



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Police briefly detained people who were out for various purposes at New Baneshwor in Kathmandu on Thursday. Authorities said a total of 2,326 people were held for flouting the restrictions while 991 two-wheelers and 322 four-wheelers were stopped and taken in custody on the charge of plying without essential work. They were later released.

POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

## Restrictions can't check virus spread, proper response needed, experts say

Public health experts reiterate that the authorities must utilise the period to expand testing and contact tracing and devise short- and long-term strategies.

ARJUN POUDEL  
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

Districts including those in Kathmandu Valley may have been under strict restrictions, but unless authorities fully utilise this period to increase tests and ensure contact tracing and pull out all the stops, it could be yet another opportunity squandered, public health experts say.

Multiple doctors the Post spoke to said that the virus has taken hold in the community and that an effective contact tracing is the only way to break the transmission chain.

"We all know a lockdown or restriction for an indefinite period is not possible. Nor is it a solution to the pandemic," said Dr Madhu Devkota, a professor at the Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University. "We have to prepare."

According to Devkota, the past lockdown is an example of how the government failed in the fight against the virus.

"The lockdown was imposed in haste and lifted without any planning," said Devkota. "We are facing the consequences now."

According to the Health Ministry, 92

new cases were reported in a week in the Valley after the lockdown ended on July 21. The number of new infections reported on August 4 was 251 (the second week); 587 on August 11 (third week); and 1,027 on August 18 (fourth week).

On Thursday, when the Valley returned to lockdown with strict restrictions imposed, 200 new cases were reported. The Valley's Covid-19 tally now has reached 2,316.

The country as of Thursday has reported 29,645 positive cases, including 126 deaths.

Death rate too has increased more than threefold in recent weeks.

Eighteen people had died until August 4—in two weeks since the end of the lockdown on July 21, but 56 people succumbed to the virus from August 5 to August 18 (two weeks).

Experts say what is concerning is cases are now doubling in a week or less in the Valley. Kathmandu is one of the most densely populated areas in the country, with a huge mobility of people.

An official at the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre told the Post that Kathmandu Valley is facing a very serious situation.

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## Confusion and chaos as Kathmandu Valley residents wake up to new coronavirus curbs

A lack of clarity on opening timings of shops selling essential goods and who are allowed to move around and who are not creates hassles for the public and law enforcers.

ANUP OJHA & SHUVAM DHUNGANA  
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

Kumar Timilsena had opened his store at Kupondole for just half an hour on Thursday morning when policemen came on motorcycles, sirens blaring, and told him to close his shop.

"I had just received a supply of milk from a dairy," said the 40-year-old who operates a grocery store. "I guess the milk will go to waste now."

Later he learned from another shop that police had been going around, announcing that stores would be allowed to open from 4am to 7am only.

On Tuesday evening, chief district officers of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur issued prohibitory orders effective Wednesday midnight to contain the spread of the virus.

The orders say people should not come out of home unless for buying medicines and essentials, vehicles should remain off the roads and only those, including shops, providing essential services should operate.

When Nalini Shah, who lives in Bakhundole, went out to buy some foodstuff about 8am on Thursday, she did not find any shops open.

"I had gone to buy milk, but all shops were closed," said Shah. "Nor could I buy vegetables."

Local administrations' prohibitory orders seem to be stricter compared to the lockdown days, but they have failed to properly inform the public.

"We had tentatively announced to allow shops selling daily essentials to open from 4am to 7am," said Narayan Prasad Bhatta, chief district officer of Lalitpur.

When there was a nationwide lockdown from March 24, essential shops selling foodstuff had been allowed to open initially until 9am, which later had been extended until 10am and then the whole day.

The Tuesday decision of the chief district officers of the Valley, however, has created confusion among the people.

Without clarity on the timings for buying essential stuff, many in different parts of the city thronged various shops, disregarding safety protocols and physical distancing. Police even held some who were out for morning walks and jogging. They, however, were let go later on after spending

some time in "holding centres" the police have set up at various places.

Police also stopped some who were on their way to office, as it was difficult for them to identify who was on essential services and who was not.

On Thursday, banks said that their staff coming to work were stopped by police and their motorcycles were impounded. They warned that they will not provide services on Friday if the movement of their staff is not facilitated.

Nepal Rastra Bank spokesman Gunakar Bhatta told the Post that the matter of obstruction of movement of the bank staff had been sorted out with the Home Ministry, as banks fall under the essential service category.

Later on Thursday, the Kathmandu District Administration Office issued a notice, saying that movement of vehicles carrying essential workers would be facilitated.



Policemen enforce a shutdown in Kalanki, Kathmandu, on Thursday.

POST PHOTO: KESHAV THAPA

The Oli government's decision to let chief district officers grant powers to issue prohibitory orders has already faced criticism with experts saying the move is against the spirit of the constitution, as it undermines provincial and local governments.

The government's move of allowing local administrators to take their own measures to contain the spread of the virus comes amid widespread criticism that it largely failed in the fight against the pandemic.

The prohibitory orders in the Valley were issued after a sudden surge in the number of Covid-19 cases over the past weeks after the government lifted the nationwide lockdown on July 21.

The Health Ministry said that 200 new cases were reported in Kathmandu Valley on Thursday—174 in Kathmandu, 18 in Lalitpur and eight in Bhaktapur. The total number of cases in Kathmandu Valley currently stands at 2,698—2,151 in Kathmandu, 367 in Lalitpur, and

180 in Bhaktapur.

Local governments say they are helpless and that they are just facilitating the chief district officer's orders.

"Our role is to disseminate the message of the district administration office, and we are implementing its decision," said Raju Man Manandhar, spokesperson for the Lalitpur Metropolitan City office.

Lalitpur Chief District Officer Bhatta admitted that there were complaints from the public about confusion in timings—as to when the shops will open and till when they can buy foodstuff.

"We are having consultations over the issue," Bhatta told the Post. "We may extend the period for buying and selling essential goods."

He, however, was quick to add that it's incumbent upon the local federal units to decide when it comes to managing shops.

In Kathmandu, too, shopkeepers said they were confused about the district administrators' orders.

"Yesterday, police came and said there would be prohibitory orders from Thursday. But we were forced to close our shops after opening it for 15 minutes at 7am," said Kiran Khanal, who owns a cold store in Dhobichaur. "We could not open the shops throughout the day."

Rajeshwor Gyawali, administrative spokesperson for the Kathmandu Metropolitan City, said he is unaware of the District Administration Office's decision regarding the timings for shops selling foodstuff.

Senior Superintendent Shyam Lal Gyawali, chief of the Kathmandu Metropolitan Police Range, said police were closing the shops as per the instructions from the local level.

"After assessing the risk in their areas, local authorities of every ward have allocated the time for shops to open," said Gyawali. "Police are only assisting in effective implementation of a ward's decisions."



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## NATIONAL

# Rupandehi authorities face local resistance to their bid to set up isolation centres

Tilottama and Siddharthanagar municipalities have failed to set up new isolation centres as Covid-19 cases spiral.

**SANJU PAUDEL**  
RUPANDEHI, AUG 20

On August 15, the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre of Tilottama Municipality, Rupandehi, decided to set up an additional isolation centre in view of the increasing number of coronavirus patients.

However, the decision to set up the isolation centre at Pushpal Park in Banbatika has hit a snag after the park officials refused to vacate their newly constructed office building for the municipality to keep coronavirus patients.

Tilottama Municipality has so far reported 32 Covid-19 cases. Twenty patients among them are being treated at Shankarnagar Health Post, two symptomatic patients are receiving treatment in Butwal Corona Hospital and the remaining patients are staying in home isolation.

"The municipality has been witnessing a rise in the number of coronavirus cases in the last few weeks. There is currently only one isolation centre. We need to add at least one more," said Moti Prasad Paudel, the health coordinator of the municipality. For the time being, the municipality has been using the building of the Shankarnagar Health Post as an isolation centre.

"We have proposed the building of Pushpal Park as it is adjacent to the health post. It will be difficult for the municipality to run isolation centres in two different places," said Basudev Ghimire, mayor of the municipality. "This is why we chose the park's building since it's close to the health

post." According to him, they can accommodate up to 20 patients in the park's building.

However, Ram Giri, coordinator of the Park Management Committee, said: "The construction work of the building has not been completed. The committee's meeting of Wednesday has decided not to provide the building for an isolation centre. We are yet to fix electricity wires and bulbs in the hall room. And, the building cannot accommodate 20 individuals."

The locals also agree that the municipality needs another isolation centre.

"The Park Management Committee should allow the authorities to use one of its buildings. The park's building is in a suitable location near the health post," said Bel Prasad Sharma, a resident of Tilottama-2.

Meanwhile, Siddharthanagar Municipality Ward No. 2 is also facing resistance to set up an isolation centre at a local school.

Dipak Kumar Thapa, ward chairman, said the local people in the ward are against the idea of setting up an isolation ward at Balbahira School.

The locals had even staged a protest against the municipality's decision on Monday.

"The school building can accommodate up to 100 individuals. But the locals aren't happy with the decision to convert the school into an isolation centre," Thapa said.

Until Thursday, 5,288 Covid patients tested positive for coronavirus in Province 5. Among them, one died and 640 tested positive for coronavirus in Rupandehi district.



POST PHOTO: SANJU PAUDEL  
The office building of Pushpal Park where Tilottama Municipality plans to set up a Covid-19 isolation centre.

# Flood-displaced families from Bhajani seek refuge in forest

More than 550 families who were displaced by the July flood have moved to a community forest after living on the Postal Highway for eight days.

**MOHAN BUDHAIR**  
DHANGADHI, AUG 20

The flood displaced families in Bhajani Municipality, Kailali, have moved to Mohanyal Community Forest from the Postal Highway, where they had been taking shelter after their settlements were flooded on July 29.

More than 550 families have pitched their tents in the forest area.

"Living on the Postal Highway got increasingly difficult for us because of continuous rainfall. So we moved to the forest 10 days ago," said Khemraj Kafle, one of the flood survivors from Bhajani Ward No. 8.

The displaced people say their homes are still waterlogged and they cannot return just yet.

"At least the forest provides better cover from the rainfall," Kafle said.

Meanwhile, Sher Bahadur Chaudhary, the municipal mayor, has claimed that not all the families living in the community forest are flood displaced.

"Some people have moved to the forest with the intention of encroaching the land. We are trying to identify the genuine flood victims to resettle them elsewhere," he said.

The municipal office has also been assessing the damage caused by the flood.

The initial record of the municipality showed that 3,200 families have been affected by the flood.

"Around 150 families have been displaced and they now have nowhere to live," said Chaudhary.

Jayasara Kami, another flood survivor from Bhajani Ward No. 3, dismissed the mayor's claim that some of them had moved to the community forest to take over the forestland.

"We came here to save our lives. We moved from the Postal Highway because living under the open sky with continuous rainfall was difficult," she said.

The displaced families, according to Kami, are still living with no provisions for food and sanitation facilities.

"The food grains provided by the municipality on August 4 barely lasted us for two weeks. We are now surviving on the food grains that we had managed to salvage from our homes," she said.

The flood survivors say for some families returning to their settlements is out of the question, as their homes were destroyed in the flood.

"None of the houses in Ward No 8 is



PHOTO COURTESY: GANGA CHAUDHARY  
Flood-displaced families have set up tents inside Mohanyal Community Forest as their homes are still waterlogged.

# Two more bodies recovered from flood-hit area in Achham

**MENUKA DHUNGANA**  
ACHHAM, AUG 20

Search team on Thursday recovered two more bodies of the flood victims who were swept away by the rain-swollen Kailash stream in Saini Bazaar, Achham, on Tuesday night.

