

# THE KATHMANDU POST

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXVIII No. 108 | 8 pages | Rs.5 Friday, June 12, 2020 | 30-02-2077







On the second day of youth-led protests in Kathmandu, police on Thursday used tear gas besides water cannon to disperse the crowd at Bhatbhateni.

# Youth-led protests against the government's handling of Covid-19 spread to major cities

On Thursday, over a thousand people in Kathmandu and hundreds more around the country demanded financial transparency and better management of the pandemic from the government.

#### **SHUVAM DHUNGANA** KATHMANDU. JUNE 1

On Thursday, over a thousand people gathered near Bhatbhateni in Kathmandu for a peaceful protest which was organised by youths through different social media platforms demanding that the government improve quarantine conditions, make wider use of polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests and make public

the Covid-19 expenditure report.

Standard < Chartered

Just a call away for your banking queries. Contact our 24X7 Client Care Centre at +977 1 4781800

In Kathmandu and across the country, young people took to the streets to protest the government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, demand more polymerase chain reaction tests and better quarantine conditions.

This was the second iteration of a series of peaceful protests first organised by youths on Tuesday, when they were met with water cannons and batons. Like then, most of the participants in Thursday's protest were young people, holding placards that

> question the Ki government's Sharma Oli response to the Covid-19 pandemic. But while Tuesday's protest was limited to the Capital, by Thursday, the protests had spread across the country.

Eighteen-year-old Pragati Parajuli, one of the protesters who was part of both protests held in Kathmandu, said that the event wasn't affiliated with any political party.

"The number of participants

protest," Parajuli told the Post.

Tuesday's protest had numbered 150 individuals but Thursday's protest had grown exponentially in number, with over a thou-

Protests were also held in other major cities like Pokhara, Biratnagar, Chitwan, Hetauda and Birgunj, while more programmes have been scheduled in other parts of the country for the upcoming week.

enty-two-year-old Suyogya Singh of Mahottari, who was one of the organisers of the protest held in Jaleswar, said that almost three dozen people gathered for a peaceful protest

"The protest was carried out following physical distancing protocols and other safety measures," said Singh. "The police did not interfere and it ended peacefully.'

Young people in Mahottari had gathered to demand an increase in PCR tests, better quarantine conditions and to protest against government incompetence, said Singh.

"We will not stop," she said. "We will continue the protests until the government listens to our voice.'

In Biratnagar too, over 500 young people had gathered for a protest on Thursday, according to Rishab Sarawagi, a participant. Sarawagi said that their protests were part of a series of protests being held for the past few days along the highways and in front of the Chief District Office.

The number of people who joined the protest was just around 50 on Wednesday but it rose to 500 on Thursday," said Sarawagi. "Although police were present during the protest, there was no interference as it was a peaceful protest.'

As elsewhere in the country, the majority of participants were not affiliated to any political parties and had gathered through social media demanding transparency and better management of the pandemic, he said. >> Continued on page 5

## Lockdown is officially eased, with shops open and private vehicles allowed on odd-even basis

After widespread criticism regarding the prolongment of the nationwide lockdown, the government decided to ease prohibitions in certain sectors.

TIKA R PRADHAN

The government has formalised Wednesday's decision to ease the lockdown by unveiling a new modality for the restrictions put in place to contain the spread of Covid-19.

"The Cabinet meeting on Wednesday decided to issue an order as per the Infectious Disease Act-2020 to ease the ongoing lockdown," said Yubaraj Khatiwada, the minister for finance and communication and information technology, at a media briefing on

According to Khatiwada, private clinics, all kinds of agriculture and animal related businesses, stores that sell essential foodstuffs and transport goods will be allowed to open

Private vehicles are also allowed on the streets from Friday onwards, on an odd-even basis. Vehicles with odd licence plates will be allowed out on odd dates according to the Nepali calendar while even licence plates will be allowed out on even dates

Development projects, including infrastructure and hydropower, extraction, collection, transportation and distribution of materials from rivers and mines for construction works will be allowed to open immediately while solid waste management, electricity, media broadcasting, postal service, and forest-related businesses can continue their activities from

Though restaurants are not allowed to open for dining in, they can arrange for takeaway. Hotels are only allowed to open for quarantine services.

As per the government's order, edu-

schools, colleges, tuition and training centres and all international and domestic flights remain prohibited. Earlier, the government had determined 20 entry points for Nepali migrant workers to come from India.

All kinds of gatherings, seminars, workshops, demonstrations, conferences and cinema halls, party palaces and entertainment venues will remain

Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security Rameshwor Raya Yadav told the Post that the government aims to lift the lockdown completely in three phases but refrained from elaborating on what exactly the three phases constituted.

>> Continued on page 5

#### What still remain closed

- Educational institutions—schools, colleges, tuition centres and training centres
- All international and domestic flights, except those receiving per mission
- All kinds of gatherings, seminars, workshops, demonstrations and conferences
- Cinema halls, party palaces, entertainment places including dance
- Public libraries, museums and zoo Spas, saloons and beauty parlours
- Swimming pools and health clubs Shopping malls
- Sports played in groups and presentation at sports grounds All kinds of religious and social
- All kinds of public transportation,

including tourist vehicles



The traffic in Kathmandu on Thursday, after the government allowed private vehicles to run.



## MEDLEY

## Inside the Post

#### National

After a wait of over two months, the first batch of Nepali migrant workers based in Kuwait arrived home on Thursday. Over 300 Nepalis were brought home on two separate flights of Jazeera Airways, a Kuwaiti airline company, and taken to the government's holding centres from where they will be taken to their respec-

#### Opinion

The Kalapani dispute has, as difficult as it is to realise, shown Kathmandu's limitations in convincing Delhi under Narenrda Modi to come to the table, but the intransigence is also an example of what happens when foreign policy gets overtaken by politicians with partisan interests and harsh words from both sides.

#### Money

The World Bank on Thursday approved a \$450 million project to help Nepal improve its roads and set the course for post-Covid-19 economic recovery through greater cross-border trade, more jobs especially for women, and better road safety.

World George Floyd's younger brother took his grief to the US Congress on Wednesday with an impassioned plea that lawmakers not let his brother's death be in vain, lamenting that he "didn't deserve to die over \$20" in a what he called a lynching.

## Culture & Arts

Yangben doesn't have any flavour or aroma on its own but when cooked with fatty pork, it absorbs the fat and lends a delicious earthy flavour to the dish.

## News Quiz

- 1. The road department will not allow digging on which roads during the rainy season?
  - a. Urban roads
  - b. Highways c. Postal roads
  - d. Corridor roads
- A Musahar woman from which district was accused of practising witchcraft and beaten?
  - a. Kanchanpur
- b. Saptari
- d. Dadeldhura
- The District Court remanded the man accused of Rupandehi mass murder to how many days
- in custody?
- d. 10
- Jos Vandelaer is the Nepal country representative for which international organisa-
- a. United Nations b. World Bank

- c. European Union d. World Health Organization
- 5. A locust swarm includes a min
  - imum of how many locusts? a. 1 million
  - b. 10 million
  - c. 40 million
  - d. 4 million



- 6. A tipper accident in which district claimed the lives of two people leaving two others miss
  - a. Kalikot
  - b. Darchula c. Kapilvastu
  - d. Saptari



Gold panners search for precious metal in the waters of Bishnumati River near Teku Dobhan in Kathmandu.

## On this day in history

#### Israel to seek US\$ 2.5 b aid package to quit Golan: Report

JERUSALEM - Israel is to demand a 2.5 billion dollar military aid package from the United States as compensation for any withdrawal from the Golan Heights, the daily Jerusalem Post said Sunday

Israel has prepared a detailed list of its demands to be discussed by chief-ofstaff Amnon Shahak with Pentagon and military officials in Washington at the

The list includes a JSTARS surveillance and coordination airplane, stationary ground early warning stations, satellite transformation and linkage stations and access to US high-resolution satellite information on the region, the Englishlanguage paper said.

The Kathmandu Post June 12, 1995

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

## Quote of the day

Quarantine centres are turning into Covid-19 breeding ground, National Human Rights Commission warns, Page 3

"The number of infections is increasing geometrically, but the government's response is nowhere close to containing it."

> Govinda Sharma Poudyal of the National Human Rights Commission on the government handling of the Covid-19 crisis.

## Most read online

#### Secondary Education Examination not to be held this year

Ending the long-drawn uncertainty over the Secondary Education Examination, the government on Wednesday decided to cancel the test for this year and issue certificates based on the internal evaluation conducted by respective schools.

#### Airfare for international chartered repatriation flights capped as government lists new flying rules

The Nepal government has capped the air fares for international chartered repatriation flights, keeping in mind the interest of passengers as well as airlines for a temporary period as the government plans to evacuate Nepalis stranded in dif-

#### Oli peddles in mistruths and sidesteps criticism before Parliament

Appearing before Parliament on Wednesday to respond to questions from lawmakers, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli once again peddled in half-truths and misinformation regarding Covid-19 and his government's response to the pandemic. At one point, Oli repeated an argument that was going around when Nepal had yet to report a large number of infections—that Nepalis have strong-

#### In Saptari, a Musahar woman is accused of practising witchcraft and beaten

Early on Sunday, Fainaku Sada set out on his bicycle to meet his married daughter in Fatehpur. He left behind his wife, Manjudevi, and their four children, at their home in Mahadeva Rural Municipality, Saptari. Fainaku wanted to know how his eldest daughter and her family were faring during the lockdown. Back in Mahadeva, 35-year-old Manjudevi was preparing lunch for her four children when she heard loud cursing outside.

## 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.

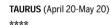
For the most recent corrections, visit kathmandupost.com/corrections.

## HOROSCOPE

### ARIES (March 21-April 19)

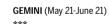


Someone thinks something about you that just isn't true, and as soon as you find out about it today you need to help them see the truth. Your reputation is something you've worked very hard to build, and it should be your top concern today. Talking to this person should be enough to clarify any confusion.





Today, you should choose to appeal to people's intellect and not their emotions. Instead of charming them or flirting with them to get them on your side, use logic. Talk to them about the facts and they'll be able to have a deeper understanding of what you want and whether or not they can give it to you.





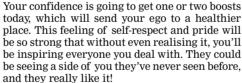
You could be in a situation today when someone who's equal to you, even a partner even, will rise above you. They may even be put in a position of authority over you! But the good news is, instead of pulling rank on you, they'll be eager to get your take on things and keep you just as integrated in the process as you were before.



Today, you could finally be given the opportunity to show someone what you're made of, but first you'll need to deal with a commitment you made. You need to hit the ground running and take care of the person you promised to help. Communicate clearly why you might not be available to help them.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

CANCER (June 22-July 22)



VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Be careful not to confuse criticism with honesty today. One doesn't necessarily include the other. Be sensitive to the egos of others, and try to avoid making anyone feel bad about themselves. You should still tell it like it is, but you should also take extra time and effort to phrase things diplomatically with their feelings in mind.



