

Nepal's largest selling English daily Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj Vol XXVIII No. 207 | 8 pages | Rs.5 Saturday, September 19, 2020 | 03-06-2077 344.0° C 14.5° C

# <image>

A footballer in action as young players have a morning practice session after the government relaxed coronavirus restrictions, at Sano Gaucharan in Kathmandu.

# After semblance of peace in ruling party, Secretariat meeting set to move to Parisdanda from Baluwatar

There had been sharp criticism of the prime minister's official residence, a public property, being used for holding meetings of a political party.



Office space and meeting halls in Dhumbarahi are congested and there is no sufficient room to hold the meeting by maintaining social distance but there is enough space at Parisdanda, according to Shrestha.

During the unification of the two parties, top leaders from both sides had agreed to use the UML's central office as the new party's central office and the Maoist headquarters in Parisdanda as the offices of the partule siden wing With festival season close, bank loans for imports halve, bankers' data shows

Low spending outlook around Dashain clearly suggests that Nepal's economy, 82 percent of which is driven by consumption, will continue to slide, economists say.

### PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA & SANGAM PRASAIN Kathmandu, sept 18

In the first two months of the last fiscal year, NMB Bank had issued letters of credit, or LCs in common usage, worth Rs6.5 billion. During the same period this fiscal year, it has issued them worth just Rs3.5 billion.

Most of the letters of credit issued in these two months are to import goods targeting Dashain and Tihar festivals, according to Sunil KC, the bank's chief executive officer.

In normal times this is also the period the country's commercial banks would be busy issuing loans particularly for importing goods for consumption during the festivals. But loans too have gone down in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Commercial banks have lent just Rs21 billion during this period, down from Rs54 billion in the same period last fiscal year, according to Nepal Bankers' Association.

Issuance of letters of credit and lending for imports grows just before Dashain assuming that people spend lavishly and consumption grows several times compared to other times.

Letters of credit are bank guaran-

tees that a buyer's payment to sellers will be received on time and if the buyer is unable to make payment on the purchase, the bank is required to cover the due amount.

"Based on the issuance of L/C in our bank and overall lending, I don't think there will be as much consumption this Dashain as in the past years," said KC.

People consume more food during the festival season than at other times and they purchase new items including garments, footwear, electronic goods and automobiles, according to economists.

The Nepal Automobile Dealers' Association auto show, held before Dashain every year, attracted 80,000 visitors and did business worth Rs5 billion last year. But this year the show has been postponed because of the Covid-19 pandemic and may be held in February, according to Surendra Pradhan, chief of the Association's secretariat.

Economist Keshav Acharya predicts that consumption of almost everything will go down this year due to two factors: reduced income of people and reduced movement of people compared to previous years.

>> Continued on page 2



POST FIL

Scheduling of the Parisdanda meeting follows Dahal assuming a bigger role in the party.

### ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, SEPT 18

Following growing criticism of the ruling Nepal Communist Party holding its meetings at the Prime Minister's official residence, the next meeting of the party's Secretariat scheduled for Monday will for the first time be held at the party's offices at Parisdanda in Koteshwor.

The Parisdanda property—which used to be the headquarters of the erstwhile Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) until its unification with the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) in May 2018 to form the Nepal Communist Party (NCP)—now houses the offices of the party's sister organisations.

"Holding the meeting at Parisdanda gives a message that party unification is being strengthened," said a Standing Committee meeting who did not want to be named.

The Secretariat meeting comes after the rift in the party has narrowed following an abrupt end to the long drawn out Standing Committee meeting. Tensions ran high when the rival faction demanded the resignation of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, but peace seems to have returned to the ruling party with the nomina-



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tion of party vice chair Bamdev Gautam to the National Assembly and the handover of party reins of Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Following the unification in 2018, the meetings of the party used to be held at Dhumbarahi, formerly the headquarters of the CPN-UML, although leaders from both sides had agreed to use the properties of Parisdanda and Dhumbarahi for different purposes and call both places the party headquarters.

But of late, most of the meetings of the nine-member Secretariat and the 44-member Standing Committee were held at the Prime Minister's official residence, which had been criticised both within and outside the party.

"This is a welcome step and this should be given continuity," said Bhim Rawal, a standing committee member who had been demanding that party meetings be held outside Baluwatar. "To run the party in a system with institutional memory and other reasons, party meetings should be held in the party office."

The decision to hold the Secretariat meeting at Parisdanda was taken in view of the criticism the party had been facing for holding various meetings inside the Prime Minister's official residence, according to party spokesman Narayan Kaji Shrestha.

> The Secretariat meeting was supposed to be held at Parisdanda on Friday but due to the busy schedule of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, it was deferred till Monday.

> "The decision to hold the meeting at Parisdada was taken by Oli and another chairman, Pushpa Kamal Dahal during their meeting on Thursday," said Shrestha.

ty's sister wings.

As soon as Oli became the prime minister in February, 2018, the party held Standing Committee meetings and Secretariat meetings in Dhumbarahi. But after the Prime Minister became ill and went to Singapore for treatment in August last year, the meetings of the top party committees were convened in Baluwatar although one Central Committee and one Standing Committee meeting were held at Dhumbarahi.

Most Cabinet meetings also have been taking place at Baluwatar since his return from Singapore but after Prime Minister Oli had a second kidney transplant in March all Cabinet meetings, party meetings and other small gatherings that he attends have been taking place at Baluwatar.

Oli has hardly visited his office inside Singha Durbar after his kidney transplant.

The Prime Minister's Office, which was relocated to a new building inside Singha Durbar after the old office was damaged in the 2015 earthquake, does not have enough space for Cabinet meetings maintaining distance, one secretary at the Prime Minister's office told the Post.

"Prime Minister Oli's health is fragile due to the recent kidney transplant and the most important reason is Covid-19," said a ruling party leader close to Oli. "Therefore, he has to take extra caution while meeting with people and cannot frequently move outside Baluwatar."

Given the mandatory health protocols, party meetings are taking place at Baluwatar, he said.

Despite the situation and Oli's health, the practice of holding party meetings at Baluwatar has drawn criticism.

"Holding party meetings inside the Prime Minister's residence was totally a wrong practice," said Chandi Shrestha, a former home secretary. "Holding Cabinet meetings is fine due to his health. The Prime Minister's official residence is a public property and the Prime Minister is of the country, not of a political party. Therefore, in general practice, party meetings should be held in the party office, not at the Prime Minister's residence. The official residence is not a place for holding family parties or party meetings." >> Continued on page 2



OYSTER PERPETUAL EXPLORER II

Regency Watch

ANNAPURNA ARCADE DURBAR MARG MGA INTERNATIONAL PVT. LTD.

# NATIONAL



Devotees immerse an idol of Lord Biswokarma, the divine architect according to Hindu mythology, in the Bagmati river at Chobhar, Kathmandu, on Friday. Owners of vehicles, tools and machinery performed rituals to mark the day dedicated to Lord Biswokarma on Thursday

# Around 750 quake displaced families live in landslide-prone settlements in Rasuwa

While some families have taken grants from the government to buy a plot of land, most are awaiting relocation to integrated settlements built by the government.

### **BALARAM GHIMIRE** RASUWA. SEPT 18

Many families who were displaced by the 2015 earthquake in Rasuwa were moved to various parts of the district the National Reconstruction Authority.

However, a study conducted by the authority a few months after the relocation had shown that most of the families were vulnerable to landslides during the rainy season.

Hundreds of displaced families are still living in temporary shelters in areas that are prone to monsoon-induced natural disasters, the study showed

A technical team of the National Reconstruction Authority had studied the earthquake-weakened topography in the district and the areas where the displaced families were relocated to a few months after the 2015 earthquake. The team had enlisted 70 places that were at risk of landslide and had recommended relocation of the settlement to other areas. The team said 30 among 70 settlements were at high risk of landslides and had to be relocated immediately. But the settlements are yet to be moved.

Hundreds of families have been staying in Rasuwa and in the neighbouring Nuwakot district after their villages were ravaged by landslides triggered by the 2015 earthquake. A od number of the tims are staying in Khalte of Uttargaya Rural Municipality Ward No. 5 that has been marked as a flood and landslide-prone area. "We have been living in this area for the past five years. We live in fear of floods and landslides every rainy season," said Chheku Lama, an earthquake victim staying in Khalte. Two hundred and thirty-one displaced families are currently staying in Khalte. "We have requested the authorities concerned to help us relocate to a safe place but nothing has been done yet." Besides Khalte, various settlements in Uttargaya Rural Municipality and Gosaikunda Rural Municipality were enlisted as landslide-prone areas in the study conducted by the National **Reconstruction Authority.** 

According to the District Project Implementation Unit of the NRA, a total of 1,127 families living in landslide-prone areas were enlisted in the beneficiary list of the 2015 earthquake victims. The office said the government provided a grant of Rs 200,000 each to 687 families to buy land to rebuild their houses

"But only 268 families have built or have started constructing their houses," said Saroj Kumar Yadav, an engineer at the unit.

According to him, around 750 families are still living in landslide-prone settlements in the district.

The government provides a Rs 200,000 grant to quake-displaced families who prefer voluntary relocation to buy land plots. To receive the grant, the local unit should recommend the beneficiary stating that his/her settlement is at risk of landslides and he/

she does not have a plot of land in a safer area to build a house. According to Yadav, the beneficiaries who opt for voluntary relocation should search for the land plot themselves

The rest of the beneficiaries who do not want to take the grant are to be kept in integrated settlements built by the government. The process to construct integrated settlements is underway in Langbu, Tiru, Bogtitar, Pairebesi and Pangling in the district. But the construction of none of the integrated settlements has been completed yet

"The delay in preparing a detailed project report and the lockdown are the main reasons behind the delay in the construction of the integrated settlements," said Yadav.

A total of 12,817 families have been included in the list of beneficiaries for the housing reconstruction aid in Rasuwa district. The unit said 10,998 houses have been constructed so far.



# Unnecessary road projects in rural areas of Baglung are causing floods and landslides

The Infrastructure Development Office opened two new tracks in the last month of the last fiscal year to avoid budget freeze, say local residents.

### PRAKASH BARAL BAGLUNG, SEPT 18

Unplanned construction of rural roads in Jaimini Municipality Ward No 1, Baglung, has exposed several settlements in the municipality at high risk of floods and landslides. The need to spend the allocated budget under infrastructure development before the end of the fiscal year saw the local government initiating two road construction projects last fiscal year alone.

The Infrastructure Development Office opened two new tracks-Dandakhet-Bhairavsthan and Githe-Deurali-in Ward No 1 of the municipality in the last month of last fiscal year that ended on July 15. There are already two road sections that pass through the same ward which were built a few years ago. Locals say that there was no requirement for the new tracks

"Our villages were already connected with a road network. We didn't need new tracks in the municipality," said Balaram Paudel of Jaimini Ward No 1. "The new roads have no proper drainage system and during heavy rainfall, the surrounding settlements get flooded.'

Two people died in separate landslides in Ward No 1 on Sunday and Monday. According to the municipality, 12 houses were destroyed by various landslides while 39 others are at risk. The landslide that occurred along the Githe-Deurali road section damaged three drinking water projects in the area last month.

The disaster-affected people are taking shelter with their relatives and neighbours. "I sent my mother to my sister's in Kushma. My wife and I are staying in Amalachaur since our village is at high risk of landslides," said Bheshraj Paudel, another local of Ward No 1.

The villagers claimed that the settlements were safe before the construction of the two new tracks "Our settlements never experienced such deadly landslides in the past. But this year, almost all villages are at risk of being swept away," said Bhadrakala Acharya, a 68-year-old of Ward No 1.