Eleven others are still missing and search for them is underway, officials said. The flood in Kailash stream had swept away 22 houses in Saini Bazaar, the trade hub of Ramaroshan Rural Municipality Ward No. 5.

So far, the search team comprising security personnel and locals have recovered eight bodies. Police said the dead and the missing persons belong to four families of Saini Bazaar.

Meanwhile, Chief District Officer Gokarna Prasad Upadhyay, who inspected the flood-ravaged area on Thursday, said the district administration was making arrangements to

compensate and relocate the flood-affected families.

Upadhyay said his office was working closely with the local government to provide treatment to the injured, offer immediate relief to the displaced families and rehabilitate them to a safer location.

Authorities are yet to ascertain the magnitude of the destruction. The flood is believed to have been caused due to damming of the stream by a landslide before bursting with a great force and laying to waste the settlements downstream.

The floods also swept away a concrete bridge and nine suspension bridges in the Darna area, according to Jhankar Saud, the chairman of Ramaroshan Rural Municipality.

An ambulance belonging to the local unit and five micro hydropower projects were also damaged in the disaster.

liveable. The houses are filled with sand washed in by floodwaters," said Kafle. "The whole municipality is at risk of inundation since the rainfall has not stopped."

The flood that occurred in the last week of July had displaced 165 households of Krishnanagar, Kadadhik, Barchaud and Khallagaun in Bhajani

Ward No.8, 115 households of Dailekhtol, Kusumghat and Barduwa in Bhajani Ward No. 3, 250 households of Kauwakheda and Kalapathhar in Bhajani Ward No. 5, 20 households of Namabasti Paduwaphant in Bhajani Ward No. 1 and 35 households of Charra in Bhajani Ward No. 7.

# Restrictions can't check virus spread, proper response needed, experts say

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"The case doubling time has come down to a week. The virus is spreading fast in densely populated areas," said the official requesting anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media. "And our health facilities are very poor."

As per prohibitory orders issued for the Valley by district administrators, which came in effect on Wednesday midnight, people are not allowed to come out of homes unless for buying medicines and other essentials. Vehicular movements have been banned and shops other than those providing essential goods and medicines will remain closed.

According to public health experts, since the virus is going to stay for long, the authorities must devise short-, medium- and long-term strategies.

"It takes time to set up new health facilities, as it is not only about placing a few beds and installing some equipment. It, rather, is about also having human resources with years of experience," said Prabhath Adhikari, an infectious disease and critical care expert.

"We should use this restriction period to break the transmission chain and to track infections. Meanwhile, we should make maximum use of available facilities."

Even though doctors had warned in the initial days that the country's health facilities would soon get overwhelmed, the authorities failed to pay heed. Public health experts say there are some visible missteps by the government in response to the virus.

It was slow in putting together a national network of testing labs and human resources to ensure effective contact tracing.

Even during the lockdown, people's movement from one district to another and to the Valley continued. The government formed two committees to fight the virus but did not appoint an expert as the coordinator.

According to doctors, an expert could have assessed the situation better than a political figure. Both the committees formed to respond to Covid-19 are led by Defence Minister

Ishwar Pokhrel and to make matters worse, he has been embroiled in a corruption controversy.

Public health experts on a number of occasions have said privately as well as publicly that the Oli administration is reluctant to pay heed to their suggestions.

"We have been calling on the authorities since the first case was reported to focus on tests, ensure effective contact tracing and isolate the infected," Dr Rajendra BC, former member of the Nepal Health Research Council, told the Post. "It has been seven months since the first case was reported. We are still making the same requests to the authorities."

When cases started to spike, government officials started passing the buck.

The Health Ministry spokesperson even went on to say why the government should take all the responsibility of the people and spend on their testing when they are reluctant to spend even Rs200.

Experts say it is also incumbent upon the people that they strictly follow safety protocols and take precautionary measures, but the government cannot wash its hands of its responsibility.

"Beds in intensive care units are already packed and the country lacks enough ventilators," said Adhikari, the infectious disease and critical care specialist.

"People will start dying without treatment, if we fail to arrange beds and ventilators immediately."

As of Thursday, 129 Covid-19 patients are in intensive care units, with 54 in Bagmati province. The Health Ministry said that seven people are on ventilator support in Bagmati province alone.

"An infected person spreads the virus to 2.3 persons on average. We had anticipated the present situation, as our preparation was not sufficient," said Devkota, the professor at the Institute of Medicine.

"The authorities might extend the restrictions as they seem to be left with no other alternative. But what the authorities need to understand is restriction is not a solution."

# Integrated settlement plan in Karnali fails to move beyond paper

**KALENDRA SEJUWAL**  
SUKKHET, AUG 20

For Dirgharaj Shahi, a local of Raskot Municipality in Kalikot, monsoons are unforgiving. Multiple landslides over the past few years have displaced many families from his settlement in Badaltola.

"We live in constant fear of during monsoons. Our houses are at risk of being swept away at any moment," he said. "Some of our neighbours have lost their houses and properties and now live in makeshift huts. None of the government bodies has so far offered us a better alternative."

In the last week of July, Badaltola was battered by a landslide that killed five members of the same family and displaced 18 other households. It is one of the twelve locations in the municipality selected as safe zones to relocate displaced landslide victims under the provincial government's Integrated Settlement Development Programme.

The programme was initiated by the Karnali provincial government in the last fiscal year wherein settlements at high risk of floods and landslides were to be moved to safer locations. The programme, however, is yet to be implemented successfully.

On December 15, 2019, a Cabinet meeting had endorsed a working guideline to develop integrated settlements. The guideline has also prioritised landless squatters, Dalits, and the marginalised.

According to the working guideline, the local units have to select safer locations to relocate families based on the recommendation from geologists, environmentalists, and technical teams.

"We thought Badaltola was less prone to landslides and had planned to move flood and landslide victims there. But the entire ward was affected by this year's monsoon," said Kashi Chandra Baral, mayor of Raskot Municipality.

According to him, the local unit had selected Badaltola without conducting a geological survey, as dictated by the guidelines, since the local unit did not have the means to hire geologists, environmentalists or a technical team.

"The local units alone can't implement the programme," Dipendra Rokaya, a member of the Karnali Province's planning commission, told the Post. "The provincial government had planned to call an expert team for survey and land use management in Karnali but the federal government did not respond to our request."

A 10-member project coordination committee led by Chief Minister Mahendra Bahadur Shahi, was formed to implement the programme.

# Most of the local units have not sent details of risk-prone areas, officials say

According to Keshav Prasad Upadhyay, spokesperson of the Chief Minister's Office, the programme has not taken off because the local governments are yet to submit the details of risk-prone settlements to the office.

"According to the guideline, the local units have to assess the risk and submit the details to us but we haven't received the data yet," Shahi said.

In the last fiscal year, the provincial government had notified all 79 local units of the province to identify settlements at high risk of floods and landslides. Out of the 79 local units, only Dullu and Chamudabindrasaini of Dailekh, Tajakot and Chankheli of Humla, Thulibheri of Rukum (West), Raskot of Kalikot and Khatyad of Mugu responded.

The government had allocated Rs 254 million for the programme that would cover all 79 local units; however, only five local units among the seven interested received Rs 1.8 million budget each to conduct a feasibility study of the land.

"We had recommended that 90 houses of Puchchhegaun, which is at high risk of landslide, should be shifted to safer locations but before they could be moved, 651 other families have been displaced this monsoon," said Mayor Baral.

The programme at Tajakot in Humla has also come to a standstill for a lack of safe locations to relocate landslide-prone settlements. Lal Prasad Dhakal, chief administrative officer of Tajakot Municipality, said, "The locations we had selected as 'safe zones' witnessed multiple landslides this monsoon. We, therefore, haven't been able to resettle the previously displaced households in Tajakot."

According to the Karnali Provincial Police Office in Surkhet, floods and landslides in various parts of the province have destroyed 91 houses and displaced 2,942 families since mid-April. SSP Rajesh Bastola, spokesperson at the office, said, "Fifty-one individuals in the province were killed and nine are still missing in this monsoon's floods and landslides."





The Maitighar-Naya Baneshwor road section wears a deserted look as the local administration imposed a week-long prohibitory order beginning Thursday in Kathmandu Valley.

POST PHOTO: ANGAD DHAKAL

## BRIEFING

### Floods sweep away six wooden bridges

**MUGU:** People of several settlements in Chhayanath Rara Municipality and Mugumkarmarong Rural municipality in Mugu have been affected after last week's floods swept away six wooden bridges over Salimkhola. According to Chhiring Kyapne Lama, chairman of Mugumkarmarong, thousands of people from Magri, Maha, Pulu, Daura, Lums, Kampha, Balchaur and Bhatdanda villages have to risk their lives while crossing the flooded stream. "Efforts are on to build makeshift bridges in the area," said Lama.

### Six more bodies recovered

**SINDHUPALCHOK:** Rescuers have recovered six more bodies from the landslide-ravaged Lidi village of Sindhupalchok on Thursday. Police said a total of 30 bodies have now been recovered so far while nine villagers remain missing. According to Deputy Superintendent Madhav Prasad Kafle, a team of 55 rescuers from Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force are searching for the missing. The massive landslide swept away 13 houses and damaged 37 others on Friday last week.

### Covid-19 cases exceed 1,000 in Kapilvastu

**KAPILVASTU:** The total number of reported Covid cases has exceeded 1,000 in Kapilvastu, Province 5. With the confirmation of 24 positive cases in Krishnagar and Bahadurgunj Bazaar on Thursday, the total coronavirus cases reached 1,014. Kapilvastu, with 204 active cases, is ranked ninth across the nation and first in Province 5 in terms of total positive cases.

### Prohibitory orders in Sindhuli

**SINDHULI:** All the nine local governments in Sindhuli district have imposed prohibitory orders allowing only essential services to run following a spike in coronavirus cases. "All local governments coordinated with each other to impose the order after contact tracing became difficult," said Chief District Officer Yogendra Prasad Pandey. "However, there won't be restrictions on the movement of essential goods." Seventeen Covid-19 patients have been kept in isolation in two different hospitals in the district while 12 have returned home after successful recovery, according to the District Health Office.

# Indra Jatra festivities called off over Covid-19 concerns

Organisers accept there's no way to observe the festival safely amidst the pandemic.

**SRIZU BAJRACHARYA**  
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

Last year Ritesh Ranjit was surrounded with throngs of people at Majipat, Lakhenani Chowk as he danced ferociously as the Majipa Lakhey, barefoot in the heat of the afternoon during Indra Jatra. He felt invigorated as the crowd cheered him on, their gasps as he closed him on them had him mirthfully laughing under the heavy red mask of the Bhairav, who is believed to be the protector of the Valley people.

"I felt out of this world performing

On Wednesday, the festival organisers were supposed to have sent people to Nala, a forest near Bhaktapur to bring *ya sin*, a wooden log to erect it outside Hanuman Dhoka Palace to mark the beginning of the festival. But they did not. And with the onset of festival, many Newar communities would accordingly plan for the procession and rituals of the jatra.

"I think it is the first time we are not celebrating the festival. Although in the past the festival has seen obstructions, we had always continued with the celebrations," Gautam Ratna Shakya, chair of Indra Jatra

Over the years, the festival has also gained international recognition with its large scale participation, chariot pulling of three living deities of the Valley, Ganesh, Kumari and Bhairav, and various mask dances.

Many Newar communities also display giant mounds of *samay baji* as feasts for the deities. The festival reiterates a tale of a time when Lord Indra disguised himself as a farmer and visited the Valley in search of parijat, the night flowering jasmine, for his mother but was held by the people who took him to be a thief.

