WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Children stand near a newly installed rote ping in Buipa of Diktel Rupakot Majhuwagadhi Municipality in Khotang. This year the Covid-19 pandemic has robbed people of the excitement in celebrating Dashain, the country's biggest festival

India intelligence chief's sudden dash for Kathmandu raises many an eyebrow

Oli's meeting with him could be aimed at mending strained ties between Nepal and India, say observers, while party leaders disapprove saying it goes against diplomatic norms.



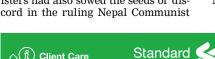
ANIL GIRI KATHMANDU, OCT 22

Last week, when Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli effected a minor Cabinet rejig, one event that starkly stood out was his decision to remove Ishwar Pokhrel as the defence minister.

Oli took the defence portfolio with himself, leaving Pokhrel as deputy prime minister to "take care of" the Prime Minister's Office.

Conjectures were that the Nepal Army chief was not happy with Pokhrel for some of his statements regarding the national defence force. Pokhrel was vocally critical of the Indian Army chief over the latter's one statement in which he had said Nepal was taking umbrage at India at the behest of China.

Oli's move of appointing some ministers had also sowed the seeds of dis-



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Samant Kumar Goe

Party (NCP), with Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the other chair, expressing dissatisfaction at the prime minister's "unilateral move"

The conflict in the ruling party further deepened after about a dozen and a half members of the provincial assembly in Karnali filed a no-confidence motion against Chief Minister Mahendra Bahadur Shahi. Of those who tried to remove Shahi, 15 are from the former CPN-UML, and of them at least eight represent the Oli faction.

Amid all these goings-on, India's intelligence chief made a dash for Kathmandu, creating ripples among Nepali analysts, academia and intelli-

Samant Kumar Goel, chief of India's Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), during his less than 24-hour stay in Kathmandu, met with Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli. Confirming the meeting, Surya

Thapa, Oli's press adviser, said that Goel "paid a courtesy call on the prime minister on Wednesday Thapa refused to provide the

details. But there was no official representation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the meeting between Oli and Goel, said a Foreign Ministry official.

A senior security official said Oli was alone while two officials

According to sources, the Oli-

accompanied Goel.

Goel meeting took place right after a meeting of the National Security Council, which ended at around

Former prime ministers Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal on Thursday morning refuted reports suggesting their meetings with Goel.

Since there has been no official word-neither from New Delhi nor from Kathmandu, the motive behind the sudden visit of the chief of Indian intelligence agency remains a

Analysts and some ruling party leaders, however, say Goel's brief visit to Kathmandu was part of a move choreographed by both the countries.

"As we know there are some misunderstandings between Nepal and India, Goel's visit may be aimed at breaking the stalemate and bringing the bilateral ties back on track, Bijaya Kant Lal Karna, a former ambassador, told the Post. "I think both sides want to engage at the top level and Goel's visit could be the starting point."

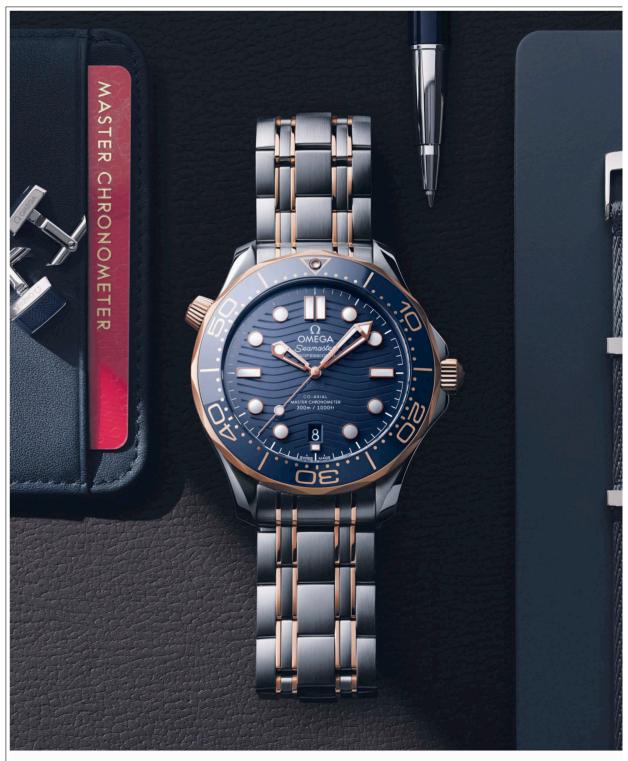
This, however, is not the first visit by Goel to Kathmandu during Oli's tenure as the prime minister. Goel had landed in Kathmandu last year in July as well, at the invitation of the chief of the National Intelligence Department, the R&AW's counterpart in Nepal.

Goel had met with Oli then too. But many wonder why New Delhi would send an intelligence chief to Kathmandu to resume bilateral

Former deputy prime minister and minister for defence and home Bhim Rawal questioned the timing of the visit and the way Goel met with the prime minister.

Nepal's Foreign Ministry expressed its ignorance about Goel's visit to Kathmandu, even though a request to allow the Indian Air Force plane, on which the Indian official arrived in Kathmandu, was made through the ministry. Flights between Nepal and India currently remain suspended due to the pandemic. The Oli administration is yet to respond to India's request to resume flights.

>> Continued on page 2



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NATIONAL



A veterinarian collects blood sample from a goat to test for diseases before it is put up for sale at Tukucha Khasi Bazar in Kathmandu on Thursday. Hundreds of goats have been brought to Kathmandu Valley for this year's Dashain festival.

Local government in Barpak provides work for jobless targeting Dashain

Forty-year-old Himlal Baram, a native of Gorkha district, returned home from Malaysia in March amid growing health concerns during the times of Covid-19. Ever since his return, he had been staying idle at home until Barpak Sulikot Rural Municipality, where his village Dandagaon falls, initiated the Employment Programme

The rural municipality initiated the ward offices 10 days ago. In Ward No. 6, authorities have engaged the locals in a foot trail repair project, hence providing an opportunity for them to seven wards of the rural municipality, the locals have been deployed in similar projects such as repair and upgradation works of drain canals, foot trails and rural roads.

"I have run out of my savings and this programme has come at an opportune moment. I earn Rs 650 per day through this programme and by the end of 10 days, I will hopefully have enough money to be able to celebrate Dashain with my family," said Baram

The rural municipality has included labourers and impoverished individuals in the list of beneficiaries for prepared a working guideline for the

On May 6, an executive meeting of the rural municipality had endorsed the working guideline to provide daily wages to the workers (beneficiaries) who received relief as part of the employment programme. Bishnu Bhatta, chairman of the rural municipality, said, "The programme was initiated to help impoverished families earn some money for the upcoming festival season. Most labourers and daily wage earners have been rendered jobless due to the pandemic. The programme was also initiated for migrant workers who have returned home from foreign employment and have no source of income left."

Deep Kumari Gurung, a local of Ward No 8, has been repairing the foot trail in her ward for the last two days and is happy with the opportunity that has come her way during these difficult times

Krishna Bahadur Gurung, chairman of Ward No 8, said his office did not have prior plans for the programme but followed through with the rural municipality's decision since it would benefit the locals financially.

"The programme has been effective in helping locals earn money during the festive season. Repair works of

roads were not included in our plan but we are happy we took part in the project. Aside from generating employment for the locals, the project has also beautified the villages," he

According to Bhatta, around 500 jobless individuals have participated in the employment programme so far.

As a part of its effort to help impoverished families during the pandemic, the rural municipality in mid-April had distributed 25kg of rice, two kgs of pulses, and one litre of cooking oil each to 650 impoverished families as

The rural municipality has allocated Rs 2.7 million for the programme.