An authority figure in your life might try to micromanage you today, which could understandably get on your nerves. But before you blow up at them and risk ruining your relationship, take a deep breath and realize that the way they're acting isn't personal. They could be going through some stuff.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)



Things are already going pretty well in your, but they're about to get even better! You can expect to have a killer day of being on top of things and making others smile. You could soon notice that your boss is in a really great mood. And they could finally find the words to tell you what a great job you're doing.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)



At some point today you could be exposed to some classical music or art. This kind of may not usually appeal to you, but today it could spark an idea or urge deep inside of you. You'll love what you're seeing or hearing and want to experience more of it as soon as possible. Your artistic sensibilities are heightened right now.



Just like pretzels and chocolate, and oddball pairing can make a good combination. If you're put into a partnership with someone you don't think you'll work well with, just relax and be open-minded about it. Set aside any negative feelings you might have about this other person and focus on completing the task at hand

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)



Temptations could be popping up all over the place today, so your self-discipline will be more important than ever! Sure, your willpower will be tested, but you will pass the test. Fortunately, the universe is sending you some powerful energy that will reinforce your backbone and keep you on the right path.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)



Other people have their own priorities, and they won't be paying too much attention to you today. But, in a way, this can be very good. Now that no one is really looking, you can feel free to do whatever you want! You won't have to worry about anyone breathing down your neck or second-guessing you.

## **CROSSWORD**

## **ACROSS**

Wahlberg 5 England's FBI Crumbly cheese 12 Early stages 14 Deli-scale word

15 Styptic 16 Fido's pal 17 Rumor mill 19 Direct

21 Heavy 22 Playful bark 23 — choy 24 Speaker's pauses

25 Cozily

29 Bottomless depth Yearns deeply 32 Razor feature 33 Hard benches

37 Before 38 Not in a whisper 39 By word of mouth 40 In a while 41 City near Zurich

denizen 43 Even up 45 Victorian

42 Down Under

garment 46 Privileged one 49 Ben & Jerry rival 50 Protective

compartment

### 51 Under Cupid's spell (2 wds.) 53 Split into thin

62 Tree trunk

64 Plus

63 Tiny shrimp

lavers 58 Numerical datum 60 Hawk's refuge 61 Portable shelter

#### 65 So far 66 Equine fodder **DOWN**

Longer 2 Strong as — 3 Invitation initials Boat's bottom

Wagon Rollover subj. 7 Stationed, as troops

8 Broad bean Skip a syllable 10 TV dial 11 Pious assents

13 Sports prelims 14 Happy-hour letters 18 Cartoon shrieks

20 Get misty-eyed 23 Air rifle (2 wds.) 25 Hot tubs 26 Barcelona boy

28 Ms. Davis of

films

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



4-10-19 © 2019 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS

29 Beautify 30 Animal's track 32 Poem of lament

34 Memorable times 35 Hull plank 36 Lath 38 Follows, as

rules (2 wds.) 42 Brown bear 44 Strauss of denim fame 45 Web suffix

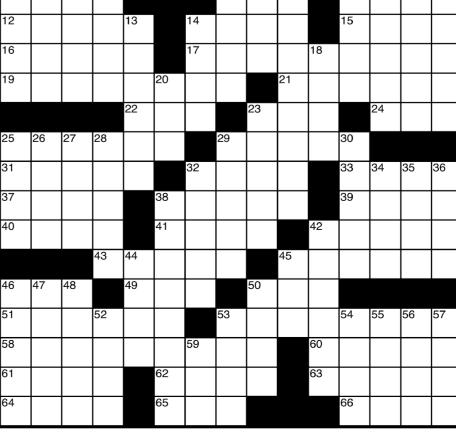
46 Panoramic

producer 48 Schemes 50 Gait 52 Sarge's pooch 53 Hum 54 Caligula's

47 Big chip

nephew 55 La Scala highlight 56 Pinball no-no

' Fish without scales 59 Dactyl



## **SUDOKU**

3 7 4 9 5 8 2 6 18327495 295146387 453879126 129563874 867214953 7 8 2 4 3 5 6 1 9 9 4 6 7 8 1 5 3 2 5 3 1 6 9 2 7 4 8

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



## **NATIONAL**

## Supreme Court orders government to allow taxpayers a month after lockdown ends

Authorities ordered not to implement tax notice and make justifiable review at places where people continue to face difficulties.

KATHMANDU, JUNE 11

The Supreme Court has issued an interim order to the government, asking the authorities to allow at least one month's time for taxpayers to pay their dues after the lockdown com-

A division bench of Justices Anil Kumar Sinha and Manoj Sharma issued the interim order to the Finance Ministry and the Inland Revenue Department, Lazimpat not to implement the notice issued for taxpayers during the lockdown and to make necessary arrangements for them to pay their tax dues within 30 days after the lockdown completely opens.

After cases of the coronavirus started appearing in Nepal, the government on March 24 announced a complete lockdown across the country. After much public hardship caused by the prolonged restrictions and growing calls for letting businesses operate, the Cabinet on Wednesday evening decided to allow shops to reopen and private vehicles to run on an odd-even basis. The interim order was issued upon hearing on two separate writ petitions filed by advocates Srijana Adhikary and Thaneswor Kafle in response to the government notifying taxpayers to clear their dues within June 29.

The top court has also told the government to make the process of paying tax easier amid the essential coronavirus safety measures when the public activity curbs are lifted.

The writ was filed after the business community objected to the government notice for paying taxes amid the lockdown.

The court has also told the authorities to make necessary review and justifiable arrangements for taxpayers at places where new situations arise due to the Covid-19 contagion and they find difficulties doing their jobs or businesses even after the opening of the lockdown.



A hairdresser wears a protective suit while cutting the hair of a client in Anamnagar, Kathmandu, on Thursday.

# Quarantine centres are turning into Covid breeding ground, National Human Rights Commission warns

Government ignoring repeated calls to improve situation in quarantine facilities, says its monitoring report.

BINOD GHIMIRE

The government has completely failed to manage quarantine centres and they increase the risk of transmission of the disease rather than preventing it, the National Human Rights Commission said

The constitutional body, in its report on the situation of human rights during the lockdown imposed to contain the spread of the disease said quarantines centres that hold around 170,000 at present are turning into hotspots for the spread of the disease as the centres don't meet minimum standards, and there haven't been any visible effort to maintain WHO standards.

Doctors operate on

coronavirus-infected

Doctors at Nepalgunj Medical College have operated on a

25-year-old pregnant woman, airlifted from a quarantine facil-

According to the doctors at Nepalgunj Medical College,

"The patient's health condition was severely deteriorating

"We put the patient up at the isolation ward and performed

A resident of Chaurpati Rural Municipality in Achham, the

woman had returned from Maharashtra, India 10 days ago and

had been living in a quarantine facility. She had been admitted

at Bayalpata Hospital, Achham, four days ago after she com-

Doctors at the hospital had referred the woman to the

Shrestha informed that doctors involved in the surgery took

Pradip Thapa, a doctor involved in the surgery, said that

the procedure became more complicated as the patient

was brought in late and was already five months into her

"The patient is still not out of danger," said Thapa, "As of

The hospital has also collected swab samples of the patient's

Thapa said that the foetus is healthy but the patient's family

'There is high risk of infection after the surgery," said

have decided to terminate the pregnancy owing to the health

Thapa, "And with the woman infected with Covid-19, we can't

Meanwhile, medical personnel involved in the treatment of

the woman have been sent to a quarantine facility at the hos-

pital. They will treat other quarantined patients during their

The Supreme Court, in an interim order on Wednesday,

ordered the government to make special arrangements for

say for sure that there won't be further complications.

husband and daughter who had accompanied her to the

all necessary precautions during the surgery and all other

services at the hospital were halted during the procedure.

Kohalpur-based hospital after her condition worsened.

Kohalpur, the patient was diagnosed with acute intestinal

obstruction, and was also found to have been infected with

when she was brought in," said hospital director Dr Dinesh

Shrestha. "We were prepared for the fact that the patient could

be infected with coronavirus. So we tested her.'

plained of problems in her digestive system.

now, we can't comment on her condition.'

complications of the mother.

stay there, according to Shrestha.

ity in Achham she suffered from problems in her intestine.

pregnant woman

in Kohalpur

an hour-long surgery on her."

MADHU SHAHI

BANKE, JUNE 1

"A majority of the quarantine centres run the risk of spreading Covid-19," said Anup Raj Sharma, chairperson of the commission, during a webinar organised to unveil the report prepared by a monitoring team that included members from Nepal Bar Association, Federation of Journalists and NGO Federation Nepal.

According to the WHO standards, those who are in quarantine must be placed in adequately ventilated, spacious single rooms with hand hygiene and toilet facilities. If single rooms are not available, beds should be placed at least one metre apart,

"The government has been ignoring our repeated calls to improve quarantine facilities," said Sharma.

Along with the commission, opposition parties have also been demanding the government pay attention to better manage quarantines. The government, however, has been saying that ensuring proper quarantine facilities for returnees from India and other countries is in its top

Speaking at a meeting of the Lower House on Wednesday, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli said the government was doing its bit to manage the 3,700 centres across the nation. He claimed the quarantine centres can still accommodate thousands of returnees.

The monitoring report says despite evidence that rapid diagnostic tests (RDT) tests aren't effective in detecting coronavirus, the government is

Govind Sharma Poudyal, a member of the commission who led the monitoring committee, said it is disappointing that the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests are being done in a sluggish manner. He said that over 10,000 tests are needed per day, but only 4,000 tests are being done. "The number of infections is increasing geometrically, but the government's response is nowhere close to containing it," he said.

The government had adequate time to prepare for the outbreak, but it didn't, said the monitoring report. The first Covid-19 case was reported in Nepal on January 23 and it was only after two months that the number of

cases surged to double digits. However, the government, so far, hardly has an installed capacity to examine around 5,000 samples per day, the authors of the report said.

The report lists around two dozen suggestions for the government asking it to ensure social distancing when the lockdown is lifted. It has also called on authorities to take prompt measures to improve quarantine facilities and tighten border control so that people don't enter without permission.

It has suggested that all Nepali citizens willing to return home be repatriated. "It is very important that three tiers of government coordinate in their response to Covid-19," reads one of the suggestions.

return immediately as the government in Nepal had restricted all international flights

as a measure to contain the spread of

As part of the Kuwaiti government's

amnesty scheme, the pardoned Nepali work-

ers were also provided with free flights,

After registering their names, the workers

Their passage to home became possible

"The flight tickets for Nepali workers stay-

after the Nepal government came up with

ing in camps have been provided by the

Kuwaiti government, whereas the embassy

has facilitated the process," said Bhandari.