On Monday, Indra Jatra Byawasthapan Samittee had also released a regretful notice to the public informing that the festival will only fulfil necessary rituals. The decision was made after their meeting with the officials of Kathmandu District Administration Office on Sunday. The notice further conveyed that this year's Indra Jatra will see no chariot procession or mask dance.

Previously, before the community-outbreak of Covid-19, the organisers of the festival had been planning to celebrate the festival as minimally as possible on a small scale.

"We had been discussing making sanitisers and masks available to everyone and having only limited people on the ground while pulling the chariot. And we were thinking of having the police oversee the participation," said Shakya.

"But a fact we cannot deny is that even if we minimise the festival in terms of participation, there still will be a lot of people involved in the chariot pulling and various other works of the jatra. And we don't want to risk people's lives and escalate the risks," said Shakya to the Post.

Over the past month, Covid-19 cases in the Valley have spiked by hundreds; 200 new cases were reported on Thursday alone.

Many of these cases in the Valley so far have been reported from inside the core Newar settlements, said Shakya. "Festivals attract people, and a festival like Indra Jatra has a huge following, so we thought this was the best decision we could make looking at the hour we are living in," says Shakya.

"It's a difficult time for everyone but people have been considerate about our decision," said Shakya. "And I think it's okay for us not to hold the celebration for this one time."



POST FILE PHOTO: ANISH REGMI

Indra Jatra (Yenya Punhi) is one of the most vibrant times of the year for the Newars in Kathmandu Valley. It heralds the arrival of Dashain and Tihar.

in front of the crowd," said Ranjit. But this year Ranjit is feeling down with the news of Indra Jatra festival being called off by the authorities conceding to the rising Covid-19 cases in the Valley. Ranjit has been performing as Majipa Lakhey for about a decade, and this will be his first time not performing in the festival.

"There's no way of curbing a crowd when you are performing as the Majipa Lakhey, there will be hordes of onlookers and although it's sad that we won't be celebrating the festival this year, it's an important step the organisers have taken," he says.

Indra Jatra, Yenya Punhi, is one of the most vibrant times of the year for the Newars in the Kathmandu Valley. The eight-day long festival heralds the arrival of Dashain and Tihar. This year the festival was supposed to begin on August 30.

Byawasthapan Samittee.

The festival, one of the most colourful in the Valley, was started in the 10th century by king Gunakamadeva. Kumari Jatra, celebrated on the third day, was an addition made during Malla times in the 18th century.

But many who believe in the rituals and the various traditions of the Indra Jatra will still try to take part in the festival in some way, said Rajiv Ranjit, who is the main lead of Indra Jatra Shri Lakhe Aaju Guthi.

"And it's understandable as they are very deeply tied to the values of the celebration. Bereaved families still might decide to walk for their deceased family members in the Upaku procession," said Rajiv Ranjit.

During Upaku, marked on the first day of the festival, bereaved families walk along the periphery of core Kathmandu city.

# Recruitment agencies fight among themselves over Japan employment

Dispute erupted after some agencies formed a separate body to work on various issues of employment in Japan.

**CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL**  
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

At a time when not a single Nepali has been able to migrate to work in Japan under the agreement both countries signed last year, a new dispute has come to the fore.

The latest row is among recruiting agencies with the establishment of the Japan Employment Coordination Council (JECC) by a group of them.

The move has irked the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA)—the umbrella organisation of agencies recruiting Nepali migrant workers for various countries—even as the government is unaware of the development.

In a statement on Wednesday, NAFEA questioned the formation of the Council and also accused the recruiting agencies forming it and the government of setting up a syndicate for Japan employment.

"All organisations working in the foreign employment sector have to register with the Department of Foreign Employment. But the JECC has been registered as a non-governmental organisation while its goals and activities appear suspicious, leading to a syndicate on employment in Japan," Sujit Kumar Shrestha, the NAFEA general secretary, told the Post.

"Our suspicion comes true because while the department has not issued new licences to agencies which wish to send workers under the Japan International Trainee and Skilled Worker Cooperation Organisation (JITCO), the new organisation has been formed."

According to Shrestha, the association had been requesting the Department of Foreign Employment to register interested and qualified agencies to work under the JITCO. Currently, there are 206 organisations accredited for sending Nepali workers to Japan under the Technical Intern Training Programme.

"All these developments indicate that there is a new syndicate in the making with the government's backing," said Shrestha.

The agreement between Nepal and Japan—Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) on sending Nepali workers with the status of residence of Specified Skilled Workers (SSW) to Japan—had ruled out the role of private recruiting agencies in hiring and supplying workers to Japan.

The Labour Ministry, on several occasions, has reiterated that a dedi-

cated Japan unit will be established at the Department of Foreign Employment to oversee workers' selection and departures. Since there are no roles specified for recruiting agencies, no one from outside will be able to process the recruitment of aspiring migrants.

"We are not formally informed about any such organisation being formed. If this is the group of recruiting agencies engaged in JITCO, then they can come together and form such a forum," said Bhola Nath Guragain, spokesperson for the Foreign Employment Department.

"But if they are trying to work as per the pact signed between Nepal and Japan, there is no such role of agencies or their coordination from outside for labour migration to Japan."

The faction of recruiting agencies forming the JECC, however, said they were neither trying to create a syndicate nor an organisation parallel to NAFEA.

Madan Mahat, president of the newly formed JECC, said it was just a common forum of recruiting agencies working in the Japan employment sector.

"This is a social organisation of JITCO representative agencies for promotion and provides required coordination among the stakeholders for tapping opportunities in Japan. But we want to talk about the broader issues of employment opportunities in Japan," said Mahat.

"Even after signing the new deal, Nepali workers have not reached Japan. We have not been able to send our workers and they are deprived of opportunities. The JECC will work for lobbying, promotion and coordination on various issues for ensuring opportunities in Japan."

The Nepal government has been drafting guidelines for implementing the deal signed in March 2019. Nepal is among nine countries from where Japan plans to hire an estimated 345,150 workers in 14 sectors over five years. However, not a single Nepali has reached Japan under the new pact while recruiting agencies have been claiming a stake in sending workers to the rich nation.

"We have also been critical of the government when it wants to send workers. What is the need for recruiting agencies then?" said Shrestha.

"But there was no need for a parallel agency while these agencies are already registered under the NAFEA. What if all them start forming similar country-specific organisations?"



POST FILE PHOTO

The agreement between Nepal and Japan—Memorandum of Cooperation on sending Nepali workers with the status of residence of Specified Skilled Workers to Japan—had ruled out the role of private recruiting agencies in hiring and supplying workers to Japan.

# Nepal receives over Rs 3 billion from Green Climate Fund for climate action

**CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL**  
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

Nepal has secured yet another significant funding from Green Climate Fund (GCF) to support climate activities in the future.

The 26th board meeting of the GCF in Sangdo, South Korea, on Wednesday approved Nepal's proposal for the project entitled 'Improving Climate Resilience of Vulnerable Communities and Ecosystems in the Gandaki River Basin, Nepal'.

With the approval of the project, the country will access a financial grant of USD27.4 million (over Rs3.29 billion) for implementing the five-year project.

"This is a significant achievement in terms of accessing climate finance for supporting our climate actions. This has been possible because of the hard work of the engaged stakeholders," said Sindhu Prasad Dhungana, spokesperson for the Ministry of Forest and Environment.

"The grant could have gone anywhere in

Latin America, Africa and Asia Pacific countries. But we have managed to receive the grant out of a tough and competitive process. First, the Independent Technical Advisory Panel of the GCF sends queries regarding the project proposals which we have to respond. There are also inquiries during the board meeting. Only then the project is approved."

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a GCF accredited entity, and the Ministry of Forest and Environment will jointly implement the project. While the Forest Ministry will be the lead agency for implementing the project, the IUCN will work on other components like capacity building, according to Dhungana.

The project aims to improve the climate resilience of nearly 1.9 million people from 198,016 vulnerable households of the Gandaki River Basin. The basin falls in 19 districts of three provinces—Bagmati Province (five districts), Gandaki Province (eleven districts), and Province 5 (three districts).

These districts cover low-lying districts of

Nawalparasi and Chitwan to the ones in the high mountains like Mustang and Manang.

In the view of the basin's high vulnerability to climate change including increased frequency and intensity of rain, floods and landslides, the project was designed to improve the resilience of communities and ecosystems in the basin area, according to the project document.

"The main goal of the project is to protect the ecosystem and enhance communities' livelihood through nature-based solutions," said Dhungana. "Watershed management, river conservation, protecting ecosystem services and improving livelihood are the major priorities. Through this project, we also want to mainstream the concept that river basins cannot be confined within the political boundary."

Despite its negligible contribution to climate change, Nepal is one of the most vulnerable countries in terms of the adverse impact of climate change.

This is the second significant funding the country has received within a year from the GCF. Last year in November, the 24th GCF

board meeting had approved the first-ever funding proposal of Nepal.

For the project, Building Resilient Churia Region in Nepal (BRCRN), to be implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in partnership with the Ministry of Forest and Environment, Nepal was awarded \$39.3million in grant.

Earlier this year, Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPCC), Nepal's first and only GCF accredited entity, also signed a contract with GCF for seeking climate finance for the country's climate actions.

The AEPCC received GCF accreditation in February 2019. The GCF accreditation status means the entity becomes eligible for claiming and accessing financial support of up to \$50 million as its climate action partner.

Likewise, Nepal's other climate finance support of \$24 million under the Strategic Climate Fund from the World Bank was approved last month for implementing the Forest for Prosperity Project.

According to Dhungana, two more climate

change-related projects worth \$7 million each from the Global Environment Facility were approved in August 2019 and April 2020.

For accessing funds from the GCF, a global platform that helps countries in their efforts to fight climate change by investing in low-emission and climate-resilient development, WWF Nepal and UNDP Nepal have also been working on their project proposals.

The recent successes in accessing climate finance for the country's adaptation and mitigation efforts show that Nepal is gradually learning ways to tap the opportunities.

"Our capacity for making our claims for climate finance has enhanced. But this is a highly competitive process and takes several months of preparations," said Dhungana. "The current project was in the pipeline since February 2018 and all the homework was happening for the last three years. For the proposal making, several rounds of consultation were held with the involvement of the targeted communities, ensuring gender components, rights of indigenous groups and safeguarding environment."



## OPINION

## EDITORIAL

## Against forgetting

We must all work together to promote human rights and peaceful co-existence.

Today and tomorrow mark major commemorative events in the global human rights calendar. The United Nations has proclaimed August 21 as the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, and August 22 as the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief. Both these days are related to protecting the human rights of victims and survivors of gross violence and injustice. They help highlight how victims and survivors struggle to have their voices for justice heard and their rights to dignity upheld. The twin commemorative days are also deeply interlinked, for they underscore the need for the world to come together to right the wrongs committed against innocent lives.

While victims of terrorist attacks tend to receive attention in the immediate aftermath of the event, they are more often than not relegated to the dark corners of history in the long run. Not only the dead but also the survivors of such attacks face neglect once the limelight shifts to more pressing events. States and rights organisations alike often overlook the need to provide the survivors with physical, psychological, financial and social support to help them cope with their trauma and eventually recover. It is with keeping this in mind that UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said it is essential to remember and hear the victims of terrorism and help them rebuild their lives and heal.

The violence against religious communities, especially religious minorities, poses another great challenge today. Religion is often a major contributing factor in terrorist attacks and communal clashes. The day to commemorate the victims of violence based on religion or belief recognises the need to create awareness about the ills of religious intolerance, violence and discrimination, and calls upon states and communities to step up their efforts in promoting communal harmony, cultural and religious plurality, human rights and dignity. Moreover, the day also marks the need to recognise the acts of violence and discrimination against atheists, children, women and LGBTQI+ community persons that come together with religious intolerance.

