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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Trump boarded secret flight via catering truck due to threat, reports say

US president did not fly by the old Air Force One he publicly boarded in Ankara.

REUTERS
WASHINGTON, AUG 11

US President Donald Trump took a secret military flight from Turkey last month in an operation that involved him being moved between aircraft in a catering truck, an extraordinary deception prompted by an Iranian assassination threat, the Washington Post reported.

The White House said at the time that the president was flying aboard Air Force One from Turkey, where he had attended a NATO summit, to Britain. But moments after Trump had boarded the plane, he left it in secret via the catering truck and boarded another aircraft for the flight to Britain, the Post said on Monday, quoting unnamed sources.



Donald Trump

The New York Times carried a similar report, quoting unnamed US officials. Trump had taken a newly renovated Qatari-donated jet to Ankara for the NATO summit but unexpectedly announced he would use an older Air Force One when departing the country, a move that prompted questions about the newer plane's security.

The trip to NATO was the first international travel for the new plane, whose speedy upgrades triggered questions over its cost and security, and took place as hostilities escalated with Iran, which borders Turkey.

Before departing Ankara, Trump said on Truth Social that he would use an older baby blue Air Force One plane "for old time's sake" to RAF Mildenhall in Britain while the new plane stopped at the same base so US service members stationed there could tour the aircraft.

After Trump boarded the old Air Force One in front of cameras in Ankara, he was secretly shuttled by the airport catering truck to a smaller plane, an Air Force C-32A, the Post reported citing a US official familiar with the operation and corroborating material it reviewed. The deception operation was triggered by a credible threat to Trump, the Post reported. A similar operation had taken place in 2000, when President Bill Clinton used an unmarked executive jet to fly into Pakistan while sending his formal Air Force One as decoy.

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People in queue for appointments at the Civil Service Hospital in Kathmandu on Tuesday morning.

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

Nepal Police seeks power to intercept calls

Lawyers and rights advocates warn that expanded surveillance powers could expose citizens to abuse, while police argue they are essential for tackling increasingly tech-savvy criminals.

GAURAV POKHAREL
KATHMANDU, AUG 11

Nepal Police has asked the government to give it legal authority to intercept telephone calls and digital communications in real time during criminal investigations, reopening a long-running debate over how far the state should be allowed to 'intrude' into citizens' private communication.

The Police Headquarters at Naxal has incorporated the proposal into its strategic planning framework, arguing that investigators need modern digital tools to pursue criminals who increasingly use encrypted and other sophisticated communication technologies.

The proposal would allow designated police officers to listen to telephone conversations and monitor digital communications in real time if the

necessary legal framework and approvals were put in place.

"Individuals involved in heinous crimes or those evading justice often employ advanced technologies, making it necessary for us to listen in on

The proposal echoes earlier attempts by state agencies for wider surveillance powers.

communications when probing serious offences," Deputy Inspector General Abi Narayan Kafle, central spokesperson for Nepal Police, told Kantipur. "We have prepared a comprehensive

plan to make police investigations technology-friendly and have already briefed the Ministry of Home Affairs on this operational strategy."

Police officials say the proposed power would be aimed at serious criminal investigations rather than broad surveillance. But the request has revived concerns among lawyers and civil rights activists over the possibility of political or institutional abuse, particularly given Nepal's history of political interference in security and law enforcement agencies.

The proposal also echoes previous attempts by state agencies to obtain wider surveillance powers, which were abandoned after strong opposition from lawmakers, rights activists and civil society groups.

The National Investigation Department, the country's principal civilian intelligence agency, had previ-

ously sought similar authority through proposed legislation. Draft legislation concerning the department had included provisions allowing authorities to monitor, track and intercept phone calls, text messages and video communications.

Section 15 of the proposed intelligence bill would have allowed the chief research officer to order the interception of electronic communications when other intelligence-gathering methods were considered impractical and when failure to intercept the communications was deemed to pose an immediate threat to national security.

The proposal drew widespread criticism over the potential for abuse. Political opposition and public concern eventually forced the government to abandon the bill.

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Susta folk caught between Indian encroachment and river erosion

Villagers laying embankment to protect their homes as erosion by Narayani worsens and Indian border force blocks construction of a permanent dyke.

NABIN PAUDEL
PARASI, AUG 11

It's 01:25 on the clock. In the dead of the night, young men are hauling sacks filled with soil on the banks of the Narayani river in Susta Rural Municipality-5 of West Nawalparasi. Those unable to carry the heavy sacks are busy arranging a wire mesh.

On Sunday night residents of Susta worked round the clock, racing to reinforce the riverbank for fear that floodwaters from the Narayani might spill into their settlement.

Sitting along the riverbank, residents, including Kamal Bhagat, were teaching other young men how to reinforce the embankment, drawing on techniques they had learned from previous efforts to protect the settlement.

This is not the first time that Susta residents have worked day and night to build makeshift embankments to protect their homes. But this year, the river has been eroding the bank more aggressively than ever. At the same time, residents say the Indian side has prevented them from building an embankment on their own territory.

The worsening situation has drawn renewed attention to the struggle of people in Susta to hold on to their land. Residents say they have long lived under pressure from India's border security force, the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), which they accused of harassing them from time to time. Now the Narayani river is posing another threat.

The river is steadily eroding the settlement, raising fears that intensi-

fied erosion could eventually force residents from their homes. For 11 days, people in Susta have been working along the river to build an embankment and protect their land.

Residents are throwing in soil, stones and fallen trees to protect their settlement from flood.