"Repatriation of the remaining workers will

According to the Nepal government, there

are a total of 2,991 Nepali migrant work-

ers—1,688 men and 1,303 women—staying in

the repatriation plan last week

continue in the days to come.

plans of the Nepal

planned to bring

home at least 25,000

Nepalis on priority

basis from various

labour destination

countries. The repa-

began on Thursday

and will continue

While the govern-

ment has agreed

to evacuate the

stranded in differ-

ent parts of the

world, the evacuees have been told to

flights—a decision

that has come under

heavy criticism.

process

citizens

for their

triation

till June 25.

Nepali

government.

were kept in six camps set up by the Kuwaiti

which helped a lot for their return home.

government.

## All 20 accused in the killings of Dalit youths in Rukum (West) arrested

**HARI GAUTAM** RUKUM (WEST), JUNE 11

Police on Wednesday arrested three more people in connection with the killings of Dalit youths in Rukum

According to police, Ghamand Malla, Bishnu Malla and Sabin Pun of Chaurjahari Municipality were arrested late on Wednesday and were sent to the District Police Office. Ghamand and Bishnu were arrested on murder charges while Pun has been arrested for additional investigation into the incident.

With this, all 20 prime accused in the Soti incident have been arrested.

Rukum (West) District Police Chief DSP Thag Bahadur KC informed that the police have arrested 28 people—20 of whom are the prime suspects in the al investigation— in relation to the

Police on Wednesday had also arrested two people, including a relative of the Malla family accused of orchestrating the killings

Earlier on June 4, the police had arrested seven people in relation to the Soti incident and the Rukum (West) District court had extended the remand of 18 individuals for 10 more days in police custody.

Twelve people, including ward chairman of Chaurjahari Ward No. 8 Dambar Bahadur Malla, were arrested on May 26 and six others were arrested on May 28 in relation to the

On May 23, locals from Soti in Chaurjahari Municipality, Rukum (West), allegedly attacked Nabaraj BK of Jajarkot and 18 of his friends who were accompanying him to the village to help him elope with his girlfriend. The bodies of Nabaraj and his friend Tikaram Sunar, both of them Dalits, were found on the banks of the Bheri River the next day.

The bodies of Ganesh Budha, Lokendra Sunar and Sandip BK, who went missing in the incident, were recovered on May 25, whereas the body of Govinda Shahi was recovered from Bheri River in Khodakhola, Jajarkot, on June 2.

transition camps in Kuwait. The Kuwaiti government has said it would take around 20 flights to fly all the Nepali workers back home as per the evacuation



# Over 300 Nepalis return from Kuwait

Undocumented women workers who recently received amnesty were the first to return home.



The returnees from Kuwait arrive at the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu on Thursday.

CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL KATHMANDU. JUNE 11

After a wait of over two months, the first batch of Nepali migrant workers based in Kuwait arrived home on Thursday.

Over 300 Nepalis were brought home on two separate flights of Jazeera

Airways, a Kuwaiti airline company, and taken to the government's holding centres from where they will be taken to their respective districts.

The first batch of people who landed at the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu on Thursday afternoon were those Nepali migrants who were granted amnesty by the Kuwaiti government in May for either overstaying their visas or staying undocumented.

Their return was made possible after the government recently announced its plan to repatriate the Nepali citizens stranded in different parts of the world amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

As part of the repatriation plan, the government had announced to bring home the undocumented Nepali migrant workers from various labour destination countries.

"We have sent back Nepali workers who had availed the general amnesty of the Kuwaiti government," Durga Bhandari, Nepali ambassador to Kuwait, told the Post over the phone from Kuwait. "We have prioritised sending back women workers first."

The two flights had Nepali women who worked as housemaids in Kuwait. The first flight had 157 passengers and the second

Bhandari said all the passengers had undergone medical tests before boarding

"All these workers have gone through medical tests at the airport. They all have got their medical test report with themselves,'

These workers had been waiting to return home ever since they were granted amnesty by the Kuwaiti government. They could not

In the first phase of repatriation, the government has

> **NOTICE TO ADVERTISERS** We wish to request all our valued advertisers

to contact us via following numbers and email address for any kind of advertising related queries:

- ◆ Anand Kumar Singh: 9801228006
- ◆ Asurari Gyawali : 9801228000
- Sanjay Gautam: 9801228001 Santosh Sharma: 9801228012
- Upendra Man Karmacharya: 9801228005

Email: marketing@kmg.com.np

**Marketing Department** 

Kantipur Publications Pvt. Ltd., Thapathali, Kathmandu

pregnant women and their newborns by making provisions for regular check-ups and vaccinations during the lockdown.

## **OPINION**

## **EDITORIAL**

## Exit strategy

More challenges lie ahead even as we learn to live with the pandemic.

As the global tally of Covid-19 surpasses the 7.3 million mark, countries around the world, including Russia and India, have begun easing their lockdowns, heralding a new phase of living with the pandemic and fighting it simultaneously. The Nepal government seems to have caught up with the global trend as well as felt the need to rectify its mistakes on the home turf as it began easing the lockdown on Thursday. Albeit necessary, the government's unlocking plan is to be taken with a pinch of salt.

The costs of the indiscriminate lockdown had been quite high, putting poor people at risk of mass starvation and pushing entrepreneurs to the verge of bankruptcy as their incomes depleted. The lack of solid containment plans alongside the lockdown meant that widespread transmission of the virus was just delayed and not averted altogether. It's a pity that PM KP Sharma Oli, while speaking in Parliament on Wednesday, chose to sing paeans to Nepali mountains and herbal medicines rather than elaborate how it managed to spend Rs10 billion on pandemic containment and relief distribution.

Even as we learn to live with the pandemic, we are confronted with the need to change our strategies and put up a more valiant fight against it. But as of today, the government has failed to communicate what strategies it has taken to support an already overwhelmed healthcare system. Even as it finally acknowledges that the lockdown was not the only way out, it has failed to explain how it plans to tackle the new challenges that lie ahead. Our strategies warrant an immediate overhaul considering the possibilities of widespread transmission sooner than later.

With Unlock One, India has seen a record rise in transmissions as it approaches the 3 lakh mark and nearly surpasses the UK to become the fourth-biggest hit country in the world. The WHO has already recommended that Pakistan re-impose the lockdown due to the exponential spike in cases after it began unlocking at the end of May. In Nepal, too, a dramatic spike in new transmissions might even force the government to enforce the lockdown

In the event of such a spike, the government is certain to blame the citizens for their carelessness rather than acknowledge its incompetence. Having been confined to their homes for more than 2.5 months, citizens are itching to step out of their homes freely. But the importance of precaution on an individual level cannot be overstated. As the government fails to come up with a robust containment plan, citizens would do well to continue following safety precautions on their own: wear masks, wash hands, avoid crowds, repeat.

## We want to hear from you

We regularly publish Letters to the Editor on contemporary lished. Please send your letters to tkpoped@kmg.com.np with 'Letter to the Editor' in the subject line.

Please include your address, phone number we can reach you at and your email address.

How to make sure your letters are published? It's simple—just follow these basic guidelines:

Keep it short. Your letters will have a better chance of success if you keep it within 400 words. If you're writing commentary, pitch

an op-ed instead. Tell us what we got wrong, but back it up with resources.

Avoid jargon, use clear words and sentences. Keep in mind you're communicating with other readers who may not be aware of the

We welcome witty letters. But please don't go overboard.

Avoid abuse and diatribes.

## Have something to say?

The Kathmandu Post invites you to submit well-researched, unapologetic opinion pieces. To make sure your articles get our attention, we ask that you keep the following things in mind when inquiring and submitting content to the Post:

All your opinion pieces should be pitched to the Opinion desknot to the editor-in-chief. Email your piece or idea (accompanied with a high-resolution headshot) to tkpoped@kmg.com.np.

We will only respond to pitches that have original ideas. We suggest that you google your pitch before writing to us. If you're submitting an article that either the Post or other publications have already covered in the past, tell us in a sentence or two why your story offers something new.

The Post receives dozens of pitches every day from aspiring writers, students, political commentators, entrepreneurs and diplomats. We are not able to respond to every single email, but if we like your idea, we will get back to you soon. Please DO NOT pitch us an idea if you're already pitching it somewhere else.

We carefully review submissions to ensure that no plagiarism has occurred. If we find any articles that have been plagiarised, such practice will lead to blacklisting.

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.

# Is this the end of the 'special relationship'?

Anti-Indianism has fuelled Nepali politics for seven decades. It now needs to decide the future of bilateral ties.

**AMISH RAJ MULMI** 



At the very outset, I want to make it clear that like most of us, I am a beneficiary of the 'special relationship' between India and Nepal: I have studied and worked in India, my partner is Indian, and I continue to work with Indian authors and companies. Even then, as a former boss likes to tell me, those who don't live on the border will probably never understand the true mechanisms of what the special relationship means on the ground. For, the India-Nepal border is a complex one, perhaps the most complex of borders in our part of the world. The open border is at the heart of this 'special relationship' continually invoked by India, and increasingly rejected by Nepal. And as much as the Twitterati berated the tone of the Hindustan Times editorial that suggested a reset of bilateral ties will have 'clear costs' for Nepal, the fact is, Nepali citizens will have to swallow a few bitter pills if bilateral ties between the two are to be revised, notwithstanding whatever implications it has for Indian

While Nepal has chafed at unequal ties and India's regional hegemony in the past, the new Kalapani chill is an outcome of the 2015 blockade and Kathmandu straining at Indian micro-management of Nepali politics. You can see strains of anti-Madhes politics tying into anti-Indianism when a parliamentarian is insulted as a 'bharati ya cheli'. Nepal's resolve has been toughened because of closer ties with China and the possibilities of economic delink ing with India. But while Beijing affords a shield, its limitations in resolving discordant India-Nepal issues was made clear during the Kalapani dispute Successive Nepali governments have insisted the special relationship cannot exist on India's terms-a fair enough observation-but Kathmandu has relied on street protests and bitter ripostes (while back-channel talks continue) to convince India to its point of view. Only this time, India has hardened its stance

The eternal paradox of the special relationship is that while it allows freedom of movement across both countries



and other extraterritorial and economic benefits, it is also at the heart of Nepal's anxiety vis-a-vis its sovereignty (one only needs to look at our citizenship laws to be convinced of this). The Kalapani dispute has, as difficult as it is to realise, shown Kathmandu's limitations in convincing Delhi under Narendra Modi to come to the table, but the intransigence is also an example of what happens when foreign policy gets overtaken by politicians with partisan interests and harsh words from both sides. As our ambassador in Delhi has said, back-channel talks have continued with the Indian establishment unlike it has been made out in Kathmandu. Unfortunately, anti-Indianism is the flavour of the month, and the ambassador's comments will disappear under the flurry of nationalist rhetoric.

