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Nepali evacuees are seen outside tents at a coronavirus quarantine site in Kharipati, Bhaktapur, on Monday. A total of 175 people have been kept there to wait out a 14-day quarantine after being evacuated from the Chinese province of Hubei where a deadly new coronavirus originated.



INTERVIEW 16

'Our film industry lacks producers who can invest more than money

Oli sees a conspiracy to unseat him, but it is unclear what he is referring to

Although those close to Oli insist that a conspiracy is brewing, political analysts are unsure how anyone could assail the strongest government in recent history.

ANIL GIRI KATHMANDU FFB 17

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli leads the strongest government Nepal has seen in the last three decades since the restoration of democracy. He has more than a comfortable majority, just 10 seats short of a two-thirds majority in Parliament. But Oli still seems to see conspiracies against his government.

On Sunday, while speaking in his home district of Jhapa, Oli said that attempts were being made to topple his government

Rajan Bhattarai, foreign relations advisor to Oli, said that the prime minister made the statement after "receiving some information" about ongoing conspiracies against the current government. He refused to divulge details.

But a section of leaders in the ruling party itself says there's no threat as such to the current dispensation in Kathmandu. They dismissed Oli's remarks as an outcome of "paranoia" or "anxiety".

Oli, who is also the chairman, along with Pushpa Kamal ahal, the Nepa

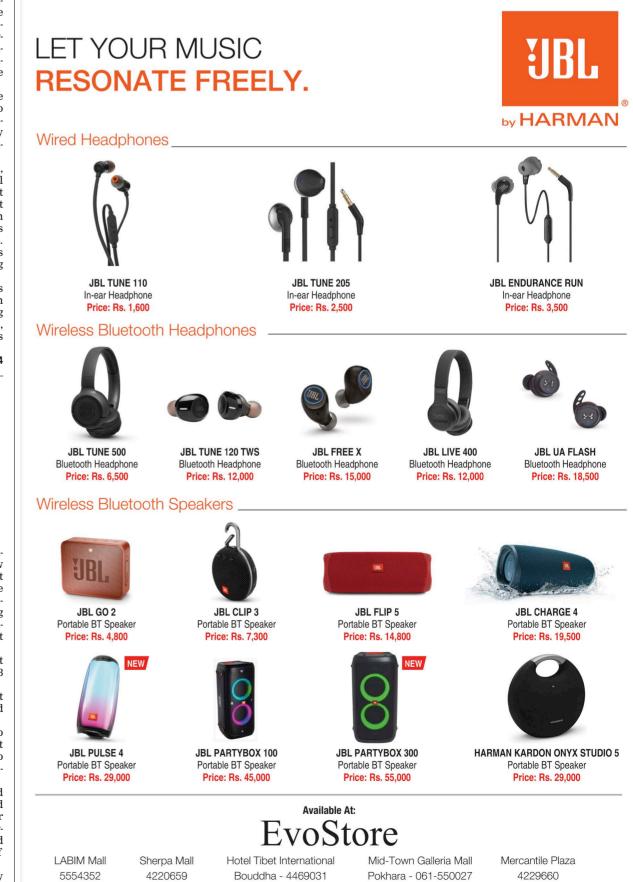


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their choice for Speaker-neither wanted Tumbahangphe.

>> Continued on page 4



patriarchy in the ruling party.

sies, but they are certain to have a

lasting effect and remain talking

points for long, say analysts and politi-

Mahara might have gotten an

acquittal from the court but moral

questions remain, especially given his stature in politics, said Rachana Khadka, a central committee member of the Nepal Communist Party.

"On legal grounds, he got a clean chit but the moral questions will continue to haunt him," Khadka told the

developments had emerged in the ruling party, with the two chairs KP Sharma Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal both making a pitch for persons of



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"Several conspiracies are being hatched to make this government fall," said Oli without going into specifics. "You may think that this government is strong and has a majority, but some elements are trying to make it fail or topple it or defame it."

With the strongest government, Nepal also has the weakest opposition. With just 63 seats in Parliament, the primary opposition Nepali Congress lacks the numbers even to block a bill.

Party, however, is clearly not happy. He is constantly upset with the media for pointing out his administration's flawed policies. Even those within his close circles admit that Oli is not good at taking criticism.

Oli completed his two years in office just two days ago, on While addressing Saturday. the House of Representatives, he listed his government's achievements.

>> Continued on page 4

No takers for mall spaces, but financiers keep pouring money into shopping complexes

A desire to replicate success, lack of market research, and changing shopping habits are behind the failure of malls, economists say.

ANUP OJHA

KATHMANDU, FEB 17

The Chhaya Centre, one of the biggest malls in the country, is located in the tourist heart of Kathmandu-Thamel. But more than a year after opening, it remains largely empty.

The ground floor of the Chhaya Centre, which opened on December 25, 2018, has 82 retail spaces but 53-more than half—are empty. Out of 75 spaces on the first floor, 25 were empty, including two large halls while on the second floor, out of 76 spaces, 38 were bare. The third floor was almost empty with construction work taking place. The mall, spread over 860,00 sq ft, was reportedly built at a cost of Rs5 billion.

In the past decade, giant shopping malls have mushroomed across Kathmandu Valley. There are nearly a dozen malls in Kathmandu alone while massive new buildings are being constructed across the Valley. In the past fiscal year alone, construction permits for 15 commercial buildings above an area of 10,000 square feet were issued, with 16 permits in the preceding year, according to the Construction Permit Building Division office at Kathmandu



More than half of 82 retail spaces remain empty at Chhaya Centre in Thamel.

Metropolitan City. While the division did not maintain separate data on malls, since 2016, the city has given construction permits to 832 commercial buildings, which include shopping malls.

Despite being built at a cost of millions of rupees, many of the new malls are finding it difficult to attract new retail outlets while older ones are emptying out. According to economists, this reflects changing shopping habits and a tendency among financiers to simply follow trends without conducting proper market research.

Kavita Risal, marketing manager at Chhaya Centre, said that out of 258 spaces, only 100 are occupied.

"People have bought spaces here but they are not opening up shops," said Risal

According to the few retailers who have maintained storefronts at Chhaya, footfalls are dwindling and do not support the cost of renting a physical space

"It's been a year since we opened our adventure information centre and we have not had a single customer yet," said Pravat Adhikari, who operates HST Adventures, a travel and tourism company, on the first floor of the centre.

The only space that regularly attracts customers to the mall is the film theatre on the top floor, according to both retailers and the few customers.

>> Continued on page 4

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MEDLEY

Inside the Post

National

A desire to replicate success, a failure to conduct market research, and changing shopping habits are behind the failure of malls, economists say

Opinion

The statistics related to performance for the past two years-especially regarding governance, economy and diplomacy-barely substantiate the recent flimsy political rhapsodies by Oli.

Culture & Arts

On the very first episode of the 18th season of American Idol, a reality-based singing show, Nepali singer Dibesh Pokharel, who goes by his stage name Arthur Gunn, gave a standout performance, winning the hearts of the judges as well as the audience.

Money

The Department of Commerce, Supplies and Consumer Protection Management has penalised the importer and distributors of fake Garima brand paddy seeds under the Consumer Protection Act 2018. The bogus seeds resulted in crop losses worth Rs230 million during the 2019 growing season.

Sports

Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho believes Manchester City's two-season ban from the Champions League has opened the door for a host of teams to qualify for next season's competition. Mourinho's men moved up to fifth in the Premier League thanks to Son Heung-min's stoppage time winner to beat Aston Villa 3-2.

News Quiz

- Who is the new Law and Justice Minister of Nepal?
- a. Shiva Maya Tumbahangpe
- b. Bhanu Bhakta Dhakal
- c. Ishowor Pokharel
- d. Padma Kumari Aryal
- Which organisation has been 2. maintaining a digital database to address the blood supply and demand gap?
 - a. Blood Donors Association
 - b. Youth For Blood
 - c. Nepal Blood Bank
 - d. Hamro LifeBank
- How many Nepalis were brought home from Wuhan, China, on Sunday morning?
 - a. 160
 - b. 170
 - c. 175
 - d. 200
- Who is the first Asian player to score 50 goals in English **Premier League?**
 - a. Park Ji-sung
 - b. Son Heung-min c. Shinji Kagawa

- d. Takumi Minamino When is the Bir Ganesh Man 5. Singh Memorial National
 - Boxing Championship set to begin?
 - a. February 25 b. March 5
 - d. March 31
- 6. When had the police filed a charge sheet against Krishna Bahadur Mahara in an attempted rape case? a. September 29, 2019
 - b. October 31, 2019 c. October 21, 2019
 - d. October 11, 2019





A worker carries construction materials up the upper tiers of Kumbheshwor Mahadev temple in Bagalamukhi, Lalitpur. The temple was damage in the 2015 earthquakes

On this day in history

Sri Lanka tones down privatisation

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka has toned down an ambitious privatisation programme in favour of state-controlled joint ventures following protests from within the new socialist government, analysts said Thursday.

Deputy Finance Minister G L Peiris told parliament the government was seeking "strategic alliance" with foreign and local firms, but hoped to retain a "golden share" in the proposed joint ventures

A committee would be appointed soon to work out reform in public sector enterprises such as telecommunications, power generation, highways, ports, railways, shipping, insurance and aviation, he said.

'The state will retain ownership in most public enterprises, whilst inviting private sector participation in part ownership. The overall responsibility of the government will always remain to ensure equality and economic justice.

The Kathmandu Post

February 18, 1995

Answers to News Quiz: 1(a), 2(d), 3(c), 4(b), 5(d), 6(b)

Quote of the day

Oli sees a conspiracy to unseat him, but it is unclear what he is referring to, Page 1

"Several conspiracies are being hatched to make this government fall. You may think that this government is strong and has a majority, but some elements are trying to make it fail or topple it or defame it."

> Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli blames unnamed detractors for conspiring against his government.

Most read online

Nepal officially proposes a review of the 1947 tripartite agreement with Britain on Gurkha soldiers

Nepal has officially proposed a review of the 1947 agreement between Nepal, India and Britain over the recruitment and deployment of Gurkha soldiers and their perks and facilities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on February 12 sent a letter to London, seeking a review of the tripartite agreement.

An irrational fear of the Chinese is causing tourists from other countries to stay away, hoteliers say

The ongoing coronavirus outbreak is giving rise to an irrational fear of the Chinese, even affecting Nepal's tourism industry. If hotels and resorts host Chinese tourists, they are less likely to get guests from the rest of the world, say tourism entrepreneurs. "There is fear everywhere. If we host Chinese tourists, others won't come," said Suman Ghimire, proprietor of the Jungle Safari Lodge in Sauraha.

Police still looking for motive in Sanepa murder

Police have ruled the death of Muna Karki, the wife of former government secretary Arjun Karki, and their domestic help Bijaya Chaudhary as a murder-suicide. Five days after the incident, police said circumstantial evidence, as well as the preliminary investigation, show that Chaudhary killed Muna before committing suicide by hanging.

Mahara cleared of all charges by Kathmandu District Court

Kathmandu District Court on Monday acquitted former House Speaker Krishna Bahadur Mahara of all charges. Mahara was accused of attempted rape. "Judge Ambar Raj Poudel decided to clear Mahara of all charges today," said Gyan Bahadur Karki, information officer at the Kathmandu District Court.

Corrections

Our reporters and editors do their best to make sure our reporting is free from errors. But when we make mistakes that warrant correction, we will be transparent and clarify at the bottom of the specific article.

If you believe we have got something wrong and it requires correction, please email us at kpost@kmg.com.np with "correction" in the subject line.

For the most recent corrections, visit kathmandupost.com/corrections.

HOROSCOPE

If your attention is being divided between your home life and your public life, the best choice is to focus on issues at your home. Why? Because your home is your refuge, a safe foundation, and you need to keep it that way. Make sure that you can leave your home every day knowing that you'll return to peace and calm.

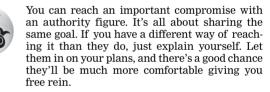
LEO (July 23-August 22)

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Balance is important today. Before making any type of decision, you have to weigh the pros and cons of each possible course of action. Don't put things off for another day because you'll have too much to deal with later. You can't understand the right way to move forward until you examine these situations more thoroughly.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)





AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Can you hear your inner engine revving up? You're raring to go, and today is the perfect time for you to take off! The runway is clear and the skies are cloudless. Head off into the wild, blue yonder! Aim for your most ambitious goals,



more possible than ever.

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

c. March 15



Taking care of your health isn't something you can do only once in a while. It's something you have to integrate into your life every single day. Your self-discipline is stronger than ever, so you're in the best frame of mind to start a new fitness routine, join a gym, or invest in some new exercise equipment.

because you're in a phase of life where they're



What are your thoughts on the latest revelation from a friend? What? Don't you know?! Today, you need to figure it out. Sure, the drama of it has caught you a little bit off guard, but your quick thinking needs to kick in right now. Don't let your reactions be guided too much by your fears

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)



It's a good day to invest in the resources that help you get things done in your life. If you need to buy computer equipment, tools, office supplies, or even just a more comfortable pair of shoes, today is the day to do it. If you shop around a bit, you'll find some great bargains. Don't worry that you're wasting your money.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

If you're in the early stages of a romance, don't worry if the conversations you have with your partner aren't exactly meaningful. As you get to know each other better, the realities of the world will start to take over. Rather focus instead on the fact that they're integrating you into their everyday life.

If waiting for the other person to make the first move makes you feel too passive today, then grab the power back! If you want things to move forward, take the first step and see if they follow you. If they do, then you both can get started on the new phase of your relationship right away

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

If you're feeling unsure in a new situation today, you can always turn to the people you love for advice and insight. They're much more aware of the big picture than you are. Right now, you're a bit too far into your own head to be able to step back and get the perspective you need.



You'll be strongly drawn to good things today, and you'll be willing to do just about whatever it takes to experience them. And that might require travelling farther to go to that bakery with those killer brownies, waiting in a long line to get the tickets you want, or paying a ridiculous amount for that special perfume.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)



Someone in your life is claiming to be working hard at improving things between the two of you, but have you seen any real evidence of it? Your patience might be running awfully thin right now, so feel free to tell them that you need to see a little bit more progress in order to feel as though you've been adequately heard.

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NATIONAL

Engineer faces corruption case for amassing illegal properties

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA KATHMANDU, FEB 17

Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority on Monday filed a corruption case at the Special Court against Jitendra Kumar Chaudhary, the chief engineer at the Biratnagar Divisional Road Office, on the charge of amassing property amounting to Rs 39.94 million illegally.

Chaudhary's high living standard made him a suspect, said CIAA.

The anti-graft body said that Chaudhary was charged after an investigation found that the living standard of his family was suspiciously high. The family had large cash deposits in several banks and added properties beyond their financial capacity.

"While filing the charge-sheet, the commission had also presented Chaudhary at the court," said CIAA Spokesperson Pradeep Koirala. "Now, the court will decide his fate."

The commission had started an investigation on Chaudhary after receiving a complaint that he had accumulated properties through illegal means in collusion with contractors.

The anti-graft body has sought two years jail term, confiscation of illegally-acquired properties and a fine equivalent to the illegally-acquired properties for Chaudhary

as per section 20 of the Corruption Prevention Act 2002.

According to the CIAA, Chaudhary had purchased land and houses and registered them to himself, his wife Kiran, and their two children Abhisek and Smriti. Chaudhary's wife and their two children have also been named defendants in the case.

Chaudhary was transferred to Dang from Biratnagar Divisional Road Office last year before he was recently transferred to the Gaighat-Diktel Road Project under the Sagarmatha Highway.

A woman prepares bara, a traditional Newari dish, in Bhaktapur

Army fails to spend budget allocated for expressway

Calling bids for complex bridges and tunnels before the new fiscal year was not possible, says Nepal Army Spokesperson Brig-Gen Pandey.

BINOD GHIMIRE KATHMANDU, FEB 17

The Nepal Army is once again returning around half of the budget released for the Kathmandu-Tarai expressway project. The government had approved Rs 15 billion for the national pride project in the current fiscal year. But the national defence force, which took over the project in 2017, was unable to spend the money.

Development Briefing the Committee of Parliament on Monday, the Army said it wouldn't be able to spend Rs 7 billion of the budget meant for the country's first expressway project. Last year, too, the Army had returned Rs 9 billion of the Rs 15 billion released for the project, saying there was no scope for calling international bids for contractors before the fiscal year ended.

The Army has furnished the same reason this year. "It doesn't seem possible to call the

hiddings for complex bridges and tur nels before the new fiscal year begins. Therefore, we have to return the budget," Brig-Gen Biygyan Dev Pandey, spokesperson for the Army, told the Post on Monday.

He said they would first need to select international consultants to provide overall support in the construction of the expressway

The consultants will prepare the bidding documents based on the detail project report before inviting bids.

Pandey said the selection of consultants would be completed by April and the bidding process for contractors will start by June. The new fiscal year begins in mid-July.

Though the Army had earlier selected six international firms-five Chinese and one Turkish-to provide consultative service, the process was scrapped after a probe found that the selection criteria were leaked as a result of technical error.

"It was a technical error and the investigation showed there was no malafide intention behind the leak,' Pandey had said in a press meet on Following the probe findings, the Army had issued a warning to project

head Brig-Gen Sharad Lal Shrestha.

Kalyani Khadka, the chairperson of the parliamentary committee, said the Army had cited delay in the approval of detail project report and the cancellation of the bidding project for the delay in calling the bidding.

The project that was supposed to conclude by August 2021 has been pushed back by around three years to May 2024. The Army has said the expressway would reduce the travel time between Kathmandu and Nijgadh in Bara district to an hour.

Pandey said they had shortlisted five international firms as consultants. "The delay in bidding will not push back the completion deadline,' he said. The detailed project report was endorsed by the Cabinet on August 18, two years after the construction began.

The detailed project report has estimated the project cost at Rs213 billion—Rs 80 billion more than what was projected by an Indian consorti-Infrastructure Leasing Financial Services Transportation Networks, IL&FS Engineering and

Construction, and Suryavir

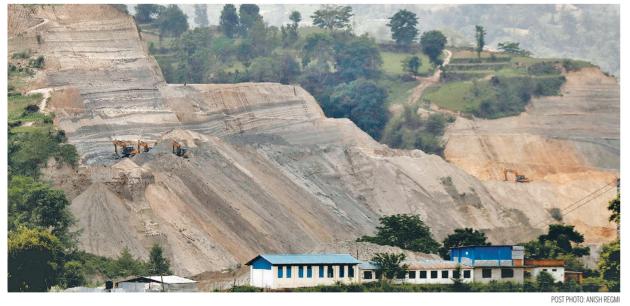
Infrastructure Construction in 2015. The expressway has three tunnels

with a total length of 6.415 km that will be constructed in three different sections of the 72.5 km long roadway. Similarly, out of 86 bridges along the expressway, 16 have been categorised as the special ones requiring international contractors for construction.

"The compulsion for the Army to return the money isn't a good sign. We hope the deadline is not extended again," said Rajendra Lingden, a member of the parliamentary committee, told the Post.







Excavators at work at the Farsidole section of the Kathmandu-Nijgadh expressway project, in Lalitpur.

Two held for defrauding woman

SHUVAM DHUNGANA

KATHMANDU, FEB 17

Metropolitan Crime Division, Teku on Sunday night arrested two members of a gang that defrauded people by asking them to deposit millions in their account to "help them secure US visas.

According to police, the duo was arrested after Sanumaya Lama, 37, of Tarakeshwor, Kathmandu, filed a complaint at the crime division, saying that a person "applying for a US visa" defrauded her of Rs 6 million. The person asked her to transfer Rs 6 million to his account so that he could present his bank details with his US visa application, said Lama.

Acting on the complaint, police arrested Ram Chandra Kunwar (34), a resident of Baglung currently living in Lalitpur and Ganesh Lama (34), a resident of Kavre also living in Lalitpur. They were arrested in

After police interrogated the duo, it was revealed that Kunwar, Lama and three other members of the gang scoured for people with millions of rupees in the bank. After getting in touch with such people and winning their trust, the gang would convince them to deposit money in their account "for a few days". They would say that they needed the money in their account to apply for a US visa, said Inspector Kumar Pandit, an officer at Metropolitan Crime Division, Teku.

"After the money was deposited, they would withdraw the money and disappear," Pandit told the Post. "Even in Lama's case, Kunwar convinced her to deposit Rs 6 million for a day so that he could apply for a US visa. But when Lama deposited the amount, five people withdrew the money from different branches of the bank," he said.

"We are looking for the other three

members of their gang," said Pandit. Investigation showed that this was not the only fraud case the gang was involved in. Members of the gang were found to have duped another person into depositing Rs 7 million in their account, said Metropolitan Crime Division Superintendent Mukesh Kumar Singh.

The number of fraud cases in Nepal has risen steadily over the past few years. According to Nepal Police, 368 cases related to fraud were recorded in the country 2016/17. The number rose to 542 in 2017/18 and to 627 in 2018/19.

"Many cases related to fraud are settled by the victim and the fraudsters after police arrest the culprit," said Deputy Superintendent Hobindra Bogati, spokesperson for the Kathmandu Metropolitan Police Range. "They are released after a settlement is reached. This could also be the reason behind the rise in the number of fraud cases," said Bogati.

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NATIONAL

Thapathali monkeys are in trouble. They neither have home nor food

Authorities are planning to renovate the area, but monkey habitat conservation is not in the plan; Ward 11 Chairman Hiralal Tandukar says the monkeys are troubling people and his office is planning to cage them in a zoo.



Monkeys at the Pashupati temple in Kathmandu. Unlike in Swayambhu and Pashupati, the Kalmochan area does not get visitors and pilgrims who would feed the monkeys

ANUP OJHA KATHMANDU, FEB 1

Over 200 monkeys living along the banks of the Bagmati in Kalmochan Ghat, Thapathali, are in trouble. Their habitat has been degraded, and they don't get enough to eat.

While a project worth over Rs 1 billion "beautifies" the area, some officials say they are not aware of the habitat of monkeys; others want to cage them to stop them from troubling people.

"The Prasutigriha area in Thapathali and the Bagmati river corridor used to be full of trees, but they are all cut now," said zoologist Mukesh Chalise, who has done extensive research on rhesus macaque (the monkeys found in Thapathali). "It's the people who snatched their natural habitats from them.'

