy's recovery from recession was stronger than previously thought in the first quarter, official data showed Friday, partly lifting embattled Prime Minister Rishi Sunak before next week's election.

Gross domestic product expanded by 0.7 percent in the first three months of this year, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement, upgrading the prior estimate of 0.6-percent expansion and beating market expectations for no change.

The surprise news comes as Sunak's Conservatives are trailing far behind the main opposition Labour party, led by Keir Starmer, ahead of nationwide

polls next Thursday. Britons will vote on July 4 in an election widely expected to be won by main opposition Labour, a victory that would end 14 years of rule by the Conservatives, who have been led by Sunak since 2022.

The UK economy had contracted slightly for two quarters in a row in the second half of 2023, meeting the technical definition of a recession on elevated inflation that prolonged a cost-of-living crisis.

"This is certainly good news for whoever will be the Prime Minister this time next week, although it could also contribute to the Bank of England cutting interest rates a bit slower than otherwise," noted Paul Dales, chief UK economist at research consultancy Capital Economics.

The ONS had already revealed earlier this month that the economy stagnated in April with zero growth, dented by wet weather which weighed on construction firms and retailers.

"More timely GDP data from April suggests that the UK economy may have slipped up again," warned XTB research director Kathleen Brooks.

Richard Flax, chief investment officer at European digital wealth manager Moneyfarm, meanwhile cautioned that Britain's economic recovery would be modest. "While the UK does not appear poised to re-enter recession, these figures hardly endorse Sunak's claim that the economy has turned a corner," said Flax.

"It's important to note that the recovery is likely to be modest... Interest rates remaining at elevated levels will continue to put pressure on household and company spending."

The BoE last week held its key interest rate at a 16-year high of 5.25 percent despite UK inflation returning to its two percent target.

Until now, it had been forecast to cut borrowing costs at its next monetary policy gathering on August 1.

Inflation in Britain has slowed sharply in recent months to strike a near three-year low, recent data showed. The Consumer Prices Index decelerated to 2.0 percent in May from 2.3 percent in April.

UK inflation last stood at the BoE's 2.0-percent target in July 2021, before rocketing higher in a cost-of-living crisis fuelled largely by soaring energy and food bills. Prices are nevertheless still rising on top of sharp increases seen in recent years.

Apple's iPhone shipments in China surge 40 percent in May

REUTERS BEIJING, JUNE 28

Apple's smartphone shipments in China rose nearly 40 percent in May from a year earlier, extending a rebound seen in April, data from a research firm affiliated with the Chinese government showed on Friday.

Shipments of foreign-branded phones in China increased by 1.425 million in May to 5.02 million units from 3.60 million a year earlier, calculations based on the data from the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT) showed.

Although the data did not explicitly mention Apple, the company is the dominant foreign phone maker in China's smartphone-dominated market. This suggests that the increase in foreign-brand phone shipments can be attributed to Apple's performance.

The jump in Apple's sales follows a weak performance by the U.S. tech giant in the world's biggest smartphone market earlier this year amid strong competition in the high-end smartphone category from local rivals such as Huawei.

The sales boost also comes after Apple launched an aggressive discounting campaign on its official

Tmall site in China in May, offering price cuts of up to 2,300 yuan (\$316.71) on select iPhone models.

Apple's May sales increase extended its growth streak for the past two months, including a 52 percent jump in April. This marks a significant improvement from the first two months of 2023, when the company experienced a 37 percent slump in sales.

Earlier last month, Apple CEO Tim Cook forecast iPhone sales growth in some markets, including China, after the company reported an 8.1 percent drop in second-quarter revenue from the Greater China region.

The price reduction in May, double the size of a discount it offered in February, comes after Huawei introduced in April its new series of high-end smartphones, the Pura 70, following the launch of the Mate 60 last August.

Huawei overtook Apple in the first quarter as the No. 2 smartphone vendor in China and is ramping up its retail strategy by opening more flagship stores and adding more retail distributors. Huawei spinoff Honor holds the top spot.

Overall phone sales in China increased by 16.5 percent to 30.33 million units in May, data from the CAICT showed.

'Rock and a hard place': What now for Kenya after tax hike reversal?

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE NAIROBI, JUNE 28

Kenyan protesters have forced President William Ruto into a U-turn on tax hikes after the initially peaceful rallies turned violent, with more than 20 people killed and parliament ransacked.

On Wednesday, Ruto said he would "listen to the people" and declined to sign the tax increases into law, kicking the contentious finance bill back to parliament with all clauses deleted.

The decision was a victory for the mostly Gen-Z demonstrators, but where does it leave the economy? And what options does Ruto have now?

What sparked the protests?

The government was taken by surprise after small rallies against tax increases in the annual finance bill gathered momentum, with thousands marching.