The Infrastructure Development Office had allocated Rs 7 million each for the Dandakhet-Bhairavsthan and Githe-Deurali rural road projects in the last fiscal year. The tracks were opened hurriedly but additional infrastructures like drainage and culverts were not constructed. As a result, the rainwaters along the tracks and rivulets enter the settlements when it rains.

Bidur Khadka, an engineer at the Infrastructure Development Office, admitted the flaws while constructing the tracks. "There was no proper geographical survey done before the tracks were opened. We will not take on such development projects in the days to come," said Khadka. "Our office was established only a few months ago here in Baglung. The Parbat office had issued the budget for the road projects.

Jaimini Municipality has urged the provincial government to repair the roads and control floods and land-

slides in the area. "The settlement is at high risk of monsoon-related disasters. The municipality's budget is not enough to control floods or relocate the settlement. We have already informed the provincial government about it," said Mayor Indraraj Paudel.

Meanwhile, in Parbat, the whole Mudikuwa settlement in Phalebas Municipality Ward No 4 is at high risk of landslide. Three dozen families of the village have been taking shelter in a local school for the past few days.

The villagers have been displaced as land just above the settlement sank and started developing fissures following heavy rains on Sunday. A fouryear-old girl was buried alive in a landslide in Mudikuwa on Sunday night. "At least 25 houses of Mudikuwa should be relocated to safe locations. Other settlements at Ward No 1, 3, 4, 6 and 10 are at risk of landslides," said Tikaram Gaudel, the ward chairman of Phalebas-4. According to him, around 90 families of seven different settlements are at risk of floods and landslides.

(Agandhar Tiwari in Parbat contributed reporting)



Mudslide debris on a recently opened dirt track in Jaimini Municipality, Baglung.

# With festival season close, bank loans ...

### >> Continued from page 1

A central bank study showed that registered firms alone laid off 22.5 percent of their staff and cut wages by 18.2 percent on average. A large number of people have jobs in the informal sectors too.

In fact, the World Bank has projected that nearly one-third of people who are just above the poverty line could lip below the line due to the pa ic. "An estimated 31.2 percent of the Nepali population who live close to the poverty line [between \$1.90 and \$3.20 a day] are at high risk of falling into extreme poverty," the global lender said.

Acharya, also a former chief economic adviser to the finance minister. "But this will not happen this Dashain."

Consumption is the key driver of the Nepali economy, contributing 82 percent to the gross domestic product. Ever since the government imposed

the lockdown on March 24, people's mobility has been greatly affected. Even though the lockdown was lifted on July 21, it remained in place in di ferent covers in most parts of the country, affecting consumption of goods and services. The government allowed resumption of international flights from September 2 for mostly foreign diplomatic staff and representatives of international agencies. Domestic flights, long-haul public transportation service and hotels and restaurants started operations on Thursday despite coronavirus cases rising rapidly. As of Friday, there have been 61,593 cases of coronavirus infections, with 2020, the highest single-day spike so far, on Friday. The death toll stands at 390 with seven more deaths reported on Friday. "Reopening of economic sectors will increase movement of people to some extent and subsequently increase demand for goods and services," said Gunakar Bhatta, spokesperson for the Nepal Rastra Bank. "But it is clear that consumption will not be as much as last year. Despite the reopening of markets, people will not go shopping as in normal times unless it is essential, said Bhatta While people consuming little is a concern for the economy, consumers may not get the goods they want in the market with importers struggling to bring in goods due to domestic and international travel restrictions. For instance, Nepal gets most of the garments, footwear and electronic goods from China to meet the festival demand. But importers say nearly 2,000 trucks ferrying goods have been stuck in Kerung, Khasa and Lhasa since China has closed the Rasuwagadhi and Tatopani border crossings for the last several weeks.

been halted for the last three years through the Tatopani while the Rasuwgadhi border point has remained closed for a month.

"We already had 1,200 trucks stuck in the bordering Chinese town. Another 800 trucks were added after two borders reopened and then closed again," said Poudel. "Now we don't have money to import any more goods even by Nepal closed its borders in January after the spread of the coronavirus in China. As a result, 1,200 trucks got stuck on the Chinese side. The Tatopani border was opened in early April and the Rasuwagadhi border in July. Hoping that the movement would be smooth, importers ordered more goods, only for the border to be closed again as coronavirus cases grew. There is, however, some hope that remittance will not be affected much before the festival, which could help increase consumption if the recent trend is anything to go by. In the last fiscal year 2019-20, remittance inflow defied expectations as it decreased by just 0.5 percent to Rs875 billion against the projection of a 15 to 20 percent drop, according to the central bank. In the last several years, remittance has been fuelling consumption and whether the country would receive remittances like in the past is uncertain According to Bhatta, spokesperson for the central bank, remittance appears to have slightly increased during the first month of last fiscal year compared to the same month last fiscal although data are yet to be processed Economists, however, say that given the current global recession, there is uncertainty whether remittance would be received as usual in the coming months. Any reduction in remittance will also affect the country's consumption pattern, economists said. "Low consumption during this festival season will affect overall economic growth this fiscal year," said economist Acharya. "The government has targeted a seven percent growth this fiscal year but it will be hard to achieve even meagre growth this fiscal considering the current state of the economy."



COURTESY: JUNGA BAHADUR TAMANO

The settlement for quake displaced families in Khalte, Uttaragaya Rural Municipality.

# Schools in Taplejung prepare to run classes by adopting health and safety measures

### ANANDA GAUTAM

TAPLEJUNG, SEPT 18

Most of the schools in Taplejung have decided to resume classes since online classes have failed to take off in the rural areas of the district given the absence of internet coverage. Educators say that even though the authorities had initiated radio and TV programmes to reach out to the students in rural areas, running classes through the medium have proved to be ineffective

During the lockdown period, most schools were running classes in small groups by deploying teachers to settlements and even conducting one-onone personal tutoring. But they were asked to discontinue these alternative classes in light of the threat of the coronavirus pandemic. On August 12, the District Administration Office in Taplejung notified schools to stop all forms of alternative teaching and learning programmes

Sinam Secondary School in Ward No. 1 of Sirijangha Rural Municipality, which was conducting classes in 12 settlements, discontinued the classes following the directive of the local administration.

The government has now handed over the decision-making authority

regarding school resumption to the local units.

"We had to stop the classes that were run in 12 settlements from mid-June to the first week of August," said Mahendra Prakash Gautam, headmaster of Sinam Secondary School. "Now we've decided to resume the classes with permission from the local government. In fact, we will be taking the classes to 25 settlements from now on. If we don't do that, the students will lose an entire academic year.

According to Gautam, they will teach a group of 50 students from each settlement from Sunday and all health and safety measures will be adopted while conducting the classes

Meanwhile, Saraswati Secondary School in Hangpang of Aathrai Tribeni Rural Municipality plans to conduct classes in the school building itself with a limited number of students.

"We will start classes from Sunday. The students will be called to the school according to their class schedule," said Laxmi Pokharel, headmaster of the school. "We have fixed classes on the basis of the settlements. The students of one settlement can take classes once every three days. Teachers will provide assignments to the students for two days. This will minimise the risk of spread of the virus.'

According to Pokharel, the school management has already informed parents and students about the class schedule. The school plans to take in only 15 to 20 students per class.

Little Buddha English Boarding School in Phungling is also preparing to resume classes by limiting the number of students and teaching hours.

"Classes taken from radio and television are not effective here. We have consulted with the parents. They have advised us to start classes even if it's for a few hours," Yubaraj Giri, the school's headmaster, said.

Chhatrapati Pyakurel, chief at Phungling Municipality, said the decision to run classes is entirely up to the school and to send wards to school is up to the parents.

"Schools and parents can take the decision independently. The municipality is not going to direct the schools to run the classes, nor is it going to ask the parent to send their children to school," he said. "We have asked the schools to ensure the health and safety of everyone involved if they decide to run the classes."

There are a total of 379 government and private schools in Taplejung.

The Bank has predicted that Nepal's economy in the current fiscal year may contract by 2.8 percent, and this would risk exacerbating poverty, inequality and food insecurity because of a large informal economy.

"Due to the lockdown imposed by the government, many people lost their jobs in the formal and informal sectors and their purchasing power has decreased, which will affect the Dashain consumption," said Acharya. "On the other hand, there won't be mobility of people from the city, the villages and from abroad to Nepal like in previous years due to psychological terror created by Covid-19, which will affect transport services and the hotel and restaurant sector."

Transport entrepreneurs said there won't be much travel for Dashain festival from the urban centre to the villages as many people have already moved to their villages in one way or another.

"Most of them have stayed in their villages. Therefore, there will not be a rush like in the past years," said Saroj Sitaula, a transport entrepreneur.

After the government reopened long-haul transport services from Thursday, he said, many people are expected to move out early considering potential crowding just ahead of Dashain. According to him, over two million people had moved out of Kathmandu last Dashain.

The movement of people brings business to the restaurants and hotels along the highway and provides employment for thousands but this will be reduced too this year.

"Consumption of goods and services during the Dashain festival brings dynamism in the economy," said

# After semblance of peace in ruling party ...

### >> Continued from page 1

But Oli's aides maintain that in future if the need arises party meetings will be held at Baluwatar. "As per the necessity and requirement, the party meetings may take place inside

According to Bachhu Poudel, president of Nepal Trans Himalaya Border Commerce Association, a grouping of traders involved in Nepal-China trade, cross-border movement of goods has

Baluwatar in future," said Surya Thapa, press adviser to the prime minister.

No matter where party meetings are held in future, the latest decision to move the meeting away

from the Prime Minister's official residence has been welcomed within the party

"This is just a beginning and the first attempt," said Rawal, the ruling party leader.

### NATIONAL



Members of Bhaktapur District Scouts go round the city as part of a programme to raise awareness about coronavirus spread. Bhaktapur has reported 1,275 infections, the lowest caseload among the Valley districts, and 14 Covid-19-related deaths so far.

# Officials raise alarm as new single-day virus spike recorded with 2,020 cases

With the festival season approaching and long-route travel ban lifted, health officials warn asymptomatic infected travellers from Kathmandu Valley could spark new waves of infections across the country.

### ANUP OJHA KATHMANDU, SEPT 18

Nepal set a single-day coronavirus case record on Friday with 2,020 infections, taking the total number of Covid-19 cases to 61,593. Kathmandu Valley also recorded the highest daily spike with 859 new infections, of which 698 cases were confirmed in Kathmandu, 82 in Bhaktapur and 79 in Lalitpur districts.

Despite the four-month long lockdown and the subsequent prohibitory orders, there has been no let-up in the rise of coronavirus cases in the Valley. As of Friday, the Valley has reported 15,138 infections. More than two-thirds of these cases (12,640) were confirmed after the three district administrators of the Valley imposed prohibitory orders starting August 19 midnight.

Health officials say the Covid-19 situation in the Valley, particularly in Kathmandu, is a cause for major concern, because with the increase in infections, the number of infected people who are out of contact is also

whose test results come positive for the coronavirus infection could not be reached. "Among the infected who are out of

contact also include the individuals

who had come from out of the Valley,'

Until Thursday, the city has diag-

Health officials have long been

struggling with the problem of delib-

erate misidentification by the people

undergoing coronavirus tests, making

the job of contact tracing trouble-

Hari Kunwar, chief of the Public

give false personal details to the health

officials fearing stigmatisation from

their communities in case their test

"In many cases we have found the

people who live in rented rooms and

apartments not giving the accurate

information. They apparently

fear being kicked out by their land-

results come positive.

Division at Kathmandu Metropolitan City, says many people

nosed 6,363 coronavirus cases and con-

ducted 14,551 contact tracing.

said Oli

some

Health

suggested that the government and other stakeholders inform and educate people about the disease.