"Each ward has been allocated Rs 200,000 to Rs 300,000 depending on the need for the employment programme. We have also instructed all ward offices to select projects and beneficiaries with the aim to help people during the pandemic," Chairman Bhatta said.

According to the working guideline of the project, heavy machines, including loaders, excavators and other equipment, cannot be used in infrastructure development projects. "We have prioritised using homemade tools and also requested technicians to oversee the ongoing development activities," said Bhatta.

Four provincial governments to continue free tests and care

Health facilities run by the federal government witness a sharp drop in number of people coming in for tests as they start charging money.

GHANASHYAM GAUTAM IN BUTWAL Ramesh kumar paudel in Bharatpur, **DEEPAK PARIYAR** IN POKHARA & CHITRANGA THAPA IN DHANGADH

Four provincial governments have said that they would continue with free Covid-19 testing and treatment days after the federal government announced to charge money for testing and treatment.

Lumbini, Bagmati, Gandaki, and Sudurpaschim provincial governments have said they will continue the free treatment and tests through health facilities that fall under the jurisdiction of their respective provincial government.

Meanwhile, health facilities run by the federal government have started to charge for tests and treatment. The number of people visiting these facilities for tests has gone down as a result.

Lumbini Chief Minister Shankar Pokharel on Monday informed the public through social media that treatment and testing will be free of cost in four Covid-19 hospitals in Butwal, Bhairahawa, Dang and Banke.

Swab samples are being collected and tested from 10 different locations while local governments are also collecting swab samples from their health facilities.

"The number of individuals providing swab samples for Covid-19 tests has not decreased," said Dr Rajendra Giri, chief at the Provincial Public Health Laboratory in Bhairahawa. When the federal government on

Sunday announced its plans to discontinue free test and treatment, barring certain groups including helpless and disabled people, 2,338 swab samples were collected in the province. The number fell to 874 on Monday

but it picked up again on Tuesday, with 1,642 swab samples collected for testing, according to the data at the Ministry of Social Development. Dr Rajendra Khanal, the medical

superintendent of Lumbini Provincial Hospital, said the federal government's decision has had no impact on test numbers at provincial hospitals.

"Our data show that the rate of infection is still increasing so testing is important. The provincial government's decision to make testing and treatment free of cost is a welcome move," he said.

Meanwhile, at Bharatpur Hospital in Chitwan, which operates under the federal government, the number of people visiting for tests has gone down since Sunday. As per the decision from

the central government, the hospital has started charging Rs 2,000 for a Covid-19 test.

'The hospital had collected 154 swab samples on Sunday. The number dropped to 95 on Monday," said Liladhar Paudel, information officer at the hospital.

Bagmati provincial government has also decided to continue with free Covid-19 testing and treatment from eight hospitals.

'Free treatment is available at Hetauda Hospital in Makwanpur, the district hospitals in Sindhuli, Ramechhap, Rasuwa, Bhaktapur, Sindhupalchok and their isolation wards and 15 other isolation facilities in locations. The treatment will continue throughout Dashain holidays," said Yubaraj Dulal, minister for social development.

Dulal added that Hetauda Hospital and Dhulikhel Hospital are collecting swab samples for testing without any

In Gandaki Province, the number of individuals providing swab samples has decreased at Pokhara Academy of Health Science, which is under the federal government.

"The number of people coming for tests has decreased after the federal government decided to charge money for testing and treatment," said Dr Arjun Acharya, director at the hospital run by the academy.

The hospital had collected 400 swab samples on Sunday. But in the last three days, the number of swab sample collections has been averaging between 60 and 70 per day.

"Only those people with symptoms associated with Covid-19 are getting tested now," said Acharya.

Health facilities that are run by the provincial government are still providing free Covid-19 tests and treat ment though.

"The government of Gandaki Province is responsible towards its citizens. Free testing and treatment will continue from 38 places in the province," said Gandaki Chief Minister Prithvi Subba Gurung.

Gandaki Provincial Directorate has been conducting free tests of those people identified through contact tracing as well.

"Around 600 swabs are being collected on a daily basis," said Nawaraj Sharma, coordinator of Provincial Health Emergency Centre.

In Sudurpaschim Province, free Covid-19 tests and treatment are available at all hospitals run by the provincial government.

"We are conducting free tests and treatment through all hospitals oper ated by the provincial government, said Dr Gunaraj Awasthi, director at Sudurpaschim Health Directorate.

Seti Provincial Hospital in Dhangadhi and Dadeldhura Hospital are charging Rs 2,000 for tests from only those people who need their test results immediately.

"So far, all treatment costs of Covid 19 patients are being taken care of by the provincial government. We are only charging money for tests of those who are in need of immediate results, said Dr Hemraj Pandey, the medical superintendent of Seti Provincial



The federal government has stopped providing free tests and treatment from Sunday.

Twenty-five landslide-displaced families to get new homes

Landslides at Limgha and Thulolumpek in Gulmi district had claimed 13 lives and displaced around 100 families last year.

GHANSHYAM GAUTAM

GULMI, OCT 22

As many as 25 families displaced by last year's landslide at Satyawati Rural Municipality in Gulmi district are getting new homes this Dashain. The construction of houses has been completed

in Limgha and Thulolumpek settlements with the financial assistance of the federal, provincial and local governments. Another 27 houses are still under construction and likely to be completed "Ten new houses in Thulolumpek and 15 others

in Limgha have been completed. We are preparing to hand over these houses to the landslide displaced families on the day of Bijaya Dashami on October 26," said Parishwor Dhakal, chairman of Satyawati Rural Municipality.

Two separate landslides in Limgha and Thulolumpek had claimed 13 lives and displaced around 100 families last year.

The local government had identified 79 houses as vulnerable to landslides and decided to relocate

According to Dan Bahadur Rana, the ward chairman of Ward No 4, an integrated settlement has been constructed for 27 households of Thulolumpek while 14 houses have been constructed at Khotdanda for the displaced families of Limgha.

The local government had provided Rs 500,000 each to the families whose homes were completely destroyed in the landslide while the provincial government had provided Rs 350,000 each to the families whose homes were partially damaged.

Twenty-seven houses are still under construction and they are likely to be completed within a month.

The local government had purchased land to build integrated settlements for the landslide displaced families with the financial help from the federal government, various social organisations and individual donors.

According to Ruk Bahadur Rana, the ward chairman of Ward No 3, the local government had provided Rs 4 million and the provincial government Rs 6.6 million to construct houses for the displaced families of Thulolumpek. "We need more funds to construct homes for the remaining displaced families. We have asked the provincial government for support," he said Ruk Bahadur.



between Tourism Minister Yogesh Bhattarai and Indian Ambassador Vinay Mohan Kwatra a few weeks ago, they had also discussed, among other things, resumption of flights.

Analysts say apart from closely observing the ruling party's internal issues, Delhi has been keeping a close eye on Beijing's growing influence in Nepal.

Of late, Beijing's moves in Kathmandu, without making any attempt to keep them clandestine, have become a cause for concern for Delhi. Chinese Ambassador Hou Yanqi earlier this year conducted a whirlwind of meetings with various leaders of the ruling party including Oli on two different occasions.

The ruling party was facing a serious crisis at that time, with a factional feud threatening a split of the ruling

ruling party, both Oli and Goel also discussed improving bilateral ties between Nepal and India, according to a top government official who spoke on condition of anonymity. "The visit is aimed at improving bilateral relations,"

Besides discussing internal political situations of the

said the official. Another senior official familiar with the visit and discussions between Oli and Goel said that both sides are planning high-level exchanges immediately after Indian

Army chief Manoj Mukund Naravane's visit to Nepal. Armies of Nepal and India share brotherly ties. During his visit to Kathmandu, Naravane will be conferred upon the honorary title of the chief of the Nepal Army as per a

long-standing tradition between the two countries. Officials said after Naravane's visit to Kathmandu next month, both countries are planning a meeting at the foreign secretary level, largely focusing on issues related to

Therefore, Goel's visit is setting the tone for upcoming talks, according to the officials.