It has become increasingly clear that Nepal wants out of the 'special relationship', even if it hasn't come out and said it openly. It has stopped invoking the term even though India continuously does; there is certain posturing against Delhi from this government that is reminiscent of its electoral victory on the plank of nationalism, and Kathmandu has been blaming Delhi for not agreeing to talks. But if the special relationship is to go, what would be the outcome?

The first effect would be on the freedom of movement between the two countries. Nepalis will no longer be able to work or study in India without a visa and Indians cannot do so in Nepal. It will also mean the Gorkha regiments will have to be disbanded; the regiments serve in the Indian Army (and the British) on the basis of a tripartite agreement made as the British left India, and is at the heart of what makes India-Nepal ties special. It will mean an end to any existing preferential trade and economic relations between the two countries. And it will mean ending the fixed exchange rate system. The implications on the border aren't discussed here, but surely the effects will be felt more intensely by border citizens. And there will be the accompanying rethinking of security and diplomatic ties

All of this is perfectly okay—after all, this is how normal bilateral ties are conducted. The question before Kathmandu, therefore, is whether it is ready to escape the special relationship.

Nepal's predicament to ensure absolute sovereignty while retaining the status quo on other implications of the existent relationship is not new. The current issue isn't a one-off either; almost every decade since 1950 has seen serious strains that have slowly eroded away India's influence in Nepal. But there was more leeway in the past from both sides, and there were also better-placed interlocutors who could defuse tensions between the two. What has changed this time around is that the

Narendra Modi government does not have any legacy ties to Nepal, unlike past Indian governments. And, already bruised from its ill-placed policy actions in 2015, it seems determined to not reciprocate the way Kathmandu wants. There is also a hardening from the Indian gov ernment that was not noticed in the past: already there are indications India, too is thinking about a reset in ties. Indian commentators would earlier call for spe cific policy revisions while retaining the special relationship, but this time around, a series of articles have asked for existing ties to be reset. That leads one to think, perhaps Delhi too wants the

special relationship to be revisited.

It's easy to raise a storm on social media and say Nepali pride will allow us to face anything as long as our sovereignty is not compromised, but the truth of the matter is rather more delicate. Ask the nearly 750,000 Nepalis who have returned from India during the lockdown (and one knows there are more Nepalis in India still), or for whom the open border is a lifeline. But if Nepal is clear it wants to replace existing ties with a new normal, it has to think beyond immediate political gain and chest-thumping. It cannot expect Delhi to accede to the status quo while it argues against the special relationship. Anti-Indianism has fuelled Nepali politics for seven decades; it now needs to decide the future of bilateral ties.

# Spreading faster than the virus

The fake news industry has become all-pervading and overwhelmed cyberspace.

DEEPA SHARMA



Last April, I received a forwarded message from my friend. It was a TikTok video of a fruit vendor moving stuff in his cart, apparently a Muslim. An appalling statement followed: 'If I could, I would slaughter these type of people, they are the real virus'. This was from a well-educated person. In this case, as with many others in Nepal, the clip was found to be fake, clickbait media. But it spread with urgency; it was sharedirrespective of age, gender and education status—fairly quickly and without any cross-verification. This raises some pertinent questions. What is fake news and why does it occur? Why do we fall victim to it? And most importantly, how can we save ourselves from it?

Understanding the problem

One might argue that the cases of fake news in Nepal has not reached a point of concern; but if learning from our southern neighbour is anything to go by, we are on the way there. If this goes unchecked, the consequences will be severe. Without the need to present evidence to back up claims, the fake news industry has become all-pervading even putting lives at risk.

Fake news and doctored videos are a cause for concern globally. The term 'infodemic' has even been coined during this crisis, referring to an information pandemic. Creators of fake news have a huge incentive in its spread. Viewership increases, increasing advertisement revenue. Viral journalism is the new trend. Politicians have a lot to gain by endorsing fake news or creating some. Social media spreads opinions faster, whether substantiated or not. Party propaganda, jingoism and fascism, all these in some way may be attributed to a rise in the culture of fake news and its spread.

Another major but less discussed consequence occurs on health. Random things are advertised to reduce cancer,



random herbal products help you lose weight, and unverified processes help to tone your skin. These concern people directly and thus spread faster. Fake news has been used by many to validate their most improbable claims, like a debate on climate change, the impact of the fashion industry on climate change, the nature and cause of philanthropy and so forth. This has created confusion among people, and more importantly, diverted attention away from causes that needed serious action.

For the most part, social media has been a boon, connecting people, sharing ideas, connecting the dots, and promoting ideas and culture. With the advent of fake news, the line has become thinner. It is good that social media companies like Twitter have acknowledged the issue of fake news and promised to take action to counter it. Sadly, the effort has not been able to control the deluge of information

Generally, this has mostly impacted the older generation. They have a hard time believing that one can write 'news stories' without substance. At some point, we have all been offended by news stories shared by relatives on social media. Even millennials and Generation X fall victim to fake news of a more sophisticated nature. We classify news as fake or credible based on our experience,

our interest, our horizon of knowledge and prejudice. News items shared by friends and family are thought to be

So, how can we break this chain? How can we help ourselves and people who are victims to come out? How do we mitigate the impact? The answers are not that straightforward. The media is rightly touted as the fourth pillar of democracy, so curbing media activities comes with a consequence. Restricting the media would make matters worse, as it increases the risk of the media becoming controlled by those in power.

The most plausible action would be to increase literacy among consumers. We can run effective campaigns to make people aware of fake news, their sources, their impacts and their consequences. The government, media houses, journalists and regulating agencies should first acknowledge this as a serious problem and be on the same page to mitigate its impact. More importantly, friends and family, schools and non-governmental organisations have a bigger role to play in this. Media literacy—with critical thinking, reflection and ethical behaviour at its core—is a key part of what it means to be educated in today's world.

Random news sites Let's say that without restricting the

media, the government passes a law making it mandatory for any site claiming to be a news site to be registered. And it tells people to consume news only from those sites registered with the government (with some technique like a tick for validity). This way, news from sites other than validated ones will be considered as opinion. This will make the media more credible and reduce the chances of people consuming fake news from random news sites. Additionally, government vigilance against fake news will help.

The government should try to contact social media giants like Facebook and YouTube to discourage the circulation of fake news. WhatsApp itself turned to print media to make people aware of false news and information by printing ads in newspapers in India. The government should coordinate with Facebook and ask it to pull down fake news and information and disable fake accounts. Fake news has been there since the birth of mass media. But the impact has never been so severe as now with communications happening at lightning speed. If left untreated, this will make matters even worse. We better start acting now.

Sharma has an MBA from the School of Management at Tribhuvan University

# 'UN stands ready to help Nepal address Covid crisis and resulting challenges'

This crisis gives all countries an opportunity to steer their economy and development to a trajectory that is sustainable, gender-equal and carbon-neutral.

The Covid-19 pandemic has left an unprecedented socioeconomic impact globally and Nepal is no exception. Though the country witnessed a slow spread in the initial days, the contagion is increasing exponentially recently. On the other hand, the lockdown imposed to contain the spread of the coronavirus has shattered the economy, left many jobless, halted educational activities, and pushed poor communities deeper into poverty. In this backdrop, the Post had an email interview with Valerie Julliand, the United Nations resident coordinator in Nepal, to learn about how the UN has assessed the Nepal government's response to the pandemic and the steps it has taken towards assisting Nepal in the fight.

The number of Covid-19 patients is increasing exponentially, around four months after the first case was reported in January. Have you assessed what could be the future scenario? Do you believe in the speculations that Nepal has yet to see its worst days?

We are facing an unprecedented global crisis. Though global in nature, the effects of Covid-19 vary from country to country and subsequently so do the approaches to preparedness and response. Each country has its own unique circumstances and capacities and thus, an approach suitable to one country may not be applicable to another. In Nepal, the government has taken proactive and early measures to stem the spread of Covid-19.

Across the world, health systems have been placed under enormous pressure and this is no different for Nepal. The government has taken measured steps to strengthen its health care system to cope with the pandemic, including an extraordinary effort to increase laboratory capacities across the country.

The impact of the pandemic is felt by everyone, but not equally. Those already vulnerable and marginalised are hit hardest. The impacts of the global crisis and the measures to curb the outbreak are already having very real effects on the lives of people in Nepal. Livelihoods have been lost; remittances cut. There is a risk that progress made by the government and people of Nepal towards gender equality, social inclusion, poverty reduction and conserving the environment may be lost. For the UN, it is our responsibility to support the government in protecting these achievements, reaching the most vulnerable and ensuring that commitments to Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals are realised.

How satisfying is the present response from the Nepal government and its preparedness to respond to the pandemic?

ed to by a single entity or government alone. Because it impacts everyone,

everywhere, the pandemic also requires a global response, one which is composed of both global actions and individual country responses. At the national level, what is needed is decisive action from the federal, provincial and local governments, civil society, the private sector and the international community alike. This is a time for national and global solidarity.

Despite Nepal being a least developed country, having only recently recovered from a devastating earthquake, and being regularly impacted by floods, the country has been able to strengthen the health system and mitigate some of the short-term socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Nepal now has 21 fully equipped laboratories that can carry out PCR testing, a designated Covid-19 hospital in each province, nearly 150,000 quarantine beds and relief packages have been distributed to 1.3 million households out of the 1.7 million estimated to be in need. These are significant achievements. However, a great deal more remains to be done and the UN stands ready to support in these efforts.

The decision of the government to place the country in lockdown and to close the borders responds to the logic of slowing the spread of the virus and "flattening the curve". This is an effort to avoid over-burdening the health care system. This can potentially save more lives, even if a similar number of people get infected in the

Of course, the very measures put in place to stop the spread of the virus have significant social and economic impacts. People cannot go to work and as most workers are in the informal sector and many wage workers, without daily income, they are unable to sustain themselves or their families. Businesses are collapsing. Saving the lives of people, at the same time as working to protect the economy is a courageous decision, but requires an adequate and swift socio-economic response, alongside a scaled up emergency response, that is health-focused. The UN is here to help the government in this effort too.

How is the UN working together with the Nepal government in combating the pandemic? How is it assisting the government agencies to prepare for the difficult time?

The UN stands ready to help Nepal address the possible crisis and challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. This means that the UN and all its staff remain in the country to work on the preparedness and response efforts. We are using all available instruments, emergency financing, delivery of assistance including relief items, policy advice, and technical assistance to respond to the needs of the government and people of Nepal. Across all the UN agencies in Nepal, we are working to ensure that the response well-coordinated, and most importantly inclusive of those most vulnerable



Valerie Julliand, United Nations resident coordinator in Nepal.

and marginalised.