"We are prepared for any struggle to protect our land," said Osiya Khan. "We have received a lot of support now. We would be grateful if the government could negotiate with India

and create an environment in which we can build an embankment up to the Nepal-India border."

Residents say they were unable to feel secure during the monsoon despite the government allocating money for an embankment last fiscal year. An embankment stretching about a kilometre was completed before the start of the monsoon at a cost of around Rs150 million.

But work on an additional 132-metre section could not be completed after Indian security personnel objected to its construction, according to residents. The area has now become a major point of river erosion, increasing the risk that the Narayani river will enter the settlement.

With floodwaters threatening their homes, residents took an initiative to

build a temporary embankment last week, filling sacks with soil and placing them along the vulnerable stretch.

This relentless effort finally drew the attention of local, provincial and federal authorities. Chet Narayan Acharya, chief minister of Lumbini, and House of Representatives member Bikram Khanal have inspected the site. During his visit, Acharya pledged that there would be no shortage of funds for immediate measures aimed at reducing the flood risk.

Residents are contributing labour and using soil, stones, fallen trees and other locally available materials to protect the settlement.

But they say their efforts alone cannot solve Susta's long-running problems of erosion and flooding.

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Online attacks on minister's wife show how political mockery turns misogynistic

From Susmita Adhikari to Hisila Yami and Arzu Rana Deuba, women have often found themselves caught in political crossfire, say experts.

DAYA DUDRAJ
KATHMANDU, AUG 11

On the night of August 5, at 9:16 pm, an online content platform named 'Interviews Nepal' posted an image on Facebook featuring Education Minister Sasmit Pokharel alongside his wife Susmita Adhikari. The post was shared during an acute cooking gas shortage across the country. It carried a fictional dialogue intended to mock the government's failure: 'Sasmit: What does a gas tree look like?'

The uploaded image quickly spread across social media channels as a satirical meme. However, the image was not recent.

It was a screenshot extracted from a video recorded during Pokharel's election campaign some five months ago. Similar repurposed visual materials are frequently used across Nepali digital spaces to criticise the government or the ministers.

When violent clashes occurred between two groups in Sunsari recently, another post featuring the

same image appeared on 'The Nepali Fever' page. It read: 'Sasmit! What is happening in Madhesh? Is there a Nepal outside Kathmandu as well?' By the time of writing, the post had gathered 899 reactions, including 755 'haha' responses. On July 30, at 6:03 pm, a page titled 'Troll Nuwakot' published a similar image.

During the Tribhuvan University MBS question paper leak incident, the same image was used with the text: 'Sasmit! What does a paper leak actually mean?' A Facebook page named 'Psycho Nepal', which commands over 421,000 followers, shared a post stating: 'Our school madam used to set question papers sitting right in front of us, but they never leaked, Sasmit.' The comment section beneath the post was filled with similar memes using Adhikari's picture.

At first glance, such a post may appear to be merely mocking Minister Pokharel. But, more subtly, such trolling is rooted in the same patriarchal mindset that seeks to belittle women, portray them as weak and ridicule them. This is not the first instance of



Education Minister Sasmit Pokharel pictured with his wife Susmita Adhikari.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF PSYCHO NEPAL/FACEBOOK

women being subjected to digital trolling or attempts to undermine them online. According to UN Women, women around the world face various forms of online abuse, including cyberbullying, hate speech, trolling, online threats, revenge porn, sexually explicit content created through AI-generated deepfakes and character assassination. The issue is also highlighted in the UN Women's FAQs report published on November 13.

Across these digital platforms, including Facebook, TikTok, Reddit, and Instagram, the memes portray Adhikari as intellectually incompetent. Variations include captions like: 'Sasmit, how far is Sudurpashchim? Is it west of Thankot?', 'Sasmit, the ATM machine drops money so easily, why do people go to work all day?', 'Sasmit, do cows produce milk or does the dairy?', and 'Sasmit, can't we collect gold from the Sunkoshi river and distribute it to the poor?'

Though the primary target of public dissatisfaction remains the performance of the government, online users persistently choose Adhikari's

image to express their frustration.

During the parliamentary election campaign, Pokharel drove a vehicle while Adhikari asked him questions regarding law, politics, society, and current affairs, to which Pokharel responded. Following the election, those video frames were isolated and paired with absurd questions designed to undermine Adhikari's perceived intelligence.

On August 4, at 10:06 pm, a page titled 'Sad Sarkar Pro Max' posted an edited image where Pokharel's face was replaced with former prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's. In the edit, Adhikari asks, 'Sasmit! When will the discussion about our picture end?' Dahal's character responds, 'After death.'

At a meeting with editors on Monday, Education Minister Sasmit Pokharel said he was aware of the trolling directed at him.

"I have seen the trolling. There are different kinds of people in society, and some people enjoy such things. It has not affected me much," he said.

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FOREX	
US Dollar	153
Euro	176.48
Pound Sterling	206.57
Swiss Franc	188.62
Australian Dollar	107.96
Canadian Dollar	109.8
Singapore Dollar	119.42
Japanese Yen (10)	9.6
Chinese Yuan	22.68
Saudi Arab Riyal	40.75
Qatari Riyal	41.97
Thai Bhat	4.61
UAE Dhiram	41.66
Malaysian Ringit	37.39
Korean Won (100)	10.8
Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank	
BULLION	
PRICE PER TOLA	
Fine Gold	Rs 307,900
Silver	Rs 4,780
SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA	

Nepal ratifies two key ILO instruments on forced labour and workplace inspection

By ratifying the two instruments, Nepal has taken an important step towards a future in which no one is subjected to forced labour, every worker enjoys effective protection under the law, and every workplace upholds dignity, safety and justice.