Meanwhile, the contact tracing job has been made doubly difficult after the government resumed long-distance bus and domestic flight services from Thursday onwards ahead of the Dashain festival.

Growing number of infected people in the city are out of contact, say officials.

Health officials fear that with the resumption of long-haul transportation service there is a chance of the out-of-contact infected people in Kathmandu spreading the virus in several parts of the country, prompting outbreaks in remote areas and new waves of infections in places

where the cases are on the wane. on approacnes there is a high risk of unwitting infected people carrying the virus to different towns and villages of the country," Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, virologist at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital in Teku, told the Post.

He warns that there is a risk of the repeat of the Covid-19 outbreaks witnessed earlier by many Tarai districts which were attributed to the people who had returned home from various coronavirus-stricken cities in India-only this time, the spreaders are likely to be from the Kathmandu Valley.

"Earlier, many Tarai districts had become the coronavirus hotspots through carriers who had come from India. Now, Kathmandu has become the most infected place," Pun said. 'There is a danger of the virus travelling from Kathmandu to various parts of the country, even those places which are relatively safe so far.'

The government has not enforced any strict health and safety guidelines for people travelling from the Valley to other parts of the country, except for the one passenger per seat rule.

Health officials have advised that the government conduct PCR tests on each passenger before he or she is allowed to travel, but the suggestion has largely been neglected.

According to the Metropolitan Traffic Police Division, a total of .813 people left the Valley on Friday

# Rural municipalities turn to study groups after virtual classes prove ineffective

### **BINOD GHIMIRE KATHMANDU SEPT1**

With the prospects of resumption of schools any time soon diminishing, and the effectiveness of virtual education questioned, various rural municipalities have started teaching students in groups at the community level.

Local governments have started programmes for teaching children by maintaining social distance a week after the Ministry of Education issued a directive putting them in charge of local school operations.

Nagendra Bahadur Malla, chairperson of Dungeshor Rural Municipality in Dailekh, said 36 schools in the district have formed study groups for children. "Some schools have started calling one-fifth of their students to school each day on a rotational basis," said Malla.

"Others are teaching children by forming study groups. Teachers interact with students and give them homework," he told the Post. Students then show their work to the teacher when it is their turn to go to school.

Malla said this teaching-learning mode will continue for a month until Dashain when its effectiveness will be evaluated. "We will decide whether to continue with what we have been doing or switch to another methodology," he said.

The ministry on September 10 came up with a directive asking local governments to categorise students into five groups based on their access to virtual learning platforms and provide them learning opportunities accordingly. As per the directive, the first category of students includes those who don't have access to any alternative learning platforms, and the second consists of those who have access to a radio. The third category of students includes those who have access to tv. Those in the fourth group have access to a computer, but not the internet. Children under the fifth category have access to the internet and other means of communication.

Representatives of local governments say they shifted to in-person teaching after assessing that the virtual learning platforms were either out of the reach of students or were ineffective. Gadhawa Rural Municipality

Nepal as a source country for foreign

workers only in 2001. And since then,

Nepalis have worked in various sec-

tors like manufacturing, construction,

plantations, agriculture and the ser-

Now, in a bid to encourage local

employers to hire Malaysian citizens,

the incentive programme pays

between RM800 and RM1,000 per work-

Under the National Economic

Recovery Plan, which was introduced

to reduce unemployment by hiring

local talent and upskilling workers,

has employed 46,043 job seekers

vice industry.

er for up to six months.

in Dang has asked schools to start classes in small groups after teaching through the local FM radio station for three months.

Sahajram Ahir, chairperson of the rural municipality, said all the schools in the area will start teaching students in small groups from Sunday. "We decided to adopt in-person study after realising that this was the only effective option we have," he told the Post. "We hope the interaction between the teachers and students will motivate students to get back to studying."

Formal classes in schools have been halted for the last six months amid an increase in coronavirus cases. The new academic session normally starts in mid-April.

However, all schools and colleges have remained shut since March 18, around a week before the country went into a full lockdown to contain the spread of the pandemic.

Ahir said they decided to start running face-to-face classes after the education ministry issued the directive authorising local governments to mobilise teachers or volunteers to conduct classes in small groups for students who don't have access to virtual learning.

Although a significant number of students have access to FM radio, it was not an effective means of distance learning as students don't get to ask teachers questions, he said.

Estimates show that only around 40 percent of schoolchildren in Nepal have access to virtual learning platforms. However, a recent report by UNICEF suggests only three out of 10 students have access to any form of virtual education.

Bansalal Tamang, general secretary of National Association of the Municipalities in Nepal, said dozens of rural municipalities that don't have active Covid-19 cases or have few cases have already started or are in the process of doing so very soon.

"Five months of the current academic session are already gone. We hardly have five-six months to complete the curricula now," he told the Post

During a virtual interaction with the journalists on Tuesday, Minister for Education Giriraj Mani Pokharel said the present academic year will not be extended, and end in April.



Gyan Bahadur Oli, the Covid-19 focal person at the Public Health Division of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, says more than 500 coronavirus infected people are currently out of contact

On an average, 12 people in the city

lords," said Kunwar. "We did trace people with the police, but that is not possible now." said Kunwar

Anthropologist Suresh Dhakal said only social counselling and better awareness about Covid-19 can help solve this problem, as infected people fear what others might say or do. He alone.

"The number will be higher in coming days," said Rameshwor Yadav, spokesperson for the division. He said on the first day of operation of long route buses only half the number of passengers had left the Valley.

# As Malaysia reserves jobs for locals, space for Nepalis reeling under pandemic shrinks more

### CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL

KATHMANDU, SEPT 18

Things were already expected to be bad for Nepal's foreign employment sector. Now it's getting worse.

Reeling under the pandemic, Nepal' foreign labour market is likely to expe rience a severe downturn with Malaysia, a top destination for Nepali workers, showing the signs of stopping the hiring of foreign workers.

Through a series of recent announcements, Malaysian authorities have hinted that there will be a cap on the arrival of foreign workers into the country and that jobs would be reserved for local citizens.

Last month, Malaysian Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri M Saravanan said there would be no new intake of foreign workers in all sectors until the year-end as locals would be given priority.

"We will not allow [new] foreign workers until the year-end. They [foreigners] can come as tourists if they are allowed," he had told local media at the launch of the Human Resources Development Fund initiative under the National Economic Recovery Plan. "We try to reduce foreign workers in the workforce besides giving priority to locals to secure jobs.

On Tuesday, Saravanan once again urged Malaysian employers to hire locals via the MYFutureJobs portal, which is the Malaysian government' national employment services portal that serves both job seekers and employers. Besides, the Malaysian government has also rolled out incentives for employers to encourage them to hire local workers.

Malaysian government's intention and recent initiatives, however, do not augur good news for Nepal, for which the Southeast Asian country remains

a favoured employment destination for tens of thousands of its citizens and a source of remittance worth billions of rupees

According to Jeevan Baniya, a labour migration expert, the move was anticipated but will hit Nepal's labour market in Malaysia.

"Whenever there is economic distress or shrinking jobs in the internal labour market, countries often come out with such policies. The country's internal political situation also inspires such moves," said Baniya, who is an assistant director at the Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility of Social Science Baha. "But this will definitely affect Nepal's labour migration scenario as Malaysia has been one of the most preferred labour destination countries for our workers.'

The Covid-19 has already resulted in a massive drop in labour migration numbers with no signs of immediate recovery.

During the 2019/20 fiscal year, the number of permits issued saw a remarkable drop of 27.5 percent, compared to the 2018/19 fiscal. Overall labour permits issued last fiscal year, when 59,714 Nepalis departed for Malaysia, were the lowest in the past five years.

With the prolonged global economic slowdown caused by the pandemic and nationalisation of jobs, the country's labour market is likely to shrink even more in the months to come, warn experts

"Foreign employment sector, which has been completely shut down for over six months due to the impact of Covid-19, is headed towards more uncertainty. We had thought that the sector would see a revival in the next few months, but that is unlikely now," said Rohan Gurung, a Kathmandu-



Malaysia currently hosts nearly two million foreign workers, including over 400,000 Nepalis.

based recruiting agency operator.

According to Gurung, who is the former president of Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agenciesthe umbrella organisation of recruiting agencies in the country, stopping labour migration to Malaysia would mean loss of thousands of jobs for Nepalis.

"In one year, as many as 175,000 Nepalis went to Malaysia. Malaysian employers have been hiring foreign workers like Nepalis as it must have been an easier and also cheaper option for them," said Gurung. "The Malaysian government is now encour-

aging local employers to hire local workers as they are also facing unemployment after workers must have returned from developed countries as well.'

Malaysia currently hosts nearly two million foreign workers, including over 400,000 Nepalis.

Although labour migration to Malaysia witnessed a surge in the 1990s, Nepal started issuing labour permits to Malaysia-bound workers only in 1997, as per a factsheet report of the Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility.

Malaysia, however, recognised

between June 15 and September 9.

Such a move can have a ramification for Nepal, where the unavailability of jobs to migrants who had returned home after losing jobs in the wake of Covid-19 has triggered re-migration.

"We have seen Nepali youths desperately trying to enter India from the Gauriphanta border. While the labour market abroad is shrinking, schemes rolled out so far to provide jobs to returnees have been ineffective as they are willing to migrate again,' said Baniya.

"Economic slowdown, new labour force entering the market every year amidst the existing unemployed population and the shrinking labour market will place the country in a difficult situation and also see a rise in social problems.'

Labour migration to Malaysia was slowly reviving from a 16-month-long suspension enforced by the government. Within the next few months, the government stopped issuing labour permits due to the fear of infection among migrants after Covid-19 ripped through labour hosting countries.

Now, when the government has started issuing labour permits, Malaysian policy is likely to affect Nepali workers' prospect of travel in the next few months.

"Nepalis have been getting to work in Malaysia, which has climatic conditions similar to Nepal and is relatively freer than the Gulf countries. Nepalis have been getting to work as factory workers in giant multinational tech companies," said Gurung.

"Sooner or later, Nepalis will start migrating due to the absence of jobs at home. They will have no option than going to Gulf countries and work in hot conditions away from factories in Malaysia.'

# WORLD

# BRIEFING

### China aims to operate regular space flights by 2045

BEIJING: China aims to set up a space programme operating thousands of flights a year and carrying tens of thousands of tons of cargo and passengers by 2045, state news agency Xinhua quoted an official as saying on Friday. China is trying to catch up with Russia and the United States to become a major space power by 2030. Bao Weimin, a senior official at China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, told a conference that the planned space flight system would be able to meet commercial demands, according to the Xinhua report. He also said China is aiming for breakthroughs in the core technology needed and for the building of a testing system by 2025.

### Trump offered to pardon Assange, says lawyer

LONDON: US President Donald Trump offered to pardon Julian Assange if the WikiLeaks founder provided the source for the hacking of Democratic National Committee emails before the 2016 US presidential election, a London court was told on Friday. Assange's lawyer, Jennifer Robinson, said she observed a meeting where former Republican US Representative Dana Rohrabacher and Charles Johnson, an associate known to have close ties to the Trump campaign, made the offer in 2017. Robinson said Assange was told that Trump approved of the meeting and that Rohrabacher would later meet with the president to discuss the reaction to the proposed deal.

### **Russia approves first Covid-19** drug for sale in pharmacies

**MOSCOW:** Russia has approved R-Pharm's Coronavir treatment for outpatients with mild to moderate Covid-19 infections and the antiviral drug could be rolled out to pharmacies in the country as soon as next week, the company said. Coronavir's approval as a prescription drug follows the green light for another Russian Covid-19 drug, Avifavir, in May, Both are based on favipiravir. which was developed in Japan. R-Pharm's announcement is another sign Russia is pushing hard to take a lead in the race against the virus. It is already exporting its Covid-19 tests and has clinched several internation al deals for its vaccine. (AGENCIES)

# India's coronavirus cases jump by another 96,000

China reports 32 imported Covid-19 cases, 13 of them in Xi'an, over a period of 24 hours.