Our immediate and medium-term responses have focussed on Health System Support, and effort led by WHO Nepal, while also supporting a wider humanitarian response. A central role that the UN plays is in coordinating the humanitarian response efforts across UN Agencies, (I)NGOs, and development partners together with relevant line ministries.

There is widespread criticism that the government failed to conduct timely tests and questions have been raised over the quality of the testkits as well. What is the UN's assessment on this?

Testing allows the identification and isolation of those people who test positive. It is important that there is sufficient laboratory capacity to test all the samples that are taken. Over the last months, the government has scaled up this capacity from one to 21 laboratories that are able to perform the PCR test. This may need to be further expanded if the number of people requiring testing were to increase significantly. Testing capacity needs to match testing needs, which change

The uncertainty followed by the weeks of lockdown is leading to a socio-economic downfall. What could be the recovery plan for Nepal? What could be the UN support for

People have lost their livelihoods and sources of income. The economy as well as communities and families dependent on remittances from millions of Nepalis abroad are severely impacted and face an uncertain future. As has been the case globally, we also see an increase in gender-based violence (GBV) and a disruption in access to essential services, particularly affecting women. We can see that the crisis has hit those most vulnerable the hardest and made a segment of the population newly vul-

The government has taken measures to mitigate the immediate socio-economic impacts and we can see also from the budget for the next fiscal year that the government has made a real commitment to addressing the needs of those most severely impacted by the crisis. As the UN it is our responsibility to provide our support to the government in addressing these socio-economic issues in rightsbased, inclusive and gender-respon-

formulating the "UN Framework for the immediate socio-economic response to Covid-19", together with the government and other partners. Globally, the UN has identified five pillars for the response: i) protecting health services and ensuring continued delivery of essential services; ii) strengthening and expanding social protection systems; iii) protecting jobs, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, and informal sector workers through economic response and recovery programmes; iv) introducing a macro-economic response which works for the most vulnerable and strengthens multilateral responses and; v) promoting social cohesion and strengthening community resilience.

This crisis gives all countries an opportunity to steer their economy and development to a trajectory that is sustainable, gender-equal and carbon-neutral. What we should aim for is that we build back new and better. As the UN, we support the government in identifying ways to achieve this, offering our expertise and backing in ensuring that we jointly move towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Though there may be additional challenges, this should only motivate us to work harder to achieve the SDGs.

The government last week unveiled its policies and programmes for the new fiscal year. Is it right tracked to address the impact of the pandemic?

It is fundamental that policies, programmes, and budget allocations serve the most vulnerable people such as women, farmers, returnee migrant workers, and daily wage labourers. I can see that the government has made great efforts to put people at the center of response and recovery. In its upcoming budget, the government has rightly emphasised social protection, expansion of health insurance schemes, creating employment opportunities, servicing finances at subsidised interest rates, and providing tax exemptions or subsidies to micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), farmers, as well as to tourism enterprises.

Nepali communities, hugely affected by the pandemic, are likely to be hit hard by the rain-induced disaster this year too. With monsoon just a few weeks away, what role can the UN play in supporting the provinces and local governments?

As we approach the monsoon season, we are working together with the newly formed NDRRMA (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority) and government ministries, to jointly plan to prepare for, and respond to, flooding and landslides that may occur, taking Covid-19 into account. For now, this includes pre-positioning emergency relief supplies, lining up partners ready to deliver and developing plans government at all levels, if they The pandemic has weakened the health system, just while it has made women and children more vulnerable. How is the UN in Nepal looking at the scenario?

I would not say that the pandemic has weakened the health system. On the contrary, it has led the government to develop its laboratory capacity, to expand its hospital services, to improve its procedures. In addition to the 21 laboratories across the country now operational, essential guidelines have been formulated, health care workers have been trained and vast communication campaigns taken place. As a result, Nepal now has a more responsive health care system to meet this and future crises

There is, however, a need to intensify efforts and enhance collaboration across the actors to ensure a response that addresses the needs of those most

Violence against women and girls has increased globally and in Nepal; women find themselves isolated and locked in with their abusers. At the same time, lockdowns have meant that reaching out for help and accessing essential services have become even more difficult. The UN is working to ensure that women and all those impacted can still access services.

The pandemic has affected the entire world. Could underdeveloped countries like Nepal seek the support from developed nations as they themselves are hit hard? How can they generate the resources for economic revival?

Almost all countries in the world are impacted, including those who support the development efforts here in Nepal. But what this crisis calls for is solidarity and that solidarity can be seen also in Nepal and the way in which the development community has responded. The UN Development System has made significant efforts to galvanise these global solidarities across member states, institutions and citizens. Donor countries have been generous, but more support is

Many say that they cannot wait for things to go 'back to normal', but the normal that we had was not healthy, in so many ways it was destructive, to the planet and the people. And this is the opportunity of Nepal and all of us to change the future to be more sustainable and inclusive.

Do you agree attaining SDG targets has become more challenging now? What could be the post Covid-19 strategy for achieving the SDGs?

The UN is working to support all governments to prevent the crisis from derailing sustainable development efforts while laying out a vision for the affected to build a better Covid-19 are already reflected in the

## Lockdown is officially eased, with shops ...

>> Continued from page 1

"Each phase will last 21 days," Yadav told the Post. While announcing the relaxation measures, Minister

Khatiwada asked the public to take proper safety measures. Motorcycles should only carry one person while cars should only carry two, he said. All public vehicles, however, are prohibited for the time

being. According to Saroj Sitaula, general secretary of the Federation of Nepali National Transport Entrepreneurs, the government has ignored the woes of transport entrepreneurs and workers

"More than 1 million people in the transportation sector are jobless but the government has not come up with any package deal or relief yet," said Sitaula. While there has recently been a public outcry asking the

government to lift the lockdown, not everyone is happy with the government's new measures. Dr Baburam Marasini, former director of the

Epidemiology and Disease Control Division, said that any haphazard easing of the lockdown could cost the country dearly. "The government should have first prepared certain guidelines for all sectors and published them widely among the public," said Marasini. "The whole country will suffer if one infected person makes a small mistake.'

#### What is allowed to open (following public health safety standards)

All health services, including private clinics All kinds of agriculture and animal related businesses

Industries, businesses, shops and department stores for food stuffs All kinds of goods carrying services

Movements on foot and bicycle following safety measures and avoiding crowds

Management of solid waste Electricity, media and broadcasting, postal services

Banks and financial institutions, cooperatives and insurance services Nurseries and forest related businesses

Privately promoted development projects, including infrastructure and hydropower

Construction materials—extraction, collection, transportation and distribution of materials from rivers

Takeaway service from restaurants

Government offices, NGOs and private offices in two

Private vehicles (odd-even number basis) in Kathmandu

# Nepal Media Society objects to Press Council survey report

POST REPORT KATHMANDU. JUNE 11

Nepal Media Society, along with its print, radio and TV publisher and broadcaster members, has objected to the recent survey report on the trustworthiness of media prepared by the Press

The society has demanded that the council retract the report and apologise, said Subha Shanker Kandel, chair of the umbrella organisation of mainstream

This report is replete with false information and smells of malintention, said Kandel. That is why it should be retracted immediately and the Press Council needs to apologise for spreading false information about Nepali media, he added. He said the society has concluded that the so-called report published during the coronavirus pandemic is unscientific and ludicrous.

The society said that the report and the survey completely disregard research norms and attack the principle of rule of law and independent journalism. That the

council conducted the said survey, prepared a report and submitted it to itself is beyond a joke, it said.

The society said that more than 20,000 media outlets are currently in operation in the country and they have millions of consumers at home and abroad. Surveying just 173 people and publishing results is an attempt to undermine Nepali media, said the statement.

It has also demanded that the Media Council Bill, which has already been approved by the Upper House, be passed soon with amendment so that it displaces organisations such as the Press Council. The society said that the council did not even seek permission from the media outlets surveyed, and went about the process the way it wanted to.

It has urged all mediapersons to become aware that the Federation of Nepali Journalists has turned into a subordinate body of the council, and called on the Press Council to stop pre-mediated attacks on mainstream media outlets. The society condemns the council's report and calls on it to rectify its errors in the future, says the

## Youth-led protests against the government's handling of Covid-19 ...

But the protest in Kathmandu was met with force from

Protestors had once again gathered near the prime minister's residence in Baluwatar at 11 am but they were visibly larger in number. Individuals had lined both sides of the street, wearing masks and holding up placards. However, an hour or so into the protest, the police asked them to disperse, as the large number of people made it impossible to maintain physical distance.

According to the Deputy Superintendent Rajkumar KC, police personnel asked protesters to clear the area after the gathered crowd grew larger and protesters were unable to follow physical distancing measures.

"Some protesters, however, started becoming more aggressive so we pushed them back towards the police headquarters in Naxal, fired tear gas shells and used water cannons to disperse the youths," KC told the Post.

None of the protesters, however, resorted to physical violence, with most of the police's alleged aggression seeming to refer to verbal curses directed at the Oli government. Many of the youths participating in the protest told the Post that they had decided to join the protest after listening to Prime Minister Oli's response to lawmakers in Parliament on Wednesday.

In response to questions from parliamentarians on Wednesday, Oli had chosen to repeat misinformation regarding the immune system of Nepalis while ignoring questions about financial transparency.

There has been much criticism of the Oli government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, with many pointing to



Over a thousand people gathered near Bhatbhateni in Kathmandu on Thursday for a peaceful protest which was organised by youths through different social media platforms.

its failure to adequately utilise the lockdown to prepare for the pandemic. Public anger has begun to spill out onto the streets, as business people from New Road too took to the streets on Wednesday, protesting the prolonged lockdown. A nationwide lockdown has been in place since

A Cabinet meeting on Wednesday, however, decided to relax lockdown in three stages on the recommendation of the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre, allowing private

transport on an odd-even basis and shops to open up.

According to Deputy Inspector General Niraj Bahadur Shahi, spokesperson for the Nepal Police, the protesters are being dispersed not because of their complaints against the government, which is their right, but because they are not following physical distancing measures in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The ongoing protests have increased the risk of Covid-19 infection not only to the public but also to security personnel working in the field under high risk to ensure public safety," Shahi told the Post. "We are not stopping people from protesting but protesting in a restricted zone with a

mass gathering is wrong." In Kathmandu, the protestors were well beyond the restricted zone but had difficulties in ensuring physical distance, partly due to the police's kettling tactic, where

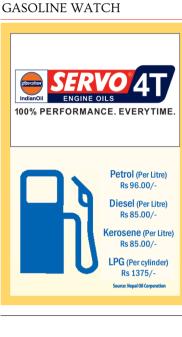
they forced the protesters into a small area by barricading both ends of the protest site. The Home Ministry, in response to the ongoing protests, issued a press release late Thursday, warning of strict action against protesters. The ministry said that its atten-

tion had been drawn to large public gatherings "in the name of peaceful sit-ins". "We remind everyone about the provision allowing the chief district officer to impose a fine of Rs 100-600 and a jail term of one-six months on persons violating the lockdown or obstructing works related to containing the pandemic, as

per Clause 3 of the Infectious Disease Act 1964," said the statement, issued by Joint-secretary Kedar Nath Sharma of the Home Ministry. Organisers said that larger protests have been planned for Saturday across the country.