People who have seen the monkeys roam the area freely in the past are concerned that the primates' manmade habitats are also under threat. "As the trees here are already gone, the monkeys used to live in old satals (travellers' rest houses) and the Shivalaya (Shiva temple)," said 40-year-old Ram Swarup Das Visnab, the main priest at Ram Mandir in Kalmochan, who was born and raised in the area. "Even the satals are being demolished for reconstruction now, but nobody is concerned about the issue.

"What if the Ram Mandir here has no monkeys, the incarnation of Hanuman (the monkey god)?" asks Visnab as the High Powered Committee for Integrated Development of the Bagmati Civilisation prepares to renovate or reconstruct 26 monuments, including satals and temples on the three-kilometre stretch from Kal Mochan Ghat to Teku Dovan (confluence).

"We are going to renovate or recon-

struct 26 monuments in the area, but nobody informed us regarding the monkeys' habitat. We were only concerned about managing humans and said their habitat," Yogendra Chitrakar, senior division engineer of the committee that plans to spend Rs1.15 billion it received from the Asian Development Bank to "beautify" the area.

A food shortage has also affected the monkeys, said Ramananda Giri, 59, the head priest of Synashi Aakhada who has been living in Kalmochan for nearly two decades. "Unlike Swayambhu and Pashupatinath, the other two habitats of monkeys in Kathmandu, the Kalmochan area does not get visitors and pilgrims who would feed the monkeys," said Giri. "I remember that until a few months back, a woman used to come here regularly to feed the monkeys, but she too has stopped coming.

Due to disturbances in their habi-

tats and lack of food in Kal Mochan ghat, the monkeys have started coming out and are getting more aggressive, locals say. "They used to come here frequently until a few months ago, but they now come here regularly, snatch biscuits, or whatever they can and run," said Vidayarthi Jaiswal, who runs a grocery shop in Thapathali.

"More than that, these monkeys are troubling pedestrians. People can't walk on this road section carrying food items. In many instances, they have even snatched mobile phones and handbags from women" he said.

When the Post contacted Ward No. 11 Chairperson Hiralal Tandukar to inquire what the ward office had done to save the monkeys, he said he was about to cage the monkeys.

"I don't see any other way out of the situation. They are troubling people," said Tandukar. He said the ward plans to build a "monkey zoo" in the area, where people can pay to see them. The money would then be used to feed the monkeys, he added.

But priests and sages who have been living in Kalmochan for decades term Tandukar's announcement as "cruel and insensitive"

"Who would pay to see monkeys?" asked Giri. "These monkeys have been living here for years and they haven't done any harm to people. If they are given enough food, and their habitat is preserved, they won't trouble people.' Giri said he was concerned that the

monkeys were ailing.

"But I have never seen a vet visit this place for their treatment. These monkeys may be living with diseases," he said. Zoologist Chalise says monkeys in Kathmandu, in general, suffer from asthma, respiratory problems, and gastrointestinal disease. "If these monkeys move and they start living near human settlements, they can spread viruses, which could be fatal. But luckily, they haven't been diagnosed with viral ailments in Nepal so

far." "The government body is running a Do these project of billions of rupees. Do these animals have the right to live or not? This is the crucial question," the zoologist concludes

Oli sees a conspiracy to unseat him ...

>> Continued from page 1

Oli often repeats how great a job his government is doing and does not stop short of taking a gibe at the media for failing to report his government's 'good performance"

But Dahal, the party's other chairman, has himself said at various platforms that the government has not been able to make achievements at the pace it was expected to.

Even a section of ruling party leaders often refrains from defending the government's actions. And of late, Oli has been facing massive opposition from a group led by Bhim Rawal over Millennium Challenge the Corporation's Nepal Compact. A study team headed by senior leader Jhala Nath Khanal with Rawal and Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali has been tasked with studying the US programme and making recommendations. But Khanal himself is not very supportive of the MCC.

Dahal too has expressed reservations about passing the MCC in its current form.

"Oli has a habit of making assumptions. He must be talking about some possibility," said Mani Thapa, a standing committee member. "I do not see any foreign forces interested in removing Oli, as he enjoys a strong electoral mandate.

Oli may be feeling insecure because of some of the actions and statements of leaders from within the party, said Thapa.

"He may have been trying to call out his opponents while glossing over his government's weaknesses," Thapa told the Post.

When Dahal, through August and September last year, brought up a 'gentleman's deal' reached between him and Oli about leading the government in turns, it had created a rift between the two chairs. But a November Secretariat meeting decided that Oli will lead the government for the full term while Dahal will be executive chairman, putting an end to speculation that Dahal wanted to replace Oli.

The primary opposition Nepali Congress, by their leaders' own admission, has neither the wherewithal nor any plan to launch an offensive against Oli.

"We have our general convention coming up and we are busy with that," Bimalendra Nidhi, Congress vice-president, told the Post. "Anyway, we are in no position to topple the government, as we don't have the numbers in Parliament. If there are conspiracies, they must be being hatched from within the prime minister's own party."

The day Oli completed his two years in office, the Congress in a statement said that it would support or oppose the Oli administration based on "the positives and negatives?

Analysts say that Oli's fear stems from a number of factors. He seems to be hounded by the failure to deliver, opposition from within the party, and criticism from the media and social media

"The government has failed on various domestic and international fronts," said Hari Roka, a political commentator. "And he is confronted with many other issues, including those raised by his own party members. So he must be indicating those when he is talking about attempts to unseat him."

According to Roka, Oli's health is yet another concern.

"The prime minister is well aware of that. He himself has said that he will go for another kidney transplant as he has to undergo dialysis on a regular basis," said Roka. "The prime minister must also be thinking about when he will have to take bed rest for five or six months after the kidney transplant. Is he going to hand over the responsibility to one of the senior ministers until he fully recovers or is he going to step down?

Those who have close relations with Oli would not say who he was indicating at-external forces, internal forces, forces within the ruling party or others

But Bhattarai, Oli's foreign relations adviser, insisted that there are some elements working against the government.

"I cannot give you details, but we have sensed some conspiracy against the government," Bhattarai told the Post. "Some elements are trying to restore political instability in Nepal. Those who do not want to see a stable government in Nepal are making some noise.

Bhattarai stopped short of saying anything explicitly but said there are some who are habituated to an unstable political environment in Nepal.

"And such forces are not happy that incumbent government is the committed to development and prosperity," he said.

Mahara's acquittal and Tumbahangphe's elevation ...

Continued from page 1

Oli favoured Subash Nembang while Dahal wanted Agni Sapkota. Dahal emerged victorious in the month-long negotiation, which led to Tumbahangphe resigning.

was deep suspicion between the former CPN-UML and Maoist leaders, including two chairs Oli and Dahal.

Since the insurgency days, Mahara has been a close and loyal ally to Dahal. But Oli concealed his unhappin Mahara for not moving the Millennium Challenge Corporation Nepal Compact bill forward in Parliament.



the intervie /itn Tumbahangphe said she had become a victim of political violence by the Nepal Communist Party leadership. Mahara, one of the top leaders of the ruling party, was then standing trial for an alleged act of violence against a woman.

Tumbahangphe, who had repeatedly said that she would not exchange her desire to become the Speaker for any ministerial berth, assumed office on Monday.

Political analyst Rajendra Maharjan disappointment expressed with Tumbahangphe's acceptance of the ministerial berth, especially given her strident criticism of the patriarchy

"Given her decision, it appears that she wasn't fighting against patriarchy," he said.

As per parliamentary regulations, Mahara had not lost his seat as a Member of Parliament; he was just deprived of the perks and facilities he was entitled to as a lawmaker and his participation in the House proceedings. With his acquittal, Mahara is set to return to Parliament now.

It may not be difficult for Mahara to make a political comeback, as he holds a prominent position in the party and has close relations with party chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

"Mahara remained a dominant figure in his party and he could make a revival after a short break," said Maharjan. "The party can show the clean chit given by the court as grounds for bringing him into politics again.

But Maharjan cautioned against taking the acquittal on face value, especially given the stature of the lawyers defending him. Mahara's defence team consisted of former attorney general Raman Shrestha and senior advocates Sher Bahadur KC, Lava Mainali, Dinmani Pokhrel and Bhimarjun Acharya.

Though there was no concrete evidence to support, many had speculated that Mahara was framed because of a political conspiracy within the party. Despite the merger, there



Even Dahal had once remarked that Mahara had indeed made a mistake and that since the case had already reached the court, it needed a judicial settlement. "It may not have been a criminal act but it was definitely morally wrong," Dahal had said in Chitwan while the court was hearing Mahara's case.

Baburam Bhattarai, a former prime minister and Mahara's conflict-era colleague, also said on Monday that Mahara's case was more moral than legal.

"The court judgment is in line with my presumption that Mahara's case was moral rather than legal. That's probably the truth," Bhattarai wrote on Twitter. "Nonetheless, those holding public responsibilities must be careful about their conduct in personal lives.

While acquitting Mahara, Kathmandu District Court Chief Judge Ambar Raj Paudel said that there was not enough evidence to substantiate allegations of attempted rape.

According to Ananda Kumar Shrestha, registrar at the Kathmandu District Court, there was a lack of ground to implicate Mahara as the plaintiff's statement did not support her initial claims and instead matched the defence. Much of the evidence, including Mahara's eyeglasses and his thumbprints on the glass, was also found to be inconclusive.

District Attorney Umakanta Poudel, however, said that his office would be challenging the case at the High Court.

"The state has lost its case but we will certainly challenge it at the High Court once we receive the full text of the decision,' Poudel said.

Chances of the case not reaching a high court are higher, as Kathmandu District Court itself said in its judgment that the victim, while recording her statement before the bench, had denied that Mahara had ever come

to her Tinkune apartment.

Earlier on November 21, Mahara had moved the Patan High Court, challenging the remand order of the Kathmandu District Court. But the Patan High Court on December 19 had quashed Mahara's plea and upheld the district court's decision. Citing the urgency of the case, the high court urged the district court to finalise the case within a month. The district court judgment, however, came after two months.

After his acquittal, Mahara was released on Monday.

People use an under-construction overhead bridge to cross the road in Balkumari, Lalitpur

POST PHOTO: ELITE JOSH

No takers for mall spaces, but financiers ...

>> Continued from page 1

Among nearly a dozen shopping malls in Kathmandu and Lalitpur that the Post surveyed for nearly two weeks, only a handful had a steady stream of customers and vibrant storefronts.

Ramesh Sharma, former chairperson of the Contractors' Association of Nepal, said that almost all shopping malls in the Kathmandu Valley are in trouble.

"Most investors in malls see the vibrant business that Bhat-Bhateni is doing and think they can replicate that success with malls," said Sharma. But they're trapped because people who can afford to shop at malls are going abroad while middle- and lower-income people prefer to shop elsewhere."

At the nine-storey CTC Mall in Sundhara, built seven years ago in 2013, there are no customers and no retail shops. The ground floor has a few mobile accessory stores, clothing and coffee shops, but no customers. Portions of the first, second and third floor have been offered up to the Civil Bank but all other shutters were closed. On the seventh floor are two cinema halls-Cine De Chef and Cine Dine.

Gopal Krishna Koirala, who runs a Chinese restaurant on the sixth floor of the CTC Mall, said that he is on the verge of closing down his business.

"When we started as a food court, there was a good footfall in the initial phase as all the floors

were filled with shops, but after the earthquake, the building was damaged and everyone left," said Koirala, who pays Rs250,000 in monthly rent. "I am only able to run my business here as have over a dozen clothing outlets in the Valley.'

Lacking customers and retailers, many malls are now opting to rent out their spaces to other commercial ventures like banks and employment and education consultancies. At the Star Mall in Putalisadak, six of its seven floors are occupied by education consultancies.

"The building was initially constructed as a mall, but before we opened in 2016, we did some market research and found that most malls were failing," said Utsab Shrestha, manager at Star Holdings, which operates the Star Mall. "Since Putalisadak is known for its consultancies, we decided to provide space for them in our build-

For economists, these numerous malls are the result of a 'bandwagon effect' where financiers are pouring millions into malls because others have done it.

"But they do not do any market research," said Keshav Acharya, former executive director of Nepal Rastra Bank and senior advisor to the Ministry of Finance.

But according to Acharya, there could be something suspicious in the way so many malls continue to pop up despite most of them not making any money.

"Nepal Rastra Bank does a lot of screening if you want to invest in the banking sector, but if you want to build a mall, there is no scrutiny. So this could be a great means to launder black money," said Acharya.

Raghubir Bista, an associate professor at Tribhuvan University's Central Department of Economics, agrees with Acharya, that the regulatory framework is at fault. Without a proper plan for the city, malls are being erected anywhere, even when it doesn't make economic or urban sense

"In our case, individuals are proactive while the state isn't," he said. "These malls are constructed on the basis of power rather than analysis. And in most cases, they are also linked with the black economy. So individuals do not look for returns.'

But the answer could be simpler. With the rise of e-commerce, shopping habits are changing and young people, the prime target market for malls, are increasingly doing their shopping online

Julia Subba, a nurse who spoke to the Post at the Civil Mall in Sundhara, said that she was there to buy cosmetics but prefers to shop online.

"You don't need to suffer from Kathmandu's chronic traffic, you can get good deals and there are a variety of items to choose from when you shop online," said Subba. "You can shop from home and things come right to your doorstep.

Chartered helicopter services banned inside Annapurna **Base Camp region**

The fourth council meeting of the Annapurna Rural Municipality decided to prohibit choppers in the region last fiscal year, citing adverse impact on the region's ecology.



Five helicopter companies are currently operating chartered flights from Pokhara Airport to the Annapurna region.

DEEPAK PARIYAR POKHARA, FEB 1

Annapurna Rural Municipality has imposed a ban on the operation of chartered helicopter flights in the Annapurna Base Camp region. The municipality recently announced its plan to restrict helicopters from flying in the area. It will, however, allow res cue helicopters to fly to the area.

The fourth council meeting of the rural municipality had decided to prohibit helicopters in the region in the last fiscal year. The ward office of Annapurna-11 had registered an applicationwith the District AdministrationOffice requesting to stop commercial flights citing its adverse effects on the region's ecology and tourism

Him Bahadur Gurung, chairman of Annapurna Rural Municipality Ward No. 11, said the number of chartered helicopters flying into the Annapurna Base Camp region had increased in recent years, and these unmanaged flights had polluted the environment.

"We used to see Himalayan monal, Ghoral and Kasturi in our villages. But now, we don't see them anymore; the noise pollution caused by helicopters have chased them away," said Gurung.

Ramesh Kumar KC, chief district officer, however, said that helicopter flights should be monitored and their frequency kept at check rather than putting a complete ban on their operation in the region.

"We just started the Visit Nepal 2020 campaign. This decision stands to affect tourist movement in the Annapurna Base Camp region," said KC

Five helicopter companies are currently operating chartered flights from Pokhara Airport to the

Annapurna region. Devraj Subedi, the spokesperson of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal Pokhara branch, said his office has received a letter from the District Administration Office, informing them to stop the operation of chartered flights based on the demand of ACAP, rural municipality and local entrepreneurs.

"However, the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation has not officially told us to stop chartered helicopter flights to the region," said Subedi.

Helicopter companies, for now, have stopped their flights, giving in to the request of the ACAP, rural municipality and the Civil Aviation Authority, said Raj Kumar Gurung, chief at ACAP.

Every year, around 15,000 tourists charter helicopters to the Annapurna Base Camp.

BRIEFING

Phuyal appointed minister of Bagmati Province

MAKWANPUR: Rameshwor Phuyal, chief whip of the ruling Nepal Communist Party in the Bagmati provincial assembly, has been appointed as the Physical Infrastructure Development Minister. Province Chief Bishnu dminister office and secrecy to the newly appointed minister amidst a function on Monday.

Road connectivity causes a slump in Doti village's crop production

Those families who were self-reliant are now completely

Assembly members demand immediate naming of Province 1

DEONARAYAN SAH MORANG, FEB 17

Province assembly members of Province 1 have mounted pressure on the government to name the province

at the earliest date possible. The assembly members of both the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) and opposition parties demanded that the province should be named by the ongoing winter session.

Speaking at the assembly meeting on Monday, Sanjha Kumari Danuwar of the Nepali Congress drew the attention of the Speaker over the delay in naming the province. Arguing that the delay had tarnished the image of the province, he demanded that the issue be sorted out at the earliest.

"Has it been delayed because the assembly members of the NCP are awaiting the directive of the party headquarters?" questioned Danuwar, reacting to the NCP-led government's lackadaisical response to resolving the long-standing issue. " It's been two years since the provincial elections.

People will insult us if the provincial assembly fails to name the province,' she added.

The NCP Secretariat had directed its provincial party committee and the parliamentary committee in Province 3 to adopt Bagmati and Hetauda as names of the province and its capital respectively in December 2019.

The NCP decision came under attack from various quarters, claiming that it was the leadership's centralised mindset. As per constitutional provisions, provincial assemblies have the right to decide the names of the provinces and their capitals with a two-thirds majority.

The assembly members of the ruling party also demanded that Province 1 also be named soon. NCP member Khinu Langba Limbu on Sunday called for the naming of the province on the basis of identity.

Earlier, all five political parties in the Province 1 assembly had assured to decide the name of the province by the ongoing winter session that began on February 6. The assembly members, however, have doubts over the issue being resolved in the winter session.

The ruling NCP holds a comfortable majority to decide the name of the province. But the assembly members of the party are divided about the possible name

According to assembly member Umita Bishwakarma, the members are divided on the proposed names of the province-Kirant, Limbuwan, Khumbuwan, Koshi, Sagarmatha, Koshi-Kirant or Koshi-Sagarmatha.

The NCP has 67 seats in the 93-member provincial assembly, while the main opposition Nepali Congress has just 21 members.

Similarly, Samajbadi Party Nepal has three members while Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Sanghiya Loktantrik Rastriya Manch has a member each and one candidate was elected as an independent member. Province 3, 4, 6 and 7 have been named Bagmati, Gandaki, Karnali and Sudurpaschim respectively. Provinces 1, 2 and 5 are yet to be named.

काठमाडौँ उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड सैबु, भैसेपाटी, ललितपुर कार्यकारी निर्देशक पदका लागि दरखास्त आव्हान सम्वन्धी सूचना

(प्रथम पटक प्रकाशित मिति: २०७६।११।०६)

काठमाडौं उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड, खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड ऐन, २०६३ बमोजिम स्थापना भएको अविच्छिन्न उत्तराधिकारवाला स्वशासित संगठित संस्थाको रुपमा रहेको छ । बोर्डमा रिक्त रहेको कार्यकारी निर्देशकको पद खल्ला प्रतिस्पर्धाका आधारमा छनौट गरी पति गर्न पर्ने भएकोले काठमाडौँ उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड नियमावली. २०६४ को नियम १७ बमोजिम देहाय अनुसारका योग्यता भएका ईच्छक नेपाली नागरिकहरुबाट यो सुचना प्रथम पटक प्रकाशन भएको मितिले २१ (एक्काइस) दिन भित्र यस बोर्डको कार्यालय, सैब, भैसेपारी, ललितपुरमा आई पुग्ने गरी रितपूर्वकको दरखास्त पेश गर्न्हन सम्वन्धित सबैको जानकारीको लागि यो सचना प्रकाशन गरिएको छ ।

- पद: कार्यकारी निर्देशक ۹.
- **आवश्यक न्यनतम योग्यता :** कार्यकारी निर्देशक पदमा नियक्तिको लागि ऐनको दफा १७ तथा नियमावली. २०६४ को नियम १७ ર. मा व्यवस्था भएको योग्यताका अतिरिक्त देहाय बमोजिमको योग्यता पुगेको हुनुपुर्नेछ ।
 - मान्यता प्राप्त शिक्षण संस्थाबाट इन्जिनियरिङ विषयमा वा व्यवस्थापन, वित्त, वाणिज्य शास्त्र, कानून, जनप्रशासन वा अर्थशास्त्र (क) विषयमा कम्तीमा स्नातकोत्तर वा चाटर्ड एकाउण्टेण्ट उपाधि हासिल गरी खानेपानी तथा सरसफाई क्षेत्रको व्यवस्थापकीय जिम्मेवारी लिई कम्तीमा ४ वर्षको अनुभव हासिल गरेको हनुपर्नेछ ।

स्पष्टिकरण : खानेपानी तथा सरसफाईको क्षेत्रमा व्यवस्थापकीय जिम्मेवारी भन्नाले नेपाल सरकारको कम्तीमा राजपत्रांकित द्वितिय श्रेणीको पदमा रही खानेपानी तथा सरसफाईको क्षेत्रमा कम्तीमा ५ वर्षको अनुभव हासिल गरेको वा खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन वोर्ड, कुनै प्राधिकरण तथा नेपाल सरकारको स्वामित्व भएको संस्थाको व्यवस्थापकीय पदमा (कम्तीमा नवौं तह वा सो सरह) रही खानेपानी तथा सरसफाई क्षेत्रमा 🗴 वर्षको अनुभव हासिल गरेको हुनुपर्नेछ ।

- दरखास्त दिने अन्तिम मितिसम्म ४५ वर्ष उमेर पगेको र ६० वर्ष उमेर ननाघेको ।
- नैतिक पतन देखिने फौजदारी कसुरमा अदालतबाट दोषी प्रमाणित नभएको। (ग)
- (घ) कनै राजनैतिक दलको सदस्य नभएको ।
- वोर्डसँग कनै किसिमको स्वार्थ (Conflict of Interest) नवाभिएको । (डः)
- कुनै देशको स्थायी बसोबासको अनुमती (Permanent Resident) प्राप्त नगरेको । (च)
- आवेदक कुनै निकायमा कार्यरत भएमा कार्यरत संस्थाको स्वीकृतिको प्रतिलिपि पेश गर्नुपर्नेछ । (छ)
- नेपाल सरकारको सार्वजनिक संस्थामा बहालवाला कर्मचारी छनौट भएमा नियुक्ति लिन् अघि त्यस्तो संस्थाबाट बहाल टुटेको (ज) प्रमाण पेश गर्नपर्नेछ ।
- **पदावधि :** कार्यकारी निर्देशकको पदावधी ४ (पाँच) वर्षको हनेछ । काठमाडौँ उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड नियमावली, २०६४ ₹. को नियम १८ को व्यवस्था बमोजिम निजको पदावधि परा हन अगावै पदबाट हटाउन बाधा पर्ने छैन ।
- ۲. पारिश्रमिक र सुविधा : कार्यकारी निर्देशकको पारिश्रमिक र सुविधा काठमाडौं उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड नियमावली, २०६४ को नियम १९ बमोजिम हनेछ ।
- X. प्र**मुख काम, कर्त्तव्य र अधिकार :** कार्यकारी निर्देशकको काम, कर्त्तव्य र अधिकार खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड ऐन, २०६३ को दफा १८ र काठमाडौं उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन बोर्ड नियमावली, २०६४ को नियम २० मा उल्लेख गरिए बमोजिम हुनेछ ।
- छनौटको आधार : काठमाण्डौ उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन वोर्डको कार्यकारी निर्देशक छनौट सम्वन्धी कार्यविधि, २०७६ बमोजिम हनेछ।
- छनौटका प्रकया : ٩

Authorities start removing snow from Manang roads

LAMJUNG: Authorities have started using dozers to clear snow from the roads and settlements in Manang district. The district witnessed snowfall some two months ago but the deposited snow has yet to melt. Chief District Officer Pushparaj Paudel said his office has started removing snow to ease vehicular movement.