POST REPORT

KATHMANDU, AUG 11

The International Labour Organization has commended Nepal's ratification of two landmark ILO instruments aimed at strengthening labour rights, combating forced labour and improving workplace inspections.

The instruments—the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (Protocol No 29) and the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (Convention No 81)—were adopted by the Federal Parliament and formally deposited during a ceremony held at the ILO headquarters in Geneva on August 7.

By ratifying the two instruments, Nepal has taken an important step towards a future in which no one is subjected to forced labour, every worker enjoys effective protection under the law, and every workplace upholds dignity, safety and justice.

The ILO also recognised the leader-

ship and collective efforts of Minister for Youth, Labour and Employment Ramjee Yadav, the relevant ministries, parliamentarians, workers' and employers' organisations, and other social partners in advancing the ratifications, the ILO said in a statement.

Yadav said the ratification reaffirmed Nepal's commitment to promoting decent work, safeguarding workers' rights and strengthening protections against forced labour.

"The ratification of these two ILO instruments reaffirms Nepal's commitment to promoting decent work, safeguarding workers' rights, and strengthening protections against forced labour," Yadav said. "It will further strengthen our existing labour system and enhance our efforts to prevent exploitation, improve labour inspection, and ensure that labour rights are effectively protected and upheld."

By ratifying Convention No 81, Nepal will strengthen its labour inspection system to better ensure

safe, healthy and decent working conditions for all workers. Effective labour inspection is essential for enforcing labour laws, promoting compliance and protecting workers' rights across all sectors of the economy. The convention will improve the enforcement of laws on wages, working time, occupational safety and health, child labour and other fundamental labour protections, helping ensure that workers' rights are upheld not only in legislation but also in factories, shops, construction sites, service workplaces and other places of work.

The ratification of Protocol No 29 will strengthen Nepal's efforts to prevent and eliminate forced labour; protect victims, ensure access to justice and remedies, including compensation and legal assistance, and address trafficking in persons for forced labour. It will support stronger measures to identify, release, protect and rehabilitate victims, including migrant workers and people in vulner-

able situations.

Ambassador Ram Prasad Subedi, Nepal's permanent representative in Geneva, deposited the instruments of ratification with Gilbert F Houngbo, ILO director-general, during a ceremony at the ILO headquarters in Geneva on August 7, 2026.

"This is a proud and significant moment for Nepal," said Numan Özcan, ILO country director for Nepal. "By advancing these two instruments, the Government is sending a clear message that every worker matters. Their ratification will help turn the promise of decent work into a lived reality. I congratulate the Government of Nepal and all those who contributed to this important milestone through their leadership, commitment and collaboration."

As Nepal prepares for graduation from its Least Developed Country status and explores future trade opportunities, including possible access to the European Union's GSP+ framework,

strong labour standards and their effective implementation will become increasingly important to protect workers and support sustainable economic growth.

Effective labour inspection benefits workers, responsible employers and the national economy alike. Fair and consistent enforcement helps create a level playing field for businesses, reduce labour disputes, prevent workplace accidents and abuse, promote productivity, and strengthen confidence in the rule of law.

Likewise, eliminating forced labour contributes to poverty reduction, the formalisation of employment and Nepal's vision of inclusive and sustainable prosperity founded on decent work.

The ILO reiterated its readiness to continue working with the government of Nepal, employers' and workers' organisations, civil society and development partners to support the effective implementation of these commitments.

Special discounts await buyers at Naima Auto Show

POST REPORT

KATHMANDU, AUG 11

New two- and four-wheelers were unveiled at the Naima Nepal Mobility Expo-2026 on Tuesday.

The expo features vehicles from 55 brands across 53 stalls. However, vehicles brought for display at some stalls have been stranded en route after the Tatopani border point remained closed for longer than expected.

Organisers said some new brands have been unveiled at

the expo, while others will be launched on Wednesday.

Organised by the Nepal Automobile Importers and Manufacturers Association (Naima), the expo features two-wheelers, four-wheelers, commercial vehicles, electric and hybrid mobility solutions, technology, services and other mobility-related products.

Special discounts are being offered on vehicles at the expo, including two-wheelers, cars and passenger buses.

Himalayan Motrux, the authorised distributor of Maxus in Nepal, has unveiled the Maxus eTerror-9 Comfort pick-

up. The vehicle is being offered at a discount at the expo. Its market price is Rs8.8 million, but customers booking the vehicle at the expo will receive a discount of Rs300,000, said Dhruv Thapa, proprietor of the company.

According to Thapa, the 16-seat E-Delivery van, which was scheduled to be unveiled at the expo on Tuesday, could not arrive because the Tatopani customs point had been shut. As a result, the company was unable to launch the vehicle at the expo, he said.

Ayam Intercontinental, a company under the Himalayan

Organisation, has unveiled an electric passenger bus manufactured by Chinese automaker Dongfeng at the Naima Expo.

The 30-seat Dongfeng Longrange EV bus is priced at Rs12.45 million.

The 28-seat city bus is priced at Rs11.45 million. The company said customers booking either bus at the expo will receive a discount of Rs500,000.

Below are the price tags of some vehicles displayed at the expo.