### **FOREX** US Dollar Furo Pound Sterling Japanese Yen Chinese Yuan 33.10 Qatari Riyal Malaysian Ringit Saudi Arab Rival Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Rank

BULLION	PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold	Rs 89,600
Silver	Rs 950
	SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA



# Lockdown-hit tea farmers complain about low prices for green leaves

The tea factories have fixed the price at Rs20 to Rs30 per kg for this year.

RIPLAV BHATTARAI

Small tea growers in the eastern hill district of Ilam say the price set by tea factories for green leaves is not enough to cover their costs. The tea factories have fixed the price at Rs20 to Rs30 per kg for this year, depending on the

Tea farmers hit by the lockdown said factory owners fixed the price of green tea leaves late in the season due to the government's stay-at-home

is too low for the first flush which is regarded as quality leaves and is worth more, they said. The price is normally fixed in mid-March.

They eventually set the rate, but it

For their part, tea factory owners say it will be difficult to export tea to India which is their main market as the lockdown has affected cross-border trade and led to labour shortages.

The government had allowed tea estates to operate during the lockdown by enforcing social distancing rules and safety protocols for workers while plucking tea leaves.

As tea exports have come to a stop, factory owners have not been able to pay farmers for their tea leaves on a

Farmers of Suryodaya Municipality, which is a large tea producer, have appealed to the city administration to prevail on the tea factories to raise the price of green tea leaves.

The farmers complained that the municipality had set a minimum price of Rs40 per kg and encouraged them to produce quality tea. Several rounds



Women pick tea at a tea garden in Kanyam, Ilam.

of talks have been held between the stakeholders over the price, but they were inconclusive.

"We have not been able to decide how to sell our tea harvest this time,' said Dilliram Shrestha, vice-chairman of the Sunrise Tea Producers' Association. "We are farmers too, and we know that the price will not even cover our costs. But there is no situation to fix a high price," he said.

Shrestha said that no tea had been exported through the Kakarbhitta border point. Some shipments have been sent through the Indian state of Bihar, but the freight charges are too high. Stating that Nepali tea had hurt sales of Darjeeling tea, the factories

there have been disrupting production for a few years, leading to a slowdown in imports.

Most factories in Ilam have tonnes of orthodox tea piled up in their warehouses. Factory owners say that it has become difficult to pay the farmers as they have more than 1 million kg of unsold stocks of finished tea. They added that they can't afford to pay the break-even price to farmers.

Tea farmers have been most severely hit by the coronavirus as the lockdown prevented regular plucking of tea leaves, their payments were held up and prices have fallen.

Picking tea leaves entails many expenses, and pricey fertiliser and

medicine adds to the production costs. Farmers have not been able to recover their investment as the price of green tea leaves has dropped steeply.

"In this situation, the state should create an environment for the tea sector so that farmers can continue growing tea," said Bal Kumar Katuwal of Arubote, Suryodaya Municipality.

The farmers say there is no alternative to planting maize in their tea gardens as the crisis has worsened, and they have lost their livelihoods.

Tea industry insiders are worried that their export markets could be wiped out by the global coronavirus pandemic which would create a longterm problem.

Of the 5.5 million kg of orthodox tea produced annually in Nepal, 80 percent is shipped to markets in India, and 10 percent goes to Western

The domestic market accounts for 10 percent of sales, and even that has evaporated as a result of the virus lockdown.

The factories that used to sell leaves at a good price in the domestic market have not been able to do anything besides processing tea and storing it

in their warehouses. Tea entrepreneurs say the industry is in crisis as finished tea only fetches IRs40-260 per kg in the Kolkata market in India.

The tea sector has an annual turnover of Rs4.5 billion and 20,000 farmers are engaged in commercial production.

The sector provides 100,000 jobs. In Ilam alone, there are several small and large factories that process tea.

## Bombardier to cut up to 600 jobs in Northern Ireland

REUTERS

Planemaker Bombardier Inc is to cut up to 600 jobs in its Northern Ireland operations, it said on Thursday, as part of plans announced last week to cut 2,500 jobs or about 11 percent of the workforce in its global aviation unit.

The Unite union said it had been informed of plans to cut 600 positions. The Canadian firm, which produces wings for Airbus's A220 jet in Belfast, is the largest high-tech

manufacturer in Northern Ireland

with a workforce of around 3,500. "We deeply regret the impact this will have on our workforce and their families, but it is crucial that we resize our business in line with market realities in these unprecedented circumstances," Bombardier said in a statement.

The cuts will allow the firm to "align with market demand for the remainder of this year and through 2021," it said.

It said it would explore opportunities to mitigate the number of redundancies during a 90-day consultation

Bombardier issued a statement announcing a cut of 400 core workers, but a spokeswoman clarified that it was would "also be releasing members of our complementary labour force gradually over the coming months, of which we have

Trade union Unite said it understood 600 jobs would be lost in a move that would have "a devastating impact across the board ... in the face of mounting threats to the aerospace sector as a whole.

## Fifty drivers fight for one order': Southeast Asia gig economy slammed by virus



Online motorbike taxi drivers use their smartphones while waiting for customers in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Wednesday.

Ride-hailing firms

were operating at a

before the pandemic.

Unions representing Gojek and

larger Singaporean rival Grab,

Southeast Asia's most highly valued

startup at \$14 billion, say thousands of

drivers are in the same situation,

especially in Indonesia, both firms'

Their plight threatens a core prom-

ise of both companies: that they can

improve the lives of tens of millions

of people across Southeast Asia even

as they provide big paydays for their

blue-chip corporate and financial

Southeast Asian governments have

The two firms told Reuters they are

warned millions could end up jobless

supporting drivers with measures

ranging from food packages and

vouchers to low-interest bank loans

But the crisis has also led them to

Doubts have also crept up about the

ride-hailing model globally and on

whether investors will continue

pumping in massive funds into the

Even before the pandemic, Grab and

Gojek-like Uber and Lyft in the

United States and other ride-hailing

firms around the world-were operat-

warned the company may potentially

Grab co-founder Tan Hooi Ling has

cut the subsidies that have fuelled

as a result of the outbreak.

and car rental rebates.

their growth.

ing at a steep loss.

around the world

steep loss even

largest market.

**REUTERS** SINGAPORE/JAKARTA, JUNE 11

Indonesian motorcycle taxi driver Aji

chain-smokes and checks his smartphone constantly while waiting for orders by the roadside in downtown Jakarta on a hot June morning, but is staring at the prospect of another fruitless day. Before the coronavirus outbreak

hit, the 35-year-old father of four would ferry at least 20 passengers for a daily income of between \$13 and \$20 as a driver for homegrown ride-hailing But when transportation services

halted under a city lockdown, Aji considered it a good day if he got more than two food delivery orders, which pay him \$0.70 each time. On some days, he has had none. Even with restrictions eased this week, he is struggling to feed his family.

"The situation is that there are many drivers but orders are few," he said, asking to be identified only by his first name.

Eleven drivers for Gojek and Grab, which is backed by SoftBank Group, in Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand told Reuters they've similarly struggled, with income slashed by more than half as the pandemic batters Southeast Asia.

And, disappointingly, for both drivers and the companies, an increase in food deliveries-forecast as a major growth area for both firms-has come nowhere near compensating for the losses in transport.

Even in Vietnam, seen as a recovery success story, drivers are reeling.

"The pandemic may cost me and many colleagues our vehicles, which we had bought using borrowed money," said Grab car driver Tung in Hanoi, fearing that lenders may repossess the vehicles.

Both companies still have plenty of cash. One source with knowledge of the matter said Grab has \$3 billion in reserves. Sources familiar with Gojek's finances said it was finalising an over \$3 billion investment round at a \$10 billion valuation; Facebook and Paypal announced investments in Gojek's fintech arm just last week, and it also counts Google and Tencent among its backers. Each has avoided major layoffs so

far, though Grab is implementing voluntary unpaid leave for staff and Gojek is reviewing its services. In the United States, Uber, whose Southeast Asia business was bought by Grab, said it would cut 23 percent of its "Transport has fallen off a cliff,

food has held steady, while logistics went through the roof and online payments are high... so having a portfolio Operating Officer Hans Patuwo. "If we were only a transport company, I'd be quite bowled over.

Executives and investors at both firms point to the resurgence of orders at Chinese ride-hailing company Didi Chuxing as cause for optimism.

"The rate of recovery will be mostly dependent on when government lockdowns end," said Grab Operations Managing Director Russell Cohen, noting Grab's transport business had previously been profitable in several

The crisis has revived speculation among investors about a merger of the two firms, which sources say has been discussed in early 2020, but not led to serious talks.

Gojek said any reports of a merger are inaccurate. A Grab spokesman declined to comment.

Grab and Gojek have long touted the fast-growing food delivery industry as a big opportunity. But with platforms taking only a 20 percent-30 percent commission that is shared with drivers, margins are slim. And growth did not materialise in every market during the lockdowns.

A restaurant chain CEO in Jakarta said food delivery had not picked up in Southeast Asia's largest economy due to people cooking more at home and as most orders traditionally consisted of lunches for office workers, who are now at home.

Aji described food delivery in Indonesia for Gojek as a "fight", with "sometimes 50 drivers for one order", with Grab Vietnam drivers recounting similar experiences.

Even in Thailand, where orders jumped for both Grab and Gojek, profitability remains distant.

According to an April interview with local media by then Grab Thailand chief Tarin Thaniyavarn, food delivery was fast-growing but loss-making during the pandemic, with costs mounting and competition

Tarin said Grab Thailand lost more than \$22 million in 2018, while rapid growth led to losses nearly doubling "Imagine last year's loss-making

business growing rapidly in a short period of time, while the business that used to make profits for us is nearly gone," he said.

## Global new clean energy investment totalled \$282 billion last year: Research

**REUTERS** LONDON, JUNE 11

Global investment in new clean energy capacity rose 1 percent last year to \$282.2 billion, research by UNEP, Bloomberg New Energy Finance and the Frankfurt School-UNEP Collaborating Centre showed on Wednesday.

The United States invested \$55.5 billion in 2019, up 28 percent from the year before as onshore wind developers rushed to take advantage of tax credits before their expected expiry, the report said.