However, the Indian intelligence chief's visit and his meetings in Kathmandu have not gone down well with some members of the ruling party itself.

Bishnu Rijal, deputy chief of the foreign affairs department of the ruling party, said politicians should not overstep in matters related to diplomacy. "Diplomacy should be handled by diplomats—not politi-

cians," he said. "The present confusion over the visit of the R&AW chief is the result of the handling of diplomacy Standing Committee member Bhim Rawal was more

forthright in his views. "The way the meeting of the chief of Indian intelligence R&AW with Nepal's prime minister was conducted and the timing and manner of the visit, which is contrary to Nepal's foreign policy, sovereignty and independence as guided by the constitution and the thought, policy and declaration of the NCP that is leading the government, is objectionable. It is against diplomatic norms." Rawal

Karna, the former ambassador, said Indian officials' meetings with Nepali leaders, even top ones and the prime ministers, are not surprising, as such things have been practised long enough to become a tradition.

wrote on Twitter.

"One thing, however, has become apparent now--Oli's nationalistic credentials are now under question," Karna told the Post.

India intelligence ... | Leaders' centralised mindset challenge to federalism

Several laws essential for a functional federal system have still not been endorsed by the federal parliament.

BINOD GHIMIRE KATHMANDU, OCT 22

The centralised mindset and lack of accountability in the political leadership are the major challenges towards implementing the federal constitution, according to legal experts.

More than a decade since an amendment to the Interim Constitution (2007) adopted federalism, there hasn't been a change in the mindset of the rulers, they say.

Mohan Lal Acharya, former adviser to the Constituent Assembly, said there has been immense interference by the federal government in the works of provincial and local level governments.

"The federal government is run by people who have a unitary and centralised mindset. This is why a number of necessary laws are yet to be formulated," said Acharya in a virtual programme organised by the Journalists' Rights Association. "This is a serious challenge towards implementing the federal constitution.

Acharya said the federal government hesitates even to recognise the authorities of the provincial and governments explicitly enshrined in the Constitution of, which is already five years old.

Expressing their views, legal and constitutional experts said the people in power are still not ready to accept that all three tiers of government are independent with parallel powers. As argued by the experts, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli often claims that the provincial and local governments are extensions of the federal government without independent identity.

Presenting his views, former chief justice Kalyan Shrestha said the huge political changes the country has witnessed over the years don't reflect in the acts of those in power. He said the people fought for the changes expecting that the revolution would bring about improvements in their daily lives.

"We have a progressive constitution but that makes no sense unless it gets implemented and ordinary people get to reap the benefits," Shrestha said, adding, the fact that the federal parliament is yet to endorse the crucial laws shows that the centre will make every possible effort to delay

the devolution of power. Five years after the Constitution of Nepal was enforced, at least half a dozen laws urgently required haven't been endorsed by the federal parliament while the federal government is yet to draft some of them.

Laws related to land, police force, citizenship and health services are pending in the federal parliament while the federal government is yet to draft the federal civil service bill.

"The country was federated to ease the people's access to government services," said Shrestha. "Having 761 governments will make no sense if the federal government, like in the unitary system, continues to make every decision.'

The experts argued that the expensive electoral system the country has adopted needs to change so that the representation of lawmakers becomes more inclusive. Rukmini Maharjan, a lecturer at Nepal Law Campus, said the expensive electoral system has shut parliament for many honest leaders because they cannot bear the cost.

Several studies suggest that elections have become excessively costly in Nepal as billions of rupees get spent in a single poll.

A report by Election Observation Committee, a poll monitoring body authorised by the Election Commission, showed that Rs69.42 billion was spent during the local level elections held in three phases in 2017. The amount is nearly twice the budget of the Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Project, the country's upcoming largest hydroelectric

"Federalism will be weakened if there isn't proper representation of the various communities," she said. "Expensive election is a hindrance to their proper representation.

Houses built for landslide-displaced families at Satyawati Rural Municipality in Gulmi district.

NATIONAL

BRIEFING

Municipality to manage bodies of Covid-19 patients

RUPANDEHI: Tilottama Municipality in Rupandehi district has decided to take the responsibility of managing the bodies of individuals who die of Covid-19. The decision was made at a meeting of the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre held on Tuesday. Earlier, Nepal Army had been carrying out the task of managing the bodies of people who have died of Covid-19. Deputy Mayor Jageswori Devi Chaudhary said the decision was made after the federal government stepped back from the task. The meeting has also decided to carry out free coronavirus tests of people in the municipality.

Water from 77 districts to be brought for Ranipokhari

HETAUDA/SINDHULI: The project implementation units of the National Reconstruction Authority in Makwanpur and Sindhuli districts have sent water from Indrasarowar and Kamala river to be mixed in the newly restored Ranipokhari in Kathmandu. The NRA had recently instructed its project implementation units in all 77 districts to collect water from holy water bodies and deliver it to Kathmandu.



A butterfly sucks nectar from a flower at Maitri Vihar in Lumbini. The arrival of butterflies in the area marks the end of monsoon, locals say.

POST PHOTO: MANOJ PAUDEL

After rolling back free testing and treatment, officials stop responding to Covid-19 distress calls

Officials at the Ministry of Health handling its hotline have stopped picking up as hospitals have run out of beds and treatment facilities.

ARJUN POUDEL

The health condition of a 38-year-old Covid-positive man from Kuleshwor Kathmandu, who was in home isolation, deteriorated fast on Wednesday. His family members as well his doctor, tried to find a hospital bed for him the

"We contacted all hospitals treating Covid-19 patients in Kathmandu for a bed. But to no avail," Dr Suyash Timalsina told the Post. "We kept trying to contact officials through the Ministry of Health's hotline for serious cases. But they didn't help."

Timalsina had referred his patient to a hospital after the oxygen saturation level in his bloodstream was low. "The patient just needed oxygen therapy, but we had to struggle for the whole day until we found a bed at Bir Hospital in the evening. Officials have even stopped responding to calls on the hotline numbers.'

The Ministry of Health and Population on Sunday enforced the Cabinet decision dated October 5 to make patients pay (except for the poor, single women, disabled, senior citizens above 70 years, frontline health workers, security personnel and and treatment. State-run laboratories stopped free tests last week and health



Covid-19 designated hospitals in the city have run out of intensive care units and beds for patients who show serious symptoms of Covid-19.

workers assigned to carry out contact tracing have stopped collecting specimens—nasal and throat swabs for polymerase chain reaction tests.

After halting free test, trace and treatment, the government has also given up managing hospital beds for gence and an extreme form of irresponsibility on the part of the government, health experts say.

The ministry, which had been operating a hotline number to assist patients find hospital beds and ventilators, stopped picking up a few days ago, doctors as well as relatives of

patients complained. responding, after a surge in infections and serious cases," an official at the ministry told the Post. "As there are no beds available for new patients, it is easy not to respond to calls and to listen to them plead for a bed.

So far over 30 people have died at home for lack of a hospital bed. Doctors say that even if the authorities concerned can't do anything more for the people, they should take the initiative to arrange general beds and oxygen therapy.

'There are dozens of hospitals and medical colleges in the Kathmandu Valley, which do not have sufficient patients," Dr Prabhat Adhikari, an infectious disease and critical care expert, told the Post. "If those facilities can be used for treatment of patients infected with coronavirus by arranging oxygen supply a lot of lives

Doctors say that oxygen therapy is a primary treatment for patients infected with coronavirus, if their oxygen level declines or they suffer from breathing difficulties.