Denza B5
Rs38 million



MG Majestor
Rs25 million



Toyota RAV4 (Hybrid)
Rs21.30 million



Toyota Hilux AT
Rs15.50 million



BAIC BJ30e
Rs11.99 million



Chery Wanda
Rs11.45 million



MG U9
Rs11 million



Mahindra XEV 9s
Rs6 million



Hyundai Venue N Line
Rs6.79 million



Nissan Tekton
Rs5.39 million



BYD Atto 2
Rs4.59 million



Tiago (facelift)
Rs2.99 million

WORLD

Syria sentences Assad to death in absentia over atrocities

MAHER AL-MOUNES/AFP DAMASCUS, AUG 11

A Syrian court on Tuesday sentenced former ruler Bashar al-Assad to death after a trial in absentia, convicting him of atrocities committed during the country's nearly 14-year civil war. It is the first such ruling under Syria's transitional leaders who ousted Assad in December 2024, vowing to provide justice and accountability for crimes committed under his rule. Assad fled to Moscow as Islamist-led forces closed in on Damascus after a lightning offensive.

At a court in Damascus on Tuesday, Judge Fakhr al-Din al-Aryan convicted Assad of crimes including "pre-meditated murder, the intentional killing of more than one person, the intentional killing of children under 15 years... torture, torture leading to death, and deprivation of liberty on multiple occasions—classified as crimes against humanity and war crimes".

"He is therefore sentenced to death," the judge said.

Syria in April began proceedings against Assad and other officials accused in person and in absentia of atrocities during the country's civil war, which erupted with brutal repression of pro-democracy protesters by the former authorities.

More than half a million people were subsequently killed and millions displaced, while tens of thousands disappeared, many into the country's prison system. The court also sentenced six former military and security officials in absentia to death, including Assad's brother Maher, who ran the army's elite Fourth Division. Those convicted included former defence minister Fahd al-Frej and Louay al-Ali, who headed military intelligence in Daraa province in 2011.

The court convicted the officials of crimes including murder, incitement to murder, torture leading to death and repeated deprivation of liberty, also considered "crimes against humanity" and "war crimes".

Former security official Atif Najib—the only one in the dock—was sentenced to death for "crimes against humanity" committed when he head-



Syria's President Bashar al-Assad speaks during a press conference with Iraq's Prime Minister in Damascus on July 16, 2023.

ed political security in Daraa province, the cradle of Syria's uprising. A cousin of Assad who was arrested in January last year, Najib was convicted of crimes including "the intentional killing of children under 15", and "torture leading to death".

Aryan said Najib had denied the charges and showed "no remorse".

An AFP correspondent saw dozens of people gathered at the courthouse for the ruling, many from Daraa province and some holding pictures of loved ones they said had disappeared or were imprisoned under those on trial. Ramzi Abu Naboud was carrying a picture of his brother Ahmed, who was killed when Assad's authorities broke up a sit-in at Daraa's Al-Omari mosque in 2011.

"Thank God and thanks to the judiciary, today we have obtained a judgement that has warmed our hearts," even if it will not bring back those who were killed, he said.

Syrian Justice Minister Mazhar al-Wais told state television that the rulings would be referred to Syria's court of cassation for a final decision, adding that defendants had the right to appeal within 30 days.

In a series of trial sessions held since late April, the court heard from witnesses and was presented with documents, images and at times classified information, while the judge's statements were sometimes televised.

Trump pivots back to sanctions for Iran as other strategies to end his war fizzle

JOSH BOAK & FATIMA HUSSEIN/AP WASHINGTON, AUG 11

President Donald Trump likes to say that he started his war with Iran after 50 years of economic pressure had failed to stop its nuclear weapons ambitions—but he's now betting that another financial squeeze can bring an end to that war.

Trump's administration is hoping that months of bombing have pushed Iran's economy to a breaking point that will force its leadership to cave to demands to end its nuclear programme and fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz to oil and natural gas tankers.

The Republican president on Monday said that since Iran is seeking compensation as part of any peace talks, he now intends to demand the same for the US side. It's part of a larger pivot this weekend by Trump to argue that Iran is now on the cusp of financially collapsing, even though it has already endured decades of financial sanctions, which are often a longer-term strategy rather than an immediate tool of warfare that can halt a conflict.

The shift comes as US stockpiles of key weapons have dwindled and as stop-start talks seem again to have stalled. But Trump insists the pressure can lead to a breakthrough.

"Yeah, they can make trouble, but they're broke," Trump told reporters. "They have no money You know, Iran is broke, totally broke. And, they're not paying their soldiers. They have inflation of 300 percent."

Inflation is running high in Iran, although Trump's estimates were higher than what administration officials have been citing to reporters. But the prospect of a longer war also carries inflation risks for other nations, including the US, where the war and higher gasoline prices are unpopular.

Crude oil prices climbed on Monday as investors interpreted Trump's comments as a sign that fewer ships would be traversing the Strait of Hormuz, continuing to limit global supplies of gasoline, jet fuel, natural gas and other forms of energy. The Iran war largely closed the waterway involved in shipping roughly 20 percent of global oil supplies before the conflict—and attempts to reopen the strait have

been short-lived as it has become a source of leverage for the Iranians in negotiations.

Iran does not appear to be publicly intimidated by the prospect of more financial sanctions.

"Whenever Washington proves itself incapable of pursuing diplomacy, it retreats into sanctions; and whenever those sanctions fail to produce results, it simply increases the dose," said Esmail Baghaei, spokesman for Iran's foreign ministry, on social media. "The real risk is that American politicians, clinging to this bad habit, will instead strangle their own remaining chances of a less humiliating exit from a crisis of their own making."



President Donald Trump walks to board Air Force One at Morristown Airport, on August 9.

The White House has called this Operation Economic Fury The president didn't say what additional financial pressure would be applied, but the administration has since April 16 been engaged in what it calls Operation Economic Fury against Iran. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent called this component the "financial equivalent" of a bombing campaign as the countries that buy oil from Iran or bank with it could be sanctioned.