Demand to name province on the basis of identity

TAPLEJUNG: A national council meeting of the Gurung Rastriya Parsiad is dissatisfied with the name of Gandaki Province. Issuing a 12-point declaration, the meeting demanded authorities to revise the name of Gandaki as Tamuwan province on the basis of identity.

Man sentenced to 37 years in prison for raping daughter

HETAUDA: The Makwanpur District Court sentenced a man to 37 years in prison on the charge of raping his daughter. The single bench of Judge Dilliratna Shrestha on Monday gave its verdict against the 49-vear-old man. a resident of Hetauda Sub-metropolis-8. The convict had raped his 17-year-old daughter a year ago.

Makeshift bridges across Mahakali demolished

DARCHULA: Police have demolished two makeshift wooden bridges that were illegally constructed over the Mahakali river in Darchula district. Security personnel from Dumling removed the wooden structures at Pelsiti and Malpa on Sunday. The bridges were reportedly built by the Indian side without taking permission from Nepali authorities.

dependent on the market for their daily supplies.

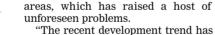
MOHAN SHAHI DOTI, FEB 17

Until recently, the people of Daudagaun had to walk for an entire day to reach Dipayal Silgadhi, the district headquarters of Doti. The journey duration has been shortened to a mere few hours as the village is now connected to the district's road network. However, road connectivity has had an opposite effect in the village: many families have stopped growing food and vegetables.

When the motor road reached Daudagaun for the first time, it was expected to provide market access to locally-grown crops and vegetables. Instead, the road has decreased the production of crops and vegetables in the village.

"No one wants to grow vegetables and crops these days," said Lal Bahadur Joshi, a resident of Kanachaur. "Most villagers have become dependent on the market for foods and vegetables.'

This problem is not limited to Daudagaun alone. A majority of local governments in Doti have prioritised road connectivity projects in their



done more harm than good. Those families who were self-reliant are now completely dependent on the market for their foods and vegetables," said Shiva Shankar Timilsena, an associate professor of Economics at Doti Multiple Campus. "Agricultural production is dwindling because more and more people are leaving their homes in search of jobs.'

Bharat Bahadur Khadka, a resident of Adarsha Rural Municipality who works in India as a daily wage worker, said 90 percent of the male population in his village was working in India.

'We can earn more money in a short period in India than from working in farmlands," Khadka said.

According to the National Census 2011, Doti has 41,440 households with a total population of 211,746--97,252 male and 114,494 female.

"The local governments are only focusing on physical development. They are doing very little to address the socio-economic needs of the people," said Chief District Officer Tek Narayan Paudel.



Doti women donate labour for a rural road project in the district.

- रितपूर्वक प्राप्त दरखास्तहरु मध्येबाट बोर्डको प्रचलित ऐन, नियमावली तथा यस पदपूर्तिको लागि तयार गरिएको कार्यविधि अनुसार देहाय बमोजिम छनौट प्रकृया अगाडि बढाइने छ ।
- शैक्षिक योग्यता. उल्लेखित विषय क्षेत्रमा कम्तीमा ३० कार्य दिनको तालिमको प्रमाणपत्र, खानेपानी वा प्राकतिक श्रोत व्यवस्थापन विषयहरुमा लेख, रचना प्रकाशित भएको भए सो को प्रतिलिपि, व्यवस्थापकीय पदको सामान्य कार्य अनभव (कुनै व्यवस्थापन वोर्ड, प्राधिकरण वा यस्तै प्रकृतिका ठुला सार्वजनिक संस्थाको व्यवस्थापक पदमा कम्तीमा ४ (पाँच) वर्षको कार्य अनभव) र विशिष्ट कार्य अनभव (खानेपानी वितरण एवं ढल निकास आयोजनामा आयोजना व्यवस्थापक भई काम गरेकों न्युनतम ५ (पाँच) वर्षकों कार्य अनुभव (कम्तीमा २० करोड भन्दा माथिको आयोजनाको व्यवस्थापन गरेको. पर्वाधार विकास सम्वन्धी आयोजनाको आयोजना प्रमखको रुपमा ४ (पाँच) वर्षको अनभव भएको. वित्त व्यवस्थापन वा श्रोत परिचालन सम्वन्धी विकास साफोदार निकाय संलग्न रहेको आयोजनामा वित्त व्यवस्थापन वा श्रोत परिचालनको क्षेत्रमा ३ (तिन) वर्ष वा सो भन्दा माथिको कार्य अनुभव, अर्न्तराष्ट्रिय विकास साभरेदार/दातु निकाय संलग्न भएको संस्था वा आयोजनामा कम्तीमा ३ (तिन) वर्ष वा सो भन्दा बढीको कार्य अनुभव सहित व्यक्तिगत विवरण (CV) को मुल्यांकनका आधारमा बढी अंक प्राप्त गर्ने ७ (सात) जना उम्मेदवारको संक्षिप्त सुची (Short Listing) दरखास्त दिने अन्तिम म्याद समाप्त भएको मितिले बढीमा १५ (पन्ध) दिन भित्र प्रकाशन गरिनेछ । उम्मेदवारले आवेदन साथ पेश गरेका कागजातहरु स्वयंले प्रमाणित गर्नपर्नेछ ।
- संक्षिप्त सुची तयार गर्ने प्रयोजनको लागि गरिएको मल्यांकनको निश्चित अंकभार, व्यवसायिक कार्य योजना (Business Plan) को मुल्यांकन, व्यवसायिक कार्य योजनाको प्रस्तुतिकरण र अन्तरवार्ताका आधारमा उम्मेदवारले प्राप्त गरेको कुल अंक गणना गरी सबै भन्दा बढी अंक प्राप्त गर्ने उम्मेदवारलाई सफल उम्मेदवार र त्यसपछि दोस्रो बढी अंक प्राप्त गर्ने उम्मेदवारलाई वैकल्पिक उम्मेदवारको रुपमा छनौट गरिनेछ ।
- **दरखास्त फारम र दरखास्त दस्तर :** दरखास्त फाराम काठमाण्डौ उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन वोर्डको कार्यालयको वेवसाइट ፍ. www.kvwsmb.org.np बाट डाउनलोड गरी वा कार्यालय समयमा कार्यालयबाट प्राप्त गर्न सकिनेछ । उक्त दरखास्त फाराम रितपूर्वक भरी तोकिएका कागजात संलग्न गरी सो दरखास्त फाराम साथ दरखास्त दस्तुर रु. ३०००।०० (तिन हजार) फिर्ता नहने गरी नगदै यस बोर्डको कार्यालय (ललितपर महानगरपालिका वडा न. १८, सैब, भैसेपार्टी) मा तिरी दरखास्त फाराम बभाउन सकिनेछ । दरखास्त फाराम बभाउन ल्याउँदा हालसालै खिचेको पासपोर्ट साईजको २ प्रति फोटो पेश गर्न पर्नेछ ।
- **दरखास्त दिने अन्तिम मिति :** यो सचना प्रथम पटक प्रकाशित मितिले २१ औं दिन भित्र कार्यालय समयमा बोर्डको कार्यालयमा . दरखास्त पेश गर्न पर्नेछ । उम्मेदवारले दरखास्त फारमसाथ शैक्षिक योग्यता, तालिम र अनभव सम्बन्धी कागजातहरु र व्यवसायिक योजना (सक्कल 9 र प्रतिलिपि २ थान सहित) कार्यपत्र तीन थान छड़ाछड़ै खाममा अलग अलग शिलबन्दी गरी पेश गर्न पर्नेछ । म्याद भित्र पेश हन नआएको र रितपूर्वक नभएको दरखास्त मान्य हुने छैन । तोकिएको समयभित्र ३ (तिन) वा सो भन्दा कम उम्मेदवारको दरखास्त परेमा पहिलो चरणमा परेका आवेदनहरुलाई यथावत राखी थप ७ दिनको म्याद राखी पुनः दरखास्त माग गर्न सक्नेछ । पुनः दरखास्त आव्हान गर्दा पनि थप उम्मेदवारको आवेदन नपरे पनि छनौट सम्वन्धी प्रकयालाई अगाडि बढाउन सकिनेछ।
- 90. व्यवसायिक कार्ययोजनाको विषय एवं ढाँचा : काठमाण्डौ उपत्यका खानेपानी व्यवस्थापन वोर्ड तथा सो को काम, कर्तव्य र अधिकार (Scope of work) सम्वन्धी जानकारी । वोर्डको आगामी पाँच वर्षको स्पष्ट दरद्षिट (Vision) सहितको व्यवसायिक कार्य योजना । व्यवसायिक कार्य योजनामा माथि उल्लेखित विषयका अतिरिक्त काठमाण्डौ उपत्यका भित्रको खानेपानीको सम्पत्ति तथा दायित्वको व्यवस्थापन, वोर्डको समस्या, चुनौती तथा समाधानका उपायहरु सहितको भावी कार्ययोजना पेश गर्नुपर्नेछ । साथै हाल विद्यमान वोर्ड तथा खानेपानी सेवा व्यवस्थापन र निकट भविष्यमा काठमाण्डौ उपत्यकामा संचालन हने मेलम्ची खानेपानी आयोजनाको सम्पत्ति तथा दायित्वको व्यवस्थापन, संचालन समेतको विस्तृत कार्य योजना संलग्न गर्नुपर्नेछ । यस कार्य योजनामा माथि उल्लेखित परियोजनाका अतिरिक्त काठमाण्डौ उपत्यकामा सर्वसुलभ एवं गुणस्तरिय खानेपानी सेवा व्यवस्थापन गर्न सम्भाव्य योजनाको खाका, श्रोतको व्यवस्थापन, कार्यान्वयन संचालन विधि (Modality), रचनात्मक लागत असुली योजना (Cost Recovery Plan) संलग्न गर्नपर्नेछ । (करिव ६००० शव्द भित्र रही)

(कार्यपत्र सामान्यतया अंग्रेजी वा नेपाली कनै एक भाषामा A4 साइजको कागजमा एकापट्टी मात्र लेखिएको हनपर्नेछ । अंग्रेजी भाषामा कार्यपत्र तयार गर्दा न्य टाईम्स रोमन फण्ट १२ र नेपाली भाषामा तयार गर्दा यनिकोड १४ फण्ट साईजमा हन पर्नेछ। कार्यपत्रको कभर पेजमा कार्यपत्रको शिर्षक एवं कार्य पत्र प्रस्तावकको नाम उल्लेख हनुपर्नेछ । कार्य पत्रको अन्य पेजहरुमा नाम लेख्ने वा अन्य कनै संकेत गर्न पाइने छैन। यसो गरेको पाइएमा कार्यपत्र रद्द गरी यसपछिको प्रकयामा सहभागि गराइने छैन ()

99. संक्षिप्त सूचीमा परेका उम्मेदवारहरुको नामावली, कार्यपत्र प्रस्तुतिकरण तथा अन्तरवार्ताको मिति, समय र स्थान दरखास्त दिने समयावधि संकिएको मितिले १५ (पन्ध) दिन भित्र सार्वजनिक गरिनेछ । थप जानकारी लिन् परेमा बोर्डको वेवसाईट www.kvwsmb.org.np र फोन नं. ०१-४४९१७३७/४४९१९३७ मा कार्यालय समयभित्र यस वोर्डको कार्यालय सैब. भैसेपाटीमा सम्पर्क राख्न सकिनेछ ।

OPINION

EDITORIAL

The blame game

Irrationality must not overpower truth. Visit Nepal's failures are due to bad campaigning.

Nepal's tourism year campaign for 2020 seems to be bound for failure. The signs towards this outcome came early, when the campaign organisers made many gaffes. That the seat of Nepal Tourism Board CEO stayed empty for much of January should have been a dead giveaway, but the rot set in much earlier. The website for Visit Nepal 2020 did not have any promotional content until at least mid-September, for instance. But it seems that the coronavirus epidemic in China has put the final nail on the coffin of Visit Nepal.

Visit Nepal was always going to suffer if a disease broke out in the neighbourhood. Other countries in Asia and abroad too are suffering from the lack of Chinese tourists. While Nepal was hoping to attract a record 350,000 Chinese tourists this year—bound not to happen now—Thailand is reeling from a tourism crisis, with 9 million less Chinese tourists expected to visit this year. However, what is a one-time, unavoidable stroke of bad luck global pandemics do not occur on a regular basis, much less consistently near Nepal—reports of discriminatory attitudes against Chinese tourists will threaten to destroy Nepal's burgeoning tourism sector and set it back by years.

Nepali officials will love to use the Covid-19 outbreak as a reason to mask the failures surrounding Visit Nepal 2020. To be sure, the disease has had a major impact the world over. Tourist arrivals from China for February are already 90 percent lower this year than the same month last year. Since 2012, the Chinese have been the largest contributors to outbound tourism globally. In 2017 alone, Chinese tourists spent \$258 billion, around 20 percent of the world's total spending on tourism that year. Posting such numbers, and with Nepal itself hoping for record arrivals from the northern neighbour, it is logical to assume that with the Chinese staying home, more and more countries will face hardships until the epidemic is contained.

However, the reduction in the numbers of all tourists this year has been painted by some as due to the fear of the Chinese tourists who have shown up to Nepal. This is just a feeble excuse. For sure, some international tourists may have stayed back owing to Nepal's proximity to the epicentre of the Covid-19 outbreak. But this has nothing to do with the few Chinese tourists that are here. In truth, the biggest issue has been Nepal's failure to adopt modern, catchy ways to market itself. The country's tourism promotion bungled from one misdirected attempt to another. The need of the hour was slick advertising campaigns on television and social media. Malaysia, for instance, has gained global recognition and seen tourist numbers greatly increase since the launch of its 'Malaysia: Truly Asia' advert campaign in 1998. Similarly, Japan has had great success-and millions of followers-on Instagram due to its #visitjapan campaign. Meanwhile, Nepal had its tourism minister lambasted for showing up to Australia-in the midst of their biggest bushfire crisis—to hold an illegal street rally.

The simple fact remains: Nepal should have done a better job in promoting tourism for this year. That the Covid-19 epidemic has scared away a chunk of the business this year will have no effects in the future of tourism in Nepal. But the lack of effective promotions, the attempted cronyism and interference at Nepal Tourism Board, and the failure to build-up necessary products and infrastructure to attract a wide range of tourists, combined, will surely have detrimental effects on Nepali tourism for many more years to come. Should discriminatory and irrational fears push the sector to reject Chinese tourists in this crucial juncture, that market may not provide tourists in the years to come. In such times of hardship, cooler heads must prevail.

Two years on, the government's promises of prosperity seem like a joke

Democratic norms are being trampled on, governance is weak and the economy is in a shambles.

ACHYUT WAGLE



The Nepal Communist Party majority government, headed by Prime Minister KP Oli, completed two years in office last week. Prime Minister Oli took this opportunity to highlight the achievements of his government through an hour-long address to the federal parliament. In his speech, Oli portrayed an unbelievably rosy picture of his administration's time in power-ranging from the enactment of almost five dozen new laws, implementation of fiscal federalism, control of corruption, consolidation of the economic outcomes to the dexterity in diplomacy. His jibe on political stability, 'the survival of a government for two years itself should be considered a great achievement in Nepal', however, hinted to a perceived imminent threat to his government, seemingly from within his party's ranks.

The fact of the matter is, these two years indeed have been a period of great achievement for Oli, at least on a personal level. He has managed to consolidate state-power singly around him and has ventured into the discretionary use of the same (largely through verbal decrees instead of legislation). He brought more than half a dozen key government agencies, which were originally conceived to function independent of direct political interference, under the Prime Minister's Office. They include the country's intelligence agency, the National Investigation Department (NID), the Department of Revenue Investigation (DRI) and the Department of Money Laundering Investigation (DMLI).

Imbalance of power

Such one-upmanship has gravely skewed the balance of power. It has brought down the separation of power—deemed sine qua non to democracy—between the three key branches of the government, namely the executive, legislature and judiciary. The parliament has become a mere rubber stamp for govern-



ment-sponsored bills. All provincial governments are constantly complaining of non-cooperation, and of the federal government's reluctance to devolve the authorities even categorically spelt out by the federal constitution. The statistics related to performance for the past two years especially regarding governance, economy and diplomacy—barely substantiate the recent flimsy political rhapsodies by Oli.

Incidentally, the seven provincial governments have also completed their two years in office and are trying to make their achievements public as well. But their approach is more subdued and apologetic for being unable to perform at par to their expectation, scope and potential. For this, the chief ministers, directly or squarely, are pointing fingers to the non-cooperation from the federal government in formulating required laws, devolving authority, designating the required number of technical and regular civil servants and supporting the capacity building of the sub-national governments.

While Oli was boasting of implementing the fiscal federalism in his address to the federal parliament, Chief Minister of Gandaki Province Prithvi Subba Gurung not only unequivocally claimed that the federal government was not being sincere in implementing the same but also demanding a review of the formulae fixing the equalisation grants from the federal to sub-national levels. The chief ministers of other six provinces of the country also generally echoed Gurung's concerns. If the national development were an aggregate of the development of the provinces, which is indeed the case, the tall claims of achievement by the prime

minister barely tally with that of the chief ministers.

Governance

The federal polity is now heavily constricted because of legal, institutional and operational shortfalls. The government seems to be keen on introducing regressive laws that are designed to restrict civic and academic liberties and strangulate the federal system. The provisions in proposed bills related to information technology, media, higher education etc. are only a few examples to this end. The transparency and accountability of the administration has been severely compromised by the arbitrary nature of the investigation and prosecution of criminal as well as corruption cases. Cases like Nirmala Panta's rape and murder, the Lalita Niwas public land graft, the corruption related to the purchase of Airbus aircraft by Nepal Airlines Corporation and transfer of ownership of a huge amount of valuable public land to Yeti Holdings without adhering to proper public procurement procedures, remind us how open to nepotism, favouritism and misuse of state power the Oli government is. In the absence of public accountability mechanisms extended parallel to the federal structure of the state, particularly with a focus on the local levels, the corruption has now diffused to the grassroots.

Economy

Against the government's claim that the economy is on the right track, key economic indicators are extremely worrisome. The government has been forced to downward revise both revenue and expenditure targets in its half-yearly review of the national budget. In the first six months, the trade deficit has exceeded Rs642 billion which is equal to more than 20 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Inflation on daily consumer products has crossed the 10 percent mark. The inflow of foreign direct investment is at an unimpressive Rs12 billion. The most worrying factor has been the very poor absorption capacity of readily available financial resources, particularly at the local levels. The unspent amount stuck in various government accounts has now reached Rs241.78 billion, including Rs.5846 billion at the local level as of mid-January 2020. With the expected change in leadership in the finance ministry, the stock market has witnessed a lukewarm positive response; though the overall economic uncertainty continues to loom large

Diplomacy

Not only the operational level day-today diplomacy, the overarching foreign policy plank of Nepal now seems to be in complete disarray. Economic diplomacy is in tatters. Oli and his government rode their anti-India and pro-China wagon to power. Now, the government has massively increased Nepal's engagement with China at various levels; between the governments, between the selected think tanks and academia and between the two ruling communist parties. At the same time, it has undermined the importance of engaging with the other powerful neighbour, India, as well as the rest of the democratic world. Extremely callous handling of the foreign policy, for all practical purposes, defeated the concept of so-called 'balanced' or 'non-aligned' position of Nepal. The entire policy paradigm has now become a plaything in the hands of a few top hats of the ruling NCP.

The latest example of foreign policy mayhem has manifested in the endeavour to ratify the \$500 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) grant compact. Prime Minister Oli declared that, regardless of the report to be prepared by his party's review committee headed by former prime minister Jhala Nath Khanal (who happens to be an Oli detractor), he would push to ratify the compact in Parliament and that it will be sanctioned. At the root of such discord and confusion is the absence of well-defined, timely-calibrated and institutionalised foreign policy.

In a nutshell, the last two years have hardly made any headway towards Oli's repeated promises of prosperity; the prosperity slogan has now become something of a joke.

Algorithmocracy: What the future may hold

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Finally, please tell us who you are in a sentence or two when you send us your story ideas. We want to know where you have published before or what your expertise is on the topic you're interested in exploring.

Artificial intelligence is changing society, for better or for worse, but Nepal is lagging behind.



Democracy has sometimes been hailed as a panacea to all the ills the world is suffering from. But, in the second decade of this millennium, things did not look that favourable for democratic process, mainly the because many people lost faith in democracy. People's participation in the electoral process decreased considerably. The lower voter turnout and people's declining trust towards liberal governments, however, are the least of democracy's problems. The biggest threat to the political order will come from disruptive digital technologies, unless it is used to the system's advantage.

The current political leadership in Nepal is clueless about the coming future. Until now, they have overlooked the importance of effectively managing digital technologies that are poised to disrupt many of the foundational ideas of democracy, specifically artificial intelligence (AI). AI refers to systems that display intelligent behaviour by analysing their environment and taking actions with some degree of autonomy to achieve specific goals. AI can also be defined as a simulation of human intelligence by machines.