Tensions escalated in several cities, with the capital Nairobi witnessing the worst of the violence, when 19 protesters were killed and a partly

ablaze parliament was ransacked. A conciliatory Ruto then addressed the nation and pulled the plug on the increases.

What was in the finance bill?

The four-trillion-shilling (\$31.1-billion) budget was the biggest in Kenya's history and included tax increases on basic necessities such as bread and fuel. Demonstrators said the measures would hit the poor and working class, already struggling with a biting cost-of-living crisis.

But Ruto and his government defended the move, which would have raised some \$2.7 billion in additional taxes, as necessary to cut debt.

How bad is Kenya's debt?

Bad. Kenya's total public debt amounts to some 10 trillion shillings, around 70 percent of GDP.

Servicing debt dominates government spending. Treasury data in April showed the government spent roughly 1.2 trillion shillings to service debt between July 2023 and March 2024,



An injured protester is helped to safety during demonstrations called after a nationwide deadly protest against a controversial now-withdrawn tax bill left over 20 dead in downtown Nairobi, on Thursday.

compared to some 1.1 trillion on salaries and development projects—such as roads, healthcare, education and other vital infrastructure.

According to UN Trade and Development figures in 2021, Kenya spends 4.4 percent of its GDP on education and just 1.9 percent on health.

The majority of the debt is foreign held, with bodies such as the International Monetary Fund urging Nairobi to implement fiscal reforms.

So what happens now?

Oxford Economics said in a note that Nairobi would have to strike a balance between "a populace willing to resort to violence to protect livelihoods, and a macroeconomic trajectory that, bar considerable multilateral support, is heading towards a cliff."

Ken Gichinga, chief economist at Mentor Economics, told AFP that Kenya had spent a record 1.86 trillion shillings on servicing the debt this fiscal year. The government needs to tread a fine line between making budget cuts and stimulating the economy, he said, keeping the deficit under

control and not letting already high inflation—a key complaint of the protesters—spiral. "The leadership is between a rock and a hard place, where the foreign lenders really care about debt sustainability but the citizens want jobs," Gichinga told AFP.

What has Ruto proposed?

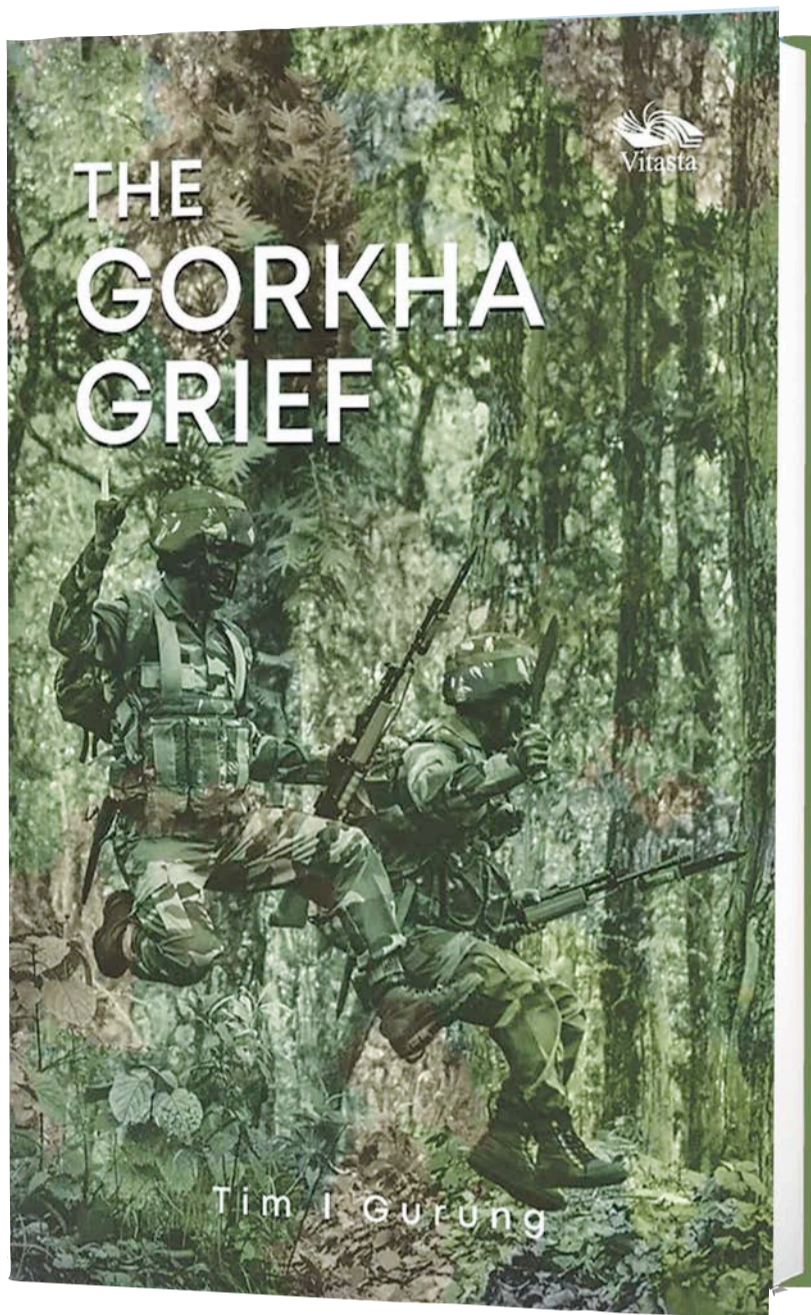
There are few details of what may replace the bill. Ruto on Wednesday emphasised that austerity measures would be required, noting there would be less funding for teachers and development programmes.