But one problem with this pivot is that the sanctions are unable to bite as quickly as the impact of the largely shuttered strait, said Richard Nephew, a senior research scholar at Columbia University who helped direct Iran

sanctions strategy in the Obama administration. Nephew stressed that the value of sanctions as a tool is limited because Trump has not articulated clear strategic goals for the war, at times stressing that it can't have a nuclear weapon, then emphasising the strait and then talking about ballistic missiles. Instead, Trump has engaged in a massive series of aerial assaults and a level of destruction that has not produced the quick end that he initially promised.

"Economic pressure is a possible element in his strategy, but he's yet to explain the purpose," Nephew said. "Trump has systematically weakened his own hand through his inadequate use of force, inarticulate elucidation of an objective, and vacillation on negotiations."

Still, the sanctions and the ongoing US naval blockade of Iranian ports give the US economic and financial leverage, said Juan Zarate, a deputy national security adviser in the George W Bush administration. Zarate said the US sanctions threatening third-party countries doing business with Iran also have an impact. But these things take time, he noted.

"The ultimate question will be how far the United States is willing to go to constrict Iran's oil trade and threaten third countries with severe sanctions—and whether it has the patience to test whether the economic pain will change the regime's behavior," Zarate said.

Past chiefs used sanctions. Trump says they didn't go far enough

Trump's latest pivot to economic issues with Iran is something of a flip-flop. Trump has long derided past presidents who used sanctions to limit Iran's economic ability to pay for its military and nuclear development. In a speech last week in Las Vegas, he defended the bombing, missiles and drone attacks that began on February 28 by indicating that the sanctions from previous administrations that date back to November 1979 had failed to succeed. "It's been 47 years, but really, it's been 50 years because they've been saying 47 for three years, it's been 50 years," Trump said. "And no other president has done what you should have done a long time ago, because Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon, can't have it."

Solar eclipse: Hunt for protective glasses

ROBIN BJALON/AFP MADRID, AUG 11

The scramble for protective glasses has reached fever pitch across Europe ahead of Wednesday's rare total solar eclipse, as pharmacies, opticians and other shops struggled to keep them in stock.

In Spain, where parts of the country will be in the path of totality, finding certified protective glasses has become increasingly difficult, with many distribution points reporting they have run out.

A notice posted at the entrance of Madrid's National Museum of Natural Sciences said its supply of protective glasses was exhausted. The museum was among 30 science institutions across the country taking part in a campaign organised by the government to distribute two million pairs of glasses for free.

Some pharmacies in central Madrid still had supplies Tuesday, generally

selling certified glasses for safely viewing the Sun for between three and four euros (\$4.60) a pair.

But Carles Sisquella, who runs an optical shop in Barcelona, said his store had been out of stock for 10 days.

"There are now a lot of people who obviously won't be able to get glasses," he said. Doctors warn that looking directly at the Sun during a solar eclipse can damage the retina, potentially harming the cells responsible for sharp central vision.

"I've been asking around since Friday, but they're nowhere to be found," a woman named Mabel told AFP in Barcelona after another fruitless search. French supermarket chain Carrefour's Spanish unit said demand for eclipse glasses has "grown exponentially", increasing twentyfold in recent days compared with the same period last month. The rush is being repeated across Europe.

In Brussels, where about 90 percent of the Sun will be covered by the

Moon, people were also racing to find glasses.

With a seeming majority of opticians and pharmacists out of stock, pastry chef Arno Dossogne, 37, struck gold at a small opticians' store that received a last-minute shipment Monday afternoon.

"I got some for me, my boyfriend and a couple of friends whose online order got cancelled!" he told AFP. "It was this or nothing. You can't mess around, or you'll burn your eyes."

The opticians' manager Fouad Mehdaoui told AFP he acted on a tip from his pharmacist wife, placing large orders of glasses early on, but even then was outrun by demand and had to order more.

"Two boxes just came in with 100 pairs in total—they were gone in 30 minutes," he told AFP as a stream of eclipse enthusiasts filed in the store, by chance or word of mouth, and an employee fielded non-stop phone enquiries.

Trump told Ukraine it had no cards. Then Kyiv took the war to Russia

EMMA BURROWS, JOHN LEICESTER & ILLIA NOVIKOV/AP AUG 11

The meeting in the Oval Office between US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was a diplomatic car crash.

"Your country is in big trouble. You're not winning," Trump said, dressing down Zelenskyy in front of the world's media. "You don't have the cards."

The blowup in February 2025, three years into the war, was more than just a heated public exchange: The Ukrainian delegation was asked to leave the White House, and Washington briefly suspended intelligence sharing with Kyiv. In the ensuing months, as Russia made slow but steady gains on the battlefield, Trump warmly welcomed Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska and seemed ready to push Ukraine into an unfavourable peace deal, including forcing it to give up territory.

But even as Zelenskyy sat next to Trump, his forces were preparing an operation that would reveal Ukraine's ability and ambition to take the war to Russia: Months later, drones smuggled into the country attacked Russian bombers, destroying or damaging planes worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Since then, Kyiv has ramped up a campaign of longer-range strikes inside Russia and in areas Moscow has seized, increased production of weapons, targeted Russian air defences, and hit oil infrastructure and the warehouses of a major retailer in a bid to ensure ordinary Russians feel the impact of the conflict.

In an embarrassment to Putin, Ukrainian drone strikes sent thick plumes of smoke billowing over St Petersburg shortly before the opening of an international economic forum in June. Concern over Ukraine's attacks led Russian authorities to scale down the May 9 military parade commemorating the defeat of Nazi Germany. Strikes on oil refineries have caused a summer fuel crisis.