A woman wearing a face mask to protect against the coronavirus is caught in the sunlight as she walks along a street in Beijing, on Friday.

### **ASSOCIATED PRESS** NEW DELHI, SEPT 18

India's coronavirus cases jumped by another 96,424 in the past 24 hours, showing little sign of leveling.

The Health Ministry on Friday raised the nation's total cases to 5.21 million, or 0.37 percent of its nearly 1.4 billion people. It said 1,174 more people died in the past 24 hours, for a total of 84,372 fatalities. Experts say India's death toll may be a significant undercount.

India is expected to have the highest number of confirmed cases within weeks, surpassing the United States, where more than 6.67 million people have been infected.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his birthday Thursday made a fresh appeal to people to wear masks and maintain social distancing as his government prepared plans for handling big congregations expected during a major Hindu festival season beginning next month.

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said with a recovery rate of more than 78 percent, India has only 1 million active coronavirus cases

Nearly 60 percent of the active cases are concentrated in five of India's 28 states-Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Worst-hit western Maharashtra state accounted for 474 of the 1,174 fatalities reported in the country in the past 24 hours.

Authorities extended until the end of September a ban on assemblies of four or more people in Mumbai, India's financial and entertainment capital. More than 178,000 people have been infected by the coronavirus in Mumbai, including 8,320 who died.

New Zealand reported no new cases of the coronavirus on Friday for the first time in more than five weeks as hopes rise that an outbreak discovered in Auckland last month has been stamped out. Friday also marked the fourth consecutive day without any cases of community transmission, with all recent cases being found quarantined passengers among returning from abroad. Health authorities expect to continue finding such cases at the border. Authorities have still not pinpointed the origin of the August outbreak, which they believe was imported. New Zealand has reported a total of just over 1,800 cases and 25 deaths.

A senior governing party lawmaker who helped with new Prime Minister

Yoshihide Suga's election campaign has been hospitalised with Covid-19, becoming the first confirmed case in Japan's parliament. Shuichi Takatori, a member of the Liberal Democratic Party, developed a fever and tested positive for the coronavirus, according to parliament's lower house. Takatori attended a plenary session on Wednesday at which Suga was formally elected prime minister. He accompanied 81-year-old party Secretary General Toshihiro Nikai when they greeted former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe after the vote, Kyodo News agency reported. Health officials are investigating his close contacts for possible infection. Japan has 77,494 confirmed coronavirus cases including 1,482 deaths as of Friday, according to the health ministry.

Meanwhile, China on Friday reported that imported coronavirus cases surged to 32 over the previous 24 hours. Thirteen of those cases were reported in the northern province of Shaanxi, whose capital Xi'an is a major industrial center, while the eastern financial and business hub of Shanghai reported 12. China has gone more than a month without reporting any cases of local transmission.

# India digs deep to boost defences on crucial China frontier

### AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ATAL ROHTANG TUNNEL, SEPT 18

A tunnel nearing completion in the Indian Himalayas will slash by hours the time it takes troops to reach the Chinese border, part of an infrastructure blitz by New Delhi that is gathering pace since a bloody border clash between the two countries.

The nuclear-armed Asian giants blame each other for a brutal high-altitude battle in June that left 20 Indian soldiers dead and an unspecified number of Chinese casualties

Both have sent massive troop reinforcements, but India has also stepped up its activities behind the frontlines—belatedly so, analysts say.

Its stepped-up infrastructure programme includes roads and bridges as well as high-altitude helipads and airstrips for civilian and military aircraft.

The showpiece is a \$400-million tunnel in Himachal Pradesh state, providing an all-weather route for military convoys to avoid a 50-kilometre (30mile) trudge through mountain passes that are snow-bound in winter and subject to frequent landslides.

From late this month, what used to be a four-hour, winding, high-altitude crossing will be cut to a 10-minute dash through the mountains in the state-of-the-art tunnel.

"There have been times on the pass route when vehicles have broken down, causing traffic jams of even six to eight hour," said Lieutenant-General Harpal Singh, head of India's Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

"This tunnel and the other infrastructure plans change a lot for the troops," he told AFP.

Labourers are working overtime to get the tunnel ready before Prime Minister Narendra Modi is due to open it later this month.

Currently, essential items such as arms, ammunition and food have to be transported up in bulk before winter starts in an area where temperatures can plunge to minus 40 Celsius (minus 40 Fahrenheit).

Constructed at an altitude of more than 3,000 metres and stretching nine kilometres, the Atal Rohtang tunnel is also a feat of engineering.

A decade in the making, freezing winter temperatures meant work

Still. India's efforts in the Himalayas only belatedly mirror those of China, experts say.

could only take place from April to September. Workers wore special microchips to help locate them if they got trapped in an avalanche. Still, India's efforts only belatedly

mirror those of China, experts say.

"Earlier administrations wasted two decades," said Harsh Pant, from the Observer Research Foundation think-tank in New Delhi.

"China, and its infrastructure, is much stronger today."

Sanjay Kundu, the Himachal Pradesh police chief, has also proposed arming locals and training them to report possible Chinese spies and drone and helicopter sightings.

"Ultimately, whether it is at the border or the hinterland, people need to be trained and they need to be trained in defending themselves," he told AFP. The government hopes it will reas

sure worried villagers. "In the last few weeks they've seen a lot more activity of fighter planes over the region," said Lobsang Gyaltsen, an elected representative from a village around 30 kilometres (20 miles) from the border.

"They often wonder if China is attacking," Gyaltsen told AFP.

The BRO says it has built more strategic roads-most in the high-tension zone next to China-the last four years than in the previous decade and aims to complete 15 more key routes by the end of 2021.

Labourers are upgrading a recently-completed 250-kilometre stretch parallel to the Chinese frontier that cuts journey times from Ladakh's capital Leh from one week to less than a day.

Significantly, by next month all bridges along the route will be able to support the weight of a 70-tonne T-90 tank on a trailer, or a truck carrying a surface-to-air missile, according to press reports.

# 'They should have let us die in the water': Desperate Lebanese migrants

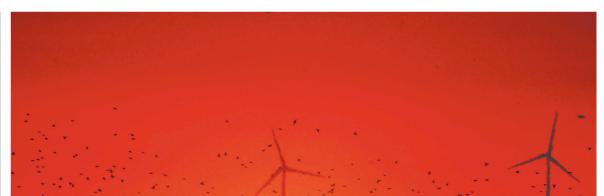
REUTERS TRIPOLI, SEPT 18

For years, small boats have left northern Lebanon's coast, packed with desperate migrants hoping to reach Until recently, they carried mostly Syrian and Palestinian refugees. But with Lebanon in freefall, its citizens have begun joining their ranks in larger numbers. Mohammad Ghandour never thought he'd be one of them. But he said Lebanon's economic crisis, which has crashed the Lebanese pound and left him unable to feed his seven children, gave him no choice. "In Lebanon, we are being killed by poverty," Ghandour told Reuters this week, from his mother's cramped threeroom apartment where he was staying with 12 other family members. He was back in Tripoli, one of Lebanon's poorest cities, after being sent back by Cyprus

With Lebanon in freefall. its citizens have begun joining

' Stelios Papatheodorou, chief of the Cypriot police, told Reuters.

He denied accusations that authorities had mistreated them and pushed back their boats. "We provided them with food and water and covered all



"This is worse than war ... My children will either die on the streets or become criminals to survive.

Ghandour, 37, is one of dozens of Lebanese who've attempted the journey since late August, when rights groups say a rise in the number of boats leaving Lebanon began. Exact figures are hard to come by, but the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has tracked 21 boats leaving Lebanon between July and Sept 14. The previous year, there were 17 in total.

### VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

1st Published: 16/08/2020 2nd Published: 4/09/2020

### **GENERAL MANAGER**

Candidate will be responsible for the efficient operation of 247 rooms 5-star Luxury Hotel. She/he must be a Hote Graduate with experience in Rooms, Sales and Food and Beverage in large volume generation and astute in Finance Experience: She/he must have 15+ years of work experience in the position of General Manager with the multicultural International 5-star Chain Hotels with 200+ bed rooms Service Conditions:

- On a contract service for a period of 2 years.
- Salary & Perks: As agreed between the Management and the applicant

Preference will be given to Nepali Citizen having required education & work experience

How to Apply: Please forward your CV, Citizenship Copy with Recent Photograph to Human Resources Department before 3/10/2020

Hotel Yak & Yeti P.O. Box – 1016, Durbarmarg Kathmandu, Nepal YAK&YETI Tel: +977-4248999, 4240520 Email:personnel@yakandyeti.com.np

asylum seekers in larger numbers.

The increase has worried Cypriot authorities, especially given the global pandemic. The island is the closest European Union member state to the Middle East and has seen a gradual rise in arrivals of undocumented migrants and refugees in the past two years, as other routes have become more difficult to cross

After 28 hours lost at sea, Ghandour said his boat, carrying his wife, children and other relatives, arrived on a beach near the seaside resort of Larnaca. He said his family was detained in a camp for several days, tested for Covid-19 and prevented from lodging a formal claim for asylum before being sent back to Lebanon

"I didn't think they would send us back," he said. "They should have just let us die in the water. It's better than coming back here."

Cypriot authorities said about 230 Lebanese and Syrians were sent back to Lebanon by sea in early September. They had arrived in Cyprus on five boats during the

previous weeks. "Following our government's orders and after consultations between the two governments (Cyprus and Lebanon) we safely returned them on September 6, 7



our Papatheodorou said.

Lebanon's General Security and Foreign Ministry did not respond to written requests for comment.

Out of work for three years, Ghandour decided last month to pack up for good and try his luck in Cyprus. He left his apartment, sold his furniture, and had his older sons sell scrap metal to help buy a small boat and supplies for the perilous journey.

Ghandour was one of four migrants interviewed by Reuters, who said they were swiftly sent back to Lebanon. According to UNHCR, the island has pushed back at least five boats, which carried Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians and others

"You can't just summarily send people back without considering their claims fully and fairly," said Bill Frelick, the director of the refugee and migrant rights division at HRW, who has been monitoring the returns.

Although Lebanon is not at war and economic hardship is not recognised as grounds for asylum, the multiple crises Lebanon is facing mean some of its nationals and residents could face serious threats, while others could qualify for refugee status on fear-of-persecution grounds, Frelick added.

In interviews with Reuters, migrants said they told Cypriot authorities they feared violence and instability in Lebanon and did not want to return.

Migrants also said they encountered aggressive tactics as they neared Cyprus. Chamseddine Kerdi said his boat, packed with 52 people, was encircled several times and ultimately damaged before being towed to shore by authorities.



Hundreds of birds fly past wind turbines as the sun rises in Frankfurt, Germany, on Friday.

# Flurry of activity at key base fuels speculation of North Korea test

### REUTERS

SEOUL, SEPT 18

Analysts and security officials say they are watching for signs that North Korea may use an upcoming holiday to unveil new weapons or test fire a submarine-launched ballistic missile, after a flurry of activity was detected at a key base.

Formations of troops have been seen practicing for what is expected to be a major military parade on Oct 10, the 75th anniversary of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea. Some observers say North Korea may showcase its largest missiles for the first time since 2018.

Imagery analysts and security officials caution that so far there is no conclusive evidence of an impending launch. But after several typhoons lashed North Korea in early September, satellite photos have shown a flurry of activity at the Sinpo South Shipyard, including in a secure basin where a barge used in previous underwater missile launches is docked.