Europe financed \$54.6 billion, down 7 percent from 2018.

China's investment fell to its lowest level since 2013 at \$83.4 billion due to support for solar power. More investment went into renewa-

bles last year than fossil fuel and nuclear technologies, the report said. Globally, new coal-fired generation

is estimated to have had \$37 billion of investment last year; new gas-fired generation had \$47 billion and \$15 billion was invested in new nuclear generation.

In terms of capacity, 184 gigawatts (GW) of new clean energy was added last year, up 12 percent from 2018.

"The all-in cost of electricity continues to fall for wind and solar, thanks to technology improvements, economies of scale and fierce competition in auctions," the report said.

"Costs for electricity from new solar photovoltaic plants in the second half of 2019 were 83 percent lower than a decade earlier," it added.

## World Bank approves \$450 million project to help Nepal improve roads and fight Covid crisis

KATHMANDU, JUNE 11

The World Bank on Thursday approved a \$450 million project to help Nepal improve its roads and set the course for post-Covid-19 economic recovery through greater cross-border trade, more jobs especially for women, and better road safety.

"In the context of Covid-19, protecting people's lives is the priority, and giving a fillip to economic recovery is equally urgent," said Faris Hadad-Zervos, the World Bank Country Manager for Nepal.

' support will pave the way Nepal's Covid-19 recovery by making roads safer and more efficient while helping move people and goods, creating jobs, and generating demand for local products and services.' The Nepal Strategic

Connectivity and Trade Improvement Project will enhance regional road connectivity by improving the Nagdhunga-Naubise-Mugling road and upgrading the Kamala-Dhalkebar-Pathlaiya road. Both are crucial to Nepal's connectivity and trade with India and other countries.

The project will also enhance infrastructure, facilities, and sanitation at border crossing points to ease trade constraints and spur agricultural exports, the bank a statement.

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the project will support better screening of goods and people at border facili-

ties and develop guidance for special working arrangements, such as safe distancing and remote working.

The project will strengthen the National Road Safety Council and the Department of Roads and support periodic maintenance of high-traffic roads within the Strategic Road Network. It also includes a contingency emergency response component to reallocate project funds to support emergency response and recovery "The project will reduce the time

and cost of moving goods and boost Nepal's trade, which accounts for nomic output," said Sri Kumar Tadimalla, the project task team leader and senior transport specialist at the World Bank.

"Equally importantly, the project includes best practices in safety, climate resilience, road asset management, gender equality, social inclusion and citizen engagement, which the federal, provincial and local governments can take on."

The project is well-aligned with the past and ongoing efforts of Nepal and its regional partners to achieve the full potential for trade in the eastern sub-region of South Asia.

It is a part of the World Bank's Eastern Corridor Connectivity Program, which since 2013, has financed a continually evolving regional programme to improve connectivity and trade in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal.



A shopkeeper arranges clothes outside his shop in Kathmandu.

POST PHOTO: KABIN ADHIKAR

# Latin America logs 70,000 Covid-19 deaths

Reopening gathers pace in the United States, with Miami allowing people onto its beaches first time in three months.



APY
Workers dressed in protective gear walk past people wearing face masks as a measure to help curb the spread of Covid-19 in Quito, Ecuador.

#### AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SAO PAULO JUNE 11

More than 70,000 people have died from coronavirus in Latin America as the pandemic sweeps through the region, putting growing pressure on an already stretched healthcare system

As the number of cases in the United States soared past two million, Central and South America has emerged as the new hotspot for a disease that has infected 7.4 million people around the globe. More than 415,000 of them have died.

In Brazil, which accounts for well over half of the deaths in the region, hospitals were struggling to cope with the influx of sick and dying. "Nursing was always an overworked profession, and this pandemic has just made things worse," nurse Hans Bossan told AFP

"Nurses deal directly with patients, with the virus, we're on the front lines of the war," said Bossan, who is working 72 hours a week in three different jobs.

Nurses have been hit particularly hard as Brazil has rocketed up the global charts to claim an unwanted third spot in the number of deaths, behind the United States and Britain.

Around 18,000 nurses there have been infected with Covid-19, and at least 181 have died—among the highest numbers in the world, according to the International Council of Nurses.

Critics of Brazil's populist President

# The economic pain of the pandemic is being felt around the world.

Jair Bolsonaro say the epidemic has been worsened by a haphazard response that has seen the president repeatedly downplay the severity of the disease.

He has agitated against the lockdowns that scientists say are necessary to tamp down the infection, insisting the economic cost is too high. On Wednesday, and with infection rates still soaring, the economic capital Sao Paulo began reopening shops.

Malls were set to reopen in a slew of other cities on Thursday, the day before Brazilians celebrate Valentine's Day.

Reopening also gathered pace in the United States on Wednesday, with tourism-dependent Miami allowing people onto its beaches for the first time in three months.

"I almost started crying as soon as I came out onto the beach," said travel agent Julie Isaacson.

The moves come despite the US infection tally tipping past the two million mark. Almost 113,000 Americans have died.

Although they are now easing, shutdowns across the country have taken their toll on the economy. Federal Reserve chief Jerome

Powell said despite a rebound expected next year, the longer-term outlook remains highly uncertain.

The economic pain of the pandemic is being felt around the world.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) warned the global economy is on course to contract by at least six percent this year.

By the end of next year, the loss of income should surpass that of "any previous recession over the last 100 years outside wartime," the forecast warned

The European Union ramped up efforts to dig itself out of the economic hole in which is languishing, announcing it hoped to open its borders to foreigners in July.

Greece, whose economy depends heavily on tourism, has already announced it will reopen its skies from June 15 to a list of countries including non-EU states such as Australia, China and South Korea.

Austria and Germany said they were easing travel restrictions, though Germany extended a warning against travel outside the EU until August 31.

In Spain, where more than 27,000 people have died from Covid-19, La Liga soccer championships are set to resume on Thursday for the first time in three months.

In Britain, which has Europe's highest death toll, a former top government adviser said half of those deaths could have been avoided if lockdown had been imposed just a week earlier.

# Floyd's brother decries 'a modern-day lynching' in testimony to Congress



George Floyd's brother, Philonise Floyd speaks during the House Judiciary Committee hearing on Policing Practices and Law Enforcement Accountability at the US Capitol in Washington.

FIITEDS

WASHINGTON, JUNE 11

George Floyd's younger brother took his grief to the US Congress on Wednesday with an impassioned plea that lawmakers not let his brother's death be in vain, lamenting that he "didn't deserve to die over \$20" in a what he called a lynching.

The House of Representatives Judiciary Committee held the first congressional hearing to examine racial injustice and police brutality following George Floyd's May 25 death after a Minneapolis policeman knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes. His death prompted a wave of protests in US cities and abroad.

"They lynched my brother. That was a modern-day lynching in broad daylight," Philonise Floyd, 42, of Missouri City, Texas, near Houston, told the committee, his voice breaking with emotion.

"His life mattered. All our lives matter. Black lives matter," he added, wiping away tears.

The Democratic-led House is moving forward with sweeping reform legislation that could come to a vote by July 4, while Senate Republicans are crafting a rival plan.

George Floyd, a 46-year-old Houston

native who had worked security at nightclubs, was unarmed when taken into custody outside a market where an employee had reported that a man matching his description tried to pay for cigarettes with a counterfeit bill.

"George wasn't hurting anyone that

day. He didn't deserve to die over \$20. I'm asking you, is that what a black man's worth? \$20? This is 2020. Enough is enough," his brother said. "It is on you to make sure his death is not in vain."

He buried his brother on Tuesday and described how they had not been able to say goodbye.

"I'm here to ask you to make it stop. Stop the pain," Philonise Floyd testified. "George called for help and he was ignored. Please listen to the call I'm making to you now, to the calls of our family and the calls ringing on the streets of all the world."

It is unclear whether Democrats and Republicans will be able to overcome partisan differences to pass legislation that President Donald Trump would be willing to sign.

Several Republicans pledged cooperation and voiced support for a pivotal provision that would scale back so-called qualified immunity protections that shield police from lawsuits by people suing for damages.

## **BRIEFING**

## Monsoon rains spread over a third of India

MUMBAI: Annual monsoon rains key to farm output and economic growth have covered more than a third of India and could spread further into its eastern and western regions this week, the weather office said on Thursday. The rains are critical for farming which makes up about 15 percent of Asia's third-biggest economy at a size of nearly \$2 trillion, since about 55 percent of arable land in the south Asian nation is rain-fed. 'Conditions are becoming favourable for further advance of southwest monsoon into more parts of the central Arabian Sea and Maharashtra, the India Meteorological Department said in a statement. In the next 48 hours, the monsoon would also advance into some more parts of the eastern states of Odisha and West Bengal, it added.

## Rowling says she is survivor of sexual assault

LONDON: "Harry Potter" author JK Rowling has revealed she is a survivor of domestic abuse and sexual assault. The celebrated British writer said in a blog post that she was disclosing the information to give context to her controversial past comments about transgender women. "This isn't an easy piece to write," Rowling said in a 3,695-word essay on gender identity and her own troubled past. "I've been in the public eye now for over twenty years and have never talked publicly about being a domestic abuse and sexual assault survivor," Rowling wrote. "This isn't because I'm ashamed those things happened to me, but because they're traumatic to revisit and remember."

## Only Hong Kong can solve unrest, UK foreign minister says

**LONDON**: The British government has said any solution to the unrest in Hong Kong must come from the former colony itself and not from Beijing, and it urged China to reconsider a new security law that has sparked renewed protests Britain, along with the United States, Australia and Canada, has criticised China for the new law. saving it would breach the 1984 Sino-British agreement on Hong Kong and threaten its freedoms. China has said its decisions on national security in Hong Kong were its own affair and that Britain's link to the territory stemmed from "aggressive colonization and unequal treaties". (AGENCIES)

## Russia rolls out first approved Covid-19 drug as infections pass 500,000

MOSCOW, JUNE 11

Russia on Thursday rolled out a drug approved to treat patients suffering from the novel coronavirus, its state financial backer said, as the number of infections there surpassed half a million

The first deliveries of the new antiviral drug, registered under the name Avifavir, were made to some hospitals and clinics across the country, Russia's RDIF sovereign wealth fund said in a press release. RDIF has a 50 percent share in a joint venture with the drug's manufacturer ChemRar that runs the trials.

The health ministry gave its approval for the drug's use under a special accelerated process while clinical trials, held over a shorter period and with fewer people than many other countries, were still underway.

There is currently no vaccine for Covid-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, and human trials of several existing antiviral drugs have yet to show efficacy.

yet to show efficacy.

RDIF chief Kirill Dmitriev last

week told Reuters the plan was for ChemRar to manufacture enough of the drug to treat around 60,000 people a month. Dmitriev on Thursday said more than 10 countries had made requests for Avifavir supplies.