By the time Trump and Zelenskyy met at a NATO summit in July, the American president said the Ukrainian leader had "been very effective" in the war. "We've actually developed a good relationship," Trump added.

But as Ukraine's strikes have intensified, so have Russia's—and Kyiv faces major challenges in defending against them because of shortages of American Patriot air defence missiles. In the first six months of the year,

1,396 civilians were killed in Ukraine, according to the UN. Meanwhile, the world body said Russian authorities reported 250 civilians killed in the same period. On Monday, a strike that Ukraine said hit an oil refinery in Russia killed 13 people, according to local officials.

And while Ukraine's effort appears to have shifted the narrative about the war in Washington, it's still not clear if it will be able to push Putin toward the negotiating table.

Ukraine's strikes are aimed at undermining the idea that Russia can afford to "just let this roll," said Jack Watling, a senior research fellow at the London-based RUSI think tank.

The question of whether it will succeed depends on how much pain Ukraine can exact. "Logically, above a certain threshold, it does work but whether they can reach that threshold is an interesting question"—and one that depends at least partly on factors outside Kyiv's control, like continued European financial support, he noted.

Ukraine brings the war to Russia

While most of Ukraine's strikes have a range of less than 200 kilometres, its longer-range attacks have increased dramatically this year. It launched three times as many of those strikes in July as it did in January, according to data from ACLED, an independent conflict monitor. Repeatedly hitting deep into Russia has forced its military to stretch air defences over a larger area.

Many of its strikes have focused on four key categories of targets, according to an Associated Press analysis of hundreds of Ukrainian attacks this year—compiled from statements by Russian officials and state media and the Ukrainian military.

As the Iran war pushed up energy prices, leading the US to ease sanctions on Russian oil, Kyiv ramped up strikes on oil infrastructure to deny the Kremlin revenue from fuel exports and force shortages on ordinary Russians. It is also striking defence manufacturing to damage Russia's long-term ability to produce weapons, targeting air defences to clear a path for its own arms, and hitting retail warehouses to bring the effects to ordinary Russians.

Starlink gives Ukraine an advantage—for now

It's not always clear if Ukraine's attacks are effective—and some may have resulted in minimal or no damage. In May and June, Ukraine said it hit several satellite, reconnaissance or signals intelligence facilities in

Russia, but satellite images analysed by AP did not show major damage.

Still, Ukraine has one advantage that can help it strip back Russian air defences and make its drone strikes more precise.

It has access to Elon Musk's satellite communications service Starlink—which means its operators can control drones in real time in Russian-held Ukrainian territory. Russia has been blocked from using Starlink.

But Russia is also building its own version of Starlink, and is installing jamming systems that hamper Starlink connectivity, Brovdi said.

Ukraine is investing heavily in weapons production

Even before the Oval Office meeting, Ukraine scrambled to invest in new weapons—but that moment was "a real wake-up call," said a European military official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the front-line situation in detail. It became clear that US support could be stopped "from one day to the next."

Ukraine doubled down on production, churning out a growing array of weapons in larger numbers and shortening traditional research and production cycles from decades to years or even months.

Even so, Ukraine is still not able to produce as many missiles as it needs. It also took Ukraine time to make systems that could target facilities precisely enough that Kyiv felt comfortable using them to strike deep into Russia, Watling said.

And while Ukraine has begun to resolve navigational issues with its missiles, such as the Flamingo, those weapons are still not as accurate—or as stealthy—as their Western analogues. That often means hundreds of drones must be fired to overwhelm Russian air defences to allow a missile to get through.

It's an expensive and time-consuming way to wage war since only 5 percent to 9 percent of what Ukraine fires gets past Russian air defences, according to Watling.

But, although Russia's weapons are more powerful, Zelenskyy suggested at the NATO summit that Putin is "losing the initiative" in the war as Ukraine has moved the fight from the stalled battlefield to the sky.

Sitting next to Trump at the summit, the Ukrainian leader even cracked a joke, demurring when Trump asked him if he would accept Moscow as a venue for peace talks, as Putin has suggested.

"There are a lot of Ukrainian drones in the air," Zelenskyy said.

Safety questions over Qatari-donated Boeing jet

>> Continued from page 1

On this occasion, the journalists who thought they were travelling with Trump on the older Air Force One, which was effectively used as a decoy, reported being advised to keep their window shades in the press cabin closed. The Post said aside from reporters, some White House staff also believed that the president was on board.

When asked later by reporters why they had to keep their shades shut during the flight, Trump said it was

because they were "probably on a dangerous flight." He went on to say: "But if I go, you go. Right?"

The C-32A carrying Trump flew to Britain and arrived at around 10:20 pm with the older Air Force One and media arriving minutes later, the Post reported. It was not clear, the paper said, how Trump was moved from the C-32A back to the older Air Force One.

Trump's travelling press pool reported he climbed down the stairs of the older Air Force One at 10:56 pm.

He gave the press a peace sign but

didn't walk over to talk to them. He then spent some time greeting service members before walking to the new, Qatar-donated plane.

When asked for comment on the revelation of a secret flight on a third plane, the White House provided a statement from Communications Director Steve Cheung saying the Qatari-donated jet has been fitted with high-level security protocols that ensure the safety of the president and his staff.

"As the President has said recently, there are many enemies of America who have their sights on him, and we use every tool at our disposal to address those threats," Cheung said. It was the same statement provided to the Post.

The Pentagon did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The new plane, with red, white, dark blue and gold livery chosen by Trump, is a Boeing 747 gifted to the United States by Qatar last year and refitted by defence contractor L3Harris Technologies. It was intended to serve as a temporary replacement while Boeing struggled to deliver long-delayed next-generation Air Force One planes.