The World Health Organization too said that oxygen therapy is a major treatment intervention for patients with severe Covid-19. "All countries should work to optimise the availability of pulse oximeters and medical oxygen systems,"the UN health agencal illness has been reported as over 50 percent, thus implementation of prov-

en critical care interventions such as lung protective ventilation should be optimized."

So far, 148,509 people throughout the country have been infected with coronavirus, with 812 deaths, as of Thursday. According to the ministry, in the last 24 hours, 3,637 people tested positive with 21 deaths. Of the total new infections, 1552 were reported in Kathmandu Valley, according to the

The number of active cases stands at 44,877 as of Thursday.

Ministry estimates suggest that the country may record an additional 320,000 cases in the next four months in the "worst case scenario". The number could go up to 148,000 in the "moderate case scenario"

With the new cases starting to spike at a rapid pace, thousands of infected patients have been compelled to stay in home isolation risking their lives.

"Even if we can't do much, we can set up oxygen supply facilities, which have been proven to be very effective, " Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, chief of the Clinical Research Unit at the Sukraraj Hospital, told the Post. "A lot of deaths can be avoided if we provide at least oxygen therapy to those suffering from breathing difficulties.'

tact ministry officials to inquire about the hotline numbers did not succeed.

Lalitpur mayor hands over Rs1 million to revenue-stricken Central Zoo

ANUP OJHA

Lalitpur Metropolitan City has handed over Rs 1 million to Jawalakhel Central Zoo which has been struggling to sustain with no visitors for months due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mayor Chiri Babu Maharjan handed over the cheque for Rs 1 million to Dr Chiranjibi Pokharel, project manager of Central Zoo, amid a programme on Thursday.

"This is a thoughtful help from Lalitpur Metropolitan City at this time of difficulty," said Pokharel.

The zoo has been closed since March 20 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. "It's been eight months, and we hav-

en't admitted any visitors. It's uncertain when we will be able to open the zoo for the public," said Pokharel.

The zoo has a menagerie of 1,064 birds and animals. In normal times, 3,000 to 5,000 people would visit the zoo daily. The zoo officials say the money

Zoo staffers are taking a 50 percent pay cut so that animals can be fed, officials said.

from ticket sales would be used for the upkeep of the animals and paying staff salary. "The central zoo would earn around

Rs 160 million annually from ticket sales. We haven't made a single rupee in the past eight months," said It takes around Rs 40 million annually just to feed the animals while the

remianing earnings from ticket sales are used to treat the animals, repair their enclosures and pay the staff. Currently, 68 people are working at

the zoo. Their salary has been slashed by 50 percent as the zoo has not been making any money.

Pokharel said the monthly expenditure of the zoo stands somewhere between Rs 10 million to Rs 15 million. 'To save money to feed the animals, we are working by taking only 50 percent of our monthly salary," said Pokharel.

The pandemic has left the zoo in dire straits but the central government has not offered any support

"This is the only zoo we have and we must do what we can to support its existence during these trying times, Mayor Maharjan said. "Earlier, the Lalitpur Metropolitan City had asked the federal government for help, but our request fell on deaf ears.

The Central Zoo, established as a private zoo in 1932 by Rana prime minister Juddha Shumsher, was brought ernment with the political changes of

Retaliatory killings major challenge for snow leopard conservation

As the country celebrates International Snow Leopard Day, wildlife experts highlight the need to address human-wildlife conflict in the mountain cat's range areas to save them.

CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL KATHMANDU, OCT 22

Local communities kill snow leopards that prey on their livestock, and this is one of the major challenges to saving the elusive mountain cat, according to conservationists.

On International Snow Leopard day conservationists are worried that the apex predator of the Himalayan ecosystem also faces a plethora of challenges due to human activities near

According to Gopal Khanal, a snow leopard researcher, retaliatory killing of the cats by local communities is the most prominent

"There are several other threats such as climate change, habitat loss, lack of reliable data on its status and population, and wrong perception of people. But the biggest threat is killing by local communities for the damages caused by these predators," said Khanal, also the assistant conservation officer with the Shey Phoksundo National Park. "In addition to that, decline in prey population has emerged as other threats. In some areas, locals even kill animals that snow leopards feed on because they damage the crops.

Khanal's recently published study showed that snow leopards from Upper Dolpa and Lower Dolpa turn to domesticated animals despite the abundance of wild prey in their habitat. Such a situation can lead to the killing of snow leopards for livestock depredation.

Nepal government's snow leopard conservation action plan (2017-2021) also identifies livestock depredation by snow leopards, and crop damage by prey species as the main cause of human-wildlife conflicts in the mountain

Another snow leopard researcher Kamal Thapa also acknowledges retaliatory killing of snow leopards as the major threat to conservation efforts aimed at saving the animal, listed "vulnerable" in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Thapa, who was speaking at an interaction organised by Environmental Graduates in Himalaya and Resources Himalaya Foundation



The elusive snow leopard has been categorised as 'vulnerable' in the IUCN red list.

to mark the International Snow Leopard Day (Oct 23), said 33 percent of snow leopards' diet comes from domesticated animals, and 67 from wild prey, mainly blue sheep, and Himalayan tahr among others.

"Snow leopards have eaten horses which are highly valuable in the mountain region. In 2003-04, snow leopards killed nearly 40 goats and sheep in one shed," said Thapa, who has been studying snow leopards since 1999. "All this depredation indicates the level of potential human-wildlife conflict.. Snow leopards are found in 12 countries,

including Nepal, across the Himalayas and high mountains of Central Asia. Fewer than 4,000 adult snow leopards are believed to be alive in the wild as they continue to face threats due to habitat loss, poaching and climate change. It is estimated that Nepal is home to around 300-400 individuals. Snow leopards are found within and outside

mountain protected areas of Nepal where their habitat is broadly arranged into three large snow leopard conservation landscapes: eastern, central, and western. The eastern landscape extends

Kangchenjunga

National Park (LNP). The central landscape spreads from LNP (west) to Tscharka Pass near the western fringe of Annapurna Conservation Area. The western landscape-the largest in terms of area— is home to the largest population of snow leopards in Nepal as it extends from Tscharka pass to Api-Nampa Conservation Area

Conservation Area to Langtang

in the far-western part of the country, and includes Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve (DHR), Shey Phoksundo National Park (SPNP), Rara National Park and Khaptad National Park, according to the action plan.

Potential snow leopard habitat is estimated to be an area of 13,000 sq km in Nepal.

According to Khanal, nearly 30 percent of snow leopard habitats are outside protected areas

"Besides, human development aspirations have affected snow leopard habitat. Ongoing construction in and around snow leopard habitats has emerged as a challenge," said Khanal. "As many as ten of the 13 northsouth corridors go past snow leopard habitats, disturbing their ecology and natural habi-

Thapa thinks the government also needs to reconsider its existing conservation model for sustainable conservation of snow leopards.

"Mountainous people share their habitat with snow leopards. They are in conflicts with the animals, but they are still surviving together," said Thapa. "For their coexistence and promotion of sustainable conservation, these people should also be given rights, not only responsibilities.'



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EDITORIAL

Building back better

The post-earthquake reconstruction has been too little and too late.

The inauguration of the reconstructed Ranipokhari and Durbar High School has brought a new lease of life. The inauguration right before the Dashain festival has brought some happiness among citizens. This is particularly evident in the way the photographs of the reconstructed structures were shared widely across social media. However, over five years after the earthquake, the completion of the reconstruction of a couple of structures is too little too late. President Bidya Devi Bhandari had inaugurated the national reconstruction campaign from Ranipokhari on January 16, 2016. The pond was expected to be reconstructed within a year, but it ended up taking more than four years.