"We're monitoring developments, as there is a possibility that a submarine-launched ballistic missile test will be conducted there using ejection equipment shortly after the repair is done," Won In-choul, the nominee for chairman of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers this week.

Other South Korean officials have sounded more cautious notes, including incoming South Korean defence minister Gen. Suh Wook, who said on Monday that he considered an SLBM test unlikely because there is too little time to prepare ahead of the anniversary.

On Thursday, Daily NK, a Seoulbased website that reports on North Korea, cited a single unnamed source near the shipyard as saying the site "is bustling with activity to prepare for the ballistic missile launch," with officials and researchers arriving since late August.

38 North, a US-based think tank, said in a report on Wednesday that imagery showed "heavy activity" at the shipyard, but that "no other indicators of launch preparations were observed."

AP/RSS

Although the activity does suggest some kind of work is being done on the missile barge, which has either been moved from the basin or repositioned under a protective awning, it would also be consistent with basic repair work after the storm, said Dave Schmerler, a senior researcher at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies.

On September 4, the US-based Center for Strategic and International Studies said satellite imagery showed activity at Sinpo that was "suggestive, but not conclusive, of preparations for an upcoming test of a Pukguksong-3 submarine launched ballistic missile."

Last October, North Korea said it had successfully test-fired a Pukguksong-3, which elicited no major reaction from US President Trump, who has held up the absence of intercontinental ballistic missile and nuclear tests by that country since 2017 as success and played down shorter-range launches

### MONEY

# Apple to launch first online store in India next week

### REUTERS NEW DELHI, SEPT 18

Apple Inc will launch its first online store in India on September 23, the iPhone maker said on Friday, coinciding with the country's holiday season that brings some of the biggest sales for retailers every year.

Apple sells its products in India through third-party vendors and e-commerce operators such as Amazon.com Inc's Indian unit and Walmart Inc-owned Flipkart.

The Cupertino, California-based tech giant's iPhones are coveted by tens of millions of Indians but their price keeps them out of the reach of many. Chinese companies led by Xiaomi Corp dominate in the world's second-biggest smartphone market, with Apple accounting for just 1% of shipments.

Through its online retail platform, Apple plans to offer assistance to customers in English and Hindi, while allowing users to personalise some devices, including iPads, with engravings, it said.

The website will also allow Mac customers to configure their laptops according to their needs.

The opening of Apple's online store presents another challenge for bricksand-mortar retailers whose business has suffered due to discounts by e-tailers, said Subhash Chandra L, managing director of Sangeetha Mobiles.

"At least some of Apple's die-hard customers are likely to shift to buying from its online store," said Chandra whose chain operates more than 650 stores across southern and western India. "But we've learned to compete with online retailers."

China's Xiaomi, RealMe and OnePlus also sell smartphones from their websites, besides Amazon and Flipkart.

Apple is building its first company-run retail store in India, in the financial capital of Mumbai, with plans to launch in 2021.

India offers huge growth prospects for device makers and competitive labour costs for electronics manufacturing.

### FOREX

I OILLIN	
US Dollar	117.82
Euro	139.65
Pound Sterling	152.99
Japanese Yen	11.27
Chinese Yuan	17.43
Qatari Riyal	32.36
Australian Dollar	86.19
Malaysian Ringit	28.56
Saudi Arab Riyal	31.41
	Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION	PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold	Rs 97,000
Silver	Rs 1,330

# Tiger Palace Casino Resort lays off 393 employees

Silver Heritage Group, the operator of the resort which came into operation in 2018, is facing financial distress with no income since March.

### AMRITA ANMOL BUTWAL, SEPT 18

Tiger Palace Casino Resort in Bhairahawa has laid off all its 393 Nepali employees due to financial distress as the virus lockdown brought tourism to a halt.

On March 23, the Silver Heritage Group, the Australian-listed gaming investor which operates two casinos in Nepal, had announced a temporary closure of its two properties—Tiger Place Resort and The Millionaires' Club & Casino in Kathmandu.

Two weeks ago, the Silver Heritage Group emailed all Tiger Palace Resort employees informing them that it was unable to renew the agreement as their two-year terms ended on September 9.

<sup>\*</sup>Following the conclusion of our initial two-year business plan and pursuant to clause 4 of the contract, the company hereby notifies you that your employment contract will not be renewed for a further period. We thank you for your efforts in completing the contract requirements," Mike Bolsover, managing director of the Silver Heritage Group, said in the letter, a copy of which was obtained by the Post.

The letter continues: "The global coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented event that has left the business mandatorily shuttered since March 2020. With no revenue since this time, the company is faced with several financial hardships and an inability to reopen unless action is taken to reduce cost and become more efficient."

The company said that during the lockdown, unlike most other businesses in Nepal, it continued to pay 50 percent of the gross salary as a gesture of goodwill.

"The company requests you to con-



Around half of the employees at the resort have launched a protest claiming that it was a unilateral decision and against Nepal's labour laws.

tact the finance department for your final settlement." The company said it hoped to reopen soon and begin the next two-year phase, and urged the employees to stay in touch regarding suitable vacancies in the future.

Indra Bhattarai, human resource manager at the company, said all employees had been served the layoff notice. "The senior teams are in Hong Kong and Australia. We are not in contact with them."

Around half of the employees at the resort have launched a protest claiming that it was a unilateral decision and against Nepal's labour laws. Nepali employees also charged that the company did not discharge foreign workers. "Some of the foreign staffers, whose visas have expired, have not been laid off yet," said Bishal Karki, an employee. "They are paid more than Rs500,000 monthly." he said. "It's a discriminatory policy to terminate Nepali workers only."

Chitra Bhandari, who has been leading the protest, said the decision to lay off workers was made unilaterally by the company. "Without prior information, we have been given a surprise termination letter by email." He said that based on labour laws, the company cannot lay off workers who have served for more than two years. "That's why we have been forced to launch the agitation."

Nearly 200 workers are protesting against the company demanding their immediate reinstatement.

Basu Dev Ghimire, mayor of Tilottama Municipality, said that they would find some solution to the problem without causing any negative impact on foreign investors. "As the resort has been operated under the foreign direct investment policy and has foreign management, the municipality does not have any crucial role to deal with the issue, but we can play a facilitating role to settle the issue."

An official of the Silver Heritage Group told the Post that they were trying to save the company and the investment. "We are, as ever, guided by and acting in accordance with the laws of Nepal. These are unprecedented times," the official said in an unofficial conversation with the Post.

The Silver Heritage Group debuted in Nepal in 2015 with the opening of The Millionaire's Club & Casino at the Shangri-La Hotel in Kathmandu. The group has planned a phased investment of more than \$150 million to develop a chain of five-star properties across Nepal.

In the first phase, the 100-room property, which is the first integrated five-star casino resort in South Asia, was developed by the company. It was awarded a five-star rating by the Department of Tourism in November 2017, and came into operation in the first quarter of 2018, well behind its operation deadline that cost the company an additional \$12 million to complete the project.

The cost overrun increased the project's price tag to \$60 million, and the company counted on its other casino, the Phoenix International Club in Vietnam, to provide support. Silver Heritage was managing the property's gaming operations at the time; however, the venue lost its gaming tables licence in 2019, dealing Silver Heritage a huge blow.

Nepal's operations haven't been able to close the gap completely, and failure to generate adequate funds even prompted the company to sell its Nepal property. Covid-19 came as another setback for the company.

# Asian financial leaders agree to make 'all policy efforts' to fight pandemic



A man wearing a face mask walks in Lujiazui financial district in Pudong, China.

### REUTERS TOKYO, SEPT 18

'inancial leaders from China, Japan

ery," they said in a joint statement. "We will remain resolute in our commitment to uphold an The coronavirus pandemic has triggered deep downturns in regional economies, disrupted global trade and supply chains, and increased market volatility in Asia and beyond, prompting authorities to enact large economic stimulus programmes.

Recognising the risk that unwinding such large stimulus plans could destabilize financial markets, the ministers from Japan, South Korea, China and ASEAN, a group known as ASEAN+3, addressed how they will exit from the crisis measures.

"We will carefully measure the appropriate timing of the exit from these pandemic measures in accordance with the economic and pandemic situation of each member," the ASEAN+3 leaders said.

ASEAN+3 leaders said. Highlighting worries about the risks of a hit to market liquidity,

Trump to block US downloads of TikTok, WeChat on Sunday

### REUTERS WASHINGTON, SEPT 18

The US Commerce Department said it will issue an order Friday that will bar people in the United States from down-

people in the United States from downloading Chinese-owned messaging app WeChat and video-sharing app TikTok starting on September 20.

Commerce officials said the ban on new US downloads of TikTok could be still rescinded by President Donald Trump before it takes effect late Sunday as TikTok owner ByteDance races to clinch an agreement over the fate of its US operations.

ByteDance has been talks with Oracle Corp and others to create a new company, TikTok Global, that aims to address US concerns about the security of its users' data. ByteDance still needs Trump's approval to stave off a US ban. Commerce officials said they will not bar additional technical transactions for TikTok until Nov. 12, which gives the company additional time to see if ByteDance can reach a deal for its US operations. Business Network.The department said the actions will "protect users in the US by eliminating access to these applications and significantly reducing their functionality."

Oracle shares fell 1.6 percent after the news in pre-market trading

The Commerce Department order will "deplatform" the two apps in the United States and bar Apple Inc's app store, Alphabet Inc's Google Play and others from offering the apps on any platform "that can be reached from within the United States," a senior Commerce official told Reuters.

The order will not ban US companies from doing businesses on WeChat outside the United States, which will be welcome news to US firms like and Starbucks WeChat's embedded 'mini-app' programmes to facilitate transactions and engage consumers in China, officials said. The order will not bar transactions with WeChat-owner Tencent Holdings other businesses, including its online gaming operations, and will not prohibit Apple, Google or others from offering TikTok or WeChat apps anywhere outside the United

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

### GASOLINE WATCH



### BIZLINE

### CG launches Black+Decker small home appliances in Nepal



KATHMANDU: CG Impex, a subsidiary of Chaudhary Group, has partnered with Black + Decker, a renowned American brand to launch their prod ucts in Nepal. The launching event was conducted virtually through zoom on Friday in CG Digital Park, Kathmandu, states the press release issued by the company. Various products from Black + Decker will now be available in Nepal through CG Impex's distribution network throughout Nepal. Customers will be able to buy products such as steam iron, grinder mills, rice cookers, gar ment steamer, sandwich maker grills. heaters, microwaves and more

South Korea and Southeast Asia vowed on Friday to redouble their efforts to help the region recover economically from the novel coronavirus and to defend a multilateral system of trade and investment.

"We will remain vigilant to the continued downside risks ... We are taking steps to reduce vulnerabilities to these risks and are determined to continue to use all available policy tools to support the sustained recovtrade and investment system, and strengthen regional integration and cooperation."

The statement followed the annual meetings of finance ministers and central bank governors from China, Japan, South Korea and the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The meetings were held via teleconfreence on the side-lines of the annual gathering of the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

a bilateral currency swap arrangement that enables authorities to swap up to \$3 billion of their currencies.

The ASEAN+3 leaders also promised to boost the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation (CMIM). The CMIM plays a crucial role in supporting regional financial stability by allowing the member economies, which include the ASEAN+3 and Hong Kong, to tap currency swap lines to secure currencies in need.

"The basic TikTok will stay intact until November 12," Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross told Fox



### REUTERS

### STOCKHOLM, SEPT 18

Helen Balfors, a project leader at Norwegian conglomerate Orkla, has been working from home for longer than most of her colleagues after returning from a skiing trip to Italy in February as the new coronavirus took hold in Europe.

The mother of three said that while the company had always encouraged a good work-life balance, some managers had required their employees to be in the office before the pandemic hit.