The twin commemorative days are also an occasion to call attention to the roles of states in committing acts of terror and violence, and perpetuating the marginalisation of victims and survivors. Apart from the well-known acts of legitimate and non-legitimate violence, states often get away with committing acts of criminal negligence such as the unlawful storage of hazardous material at a port in Beirut, which resulted in a deadly explosion that claimed over 170 lives. A BBC Nepali Service report recently highlighted the threat posed by the storage of large amounts of the same hazardous material that caused the Beirut explosions in military bunkers at Swayambhu, right in the heart of Kathmandu.

From dictatorships to democracies, states all over the world have for long remained playgrounds for acts of violence against minorities of all kinds including religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic and gender. Recent events in the global scene have shown that the unholy alliance between majoritarian-nationalist politics and religious fundamentalism poses a grave threat to the lives and livelihoods of minorities. It is time for governments, activists and rights institutions to come together and work towards promoting shared values of fraternity, human rights, peace, co-existence and benevolence. May the twin commemorative days remind us once again of our collective responsibility towards society. It is only by remembering the victims and protecting the vulnerable that we can ensure that justice prevails in its truest sense.

## Starting over again



POST FILE PHOTO

There seems to be no end to either the pandemic or the government's incompetent response.

AMISH RAJ MULMI



Every morning, for the past five months, a tailorbird couple sits outside our window, their distinctive *cheep-cheep-cheep* call acting as our alarm clock. In these months, the couple has raised two sets of chicks. The first brood had three chicks, each a little ball of fluff, and I saw them one evening as they huddled close to each other in a jasmine bush as the parents rushed about trying to gather insects for them.

The second brood had two chicks, born sometime in the past month. The tailorbird sews leaves together to make a nest of brilliant craftsmanship, another of everyday nature's wonders. But I am yet to see the nest in my garden, despite my many attempts. If the past five months have taught me anything, however, it is to be patient.

I was never a patient person to begin with, but the lockdown months forced me to be one. As days pass like clouds and months disappear into the ether, there is little else one can do. This pandemic is an extraordinary event; like a

bad acid trip, it intensifies the questions we ask ourselves and makes our mind go places we don't want it to. Covid-19 eats away at the foundations of our trust in others—friends, family, relatives. Before meeting them, we want to know, who else did they meet? Where did they go? Have they been wearing masks?

The virus also turns us selfish. How far should we go to keep ourselves and our families safe? We've thrown social niceties out the window. There is awkwardness all around if we meet someone. Do we hug? Take off our masks (the literal ones, too)? And should we be sitting here, in this cafe? Isn't home safer?

Over the months, as Nepal's response to Covid-19 falters under the weight of state incompetence, I see the disease closing in upon us. At first, it was a distant one—spatially and metaphorically. Things looked under control. Tests were being done; hospitals did not overflow. Cases rose, but the overall numbers didn't look too bad. We grew accustomed to the smell of sanitisers; our hands soaked in the smell of soap. And our faces bore the marks of mask straps—but we were okay with it.

Then came the inexplicable decision to remove the lockdown. Just like that, the tap was turned on. Everybody seemed to forget that the virus isn't one to follow state regulations. Things went back to normal: traffic jams, daily lives, etc. Experts argued the lockdown wasn't a feasible solution, livelihoods had to be earned, businesses could close down.

All of this is true. But what now—when cities across the country are clos-

ing down again, and when our feeble healthcare system is beginning to get overwhelmed? What good is growth when survival is the answer?

The circle has begun to close in. Last month, we joked about a false alarm in our neighbourhood. Last week, a vendor tested positive. The other day, a friend said we—he meant people like us, who wear masks, sanitise ourselves all the time, wash our hands at every opportunity, who live in homes with open spaces—wouldn't get it. He corrected himself immediately; of course it wasn't true. Our privilege affords us space and perhaps a measure of safety. But if we've learnt anything over this year it is that the virus is a great equaliser.

As our cities return to living under a blanket of dread, we ask ourselves if we are doing enough. But the citizen has been compliant; she has been wearing a mask, and she has suffered the loss of livelihood and income with stoicism. But she has also followed orders—and if the order is to go to work, there is little she can do. The citizen is a puppet, strung along by a government that has fumbled its way as it diverted our attention with gods and maps.

All these months, I have desisted from critiquing our government's pandemic response. I have said we need to be more patient, especially because more advanced health systems than ours—Italy, Sweden, the US, even India—have collapsed under the weight of cases. I have pointed out the futility of comparing mass testing in an advanced island-state like Singapore and a country like ours. And I have, like many still do, faulted the citizens

for not following basic precautions.

But increasingly it is clear that our Covid-19 response is built upon the twin pillars of incompetence and abdication of responsibilities. We relied on donations for ventilators; we did not prepare enough beds; we reduced PCR testing at a time we should have increased them; we allowed mass transit of people into populated areas; we are not informing those who have tested positive on time; Nepalis are stuck abroad with little information about when they can return—the list is long.

What we have done is bring out a shoddily designed badge on which we spent Rs2 million, published a map that has done little except become an irritant, attempted to identify the birthplace of gods at a time when humans are dying and fought for power when a coherent response was needed.

Public health experts have cried themselves hoarse, but no, it's time to change the carpets and buy new vehicles (turns out, there is plenty in the coffers when one needs it). Frontline workers like doctors and the police are testing positive every day. But no, we will assume the virus doesn't move at night, and so we will issue prohibitory orders only for the night. And now that the excreta has hit the fan, we are now entering damage control by issuing a weeklong prohibitory order. If only the virus listened to official orders.

And so, I return to watching the tailorbirds stoically, and hope to find the nest soon. There isn't much we can do, except keep ourselves safe as best as we can. Like the kings of yore, we hope that Pashupatinath will watch over us. After all, what can we expect the government to do?

## Now is the time

The government and businesses need to plan a recovery that is greener and more sustainable.

MADHUKAR UPADHYA

STARTING POINT



It's yet another trying moment for the average citizen as the government has extended restrictions on travel and nonessential services until August 31 due to rising Covid-19 cases. For now, one can only hope that the virus outbreak doesn't get out of control; and to this end, if the restrictions need to be further extended, so be it. Lives must be protected first.

With nearly two-thirds of businesses closed completely and transactions reduced by about 74 percent among those that are still in operation, thousands of jobs have been lost. This has crippled the economy which has affected everyone, although the lower middle class, primarily employed in informal sectors, has suffered the most. It's difficult to predict when these lost jobs will resume, if they do at all. However, the government can't waste time to see how we want to build our recovery plans, and while doing, it must consider one area in particular—environmental protection.

Fossil to clean energy

We must remind ourselves that the pre-Covid economy had its own issues. It had caused severe degradation of the environment, the rivers were polluted, groundwater had depleted beyond repair, urban centres were over-crowded, putting more pressure

on local sources, and managing solid waste had become an unending challenge. Kathmandu had turned into one of the most polluted cities in Asia. Overall, the pace of nature's decline had already been exceptional and required a fundamental reorganisation across technological, economic, and social systems to restore them. Planners were well aware of the decline, and yet, they didn't commit themselves enough to change. The pandemic has forced us to revisit our actions.

The lockdown has had an exceptional, positive impact on the environment. Vehicular emissions decreased dramatically as the use of fossil fuels dropped. Dust and other suspended particles in the environment fell to minimal levels. Industrial waste emissions remained low. As a result, the environment, especially in urban areas, improved greatly. In Kathmandu and other major cities, people could breathe clean air and see clear blue skies for the first time in decades. Who wouldn't want to have this improvement sustained—for the health of our communities?

The government, obviously, would want to resume economic activities as soon as the curve of transmission is flattened. Reverting to the status quo will mean continuing with the economy that led to large-scale environmental degradation. The question is whether we want to follow the same trajectory that got us into this mess before the pandemic or maintain the environment that we have experienced in the last five months. The latter demands that we re-examine our development trajectory and get back to a mutually effective connection between humans and nature.

An increasing number of people now accept that we need to shift from fossils to clean energy in the larger interest of the future of humanity. However, authorities with the power to possibly make the required reforms, which the state has agreed to do on



POST FILE PHOTO

several occasions, don't seem to be ready to do so as of yet.

Except for the health sector that has been overwhelmed and exhausted by the pandemic, other development sectors were doing minimal routine work during the lockdown. This period provided these sectors with ample time to work on developing policies to maintain the aforementioned improvements by introducing new measures and regulations. Unfortunately, such initiatives were absent. The energy and transport ministries, for example, could have worked together to impose higher standards for vehicle condi-

tions and stricter emission regulations. Introducing simple rules like lane driving and strictly adhering to the speed limit would significantly improve traffic conditions. Making dedicated bicycle lanes and encouraging the use of bicycles even for the delivery of goods such as takeout or online purchases within the city limits could help promote a bicycle culture. Replacing small delivery vans with electric three-wheelers would lessen demand for petroleum products.

Similarly, shifting from roads that are not only expensive to maintain in the hills but also known to have caused

massive landslides and catastrophic erosion, to ropeways, a transport system that suits the landscape as well as the economy, would greatly benefit the natural environment. Considering the landscape and our economy, ropeways should have been the solution to the problem of our mobility, particularly for goods. In fact, cargo bicycles and goods transporting ropeways had been introduced and tested in the past, but government apathy discouraged their endorsement. Promoting such means of transport will not only improve the environment but prevent limited foreign currency reserves

from haemorrhaging further.

The supply and agriculture ministries could have worked together on policies to better market local farm produce and ensure timely availability of imported fertiliser so that farming would become a little more rewarding to attract the youth who are otherwise certain to depart for foreign employment later on. Imposing stringent rules to curb middlemen would enable farmers to produce more and create opportunities in their villages. The Roads Department resurfacing the roads in the capital demonstrating that the lockdown period presented a unique opportunity to take advantage of urban life coming to a grinding halt by coming up with plans to make reforms, which otherwise would have been difficult.

More resilient future

It's time to think outside the box in order to shape our recovery in a way that will reframe the future to deliver a more sustainable and more equitable revival tailored to suit our situation and needs. Instead of just shoring up our fledgling economy, rendered further feeble by the pandemic, the government and businesses need to plan a recovery that is greener and more sustainable, which may require making drastic and necessary changes in our policies.

Critics may say that switching from fossil to clean, green energy may not get us to the growth rates of yesteryears for some time, but with the shift, we can ensure sustainable and low-risk prosperity. No doubt our development funds, in the wake of Covid-19, will be limited for years to come because our revenue sources have been hit hard. We'll see less aid coming as donor countries themselves face unprecedented economic slowdowns. Current improvements in the environment aren't just a fluke; they're a rare opportunity to re-route our development path to a more resilient future.



# India rice prices rise as exporters grapple with floods, coronavirus

REUTERS  
BENGALURU, AUG 20

Rice export prices in top-hub India edged higher this week as floods and surging coronavirus cases hampered supply and export logistics.

India's 5 percent broken parboiled variety rose to \$383-\$389 per tonne from last week's \$382-\$387, with exporters struggling to fulfil orders due to limited availability of containers and workers at the country's biggest rice handling port, Kakinada, in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

"Demand is huge for Indian rice due to lower prices, but exports are getting affected by floods and the coronavirus outbreak in Andhra Pradesh," said Nitin Gupta, vice president for Olam India's rice business.

## Traders expect prices to stay elevated for the next few months.

With 2.84 million total Covid-19 cases, India is the worst-hit country in Asia and third only behind the US and Brazil in terms of the number of cases. Floods in neighbouring Bangladesh damaged rice crops worth 363.34 billion taka (\$4.29 billion) on around 100,000 hectares, Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque said.