The Ranipokhari reconstruction is also a prime example of how we have spent our precious time fighting amongst ourselves on how we wanted to build back better. The pond became the centre of conflict early on as the National Reconstruction Authority and Kathmandu Metropolitan City office-bearers came into conflict with conservationists over the modality of the reconstruction. It also became the site of a grand tamasha between Kathmandu Metropolitan City Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya and Deputy Mayor Hari Prabha Khadgi as the latter claimed the reconstruction work had destroyed its original structure. Thankfully, the plan to turn the ancient pond and its surroundings into a commercial promenade with concrete structures was rightfully defeated.

The 7.8 Richter scale earthquake that shook central Nepal, killing nearly 9,000 people, had brought to the ground thousands of structures, including government and public office buildings, archaeological and cultural heritages, school buildings, and hospitals, among others. A host of these structures have already been rebuilt and are in the process of being rebuilt, some in an indigenous way and others haphazardly. However, many others need to be begun from scratch over five years after the devastating earthquake.

The reconstruction process has been hit by institutional gaps, including the absence of local government in the initial few years, lack of coordination between institutions, bureaucratic red-taping, political transition, weak governance, manpower shortage and knowledge gap. The National Reconstruction Authority, which is the focal institution for the post-earthquake reconstruction, has been at the centre of much political bickering and has not been able to expedite

A report by the National Reconstruction Authority earlier this year showed that out of 7,553 schools that needed reconstruction, only 5.598 had been completed fully or partially. About 26 percent (2,015) of the quake-damaged schools were yet to be rebuilt. This year brought in additional problems, with the Covid-19 pandemic halting almost all of the reconstruction work. The completion of the Ranipokhari reconstruction work is, thus, a welcome development.

The Ranipokhari reconstruction work has also shown that indigenous knowledge is of paramount importance in building back better. While the Ranipokhari reconstruction work is worthy of emulation, considering the precious architectural and cultural heritage we need to conserve, the dillydallying and bickering is unwarranted. There are both good and bad lessons to be learned from the Ranipokhari case. It is up to the authorities to decide what they want to learn and whether they want to earn bouquets or brickbats in the future.

No alternative to disarmament

Until the issues of poverty, inequality and discrimination are addressed, armament will not stop.

SAGAR PHUYAL



One of the cardinal goals of the United Nations is to maintain international peace and security. To this end, achieving disarmament is crucial. Despite the existence of the universal body, its organs, legal instruments and all other efforts, armament continues unabated. Why have we failed to achieve the goal of disarmament? And what can be done to achieve the desired results?

The nature of wars changed in the 20th century. After the balance of power between the European countries was disturbed, the world witnessed two world wars. In World War I, an estimated 8.5 million soldiers were killed and civilian casualties ranged from 5 to 10 million. In World War II, around 55 million people lost their lives. A variety of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical and biological weapons, were developed; and the arms race between the powers moved ahead at full pace. World War II came to an end with the dropping of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. As most countries of the world were involved directly or indirectly, the wars shattered human societies and their social fabrics.

The arms race

Even after the end of the Second World War and the establishment of the United Nations, the world faced the looming threat of war as a result of the Cold War between the blocs led by the United States and the then Soviet Union. This led to the development and growth of weapons of mass destruction. In the realist world, it is claimed that armament is unstoppable due to security concerns. This theory assumes that due to the perception or misperception of a possible threat from the opponent, the first country is forced to develop the required weapons for its own security, and this triggers the second country to develop even more advanced weapons, and this cycle of armament goes on and on.

At the beginning of the 21st century, acts of terrorism increased sharply. September 11, 2001, was a day that was beyond anyone's imagination. Persons trained as pilots in the United States hijacked four passenger aircraft and used them as lethal weapons of mass destruction with the loss of thousands of lives. This perplexed the world community in defining the nature of weapons of mass destruction. Advancements in communication and information technologies like cyber technology and artificial intelligence like 'drone' aircraft for war and lethal autonomous weapons (killer robots), among others, are being misused for destruction. This forces the United Nations to think in a different way to tackle such misuse of technologies

Trading weapons of any kind through legal or illegal channels has been a lucrative business for many countries and groups. Easy availability of small arms and instigation of interstate or intra-state conflict for the individual benefit has resulted in disruption of social systems, a mass outflow of citizens as refugees, sexual exploitation and impoverishment of countries. Such moments resulted in poverty which is the most destabilising and major source of conflicts.

The United Nations was established in 1945 mainly with the objective of maintaining international peace and security. It has six main organs—the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice and Secretariat. The General Assembly and Security Council are the major organs to maintain international peace and security. The Security Council has some binding power to implement its decisions including disarmament if it is able to garner the consent of all five of its permanent members.

The United Nations has passed various conventions, treaties and resolutions to manage, discourage, minimise and finally eliminate weapons of mass destruction. Among the major conventions and treaties, some have yielded the expected results. The Convention on Cluster Munitions, Mine Ban Convention and Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons have proved to be effective. The United Nations recently published a book entitled Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament. Most of its agendas have a direct or indirect aim of disarmament. But the most important thing is how much effort the world community puts in to achieve the goal of disarmament. The bitter truth is that if the leading powers don't find such negotiations in their favour, they choose not to comply with the provisions because, for them, the world runs chaotically rather than systematically, and power ultimately prevails.

If the major countries cut their expenditure on militarisation even slightly, and divert the savings to promoting human welfare and building fundamental structures in the developing world, the world will be a safer and more peaceful place to live in. It seems that the world order is on the cusp of change. There are also some serious issues that are threatening world peace. Such issues are, among others, the abrupt decision of the United States to pull out from the Paris Agreement, mounting tensions in the South China Sea, escalating border disputes between India and China, the trade war between the United States and China, and the origin and spread of the pandemic and its devastating impact on human lives and world economies.

Climate change As for the problem of climate change and global warming, the United Nations and the international community have to give special attention towards countries like Nepal which are bearing the costs without being a party to the problem. There is a nexus between climate change, poverty and conflict. Until the issues of poverty, inequality and discrimination among peoples and nations are addressed, the process of armament will go on unchecked, and disarmament will

prove to be a distant dream.

Though the major responsibility of maintaining international peace and security falls on the United Nations, the problems we are facing are matters of concern to everyone. Not only the state, but all non-state actors including civil societies, persons with international stature, scholars and individuals should put in their efforts and show their solidarity to make the world free of all kinds of weapons. Whatever we gain from such efforts, it will be highly in favour of all in general, and the developing countries and their peoples in particular. By and large, disarmament is a matter of moral ethics and commitments of the international community rather than legally binding contracts under international law. In this civilised world, every nation, civil society, private sector and individual must assume the moral obligation to make the world free of arms. We want long-lasting peace and security.

> Phuyal is an Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Africa's WTO moment

Okonio-lweala has a rare combination of skill and proven technocratic competence.

KINGSLEY CHIEDU MOGHALU



The selection of the World Trade Organisation's next director-general has entered its final phase, with two candidates left in the running: Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a former Nigerian finance and economy minister and a former managing director of the World Bank, and Yoo Myung-hee, South Korea's trade minister. In view of the WTO's current challenges, Okonjo-Iweala is the better choice.

The WTO faces two major crises: an institutional crisis caused by the great-power rivalry between the United States and China, and a crisis of globalisation—of which the WTO, as the overseer of global trade rules, is a major symbol.