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The ideal self we were taught to dream of

From body image to beauty to careers and material success, the world around us shapes our ideas of who we should become.

TASHI GURUNG

A few weeks ago, while occupied with the ordinary routines of daily life, a random thought came to me: What would my ideal self look like? What would I consider a successful life?

As I genuinely reflected on the question, I noticed a pattern emerging. The first images that came to mind were surprisingly concrete and material: a particular physical appearance, a certain car, a beautiful apartment, financial security, perhaps a lifestyle that would signal that I had ‘made it’.

I found myself amused and slightly unsettled by the realisation that the first things I associated with my ideal self were material possessions and outward appearances. It made me wonder: Where did I learn to define success this way? Why do these things feel like evidence of becoming the person I am supposed to be?

The more I thought about it, the more I recognised that perhaps these desires did not originate entirely from within me. They may have been shaped, gradually and almost imperceptibly, by the world around me.

A particular scene from *Little Miss Sunshine*, a movie I find beautiful, came to mind. Little Olive is travelling across the country with her family to attend a children’s beauty pageant. She is excited about the trip and has been looking forward to the competition for a long time, even practising the dance routine she plans to perform with her grandfather.

At one point, the family stops at a diner for breakfast. Olive excitedly orders a ‘waffle à la mode’, a waffle topped with vanilla ice cream. Her father, Richard, immediately intervenes. Rather than openly insulting her, he uses an insidious, passive-aggressive logic. He tells Olive that the women who compete in the Miss America pageant are always skinny, and that eating ice cream makes people fat.

I remember feeling infuriated watching that scene. There is something particularly disturbing about hearing an adult speak to a little girl that way, not simply because of what he says, but because of what he introduces into her world.

Before that moment, Olive is completely innocent of the idea that her body needs to be evaluated. She is excited about her waffle, her dance, and her pageant. Her body is simply her body; it is not yet a problem she needs to solve.

And then, almost instantaneously, that changes.

Olive becomes visibly self-conscious,



SHUTTERSTOCK

absorbing the implication behind her father’s words: perhaps there is something wrong with the way she is. Perhaps she needs to become different in order to be accepted.

That moment stayed with me because I think it captures something much larger about how we learn to see ourselves.

The message rarely arrives as an explicit instruction saying, “You must look this way to be worthy.” Instead, it comes in fragments, in advertisements, movies, social media, conversations, family expectations, compliments, jokes, fashion, and the lifestyles presented to us as desirable.

Over time, these messages become so familiar that they no longer feel external. They begin to sound like our own thoughts.

We learn that certain bodies are more desirable, certain careers more respectable, certain homes more successful, and certain cars more prestigious. We learn that having more money means achieving more, that attractiveness determines worth, and that productivity is a measure of value. Most importantly, these standards are rarely presented as standards. They are presented as normal.

This is what made my original question about my ‘ideal self’ feel so revealing.

When I first imagined the person I

wanted to become, I instinctively imagined the visible markers of success: how I would look, what I would drive, where I would live, and how much money I would have. None of these desires are inherently wrong.

But I began to wonder whether these things were actually my definition of a meaningful life, or whether I had simply learned to associate them with one.



— MENTAL WELLBEING —

Perhaps the more important question is not “what would my ideal self have?” but “who would my ideal self be?”

Would I be kinder? More courageous? More emotionally grounded? Would I have meaningful relationships? Would I be someone who makes others feel safe and accepted? Would I have the freedom to spend my time in ways that feel meaningful? Would I be curious, compassionate, resilient, generous, or intellectually fulfilled?

And perhaps most importantly, would I be able to exist without constantly feeling that I needed to become someone else before I was allowed to feel enough?

As adults, the messages become more sophisticated, but the underlying lesson remains remarkably similar: there is a version of you that is more acceptable than the person you are right now.

And so, we spend much of our lives moving toward an imagined version of ourselves, sometimes without stopping to ask who created that image in the first place. Perhaps introspection allows us to separate these two voices: the voice of what we genuinely want, and the voice of what we have been taught to want.

The answer is not to reject material things or ambition altogether. The problem is not wanting a beautiful apartment, financial stability, or a particular appearance. The problem begins when these things become conditions for self-worth, when they stop being things we enjoy having and become evidence that we are finally enough.

The ideal self does not need to be the person who has everything society has taught us to want. Rather, it can be the

person who is more conscious of why they want what they want.

Someone who can recognise the standards we have inherited without automatically accepting them. Someone who can enjoy beauty without believing that beauty determines worth. Someone who can pursue success without allowing success to determine their value. Someone who can want more for themselves without believing that who they are now is somehow inadequate.

Perhaps this is a more meaningful definition of the ideal self: not a perfected version of ourselves, but a more authentic one.

And, in the end, an ideal life is not about finally becoming the person who fits the picture perfectly. It is about becoming comfortable enough with ourselves to ask whether we even want to be in the picture.

Gurung is a counselling psychologist at Happy Minds, a mental health and well-being platform.



In ‘One foot in front of the other’, four runners build their utopia on the road

Biradar’s documentary follows four runners on a 340-kilometre journey, where endurance gives way to an unexpected sense of community.

TATSAM MUKHERJEE

Few things help people bond more than being in the trenches through an extreme experience: travelling/living with someone over a long period, being on an outdoor schedule, working in the same department overseen by a tyrant, or taking part in high-endurance sports like trekking or long-distance running.