Bangladesh, the world's third biggest rice producer, often relies on imports to cope with shortages caused by floods and droughts.

Meanwhile, Vietnam's 5 percent broken rice rates jumped to \$480-\$490 a tonne on Thursday, its highest since late 2011, from \$470 last week.

"Supplies are thin as local traders have increased their purchases recently and the summer-autumn harvest has ended," a trader based in Ho Chi Minh city said.

The return of the novel coronavirus to Vietnam late last month has also prompted the hoarding of rice domestically, the trader noted.

Traders expect prices to stay elevated for the next few months until a new harvest in October.

Supply concerns also pushed Thailand's benchmark 5 percent broken rice prices up to \$480-\$500, its highest since July 2, from \$465-\$500 last week. "It seems like the rice harvest in the provinces will not be so great," a Bangkok-based trader said.

### FOREX

US Dollar	120.35
Euro	142.61
Pound Sterling	158.19
Japanese Yen	11.37
Chinese Yuan	17.40
Qatari Riyal	32.82
Australian Dollar	86.21
Malaysian Ringgit	28.84
Saudi Arab Riyal	32.09

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

Shares	
<b>Nepse</b>	1,397.57 pts 0.45%
<b>HIGHEST GAINERS</b>	
SFCL 9.91%	CLBSL 5.75%
BBC 5.52%	SLBS 3.88%
BFC 3.03%	SJCL 2%
<b>MODERATE GAINERS</b>	
SHVM 2.92%	CHCL 2.34%
EIC 2.09%	SABSL 2.08%
HBL 2.04%	DHPL 2%
<b>MODERATE LOSERS</b>	
SLBSL -1.31%	GMFBS -1.32%
LBBL -1.63%	MSMBS -1.64%
GHL -1.75%	TRH -1.96%
<b>HIGHEST LOSERS</b>	
BNT -2%	SFC -2%
MHNL -2.44%	MPFL -2.78%
SDLBSL -2.99%	JOSHI -6.45%

BULLION		PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold		Rs 98,800
Silver		Rs 1,360

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

### GASOLINE WATCH

**SERVO 4T**  
ENGINE OILS  
100% PERFORMANCE. EVERYTIME.

	<b>Petrol (Per Litre)</b> Rs 105.00/-
	<b>Diesel (Per Litre)</b> Rs 91.00/-
	<b>Kerosene (Per Litre)</b> Rs 91.00/-
	<b>LPG (Per cylinder)</b> Rs 1375/-

Source: Nepal Oil Corporation



With a week-long prohibitory orders in place, shops in Kathmandu Valley, like these in New Road, have been forced to pull down their shutters. The orders were issued as part of a measure to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

# Apple reaches \$2 trillion market value as tech fortunes soar

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
CALIFORNIA, AUG 20

Apple has become the first US company to boast a market value of \$2 trillion as technology continues to reshape a world where smartphones are like appendages and digital services are like instruments orchestrating people's lives.

The iPhone maker reached the \$2 trillion milestone on Wednesday's early stock market trading when its shares surpassed \$467.77.

The stock later backtracked to close at \$462.83, but it didn't diminish a remarkable achievement that came just two years after Apple became the first US company with a \$1 trillion market value.

It comes amid a devastating pandemic that has shoved the economy into a deep recession and caused unemployment rates to soar to the worst levels since the Great Depression nearly a century ago.

But Apple and other well-established tech giants such as Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Facebook and Netflix have thrived during the upheaval as the pandemic has forced millions of people to work, attend classes, shop and entertain themselves at home. That, in turn, has made technology even more crucial, a factor that has caused investors to snap up the stocks



The sun is reflected on Apple's Fifth Avenue store in New York.

of the industry's biggest players, as well as relative newcomers, such as video conferencing service Zoom, which has seen its shares quadruple so far this year.

Apple's stock has climbed nearly 58 percent this year. In recent weeks, the rally has been bolstered by excitement over a four-for-one stock split that Apple announced late last month in an effort to make its shares more affordable to a wider swath of investors.

The broader boom in tech stocks also has helped the benchmark S&P 500 index reach new highs after steep declines earlier in the year. Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Facebook and Google's parent company, Alphabet account for nearly 23 percent of the S&P 500's entire value.

Apple isn't the first company in the world to reach a market value of \$2 trillion. That honour belongs to energy producer Saudi Aramco, which attained it in December 2019. Saudi Aramco now trails Apple with a market value of about \$1.8 trillion.

Now that technology has clearly become the oil of the 21st century, other industry leaders could soon be joining Apple in the \$2 trillion club, now that it is clear technology has become the oil of the 21st century. Many industry analysts are predicting Amazon, Microsoft and Alphabet could eclipse the milestone in the upcoming months too.

Not all technology companies are doing as well as they were before the pandemic. Google, for instance, suffered the first quarterly revenue decline from the previous year in its history during the April-June period as the advertising sales that generate most of its profit tapered off amid pandemic-driven lockdowns across the US.

# 17 diners receive 'very good' rating after inspections

Government teams checked 501 roadside restaurants and eateries in the last fiscal year for food quality and hygiene.

KRISHANA PRASAIN  
KATHMANDU, AUG 20

Only 17 among the 501 diners on Nepal's highways passed food hygiene inspections with a 'very good' rating, according to a report issued recently by the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control. These establishments were awarded a green sticker with three stars.

Matina Joshi Vaidya, director general of the department, said it was very challenging to be graded 'very good', and many among the 501 roadside restaurants and eateries the department checked in the last fiscal year for food quality and hygiene did not meet the required standards.

"It is not enough to have good food hygiene, you need to have a consistent record of maintaining proper hygiene which many restaurants did not have," she said.

The restaurants and eateries may be maintaining quality, but they should also keep records to show the inspection team that they offer quality and standard foods, she said.

The inspection team cannot check the restaurants daily, so the team normally grades them based on their records, she said. "Restaurants and eateries must be able to show how they are assuring quality and safety when the inspection team asks for it," she told the Post.

Maintaining quality and hygiene is a basic requirement. There are other criteria like maintaining the proper temperature in the refrigerator, ensuring that cooked food is kept at a temperature of at least 75 degrees Celsius, washing salad ingredients in potassium permanganate or chlorine, and not reusing cooking oil.

Hotels and restaurants also need to keep health records of their employees as per the hotel and restaurant analysis criteria.

According to the report, 82 hotels and restaurants, or 16.5 percent of the total, were graded 'good' and received a green sticker with two stars; 201 establishments, or 40 percent, were rated 'satisfactory' and were given a green sticker with one star.

The remaining 201 diners got a starless yellow sticker, meaning they needed improvement.

As per the department, restaurants classified as 'very good' will receive a green sticker with three stars, and restaurants ranked as 'good' will get a green sticker with two stars. A green sticker with one star means 'medium', and an eatery with a yellow sticker means it is in need of improvement.

The department in the previous

fiscal year 2018-19 conducted inspections and standardisation in 860 hotels and restaurants. A total of 748 hotels and restaurants were categorised on the basis of food safety. Among them 14 were issued a very good score, 94 good, 288 satisfactory and 352 average.

Many hotels and restaurants in the previous fiscal year fell under the average category that needed improvement. According to the data, many diners were found to be not fulfilling standardisation requirements.

Mohan Krishna Maharjan, spokesperson for the department, said that ratings were issued particularly to hotels and restaurants on the highways where public vehicle movement is high. Inspection and standardisation were conducted in establishments that serve meals, he said.

Eateries in Khurkot, Nepalthok, Muglin, Malekhu and other highway rest areas were targeted because of their heavy traffic and long duration stops, he added.

"We began issuing ratings to the hotels and restaurants in places like Nagarkot and Bandipur with the start of Visit Nepal 2020, but we stopped inspecting them following the cancellation of the tourism promotional campaign," he said.

The department's regional offices in Biratnagar, Janakpur, Hetauda, Bhairahawa, Nepalgunj and Dhangadhi inspected the diners and graded them, Maharjan said.

"The department's inspection teams look closely at kitchen hygiene, store, toilet sanitation, hygiene management, raw material store and hygiene knowledge," Maharjan said.

In October 2017, the department issued a directive making it mandatory for hotels and restaurants to maintain food quality standards, food safety measures and hygiene.

Eateries have been classified into four types—very good, good, medium and average—based on the quality of food, service and infrastructure. The directive came into force after being endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture Development. Hotels and restaurants receive four types of stickers depending on how well they fulfil the standards prescribed by Good Manufacturing Practice, Good Hygiene Practice and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point principles to protect consumers' health.

The department received 461 complaints regarding processed drinking water, edible oil, quality of meat-related products, hotels and restaurants and the quality of rice, and its rapid response team took immediate action, officials said.

# India faces slowdown as virus clouds rural revival

REUTERS  
MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, AUG 20

India is staring at a protracted slowdown as coronavirus cases reach its countryside, with signs of recovery in the rural economy hailed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi "at best a mitigating factor", government officials and analysts said.

The world's No.5 economy reports first-quarter GDP data on August 31 and, according to a Reuters poll, it is likely to have contracted 20 percent over April-June. It is forecast to shrink 5.1 percent in the year to March 2021, the weakest since 1979.

Nearly half of India's 1.38 billion population rely on agriculture to survive, with the sector accounting for 15 percent of its economic output.

Modi has been citing higher fertiliser demand and sowing of monsoon crops, both key signs of rural activity, to show there are "green shoots" in the economy.

But four government officials said the uptick in activity may not be as large as believed given a spike in virus cases in rural areas that were initially isolated from the pandemic.

"The economic situation has in fact worsened since April and May, and we are likely moving towards a longer economic slowdown than earlier expected," a finance ministry official said.

The official pointed to sluggish consumer demand and a slowdown in rural lending as causes for concern.

"The situation on the economy front is very serious and the government's hands are tied on the fiscal front," a government adviser with direct knowledge of India's budget plans said. Both declined to be named as they were not authorised to speak to media. A ministry spokesman declined to comment.

A slump in monthly demand for fuel, electricity, steel, consumer durables and auto sales over April-June further highlight the dire state of the economy. India also has the third-highest number of virus infections in the world at more than 2.7 million, and



A file photo shows farmers planting saplings in a rice field on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, India.

new cases are increasingly emerging outside major cities, dashing hopes the rural economy will be a buffer against shrinking exports and manufacturing.

"While a recovery in rural activity provides a glimmer of hope, it is at best a mitigating factor," said Rahul Bajoria, a Barclays economist. Bajoria expects India's GDP to have contracted 22.2 percent in the June quarter.

Farmers planted nearly 14 percent more land between June 1 and July 31 than last year given good monsoon rains, while fertiliser production rose 4.2 percent in June.

"Even as the momentum coming from the agriculture sector owing to a normal monsoon and robust sowing is a positive, we believe this may not sustain due to surplus labour con-

cerns, along with an increasing proportion of active Covid-19 cases," said Upasna Bhardwaj, economist at Kotak Mahindra Bank. Rating agency ICRA believes pent-up demand contributed to some improvement in manufacturing in June and July, and that it may not continue in August due to virus-related lockdowns.

A widening fiscal deficit may also limit India's ability to provide more stimulus, though Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has promised to take steps for industries like tourism and hospitality.

India's fiscal deficit hit a record \$88.5 billion over April to June, already 83.2 percent of the target for the whole fiscal year, due to lower tax collections and front-loaded spending. India's central bank has frontloaded

interest rate cuts, but many feel demand is likely to remain subdued until virus worries subside and the government pumps in more money.