The Nepali government seems to be confident about the possibility of devising policies to manage AI in due course of time. The effects of new technologies unfolded relatively slowly in the past, allowing former governments enough time to adjust. This time though, the policymakers are mistaken. The pace of the AI revolution will be much faster and will fur-



ther accelerate over time.

The use of AI in politics brings new opportunities as well as poses various challenges to the democratic process. Politicians usually design the election agenda that they thought would best serve the interests of the constituency. This created a huge design-reality gap that made citizens more dissatisfied with democracy. Modernday tech-savvy politicians have already started using AI to study the electorate's views to adjust their campaign strategies.

Such politicians are using AI to analyse data about voters' preferences by studying their social media activities. This could be a good thing if politicians increase communication with the voters. This could be a threat as well. For example, in most cases, the illiterate voters do not know what is good for them and are only interested in short term gains, thus democratic elections could end up becoming mass appeals instead of the reasoned deliberation process that has until now benefited society as a whole.

Political advertising provides politicians with tools that enable them to manipulate citizens by using smartly designed algorithms. The tool can also be used to study individual opinions and nudge undecided voters towards the side that invests more in machine learning strategies. The reasons for this shift are complex, but appear to be AI-related. Politicians and governments are using AI to manipulate people.

Another large threat to democracy could come from the AI industry dominated by a few tech giants. Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Facebook, IBM, Apple, Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent already lead AI development. Furthermore, these tech giants are developing the frameworks, chipsets and networks that underpin the communication infrastructure of the modern world. They are also funding the majority of research and earning the lion's share of patents. Above all, these companies are not transparent.

The Chinese government, meanwhile, is pumping huge sums of money into AI research as part of a strategy developed in 2017. In the US, the private sector traditionally funded AI research, but now the US is following in the footsteps of China. Earlier this month, the White House announced that it is pumping hundreds of millions more dollars into AI research. The administration is planning to boost funding for AI research at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the National Science Foundation, the Department of Energy and the Department of Agriculture.

The Chinese government's development strategies have already proven to be effective. Between 2016 and 2018, Chinese companies filed more AI-related patents than their US counterparts. According to a recent study conducted by Nikkei, in 2018 alone the northern neighbour was responsible for 30,000 new patent filings related to artificial intelligence. This is because private AI companies in China leverage strategic support from the government to form the collaborative networking necessary for AI innovation.

There are many things the government here in Nepal can learn from the Chinese government in promoting AI in the country. Yet, It is unlikely that we will see any efforts from the government's side to create an effective strategy. This is because the political leaders' thought process and ideology are still stuck in the 19th century.

Meanwhile, artificial intelligence continues to rise in importance. It has also become an important tool in the fight against disease outbreak. Insilico Medicine, a startup based in the US, used AI to rapidly identify molecules that could form the basis of an effective treatment against the current Coronavirus outbreak. The AI-based system took only four days to identify thousands of new molecules that could be turned into potential medicines against the virus.

Artificial intelligence can provide society with many benefits, if regulated and used responsibly. Elected representatives cannot afford to ignore this technology any longer. The government's role will always be pivotal to using such technology to benefit democracy.

Shah works as a trade and transport consultant.

China's secrecy has made coronavirus crisis much worse

China's authoritarian system needs to step up its game confronting unexpected crises that require a rapid response.

IVO DAALDER

For eight years, China's President Xi Jinping has trumpeted his country's increasingly authoritarian system as a grand model for other developing countries to follow. No doubt, China has seen an extraordinary period of economic growth, which has benefitted hundreds of millions in China and around the world. But authoritarianism has also come at great cost, as the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus underscores.

In two months, the virus has spread throughout China and beyond. More than 60,000 people have been reported infected, and nearly 1,400 have died as a consequence of the disease. These numbers are likely to vastly understate the true extent of its spread and impact. The numbers inside China are bound to be much higher, and the lack of reports from Africa, the Middle East and South America are more likely due to faltering health care systems rather than its absence altogether.

We may never know if the spread of the new virus could have been prevented by earlier, concerted action. But the fact that China chose secrecy and inaction turned the possibility of an epidemic into a reality.

The first instance of a new pneumonia-like disease in Wuhan, an industrial city of 11 million people, emerged in early December. By the end of the month, doctors in Wuhan noticed an increased number of sick people with symptoms similar to the SARS outbreak that had killed nearly 800 people in 2002-03. The patients were quarantined, and the Wuhan health commission issued a public notice stressing no cause for alarm. The infections were traced to a live-animal food market, which was shut down January 1, and the genetic sequence of a new coronavirus was identified two days later.

Official communications stressed that there was no reason to believe the disease could be spread among humans, and the authorities cracked down hard on any medical warnings that appeared on social media. In one notable case, a WeChat post by Dr Li Wenliang to colleagues that patients at his hospital had been quarantined with SARSlike symptoms, was dismissed as 'illegal



acts of fabricating, spreading rumours, and disrupting social order'. (Dr Li later contracted the disease and died).

Chinese authorities waited for a month after the first case to notify the World Health Organisation about the new coronavirus, thus delaying concerted efforts to understand the virus, its transmissibility and lethality among infectious disease specialists around the world. Even so, from January 2 to January 18, China did not report any new cases and continued to downplay its severity. As the number of hospitalisations mounted in Wuhan, officials went ahead with a New Year banquet for 40,000 people.

Only when new cases were reported outside Hubei province on January 20 did the Chinese authorities decide to act. Within days, Hubei province, home to 50 million people, was quarantined, with no travel allowed.

But it was too late. The disease had spread around the country and the world. Within Wuhan, reports of new cases and deaths grew exponentially—from just 100 infected patients and deaths in single digits in mid-January to tens of thousands of reported cases and hundreds of death a few weeks later. Yet, even though Chinese authorities finally acknowledged the severity of the situation, Beijing did not allow a WHO investigating team to enter China until this week and still declines offers by the United States and other countries to send all the experts needed to help combat the disease.

Authoritarian political systems don't do well when confronting unexpected crises, especially those like infectious diseases that require a rapid local response. They disempower officials at the lower rungs. The firmer the control at the top, the less likely the initiative from the bottom. Dangers go unreported and those who speak out, like Dr Li, are quickly punished as a clear sign to others to stay in line.

But when it comes to infectious diseases, top-down approaches fail. In fact, they make things worse, by delaying actions that could otherwise prevent the spread of the disease. Only if people are empowered to take the initiative can quick action be taken.

When the first coronavirus patient in the United States presented himself in Snohomish County, Washington, Hollianne Bruce didn't wait for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to confirm the SHUTTERSTOCK

disease. The epidemiologist assigned to the county immediately traced everyone the patient had been in contact with and urged them to remain in isolation for 14 days to prevent the disease from spreading. So far, it hasn't.

Authoritarians are good at ducking responsibility and shifting blame. And no doubt Xi Jinping will survive this latest crisis and remain fully in charge of the country. But people inside and out of China will have noticed that secrecy and control can be deadly, and will begin to question whether the system is in fact as effective as China's leaders make it out to be.

This article was previously published in The Korea Herald, a part of the Asia News Network.

Twenty-first century skills and the 4th Industrial Revolution

The prospects and problems are spectacularly different for most people in low income countries.



MANZOOR AHMED

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently said, 'It is not only Bangladesh, the whole world will need skilled manpower... and for that we have reformed our education system, giving priority to vocational training'. She was speaking at the international conference on 'Skills Readiness for Achieving SDG and Adopting Industrial Revolution 4.0' on February 2, 2020. The event was organised by the Institute of Diploma Engineers Bangladesh (IDEB) and the Colombo Plan Staff College in Manila, Philippines.

The Prime Minister has rightly indicated an important priority. The question is: how are buzzwords such as the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' understood and what is happening on the ground in the thousands of secondary level institutions across the country?

Klaus Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum and the organiser of the annual Davos Summit, is credited with popularising this term. As Schwab explains, the First Industrial Revolution started in the 1780s, using water and steam power to mechanise production. The Second, beginning in the 1870s, used electric power to create assembly lines and lead to mass production. The Third, starting from the 1960s, used electronics and information technology, also known as digital technology, to automate production. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) now builds on the digital revolution.

The latest Industrial Revolution blurs the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres in an unprecedented way. The 4IR is radically different, since it is more than only a technological shift in economic production, as the previous three were. It opens unlimited possibilities for addressing critical challenges of poverty, inequality and sustainable development. However, beyond the hype surrounding 4IR, the potentials and challenges have to be seen from the perspective of the real world, especially from the point of view of low income countries like Bangladesh where the majority of the world's people still live. The prospects and problems are spectacularly different for most people in these countries when compared to those in wealthier countries.

Over 80 percent of our workforce is employed in the informal economy, which is not regulated by worker welfare and rights standards. A third of the workforce has no education, 26 percent have only primary education and 31 percent have only up to secondary education, according to a 2017 Labour Force Survey. Over 40 percent of workers are engaged in the low-skill and low-wage agricultural sector. The concept note for the Eighth Five Year Plan (FY2021-25) that is under preparation says that the overall quality of the labour force is much below the level that is needed to achieve the planned 15 percent growth in manufacturing, to expand the organised service sector, and to facilitate the transition to an upper-middle-income country.

Life and the livelihoods of the majority of people in Bangladesh are largely characterised by the use of the second or even the first Industrial Revolution technologies. At the same time, ironically, most people are also touched by the third Industrial Revolution through the penetration of mobile phone technology. The features of 4IR can be found in a handful of the better educated and privileged population who benefit from or contribute to its development at home or abroad. What this means is that simultaneously, technologies and people's skills, as well as their attitudes and aspirations, have to be lifted across the board in all four phases of industrial revolutions, starting from wherever the people are on this spectrum. This is where skills formation, the role of the education system and the relevance of 21st century skills come in.

What we call 21st century skills are not necessarily all novel, nor do they mark a clean break from what were important in the 20th century or the 19th century. There are common and timeless elements of quality and relevance for learners and the whole of society in any system of education. Education systems have always struggled to achieve and maintain these essential elements, and they have not become invalid in the 21st century.

This formulation of 21st century skills recognises the value of the foundational skills of multiple literacies, the essential tools for learning. This is the base on which the higher order skills of solving problems and thinking critically are built. Young people also have to be helped with social and emotional maturity and acquiring moral and ethical values—the qualities of character. A lifelong learning approach has to be adopted for this. As in the case of technology adoption and adaptation, skills development and education also need to consider the perennial basic and essential elements that can respond to the diverse phases of technology, production, consumption, lifestyle and expectations in which people find themselves.

The education authorities-the two divisions of the Bangladesh Ministry of Education and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board—are engaged in a review of school curricula in the context of 21st century challenges. What is more important than formulating the curriculum is to find effective ways of implementing the curriculum. Teachers-their skills, professionalism and motivations-are the key here. So is the way students' learning is assessed. Look at the negative backwash effects of the current public examinations-too early and too frequent; many questions on what they actually assess; and the distortion of the teaching-learning process in schools.

A good move is to start streaming students to different tracks from 11th grade rather than 9th grade, something which is under consideration now. The aim is to build a common foundation of competencies for SHUTTERSTOCK

all, and not force young people to foreclose their life options early.

Klaus Schwab had warned that we face the danger of a job market that is increasingly segregated into 'low-skill/low-pay' and 'high-skill/high-pay' segments, giving rise to growing social tensions. Coping with the implications of this danger for education and skill development is a continuing concern. We cannot discuss the numerous structural and operational obstacles to necessary reforms in education and skills formation and how to deal with these within the confines of this article. But we can hardly ignore them either.

The decision-makers of today find it difficult to free themselves from the trap of traditional, linear thinking. They are too absorbed by the multiple, immediate crises knocking at their doors every day. Can they find the time and focus their mind enough to think strategically, looking at the bigger picture and with a longer time horizon, about the forces of change and disruption that are shaping our future?

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TECHNOPOLIS

China's smartphones adapt to business under coronavirus

The outbreak has forced the temporary closure of smartphone factories across China after authorities imposed restrictions on large gatherings of people.

CELIA CHEN AND MINGHE HU

BEIJING

Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi became the first among its peers to host an online-only flagship product launch this week in a move that is likely to become commonplace in the country's tech sector amid the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

Xiaomi founder Lei Jun, originally from Hubei province where he attended university in Wuhan—the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak—became emotional on Thursday as he opened the live-streamed video conference.

"Wuhan is a city of heroes. Wuhan people are brave, confident and optimistic ... Life can be affected by the epidemic, but we cannot be defeated by it," he said, holding back tears while wearing a mask.

While the purpose of the event was to launch the company's new Mi 10 flagship 5G phone, the billionaire entrepreneur admitted that the smartphone industry was "quiet" amid the public health crisis and he hoped normal production would resume soon.

The online event came after Lu Weibing, vice-president of Xiaomi and general manager for its Redmi brand, apologised to users in a Weibo post last month, saying that the planned release of new products had been disrupted and that the company was making adjustments amid the setbacks facing the entire industry.

Live-streaming of product launches has quickly emerged as one alternative to bringing new devices to market at a time when the coronavirus crisis has temporarily ended prospects for large gatherings of people at such events.

The coronavirus outbreak has forced the temporary closure of smartphone factories across China after authorities imposed restrictions on large groups of people being in one place.

Most bricks and mortar smartphone retail stores are closed to reduce person-to-person contact and those that remain open have seen a dramatic decrease in customers as residential communities in mainland Chinese cities have gone into partial lockdown to prevent the spread of the deadly respiratory disease.

As a result, research firms have slashed their forecasts for China's smartphone sales. Canalys and Strategy Analytics expect shipments to drop 50 percent in the first quarter from a year ago, while IDC sees a 30 percent slide.



Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi became the first among its peers to host an online-only flagship product launch this week, an alternative to bringing new devices to market at a time when the coronavirus crisis has temporarily ended prospects for large gatherings of people at such events in China.

"The outbreak of coronavirus is likely to disrupt the supply chain and new product launch cycle during the first half of this year," Wu Yiwen, senior analyst at Strategy Analytics, wrote in a report. "Moving online is more short-term oriented ... I think these efforts are effective to some degree [in mitigating the coronavirus impact]," she told the Post.

Other major brands including Huawei's Honor, Oppo-spin off Realme and Xiaomi's Blackshark have also gone online for new product launches.

With limited access to physical shops, consumers have no choice but to buy their new phones online. The proportion of online sales will increase significantly in the first half of the year, IDC said in a report released early this month.

Although online product launches and e-commerce stores provide a medium for smartphone vendors to showcase and sell new devices, offline channels are still important because they provide more interaction with potential consumers.

"Offline channels [are still very important], accounting for 70 percent of the total sales in China," said Jia Mo, an analyst from research agency Canalys.

The importance of offline channels for product launches and sales can be seen in the efforts by China's leading smartphone makers, including Huawei, Oppo, Xiaomi, and ZTE, to stick with the mobile industry's biggest annual exhibition before it was cancelled due to concerns over the coronavirus outbreak. The companies sent teams of employees to Spain weeks ahead of MWC Barcelona after organisers said all visitors would have to prove that they had not been in China for at least 14 days before the show.

However, after major exhibitors including LG, Nokia, Vodafone, AT&T, Sony and Intel pulled out of the event, the organiser GSMA was left with no choice but to cancel the entire conference, which was originally scheduled for Feb 24 to 27.

Oppo said it respected the decision of GSMA, adding that the company has postponed its Oppo Find X2 global conference that was to take place two days before MWC Barcelona. Xiaomi delayed the global product launch of its flagship Mi 10 series originally planned for Feb 23.

Vivo, which had announced its intention to pull out before the show was cancelled, was instead "pushing hard for its online-focus series, which is expanding to India this quarter", said Wu from Strategy Analytics. "Expanding to overseas markets is more long-term oriented."

With new product launches and overseas expansion continuing, albeit mostly via online marketing, the focus is on the resumption of full scale production at Chinese smartphone factories operated by subcontractors such as Foxconn and Pegasus, which produce 70 percent of all smartphones sold globally.

Traditionally, the period from February to March is the product testing phase for manufacturers before they ramp up mass production after the Lunar New Year holiday. "Any change of product plans in the first half of the year will hurt medium and even long-term plans," the IDC report said, adding that it forecasts China's smartphone market will contract 4 percent in 2020.

If smartphone subcontractors like Foxconn, Pegatron and Flex—which produce phones for brands like Apple and Huawei—cannot resume full capacity in the near term, it could hamper the ability of the brands to bring their newest products to market.

Oppo is looking to fill the shortfall by allocating more of its production to manufacturing centers in Indonesia, India, Algeria, Bangladesh and other countries, according to a report from state-run media Xinhua.

Oppo vice-president Shen Yiren said in a Weibo post that the epidemic will substantially affect the production of its next flagship smartphone as supply would be tight. "The productivity of any part of the supply chain, even the packing box, will impact the factory output of the whole phone," Shen said in the post.

With the medical sector experiencing a shortage of resources, some electronics companies have started manufacturing protective face masks themselves. Apple's main supplier Foxconn has switched some of its production lines to make surgical masks for its own staff, as it delays resumption of full production due to the outbreak, while Vivo reportedly has two production lines allocated for mask making.

"Factories are taking measures to prevent the coronavirus but mobile [device] production is labour intensive work ... If one virus case is found in a factory, it will be a disaster," said Jia. "However, if production cannot resume, the factories face huge losses every day."

Automation could help production lines recover more quickly during a crisis. Taiwanese-owned Foxconn expects to fully automate 30 percent of its production in China by this year. "Automation can work as a solution and it is a trend, but the automating process requires high [investment] cost," said Zaker Li, a senior industry analyst at IHS Markit.

–The Star

Smartphone voting stirs interest—and security fears

Rising interest in electronic voting has heightened concerns among security experts who fear these systems are vulnerable to hacking.

ROB LEVER WASHINGTON

West Virginia's disabled residents and overseas military personnel will be able to vote by smartphone in the US presidential election this latest development in a push to make balloting more accessible despite persistent security fears. Rising interest in electronic voting has heightened concerns among security experts who fear these systems are vulnerable to hacking and manipulation that could undermine confidence in election results. Overseas service members from West Virginia first voted by smartphone in 2018 with the blockchain-powered mobile application Voatz, which is now being tested in some elections in Colorado, Utah, Oregon and Washington state



Flight of fancy? Aviation industry tries to go green

Swiss company Smartflyer is aiming to launch a hybrid-electric aircraft for four people by 2022.

CATHERINE LAI AND SAM REEVES Singapore

facturer says it has the potential to cut fuel consumption by up to 20 percent compared to current sin-

West Virginia recently expanded the programme to people with physical disabilities.

A report released Thursday by Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers uncovered Voatz "vulnerabilities" which could allow votes to be altered and potentially allow an attacker to recover a user's secret ballot.

Voatz called the study "flawed" and said its app has been updated 27 times from the version used by researchers.

MIT researchers Michael Specter, James Koppel and Daniel Weitzner on Friday stood by their findings, saying they used recent versions of the app.

The researchers said that amid the uncertainty, election officials should "abandon the app for immediate use."

Backers of mobile voting argue it is more efficient, and can improve accessibility for deployed troops, the elderly and other people who can't get to polling stations.

Former presidential candidate Andrew Yang endorsed the idea, saying, "Americans should be able to vote via their mobile device, with verification done via blockchain."

Critics however call for caution in light of an array of cybersecurity worries and a fiasco in Iowa over a mobile app that was used for vote tabulation, but could have been adapted for individual ballots.

While internet voting has been implemented in parts of the world, notably in Estonia, security is still a key concern, and that goes double for smartphone voting, say researchers.

"Internet voting can't be secured by any known technology," said Andrew Appel, a Princeton University computer science professor and member of a National Academy of Sciences panel which produced a 2018 report, "Securing the Vote," that recommends against internet voting.

A key hurdle for online voting, including with smartphones, is ensuring ballots are secret while at the same time verifying the voter's identity and securing the ballot against tampering.

Appel noted that while many people are used to handling sensitive transactions like banking on a smartphone, the security risks of voting are unique.

The 2018 report, Appel noted, recommends the use of "human-readable" paper ballots which can be audited.

Blockchain or not?

Voatz claims its use of blockchain and other technologies can deliver both accessibility and security.

"Voatz leverages the latest security features of smartphones and facial recognition technology to verify and validate the identity of the voter, biometrics to secure that voter's identity, cryptography to automatically produce a paper ballot for tabulation at the jurisdiction, and blockchain for rigorous post-election audits to ensure voter intent is reflected in the overall count without revealing voter identity," a Voatz spokesperson said in an email to AFP.

The Voatz app requires users to scan a driver's license or other identity card and authenticate with a fingerprint reader and a selfie that is matched against it using facial recognition software.

But some analysts say the security using blockchain, which is a shared ledger used for cryptocurrencies that cannot be modified without all parties on the chain being notified, does not address the problems of electronic voting.

"Blockchain solves a problem for elections that pretty much doesn't exist, which is securing votes already cast," said Matt Blaze, a Georgetown University professor specializing in cryptography who has studied election systems.

"It doesn't address the problem of how to know these are the votes people have cast."

Appel said if a ballot is altered by a hacker before it is tabulated, "the hacked ballot would go into the blockchain."

Moving ahead online

Still, internet voting appears to moving forward in the US and elsewhere. At least four US states allow some voters to return ballots using a web-based portal and 19 allow email or fax, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Barbara Simons, board chair of the nonprofit election watchdog Verified Voting Foundation, said some firms are selling new technology by promising increased voter participation.

"This is an incredible myth there is little to no evidence showing internet voting is going to increase voter participation," Simons told a conference at Georgetown University.

Outside the US, at least a dozen countries have experimented with some form of online voting, according to Verified Voting.

Estonia's system in place since 2005 is seen by some as a model to follow. But France dropped its system for overseas voting online in 2017 over security concerns.

Appel said one problem in evaluating online voting is that it may be impossible to detect a hack.

For a fully electronic system, he said, "there is no practical way to know if the vote is recorded in an accurate way."

-Agence France-Presse

From an emissions-reducing model jet that looks like something from a sci-fi movie to electric aircraft and sustainable fuel, the aviation industry is ramping up efforts to go green as consumer pressure grows.