The move may pacify critics appalled at what they say is his administration's profligate spending, which in one case included Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua splashing out some 10 million shillings on curtains for his office. Gichinga said it was unclear whether the cuts would focus on "excessive spending" or critical services.

Ultimately, he said, "the IMF's primary focus is on debt sustainability, but the country has to deliver on jobs for its people."

Famed ferocity, fragile reality

In 'The Gorkha Grief', Tim Gurung illuminates the struggles of Gorkhas in India and advocates for their recognition.



The Gorkha Grief
Author: Tim Gurung
Year: 2024
Publisher: Vitasta Publishing
Pages: 232

ANUSHA DHAKAL
 KATHMANDU

Learning about the Gorkhas is mandatory in Nepal's social studies curriculum. Students learn about Prithivi Narayan Shah's unification campaign, the brave defence by Balabhadra Kunwar at the Nalapani fort, and the significant contributions of Gorkhali soldiers in World War I and World War II.

The Gorkhas' legendary valour, strength, and tenacity are well known, and their stories are a source of immense pride for Nepalis. Yet, the stories of their grief and the struggles faced by the Gorkha community as they resettle around the world often remain unrecognised.

In 'The Gorkha Grief', Tim Gurung endeavours to close the gap in our knowledge of the Gorkhas' bravery by shedding light on the struggles of the Gorkhals who have resettled in India.

This book is a sequel to his first, 'Ayo Gorkhali: A History of the Gorkhas,' published in 2020.

In this book, Gurung begins by tracing the historical migration of Nepalis across the Teesta River into India. He then extends his research through firsthand explorations and interviews in Dehradun, Nainital, Sikkim, Assam, Banaras, and Darjeeling, uncovering the adversities and sufferings encountered by the Gorkhals.

Gurung, a former Gorkha soldier himself, currently resides in Hong Kong. In the introduction to this book, he writes that discussing the grief of his people is never easy and, unfortunately, feels compelled to do so: "For nobody will, if I do not write about them."

Gurung emphasises the recruitment process and the Gorkha battalions' crucial role in the security and defence of a larger India in the book. He also talks about how the Gorkhas were given land by the British in Northeast India, highlighting their significance and role in maintaining security and peace in the area.

Gurung emphasises a crucial distinction between Nepali migrant workers of Nepali origin and Indian-domiciled Gorkhas of Nepali origin. He believes that conflating these two groups under a single name is incorrect and unjust.

According to him, this misunderstanding has led to significant issues, resulting in unprecedented discrimination against Indian-domiciled Gorkhas. Their sufferings, as a consequence, are devastating.

In the book, he also talks about the loss

of identity faced by the Gorkhas. Gurung states that an identity crisis is inevitable when Gorkhas are treated as "second-class citizens." He discusses how this "loss of identity" is prevalent throughout Gorkha communities worldwide.

Gurung emphasises that this loss of identity is particularly severe for Gorkhas living in India due to the severe and unfair discrimination they face.

He talks about how using words like "Bahadur" derogatorily when it means "brave" in Nepali and stereotyping them into roles like security guards and taxi drivers is disrespectful.

It is not mere discrimination that he brings up in the book, he brings up severe problems that affect the Gorkha community.

He highlights the primary Gorkha grievance: not being able to own land and being treated as foreigners in a land they have lived in for over 200 years.

understanding its significance to their identity and community cohesion.

Although Gurung presents many other solutions and explains why this situation arose, this particular solution felt tone-deaf coming from him.

He also talks about how 5,000 to 7,000 Gorkhali women are trafficked in India every year. He highlights the exploitation of Nepali workers in menial jobs and calls for the government to take action against these injustices.

Though informative, this book seems confused about its focus, as Gurung shifts from discussing the Indian Gorkhas to the British Gorkhas to the Gorkhas of Hong Kong.

The book is also very repetitive. The Indo-Nepal Treaty for Peace and Friendship of 1950 is repeatedly mentioned, and it would have been more effective to discuss related matters together. Gurung keeps reiterating that "we must do something," a line that appears in almost every chapter.