"Flattening of India's virus curve is critical for a pickup in production. Once the economy unlocks fully, we expect exports to lead to recovery and domestic demand to lag," said Kapil Gupta, chief economist, Edelweiss Research. Former central bank Governor Raghuram Rajan has called for greater focus on protecting India's economic capabilities for a meaningful revival.

"As is the case with most countries in the region, there is bound to be some permanent damage to output, setting recovery back by a few years to return to pre-Covid trend," said Radhika Rao, a DBS economist.

# China, US agree to hold trade talks, Chinese commerce ministry says

REUTERS  
BEIJING, AUG 20

China and the United States have agreed to hold trade talks "in the coming days" to evaluate the progress of their Phase 1 trade deal six months after it took effect in February, the Chinese commerce ministry said on Thursday.

Ministry spokesman Gao Feng made the comments at a weekly briefing held online, but did not elaborate.

They followed Tuesday's remarks by White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows that no new high-level trade talks were scheduled, though both sides were in touch about implementing the Phase 1 deal.

The deal, reached on January 15, and seen as a major breakthrough after a two-year long trade dispute between the world's two largest economies, set ambitious targets for China to sharply boost purchases of US farm and manufactured goods.

But ties quickly soured in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic and China's imposition of a new national security law in Hong Kong.

Both sides traded threats and sanctions on individuals and businesses, such as Chinese video platform TikTok.

Official data also suggests China's imports of US farm and manufactured goods, energy and services are well behind the pace needed to meet a first-year target increase of \$77 billion over 2017 purchases. China's purchases have increased as its economy recovers from this year's coronavirus lockdown, however.

On Tuesday, US President Donald Trump told reporters he had postponed an August 15 review of the trade pact, in frustration over Beijing's handling of the virus pandemic.



## WORLD

## BRIEFING

## China says Taiwan allegations 'malicious slander'

**BEIJING:** China on Thursday branded as "malicious slander" accusations from Taiwan about hacking attacks linked to the Chinese government, further adding to tensions between Beijing and Taipei. Taiwan has been urging its people to be alert for what officials call "omnipresent infiltration" from China, ranging from Beijing-backed media campaigns to cyberattacks, against the island that China considers its territory. This week, Taiwan said hacking groups connected to the Chinese government had attacked at least 10 government agencies and some 6,000 email accounts of government officials in an "infiltration" to steal important data.

## Thai police arrest activists over protests

**BANGKOK:** Thai police said on Thursday they had arrested eight more activists, including two popular rappers, in a crackdown after more than a month of protests against the military-backed government that have also challenged the powerful monarchy. The eight arrested overnight and on Thursday are charged with breaching internal security laws over a July 18 protest and defying an emergency decree that banned public gatherings to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, police said. "The arrests of the leaders that organised such activity are being processed based on the law," Jirapat Phumjit, deputy chief of the Metropolitan Police Bureau told reporters.

## Iran announces locally made missiles

**DUBAI:** Iran displayed a surface-to-surface ballistic missile on Thursday that Defence Minister Amir Hatami said had a range of 1,400 kilometres and a new cruise missile, ignoring US demands that Tehran halt its missile programme. "The surface-to-surface missile, called martyr Qassem Soleimani, has a range of 1,400 km and the cruise missile, called martyr Abu Mahdi, has a range of over 1,000 km," Hatami said in a televised speech. Pictures of the missiles were shown on state TV, which it said was "the newest Iranian cruise missile that will further strengthen Iran's deterrence power". (AGENCIES)

## Putin critic Navalny in coma, aides suspect poisoning

**REUTERS**  
MOSCOW, AUG 20

Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny was in a coma in a Siberian hospital on Thursday after drinking a cup of tea that his spokeswoman said she believed was laced with poison.

A fierce critic of President Vladimir Putin, Navalny started feeling ill when returning to Moscow from Tomsk in Siberia by plane on Wednesday morning. He was carried off the plane on a stretcher after it made an emergency landing at Omsk.

He was in intensive care and on an artificial lung ventilator in an Omsk hospital, his spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said.



Alexei Navalny

"We assume that Alexei was poisoned with something mixed into his tea. It was the only thing that he drank in the morning. Alexei is now unconscious," Yarmysh said.

Doctors gave contradictory information about his condition, saying it had stabilised but also that there was still a threat to his life and they were working to save him.

There is a long history of Kremlin foes being poisoned or falling ill after suspected poisonings.

They include Alexander Litvinenko, who died in London in 2006 after drinking tea laced with polonium-210, and Sergei Skripal, a former double agent who was poisoned with a nerve agent in 2018 in Salisbury, England.

The Kremlin has repeatedly denied involvement in those and other incidents, calling them anti-Russian provocations. Yarmysh did not say who she believed may have poisoned Navalny but said police had been called to the hospital.

A regional health ministry spokeswoman, Tatyana Shakirova, confirmed that Navalny has been hospitalised in Omsk and said doctors assessed his condition as serious.



A newly-wed couple kiss as Belarusian opposition supporters hold flowers during a protest in Minsk, Belarus, on Thursday. Demonstrators are taking to the streets of the Belarusian capital and other cities, keeping up their push for the resignation of the nation's authoritarian leader.

## India records another high of new coronavirus infections

Delhi has about 11,000 active cases after more than 139,000 people were infected.

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
NEW DELHI, AUG 20

India counted another record high of new coronavirus infections on Thursday as it ramped up testing to more than 900,000 a day.

The 69,652 new cases pushed India's total past 2.8 million, of which 2 million have recovered, the Health Ministry said.

The country also recorded 977 coronavirus fatalities in the past 24 hours, raising total deaths to 53,866, the ministry said. Covid-19 illnesses and deaths are thought to be far higher around the world due to limited testing and other factors.

India has conducted 3 million tests for the virus, but experts have urged increasing its testing capacity greatly, given India has the world's second-highest population of 1.4 billion people.

It has the third-most cases in the world, behind the United States and Brazil, and has the fourth highest number of deaths behind the US, Brazil and Mexico. India's nationwide lockdown imposed in late March began easing in May and is now largely being enforced in high-risk areas.

On Wednesday, authorities ordered reopening of hotels and weekly markets in the Indian capital that were closed for nearly four months. The situation improved in the Indian capital with only 12 deaths reported in the past 24 hours.

Delhi has about 11,000 active cases after more than 139,000 people were infected. Four of India's 28 states now account for 63 percent of total fatalities and 54.6 percent of the caseload. Western Maharashtra state and three southern states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka

## Russia to begin Covid-19 vaccine trials on 40,000 people

**MOSCOW:** Mass testing of Russia's first potential Covid-19 vaccine to get domestic regulatory approval will involve more than 40,000 people and will be overseen by a foreign research body when it starts next week, backers of the project said on Thursday.

These were the first details on the shape and size of the upcoming late-stage trial of the vaccine given by its developers, who are aiming to allay concerns among some scientists about the lack of data provided by Russia so far.

The vaccine, called "Sputnik V" in homage to the world's first satellite launched by the Soviet Union, has been hailed as safe and effective by

are the worst-hit regions.

South Korea reported 288 new cases, its third straight day over 200, as health authorities scramble to slow an outbreak in the greater capital area. The Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said 230 of the new cases came from the Seoul metropolitan region, where health workers have struggled to track transmissions tied to various places and groups, including churches. As of noon Thursday, 676 cases have been linked to a huge northern Seoul church led by a vocal conservative activist.

Sarang Jeil Church's pastor, Jun Kwang-hun, marched in downtown Seoul over the weekend, shared a microphone with other protesters and was later hospitalized after testing positive. At least 17 other protesters have tested positive so far. Separately, the Education Ministry said 240 infections have been confirmed among students and teachers since the country

Russian authorities and scientists following two months of small-scale human trials, the results of which have not been made public yet.

But Western experts have been more sceptical, warning against its use until all internationally approved testing and regulatory steps have been seen to be taken and proved a success.

"A range of countries is running an information war against the Russian vaccine," Kirill Dmitriev, head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) that is backing the vaccine, told a briefing. The vaccine data will be published in an academic journal later this month, he said. (REUTERS)

reopened elementary, middle- and high-schools in May.

Health officials in Australia's hot spot state said the daily new Covid-19 tally would have to be substantially lower before authorities would consider easing the lockdown in the city Melbourne.

"I won't give you a figure, but single digits or even low double digits," Victoria state Deputy Chief Health Officer Allen Cheng said, though he was encouraged by a downward trend. Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews said if the city was reopened even at half the current figures, "you wouldn't have defeated the second wave. You'd just be beginning the process of a third wave."

Victoria reported 240 new cases and 13 deaths on Thursday, an increase from the previous day but continuing a recent decline. Melbourne has been under Australia's toughest pandemic lockdown restrictions for two weeks.

## North Korean leader's sister named 'de facto second-in-command'

**REUTERS**  
SEOUL, AUG 20

South Korea's intelligence agency believes that Kim Yo Jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, is serving as his "de facto second-in-command" but has not necessarily been designated his successor, a South Korean lawmaker said on Thursday.

Believed to be in her early 30s, Kim Yo Jong is the leader's only close relative with a public role in politics, recently spearheading a new, tougher campaign to put pressure on South Korea.

Ha Tae-keung, an opposition party lawmaker on parliament's intelligence committee, told reporters that Kim was helping to run the regime with mandated authority from her brother.

"The bottom line is that Kim Jong Un still holds absolute power, but has turned over a bit more of his authority compared to the past," Ha said, following a closed-door briefing by the South's National Intelligence Service.

"Kim Yo Jong is a de facto second-in-command," Ha added in a transcript of remarks seen by Reuters.

More authority on economic and military policy has also been delegated to several other senior officials, although at a lower level, possibly to reduce strain on Kim Jong Un as well as help him avoid blame for any failures, Ha said.

Kim Yo Jong won fame ahead of her brother's 2019 summit with US President Donald Trump in Vietnam, when her efforts to ensure everything went well included holding an ashtray for the North Korean leader at a train station on his journey.

Her prominence in the campaign against South Korea this year high-



Kim Yo Jong

lighted a substantive policy role that goes beyond being merely Kim's assistant, analysts say.

She issued her first public statements to spray criticism at the neighbouring nation, and the North's state media portrayed her as playing a decision-making role.

In July, she offered personal views on diplomacy with the United States in an unusual statement in state media, saying her brother had given her special permission to watch recordings of that country's Independence Day celebrations.

When rumours and speculation arose in April about Kim Jong Un's health, his sister was seen a possible placeholder to take over the family dynasty until one of Kim's children is old enough.

Kim Yo Jong has been absent, however, from several recent high-level meetings, such as a plenary gathering of the ruling Workers' Party on Wednesday, said NK News, a Seoul-based website that tracks North Korea.

That has stirred some speculation about a possible demotion.

## Harris seizes historic moment in accepting nomination

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
WILMINGTON, AUG 20

Kamala Harris accepted the Democratic nomination for vice president on Wednesday, cementing her place in history as the first Black woman on a major party ticket and promising she and Joe Biden will rejuvenate a country ravaged by a pandemic and riven by racial and partisan divides.

In an address capping the third night of the virtual Democratic National Convention, the California senator evoked the lessons of her late mother, Shyamala Gopalan, a biologist and Indian immigrant, saying she instilled in her a vision of "our nation as a beloved community—where all are welcome, no matter what we look like, where we come from or who we love."

"In this election, we have a chance to change the course of history," Harris said. "We're all in this fight."

Mixing a former prosecutor's polish with the deeply personal, Harris also spoke of her Jamaican father and getting a "stroller's eye view" of the civil rights movement as her parents protested in the streets in the 1960s.