In an era when teen climate activist Greta Thunberg opts to travel on an eco-friendly boat and "flight-shaming" is all the rage in her native Sweden, air travel's reputation has never looked as dire.

Aviation accounts for three percent of climate-damaging carbon emissions globally, according to the European Environment Agency, and the world is experiencing record heatwaves, wildfires and storm surges made worse by rising seas.

"Sustainability" was the buzzword last week in Singapore at Asia's biggest air show—which was powered by solar panels with manufacturers and airlines trying to outdo one another on vows to become more sustainable.

Some environmentalists however have criticised such pledges as "greenwash", PR stunts that will do little to mitigate the damage caused by the vast quantities of jet fuel burnt every year.

"Aviation is under significant pressure to improve its sustainability image," Paul Stein, chief technology officer for engine maker Rolls-Royce, told AFP.

Airlines are "working with us to find pathways to increase the availability of sustainable fuels, look at how electrification can impact them... and also looking to more and more efficient engines and airframes".

Cutting emissions

The aviation industry has pledged to reduce its net carbon emissions by 50 percent by 2050 compared with 2005 levels, and the British sector went further this month with a vow to achieve net zero emissions by the same date.

At the Singapore Airshow, European plane maker Airbus unveiled a model of a futuristic new jet that blends wings with body and has two rear-mounted engines. The demonstrator model's sleek design is meant to reduce aerodynamic drag, and the manugle-alsie alrcraft.

Dubbed Maveric, the 2.2-metrelong (7.2-foot) model had its first test flight in June last year.

Franco-Italian manufacturer ATR was meanwhile keen to highlight that its turboprop aircraft popular for short hops, particularly in parts of Asia with poor infrastructure—burns 40 percent less fuel compared with a jet of the same size. "It is a trade-off between fuel consumption and speed," ATR chief executive Stefano Bortoli told AFP.

"You can gain five, 10 minutes with a faster jet but in terms of pollution, it is more damaging."

Slow-moving solutions

There have also been steps towards producing electric planes. The world's first fully electric aircraft—designed by engineering firm magniX—made its inaugural test flight in December in Canada.

Swiss company Smartflyer is developing a hybrid-electric aircraft for four people and is aiming for a maiden flight in 2022. As well as reducing emissions, the aircraft is less noisy and cheaper to operate due in part to lower fuel costs.

But Aldo Montanari, the company's head of avionics and user interface, cautioned such projects would not be quick.

"The pressure is quite big... and I think the industry has understood but they need time to react, they cannot do it in one year," he said. "It has to be safe."

Biofuels are touted as a major route for the aviation industry to cut carbon emissions, and several airlines have in recent years operated commercial flights using them. But prices remain higher than regular fuel, and they represent just a tiny proportion of jet fuel used globally.

Despite the efforts, environmentalists accuse the aviation industry of moving too slowly as more evidence emerges of the devastating impacts of climate change.

"It will take a long time for airlines to become sustainable," Dewi Zloch, climate and energy campaigner with Greenpeace, told AFP. "Technological solutions will take decades."

-Agence France-Presse

CULTURE & ARTS

Why do we want the big, fat Nepali wedding?

From a *mehendi* ceremony to a bachelorette party to a filming/photography crew, Nepali weddings these days have become massive, lavish and very expensive.

ANKIT KHADGI KATHMANDU

Deepika's engagement ceremony was everything she had ever wished for. A designer outfit, professional makeup, a palace-like venue, her family having a ball and top photographers documenting the special day. Deepika, 26, who wants to be known by her first name only, was the first one in her family to have such an extravagant engagement ceremony, and the first to add the ritual of an exchange of rings.

"Traditionally in our Newa culture, we have the *kochi*, the first ceremony of the wedding in which the groom's presence is not necessary. In this ceremony, the groom's family visits the bride and performs *pujas*, to confirm the wedding," says Deepika. She opted for a ring exchanging ceremony instead, replicating an Indian ritual she's seen many a time in Bollywood movies.

Like Deepika, many urban Nepalis these days are opting for weddings that include a series of events that reflect an assimilation of various cultural practises, some straying from traditional practice, like synchronised dance performances, *mehendi* and *haldi* ceremonies, bachelorette parties, cinematic wedding videos. And while doing so, they are not shying away from spending exorbitant amounts of money.

According to Anup Ghimire, director of Wedding Dreams Nepal, a wedding management and planning company, "Most people want big weddings because it's a special time. They want it to be memorable for themselves and for everyone else."

Weddings have always been an important aspect of society, especially in the South Asian region. It is estimated the Indian wedding industry, which is the biggest in South Asia, is worth an approximate \$50 billion dollars alone. From making Bollywood actors serve food to your guests and hiring Beyonce to dance at your *sangeet*—people are willing to do anything to make people remember their wedding.

But why do people want such grand celebrations? Dissecting this psyche, Lalita Bashyal, a sociologist, says wedding celebrations have always been a huge deal in Nepali society, as weddings are generally associated with power and status. "In our context, wedding celebrations have always been a symbol of status. That's why people want weddings to be

Brides and grooms hire photographers and spend hours to capture the 'perfect' shot, which looks like a photo straight out of a magazine.

Weddings have always been an important aspect of South Asian societies.

position," says Bashyal, a teaching faculty at Madan Bhandari Memorial College. "People will feel that their status-quo in society might get affected if they don't throw big celebrations. That's why they opt for grand weddings."

People also want to document all their celebrations. Gone are those days when wedding photos would be limited to the brides and grooms bowing their heads in to shyness, their families beside them. Today, brides and grooms spend hours for the perfect shot, which looks like a photo straight out of a magazine. Some even go a step further and have a pre-wedding photoshoot. Along with photos, couples want videos too, particularly crafted for social media. "Thoy also eme with phone of

"They also come with plans of where they want their video to be shot at and even the kind of music



they want in their video," says Bishwas Magar, director of Wedding City Nepal, who has been in the business for almost five waare There's also a high domand for drone shots, a reflection of how important photos have become for the newly-weds. "Since from a bird eye view everything locks curving weddings, says Rajesh Ghimire, hairstylist and makeup artist at Arden The Beauty Point, Kupondole. "When people see someone's wedding pictures and videos on social media and other people raving about it, they want something similar," says Ghimire.

According to sociologist Bashyal, people's habit of seeking gratification from others has also contributed to this need for organising big weddings. "Previously, weddings were a private affair. But with the advent of social media platforms, more people are sharing their precious moments with their friends and family and it has been a barometer for the couples to determine whether their wedding was hit or not on the basis of how their wedding has been received on those platforms," says Bashyal.

Many also believe that people's fixation for grand weddings, with the inclusion of events like *mehendi* and *sangeet*, is partly also a result of people's fascination with Bollywood.

"Bollywood is definitely one of the main reasons why people want big weddings and include multiple events like *mehendi* and *sangeet*," says Riza Poudel, a wedding planner at Welcome Event Management. According to Poudel, the needs and aspirations of clients are getting bigger and bigger and that has made it challenging for them to handle weddings.

The shift in the decision making power of planning weddings and celebrations, from the hands of elders to those who are taking the nuptials, is also one of the reasons why weddings have become so much bigger, says Prathana Shrestha, co-founder of MP Luxury Bridal, a wedding design firm.

"Couples are getting more involved in the planning and execution of the smallest details rather than leaving it completely to their parents. They are experimenting with new approaches, and considering the abundant resources and inspiration online and offline, it is fairly natural for brides and grooms to want nothing less in their celebrations," says Shrestha.

And that's what people who are about to tie the knot say too. "I will replicate the same grandeur in my wedding ceremony because it's a one-time thing. Obviously it has to be special," says Deepika, who has been frequenting boutiques in Kupondole and Indra Chowk trying to find the perfect outfit

PHOTO COURTESY: WEDDING DREAMS NEPAL Planner Manage Poudel,

PHOTO COURTESY: WELCOME EVENT MANAGEMENT aerial photography for their wed-

dings," says Ghimire, of Wedding Dreams Nepal. Social media also has a lot to do

Is Oscar-winning film Parasite inspired from a Tamil film?

Thalapathy Vijay's Minsara Kanna, when released in 1999, was one of the biggest hits then in Kollywood that year.

DAWN

South Korean dark comedy thriller film, *Parasite*, created history this year by bagging multiple awards— including Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, Best Foreign Film and the first-ever foreign-language release to win the Best Film award at the Oscars. But it seems Tamil producer PL

Thenappan, who holds the rights of the 1999 Vijay-starrer *Minsara Kanna*, claims that Bong Joon-Ho's directorial is a plagiarised version of his film. The producer recently announced that he will sue the makers of *Parasite* and pursue a legal course of action against them.

The producer added that he will also claim compensation for stealing credit for his work.

"On Monday or Tuesday, I will be filing a case with the help of an international lawyer. They have taken the plot from my film. When they find out that some of our films have been inspired by their films, they file cases. Similarly, it is only fair for us to do the same," said Thenappan while talking to an Indian publication.

Parasite is a dark comedy thrill-

er that follows the members of a poor family who scheme to become employed by a wealthy family by infiltrating their household and posing as unrelated, highly qualified individuals.

Tamil film Minsara Kanna revolves around a wealthy boy who decides to work for a businesswoman and employs every member of his family at the businesswoman's house to succeed in love.

Although social media has refused to take the plagiarism claims seriously, Thenappan insisted he means business. He has, however, failed to file a case so far.



Thenappan claims that Bong Joon-Ho's directorial is a plagiarised version of his 1999 film and he will pursue a legal course of action against the makers of *Parasite*.

Nepali singer wows judges, winning appreciation both on and offline

Twenty-one-year-old Dibesh Pokharel won the golden ticket at the audition round of the 18th season of American Idol for his standout performance.



POST REPORT Kathmandu

On the very first episode of the 18th season of American Idol, a reality-based singing show, Nepali singer Dibesh Pokharel, who goes by his stage name Arthur Gunn, gave a standout performance, winning the hearts of the judges as well as the audience.

Pokharel, who originally hails from Kathmandu, sang Bob Dylan's 'Girl from the North Country' and 'Have You Ever Seen The Rain' by Creedence Clearwater Revival impressing the three judges—Katy Perry, Lionel Richie and Luke Bryan who awarded him a golden ticket commending his voice.

Pokharel, an aspiring musician, shifted to Wichita, Kansas, in the US, five years ago.

"You are a rockstar," said Perry, after listening to his performance. All of the judges were blown away by his singing talent and unanimously agreed that he shows great promise in the competition.

Pokharel, 21, an aspiring musician, shifted to Wichita, Kansas, in the US, five years ago. He has been SCREENGRAB VIA YOUTUB

producing and singing Nepali songs for his YouTube channel creating his own niche audience since, with one of his songs 'Nyano Ghar' receiving more than 600k views on YouTube.

After the season premiere of the singing contest, his audition clip has gone viral on social media, with many complimenting his raw, deep voice. In his introductory video, Pokharel said that music has always been his passion and after shifting to America he has found interest in bluegrass and country music genre.

Pokharel, who gave the audition in Detroit, Michigan, will be moving to Hollywood for the next round, where he will be competing with other contestants.

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WORLD

US justice department former officials call on William Barr to resign



Attorney General Barr has been criticised for his handling of the trial of a Trump adviser.

REUTERS WASHINGTON, FEB 17

More than 1,000 former US Justice Department officials on Sunday called for Attorney General William Barr to resign over his handling of the trial of a longtime adviser of President Donald Trump.

The former officials, who served Republican and both under Democratic administrations, criticized Barr, the country's top law enforcement officer, for overruling his own prosecutors in a case that has prompted accusations that the Trump administration is weakening the rule of law

On Tuesday, the Justice Department abandoned prosecutors' initial recommendation to give the veteran Republican operative Roger Stone seven to nine years in prison after he was found guilty in November of seven counts of lying to Congress, obstruction and witness tampering, prompting all four prosecutors to quit the case.

"It is unheard of for the Department's top leaders to overrule line prosecutors, who are following established policies, in order to give preferential treatment to a close associate of the President, as Attorney General Barr did in the Stone case, said the letter, published on the website Medium.

"Those actions, and the damage they have done to the Department of Justice's reputation for integrity and the rule of law, require Mr. Barr to resign," the letter said.

The Department of Justice did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Trump had heavily criticized the original sentencing request for Stone and the Justice Department subsequently abandoned it, instead deciding to make no formal sentencing recommendation.

Democrats blasted the department's shift in the high-profile case involving Stone, whose friendship with Trump dates back decades. Stone's trial arose from former Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation that detailed extensive Russian interference in the 2016 election to benefit Trump's candidacy.

Barr said on Thursday in an interview with broadcaster ABC that Trump's criticism of those involved in the Stone case "make it impossible for me to do my job."

France warns of bloody Brexit talks battle

The remaining 27 EU states are currently drawing up their mandate for talks on their future relationship with the UK.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MUNICH (GERMANY), FEB 17

France on Sunday warned Britain to expect a bitter, bloody battle in Brexit trade talks with the EU, saying the two sides would "rip each other apart".

Negotiations for a deal on future EU-UK relations are not due to start until next month, but London and Brussels have already clashed over rules for British financial firms' access to the EU after Brexit.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves le Drian said it would be tough to achieve Britain's aim of agreeing a free trade deal by the end of the year, with the two sides far apart on a range of issues

"I think that on trade issues and the mechanism for future relations, which we are going to start on, we are going to rip each other apart," Le Drian said at the Munich Security Conference.

"But that is part of negotiations, everyone will defend their own interests.'

Britain formally left the EU two weeks ago but still trades like a member under a transition period ticking down to the end of this year.

The remaining 27 EU states are currently drawing up their mandate for the talks on the future relationship, with France in particular pushing for a strong stance, notably on the vexed question of fishing.

France and several other countries want to be able to keep fishing in British waters, while London wants full autonomy and limited access for European fishermen

"Let's hope the talks are done as quickly as possible, but there are a lot of issues and some difficult points to deal with," said Le Drian, who is from the important French fishing region of Brittany.

The bloc's chief negotiator Michel Barnier has said the EU's top priorities are fishing, security and maintaining fair trading conditions for European companies

In a sign of the likely bruising exchanges ahead, Barnier this week told London not to kid itself about EU access for its prized financial services sector.

Barnier firmly rejected a British suggestion that City of London companies could be given broad, permanent access to EU markets without conditions. Before the January 31 exit from the

taking too long to respond to a French push to strengthen the EU after Brexit. "I would like to apologise for the German government," Armin Laschet said, casting himself as strongly pro-EU as the race to find a new leader

for Merkel's centre-right CDU party heats up. Macron has long called for an overhaul to the European Union in response to Britain's departure from

ear, with the two sides far apart on a range of issues

government

EU, Britain said it wanted an ambi-

tious and comprehensive accord with

But since then, Prime Minister

has dialled back, signalling it is will-

ing to accept trade friction in return

Merkel succession contender

calls her out over EU revamp

MUNICH: A leading contender to suc-

ceed German Chancellor Angela

Merkel on Sunday criticised her for

Johnson's

the European bloc.

for sovereignty.

Boris

the bloc, including deeper integration in financial and defence matters, and has repeatedly urged Berlin to champion the reforms with him.

"I would have liked a more engaged and faster answer to Macron, and a dialogue with him," Laschet, the premier of Germany's North Rhine-Westphalia state, said at the Munich Security Conference. Speaking at the same gathering a day earlier, Macron said he was "impatient" at Germany's reluctance to take up his offer to jointly spearhead EU reforms.

Laschet said Merkel's government, an alliance between her conservative bloc and the centre-left SPD, had not lived up to the promise enshrined in their 2018 coalition agreement to create a "fresh start" for Europe

"We've not seen much of that in the past two years," Laschet said.

Looking ahead to Germany's sixmonth EU presidency starting in July, he said there was an opportunity for "a new momentum" on European issues

Brexit, the migration crisis and other immediate challenges had made it difficult in recent times to focus on

game, Steggall told AFP. "There was a

certain defensiveness in the early

days of this debate because the finger

was so squarely pointed at coal and

tion that worked really hard at build-

ing Australia's prosperity on

fossil fuels. You have to be very careful

in the debate about apportioning

blame. It's not like it was done on

thankful for that contribution, but

acknowledging that we do need to

evolve," she added. "We're all going to

With bushfires projected to get ever

more deadly and the next season a lit-

tle over six months away, the risk,

Steggall says, is that politicians take

so long to reach consensus "it will be

"It's about recognising and being

"You have to think about a genera-

fossil fuels."

purpose.

get there in the end."

too late to do anything".

"big European visions", Laschet said. "But now I think we are going to need them again.

Veteran chancellor Merkel is slated to retire from politics when her fourth term ends next year. Her preferred successor, Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, recently stepped down as CDU leader and announced she was giving up her leadership ambitions, throwing the race to the chancellery wide open.

Laschet, seen as a compromise figure between the CDU's more conservative and centrist wings, has been tipped as one of three possible contenders to become the party's new leader and chancellor candidate in the next election.

But the 58-year-old refused to confirm in Munich that he had his eye on the top job. Asked whether he saw his future in Duesseldorf, the capital state of North Rhine-Westphalia, or Berlin, he replied: "Aachen". The German city was the ancient centre of the empire of Charlemagne, credited with inspiring the European project.

Trump, Turkey call

for Russia to stop

backing Syrian

BRIEFING

Twenty-four killed in Burkina Faso church attack: Governor **OUAGADOUGOU:** Gunmen have killed 24 people and wounded 18 in an attack on a Protestant church in a village in northern Burkina Faso, the regional governor said Monday. A group of "armed terrorists" burst into the village of Pansi, in Yagha province "and

attacked the peaceful local population

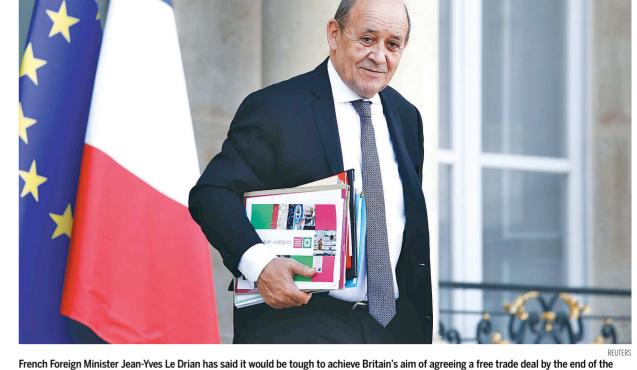
Australian bushfires extinguished, but climate rows rage on

Australia's "black summer" of devas-

atrocities AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON, FEB 17

Donald Trump has



after having identified them and separated them from non-residents", Colonel Salfo Kabore said in a statement sent to AFP. The assault occurred on Sunday during a weekly service, security officials said. "The provisional toll is 24 killed, including the pastor... 18 wounded and individuals who were kidnapped," Kabore said. A resident of the nearby town of Sebba said Pansi villagers had fled there for safety. One of the poorest countries in the world, Burkina Faso is on the front line of a jihadist insurgency advancing in the Sahel. Since 2015, around 750 people have been killed in Burkina and around 600,000 people have fled their homes.

EU gloomy about reviving Libya naval mission

BRUSSELS: EU foreign ministers are unlikely to revive a naval operation to enforce an arms embargo on war-torn Libya on Monday, the bloc's diplomatic chief said, saying a number of countries were still against the plan. Austria has led opposition to re-equipping Operation Sophia with ships to ensure the UN arms embargo-currently routinely being flouted—is respected, fearing it could reactivate a rescue fleet that would end up ferrying migrants across the Mediterranean to Europe's ports.

Woman missing for five days in Australian bush found alive

SYDNEY: A 26-year-old woman has been found alive and in "surprisingly good spirits" after spending five days lost in flood-hit Australian bushland, emergency responders said on Monday, Yang Chen went missing Wednesday after her male walking partner lost sight of her at a waterfall in Tallebudgera, west of the popular Gold Coast in Queensland. "She's been found alive. Our water police located her a short time ago," a police spokeswoman told AFP. Local media reported police divers had joined the search for the Bond University student on Monday, after heavy rainfall had earlier forced authorities to suspend the search. The woman, who lives on the Gold Coast, was found near the waterfall where she first (AGENCIES) went missing

to tackle climate-fuelled disasters are

tating bushfires is finally coming to a

close, but bitter arguments over how

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SYDNEY, FEB 17

When firefighters announced this week that all blazes in the hard-hit state of New South Wales were under control for the first time since September, the relief was palpable.

In other regions, a few fires are still being contained, but most Australians can finally abandon the grim rituals of the last half-year-morning checks of smog monitors and "Fires Near Me" apps, deciding whether the kids can play outside, whether to flee or defend their homes.

But the after-effects will endure, and national soul searching has already begun.

"We know events like these can challenge the way we think about the world, undermine our perceptions of safety, and rupture social bonds," said disaster response expert Erin Smith. Dozens of families have lost loved ones, thousands of homes and farms have been gutted, swathes of the east coast are scarred charcoal-black and millions have had their sense of security shaken.

"It will likely take years and a great deal of imagination for us to figure out where we go from here," said Smith. The question of what is next for Australia is already being asked, most of all of political leaders, and it is being met mostly with finger-pointing and recrimination.

While scientists agree climate change created favourable conditions for the blazes, politicians of all stripes are acutely aware how sensitive the issue is in Australian politics.

In an arid nation whose economic strength is intimately tied to the mining and export of fossil fuels, at least four prime ministers have been ousted in part over their climate policies.

In recent weeks, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has seen his ruling conservative coalition threatened by members in rural constituencies demanding funding for more coalfired power plants.

At the same time, the centrist wing of his party has criticised his climate targets as inadequate.

Meanwhile rebel members of opposition Labor met secretly to steer the centre-left party's leadership toward a more overtly pro-coal stance.

The party's deputy leader awkwardly refused to rule out more coal subsidies, months after vowing they should end



A file photo shows firefighters spraying water on a smouldering tree in the wake of a bushfire near Bumbalong, New South Wales, Australia.

Coal accounts for around 75 percent of Australia's power generation.

"They don't want to stick their heads above the parapet, at least when it comes to suggesting substantive policy," said Matt McDonald, an expert in climate politics from the University of Queensland.

One reason, he explained, is that while the hot and dry Australian continent is uniquely susceptible to the impact of climate change, it is also a world-beating source of coal.