Sino-American trade tensions have paralysed the organisation, with the US blocking the appointment of new judges to its appellate body, which rules on trade disputes among member countries. Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis, another source of great-power tension, has prompted many firms to consider reshoring production in order to reduce their reliance on pandemic-hit Chinese suppliers, thus disrupting the global supply chains that are critical to world

If chosen to head the WTO, Okonjo-Iweala has the leadership credentials to restore relevance to a broken organisation. The WTO needs a tested global leader who is well versed in the role of trade in development, rather than a trade bureaucrat who might lack the broader view. With her experience at

the World Bank (where the US and China are major players) and as a reformist finance minister in Nigeria, the Harvard and MIT-educated Okonjo-Iweala has a rare combination

en technocratic competence. The WTO needs a leader who can build consensus, because the organisation's design doesn't allow for topdown leadership. And Okonjo-Iweala has the gravitas to build bridges between the US and China, on the one hand, and between the WTO and Africa, on the other.

of political leadership skills and prov-

Despite being widely regarded as the world's next frontier for investment and development, Africa is essentially an onlooker in the world gre 2 percent of global exports. Although the continent is a growing market for the products of globalisation, it does not benefit much from world trade, owing to its limited presence in globalised value chains. Instead, Africa trades mainly in agricultural goods and natural resources, whereas most world trade is in manufacturing and services. Africa needs to trade with the world

on the same basis that other regions do, but the global trading system is keeping the continent underdeveloped. In particular, industrialised countries levy low tariffs on imports of African raw commodities, but higher ones on finished African goods-

Today's world trade is thus rigged against Africa. To help redress this imbalance, the WTO's special and differential treatment provisions for least-developed countries should permit African governments to provide temporary tariff protection for infant domestic manufacturers within WTO rules. We could call such necessary and temporary measures 'smart protectionism'.

More generally, it is time to make the WTO work for all member countries, not just for the great powers or countries whose global economic success was built on trade protectionism but now seek to 'kick away the

will expand the global sphere of prosperity, is best mediated by a WTO leader who is not from a major trading

Furthermore, African countries currently do not use the WTO's dispute-settlement system, because they are too weak to take on donor countries, whether Western powers or China. So, Chinese products, for example, have been 'dumped' in African markets with no consequences. Okonjo-Iweala has the skills to build a consensus on giving Africa a fairer shake in the global trading

Much will also depend on the out-

come of the US presidential election on November 3. President Donald Trump believes that China has gamed global trade to the detriment of US national interests, while China thinks America has rejected the WTO's rulesbased regime. Resolving this tension will require both powers to find the political will to compromise. It will also require a global development leader such as Okonjo-Iweala, who has served on international development commissions with current and former heads of government, to facilitate a rapprochement. But regardless of who wins on November 3, the Covid-19 pandemic will inexorably weaken globalisation as the US and other countries seek to shorten and localise sup-

ply chains. Meanwhile, the importance of world trade to human development will again become apparent when billions of doses of Covid-19 vaccines become available, most likely sometime in 2021. As chair of the board of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, Okonjo-Iweala has played an important leadership role in negotiations to make vaccines widely available in developing countries.

The WTO's predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, was originally conceived as part of the post-World War II Bretton Woods system, but weak domestic political support in the US delayed its establishment. The International Monetary Fund has been headed since its founding by Europeans, and the World Bank by Americans. This realpolitik blocked Okonjo-Iweala's bid to lead the World Bank nearly a decade ago.

It is past time to eliminate such a spoils system, and for the developing world finally to have its chance. And in Okonjo-Iweala, Nigeria and the world have a highly competent candidate to lead the WTO.

Moghalu, a former deputy governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, is a senior fellow at the Council on Emerging Market Enterprises at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.



IMF cuts Asia's growth forecast, warns of Covid-19 driven risks



REUTERS

The International Monetary Fund slashed this year's economic forecast for Asia, reflecting a sharper-than-expected contraction in countries like India, a sign the coronavirus pandemic continues to take a heavy toll on the

While the IMF upgraded next year's growth forecast, it warned the recovery will be sluggish and patchy with countries dependent on tourism seen taking a particularly hard hit.

"Fear of infection and social distancing measures are dimming consumer confidence and will keep economic activity below capacity until a vaccine is developed," the IMF said in a report on the Asia-Pacific region released on Wednesday.

"Although China's recovery can boost regional trade, weak global growth, closed borders, and festering tensions around trade, technology, and security have worsened the pros pects for a trade-led recovery in the

The IMF said it expects Asia's economy to contract 2.2 percent this year. That decline is 0.6 of a percentage point larger than its forecast in June, due to sharp slumps in countries like India, the Philippines and Malaysia.

India's economy is likely to shrink 10.3 percent this year in stark contrast to China, which is set to expand 1.9 percent, the IMF said.

Asia's economy is likely to grow 6.9 percent in 2021 thanks to the boost from expected stronger recoveries in China, the United States and the euro area, it said.

But the IMF said there were "considerable" risks such as the chance of a second wave of infections, escalating U.S. tensions and a potential return to tighter financial conditions.

"With the pandemic seemingly far from over, policy support should be sustained and, in some cases, increased," it said.

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The government goes borrowing as virus strangles revenue sources

Foreign aid commitments to Nepal in the first two months of fiscal year grow seven-fold.

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA

Hard up for cash after the coronavirus strangled revenue sources, the government is looking afar for capital to stimulate a comatose economy and

pay for rising healthcare expenses. The Finance Ministry said the government managed to garner foreign aid pledges totalling Rs84.07 billion in the first two months of the current fiscal year 2020-21, a near seven-fold increase year on year. During the same period in the last fiscal year, aid commitments amounted to Rs12.35 billion.

Out of the total aid pledged in the first two months of this fiscal, 64 percent is for roads and good governance, 33 percent for energy, 2 percent for education and 1 percent for reconstruction.

Foreign aid commitments to the country in the last fiscal year 2019-20 came to Rs219.88 billion, recording a 59 percent jump year on year.

"The main reason behind the recent rise in foreign aid is higher external support considering the impact of Covid-19," said Shankar Sharma, former vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission

"The International Monetary Fund, which used to provide credit whenever the country faced a current account deficit, is now providing emergency credit to Nepal considering the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nepal has been forced to seek external assistance as its revenue sources are drying up amid the coronavirus pandemic

The higher revenue has been inadequate even to meet the government's recurrent expenditure.

As of October 20, the government's revenue collection stood at Rs180.79 billion while it faced a recurrent expenditure bill of Rs192.91 billion, according to the Financial Comptroller General Office that keeps records of the government's income and expend-

In the last fiscal year, the revenue to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio declined for the first time after observing an ascending trend for 10 consecutive years.

It decreased to 21.07 percent of the GDP in the last fiscal 2019-20 from 23.99 percent in the previous fiscal.

The federal government collected revenue totalling Rs700.04 billion in the last fiscal year, down from Rs731.37 billion in the previous fiscal, according to the Finance Ministry.

Under the circumstances, the government has been seeking more external aid to bridge the resource gap.

In April, the government looked for additional annual funding from international multilateral donors—in the range of Rs69 billion to Rs104 billion-to cover the increased healthcare costs in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic

Experts say that current level of debt against the GDP is not a worrying sign yet.

In August, former finance minister Yuba Raj Khatiwada talked with the World Bank's vice-president for the South Asia Region Hartwig Schafer about Nepal's need to borrow more funds from the World Bank due to a drop in revenue to finance its economic recovery, implement a new programmes including disaster management, pay for infrastructure projects and prepare for a digital economy.

Even after the earthquake in 2015, there had been a substantial rise in regular aid commitments to Nepal from donors. In fiscal year 2016-17, Nepal received aid pledges worth Rs250 billion.