"But now they realise it works just as well to be at home," she said. "I just needed an extra screen and an extra keyboard from the office, which I got in a couple of days."

Well-developed digital infrastructure has helped the Nordic economies weather the pandemic better than most of Europe.

Britain's economy contracted by around a fifth in the second quarter, Spain registered an 18.5 percent drop, while the euro zone economy as a whole shrank 11.8 percent.

In contrast, Finland's GDP fell just 4.5 percent although Sweden and Norway saw larger hits of 8.3 percent and 6.3 percent respectively.

"Better digital infrastructure means we were quicker at being able to work from home. The infrastructure is there and we are used to using it," said Robert Bergqvist, chief economist at Swedish bank SEB.

"That has helped hold up production and consumption."

Denmark, Sweden, Finland and the

Netherlands had the most advanced digital economies in the EU in 2018, a research paper from the European Commission showed, based on connectivity, human capital, internet use and extent of e-commerce.

The Nordics—home to telecoms infrastructure firms Ericsson and Nokia—topped the EU table for home-working even before the pandemic. Sweden, in first place, had just under a third of workers working from home, at least occasionally, in 2019, according to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), an EU agency. The EU average was around 10 percent.

Long-term flexible employment practices, such as allowing parents to stay home with sick children and an emphasis on a healthy worklife balance have encouraged remote working.

During the pandemic, around 60 percent of Finns have been able to work from home, around double the level in Spain. Sweden and Denmark are also well above the EU average of less than 40 percent, according to Eurofound.A high proportion of information technology-focused jobs that lend themselves to distance working has helped but businesses and individuals have been quick to make the digital leap.

That, along with well-established rules for furloughing employees, means working hours have dropped less than in most of Europe—by 4.2 percent in Norway in the second quarter against a drop of 10.7 percent for



Following eased lockdown measures amid the coronavirus disease outbreak in Helsinki, Finland, people enjoy and stroll in a park.

the euro zone as a whole, Eurostat data shows.

With workers retaining at least some income, household spending and consumption have held up well.

Eurofound's survey showed around 70 percent of Swedes, Finns and Danes were optimistic about their future against just 45 percent across the EU.The Nordic economic resilience has come despite very different approaches to fighting the virus.

While Sweden took a light-touch

approach, Norway, Denmark and Finland all opted for stricter measures, with Finland isolating its capital from the rest of the country.

That means other factors have played a significant role.

"The structure of the economy is an obvious candidate, where many southern European countries are more dependent on tourism," Riksbank Deputy Governor Martin Floden said this earlier month.

Tourism accounts for just under 15

percent of GDP in Spain and Italy two of the economies worst hit by the pandemic—according to the World Travel & Tourism Council. Denmark's share is 6.6 percent and Norway 8.0 percent. On the flip side, Norway has had to contend with the collapse in oil prices, while Sweden's automotive sector has been badly hit. But strong public finances have given Nordic governments the flexibility to spend their way out of trouble. Norway raided its wealth fund—the world's biggest.

Bale could have done more, on the

pitch, where he let too many games pass him by, lacking either the energy

or perhaps belief to whir his legs like

he used to. And off the pitch, where

his lack of interaction was taken as a

lack of interest, the sneering at his

Spanish and passion for golf unseem-

ly but symptomatic of an unwilling-

But taking over the mantle of

Ronaldo was always going to be a gar

gantuan task, not least while Ronaldo

was still there, the figure that defined

the club for the best part of a decade.

And by the time Ronaldo was gone, it

was too late, Bale almost 30 and

already an outcast, his decline under

Bale's earliest memory of Madrid

was watching Zidane's volley against

Bayer Leverkusen as a boy. But it was

Zidane who brought his Madrid career

to a close, their relationship irretriev-

able after four years when affection was in short supply and trust eventu-

ally ran out. Zidane gave Bale chances

and repeatedly backed him in public,

regretting it almost instantly when he

spoke too freely before a move to

China broke down last year. When Bale returned to London for talks with

his agent, Zidane said he had his per-

mission. When Bale, on international

duty, celebrated behind a banner that

For a while, Zidane kept faith in the

most important games, suspecting the

fire burned hot in Bale only on the

biggest stage. Then he played him against weaker teams, when defensive

lapses were less likely to be punished.

In the end, he refused to play him at all.

forming Madrid and taking them to

the La Liga title last season, almost

entirely without Bale, who played just

two of their final 11 games. While his

teammates were tossing Zidane into

the air, Bale stood back, arms folded, a

second league winner's medal draped

Madrid shirt after a long relationship

defined by unforgettable moments,

lingering disappointment and when it

was all over, for everyone, relief.

It was his last appearance in the

around his neck.

Zidane won the argument, by trans-

read 'Wales.Golf.Madrid'.

Zidane long-since setting in.

ness to engage.

# SPORTS | MEDLEY

# **Champions Liverpool face Chelsea test**

Frak Lampard's ambitious Blues welcome Juergen Klopp's Reds while Pep Guardiola's Manchester City travel to Wolves.

### AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LONDON, SEPT 18

Liverpool face an early test of their Premier League title defence against Chelsea this weekend as Manchester City and Manchester United launch their quest to be champions. Arsenal, Everton and Leicester hope to build on encouraging opening wins while Jose Mourinho needs a morale-boosting victory for Tottenham.

Here are some of the main talking points ahead of the action.

### Will big-spending Chelsea make Liverpool pay?

Chelsea's meeting with Liverpool at Stamford Bridge on Sunday has added edge after a feisty exchange between the managers over transfer spending. The London club finished 33 points behind the champions last season but have splashed out around £200 million (\$259 million) on new players. By contrast, Liverpool have been relatively quiet, adding just Greece left-back Kostas Tsimikas so far, with Spain midfielder Thiago Alcantara likely to follow

Klopp pointedly said Jurgen Liverpool could not spend in the same way as clubs owned by "countries" and "oligarchs" such as City and Chelsea during the coronavirus pandemic. But Frank Lampard, who also became embroiled in a spat with Liverpool's bench in July, pointed out the Anfield side had spent big in previous seasons as they built their title-winning side.



RELITERS/AF

Frank Lampard (left) says he was amused by Juergen Klopp's comments on Chelsea's spending.

Liverpool will be keen to cut out the defensive errors they committed in a 4-3 win against newly-promoted Leeds, but Mohamed Salah looked in fine early season form as he scored a hattrick on the opening weekend. Chelsea were also unconvincing winners against Brighton in their opening match, but Timo Werner, who chose to join the Blues despite interest from Liverpool, did impress in winning a penalty against the Seagulls.

### Manchester City's tough task

Manchester City are the bookmakers' favourites to land a third Premier League trophy in four seasons but face a tough opener against Wolves. City boss Pep Guardiola has shored up his



City scored 102 goals last season as they finished second, but lost nine matches as they surrendered their crown to Liverpool. Both Manchester clubs are starting a week later than other sides due to their European commitments last season

Guardiola will be painfully aware that his team must be more consistent this campaign and he cannot afford to let Klopp's men open up an early lead. But he will feel nervous as he travels to face Wolves, who beat City twice last season, after a disrupted pre-season

City duo Aymeric Laporte and Riyad Mahrez tested positive for coronavirus earlier this month, while Phil Foden was sent home by England after breaking coronavirus protocols while on international duty.

### **Can Man Manchester United** progress?

The challenge facing Ole Gunnar Solskjaer ahead of a match against Crystal Palace is how to improve on last season's third-place finish. Midfielder Bruno Fernandes was the catalyst as United put together a

long unbeaten run, with a front three of Anthony Martial, Marcus Rashford and Mason Greenwood providing the firepower. But United have been relatively quiet in the transfer window, so far adding just midfielder Donny van de Beek from Ajax, despite persistent speculation linking them with Borussia Dortmund's Jadon Sancho.

### Arsenal's feel-good factor

Arsenal are buoyant after launching their season with a 3-0 win at newly promoted Fulham and tying down captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang for three more years.

Mikel Arteta's men, who host West Ham on Saturday, finished down in eighth place last season but ended their campaign on a high, winning the FA Cup for a record 14th time. They followed that up by beating Liverpool on penalties in the season-opening Community Shield before the announcement on Aubameyang this week that fans had craved.

# Gareth Bale leaves Madrid after loveless marriage and disappointment

### AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MADRID, SEPT 18

Gareth Bale arrived at Real Madrid as the world's most expensive player and the heir to Cristiano Ronaldo. After seven years, he will leave for next to nothing, a dramatic return to Tottenham allowing Madrid's fans and accountants to breathe a heavy sigh of relief. They will be rid of the player that delivered jaw-dropping moments but overall failed to justify the expectations or expense, neither

of which were of his own making. Bale's flashes of brilliance will leave an indelible mark, not only on his own career but on the history of the club too. He can lay claim to scoring the greatest goal in a Copa del Rey final, at the end of that barnstorming run that began on the halfway line, circled almost into the stands and finished with Barcelona crumpled in a heap. And the best goal in a Champions League final probably belongs to him as well, Bale's bicycle kick against Liverpool perhaps better even than Zinedine Zidane's volley 16 years before. There was the crucial header against Atletico Madrid in another Champions League final, the stunning volley against Borussia Dortmund, the quick feet against Schalke and against Rayo Vallecano another surge, this time from deep in his own half. But Bale was never loved at Madrid, even if disappointment felt almost inevitable given the context in which he started.

Early on, injuries proved disruptive, creating scepticism instead of affection and while Bale's transfer record was repeatedly beaten, his wages would become a new yardstick for him to be measured against. The contract he signed in 2016, worth 30 million euros a year, made him the game's highest paid player, but the cost only intensified resentment when his contributions became increasingly lacklustre.

The fans felt it, whistling harder at Bale when shots flew over and crosses went unmet. When defeats came, the criticism from the press was heavier for him than others too.



A file photo shows Real Madrid's Gareth Bale celebrating in their Champions League match.

Second-tier Stoke knock Wolves out AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

### WOLVERHAMPTON, SEPT 18

Championship outfit Stoke dumped Wolves out of the League Cup on Thursday as the Premier League side's club record signing Fabio Silva had a nightmare debut in a 1-0 defeat

The 18-year-old, who cost 40 million euros (\$47 million £36 million) from Porto despite scoring just three goals for the Portuguese giants, fired a glorious opportunity wide to open the scoring in the second half. But it was Stoke substitute Jacob Brown who netted the winner four minutes from time to stun a strong Wolves side named by Nuno Espirito Santo.

Burnley edged Sheffield United 5-4 on penalties after the all-Premier League tie ended 1-1. David McGoldrick's early strike for the visitors was cancelled out by Matej Vydra midway through the second half. England international Nick Pope then got down low to save Oli McBurnie's spot-kick and Burnley were clinical in the shootout, netting all five of their efforts.

Brighton were comprehensive 4-0 winners over Portsmouth with Alexis Mac Allister, Alireza Jahanbakhsh, Bernardo and Victor Gyokeres on target.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) \*\*\*

# Naomi Osaka pulls out of French Open

REUTERS LONDON, SEPT 18

Japan's Naomi Osaka has withdrawn from the upcoming French Open with a hamstring injury, she said on Thursday.

The 22-year-old had her left hamstring taped when she battled back against Victoria Azarenka in the US Open final in New York on Saturday to win her third Grand Slam title.

"Unfortunately, I won't be able to play the French Open this year," the world number three wrote on social media in a message she also posted in Japanese.

"My hamstring is still sore so I won't have time to prepare for the clay-these two tournaments came too close to each other for me this time. I wish the organisers and players all the best.'

The French Open will be held from September 27 to October 11 after being moved from its usual late May-June slot due to the coronavirus pandemic.