He mentions travelling to various areas to collect information and personal accounts, but this is only evident in the first chapters. There are also a few pictures at the beginning, but they stop appearing after a while. This disorganisation can be frustrating for the reader.

While combining historical facts, personal narratives, and societal analysis could have been compelling, the writing's disorganised nature diminishes its allure.

'The Gorkha Grief' shines a light on a significant yet often overlooked topic: the anti-foreigner movements that unjustly targeted Gorkhas. It highlights direct attacks suffered by the community, such as the events in 1986-87 when Gorkhas in Shillong, Jowai, and other parts of Meghalaya were attacked by the Khasi tribe.

These attacks included killings, burning of Gorkhali villages and schools, and deportations of Gorkhas. It's indeed heart-breaking to read about these events.

It's crucial for Nepali youth, who often learn about Gorkha's bravery and pride, to also be aware of and stand up against the injustices faced by the Gorkhas. Understanding these historical injustices can foster empathy and drive efforts toward justice and equality.

Gurung ends the book on a note of hope and faith, expressing his heartfelt wish that the Gorkha people can one day live a simple, dignified, and honourable life without having to leave their homes.

He believes this would be the happiest day of his life, a sentiment that reflects the struggles and aspirations of his community.



BOOK REVIEW

Gurung, a former Gorkha soldier himself, traces the migration of Nepalis across the Teesta River into India.

In tribal states like Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Meghalaya, the Gorkhas have no land ownership rights or the right to vote. He believes that while the Gorkhas themselves bear some responsibility for this issue, the relevant authorities should be held accountable.

He argues that it is not merely gross negligence that prevents the Gorkhas from owning land or voting but a crime on the government's part.

To address this, he offers a solution, suggesting that to prevent unfair discrimination, the Gorkhas must change their way of life from farming and animal husbandry to a new one that guarantees their position.

This statement overlooks the deep-rooted cultural practices and traditions of the Gorkhas, implying that their way of life is somehow inferior or inadequate without



When: June 26 to July 1
Time: Everyday 5:30 pm (Except Tuesday) and Saturday 1:00 pm
Entry: Rs300 (normal) Rs200 (for students with student ID)

Bharosa Nepal Tour



The Elements is starting its nationwide 'Bharosa' tour. It will kick off in Kathmandu and travel to various parts of the country. During the tour, the band will perform live, featuring exclusive tracks from their latest albums.

When: June 29
Where: Lord of the Drinks, Thamel
Time: 7:00 pm onwards
Entry: Rs800 to Rs1,200

Ropain Festival

Organised by Tokha Urban Farm, this event features rice planting, food and music, tug-of-war, and cultural dances. The venue has clean-up facilities.

Where: Tokha Urban Farm, Tokha
When: June 29
Time: 11:00 am onwards
Entry: Rs1,200 (Early Birds) and Rs 1,500 (Event Day)

Almost Weekend Standup Comedy

The 'Almost Weekend Standup Comedy Open Mic' is the perfect midweek escape, taking place on Wednesday. The event promises a night of hilarious humour and memorable moments, offering a great chance for comedy enthusiasts to showcase their talents.

When: July 3
Where: Ivory, Thamel, Kathmandu
Time: 7:30 pm onwards
Entry: Rs250 to Rs1,000

Rice Planting Festival

Rice Planting Festival is being organised in celebration of the 'National Paddy Day' or 'Dhan Diwas' marking the beginning of the planting season.

When: June 29

Where: Bungamati and Khokana
Time: 11:00 am onwards
Entry: Rs2,950 (Adult), Rs1,450 (Child), Free for the age below 4

Harmony for Humanity

The musical band Kutumba and Nepal Idol finalist Amit Baral will perform tomorrow at the event 'Harmony for Humanity'. In addition to music, the event will feature food, refreshments, and games. Attendees can also donate stationery to students in Jajarkot.

When: June 29
Where: Jesse's International School, Chandragiri
Time: 3:00 pm onwards
Entry: Free entry for SEE and +2 exam appeared students

Pop-Up Market at Oops!

Oops! Nepal is organising a pop-up market. The event supports local businesses and provides visitors with a chance to browse many stalls and explore local artwork, delicacies, and fun games. It offers something for people of all age groups.

When: July 5
Where: Dhumbarahi Pipalbot, Kathmandu
Time: 10:00 am to 6:00 pm
Entry: Free for all

MAD-Fest 2024



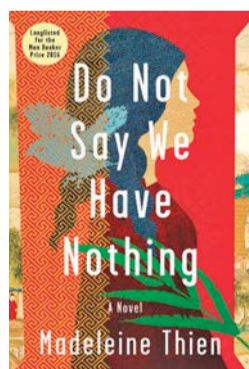
The Mandala Alumni Circle and Mandala Theater are collaborating to organise the first-ever Mandala Alumni Drama Festival (MADFest). The three-day event will feature six plays from prominent Nepali playwrights.