"There is no vaccine for racism," Harris said. "We have got to do the work."

Harris addressed a party that has staked its future on bringing together a racially diverse coalition of voters.

She was preceded in the convention program by Barack Obama, meaning the nation's first Black president introduced the woman trying to be the first Black person to hold the vice presidency. Obama said Harris was an "ideal partner" for Biden and was "more than prepared for the job."

Harris is a former district attorney and California state attorney general. She promised to speak "truths" to the American public. She said she and Biden, who tapped her as his running mate last week, believe in a country where "we may not agree on every detail, but we are united by the fundamental belief that every human being is of infinite worth, deserving of compassion, dignity and respect."

Democrats hope Harris can galvanize their party's faithful—who are divided between progressive and moderate wings—and win over swing voters still deciding between Biden and Trump. But she also was introducing herself to a national audience that may not have been paying close attention to the race until now.

"For somebody with her wealth of background and experience, she's still fresh. She's still new," said Ohio Rep Marcia Fudge, a former chair of the Congressional Black Caucus who endorsed Harris' 2020 presidential primary run before throwing her support behind Biden in March.

Harris spoke at a convention centre in Biden's home state of Delaware that



Vice presidential candidate Kamala Harris speaks at the Democratic National Convention.

was empty except for socially distanced reporters and a few campaign staffers. She was introduced by her sister, Maya, her niece Meena and Ella Emhoff, her stepdaughter who calls her "Momala." At the end of her speech, Biden walked out to join her from a distance and both were soon joined by their spouses.

In sweeping remarks that touched on the legacy of Black women who paved the way for this moment, Harris

noted that this week marks the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. Except that right, Harris said, came much later for most Black women, who helped secure that victory yet were still prohibited from voting.

"Without fanfare or recognition, they organized, testified, rallied, marched, and fought—not just for their vote, but for a seat at the table," Harris said. "We're not often taught

their stories. But as Americans, we all stand on their shoulders."

Harris also blistered Trump, something she's expected to do frequently as she campaigns with Biden in the coming months—though in-person events may remain impossible as the coronavirus rages. She recalled her days in the courtroom when she would declare "Kamala Harris for the people," reviving a slogan from her presidential campaign, while noting, "I know a predator when I see one." She didn't mention the president by name then but didn't spare him later.

"Donald Trump's failure has cost lives and livelihoods," Harris said. She later added, "Right now, we have a president who turns our tragedies into political weapons. Joe will be a president who turns our challenges into purpose."

The Biden campaign is hoping Harris can excite young voters and people of colour, especially after months of protests over institutional racism and police brutality that swept the country. She's known for her tough questioning in the Senate, particularly during confirmation hearings of two Trump nominees, Brett Kavanaugh for Supreme Court justice and William Barr for attorney general. She also caused a stir by broadsiding Biden during a primary debate last summer over his opposition to busing in the 1970s to integrate public schools.



BRIEFING

Ethics committee clears Infantino after investigation

ZURICH: FIFA's independent ethics committee has cleared the organisation's president Gianni Infantino of any alleged breach of its code, world football's governing body said on Wednesday.

Two coronavirus infected players in South Africa squad

CAPE TOWN: Cricket South Africa on Thursday reported two positive Covid-19 tests among national team players who were due to participate in a squad camp taking place this week.

Sheffield United sign Ramsdale after Henderson departure

LONDON: Sheffield United have signed English goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale from Bournemouth on a four-year contract, the Premier League club announced on Wednesday.

Gnabry powers Bayern into Champions League final

The Bavarian giants roar to a 3-0 victory over Olympique Lyonnais to set up mouth-watering against final against PSG with Neymar and Mbappe on Sunday.

REUTERS LISBON, AUG 20

Bayern Munich powered into the Champions League final, where they will face Paris St Germain, as two goals from Serge Gnabry led them to an emphatic 3-0 win over Olympique Lyonnais on Wednesday.

Bayern will bid for their sixth European Cup triumph when they come up against Neymar and Kylian Mbappe on Sunday and after convincingly beating Chelsea, Barcelona and now Lyon, Hansi Flick's side will surely start as favourites.

The Germans are unbeaten in 2020, winning 24 of 25 matches in all competitions and they have won every Champions League game this season. No team has ever won the Champions League with a 100 percent record but while Bayern will fancy their chances, PSG's powerful attack should make for an entertaining contest.

"Paris are a good team. For now we celebrate a little bit but afterwards we focus on the next game," said Bayern's Canadian left back Alphonso Davies. "It's going to be a good game, there's going to be goals in it. This is what you dream of as a footballer—playing against the best in Europe. And we're able to do that, I'm excited," he added.

PSG will take hope from the early chances that Lyon created—Memphis Depay found space behind the Bayern defence but, forced wide, he could only shoot into the side-netting. Lyon, who upset Juventus and Manchester City in the previous rounds, had warmed up on the field before the game with rarely-seen intensity and it showed as they took the game to Bayern and they went close again in the 17th minute.



Bayern Munich's Serge Gnabry in action during the Champions League match against Lyon in Lisbon, Portugal on Wednesday.

Powerful striker Karl Toko Ekambi found space in the Bayern box and should have done better after his first shot was blocked and his follow-up effort struck the post. But moments later Bayern grabbed the lead—a clev-

er ball from Joshua Kimmich found Gnabry who danced in from the right and unleashed an unstoppable shot, from over 20 metres out, into the top corner. Gnabry went close again with a snap-shot that Lyon keeper Anthony

Lopes did well to keep out as Bayern pushed hard for a second. It came in the 33rd minute—and was started and finished by Gnabry. The former Arsenal midfielder fed Ivan Perisic on the left and the Croatian's low cross

found Robert Lewandowski at the back post. His weak shot was saved by Lopes, only for the alert Gnabry to pounce and convert his ninth goal in nine Champions League games.

Lewandowski, looking well below his usual levels of sharpness, had another good chance after the interval, but he again made it too easy for Lopes, leaving Lyon still with hope. Moussa Dembele, the two-goal hero in the quarter-final win over Manchester City, came on for Depay in the 58th minute and added much-needed life to the Lyon attack.

But once again, when the chance came for the French side, they failed to make the most of it—Houssem Aouar finding Ekambi in the box but the Cameroonian's finish was straight at Manuel Neuer.

Bayern lacked the intensity of their first-half display but they made sure of the win in the 88th minute when Lewandowski rose to head home a Kimmich cross from a free kick for his 15th Champions League goal this season. Lewandowski has scored in nine straight UEFA Champions League matches—only Cristiano Ronaldo (11) has a longer streak—and has notched 55 goals in all competitions this season.

Lyon's disappointment will be stronger given that their seventh-place finish in the French league means they will not be competing in European football next season. "We knew that we were up against a better team and we stuck to our game plan but to beat such a team, you need to score when you have the chance," said Lyon sports director Juninho. "Maybe it would have been different if we had converted our early chances."

Barcelona appoint Koeman to lead recovery

REUTERS BARCELONA, AUG 20

Barcelona have appointed Ronald Koeman as their next coach, the club said in a statement on Wednesday, as the Catalans look to rebuild after their 8-2 thrashing by Bayern Munich in the Champions League last week.

Koeman, who has left his role as manager of the Netherlands, has signed a two-year-deal with Barcelona, who sacked Quique Setien on Monday after he presided over the club's worst defeat ever in European competition and a first trophy-less season for the club since the 2007-08 campaign.

Koeman, who will be officially presented at the Camp Nou stadium later on Wednesday, is dearly loved at Barca for his role in Johan Cruyff's hugely successful side known as the 'Dream Team' and for scoring the goal that delivered the club's first ever European Cup in 1992. The defender

later became the club's assistant coach before embarking on a career as a head coach, managing Dutch sides Ajax Amsterdam, PSV Eindhoven and Feyenoord plus Premier League sides Southampton and Everton and La Liga's Valencia.

"Barcelona and Ronald Koeman have come to an agreement for him to be the team's coach until 30 June 2022," said Barca's statement. "A club legend and Barca's hero at Wembley who gave fans their first European Cup, Koeman is coming back to the Camp Nou. But this time he will be in the dugout to lead the team."

Koeman has frequently been linked with the Barcelona job in the past, in spite of a somewhat patchy club record which included disappointing stints at Valencia and Everton. But he worked wonders with the Dutch national team, leading them to 2019 UEFA Nations League final as well as earning qualification to the postponed

European Championships after they had failed to reach Euro 2016 and the 2018 World Cup.

"Over the past two and a half years, I have done everything I can to achieve success with the team," Koeman told the website of the Netherlands' football association, the KNVB. "I look back with pride on what we have achieved together in that period. The Dutch national team has a bright future, I am convinced of that. Everyone knows that Barcelona is my dream club. It feels very special to me to be able to become a coach there."

The KNVB's director Eric Gudder added: "We regret Ronald's decision, but respect his choice. In the period that Ronald has been national coach, he has achieved good results and given the team colour back in their cheeks after a number of difficult years." Assistant coach Dwight Lodeweges will act as interim national coach until the KNVB has appointed a successor.

Ponting against 'Mankading'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE NEW DELHI, AUG 20

Ricky Ponting has warned Ravichandran Ashwin and the rest of his Delhi Capitals squad he won't tolerate any "Mankad" run-outs during the Indian Premier League.

The Australian great, who will again coach the team in next month's star-studded tournament, said the controversial tactic might be legal, but it was against the spirit of the game.

All-rounder Ashwin sparked controversy and a worldwide debate last year with his "Mankading" of England batsman Jos Buttler when the spinner was captain of Kings XI Punjab.

He has been hired by Delhi Capitals for next month's IPL in the United Arab Emirates, and Ponting said he will be talking to Ashwin as a priority. "I'll be having a chat to him about that, that'll be the first thing I do," he

told the Grade Cricketer podcast on Wednesday. "It is going to be a hard conversation I'll have to have with him, but I'm pretty sure he'll take it on the chin. He will say that it was within the rules and he had his rights to do it, but it's not within the spirit of the game or certainly the way I want the Delhi Capitals to play."

The dismissal was named after India's Vinoo Mankad, who ran out Australia's Bill Brown by removing the bails at the bowler's end during the 1947 Sydney Test. The mode of dismissal, while legitimate, has been widely considered unsporting.

But opposition to it has been softening recently, particularly in limited-overs cricket, when non-strikers can gain an unfair advantage by leaving the crease early. Ashwin employed the tactic last year, stopping in his delivery stride to whip off the bails while Rajasthan Royals' Buttler was backing up out of his ground.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19) \*\*\*\* Instructions belong in a board game, not in romance. It's important to do things your own way, and yes, that may include making your own mistakes. If other people are giving you unwanted advice, thank them and then ignore them.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) \*\*\* There will be an unusual or heated exchange between you and another person in the morning, and it could leave you feeling confused for the rest of the day. It isn't often that the opinions of someone else stay with you like this.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) \*\*\* While this day's events are too chock-full of details for most people to handle, you will flourish under the barrage of dates, times, facts and figures. Embrace all the chaos of the day, and tie up all those loose ends.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) \*\*\*\* Your home is usually your refuge from the world, but recent events could be causing some problems in that area. If it's a matter of physical disrepair, make all the phone calls and arrangements necessary to get things mended.