### US Open champion Naomi Osaka.

The hamstring issue had prompted Osaka to withdraw from the final of the Western & Southern Open in the run-up to the US Open but it did not appear to hamper her at Flushing Meadows

Osaka made headlines in New York as much for her performances on court as for her commitment to social justice causes.

For each of her US Open matches she wore a different mask that carried the name of a Black

### HOROSCOPE

53

American, aiming to highlight racial injustice in the United States to a wider audience.

The withdrawal of Osaka, who has never advanced past the third round at Roland Garros, comes as another blow to the tournament after world number one Ash Barty of Australia said she would not be defending her title due to Covid-19 concerns. On the men's side, Roger Federer will not compete as he continues to recover from knee sur-

Osaka's absence would improve Serena Williams's chances of winning a record-tying 24th Grand Slam title if the American chooses to play. The 38-year-old has pulled out of the Italian Open with an Achilles issue.

The French Tennis Federation (FFT) said on Thursday it would allow 5,000 spectators per day following a recent spike in COVID-19 cases in the country. It had previously said the claycourt major would permit a maximum of 11,500 fans per day.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) \*\*\*

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) \*\*\*



There is a hero deep inside of you, and you just might get a glimpse of that person today when you notice a problem or danger that no one else notices. Your quick action will be essential for creating a safer environment for the people you love.

### TAURUS (April 20-May 20) \*\*\*\*



If drama erupts on the scene today, avoid it at all costs. Just keep your head down, mind your own business, and resist the urge to go find out what the fuss is about. Getting caught up in a power struggle right now is not going to be a good move.

### GEMINI (May 21-June 21) \*\*\*



You need to pay closer attention to the numbers today, especially if you're reviewing any budgets or bank statements. It is not a day to gloss over details and just hope that everything turns out all right. Numbers could also be important socially.

### CROSSWORD

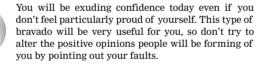
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You could receive an inexpensive but impactful gift and it will be no bargain basement purchase! It will be more like a gift of an idea, an inspiration that creates a spark in your mind. This spark could grow into a flame of new romantic feelings

### LEO (July 23-August 22) \*\*\*\*

CANCER (June 22-July 22) \*\*\*



### VIRGO (August 23-September 22) \*\*\*

Are you worried that there is too much happening in your life right now? Think about those days that are filled with boredom and how difficult they can be, and then consider yourself lucky that you are being kept so active and busy right now

It's time for you to give your subconscious something new to dream about at night. Take the time to picture where you want to be and who you want to be with in five years. And don't forget to include family and friends.

### SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) \*\*\*\*

You have mastered an immense challenge that few people could have handled, but you might be feeling like no one noticed! This resounding lack of praise could be disappointing, and it certainly is not appropriate. You deserve praise for your accomplishments.

### SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) \*\*\*\*\*



You probably won't be in a very aggressive mood today. Mellow is more your style right now. But don't think that this laid-back attitude won't have its advantages, because it certainly will! You will unknowingly invite more people of all walks of life to talk to you.



There are a lot of things going on in your life already, so it's not an easy day for new beginnings. Instead of starting yet another new project or trying yet another new activity, stick with the tried and true for now

### AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) \*\*\*\*



Someone's words are not matching their actions, and it should cause you to think twice about taking their advice or following in their footsteps. These contradictions in their character are a sure sign that they are not who you thought they were

### PISCES (February 19-March 20) \*\*\*

SUDOKU -



There might be a lot of drama going on in your life now, but none of it is centered around negative energy. There are just a few different people with differing agendas working against each other, and you're getting caught up in the middle of it all.

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We must have been just another Asian couple to their eyes. Because he could have been placed anywhere from the Middle-east to South Asia. And I could be placed anywhere from South to the Southeast of Asia.

### PRATEEBHA TULADHAR

n the Tube, he stood over me like he was guarding me from the world; his back almost arching to keep the world out. Whenever I looked up at his face, he would look into mine and smile, his eyes widening like he'd just received a surprise. I suppose we were his surprise!

Once, when the train tunneled in, I reached out for him in reflex and my hands clutched his jumper briefly. I let go quickly, in embarrassment.

Some fellow-passengers stared at us. You know how it is when people look at you and then swiftly away like they never looked your way, and still keep an eye on you from the corner of their eyes?

We must have been just another Asian couple to their eyes. Because he could have been placed anywhere from the Middle-east to South Asia. And I could be placed anywhere from South to the Southeast of Asia.

He looked my way a lot. Like he was constantly watching over me. And always with that smile, as though responding to some sort of serendipity. For the first time, I actually noticed that he had a nice smile. I guess I had never really cared to look at him properly during our previous meeting two years ago. I noticed he had nice eyes, and his movements were graceful. Almost feminine, which made him attractive to me suddenly. But I remembered his face had carried those sure pair of eyebrows from my memory of him. It perked up now and then now, as he smiled at me. This man I had married!

I had married him in a hurry. Two years ago. In a random, impulsive moment

I had walked into our regular cafe in Thamel, where my sister would usually

meet her friends and found her seated with this man and an elderly woman. Over coffee, in the next hour, we had started talking about the mounting marriage pressure on Nepali women, the moment they were in their early 20s. And my sister made fun of me for how I was being hounded by relatives and how I wasn't ready. I didn't have my sister's fierceness and rebellious spirit. Not then. And every day, I was terrified I would just cower down to the pressure.

And just then the woman said: Just get married to someone you like and then when they ask you to get married, tell them you're married! She was clearly a confident, open-minded, opinionated woman in her 30s. I envied her.

"I can't just get married!" I had said.

"Yes, you can!" She had said and then gone on to explain how I should find an accomplice. And before we knew, she had suggested I marry him!

"I can't!" I protested. "We don't even know each other!'

He had just smiled through it, exposing a neat set of teeth that put my tetracycline stained teeth to shame. He hadn't said no, but had thrown his hands in the air for a bit and smiled, like he was being shoved into some sort of adventure.

So, before I knew, my sister and this woman darted off in the search of rings.

With them gone, silence fell between us and we were swallowed whole by the buzz in the cafe. Awkward. Then he raised his eyebrows and asked me about work. I finally had a chance to speak for myself. I think he did too. He didn't seem to divulge much about himself, but he listened intently when I spoke.

Then they returned with two identical silver rings that looked like wedding bands. We exchanged them over sips of coffee and we were married!

They told me to wag a finger at the elders, anytime I came under marriage



I was trying to hide. From all sorts of things. From the world, mostly.

pressure. But what was I going to say? That I was married to someone I don't even know? We laughed then parted, my secret pressed between my fingers, with my sister as its witness

I didn't see him in Kathmandu after that. We didn't really have an excuse to see each other. In the months that followed, I heard from my sister that he had left for Egypt. That's where he came from, in case I forgot to mention.

Two years after our hurried wedding, I found myself in the UK. I was trying to hide. From all sorts of things. From the world, mostly. Then one day, my sister

wrote to me saying he was there and I should try and meet him if I happened to be in London. She had sent his email. So, I wrote to him:

Dear Mohammed, I don't know if you still remember me. I'm Looni's sister. I'll be in London next month and I would like to meet you if you have time.

Mohammed wrote back. (Yes, that was his name.) Soon, we were chatting over hotmail's msn service.

We met in a garden. I can't even recall its name or the location anymore. But I remember how he came darting towards me-white shirt, sky blue jumper, black coat and jeans- and gathered me in a hug. As though we'd always hugged.

How odd to think now that we were dressed almost identically.

I was carrying a homemade sandwich-cheese and lettuce and tomatoes-Walkers crisps and some Tropicana in my bag. We sat on a park bench, shared it and talked. He told me about how difficult it had been for him to find jobs in the past year since he moved to the UK from Egypt, and that he finally had one he liked.

Later, over coffee in a café, the setting of which escapes my memory, he asked me about my plans. I said I didn't know. I didn't. I had gone to the UK with no dream, only one of being able to put off getting married for as long as I could. But it looked like I was surrounded by everything that resonated with it. Because here I was, sitting next to my almost-husband. He said I should move to London, look for a job. He would help me. I could move in with him. "I don't know," I said and smiled.

As opposed to everyone else who seemed to be going somewhere in a hurry, we sauntered around all day, until it was time for me to catch the last train to Cambridge. Then we jumped on and off

Tubes, trying to catch the right line. When he saw me off at King's Cross, he held me again, more comfortably this time, and said: "I'll see you soon."

It was the last time I saw him.

We kept in touch over msn and emails. Cell phone calls were expensive then, so he would call me on the landline some evenings and I would sit on the steps, whispering details about my slow day to him. There wasn't much happening in my sheltered life then, but his was going through quick changes. Whenever he called, he always eventually arrived at the same question: "When would I go to London again?'

But when I did go again, it was Dashain and I was busy visiting family friends. We didn't get a chance to meet.

I decided to move back to Nepal suddenly, in the midst of political changes in the country that made me feel like I had to come home. I didn't get a chance to say goodbye to him. And over the years, we kept in touch for some time over msn and then Gmail took over and I no longer remembered my Hotmail account passwords. I guess we became blocked for each other because of a change in our email addresses. We lost each other to the ether.

A couple of months ago, he popped up in my mind and I asked my sister: "What happened to your friend Mohammed?'

She said: "Which Mohammed? Oh! Right. I don't know.'

I asked: "What's his full name again?" She said: "I can't remember."

I did a Google search for "Mohammed + Egypt=UK" and the results were always overwhelming. His family name remains lost on my memory and with that, every possibility to look him up.

Tuladhar has worked as a journalist for over a decade, with affiliations to Kantipur TV and German Press Agency.

# Living and working with the stigma called Covid-19

I will most likely be infected with the virus in the next few days or months. But I became a physician knowing the job incurred risks.

### **PREETI SHAKYA**

ou walk in for your shift at the emergency department. Shortly after your arrival, a patient arrives gasping. Short of breath. Fever. A chill runs down your spine but you have no time to contemplate. You quickly assess the patient and carry out the immediate interventions. More patients arrive. More assess-

ments. More interventions. You are dripping in sweat inside your protective suit. It is starting to get uncomfortable inside. You want to rip it off and throw your mask away but you quickly come back to your senses-because these are the only set of protective gear you have

In between hours, your phone keeps



care workers will have to miss work because they or their family members will be ill. It is clear: we still do not realise our own vulnerability.

Our hospitals only have a limited number of ICU beds isolated to treat Covid-19 patients. Hospitals are nearing capacity and we are running out of ICU beds and ventilators. Ambulance sirens don't stop beeping. The number of cases will continue to rise as they have in the past few days. Our health care systems will become overwhelmed at any moment; a total collapse of the system can be very much anticipated.

Looking at the state of things, I will most likely be infected with the virus in the next few days or months. But I became a physician knowing the job incurred risks and that I have a duty towards atients and society. Even today, at the face of this pandemic and uncertainty, I wouldn't trade this life for anything because this is what I signed up for. At such a testing time, we, as a society, need to introspect. Where are we headed? The decisions governments and people take now and in the next few days will probably shape our world for years to come. It will not only shape our health care systems but also other aspects of our society including our economy, politics and culture. Every crisis is a challenge, yet every crisis presents itself with an opportunity. A crisis can be a turning point for society, but only if we make it thus.

beeping. It's your mother checking up on you. 'Stay safe,' she reminds you, now and then. Every day you leave for work, you leave your family anxious at home

It's already late afternoon and you realise you haven't had a sip of water all morning. You are too afraid to take off your mask. You think water can wait until lunch time.

It's lunch time. You wash your hands thoroughly. All seven steps you count. Has it been twenty seconds? You are not sure. You repeat the hand washing. You cautiously take off your mask. Get your lunch. Eat as fast as you can. And get back to your shift

A few more patients. And it's time to leave

Before you leave the hospital, you wipe everything. Your phone, your wallet, your water bottle. Check again. Are you sure?