When: July 5 to July 7
Where: Mandala Theatre, Thapagaun
Entry: Rs300 for entry, and Rs1,500 for all plays

BEST-SELLERS | NEW RELEASES

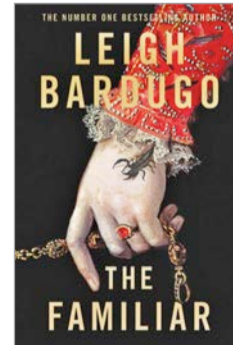
Fiction

1. Do Not Say We Have Nothing by Madeleine Thien
2. Heaven by Mieko Kawakami
3. Exes and O's by Amy Lea
4. Before the Coffee Gets Cold by Toshikazu Kawaguchi
5. The Four Winds by Kristin Hannah



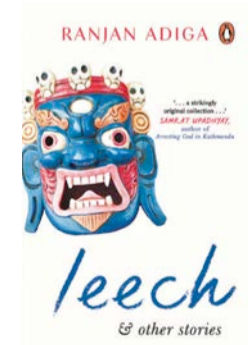
When Things Don't Go Your Way
Author: Haemin Sunim
Price: Rs1,278
Publication: Penguin Books

Haemin Sunim's insightful book, 'When Things Don't Go Your Way', offers a unique perspective on life's challenges by blending Zen Buddhist philosophy with practical wisdom. Sunim's compassionate and perceptive style helps readers view obstacles such as rejection, grief, and uncertainty as opportunities for personal growth. Through thoughtful exercises and touching anecdotes, he promotes resilience, grace, and spiritual strength, enabling readers to navigate adversity with courage and inner peace. This book serves as a beacon of hope for anyone seeking to handle life's ups and downs with grace and expertise. Sunim's focus on transforming setbacks into learning experiences resonates deeply with readers.



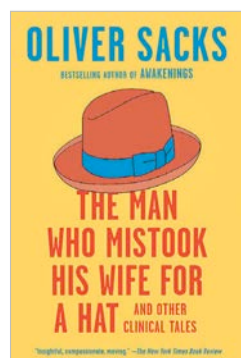
The Familiar
Author: Leigh Bardugo
Price: Rs1,278
Publication: Viking

'The Familiar' by Leigh Bardugo transports readers to the grim streets of Madrid, where LuziaCotado's life as a kitchen servant dramatically changes when her calculating mistress discovers her hidden magical talents. Luzia finds herself torn between the desires of a disgraced secretary and the approaching danger of the inquisition in what begins as an entertaining game for the elite but quickly turns into one that is hazardous. Bardugo skillfully combines political, magical, and survival elements to create a compelling story that has readers on the edge of their seats. As Luzia travels through a world of seers, alchemists, and ancient secrets, her journey becomes a thrilling exploration of power, identity, and the lengths one will go to achieve freedom.



Leech and Other Stories
Author: Ranjan Adiga
Price: Rs638
Publication: Penguin Books

Ranjan Adiga's 'Leech and Other Stories' offers a compelling exploration of Nepali life, weaving traditional beliefs with modern challenges. Set in Kathmandu and America, these stories delve into relationships, immigration, sexuality, and identity, presenting characters grappling with personal struggles, cultural shifts, and socioeconomic disparities. From a professor's immigration anxieties to a leech symbolising societal fissures, each narrative illuminates the human experience amid changing circumstances. Adiga masterfully captures the emotional landscapes of displacement, desire, and belonging, showcasing his storytelling prowess. 'Leech and Other Stories' provides a vivid portrait of the Nepali diaspora.



Non-Fiction

1. The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat by Oliver Sacks
2. Money Men by Dan McCrum
3. The Subtle Art of Dealing with People by Aruna Joshi
4. The Power of Your Subconscious Mind by Joseph Murphy
5. Going Infinite by Michael Lewis

EKTA BOOKS



Play the system, or it plays you

Kathghera's 'Play the System' is a comic exploration of the discrimination and sexism women face in the workplace.

○ ANUSHA DHAKAL
KATHMANDU

In the highest room of the office, illuminated by lights ranging from warm yellows to cold blues, two men launch into a vile tirade about their female colleague. Fueled by alcohol, they spew an exorbitant amount of profanity in every sentence. "What a bitch!" they whine repeatedly (among other disgraceful rants.)

As their profanity intensifies and they descend into a frenzy, the story unfolds: their female colleague had merely voiced her frustration about feeling underutilised and underestimated in the office. She communicated, though cunningly, about how she was given fewer projects than her male colleague, who contributed little.

Communicating assertively about discrimination in the workforce? Indeed! What a bitchy thing to do.

Sexist men in the workplace are infuriating beyond belief. This fury and exasperation is amplified in the workforce because sexist men severely underestimate women. They often refuse to collaborate with you due to their long-internalised assumption of female incompetence.