It is during adverse conditions that all politeness flies out of the window, and people show you who they really are. It’s intimacy unlike anything else. It’s what probably explains the thick camaraderie at the heart of Basav Biradar’s 62-minute documentary, *One Foot in Front of The Other*.

Here, Biradar chronicles a 2018 run between Bengaluru to Chennai, along with backstories of the four runners: Santosh, Chandra, Mani and Krishan. As the group undertakes the journey of 340-odd kms, the film gradually bleeds the noise around long-distance running as an endurance sport.

Santosh, a US-returned software techie (one might consider him a Bengaluru cliché), took up social work on the side in the mid 2000s. Dissatisfied with how it wasn’t leading to any ‘positive’ change, he started a running group in the late 2000s, inviting friends, acquaintances and strangers to join him.

With Runner’s High, Santosh found an outlet for his compassion to do good for society, while also seeing tangible results for his effort. Santosh leads the group over four and a half days, metic-

ulously planning each stop, the food to be had, the overall pace of the group, ensuring everyone’s safety (especially Chandra, the only female runner here).

Biradar’s film is a pared-down project, with the rawness of a V-log. If the role of a documentarian is to become invisible around their subjects, Biradar is successful. None of the runners seem conscious of the camera, and keep their banter going. It seems like the filmmaker has spent enough time with the ‘characters’ here, so as to never treat presence as an invasion of their privacy. More than once, during the film, the runners warmly greet the camera.

All four runners hail from different backgrounds – Krishan recounts growing up during the 1980s insurgency in Punjab. Having moved to Bengaluru in 1998, he began training under Santosh from the late 2000s. Chandra, originally hailing from Kerala, discovered her passion for long-distance running at the Mumbai marathon at the age of 45, when she accidentally won in her category.

At the age of 60, she’s the eldest and among the most resilient in the group. Mani, a native of Trichy (Tamil Nadu), seems to look at running as a way to test himself, but confesses that it’s the feeling of community that has brought him back to Runner’s High again and again.

As much as high-endurance sports are about the myth of discipline, focus and isolation – a thing I appreciated about Santosh in the film is his intent to bust all of it. He calls his group of long-distance runners, JLBR: Jobless Lazy Boring Runners.



PHOTO: THEWIRE.IN

“Anyone can do it, as long as they have the time,” Santosh tells the camera, which is, of course, not entirely true.

During the run, everyone’s mindful about doing their best, and inspiring each other to keep moving when things become unpleasant beyond a certain degree. None of the runners want to be the one to slow down the entire group. And yet, at no point, are any of the runners being forced to finish the run at the expense of their mental or physical health. An unspoken trust binds the group.

The group’s culture, primarily under Santosh’s leadership, is a Utopian bubble unto itself. Everyone tries their best, they wait for the one struggling on a particular day, and manage to inspire each other to get over the finish line.

As a result, long-distance running becomes a metaphor for life, and the generosity on the road begins to feel like a larger philosophy for one’s way of living. I think running for such hours over long distances gives one time to think: about their value system, beliefs. I’d like to believe after all the pain a body is subjected to, it turns one into a humble, empathetic version of themselves.

One thing I particularly enjoyed about Biradar’s documentary was the idealism he brought out, especially in this world of late-stage capitalism. I associated its sincerity and charm with the Doordarshan films I grew up watching. I was reminded of a film that I’d caught by chance, Parvati Menon’s *Triyatri* (1990).

Menon’s film follows three teenage boys, who have just got their results for 10th boards. They’re encouraged to learn from living, by riding their bicycles from Bombay to Kanyakumari (by none other than Utpal Dutt, who plays a character’s grandfather here). Menon’s film has a sense of wading into the unknown, and the optimistic outlook to treat any adverse experience as an opportunity to build character. Similarly, as much as there’s toil, sweat and pain in the mission at the heart of Biradar’s film, there’s also a sense of exploration.

While Santosh, Chandra, Mani and Krishan put their bodies on the line, by running on an average for 11 hours on consecutive days (about 70 kms per day), they also never seem to be trying to make it look aspirational. Biradar’s film, while recording this extraordinary feat, never frames the runners as anything beyond ordinary people.

It might make viewers think of taking up long-distance running as a hobby (it’s obviously harder than the film makes it look). However, as the film’s name also accurately explains, it’s only about putting one foot in front of the other.

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WHAT I WATCH ONLINE



Numa Sambahamphe

Stylist, costume designer, model, and actor Sambahamphe shares the shows and YouTube channels she turns to for comfort and adventure.

Q2han

Two twins Qwon & Qjin vlog about fashion, lifestyle, decor, travelling, cooking, learning new skills, and everyday life. They are one of my go to comfort shows to watch. Whenever I feel down or tired or am just resting at home, I go watch them all the time.



Try Guys

The Try Guys are a fun group who basically try everything from games, makeup, cooking, challenges, and even things they’ve never done before. They approach everything like complete beginners. I have been watching them since 2020 and still enjoy everything they put out.

Running Man

It’s a Korean variety show and definitely one of my all-time favourites. I love how chaotic, funny, and unpredictable every episode is, with the cast competing in different games and challenges while constantly making fun of each other. It’s one of those shows I can watch anytime.



The Big Bang Theory

When I am looking for a fun geeky sitcom with a mix of comedy, friendship, and everyday chaos, ‘The Big Bang Theory’ is my ultimate choice. I love the dynamic between the characters and how their completely different personalities somehow work so well together.

One Piece

One Piece is not just an anime to me; it’s a story that reflects so much of reality, especially when it comes to human emotions, relationships, and the injustices of the world. Beneath all the adventure, humour, and fantasy, there are so many real-life themes that make you think and feel deeply.