Negotiations were underway to supply the drug to almost all of Russia's regions, with seven of its more than 80 regions receiving Thursday's initial deliveries, Dmitriev added.

With 502,436 cases, Russia has the third highest number of infections in the world after Brazil and the United States, but has a relatively low official death toll of 6,532—something that has been the focus of debate.

The Moscow health department on Wednesday raised its death toll for the month of May, citing changes in the way it determines the cause of death for patients suffering from other health problems.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Thursday denied there was anything untoward with Russia's official coronavirus death data after the World Health Organisation said this week that Russia's low death rate was "difficult to understand".



An auto rickshaw drives through a road during a heavy downpour in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Thursday.

AF

## Outbreak quashed, China launches test lab spending spree

REUTERS

BEIJING, JUNE 11
China is but

China is building hundreds of testing laboratories and stocking up on tests to ramp up screening for the coronavirus, even in healthy people, having all-but stamped out local transmission of the disease.

China is looking to make testing universal, available in every corner of the mainland.

Procurement documents and official notices show it is sharply expanding its testing capability, already the world's largest, extending it even to rural health facilities as it looks to revive the economy after an unprecedented plunge in the first quarter.

On Monday, the National Health Commission said it would look to "normalize" nucleic acid testing.

"If they're willing to be checked, check them all," said the policy notice.

Life is increasingly returning to normal in China, where the outbreak first emerged in the city of Wuhan late last year.



Residents line up for nucleic acid testings at a residential compound in Wuhan, the Chinese city hit hardest by the coronavirus outbreak, Hubei province, last month.

Last month, Wuhan tested around 6 million people over 10 days at a cost of 900 million yuan (\$127 million), an initiative some experts said largely had the benefit of boosting confidence.

Unlike many countries, tests are widely available in China. Ben Cowling, an infectious disease specialist at Hong Kong University, said he expects many organizations in China

to arrange regular screenings of staff.
"Testing is expensive, but perhaps
not as expensive in China because the
reagents and machines tend to be pro-

"It's also not as expensive as local or city-wide lockdowns might be, if outbreaks became larger before being identified."

duced in China," he said.

Hundreds of bidding documents issued by hospitals and centres for disease control (CDC) in every province since the beginning of May list requirements for new testing labs, painting a picture of a fast-paced national program.

The most expensive items are polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machines, a key testing component documents show can cost up to \$99,000.

Chinese organizations bought 257 PCR laboratories in the last 30 days, according to listings on procurement platform Jianyu360, compared with an average of 21 per month in the previous 12 months.

Those figures represent a fraction of the total, as not all projects are

detailed in public procurements.

For over two weeks after the virus was identified in January, no hospitals in Wuhan - a city of 11 million - were equipped to conduct tests, meaning no new cases were confirmed until days before the city's lockdown.

Most of the new labs are being

installed in hospitals, and most cost between 100,000 and 3 million yuan (\$15,000-\$420,000). Some institutions require all equipment to be produced within China, though others call for specific foreign-made gear, including PCRs made by Switzerland's Roche Holding AG and US-based Bio-Rad Laboratories Inc.

China has said it can produce 5 million test kits a day, and provincial governments have imposed strict price controls on manufacturers.

Hubei province, the epicentre of the outbreak, compels test makers to cut prices for bulk orders, driving them as low as 16.78 yuan for a nucleic acid test, and 12.9 yuan for an antibody-based kit, according to figures released on May 9.

FOOD & TRAVEL

# Yangben: The wild delicacy of the Limbus

How the yangben became crucial to Limbu cuisine and how you can make it at home.

#### **PRASHANTA KHANAL**

he Limbus, an indigenous people from Nepal's eastern hills, have interesting and unique food traditions. Wild edible lichen, known as yangben, is the community's signature speciality. Limbus cook yangben with meat, especially pork, to make a variety of dishes. And one of the most loved delicacies is yangben-faksa, pork with lichen. Another popular dish is blood sausage, known as sargemba or sargyangma, which is made by adding lichen to minced meat or innards.

Yangben doesn't have any flavour or aroma on its own but when cooked with fatty pork, it absorbs the fat and lends a delicious earthy flavour to the dish. Pork and yangben marry well together.

Because of the yangben's popularity, neighbouring Rai and other communities have also adopted yangben in their food culture. But from where and how did the lichen become part of traditional Limbu food? Let's find out.

As with the kinema (fermented soybeans) and alcohol drinking, the history of lichen consumption in Nepal probably has its origins in current southern China's Yunnan region. Limbus' ancestors came to Nepal's eastern hills from Yunnan via Northern Burma and Assam, according to historians. According to the book 'Kirat History and Culture', written by Imanshing Chemjong, the Limbus came to eastern Nepal around the seventh century and joined a related group called Kirats who came to the region much earlier.

Lichen is considered ancient food in Yunnan, and in Nepal only the Limbus have traditionally consumed lichen even though it's widely available across the country's hills and mountains. Based on this observation, it is only plausible that Limbus might have brought the practice of eating lichen from the Yunnan region.

Here's another example that supports the claim that the practice of eating lichen in Nepal might have come from the north-east: In 1871, the British Medical Officer John Anderson encountered lichen in a local market of Northern Burma, next to Yunnan, during his expedition from Calcutta to Western Yunnan. 'A dried, almost black lichen,' he reported, 'is sold commonly as an article of food, and mushrooms are much run after.'

People in many parts of the world-Northern Europe, Siberia, North America, Central Asia, and South-East Asia-also



consume lichen as food. In India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, people use a lichen known as kalpasi or patthar ka phool to flavour biryani and meat stews.

There's another hypothesis that as with many other wild vegetables, the practice of eating lichen might have come from humans' survival instinct. People had to make use of whatever ingredients grew around them.

Lichen is a composite organism made up of symbiotic relations of different species of algae, cyanobacteria, and fungi. Limbu and Rai communities consume three lichen species: Everniastrum cirrhatum, Everniastrum nepalense, and Parmotrema cetratum. These filamentous or small leaf-like lichens grow on old chestnut, rhododendron and alder trees.

The process of making yangben is easy. It starts with foraging, then the collected yangben is boiled in water with firewood ash for a few hours. When boiled with ash, yangben turns from light greenish-white to dark-brown. Alkaline ash is used because it removes the lichen's toxicity, reduces bitterness and makes it tender. There are a few other Nepali communities that also use alkali: Chepangs use firewood ash to eliminate the toxicity and bitterness of wild tubers, and in Mustang, people use naturally found alkaline salt to tenderize dried greens.

Anyway, back to the yangben. After the yangben turns dark-brown, it is then washed with cold water several times until the water runs clean, then the yang-

Yangben doesn't have any flavour on its own but with pork, it lends a delicious earthy flavour.

ben is sun-dried and stored for later use. In Nepal, people also use lichens to make dyes and for ritual and medicinal purposes. However, the availability of the traditional lichen is declining, says Shyam Sunuwar, owner of a Sabi-Siwani Sekuwa Ghar in Talchikhel, Lalitpur. He sources yangben from Panchthar and Ramechhap, and processes and sells it in his restaurant.

"In the past, only Limbus used to eat yangben," he says. "But now other communities have started consuming it, and that has led to overharvesting." There are others who believe that the dust from vehicles that ply the roads built through rural forests have also barred the lichen from flourishing.

This just adds to the fact that the yangben is a prized delicacy among the Limbus. Traditionally, they have been used to gift it to relatives as a koseli. It is a most sought-out item by Limbu and Rai communities living abroad. Outside the eastern hills, yangben is only available in



areas with a large diaspora of Limbu-Rai communities such as Itahari and Dharan In Kathmandu valley, you can find yang ben in the Talchikhel-Nakhipot area, in pork shops and groceries run by Limbus.

As said earlier, yangben is almost always cooked with meat and innards of local black pig, which is popularly known outside the eastern region as Dharane kalo sungur. Limbus and Kirats revere this indigenous variety of pig meat and the meat is even offered to their ancestral deities. No festival or special occasion is complete without it.

"Yangben has high-fibre content and doesn't easily digest, and this helps in reducing the pork's fat absorption in the body," says food technologist Huma Bokkhim. "That's probably one of the reasons why lichen is cooked with pork. In terms of nutrition, it has many miner als," she adds.

Limbus usually prepare yangben during the festivals of Chasok Tongnam, Sisekpa Tongnam, Kokphewa Tongnam, Dashain and Tihar. "Yangben gives us Limbus our cultural identity," anthropologist Dambar Chemjong.

Yangben-faksa, a dish made from pork (including a generous layer of fat and skin), pig's blood, and lichen, is one of the beloved Limbu delicacies. Fak-sa in the Limbu language means pig's meat. Sa or sya in many languages in Nepal means meat. Yangbenfaksa can be eaten with rice and selroti, and pairs well with tongba or thi (raksi)—a local alcohol of the Limbus

#### Below is the recipe of yangben-faksa: **Ingredients:**

- 1 kg local black pig's meat (kalo sungur ko masu), cut into bite-sized pieces
- A fistful of yangben
- 1 cup pig's blood
- 5-6 garlic cloves
- thumb-size slice of ginger teaspoon cumin seeds
- teaspoon coriander seeds
- 1-2 green or dried red chillies teaspoon turmeric powder
- Salt to taste

#### **Directions:**

- First, make a spice paste by grinding together garlic, ginger, cumin seed, coriander seed and chilies
- Soak a fistful of yangben in hot water for about five minutes. Drain the soaked yangben, and add a cup of pig blood, half of the spice paste, and sprinkle some salt. Mix them together.
- Heat one or two tablespoons of vegetable oil in a karai or cooking pan over medium-high heat. Add pork pieces with fatty skin and then turmeric powder. Cook until the fat melts and the meat browns lightly, until the meat is almost cooked. Add salt and the remaining spice paste, and cook for a few more minutes.
- Finally, add the yangben-pig blood mixture. Then mix and cook with the lid on, stirring occasionally until the meat is fully cooked. The blood will help to keep the curry moist; it also imparts a rich earthy creamy flavour to the curry.





पाठकको फेरिंदो जीवनशैलीसँऔ "साप्ताहिक"को फेरिंदो डिजिटल स्वरूप । अब हरेक दिन कला-मनोरञ्जन विज्ञान-प्रविधि, स्वास्थ्य, र जीवनशैलीसम्बन्धी रिपोर्टिङ, फिचर, प्रोफाइल र अन्तर्वार्ताहरू । हरेक दिन मिटिमिडियामा भिडियो, पोडकास्ट र फोटोस्टोरीहरू । २६ वर्षदेखि तपाईंहरूसँगै छ- सूचना र मनोरञ्जनको सँगालो साप्ताहिक ।

www.saptahik.com.np