'Play the System' is a familiar play because it reflects the common sexism and discrimination women and girls face in

the workforce. To sexist 'corporate bros,' women are merely decorative, and subservience is a woman's most remarkable quality.

This theatre production capitalises on stereotypes, increasing its relatability. The compactness of Kausi Theatre fully envelops the audience, and the wonderful actors completely captivate from the start.

You are so intensely focused that you find yourself cursing alongside the characters, feeling their frustration boiling within you, and recollecting similar experiences from your own life.

Sailesh (played by Eelum Dixit) is the boss who favours his male colleague over his female counterpart, exhibiting severe discrimination against women. Biswas (played by Suraj Malla) is the enabler, a bystander who occasionally voices mild dissonance about women to appease his boss but generally remains silent.

Pankaj (played by Rishikesh Basyal) is a stereotypical slacker, all talk and no action, who uses philosophical jargon to mask his incompetence.

Chahana (played by Roshani Syanbo) is a quintessential "pick me" character, eager to please the men in the office, switching her tone to please the men, and complying without protest.

She is the embodiment of submission, which is why the men in the office tolerate



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MANISH PANDEY

Both Namita (left), played by Ranjana Bhattarai, and Chahana (right), played by Roshani Syanbo, are victims of rampant sexism in their workplace, but they respond differently to this treatment.

her. Namita (played by Ranjana Bhattarai) is confident, smart, and exceptionally talented, but in this competitive architecture firm, she must navigate the system carefully to be taken seriously.

Namita's theme song would undoubtedly be Taylor Swift's 'The Man': "I'm so sick of running as fast as I can, wondering if I would get there quicker if I was a man."

In contrast to her colleague Pankaj, who garners praise for minimal effort, Namita struggles to secure meaningful assignments and faces pervasive assumptions of incompetence.

Even when she delivers, her achievements are frequently overlooked and overtly scrutinised. Her story reflects the broader challenges working women endure in male-dominated fields, where despite their undeniable talent, they are often unfairly judged as sub-par or deemed incompetent.

Women often have to go out of their way just to be acknowledged or appreciated. The rat race and corporate grind become even more intense for women due to the additional hurdles they face. Namita has no choice but to become the "bitch" her coworkers think she is, or she won't survive the workplace.

Despite the discrimination and frustrations she faces, Namita persists.

The dynamics between Namita and Chahana are deeply interesting to watch. Both women are victims of rampant sexism in their workplace, but they respond differently: Chahana bends to the discrimination, while Namita protests against it.

From the audience's perspective, neither woman is wrong—they are simply doing what it takes to survive in a

male-dominated, toxic environment. They clash over this difference, with Namita judging Chahana for choosing to stay ignorant, while Chahana criticises Namita for being too confrontational and not complying with the 'system' that discriminates against her.

Watching these characters interact with one another is highly amusing. A recurring joke about 'piping' threads throughout the production, becoming funnier each time the issue is mentioned. The actors skillfully make the audience love and hate them simultaneously—all characters are grey to varying degrees.

The actors skillfully make the audience love and hate them simultaneously.

It can be enjoyable to watch a grey female character; the majority of the audience may even think 'good for her,' when Namita cunningly plays games to preserve herself within the system.

For women, this play is catharsis. The moment when Namita breaks down, overwhelmed by the realisation that no matter how hard she tries, it is never enough, becomes a pivotal point of emotional release. Watching how Namita is treated by the audience may also help women recognise that, more often than not, they are not the problem; sexism is.

This play would've easily been five stars if it didn't have the ending it does. It felt as if the ending drove the play away from the

message it was originally trying to convey.

However, with brilliant writing, wonderful actors, beautiful set design, and an evocative storyline that represents women's plight, this play is a must-watch. For me, it might even warrant a re-watch because it delivers an important message while being deeply engaging, funny, delightful, and wholesome at times.

It accurately depicts human relationships and is a release for women who have always been suppressed or labelled as 'bossy' for simply being competent and confident.

Despite claims that feminism is unnecessary and sexism is non-existent (by the Saileshs and Pankajs themselves), the impact this play has on women proves otherwise.

With sexism, it is important to take the bull by the horns, as there is no progress in the face of denial. By acknowledging the impacts of sexism, we are actively sparing confident little girls who are unfairly labelled as 'bossy' or 'annoying,' from the challenges faced by women like Namita.

Play the System

Director: Akanchha Karki
Cast: Eelum Dixit, Ranjana Bhattarai, Suraj Malla, Roshani Syanbo, Rishikesh Basyal
Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes
Venue: Kausi Theatre, Teku
Showtimes: Every day at 5:15 pm and an extra 1:00 pm show on Saturday until July 15



Sailesh (left), played by Eelum Dixit, favours male colleagues, showing strong bias, while Biswas, played by Suraj Malla, occasionally dissents passively.