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS 1 Whipper 5 Ribs of a leaf 10 Fumble the ball 14 Vacation destination 15 Bean or Welles 16 Roof overhang 17 Gator kin 18 Bard's teen 19 With, to Jacques 20 Makes a portrait 22 Dump truck fillers 24 Katharine — Bates 25 Go fast 26 Star system 29 Mentions 33 Wave hello 34 — Khayyam 36 Ricci or Foch 37 Dory's need 38 Eye doctor 41 London's Old — 42 Comics dog 44 Poet's eyes 45 "— for dinner?" 47 Kitchen gadgets 49 Online messages 51 CPA employer 52 Collection of tales 53 Hide 57 Pooh's friend

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED. Grid with words filled in: CAMPER, KEA, AAHS, ORALLY, ALS, SLUE, PINATA, RES, TOLL, CONVENTIONAL, RAVEN, NEA, GUESSES, ENID, FEM, ANN, HIS, BIC, SKIDDED, AMI, ARK, ART, EGO, BATTLES, HOE, FRI, USS, IAN, FEEL, HOSTA, FORD, DIRTY, ACCOMMODATED, THOR, OUI, UPDATE, CORE, UND, GOLFED, HAND, ETE, STERNS.

Large crossword puzzle grid with numbers 1-70 indicating starting points for clues.

SUDOKU

Sudoku puzzle grid with numbers 1-9. Includes 'YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION' and 'DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆'.



# How Teej songs have evolved and what they mean for women

From bitter-sweet lyrics with which women vent their emotions to notes of resilience against patriarchy, Teej songs have for years been used as a means to reflect women's position in Nepali society.

ANKIT KHADGI  
KATHMANDU

On July 19, singer Sophia Thapa released a Teej song 'No Barta Please' on YouTube. Through the song, Thapa urges women who are pressured to fast on Teej to not succumb to external forces. "If one wants to fast, it should be their personal choice," says Thapa, who wrote the song during the lockdown days within two days.

"Through the song I also wanted to comment on discriminatory customs, like drinking khutta ko pani [leftover water after the husband's feet are cleaned], which are responsible for maintaining hierarchy," she says, for whom such songs are an artistic medium through which she conveys messages of equality and rebels against patriarchal practises in the name of festival and culture.

Her song, however, was met with a lot of backlash, and the video of the song had to be removed from the social media site because the singer started facing threats from the public as well as religious fundamentalists.

Although Thapa had to pay a price for being vocal about women issues through her work, according to Indira Mishra, associate professor of English in Mahendra Multiple Campus, Dharan, the essence of Teej songs has always been this—to use the songs as a medium to vent out the frustrations and grief women face in society, because of patriarchy's unfair treatment and other societal injustices.

"Teej songs, most of the time, are filled with pathos, as it has always been used as a medium through which women express their problems," says Mishra, who has written research articles and presented academic papers on Teej songs.

Celebrated annually on the third day of the waxing moon in the Nepali month of Bhadra, Teej is a prominent festival which is observed with fervour and enthusiasm mostly by Hindu women living in the hills and plains of Nepal.

The women observe the festival (by feasting and dancing with other women and then fasting) in the hope that they will find a 'good' husband like goddess Parvati did in lord Shiva. Legend has it that goddess Parvati, who was supposed to marry lord Vishnu, too had undergone rigorous fasting to get Lord Shiva, as he was the one she wanted to marry. Married women observe the festival in the hopes that their husbands will have long lives.

On this day, women dressed in various hues of red, orange, green and pink dance their heart out in both public and private places on Teej songs, which according to Bindu Sharma, assistant professor of Nepali at Ratna Rajya Campus, is the soul of the festival.

"Without songs and dance, Teej can't be celebrated. The essence of the festival lies in women coming together to observe it by dancing and singing on songs that are made for the festival," says Sharma.

But over the years, the nature of Teej



On Teej, which falls on Friday, women come together to observe the festival by dancing and singing.

songs have altered. While traditionally, Teej songs have always been like an alternative genre in the "herstory" of songs in Nepal, where women have the agency to tell their stories, today they have become commodified. "Traditionally, there were no opportunities in the public sphere where women could openly talk about their problems. That's why they used these songs as an opportunity to sing bitter-sweet songs about their inner sufferings," says Sharma.

With the end of civil war, democratisation of institutions, and rise in the economy, many Nepali women started getting employment and education opportunities. And this became the most important changing point in the nature of Teej songs, says Mishra.

"Before Panchayat, we had songs where women made their miseries the subject of the song. During Panchayat, and even during the multi-party system of the '90s, Teej songs had elements of revolution in it," says Mishra. "It was only after 2006 that a new wave in Teej songs flourished in Nepal, after women started getting economically independent," says Mishra, who credits the arrival of Komal Oli's Poila Jana Pam for changing the nature of Teej songs in Nepal.

Until 2006, for almost two decades,

While traditionally, Teej songs acted as an agency to tell stories, today they have become commodified.

Teeja ko Rahar Aayo Bari Lai from the 1991 classic film Kanyadan was the number one Teej song for most women. Then came Oli's song, whose lyrics were initially lambasted (for it carried the message that women should have the decision to select partners on their own), which changed the game and the nature of Teej songs.

According to Oli, who's currently serving as a Member of Parliament, the song was created intentionally to bring a revolution in Teej songs by highlighting the importance of self-decision of women in picking up the spouses. "Back then, it was mostly the family members who decided whom the girl should marry. Likewise, there was also the trend where men would be visiting different families to search for the 'perfect' bride. Only the approval of

the guy mattered," says Oli.

With Oli's song, the market of Teej songs blossomed, with more and more artists showing interest in creating such songs; however, according to Sharma, the more advanced society became, the more Teej songs started getting driven by capitalist motives, to cash in on a song's popularity rather than to create meaningful art.

"Before the subject of the songs were centred around women and their expression. Now the trend has switched and artists are only concerned about how to sell their songs for which they use various antics," says Sharma.

These antics, Sharma says, are regressive, failing the songs in helping them become what they originally were created for—agents of raising women's issues in the form of songs, says Sharma.

In Sharma's private study, where she analysed 66 Teej songs that were released this year on YouTube, the researcher found that 32 percent of the songs were still driven by the patriarchal notions, where women were shown as materialistic beings. Likewise, the time-worn archetype of women being responsible for other women's miseries was also reflected in the songs.

According to Sharma, such stereotypi-

cal representation and underlying sexism in Teej songs is a result of male singers penning and performing Teej songs. "When more and more men singers and writers started occupying space in Teej songs—which was largely the domain of female artists for a long time, the songs suffered from the male gaze, leading to show women and their issues in Teej songs in a stereotypical manner," says Sharma.

Sharma's views echo in the songs by Santosh KC and Khuman Adhikari, who have been releasing Teej songs almost every year which receives millions of views on YouTube. Last year, Durgesh Thapa had also released the first series of 'Bich Bich Bich Ma', a Teej song that brought a wave of conversations, as it insisted men too should be involved in the celebrations of Teej. This year too, he has released two back-to-back Teej songs 'Bich Bich Bich Ma 2', and 'Bich Bich Bich Ma 3'.

Many do not agree with this notion. "The trend of male singers entering the realm of Teej songs is daunting, as they are not only taking away space of female artists, but are also taking the voice of women for whom Teej songs have been a way of expressing themselves," says singer Jyoti Magar, who for the past seven years has been releasing Teej songs.

While Magar's Teej songs have also been deemed as frivolous by many, for her, it's the market that dictates the nature of her songs.

"There have been times when I have been a part of projects, which I did for experience and because it had commercial value," says Magar, who has been part of four Teej songs this year alone.

But when it comes to creating her own songs, she is interested in composing songs that reflect women's resistance to patriarchy as well as the essence of celebrating the festival with full freedom without any moral policing.

"We don't live in a utopian society, where gender-based discrimination doesn't exist," says Magar.

"It's just the forms and ways of discriminating against women that have changed now. That's why artists need to write Teej songs, which reflects the state of women as well as showing them resilient people who won't succumb to any pressure from now on," says Magar.

But the songs don't only have to be limited to resilience, she says; it can be just about having fun as well, which is what her latest Teej song 'Gilash Thokauni' is about. But viewers took offence at her song, for it showed women consuming alcohol during Teej celebrations.

Magar, however, hasn't given much thought to the criticism because she believes a person should be allowed to celebrate a festival any way they choose. "In the end, Teej is a festival of women, by women, and for women only," says Magar.

"It's women who should be the one deciding how they want to celebrate and if the songs reflect their way of celebrations, no one should have an issue with it," she says.

## 'Unhinged' is no reason to return to a movie theatre

Unhinged is a frankly mediocre effort, with no apparent point other than titillating (but somehow tedious) gore rage, and endless (though impressive) car crashes.

JOCELYN NOVECK  
LOS ANGELES

"We hope you are as excited as we are," goes the promotional email from the studio, "about bringing the beloved pastime of going to the movies back into America's lives."

Well, yes, of course we are.

But then we watch the film. And we wonder .... Really? THIS movie?

It's more than a little disturbing that Unhinged, essentially an angry-white-male revenge flick, will be the first wide release to invite patrons back to theatres since the coronavirus pandemic shut them down. Because, well, besides an energetically committed (no pun intended) performance from Russell Crowe, Unhinged comes off as a frankly mediocre effort, with no apparent point other than titillating (but somehow tedious) gore, misogynistic rage, and endless (though impressive) car crashes.

It also lacks any discernible trace of deeper social meaning, or even—which might have saved it—a whiff of self-aware wit. So, again, THIS is the movie that's going to proudly welcome us back to the multiplex?

The real question is whether it's even worth watching from your couch—where you don't have to worry about distancing, let alone pay for parking, the babysitter or a vat of popcorn.

Let's start with an odd filmmaking decision by director Derrick Borte and screenwriter Carl Ellsworth: In a brutal prologue, we see Crowe's character beginning his day (his terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day) at 4 a.m., in his truck outside the home where he seemingly lived with his ex-wife. He removes his wedding ring, exits his vehicle with an axe and a jug of gasoline, and proceeds to bludgeon the occupants to death and set the home on fire (because this appears in the trailer, it hardly seems a spoiler).



A scene from Unhinged which shows Russell Crowe.

OK, so this is a very troubled man—or Man, as he is identified in the script, with no name attached. But why start the action here? It means we don't have any mystery, and thus narrative tension, as to how far Man can and will go. Maybe this

is why the 90-minute running time will still feel bloated.

We then get a documentary-style lesson, during opening credits, on the plague of road rage. We hear news commentators saying deep things about anger, like

"When you're very angry you lose a lot of self-control." Also: "People have so much coming at them that their brains can't handle it." (This is pre-pandemic. You want to shout at the screen: "Tell us about it!")

Despite the film being dubbed a 'psychological thriller', one is hard pressed to find the psychology.

But, you think, maybe there's something interesting to explore? The precipitating incident is simple: Harried mum Rachel (Caren Pistorius, doing her best to differentiate levels of fear behind the wheel), is going through her own divorce and trying to raise a school-aged son (a sensitive Gabriel Bateman, who like everyone here deserves a better movie). Of course she's late getting him to school, because she's a harried single mum in the movies.

Stopped at a red light, Rachel honks at the guy who fails to move when the light changes, then flips him off. This is, as Julia Roberts would say in "Pretty Woman," a big, huge mistake. He asks her to apologize. She doesn't. And the rampage begins.

Other than the slightly creative touch of having Man play Russian Roulette with the contacts on Rachel's stolen phone—even this, though, is clumsily telegraphed in an earlier scene—there are few surprises. And despite the film being dubbed a "psychological thriller," one is hard pressed to find the psychology.

As for a moral—well, judging from the end, it seems to be: "Don't intentionally enrage a big crazy angry guy in a truck." OK, noted.

At certain points that strain all credulity, you're just hoping Crowe will look up and wink, and maybe whisper his famous Gladiator line: "Are you not entertained?" Because then we could laugh along with him—as we can with a humorous tweet he recently sent, promoting the film.

Alas, no such luck.

—Associated Press