"Even though Nepal has been seeking increased foreign aid to fill the resource gap during the pandemic, it would be wise not to use foreign loans in emergency response," Bidyadhar Mallik, former minister and finance secretary. "The foreign loans can be utilised in

developing health infrastructure which will give returns in the Nepal has been increasingly receiv-

ing more aid from multilateral donors in recent years

"Besides the Nepal government's appetite for more aid, the increase is also due to a drop in the number of credit receiving countries with several countries elevating themselves to credit providers such as India and China," said Sharma.

He said that donors also increased aid to Nepal after the formation of a stable government following the 2017 elections.

The loan portion in foreign aid has been growing in recent years in response to Nepal's increased capacity to repay debts, and a global trend of not providing grants and concentration grant assistance to African countries, the Finance Ministry said in its recently released annual bulletin 2019-20.

As a result, the portion of outstanding loans to the gross domestic product (GDP) has swelled.

According to the annual bulletin, the country's outstanding loans (both internal and external) stands at 37.69 percent of the GDP, up from 27.86 percent in the fiscal year 2015-16.

Experts say that current level of debt against the GDP is not a worrying sign yet as there is still scope for Nepal to take more loans.

"We are safe till now because the debt to GDP ratio is below 50 percent, but the time has now come to be cautious and serious about the debt sustainability of the country," Nara Bahadur Thapa, former executive director of Nepal Rastra Bank, had told the Post in August.

Former minister Mallik also stressed that the current level of debt was nothing to worry about. "But we should use the debt in a way that yields results," he said.

The government has significantly increased external borrowing in recent years as it enlarged the budget size massively.

Big amounts were allocated for various infrastructure projects, and the budget allocation for government staff salaries and social security increased. Most of the resources required for post-earthquake reconstruction were also generated from external loans.

"Now the time has come to be careful about selecting projects and completing schemes where foreign loans have been used," said Sharma.

"Now, several projects funded by foreign loans are not being completed on time, and such a trend will lead the country into high indebtedness."

He said it was necessary to invest loans in projects which can yield a good rate of return.

"Otherwise, we will be forced to spend huge amounts of money from our revenue for repaying the loans.

Indian economy set for a near double-digit contraction this fiscal year, Reuters poll shows



Catering workers wearing protective masks stand at an empty food counter at a wedding ceremony amidst an outbreak of the coronavirus disease in New Delhi, India.

REUTERS

BENGALURU, OCT 22

The Indian economy will suffer its deepest contraction on record this fiscal year and recent government stimulus does not go far enough to significantly boost activity depressed by the coronavirus pandemic, according to economists polled by Reuters.

With over 7.6 million coronavirus infections, India is the second worst hit country in the world after the United States and the spread shows no signs of abating. While the government has removed

most restrictions imposed on businesses to slow the spread of the virus, the Reserve Bank of India issued gloomy economic forecasts earlier this month but kept interest rates unchanged citing rising inflation.

That puts the onus on the government, which last week announced another round of fiscal stimulus to boost demand by \$10 billion.

But the Oct. 13-21 poll of 55 economists showed they were more pessimistic about this fiscal year's outlook than just two months ago

Nearly 90 percent of economists, 34 of 39, who responded to an additional question said the latest government stimulus was not enough to boost the economy significantly.

"While the measures introduced to push consumer spending and capital expenditure are clearly innovative within the confines of fiscal prudence, they do little to move the needle significantly in terms of the growth outlook this [fiscal] year," said Sakshi Gupta, senior economist at HDFC Bank.

After shrinking a record 23.9 percent in the April-June quarter, the Indian economy was forecast to contract 10.4 percent and 5.0 percent in the third and fourth quarter, respectively and merely stabilize in the first three months of 2021.

That compares with contractions of 8.1 percent and 1.0 percent, respectively, and 3.0 percent growth forecast in For the current fiscal year ending

March 31, Asia's third-largest economy was predicted to shrink 9.8 percent, more than the RBI's latest 9.5 percent projection, and 26 of 55 economists saw a contraction of 10 percent or more for the year. The poll marks the seventh consecu-

tive downgrade to this year's outlook and if confirmed, would be the weakest annual economic performance since records began six dec-Although the economy was expect-

ed to grow 9.0 percent and 5.7 percent next fiscal year and in FY 2022-23, respectively, all but one of 36 economists with a view said it would take at least a year for Indian GDP to reach pre-Covid-19 levels.

European Union, Britain agree to resume trade talks

BRUSSELS/LONDON, OCT 22

European Union on Thursday, marking a new push by the two sides to protect billions of dollars' worth of trade from the beginning of next year.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson walked away from the negotiations late last week after British officials criticised conclusions from an EU summit which they said suggested only London should compromise to try to secure a new trade deal. With just 10 weeks until a status quo

Brexit transition period is due to end, both sides have traded blame and called on each other to offer more concessions in the talks, which have been all but deadlocked since the summer.

But while markets welcomed the resumption, it is unclear whether the two sides can bridge gaps on fair competition guarantees—especially state aid rules—and fisheries, a sector laden with symbolism for Brexit sup-

A spokeswoman for Johnson's Downing Street office said Britain's ken to EU counterpart Michel Barnier and welcomed his comments from earlier in the day.

"On the basis of that conversation we are ready to welcome the EU team to London to resume negotiations later this week. We have jointly agreed a set of principles for handling this intensified phase of talks," the spokeswoman said.

"It is clear that significant gaps remain between our positions in the most difficult areas, but we are ready, with the EU, to see if it is possible to bridge them in intensive talks," she said in a statement.

The British side was keen to play up that "as both sides have made clear, it takes two to reach an agreement".

The initial phase of negotiations will take place in London from October 22 until October 25, with talks after that taking place by agreement.



A woman dries clay pots at pottery square in Bhaktapur

POST PHOTO: BIJU MAHARJAN

BIZLINE

Nepal Tourism Board receives 'SKAL' International President's Award

KATHMANDU: Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) has been awarded with the SKAL International President's Award by SKAL International, an organization working in the tourism sector, based in Spain. The selection of NTB in the best corporate category comes at a time when Nepal has been chosen as the best tourism destination of 2020. The international award is bestowed to the best performing organization which organizes tourism campaigns with an intention of transferring positive messages for the promotion of tourism sector and inspiring tourism entrepreneurs around the world, states the press release issued by the board. Chief Executive Officer of NTB Dhanajay Regmi expressed his happiness after NTB was selected for the award and said that this sort of recognition by an international organization will further motive employees to perform at the best of their capacity in the development and promotion of Nepal's tourism in the domestic as well as international market.

Despite pandemic, Indian traders stock up in hopes of festive cheer

JAIPUR/NEW DELHI (INDIA), OCT 22

Indian businesses are stocking up more ahead of this year's big festival season than at any time in the last five years, expecting people whose earnings were relatively unaffected by the pandemic to spend the money they saved during months of lockdowns.

India's biggest shopping season is at the time of the festivals of Durga Puja and Diwali, which fall 20 days apart in October-November each Traditionally, this is a time when houses are re-decorated, big-ticket items purchased, feasts held and gifts exchanged. Businesses and shopkeepers expect

more purchases than usual this year, beginning with Durga Puja on Thursday, because the months of lockdowns have resulted in pent-up demand.

Recent data shows that demand for diesel, power and cars has already picked up, and any resurgence of retail buying of everything from phones to furniture would bode well for India's economy that shrank 23.9 percent in the quarter ended Juneits steepest decline. Brokerage firm



A customer with his family is seen at an electronics and appliances shop in Jaipur, India.

Nomura said its India business-resumption index for the week that ended on October 18 hit its highest level since the country first imposed a lockdown in late March to contain the coronavirus.