Artists, directors call for inclusion in Nepali film industry



PHOTO: COURTESY OF MANISH MAHARJAN/SXC

(From left) Manoj Pandit, Ramyata Limbu, and Prakash Saput during the MediaTalk series at St Xavier's College on Friday.

○ POST REPORT
KATHMANDU

Stakeholders of the Nepali film fraternity have called for social inclusion in the content and characters of Nepali films. During the 34th edition of the MediaTalk series, organised by St Xavier's College on Friday, leading actor and singer Prakash Saput, film director Manoj Pandit, and documentary director Ramyata Limbu discussed the industry critically and called for social inclusion.

The MediaTalk series is a bimonthly educational event led by the Faculty of Journalism at the college. Students interact directly with national and international professionals, academicians, and activists on a range of social issues.

The theme of the talk series was "The Voice of the Excluded in the Nepali Cinema" in celebration of the college's theme of the academic year 2024-25, "Walking with the Excluded".

Film director Pandit emphasised the significance of both the director as a communicator and the audience as a critical analyst. "The difference lies in the audience's perception of the content as opposed to how it is intended to be perceived".

Pandit, also a member of the Film Development Board Nepal, further stressed that the movies screened to the audience shouldn't only be profit-centric but must depict a story of struggle that clearly makes an impact and drives the viewers.

Saput, an actor and singer, opined that stories and content should be presented on the screen not only as the voice of people but also as a medium of interconnectedness. He stated that while the idea of inclusion has always been reflected in movies, society has failed to recognise these narratives.

Echoing the sentiment, the Director of the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (Kimff) Limbu, called for self-development and awareness among society as well as film directors in the film sector.

"The narratives in the screen depend on the perspective and approach of the director, but they also depend on the audiences since they are the power bearers," she suggested.

"We're on a journey to educate students with a series of project-based pedagogies," said Chun Bahadur Gurung, the faculty coordinator of the MediaTalk series.

"Critical discourse on the theme today has helped students understand the progress Nepali cinema has made with respect to raising the voices of the excluded," he added.

"Social exclusion is an easy evil, but social inclusion is a deliberate and noble action", said Fr Augustine Thomas, SJ, the principal of the college.

He further stated, "Listening to the experiences and views of notable personalities in this series aimed to broaden students' perspectives and inspire them to be boundlessly inclusive in their lives."

Kevin Costner sets the table with overstuffed first take on 'Horizon'

Costner's universe is fatalistic. Both sides may be right and wrong, but there will always be another round of savagery.

○ MARK KENNEDY

There's a scene deep into Kevin Costner's new Western when he and a woman are fleeing bad guys on horseback. They pause at a jaw-dropping vista and he turns to her: "You just gotta keep going," he tells her.

That should be the slogan of "Horizon: An American Saga—Chapter 1," the initial three-hour salvo in what could morph into a four-part epic about the West that could tax even the biggest cowboy fan.

Give Costner—co-writer, director, producer—his due. This is a labour of love he's been thinking about since the 1980s and he has skin in the game: He took out a mortgage on his 10-acre home in Santa Barbara, California. Well, one of his homes, at least. He's not a total idiot.

"Chapter 1"—"Chapter 2" is to be released in August and parts three and four depending on if folks keep going—is a

sprawling, often unwieldy placesetter, introducing dozens of characters in different parts of the West who, one has to assume, will interact at some point. If they survive, that is.

It's a spectacularly subtle movie, from the opening moment when a group of ants on a hill of dirt are crushed by a surveyor's wooden stake. If there's any doubt about what we must feel, listen to John Debney's ponderous, pretentious score, with its criminal overuse of cellos.

Costner scrambles the plot—crafted by him and Jon Baird—almost immediately by offering a climactic battle scene within the first half hour, one in which a small white settlement in Arizona's San Pedro Valley (thanks, southern Utah!) is sneak-attacked by Apaches during an innocent dance.

It's a slaughter and it lasts way too

long—savagery on one side, noble victims on the other. Mothers are struck by arrows while carrying their babes, unarmed musicians killed without a thought. "Ready son?" asks a dad to his teenage son, handing him a rifle and facing certain death. "I think so, dad," comes the plucky reply. In the aftermath, a mother cradles the corpse of her son and talks to it.

This slaughter shoots off a few story strands—some survivors (like spunky new widow Sienna Miller and her daughter) find shelter at a U.S. Army camp led by an achingly honourable lieutenant, played by Sam Worthington. Another story arc sees bounty hunters go in search of the Apaches who attacked the settlement, seeking profit and revenge.

"Horizon" also shows the internal divisions within the Apaches, with the chief's hot-head son and new father (Owen Crow Shoe) ready to keep fighting.

"Their sons will

always be another round of savagery. "There's no one on Earth going to stop these wagons from coming," an exasperated Army officer says at one point.