Coal accounts for around 75 percent of Australia's electricity generation

and exports of the fossil fuel are worth Aus\$60 billion a year, the country's largest export after iron ore.

People in affluent suburbs may call for emissions cuts and green energy, but coal accounts for thousands of jobs in election-deciding districts of Queensland and New South Wales, and many more in the related aluminium smelting business.

Independent MP Zali Steggall-a former barrister and Olympic medal-winning skier-who ousted climate-sceptic former prime minister Tony Abbott from his Sydney seat at the last election, wants to take some heat out of the debate. She has introduced a bill that would reduce Australia's carbon emissions to zero by 2050 and divert some contentious issues to an independent expert body.

"The debate has been very divisive," in part because of the blame

called for Russia to end its support for the Syrian regime's "atrocities" as he expressed US concern over violence in the Idlib region, the White House said Sunday.

Turkey's foreign minister also pressed his Russian counterpart over the attacks by Damascus on the last rebel-held bastion in the country.

Backed by Russian air power, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made fresh gains Sunday as he intensified his assault on the holdout northwestern province of Idlib.

In a telephone call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Trump "expressed concern over the violence in Idlib, Syria and ... conveyed the United States' desire to see an end to Russia's support for the Assad regime's atrocities.²

Turkey has 12 observation posts in Idlib as part of a 2018 deal reached between Ankara and Moscow to prevent a regime offensive, but Syrian regime forces have pressed ahead regardless.

Four of the Turkish posts are believed to be encircled by Syrian forces, and Ankara has threatened to attack in retaliation if the government in Damascus did not order its troops to retreat by the end of February.

"I stressed that the attacks in Idlib must stop and it was necessary to establish a lasting ceasefire that would not be violated," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told journalists at the Munich Security Conference, after he met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Rebel supporter Turkey and Damascus ally Russia have worked closely on Syria in recent years despite being on opposing sides of the nine-year conflict.

A Turkish delegation will head to Moscow on Monday, after Russian officials visited Ankara last weekend but failed to reach a concrete deal.

War monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on Sunday said regime forces "were in control of all the villages and small towns around Aleppo for the first time since 2012."

Regime forces have for weeks been making gains in northwestern Syria and chipping away at territory held by jihadists and allied rebels, focusing their latest operations on the west of Aleppo province.

ASIA

South Korea's main opposition party changes name again

SEOUL: South Korea's main opposition party changed its name for the second time in three years on Monday as it seeks to forge a conservative alliance against left-leaning President Moon Jae-in ahead of April polls. The country's political parties have a tendency to adopt new names to sever ties with a tainted past or appeal to a wider audience. The Liberty Korea Party—a name it only began using in 2017 as it sought to distance itself from a corruption scandal swirling now-ousted president Park Geunhye-has declared itself the United Future party while absorbing into its ranks two minor conservative allies.

At least five Afghan soldiers killed in Taliban attack

KABUL: At least five Afghan soldiers were killed when Taliban fighters stormed their base in northern Afghanistan, officials said on Monday, as the country waits for an expected "reduction in violence" before a US-Taliban deal. The attack happened in Shora Khak area of volatile Kunduz province on Sunday, days after US Defense Secretary Mark Esper said an agreement with the Taliban was in place for a "conditions-based" seven-day reduction in violence, "Unfortunately, five army soldiers were martyred and three wounded," the Afghan defence ministry said in a statement, adding that Taliban fighters also suffered casualties

Indonesia military to blame for 2014 Papua killings: Report

JAKARTA: Indonesia's military shot dead four students in the country's restive Papua region during 2014 protests and carried out "gross human rights violations", a commission investigating the uprising concluded Monday. Komnas HAM issued its findings five years after the highschool students were gunned down in Paniai, a central area of insurgency-wracked Papua province, which shares a border with independent Papua New Guinea, "This incident constitutes crimes against humanity, the commission's chief investigator Muhammad Choirul Anam told AFP in a statement Monday. The military did not immediately respond to requests for comment. (AGENCIES)

Afghanistan to reveal long-delayed election results in 'days'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE KABUL, FEB 17



Visitors walk through an unusually-empty Wat Arun temple in Bangkok on Monday amid a slump in international tourism over the spread of the covid-19 coronavirus.

Infected passengers aboard US evacuation flights as China virus death toll mounts

The covid-19 virus has infected more than 70,500 people in its epicentre of China and sparked panic buying.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE TOKYO. FEB 17

More than a dozen infected Americans from a coronavirus-riddled cruise ship off Japan flew on evacuation flights to the US with other passengers on Monday, as the epidemic claimed more lives in China to take the death toll above 1,700.

The covid-19 virus has infected more than 70,500 people in its epicentre of China and sparked panic buying, economic jitters and the cancellation of high-profile sporting and cultural events.

With fresh cases emerging daily in Japan, the government has advised citizens to avoid mass gatherings, and on Monday cancelled celebrations for the Emperor's birthday an annual jamboree that sees thousands of well-wishers descend on central Tokyo.

Beijing's municipal authorities have ordered everyone arriving in the capital to self-quarantine for 14 days, the presumed incubation period of the virus. State media said China may postpone its annual parliament session which has been held in March dling of the ship crisis, governments are scrambling to repatriate their citizens, with Canada, Australia, Italy, and Hong Kong poised to follow Washington in removing nationals from the vessel.

Early Monday more than 300 passengers were transferred onto coaches via a makeshift passport control and loaded onto two planes heading for air bases in California and Texas.

The first flight touched down at Travis Air Force Base in California shortly before midnight Sunday.

Before they boarded the flights, US officials were informed 14 of them tested days earlier had received posi-

tive results. Authorities allowed them to board but isolated them from other passengers in a "special containment area".

Those on board were expected to undergo a further 14-day quarantine period on US soil. "I am happy and ready to go," Sarah Arana told AFP before leaving the ship. "We need a proper quarantine. This was not it."

Australia became the latest country to order its citizens evacuated from the ship, with Prime Minister Scott Morrison saying more than 200 Australians still on board would be rescued on Wednesday.

Some Americans on the ship, how-



ever, declined the government's offer. "My health is fine. And my twoweek quarantine is almost over. Why would I want to be put on a bus and a plane with other people they think may be infected when I have spent nearly two weeks isolated from those

people?" tweeted Matt Smith. Forty other US passengers tested positive for the virus and were taken to hospitals in Japan, said Anthony Fauci, a senior official at the National Institutes for Health.

It was not immediately clear if they were already counted among the 355 confirmed cases on the ship.

In China, authorities have placed about 56 million people in Hubei under quarantine, virtually sealing off the province from the rest of the country in an unprecedented effort to contain the virus.

New cases outside the epicentre have been declining for the last 13 days. There were 115 fresh cases outside the central province announced Monday—sharply down from nearly 450 a week ago.

Chinese authorities have pointed to the slowing rise in cases as proof their measures are working, even as the death toll climbed to 1,770 with more than 11,000 recovering. India women facing sedition charges over school play get bail



India has been gripped by widespread street demonstrations against the law that grants citizenship to religious groups from three neighbouring countries, but excludes Muslims.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE NEW DELHI, FEB 17

Two women held for two weeks by Indian police on sedition charges over a school play which allegedly criticised a contentious citizenship law have been granted bail, officials said Sunday.

Teacher Fareeda Begum, 50, and parent Nazbunnisa, 36, were arrested on January 30 for helping the children stage the play at Shaheen Public School in Karnataka state.

The play depicted a worried family talking about how they feared the government would ask millions of Muslims to prove their nationality or be expelled from India.

They were detained under a British colonial-era law after a member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party claimed the children insulted the Hindu-nationalist leader in the play.

India has been gripped by widespread street demonstrations against the law that grants citizenship to religious groups from three neighbouring countries, but excludes Muslims.

Nearly 30 people died in the monthslong protests, including two in Karnataka, which is ruled by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party.

The women were denied bail multiple times before a court set them free late Saturday on a personal bond of \$1,400 each. "The accused have been released on bail but we will continue with our investigations," an officer told AFP.

Officers visited the school at least five times to quiz children about the play and gather evidence against the accused.

Critics accuse the police of misusing the law amid a public outcry and several protests after videos showing officers interrogating the children ered between pine and 11 years. want

Afghanistan will announce the long-delayed results from its presidential election within "three to four days", a spokesman for the election commission said Monday, nearly five months after polls were held in the war-torn country.

In December, the election commission announced that incumbent President Ashraf Ghani had won a slim majority of 50.64 percent in the September 28 poll. His closest rival, Abdullah Abdullah, alleged vote-rigging, forcing a recount. for the last 35 years.

Outside China, the biggest cluster of infections is from the Diamond Princess cruise ship off Japan's Yokohama, where an additional 99 cases were revealed on Monday.

That brought the total to 454 diagnosed despite passengers being confined to their cabins during a 14-day quarantine.

As criticism grows of Japan's han-

Chinese paramilitary police officers wear face masks as they secure an area at Daxing international airport in Beijing.

But World Health Organization head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has warned it is "impossible to predict which direction this epidemic will take".

Concerns remain about global transmission, especially on cruise ships, which appear to have become especially virulent breeding grounds. aged between nine and 11 years—went viral on social media.

The citizenship law, combined with a mooted national register of citizens, has stoked fears that India's 200 million Muslims will be marginalised.

The British-era sedition law enacted in 1860 carries a maximum penalty of life in prison.

Prosecutions are rare but it has frequently been used against critics of the government of the day.

The final results of the presidential election is expected within three to four days.

The delay has left Afghanistan facing a political crisis just as the US seeks a deal with the Taliban which would allow it to withdraw troops in return for various security guarantees and a promise that the militants would hold peace talks with the Afghan government.

If all goes well, then whoever wins the election is likely to be the man sitting across from the Taliban at the negotiating table in a bid to chart Afghanistan's future.

"The final results of the presidential election will be announced within three to four days," Zabihullah Sadaat, spokesman for Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission, told AFP. "The recounting and auditing is completed," Sadaat said.

Whether the results will be accepted remains to be seen.

Earlier this week, Abdullah's team said they would not accept fraudulent results. Current vice-president Abdul Rashid Dostum, a powerful Uzbek former warlord and Abdullah's ally, has also threatened to form a parallel government if fraudulent election results are announced.

Nearly one million of the initial 2.7 million votes were purged owing to irregularities, meaning the election saw by far the lowest turnout of any Afghan poll.

UAE issues licence for first Arab nuclear power plant

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE ABU DHABI, FEB 17

The United Arab Emirates said Monday it has issued a licence for a reactor at its Barakah nuclear power plant, the first in the Arab world, hailing it as a "new chapter".

The UAE has substantial energy reserves, but with a power-hungry population of 10 million it has made huge investments in developing alternative power sources including solar.

"Today marks a new chapter in our journey for the development of peaceful nuclear energy with the issuing of the operating license for the first Barakah plant," Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan said in a tweet.

"As we prepare for the next 50 years to safeguard our needs, our biggest strength is national talent."

The Barakah plant, located on the Gulf coast west of the capital Abu Dhabi, had been due to come online in late 2017 but faced a number of delays that officials attributed to safety and regulatory requirements.

The national nuclear regulator has now given the green light to the first of four reactors at the plant, Hamad al-Kaabi, the UAE representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), told a press conference.

Abu Dhabi authorities said in January that the plant would start operating within a few months. No new date was given on Monday but Kaabi indicated it would happen soon. "The full operation of Barakah plant in the near future will contribute to the UAE's efforts for development and sustainability," he said, adding that the operator would "undertake a period of commissioning to prepare for commercial operation".

The plant is a regional first—Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, has said it plans to build up to 16 nuclear reactors, but the project has yet to materialise.

It is being built by a consortium led by the Korea Electric Power Corporation at a cost of some \$24.4 billion.

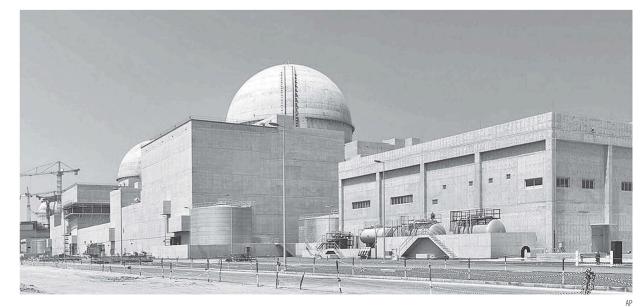
When fully operational, the four reactors have the capacity to generate 5,600 megawatts of electricity, around 25 percent of the nation's needs. The remaining three reactors are almost ready for operation.

As well as generating competitively priced electricity, the UAE also hopes the nuclear plant will elevate its status as a key regional player, building on its success in establishing itself as a centre for tourism, banking and services.

"This is part of the UAE's drive to diversify its energy economy, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and project its image as a regional leader in science and technology," one Gulf analyst told AFP.

Other headline initiatives include a homegrown space programme, which saw the first Emirati astronaut sent into space last year, and plans to launch a probe to Mars.

The Barakah plant is situated on the Emirates coast, separated from Iran by the troubled Gulf waters. It is just 50 kilometres (30 miles) from the border of Saudi Arabia, and is closer



The under-construction Barakah nuclear power plant in Abu Dhabi's Western desert.

to the Qatari capital Doha than it is to Abu Dhabi.

Amid a tense confrontation between Iran and the United States over Tehran's nuclear programme, the UAE has said it will not be developing an uranium enrichment programme or nuclear reprocessing technologies.

But relations between Iran and the UAE, a staunch US ally, have deteriorated as Washington pursues a "maximum pressure" policy against Tehran and accuses it of attacking oil tankers in Gulf waters.

Energy giant Saudi Aramco was the target of a missile and drone attack in

September that knocked out half of its production. The strike was claimed by Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels but Washington accused Tehran of carrying it out.

"The 2019 attack on Aramco highlighted the vulnerability of the Gulf's energy infrastructure to external attacks," said the Gulf analyst, who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the issue.

"The heightened pitch of regional tensions between Iran on the one hand, and the US and its allies on the other, increases the vulnerability of new energy infrastructure to the possibility of such attacks."

The UAE has repeatedly said its nuclear ambitions are for "peaceful purposes" and moved to dispel any concerns over safety.

It says it has welcomed more than 40 international missions and reviews from the IAEA and World Association of Nuclear Operators (WANO) since 2010, as proof of its commitment to transparency.

Residents living within a 50-kilometre (30-mile) radius of the Barakah plant have been instructed on emergency procedures in case of an accident.

MONEY

GM shuts Australia, NZ operations; sells Thai plant to Great Wall

Some 600 jobs will be lost in Australia and New Zealand, while about 1,500 jobs would be affected by the sale in Thailand



A Holden vehicle sits in a car yard in Melbourne on Monday

REUTERS

NEW YORK/BELJING, FEB 17

General Motors Co said it would wind down its Australian and New Zealand operations and sell a Thai plant in the latest restructuring of its global business, costing the US auto maker \$1.1 billion.

The moves will accelerate GM's retreat from unprofitable markets, making it more dependent on the United States, China, Latin America and South Korea, and give up an opening to expand in Southeast Asia.

They come after the company told analysts this month that restructuring GM's international operations outside of China to produce profit margins in the mid-single digits would represent "a \$2 billion improvement" on two years ago.

GM has forecast a flat profit for 2020 after a difficult 2019, and is facing bal-

The moves will accelerate GM's retreat from unprofitable markets.

looning interest in electric car rival Tesla Inc.

GM is "focusing on markets where we have the right strategies to drive robust returns, and prioritizing global investments that will drive growth in the future of mobility," especially in electric and autonomous vehicles, GM Chair and CEO Mary Barra said in a statement late on Sunday.

The latest changes—a continuation of GM's retreat from Asia that began vehicles, GM President Mark Reuss said.

The move stoked anger in Australia, where GM Holden long ranked among the country's best selling car companies after the first locally made mass-production car rolled off the assembly line with a Holden badge in 1948.

Amid continuous decline in new car sales, GM said it was ending Australian factory production in 2017 and last year called time on former best-seller the Commodore as part of a shift towards more compact SUVs and utility vehicles

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Monday he was disappointed and angry at the decision, although not surprised.

"Australian taxpayers put billions into this multinational company. They let the brand just wither away on their watch," he told reporters in Melbourne.

Great Wall, one of China's biggest sport-utility vehicle makers, said it will sell cars from the Thai manufacturing base, which also has an engine plant, in Southeast Asia and Australia as it seeks global sales amid a slowing domestic market.

It also signed an agreement in January to buy GM's car plant in India. The Thai transaction is expected to be completed by the end of 2020.

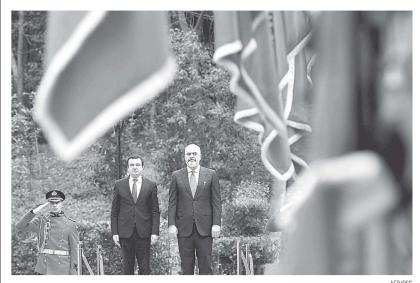
"Such acquisition could an give Great Wall quick access to the ASEAN market, and Thailand is a good choice for its production base amid the country's established supply chain in the automotive industry,' said Shi Ji, analyst at Haitong International.

Great Wall is likely to face fierce competition from Japanese automakers which dominate Thailand's domestic car sales. Thailand produces around 2 million vehicles each year, with just over half exported.

Great Wall may consider also building pickup trucks and SUVs in Thailand, a source familiar with the matter told Reuters

The firm, which is building a car plant with BMW in China, sold 1.06 million cars last year, including 65,175 units for export.

Albania hopes for 400m euros for quake recovery



Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama (right) and Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti inspect a guard of honour during a welcoming ceremony in Tirana.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BRUSSELS, FEB 17

Prime Minister Edi Rama warned Monday that Albania will be "in trouble" if a donor conference does not pledge at least 400 million euros to help it recover from a powerful earthquake.

The impoverished Balkan state was hit by a 6.4-magnitude quake in November, killing 51 people, leaving 17,000 homeless and creating a recovery bill of more than a billion euros (\$1.08 billion), according to an official assessment.

As major donors as well as UN agencies, assembled in Brussels to gather pledges of financial support, Rama said he had been impressed by the speed of the EU response

"The assessment of the post-disaster report which was prepared together with the World Bank, United Nations and the EU is quite frightening, because it says that the damages exceed a billion euros," Rama told reporters.

"For a country with a GDP of 13.5 billion it is quite a big sum and it's beyond our human possibilities to address all that need alone."

Rama said he did not expect the conference to cover the whole amount, but "a minimum of 40 percent because-otherwise we might be in trouble"

Albanian expectations have been dampened by what Rama called a "political earthquake" in October, when three EU states blocked Tirana from starting membership talks to join the bloc-the second such delay in less than six months.

"We have to be realistic and not raise the expectations beyond a certain bar because we have learned the hard way that we should not have excessive expectations from today's European Union," Rama said.

France-which led the Netherlands and Denmark in October's veto-softened its opposition at the weekend after the European Commission, the bloc's executive, proposed a tougher and more political admissions process for new members.

French President Emmanuel Macron said that if a commission report on Albania and fellow hopeful North Macedonia next month confirms enough progress on reforms, he would be ready to agree to start the long accession process

'They speak about dates and we are like lovers that wait for the date to get married and then the other side don't show up," Rama said.

"I'm expecting nothing. If it will come, it will be a great joy, if it will not come we continue with more stubbornness and with more willingness to do what we have to do and to prove them wrong.'

Stocks rebound tracking virus fallout

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE LONDON, FEB 17

Stock markets mostly rebounded on Monday, with investors assessing the extent of economic fallout from the new coronavirus, as the death toll in quickly find themselves up the creek... without a paddle," he said.

"Financial markets are not known for their rational thinking lately and given the 500 million or so mainlanders affected by the (COVID-19) quarantine... it's also not hard to come up



in 2015 when it announced it would

stop making GM-branded cars in

Indonesia-will lead to cash and non-

cash charges of \$1.1 billion. Some 600

jobs will be lost in Australia and New

Zealand, while GM said about 1,500

jobs would be affected by the sale in

Barra has prioritized profit mar-

In 2017, she sold GM's European

gins over sales volume and global

Opel and Vauxhall businesses to

Peugeot SA (PEUP.PA) and exited

South Africa and other African mar-

kets. Since then, Barra has decided to

pull GM out of Vietnam, Indonesia

Like Britain, Australia and New

Zealand are right-hand drive markets.

With sales of GM's Australian Holden

brand plummeting, the company

could not justify the investment to

continue building right-hand drive

presence since taking over in 2014.

, Thailand.

and India.

lina from the infections topped 70,500.

After Wall Street's muddled performance on Friday and with US markets closed Monday for a holiday, traders turned their attention to some grim Asian economic news

Japan's economy suffered the worst quarterly contraction in more than five years, while Singapore cut its growth forecast for 2020 as the virus batters the city-state's tourism and trade.

That comes after Europe's largest economy Germany on Friday reported zero growth in the last quarter of 2019 and warnings from the International Monetary Fund that the virus could damage global economic activity this year.

The euro on Monday hit a near three-year low at \$1.0822 in Asian trading hours, before recovering.

'The European Commission is assuming 1.2 percent growth across euro-area in 2020 but markets appear to be less optimistic," said Jasper Lawler, head of research at traders LCG.

As for China, while investors are comforted by a slowdown in new infections outside hardest-hit Hubei province in recent days, they might be less sanguine if the country's economy takes a worse-than-expected hit, said Stephen Innes of AxiCorp.

"If it comes out bad enough for confidence to plummet, investors could ones right now," Innes added.

A spokesman for China's national health authority said the slowdown was a sign the outbreak was being controlled.

However, World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has warned it is "impossible to predict which direction this epidemic will take"

Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 index closed down 0.7 percent after the Japanese economy shrank 1.6 percent in the three months to December from the previous quarter, even before the novel coronavirus outbreak in China hit Japan, official data showed.

Mainland China's benchmark Shanghai Composite Index closed up 2.3 percent after the central bank announced measures aimed at cushioning the economy against the health crisis.

On Monday, the People's Bank of China offered 200 billion yuan (\$29 billion) of one-year medium-term loans at a 3.15 percent interest rate, 10 basis points lower than previously.

It also added 100 billion yuan to money markets through reverse repurchase agreements.