### You wipe again.

You get home. You get into the shower as quickly as you can making sure you don't touch anyone, anything. You have an ageing father who is on anti-hypertensive and anti-diabetic drugs. You fear you carried the virus home. So you go to your room and lock yourself up. Home isolation

This is what everyday looks like for a doctor at the emergency department. Here, patients arrive with symptoms and no diagnosis at all. Doctors have to think on their feet and take immediate interventions before they have time to screen the patient for Covid-19.

For young doctors like me, this is all very new. We have never been put face to face with this level of anxiety and stress. Even senior doctors are having a difficult time coping with the stress. We have had emergencies in the past. But this is different because of the scale and uncertainty of the disease. The protocol we must follow changes every few hours to meet the shifting dynamics of the disease. Add to

that the shortage of protective gears. Some health care centres are down to one surgical mask per shift, some per day. The stress level only increases when coworkers start testing positive.

I feel like I am dipping into a swamp every day.

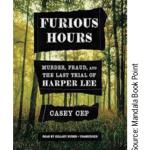
There is no denying the coronavirus has brought humanity to its feet. The health care systems of countries deemed the most developed have failed in front of our eyes. As cases flare up day by day, it is expected that a certain number of health-

Shakya is a doctor working at the Department of Pediatric Oncology at the BP Koirala Memorial Cancer Hospital, Chitwan.

# **BEST-SELLERS | NEW RELEASES**

### Fiction

- Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud 1. and the Last Trial of Harper Lee by Casey Cep
- The Secretary by Renee Knight 2
- The Golden House by Salman 3. Rushdie
- 4. The Guardians by John Grisham
- A Year of Wednesdays by Sonial 5. Bahal



### Non-Fiction

1.

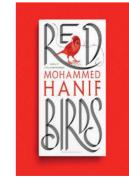
(25)Studies in Nepali History and Society

- Studies In Nepali History and Society: Volume 25, No.1, June 2020 by Pratyoush Onta, Mark Liechty, Seira Tamang, Tatruro Fujikura
- Cabals and Cartels by Rajib Upadhya 2.
- 3. China Pakistan Military Nexus by P C Katoch. Sarad Tewari
- The Politics of Nepal: Persistence and 4. Change in and Asian Monarchy by Leo E Rose and Margaret W Fisher
- 5. Nepal's Quinquennial Mission to China by Rri Ranta Manandhar & Tirtha Prashad Mishra



Samajwaad: Samriddhi ra Bikash Uddhab Pyakurel **Editor:** Publisher: Sangrila Book Price: Rs 335

Edited by scholar Udhhab Pyakurel, the book consists of anecdotes of leaders like Pradeep Giri, Chaitanya Mishra, Nawin Tiwari, Supriya Manandhar and others about how Nepal can become developed by filling the gaps in political and social sectors.



**Red Birds** Author: **Publication:** Price:

the Middle East.

Mohammed Hanif Grove Press Rs 958

A poignant and a thrilling satire on US foreign policy told through the story of a teenage refugee and a philosopher dog, the book captures the horrors of war and criticises the

American military and its missteps in



Supermarket Author: **Publication:** 

Price:

Bobby Hall Barnes & Noble Rs 798

Dark, funny and a psychological thriller, Supermarket by Bobby Hall is an interesting tale of a guy, who's dealing with his own problems and starts working in a supermarket where a crime scene occurs

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

# Not an eye-opener but still consequential

Here's why you should watch Netflix's latest docu-series The Social Dilemma.

**ANKIT KHADGI** KATHMANDL

ive years ago, when I started using Instagram, the "likes" I got on my posts meant something to me. For a 17-year-old, getting these "likes" meant constant doses of instant gratification. And I was so hooked to this form of social approval that my dopamine rushed if I received more likes on my posts.

The fixation reached such a level that I even downloaded applications to increase likes on my posts (even if it was from bots) and spent time researching how I could be Instagram-famous and how I could look cool on the platform so more and more people would follow me.

This was how Instagram made me obsessed with likes. And depicting similar stories of how social media platforms are responsible for making people hooked to their phones is Netflix's latest docu-drama The Social Dilemma.

Directed by Jeff Orlowski, the 94-minute-long docu-drama, which premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival, is a genre-bending cinematic experience. The film features head-short interviews of former honchos of big tech companies like Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and other platforms, who speak against the obsession brought on by the social media frenzy.

Parallel to this runs a fictional story of a suburban American family, who are falling prey to social media. The family, which consists of three children, a son, a daughter, and a pre-teen kid, represents the psyche of Generation Z, whose mind revolves around their social media platforms.

The son, although tries to resist his phone consumption, is hooked to his phone so much that he even starts missing his soccer practice. The pre-teen girl has her fair share obsession with social media as well. While in her age, it's understandable for kids willing to conform to social norms to get acceptance from their friend circle, but social media has made her so conscious about her looks that she starts doubting herself when a friend of hers comments about her big ears

The film presents us how everything we see on our news feed is cleverly curated by an algorithm that knows us better than we know ourselves. The cute cat video or a picture of a quote about loneliness, which people assume is god sending them a message to move on, doesn't just appear out of nowhere. The algorithm knows whether we are sad, happy, depressed, and excited. It knows how to hit the right button and curates our feed in such a way that we keep scrolling.

There's no denying that algorithms help us find content we like. But the problem it creates is it widens an already divided social fabric. And this is what the film depicts. The docu-drama also touchand falling of democratic institutions of which social media is often the flagbearer of.

There have been multiple articles, documentaries, and movies that have also warned about the falling of the human civilisation because of social media. But what makes this docu-drama different is that it knows how to pursue the subject material in a way that it can be an engaging watch

Director Jeff Orlowski understands that the attention span of people in today's world is minimal and if he wants to make people engage with the message he wants to convey he can't follow the conventional documentary style. Hence he binds two genres and thus develops a narrative that is familiar to people.

cinematic experience.

As a filmmaker, Orlowski understands how the mind of his target audience works, hence he provides a dramatised account of a family who is dealing with the problems of social media, which the drama-loving people of today's generation can relate and even engage to.

He also, instead of relying on just the tech experts speaking on the functioning of algorithm in trapping us to use or phones, deploys the use of a Black Mirroresque kind of setting, wherein a laboratory we see a humanoid form of an algorithm that is making the users fall prey to its system, which is successful in keeping

What also works for the film is its soundtrack, graphics, the new footage, and even the B-rolls. However, there's no new piece of information or surprising facts and knowledge that can incite new discourse around the effects of social media. Likewise, even though it touches the issues of making technologies as humane as possible, so that we can use it for our goodwill, solutions aren't given too much space

The docu-drama just scratches the issue and even the treatment that is there of the issue is not hard-hitting as the manipulation done by the people in power, from the government to private companies, to safeguard their authority and money isn't explicitly covered, failing to hold them accountable for the destruction they have created.

For this kind of a subject matter of surveillance capitalism, which the media, general people, and concerned authorities have been raising their voices against, the space to answer the questions of battling the insecurities should also have received the space in the

There is no space given to digital rights activists, who probably have been raising this topic for years also. The troupe of 'white-saviour' is also evident, as white men are presented as messiahs who will help us to come out from the tunnel.

Likewise, as a filmmaker, Orlowski should have also used the bottom-up approach, rather than the top-bottom. We know we are all in the Matrix. Now how can we come out of it? By focusing on solutions and issues that could answer all of our queries about the future, then already depicting or answering the known, the series could have incited a new discussion and imparted people with new knowledge. The film thus fails in some ways but there is no denying that in many ways the film is consequential.



## A PROMISED LAND

BARA ΟB

This photo provided by Random House shows the cover of A Promised Land.

### HILLEL ITALIE NEW YORK

he first volume of former President Barack Obama's memoir is coming out November 17, two weeks after Election Day. It's called A Promised Land and will cover his swift and historic rise to the White House and his first term in office.

The publication date for the second volume has not yet been determined.

"I've spent the last few years reflecting on my presidency, and in 'A Promised Land' I've tried to provide an honest accounting of my presidential campaign and my time in office: the key events and people who shaped it; my take on what I got right and the mistakes I made; and the political, economic, and cultural forces that my team and I had to confront thenand that as a nation we are grappling with still," Obama said in a statement Thursday.

"In the book, I've also tried to give readers a sense of the personal journey that Michelle and I went through during those years, with all the incredible highs and lows. And finally, at a time when America is going through such enormous upheaval, the book offers some of my broader thoughts on how we can heal the divisions in our country going forward and make our democracy work for everybody-a task that won't depend on any single president, but on all of us as engaged citizens.

Obama's book, like his previous ones, will be released by Crown, a division of Penguin Random House.

The 768-page book is the most anticipated presidential memoir in memory, as much or more because of the quality of the writing than for any possible revelations. He has been called the most literary president since Abraham Lincoln and has already written two highly praised, million-selling books: Dreams from My Father and The Audacity of Hope, both of which have been cited as aiding his campaign in 2008 and making him the country's first Black president.

Even with a substantial list price of \$45, A Promised Land is virtually guaranteed to sell millions of copies, and has an

AP/RSS

announced first printing of 3 million. Barnes & Noble CEO James Daunt likened the enthusiasm for Obama's book, which seems well positioned to become the best-selling presidential memoir in history, to the final volume of JK Rowling's Harry Potter series.

"This will be a book of rare consequence," Daunt said in a statement. "That it will sell as no other book has done since July 21, 2007 is immensely cheering to booksellers."

"'Dreams from My Father' introduced us to a little known US Senator and to a writer of poetic grace. The Audacity of Hope gave a thrilling vision to his ambitions for political office. A Promised Land now offers us a grand, lyrical narrative of his Presidency. This will be a book of rare consequence.

The book is much anticipated for its quality of writing and for possible revelations.

But A Promised Land will face challenges far different from most presidential memoirs, and even from former first lady Michelle Obama's blockbuster book, Becoming, which came out two years ago and has sold more than 10 million copies. Because of the pandemic, the former president will likely be unable to match Michelle Obama's spectacular, all-star arena tour. Barack also may find Obama his memoir coming out at a time when the November 3 election is still undecided and the country far more preoccupied with who the next president will be than with events of the past.

Obama has taken longer than most recent presidents to complete his memoir, with the first volume coming nearly four years after the end of his second term. (George W. Bush's Decision Points, a single volume, arrived within two years). He has been writing during unusual times, even before the pandemic spread earlier this year. His successor in the White House, Donald Trump, has attacked and upended achievements of the Obama administration ranging from the Iran nuclear treaty to Obamacare. Whether Trump or Obama's vice president, Joe Biden, wins the election may well determine Obama's legacy and will shape how the book is read.

Obama is not the first president to publish more than one volume of memoirs; Dwight Eisenhower also wrote two. But he had been expected to write just one when Penguin Random House first announced, in February 2017, a multimillion joint publication deal with Barack and Michelle Obama. On Thursday, Crown Publisher David Drake cited the scale of Obama's ambition to write a book that captures the experiences of being president and offers an inspiring story for young people.

"As his writing progressed and the scope of the memoirs continued to grow, he ultimately decided to write two volumes," Drake said.

The November release will be welcomed not only by Obama readers, but by booksellers and fellow publishers who anticipate that the massive demand for A Promised Land will raise sales for everyone during the holiday season.

Its popularity may also present another complication: The publishing industry has struggled with chronic printing shortages in the US over the past two years, leading to frequent delays. Drake said that Crown had taken several measures to minimize disruption, from printing one-third of the copies in Germany to arranging for a U.S. plant that had been scheduled to close in October to remain open for two additional months.

"The president's book should not impact the US print market more significantly than other major bestsellers of late," Drake said.

-Associated Press