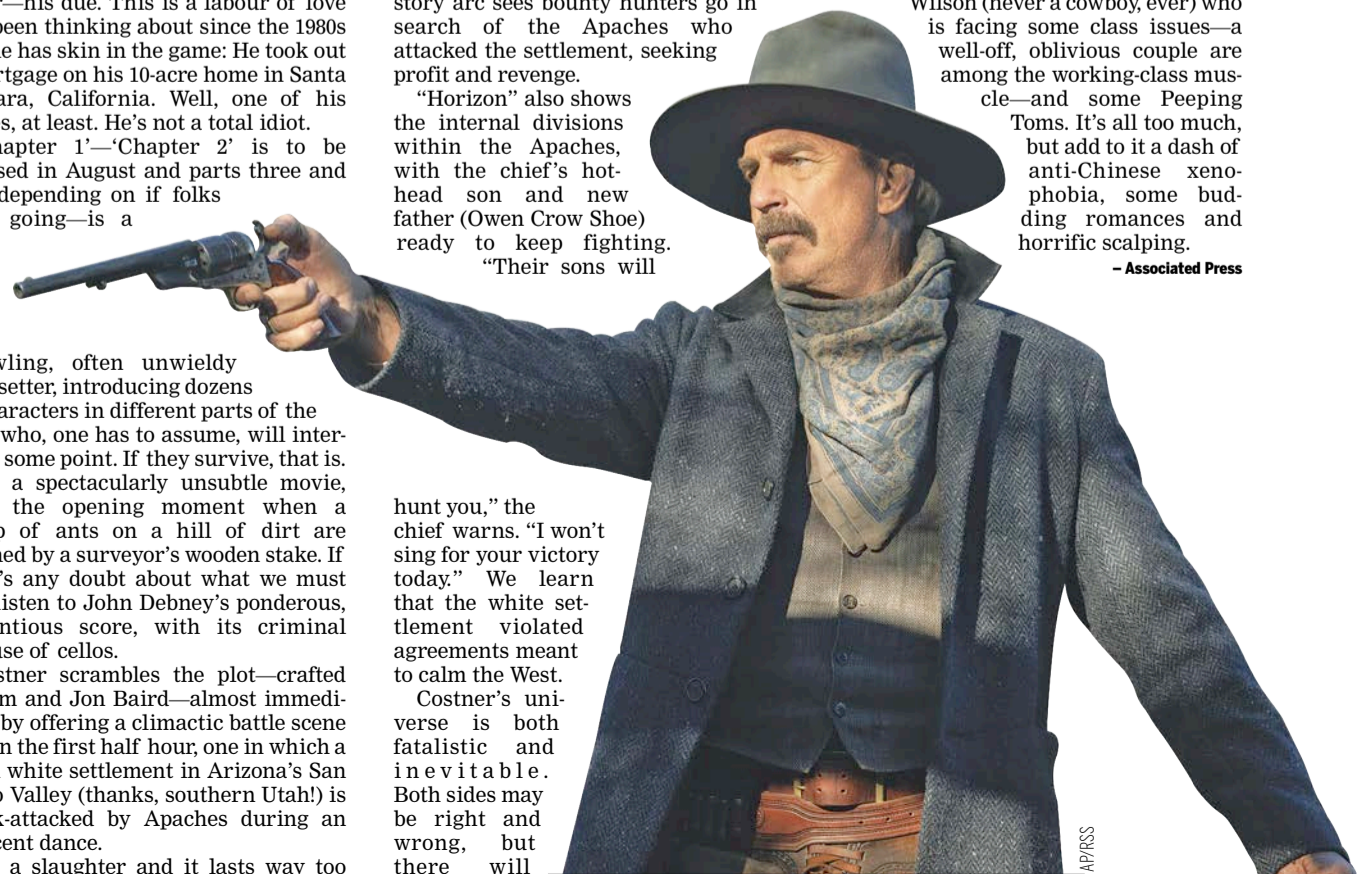
After an hour, Costner himself arrives a quiet, strong loner who enters a Wyoming Territory settlement with the hope of a nice drink and some lady company and yet who leaves on the run, protecting a sex worker (Abbey Lee) and a boy in her care from psychotic horsemen who wish them harm.

Two hours into the movie comes another whole set of characters, with Costner's menu now completely out of whack. It's a wagon train led by Luke Wilson (never a cowboy, ever) who

is facing some class issues—a well-off, oblivious couple are among the working-class muscle—and some Peeping Toms. It's all too much,

but add to it a dash of anti-Chinese xenophobia, some budding romances and horrific scalping.

—Associated Press



hunt you," the chief warns. "I won't sing for your victory today." We learn that the white settlement violated agreements meant to calm the West.

Costner's universe is both fatalistic and inevitable. Both sides may be right and wrong, but there will