



THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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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.

POST PHOTO: ELITE JOSHI

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 11

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.

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 called into question the KP Sharma Oli government's 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

was huge, compared to the previous protest," Parajuli told the Post.

Tuesday's protest had numbered around 150 individuals but Thursday's protest had grown exponentially in number, with over a thousand attendees.

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.

Twenty-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 on Thursday.

"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 condi-

tions 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.

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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
KATHMANDU, JUNE 11

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 Thursday.

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 immediately.

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 Monday.

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, educational institutions including

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 shut.

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 permission
- All kinds of gatherings, seminars, workshops, demonstrations and conferences
- Cinema halls, party palaces, entertainment places including dance bars
- 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 places
- All kinds of public transportation, including tourist vehicles



POST PHOTO: KABIN ADHIKARI

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

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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 again.

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 issues or direct responses to something the Post has recently published. 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.

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Tell us what we got wrong, but back it up with resources.

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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 desk—not 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 citizens.

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 ‘*bharatiya cheli*’. Nepal’s resolve has been toughened because of closer ties with China and the possibilities of economic delinking 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 as well.

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



POST FILE PHOTO

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 government 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 specific 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 shared—irrespective 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,



SHUTTERSTOCK

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 created.

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 bona fide.

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 (SOMTU).



MONEY

FOREX

US Dollar	121.56
Euro	138.12
Pound Sterling	153.92
Japanese Yen	11.35
Chinese Yuan	1720
Qatari Riyal	33.10
Australian Dollar	84.07
Malaysian Ringit	28.62
Saudi Arab Riyal	32.40

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION

	PRICE PER TOLA
 Fine Gold	Rs 89,600
 Silver	Rs 950

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

GASOLINE WATCH



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Petrol (Per Litre)	Rs 96.00/-
Diesel (Per Litre)	Rs 85.00/-
Kerosene (Per Litre)	Rs 85.00/-
LPG (Per cylinder)	Rs 1375/-

Source: Nepal Oil Corporation

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.

BIPLAV BHATTARAI
ILAM, JUNE 11

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 quality.

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 order.

They eventually set the rate, but it 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.

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 regular basis.

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



AP/RSS

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

Bombardier to cut up to 600 jobs in Northern Ireland

REUTERS
BELFAST, JUNE 11

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 period.

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 over 200."

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



REUTERS

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

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 app Gojek.

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.

Ride-hailing firms around the world were operating at a steep loss even 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' largest market.

Their plight threatens a core promise 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 investors.

Southeast Asian governments have warned millions could end up jobless as a result of the outbreak.

The two firms told Reuters they are supporting drivers with measures ranging from food packages and vouchers to low-interest bank loans and car rental rebates.

But the crisis has also led them to cut the subsidies that have fuelled their growth.

Doubts have also crept up about the ride-hailing model globally and on whether investors will continue pumping in massive funds into the startups.

Even before the pandemic, Grab and Gojek—like Uber and Lyft in the United States and other ride-hailing firms around the world—were operating at a steep loss.

Grab co-founder Tan Hooi Ling has warned the company may potentially

face a "long winter".

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 workforce.

"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 of products helps," said Gojek Chief Operating Officer Hans Patuwu. "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 markets.

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 steep.

Tarin said Grab Thailand lost more than \$22 million in 2018, while rapid growth led to losses nearly doubling in 2019.

"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 continued government cutbacks on support for solar power.

More investment went into renewables 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

POST REPORT
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.

"Our support will pave the way for 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 Road 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 said in 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, it said.

"The project will reduce the time and cost of moving goods and boost Nepal's trade, which accounts for about 40 percent of the country's economic 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.



POST PHOTO: KABIN ADHIKARI

A shopkeeper arranges clothes outside his shop in Kathmandu.

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.



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 over-worked 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:

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, saying 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

REUTERS
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.

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”.

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.

REUTERS
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.



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

Outbreak quashed, China launches test lab spending spree



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 produced in China,” he said.

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

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.

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

The 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-

ben is sun-dried and stored for later use.

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



PHOTOS: PRASHANTA KHANAL

areas with a large diaspora of Limbu-Rai communities such as Itahari and Dharan. In Kathmandu valley, you can find yangben 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 minerals," 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," says 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. Yangben-faksa 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
 - 1 thumb-size slice of ginger
 - 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
 - 1 teaspoon coriander seeds
 - 1-2 green or dried red chillies
 - 1 teaspoon turmeric powder
 - Salt to taste

Directions:

- First, make a spice paste by grinding together garlic, ginger, cumin seed, coriander seed and chillies.
- 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.





The laptop screen shows the Saptahik website with a headline about COVID-19 and a sidebar with various news items. A hand is visible on the right side of the laptop, resting on the trackpad.



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साप्ताहिक

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