Wanlong Securities said the central bank's steps amounted to an "interest rate cut in disguise"

"The market got a boost from these supportive measures," it said in a client note.



An aerial view shows residential and commercial buildings on Hong Kong island (foreground and left) and Kowloon (top right), either side of Victoria Harbour, on Monday.





The German share price index DAX graph is pictured at the stock exchange in Frankfurt, Germany.

Zuckerberg visits Brussels in EU lobbying push

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BRUSSELS, FEB 17

Facebook head Mark Zuckerberg was

expected in Brussels on Monday to lobby top European officials who have become the world's toughest enforcers on regulating big tech.

The founder of the world's biggest social network, which also owns Instagram and Whatsapp, comes to EU headquarters just as Brussels is set to unveil a highly anticipated strategy to regulate artificial intelligence.

His visit comes on the heels of similar meetings by Google boss Sundar Pichai, who in January called on Brussels to tread carefully in regulating AI.

Facebook is currently fighting several probes with European data protection agencies.

An EU spokesman on Monday said Zuckerberg would discuss the "digital agenda" with European Commission Executive Vice President Margrethe Vestager and Commissioner Thierry Breton.

European Commission Vice President Vera Jourova meanwhile

"intends to raise issues related to the protection of democracy and fundamental rights, free and fair elections, the fight against disinformation, including the transparency of politi-cal advertising," the spokesman added.

In an editorial ahead of the visit, Zuckerberg wrote that his company now firmly backed deeper regulation for big tech, a change of heart that came after the Cambridge Analytica data scandal.

"I don't think private companies should make so many decisions alone when they touch on fundamental democratic values," he said in the Financial Times

In a statement in January, Facebook said Zuckerberg would "discuss a framework for new rules and regulation for the internet."

Facebook is currently fighting several probes with European data protection agencies and Brussels is looking more deeply into possible anti-trust problems on data use

The EU's proposal on AI on Wednesday is expected to pursue a "risk-based" approach to assessing machine learning similar to how Europe approaches food safety concerns, such as GMOs and certain chemicals.

The EU was expected to back away from a ban on facial recognition technology, instead asking companies and European authorities to think hard before deploying it.

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THE KATHMANDU POST

MONEY





People buy blankets at the shops in Basantapur, Kathmandu

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK K

Consumer Protection Department fines importer and sellers of fake paddy seeds

The bogus Garima seeds resulted in crop losses worth Rs 230 million during the 2019 growing season.

KRISHANA PRASAIN Kathmandu, Feb 17

The Department of Commerce, Supplies and Consumer Protection Management has penalised the importer and distributors of fake Garima brand paddy seeds under the Consumer Protection Act 2018. The bogus seeds resulted in crop losses worth Rs230 million during the 2019 growing season.

Farmers had planted the seeds on 1,700 hectares in 13 districts in the western Tarai, according to a report submitted by the Seed Quality Control Centre to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.

The department took action against iines tota Rs3.12 million. The importer of the seeds, Sunrise Agriculture Research of Dang, was fined Rs300,000 while 14 sellers were fined Rs200,000 each-Tanahu Bij Bhandar, Tanahu; Jamil Bij Bhandar, Kapilvastu; Ghimire Agrovet, Kapilvastu; Laliguras Agrovet, Kapilvastu; Swargadwari Agri Nepal, Dang; Janata Agrovet, Dang; Munal Agrovet Concern, Nepalgunj; Srijana Vet Centre, Bardia; Agro Centre, Sikha Bardia; Khushiram Veterinary Centre, Bardia; Lohiti Agrovet Centre, Bardia; RH Agrovet, Kailali; Kishan Agrovet Centre, Kailali and Prasant Agrovet Centre, Chitwan. Netra Prasad Subedi, director general of the department, said that lack of regulation and work procedure in the law prevented him from taking stricter action against the offending traders.



department for not taking stringent action against fraudulent traders while consumer rights activists claim government influence and pressure has weakened it.

The Commerce Department filed a case against Alfa Beta Complex for distributing poor quality food and Shubhakamana Mineral Water Company for not meeting quality standards. Alfa Beta's case has been submitted to the director general while the mineral water company has been slapped a Rs300.000 fine.

while the mineral water company has been slapped a Rs300,000 fine. "We will take legal action if a connection is found between the recent destruction of chicks and eggs and rising prices of chicken meat and

rising prices of chicken meat and eggs," officials said. KUALA LUMPUR, FEB 17 Malaysia's own security standards will dictate which companies take part in its planned 5G rollout this year, its communications minister told Reuters on Monday, as the United

REUTERS

Malaysia to choose 5G

partners based on own

security standards

China's Huawei. Huawei, the world's largest telecommunications equipment maker, has been at the centre of a U.S.-led campaign to clamp down on the use of Chinese technology in the development of the next-generation telecommunications platform because of concerns the equipment could be

States pushes countries to exclude

Asked if Huawei had made a promise similar to the one made to India on preventing "back doors" in its equipment, which the US had said could be used by Beijing to carry out covert surveillance on other countries, Singh Deo said: "I don't think we look at one particular company and say this is how it should be," he said.

"When you talk about security, be it Huawei or anyone else, you want to be assured that whatever system they propose... is suitable for you. We do not say we will not deal with one particular company because generally there are security concerns."

Malaysia plans to issue spectrum tenders in April and estimates that fibre optics infrastructure and cellular coverage expansion, which includes 5G development, would cost some 21.6 billion ringgit (\$5.22 billion) over five years. Huawei has already signed a 5G deal with Malaysian mobile network operator Maxis and preliminary agreements with other telcos such as Axiata Group's Celcom and Telekom Malaysia.

"It took a year for the regulation to be approved; and until it is published in the Nepal Gazette, we can do nothing," he added.

Subedi said that according to the law, the sufferers have to go to court to claim the compensation amount. Consumer rights activists can help the farmers initiate proceeding in the district courts as there is no consumer court in the country.

He added that the Agriculture Ministry would determine the amount of compensation to be provided by the federal and local governments respectively.

The Commerce Department has also written to the Department of Industry to investigate online shopping company Daraz as it has been Farmers had planted the seeds on 1,700 hectares in 13 districts in the western Tarai.

engaged in business activities while being registered as a cargo service provider.

Daraz was slapped a Rs300,000 fine for delivery of incorrect product, and the firm has asked for a review of the case.

Consumers have criticised the

The department collected K510 million in fines from 1,164 firms found engaged in illegal business practices during market inspection in the first seven months of the current fiscal year. Its inspectors also destroyed Rs10.5 million worth of illegal goods.

Subedi said that the department had spent Rs2 million out of its Rs10 million budget during the first seven months. "We have adequate staff to conduct market inspection," he said, refuting previous claims that the department needed additional personnel.

The preparation of the work procedure for strategic market inspection has reached the final phase, and it will be made public soon, he said. The work procedure mainly deals with taking action according to the law on the basis of information and surveillance, and establishing strong coordination with the related government bodies.

used by Beijing for spying.

The United States placed Huawei on a trade blacklist in May, and in February U.S. prosecutors accused it of stealing trade secrets and helping Iran to track protesters. The company denies the charges.

Malaysia is aware of the "concerns that have been expressed around the world" about Huawei, but it will be governed by its own security standards in choosing partners for the nationwide 5G rollout planned for the third quarter, minister Gobind Singh Deo said.

"My position is very clear, we have our own safety standards, we have own safety requirements," he said in an interview.

"So whoever deals with us, whoever comes up with proposals, we have to be certain and we have to be sure they meet the security standards that we have." Besides Huawei, other suitors seeking a piece of Malaysia's 5G business include Finnish company Nokia, which is positioning to provide services for the trade-reliant nation's ports industry, and Sweden's Ericsson.

Singh Deo said the government was keen to involve as many companies as possible to encourage healthy competition in the name of better services.

Indian experts conduct survey for second oil pipeline in Jhapa

The proposed 50-kilometre pipeline will extend from the Charali depot to Siliguri in West Bengal.

PARBAT PORTEL

KAKARBHITTA, FEB 17

The government has begun the process to establish another pipeline in Jhapa, buoyed by South Asia's first cross-border pipeline in Amlekhgunj through which oil started flowing from India last September.

À team from Indian Oil Corporation, which built the Amlekhgunj pipeline as a gift, has conducted a survey for the proposed pipeline connecting Nepal Oil Corporation's depot at Charali, Jhapa with Siliguri, which lies across the eastern border in West Bengal, India.

According to Bipin Kumar Shrestha, chief of Nepal Oil Corporation's Jhapa depot, the Indian team made the field study on February 12.

Experts carried out the survey in Batasi in northern West Bengal, about 3 kilometres from the India-Bangladesh border and Jyamirgadi in Jhapa. "The survey team also studied three rivers—Mechi, Ninda and Hadiya—on the east-west highway," he said.

The team will submit its survey report to Indian Oil Corporation, and after that a financial assessment of the project will be prepared. The distance between the Indian Oil Corporation depot in Siliguri and the Nepal Oil Corporation depot in Charali is 50 kilometres. "This distance can be reduced," Shrestha said, quoting the survey team.

Nepal Oil Corporation had last month requested the Indian government to study the possibility of building another cross-border pipeline during a meeting of the Nepal-India Petroleum and Gas Joint Working Group in New Delhi, India.

According to Birendra Goit, spokesperson for Nepal Oil Corporation, the agenda has been discussed at a commerce secretary-level meeting between Nepal and India too. "The pipeline will provide a number of benefits that will reduce the supply cost."

According to Nepal Oil Corporation officials, the transportation of gaso-

line through the pipeline is expected to slash Nepal's fuel import cost immensely. It can also significantly reduce leakage and wastage. With reduced use of tankers to carry fuel, there will also be a significant benefit to the environment.

The 69-kilometre Amlekhgunj pipeline brings fuel from India's Barauni refinery in Bihar to Nepal. Of the pipeline's 69-kilometre length, a 36-kilometre section lies on the Nepali side of the border and the rest on the Indian side.

The 10-inch diameter pipeline has a capacity to transport 2 million tonnes of oil per annum. Petroleum supplies from Indian Oil Corporation to Nepal Oil Corporation started in 1974.

According to Nepal Oil Corporation, it has been able to save Rs2 billion annually in freight charges and avoid the vagaries of transportation via tanker truck at the Birgunj border point after it started getting fuel through the pipeline. It currently takes at least 14 hours to ferry gasoline from Patna to Amlekhgunj.



Oil tankers are seen lined up at Indian Oil Corporation depot in Siliguri, India.

SPORTS

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FIXTURES

Atletico Madrid vs Liverpool 0145 NST (Wednesday) Borussia Dortmund vs PSG 0145 NST (Wednesday) Atalanta vs Valencia 0145 NST (Thursday) Tottenham vs Leipzig 0145 NST (Thursday)

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS

Real Madrid	2-2	Celta Vigo
Sevilla	2-2	Espanyol
Leganes	0-0	Real Betis
Athletic Bilbao	0-1	Osasuna

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS

Udinese	0-0	Hellas Verona
Sassuolo	0-1	Parma
Sampdoria	1-5	Fiorentina
Juventus	2-0	Brescia
Cagliari	0-1	Napoli
Juventus	2-0	Brescia

PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS

Arsenal	4-0	Newcastle							
Aston Villa	2-3	Tottenham							
FRENCH LIGUE 1 RESULTS									
Lyon	1-1	Strasbourg							
Reims	1-0	Rennes							
Brest	3-2	Saint-Etienne							

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA RESULTS

1-2

Marseille

Schalke

Bayern Munich Cologne 0-0

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Returning to the court was a feeling that I had inside, a feeling that I had inside for a little while. Once in a while that feeling would go away when I was home with the (three) kids. A couple times it would come back. It got stronger and stronger. I talked to my husband. He was like, 'stop worrying about why and ask yourself why not.3 -Kim Clijsters



Man City ban opens the door for others, says Mourinho as Tottenham edge Villa

The ban, if enforced, means Premier League's fifth place team could earn place in the next years' Champions League.



Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min misses from the penalty spot during their Premier League match against Aston Villa at the Villa Park in Birmingham on Monday.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE **BIRMINGHAM, FEB 17**

Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho believes Manchester City's two-season ban from the Champions League has opened the door for a host of teams to qualify for next season's competition.

Mourinho's men moved up to fifth in the Premier League-which could be enough to secure Champions League football should City's appeal against the ban fail-thanks to Son Heung-min's stoppage time winner to beat Aston Villa 3-2 on Sunday. Spurs are also now just one point behind Mourinho's old club Chelsea, who they face at Stamford Bridge next weekend. However, all of the top 10 are now within six points of what could be a Champions League place. "A window opens for many teams,"

said Mourinho. "What seemed far, now the fifth place is not far. Arsenal, Everton, Sheffield United, Wolves. Everyone will feel they have the chance.'

Tottenham had to bounce back from a nightmare start at Villa Park when Toby Alderweireld sliced into his own goal. Alderweireld had not travelled with his teammates to Birmingham after attending the birth of his son this week and admitted to feeling heavy legged after he turned Anwar El Ghazi's deflected cross into his own net after just nine minutes. But the Belgian quickly made amends at the other end by smashing a loose ball from a corner high past the helpless Pepe Reina to equalise.

Villa could have been two in front before Tottenham levelled as only a goal-line block from Ben Davies denied Douglas Luiz. However, Dean Smith's side find themselves in a relegation battle as they have now conceded more goals than any other team in the league.

"They have a front four that can hurt anyone, that's why we had to get forward and defend on the front foot," said Smith, with Villa still just one point above the bottom three. "On the whole I thought we dealt with them really well but we're disappointed with the goals we conceded.'

A rash challenge by Bjorn Engels on Steven Bergwijn handed the visitors the chance to go in front just before the break, albeit it took a VAR review to award a penalty. Son's spotkick was saved by Reina, but the South Korean followed up to prod home and become the first Asian player to score 50 Premier League goals.

Engels also made amends as an attacking force as he rose highest to head home Jack Grealish's corner eight minutes into the second half, but Mourinho furious was Alderweireld's defending.

"I'd say he's scored three goals: the own goal, his goal and then when he loses the duel with Engels," added the Portuguese. Tottenham took the game to the hosts in the final quarter, but struggled to find a way past the inspired Reina.

The on-loan AC Milan goalkeeper saved three efforts from Son and denied Dele Alli when one-on-one. However, Son had the final say by composing himself to slot just beyond Reina's reach with virtually the last action of the game and send Spurs closer to a fifth straight season of Champions League football.

Pakistan beat arch rivals India in kabaddi World Cup AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LAHORE, FEB 1

Pakistan became kabaddi world champions Sunday after narrowly beating arch rivals India who played even though authorities at home vowed to investigate why a team competed despite a ban on sporting ties.

In final, Pakistan fought back in the second half to secure a 43-41 win over the defending champions in the popular South Asian sport in front of thousands of spectators. "We are grateful to all the nations which made this event colourful," Rana Muhammad Sarwar, the secretary general of the Pakistan kabaddi federation, told AFP. "We should not let sports and culture become a victim of politics.³

Pakistan fought back in the second half to secure a 43-41 win over India.

Last week, Indian sports minister Kiren Rijiju said no kabaddi player had been given permission to participate. "Playing in the name of the country with India's flag being used are matters to be investigated, Rijiju said.

Apart from India, teams from Iran, England, Germany, Sierra Leone, Australia, Canada and Azerbaijan participated in the event. India cut bilateral cricket ties with Pakistan after attacks in Mumbai in 2008 that authorities blamed on Pakistani militants. India has since ordered a freeze on general sporting contacts, and last year a Davis Cup tennis tie between the two nations was shifted out of Pakistan to Kazakhstan.

Few international sports events are held in Pakistan due to safety concerns, though in recent years cricket has made a comeback amid improving security. Kabaddi originated in the sub-continent and later spread to other Asian countries. Each team starts with seven players. During the 40-minute game, lone players will cross the centre line and attempt to tag opponents before racing back to their half and safety.

Munich air crash hero Gregg dies

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE LONDON, FEB 17

Harry Gregg-hailed as a hero for saving lives in the air crash which killed eight of Manchester United's "Busby Babes" in Munich—has died at the age of 87.

Gregg, who was United's goalkeeper, rescued a mother and her baby



time. In fact I would go insane," he said in 2018 before a service marking 60 years since the disaster. "I know the media would like to talk about what happened on a runway. I don't blame people for that, but if all I was ever part of, or all I ever achieved was to do with what happened in Germany, in Munich, if that was what my life was all about, it didn't come to

Morgan leads England to T20 series win over hosts AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

CENTURION, FEB 17

England captain Eoin Morgan went on a six-hitting spree to take his side to a series win in a high-scoring third and rwenty20 internationa South Africa at SuperSport Park on Sunday. Morgan slammed seven sixes in an innings of 57 not out off 22 balls as England chased down South Africa's 222-6 with five wickets and five balls to spare. "It's a nice note to leave this tour on," said Morgan. But Morgan had sympathy for the bowlers on a day when a capacity crowd were peppered with 28 sixes as the batsmen took advantage of a true pitch and the thin air of the South . African highveld. "It was a helluva game," said Morgan. "You have to commend both sides' bowlers. It's not the easiest ground to bowl on, especially with a wicket like this.' Heinrich Klaasen, playing in his first match of the South African home international season, hit 66 off 33 balls for the hosts after Temba Bavuma (49) and captain Quinton de Kock (35) hammered 84 for the first wicket off 46 balls. "When any side posts 220 it's a tough ask but going back to the 2016 World Cup with this group of players we chased down 230 against South Africa in Mumbai. So we always had this belief," added Morgan. Jason Roy was out early but Jos Buttler (57) and Jonny Bairstow (64) put on 91 off 50 balls for the second wicket to put England in a strong position. But 78 runs were still needed off 38 balls when Dawid Malan was fourth out with the total on 145. Ben Stokes joined Morgan and the pair added 61 off 27 balls before Stokes was caught with 17 still needed off 11 balls. Morgan hit two sixes off successive balls from Lungi Ngidi in same over and the contest was effectively ended. Morgan was named the man-of-thematch and man-of-the series after pipping opposite number De Kock as the leading run-scorer in the series. "We knew it would be a high-scoring game but we're a bit disappointed not to get over the line," said De Kock. South Africa won the first game by one run before England levelled the series with a two-run victory. It was the last match for England after a tour in which they won a four-match Test series and shared a one-day series. South Africa will be back in action on Friday when they play Australia in Johannesburg in the first of three Twenty20 internationals, which will be followed by three one-day internationals.



REUTERS

am-mates Bobby and Jackie Blanchflower and manager Matt Busby from the wreckage of the plane on February 6, 1958. He was back playing for Manchester United just 13 days later against Sheffield Wednesday. Gregg became the world's most expensive goalkeeper when he joined United in December 1957 for £23,500 and went on to be voted the best at the following year's World Cup. He was capped 25 times by his country and played 247 times for United from 1957-66.

"It is with great sorrow that we inform of the death of Manchester United and Northern Ireland legend Harry Gregg, OBE," the Harry Gregg Foundation announced on its Facebook page Monday. "Harry passed away peacefully in hospital surrounded by his loving family.'

United posted a tribute on their

Harry Gregg

website. "It is with deepest sadness that we have learned of the passing of former player Harry Gregg OBE,' said the club. "The thoughts and prayers of everyone at the club go out to Harry's family and friends.'

REUTERS

Gregg, who legendary United manager Alex Ferguson said was his hero, was humble about his bravery in Munich. "I would be telling lies if I said that I thought about it all the

' mucn

It was left to others such as fellow Northern Ireland great George Bestwho cleaned Gregg's boots-to sum up his courage. "Bravery is one thing but what Harry did was about more than bravery," Best wrote in the foreword to Gregg's autobiography in 2002. "It was about goodness.

The disaster, after a refuelling stop, killed eight of the young side dubbed "the Busby Babes" who had won successive league titles. The crash left manager Matt Busby fighting for his life. The ill-fated aircraft was bringing the team back via Munich from Belgrade after they had reached the European Cup semi-finals. The plane crashed on its third take-off attempt in terrible weather conditions killing 23 people, including three of the club's backroom staff, two crew, eight journalists and two others.



Barbora Strycova of Czech Republic returns to Amanda Anisimova of the US on the first day of the WTA Dubai Tennis Championship at the Dubai Tennis Stadium in the United Arab Emirates on Monday.



Faf du Plessis

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

JOHANNESBURG, FEB 17

Faf du Plessis announced on Monday that he was stepping down as South Africa's cricket captain with immediate effect.

Du Plessis, 35, said he needed to take "a step back" from the captaincy in order to help the emergence of the next generation of leaders under Quinton de Kock. De Kock led the team in recent one-day and Twenty20 internationals against England while Du Plessis was being rested. It was announced last month that De Kock would be South Africa's long-term one-day captain but in Monday's statement, Du Plessis said he was also relinquishing the Test and T20 captaincy.

The announcement clears the way for De Kock to lead South Africa at the T20 World Cup in Australia in October and November and possibly to lead the Test team in a two-match series in the West Indies in July and August. In a statement issued by Cricket South Africa, Du Plessis said he wanted to concentrate on contributing to the team as a batsman and senior player.

Du Plessis captained South Africa in 112 matches across all formats, including 36 Tests. He said his time away from cricket since the end of the Test series against England last month had given him "a lot of perspective". Du Plessis added, "It has been a rewarding, sometimes tough and other times a lonely road, but I would not replace the experience for anything, because it has made me the man that I am proud to be today."

He said the decision to step down was one of the toughest decisions he had made but he said he was committed to supporting De Kock, coach Mark Boucher and the rest of his

team-mates. "After the 2019 ICC World Cup, I made the decision to continue in my role as captain while the team went through a rebuilding phase following the retirement of some key senior players and a complete overhaul of the coaching staff that we had worked with until then," he said. "It was important to me that I stayed to help the team find its feet and plot a new way forward while assisting in identifying the next generation of leaders during a time of turbulence in SA cricket. The last season of my captaincy has been the most challenging to date as I had a lot of off-field issues that I devoted my energy towards."

Du Plessis took over as limited overs captain in 2012 and became Test captain in 2016. He built up a reputation as one of the country's outstanding leaders with his achievements including home-and-away series wins against Australia in both Tests and one-day internationals. But South Africa lost eight of their most recent nine Tests under his leadership and had a poor World Cup. This period coincided with upheavals in administration and the firing of coach Ottis Gibson and most of his backroom staff, as well as the retirement of key players.

"I have strived to lead the team with dignity and authenticity during exhilarating highs and devastating lows,' said Du Plessis.

Jacques Faul, acting chief executive of CSA, paid tribute to Du Plessis. "He has always put the team first," said Faul. "Following the retirement of Vernon Philander he and Dale Steyn are the last survivors of the golden generation that took the Proteas to the top of the Test rankings and he still has a vital role to play as we bridge the gap between one generation and the next.'

BRIEFING

Striker Moussa Marega walks off pitch after monkey chants

MADRID: Porto's Mali international striker Moussa Marega walked off the pitch in disgust after being subjected to a torrent of monkey chants in a Portuguese league game at Vitoria Guimaeres. The 28-year-old had scored a 60th-minute winner for the Porto against his former club which sparked the home fans to aim even more vitriol at the France-born player. In the 71st minute, Marega signalled to the bench that he was walking off in protest even though teammates, Porto coach Sergio Conceicao and Vitoria players tried to get him to stay on the pitch. As he walked off, an angry and upset Marega gave a thumbs-down signal with both hands to the home fans.

Edmund downs Seppi to claim New York crown

NEW YORK: Britain's Kyle Edmund defeated Italy's Andreas Seppi in straight sets to clinch the ATP Tour's New York Open crown on Sunday. Edmund, whose only previous singles title came at the European Open at Antwerp in 2018, cruised to a 7-5, 6-1 victory at the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Uniondale, Long Island. The eighth-seeded 25-vear-old right-hander wrapped up victory in 1hr 21min, converting the second of three match points. World number 62 Edmund overwhelmed Senni with a vastly superior service game, peppering his Italian opponent with 11 aces to Seppi's four with no double faults. Edmund also put Seppi's erratic serve under pressure. carving out seven break points to take a grip on the match. Edmund had registered a 6-1, 6-4 victory over Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic in the semi-final.

Ruud bags maiden ATP title at Buenos Aires

BUENOS AIRES: Casper Ruud became the first Norwegian to win an ATP title on Sunday after seeing off Pedro Sousa in straight sets 6-1, 6-4 in the final at Buenos Aires. World number 45 Ruud made short work of Sousa, who is ranked 145th, with the 21-year old seeing off his opponent in little more than an hour. The win should move Ruud up to 34th in the ATP world rankings, which will be his best ever placing (AGENCIES)

Atletico seek old habits to upset Liverpool and odds

Diego Simeone's side, however, are no longer the same Atletico famed for their inch-perfect defence and relentless work ethic.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MADRID, FEB 17

Atletico Madrid might once have relished the challenge of resisting an opponent like Liverpool, but reaching the Champions League's quarter-finals will require a performance not yet seen from them this season.

Diego Simeone's side are no longer the same Atletico famed for their inch-perfect defence, relentless work ethic and a knack for grinding down even the most assured, attacking teams. Instead, they are 12 points adrift of leaders Real Madrid in La Liga and last week sat sixth, a reflection of a deflating few months during which their old identity has blurred and their esteemed coach been questioned.

When it was pointed out to Simeone on Friday that both of Valencia's goals in their 2-2 draw at Mestalla had come from set-pieces, he said: "We don't have the same characteristics now. Just like we attack differently, we also defend differently." Out of the title race before March and knocked out of the Copa del Rey before the last 16, many in Spain believe Atletico's season is in tatters, with the assumption they will soon depart the Champions League too.

The debate has inevitably turned to Simeone and whether he remains the man to better those high standards he himself has set. "In the eight years I've been here, every year it's been said the squad isn't with me," Simeone said in December. "There is always a rocky patch but I have always had patience, energy and confidence in what I believe. We can win or lose but I am convinced of what I want because I know my players."

To prove the doubters wrong against Liverpool, Simeone will have to extract a throwback display from a new group of players and against the finest team in Europe, both in terms of current form and the last name written on the cup. Atletico might take heart from their record at home, where they must surely avoid defeat on Tuesday to keep the tie alive ahead

of a daunting second leg at Anfield. They have lost only once in 21 Champions League games in front of their own fans, even if Liverpool will hardly feel uncomfortable at the Wanda Metropolitano, where they were celebrating last June after lifting their sixth European Cup. And a sense

of inferiority might also appeal to Simeone, whose Atletico have often appeared to excel when the chance of victory seemed lowest. In recent years, they have prevailed against Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Juventus and Real Madrid.

Yet all logic points to a Liverpool victory, particularly given Atletico are likely to be without Diego Costa and Joao Felix, the forward who has so far

struggled to live up to the hype. Alvaro Morata's fitness is also in doubt after he played only 24 minutes off the bench against Valencia.

When Atletico thrashed Real Madrid 7-3 in pre-season, many wondered if they could repeat their remarkable title-winning feat of 2014, reinvigorated by new signings and fresh belief. But a promising start quickly fizzled and Simeone raised

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MADRID. FEB 17

eyebrows in December by insisting this was always a "transition season" for his team, despite close to 250 million euros spent last summer.

Those arrivals had big shoes to fill, after Antoine Griezmann left for Barcelona and the drain of leadership continued with the departures of Diego Godin, Lucas Hernandez, Filipe Luis and Juanfran. Simeone said transition did not mean stagnation.

"Anyone who believes the word transition means sunbathing and waiting for the flowers to come out doesn't know me," he said.

Yet while he may never be under pressure at the club he has transformed since his appointment in 2011, Simeone is in need of a boost as he attempts to put Atletico back among the elite. Liverpool may remind them how far they have to go.





Atletico Madrid players attend a training session in Majadahonda, outskirts of Madrid, on the eve of their Champions League match against Liverpool on Monday.



POST PHOTO: AR IUN RA IBANSHI

Nishan Khadka (right) of Three Star in action against Belbari Football Club during their quarter-final match of the Shiva Satasi Gold Cup football tournament in Jhilihile. Jhapa on Monday. Three Star won 3-0 with two goals from Saniog Rai and one from Sushil Rai.

Lazio fight back to beat Inter Milan 2-1, go second behind Juventus

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MILAN, FEB 17

Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi gave warning his side are ready to fight for their first Serie A title since 2000 after moving into second in Serie A on Sunday, just one point off leaders Juventus after a come-from-behind 2-1 win over Inter Milan.

Juventus reclaimed pole position thanks to Paulo Dybala and Juan Cuadrado's goals as the Turin giants rediscovered their winning form 2-0 at home against Brescia. Inter Milan dropped from top spot to third-three points behind the eight-time reigning champions-after falling to just their second defeat of the season.

"We need to stay humble and focused but I'm sure we will succeed. We have nothing to lose," said Inzaghi. "We know that Juventus and Inter are two great teams and we will do everything to fight to the end, knowing that it will be very difficult.'

In a fiery clash in the Stadio Olimpico defender Ashley Young broke through just before the break with his first Serie A goal for Inter

Milan after his move from Manchester United. The 34-year-old got his foot to tap-in off a rebound after Thomas Straskosha had cleared from former Lazio player Antonio Candreva. A Stefan de Vrij foul on Ciro Immobile allowed the Serie A top scorer to slot in his 26th goal in 24 games this season, five minutes after the break. Sergej Milinkovic-Savic snatched the winner after 69 minutes amid confusion in front of goal.

"We gifted Lazio two goals," said Inter coach Antonio Conte as the northerners fell to their second defeat after Juventus in October. Lazio extended their unbeaten run to 19 games as they target their second Scudetto, with a return to Champions League football on the cards for next season

In Turin, Argentine forward Dybala curled in a perfect free kick six minutes before the break, shortly after Brescia's Florian Aye was sent off for two yellow cards in quick succession. Colombian Cuadrado tapped in the second from close range after a Blaise Matuidi cross with 15 minutes to go, to get back winning after two away defeats.

"We did what we had to do," said Juve coach Maurizio Sarri. Cristiano Ronaldo was rested, but veteran defender Giorgio Chiellini returned after a long injury layoff. "Cristiano had to rest, he cannot play 75 games a year between the national team and club, we decided to let him recuperate," said Sarri.

The champions did not have it all their own way against Brescia, who stay second-from-bottom, seven points from safety after extending their winless run to nine games. Enrico Alfonso went off after just 10 minutes following a knock to the head, with substitute Brescia keeper Lorenzo Andrenacci pulling off some fine saves.

In Sardinia, Napoli got back to winning ways with a Dries Mertens' 65th-minute goal sealing a 1-0 success over Cagliari. The Belgian completed a give-and-go with Elseid Hysaj with the ball curling in with a deflection off the post. It was the 32-yearold's 120th goal for Napoli, one short of Marek Hamsik's all-time record, and five ahead of club legend Diego Maradona

just the vav things are it's football," he said. "I'm not worried about it, but I'm disappointed, as always when you drop two points at home.'

Real Madrid's winning streak ended when they conceded a late goal to draw 2-2 at home to Celta Vigo and finish the weekend with their lead over Barcelona down to one point. Real manager Zinedine Zidane was philosophical. "There's nothing to

Barcelona beat third place Getafe on Saturday to open a 10-point gap on the chasing pack. Sevilla could have climbed to third on Sunday but were held, 2-2, at home by rock-bottom Espanyol. Real had won five straight in La Liga to accelerate past Barcelona.

On Sunday they welcomed back Eden Hazard, who had been out since November. Coach Zinedine Zidane also recalled his other 100 million euro player Gareth Bale to complete an allstar attack with Karim Benzema. Yet Celta leapt into the lead after seven minutes. A pass from Iago Aspas sent Fedor Smolov galloping clear up the middle and he shot low past Thibaut Courtois. "There were mistakes, especially for the first goal," said Zidane. "We were not well positioned, it happens, and it'll happen to us again."

Celta had only climbed out of the relegation places the weekend before and looked anxious and overawed on the ball. Real dominated the rest of the first half and their starry attacking lineup produced pacy, intricate and imaginative attacking interchanges but a combination of good defending and bad finishing kept Real out for the rest of the first half.

Real again dominated the start of the second half. Sergio Ramos, already playing as an extra striker, slammed the ball into the net but had been standing offside. In the 52nd minute, Marcelo, not for the first time, found space on the left. His low cross deflected to Toni Kroos following the attack. The German drilled in the equaliser. It was the sixth straight season Kroos had scored against Celta.

In the 65th minute, goalkeeper Ruben Blanco pulled down the impressive Hazard. Ramos slammed the penalty into the bottom corner of the net. "We're glad he's back," said Zidane who took the Belgian off in the 73rd minute. "We know what he can do for us. He didn't go further than we planned after three months out," Zidane said. Celta responded by rediscovering their attacking nerve. With four minutes left, a sharp pass from Denis Suarez, who had come on in the 71st minute, caught the Real back four rigid on the edge of their own area. Santi Mina, who had been on for just

Real Madrid's Casemiro (left) and Celta Vigo's Fyodor Smolov jump for the ball during their Spanish La Liga match at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on Sunday.

two minutes, raced onto the ball and drilled a shot past Courtois. "An extraordinary pass," said Zidane.

Real play Levante in the league next Sunday before entertaining Manchester City in the Champions League. Real Madrid also used the match Sunday to send a message to China. The players came on before the match wearing shirts with the Chinese message "China, come on!"

During the game the advertising hoardings flashed up the English message "Wuhan! Come on! We support you!" "Real Madrid wishes to express its full support for all of the people affected by the coronavirus," the club tweeted in English. Yao Fei, Charge d'Affaires in China's Madrid embassy, responded with a tweet of thanks in Spanish. "A million thanks to Real Madrid for their valuable support for China in the fight against the coronavirus! Victory will be ours!"

The point ensured Celta stayed just outside the relegations places ahead of Mallorca, who beat Alaves on Saturday, on goal difference. The pair are two points clear of Leganes, who drew with Betis on Sunday and Espanyol who drew at Sevilla. Sevilla missed a chance to exploit Getafe's loss to Barcelona and fourth-placed Atletico Madrid's 2-2 draw at Valencia on Friday. Lucas Ocampos headed Sevilla in front after 14 minutes before Adrian Embarba levelled the scores with a free-kick. China winger Wu Lei put the away side ahead five minutes after the break. After Victor Sanchez was sent off Suso exploited Sevilla's man advantage to score his first goal for the club since arriving on loan from AC Milan last month.

INTERVIEW

'Our film industry lacks producers who can invest more than money'

Award-winning Min Bahadur Bham on his love for cinema and the Nepali film industry.

n the year 2015, everything changed for filmmaker **Min Bahadur Bham** after the release of his first feature film, *Kalo Pothi*. From becoming the first Nepali filmmaker to bagging the best film award at the Critics Week of Venice International Film Festival to even receiving love from Nepali audience for his film, Bham achieved what every filmmaker aspires to with his first film.

Currently, he is working on his upcoming project *A Year of Cold* for which he received funds as the winner of the Norwegian Sorfond Award at last year's Cannes Film Festival. The Post's **Ankit Khadgi** sat with the award-winning filmmaker to talk about his filmmaking journey, his passion for story-telling and his views regarding the current situation of the Nepali film industry. Excerpts:

How did you end up becoming a filmmaker?

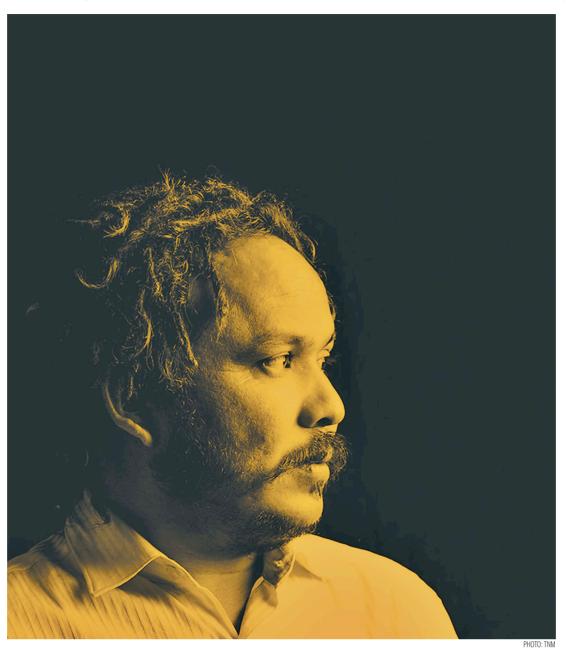
My love for films started young. When I was a child, my father had a small cinema theatre in Mugu where he'd screen Hindi films. I liked watching films rather than spending my time playing with toys. My friends aspired to become the hero, but I always wanted to become the one who used to direct the heroes.

I understood the power of words when I was young too. The village I grew up in was a close-knit, remote community, and people who left the village for work outside often wrote telegraphs to people back home. I was one of the few who could read, and I would read all the telegraphs that came. These telegraphs were expensive back then, and keeping that in mind, people sent short, strong notes back home. I used to be stunned by how you don't need too many words to convey what you feel. This made me realise the power of such form of communication. My passion for films increased. I realised how through just a few hours one could connect people with something deep. I was also into writing poems and loved reading books that enhanced my love for story-telling.

Eventually I ran away from home after my SLC and came to Kathmandu, where I joined theatre. But my end goal was always the big screen and with many struggles and hard work, I achieved what I wanted in my life—to make films.

How do you decide on your storyline?

Kalo Pothi's story was somehow a reflection of my personal experiences. Back in my village, when I was young, I had a friend with whom I shared a close bond with. He was from a 'so called' lower caste, and our friendship had some terms and conditions forced by our social structure. He was not allowed to enter my house. These things had a deep impact on me and I weaved the film's storyline with this issue along with the then political situation. I like to tell stories of people I know on an intimate level, real life experiences, and the political situation of our country.



also try to visit the place where the story is based on. The research process is a long process too, because whenever I come across some new information or detail, I rewrite and make changes in the story and in the script itself.

What are the challenges you face as an independent filmmaker?

Independent filmmakers from all over the world have to overcome many challenges. If we speak in terms of our country, we lack government support in terms of subsidies. The private investors also lack a comprehensive understanding of cinema due to which it's difficult to find creative producers who are fully involved in the process, besides backing the film financially. There's also a hurdle in getting an audience as well as releasing your film in theatres. Sometimes, it's also difficult to convince the actors and the rest of the crew to have faith in your idea.

How did you feel when you became the first Nepali filmmaker whose feature film was screened at the Venice Film Festival?

and made a film about everyday people, a story everyone could connect to. I think that's the reason why many people loved the film, as they felt the story was real. I was suggested by many to change the language of the film into Nepali. But I followed my vision of telling the story of the ground reality and showed the real culture. I think if you tell stories that reflect reality, many can connect to it. If they can do that, they will enjoy your film.

How has film festivals helped you and your craft?

Film festivals are very important, as they give you a platform for your work to receive exposure among the masses who appreciate art. I don't think my film *Kalo Pothi* would have been this big if it wasn't screened at the Venice festival. The screening helped promote the film directly affecting its business. When your film gets the stamp of a film festival, it also becomes easy to get distributors in the global market.

How did your experience in theatre help you in filmmaking?

If I wasn't involved in theatre, I couldn't have seen myself becoming a filmmaker. Theatre made me disciplined and understand the value of art. Generally, in filmmaking, you have more choices. It's like living a lavish life, where you have multiple options to choose from. However, when you are in theatre, you have to makedo with what you have or always look for alternatives. Because of my theatre experience, I always look for an artistic approach to tell what I want in my frames and utilise the available resources rather than spend an exorbitant amount of money just for a scene. "I like to tell stories of people I know on an intimate level, real life experiences, and the political situation."

Theatre also helped me to polish my team-working skills.

How difficult is it for you to balance both roles of a director and producer?

The main reason why my next project is getting delayed is because I am both the producer and director of the film. It's difficult for me to take time out and do both things simultaneously. I have to work on the script, audition the actors, manage the finances, do marketing work, and oversee distribution. It becomes so hectic that sometimes there's a possibility of not being able to start the film at the estimated time.

Many say that Nepali films are not exploring themes beyond migration, civil war and comedy. Why do you think filmmakers aren't taking enough risks?

Nepali films have always stuck to a particular theme when it comes to storytelling. Earlier, films mostly dealt with the suppression of the working class by the ruling class. The lead would be a rebellious proletariat who would fight against 30 goons, who worked for the ruling class, the antagonist of the story.

These days, directors use issues of migration, the effects of civil war and comedy to tell stories because that's what the audience wants to see. People want to see a fantasy world, and pay money to watch people driving expensive cars, clothes or living a good life abroad. Producers and directors are just cashing in on these aspirations and making films about it.

How can our film industry change?

First of all, we have to stop trying to imitate Bollywood's model. We don't have a proper film studio or stars who can guarantee a film's success, thus it is unwise to imitate them.

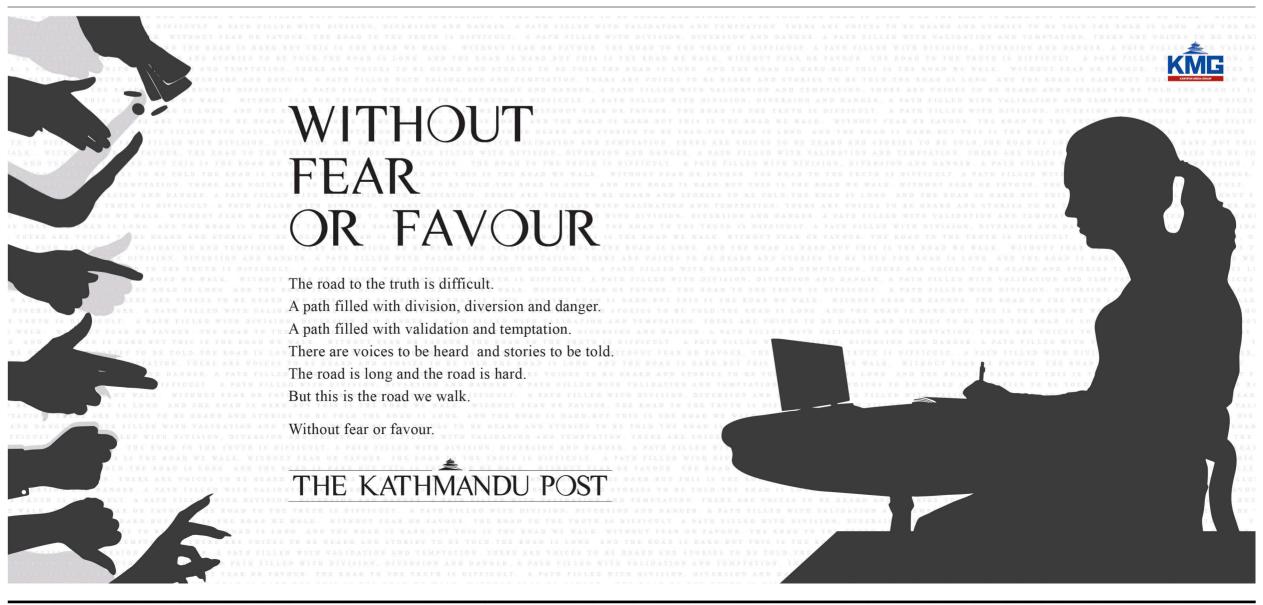
Also, for Nepali films to do better, the producers should think beyond finance. It's crucial the producers deeply understand the films, just like the directors, so they can find the right approach and resourcto tell the story. Our film industry lacks produ who can invest more than money. A country's film industry can only excel if there are good producers who value the art of cinema. The artists and the makers should also acknowledge the power they have in shaping the mindset of people too. They should be socially responsible and shouldn't think only of money. It doesn't mean that they have to make films preaching social messages only, but they should be conscious of what discourse their film will spark among the audiences

What's your method of working?

I need to have a clear narrative for my story, the structure can change. Scriptwriting is a lengthy and lonely process, and I usually go to secluded places to write. I To be honest, I was neither excited nor nervous. Back in 2012, my short film *The Fruit (Bansulli)* had also been screened at the same festival. For me, the process of making films is more important. Other things are secondary.

Kalo Pothi was loved by both critics and the masses. How did you strike that balance?

I didn't make the film with the intention of telling a story that has the 'balance'. I used the available tools



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