Big retailers such as Croma and Vijay Sales, both dealing mainly in electronics and home appliances, told Reuters sales in recent days indicated that this holiday season could be better than last year and that they were

actually worried about tightening inventory in certain categories like entry-level laptops and high-end televisions. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said its 70 million small businesses on average were planning for a buffer stock of around 14 percent this season compared with last year's 10 percent, to ensure they don't run out of goods should demand surge. "In the last two months, despite fac-

ing a financial crunch, we have been procuring goods in anticipation that in the festive season we will have considerable footfalls," said Praveen Khandelwal, the group's secretary general, seated in his home-fittings shop in Delhi's Karol Bagh area.

'Our expectation is that this will be the best Diwali for us in at least five years. Naturally, our stocks levels will be as high too.'

Customer arrivals this month have already been the highest in about seven months, hovering around 10 per shop on average-still only about a third of the normal level but expected

to rise, Khandelwal said. But not everyone is as enthusiastic. Shops and factories in the city of Jaipur, typically bustling with local and foreign tourists, did little business on a warm afternoon this week. Traders there said they had laid off staff as the city's key income source of tourism was still feeble and it did not have as many salaried people as places like Delhi.

"Until a vaccine is out, I think we will keep operating at 30-35 percent of pre-Covid levels," said Suresh Tak, owner of four clothes shops and factories printing designs on fabrics

Even Google's mobility data from last week for West Bengal, India's fourth-most populous state where Durga Puja is the main festival, showed that people were mainly visiting supermarkets and pharmacies, not retail and recreation facilities.

Thousands of miles away in the rural district of Satara in India's west, Nilesh Kadam says he is trying to save as much as he can, having returned to work only recently.

"From June to August the company had given me a break as there wasn't much work at the factory," said the 35-year old, whose company makes steel products. "This year I am not planning to make any big-ticket purchase." Still, CAIT estimates Indians have amassed about 1.5 trillion rupees (\$20 billion) in savings since April, a chunk of which could now be directed to holiday shopping.

Online retailers Amazon and Walmart Inc's local unit Flipkart have also kicked off their annual sales events with heavy discounts.

Flipkart said on Wednesday sales have tripled for more than 35 percent of its sellers this year and that there were "green shoots of recovery for everyone across the value chain".

BRIEFING

Parents not found for 545 children separated at US-Mexico border

NEW YORK: Lawyers and non-profit organisations seeking to reunite immigrant families separated at the US-Mexico border by the Trump administration have not been able to locate the parents of 545 children so far. A federal judge ordered thousands of families separated at the border in 2017 and 2018 to be reunited after a 2018 lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union. A court filing in the case this week said some parents deported without their children could not yet be located. US President Donald Trump in May 2018 implemented a controversial "zero tolerance" policy to prosecute families caught crossing the border illegally and remove their children. Amid international outcry, Trump ended the policy just months after it was announced.

EU lawmakers award rights prize to Belarus opposition

BRUSSELS: The European Parliament awarded Belarus' democratic opposition on Thursday its annual human rights prize, in support of the country's protests against the results of an August presidential election that the West and the opposition say was rigged, "My message for you, dear laureates, is to stay strong and not to give up on your fight. Know that we are by your side," European Parliament President David Sassoli said after announcing the prize to "brave women ... prominent political and civil society figures."

Trudeau avoids snap election

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau survived a confidence vote on Wednesday after a key opposition party backed his ruling Liberals, averting the chance of a snap election as a coronavirus outbreak worsens. Legislators voted 180-146 against a motion from the Conservatives, Trudeau's main rivals, to set up a committee with wide-ranging powers to probe whether the government improperly handed contracts to friends as it battled the pandemic ear lier this year. The result means Canadians will be spared from going to the polls again as winter approaches and the country faces a second wave of Covid-19 infections. (AGENCIES)

Sri Lanka expands curfew as outbreak grows; India's tally past 7.7 million

Schools and key public offices have been closed, public gatherings banned and restrictions imposed on public transport.



Women passengers wait for a local train in Mumbai, India. Indian railways has permitted women passengers to travel in local trains during non-peak hours beginning Wednesday, which otherwise has been running only for essential services.

In other developments in the Asia-

Pacific region, India added fewer than

60,000 new coronavirus cases for a

third day. The Health Ministry report-

ed 55,839 new cases, taking India's

total past 7.7 million. The 702 deaths

recorded in the past 24 hours brought

its total fatalities to 116,616 on

Thursday. Authorities are concerned

relaxing attitudes might cause a

resurgence. The Election Commission

issued a warning after political cam-

paigning drew large crowds without

masks and social distancing in east-

ern Bihar state where voting for state

elections is due to begin next week.

Bihar is India's third largest state

with a population of about 122 million

ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLOMBO, OCT 22

Sri Lanka's main fish market was closed on Thursday and a curfew widened as a Covid-19 outbreak grows.

The government imposed the curfew in parts of the capital and some areas outside Colombo after earlier isolating at least six villages in Western province where the new cluster was discovered early this month.

Health authorities also temporarily closed the island nation's main fish market after 49 traders tested positive. Hundreds of other traders at the market on the outskirts of Colombo are being tested for the coronavirus.

By Thursday, 2,510 infections have been connected to the cluster first tied to a garment factory and which authorities identified as Sri Lanka's first community outbreak in two

Schools and key public offices have

been closed, public gatherings banned cerned about the potential spread durand restrictions imposed on public ing religious festivals.

In West Bengal state, a court limited Sri Lanka has reported a total of the size of congregations during the 5,811 confirmed cases with 13 deaths Hindu Durga Puja festival. since March.

South Korea added 121 new cases of coronavirus infection in its first triple-digit daily jump in a week. The steady spread of the virus has

caused concern in a country that eased its social distancing restrictions just last week to cope with a weak economy. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency said Thursday 104 of the new cases were local transmissions, which last exceeded 100 on September 24. The other 17 cases were linked to international arrivals. Hundreds of recent infections have been tied to hospitals in major cities such as capital Seoul and Busan.

Health officials are testing workers at hospitals, nursing homes and senior facilities in the Seoul metropolitan area to prevent further transmissions.

Japan researchers show masks do block coronavirus, but not perfectly

REUTERS

Japanese researchers showed that masks can offer protection from airborne coronavirus particles, but even professional-grade coverings can't eliminate contagion risk entirely.

Scientists at the University of Tokyo built a secure chamber with mannequin heads facing each other. One head, fitted with a nebuliser, simulated coughing and expelled actual coronavirus particles. The other mimicked natural breathing, with a collection chamber for viruses coming through the airway.

A cotton mask reduced viral uptake by the receiver head by up to 40 percent compared to no mask. An N95 mask, used by medical professionals, blocked up to 90 percent. However, even when the N95 was fitted to the face with tape, some virus particles still sneaked in.

When a mask was attached to the coughing head, cotton and surgical masks blocked more than 50 percent of the virus transmission.

"There was a synergistic effect when both the virus receiver and virus spreader wore masks," the researchers wrote in a study published on Wednesday.

There has been a growing consensus among health experts that the Covid-19 virus can be spread through the air. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revised its guidance this month to say the pathogen can linger in the air for hours.

A separate team of Japanese researchers used supercomputer simulations to show that humidity can have a significant effect on the airborne dispersion of virus particles.

Vatican to push for religious freedom as China deal extended

REUTERS

VATICAN CITY/BEIJING, OCT 22

The Vatican and China on Thursday renewed an agreement on the appointment of bishops in China and the Vatican promised to push the communist government to allow more freedom of religion.

The accord gives the pope the final say over the appointment of Chinese bishops, and the Chinese government allows all of them, including those hailing from a state-backed Church, to recognise the pope's authority. But conservative Catholics have accused the Vatican of selling out to Beijing and last month US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo asked the Vatican not to renew the deal. He set off a diplomatic incident by saying the Holy See was compromising its moral authority.

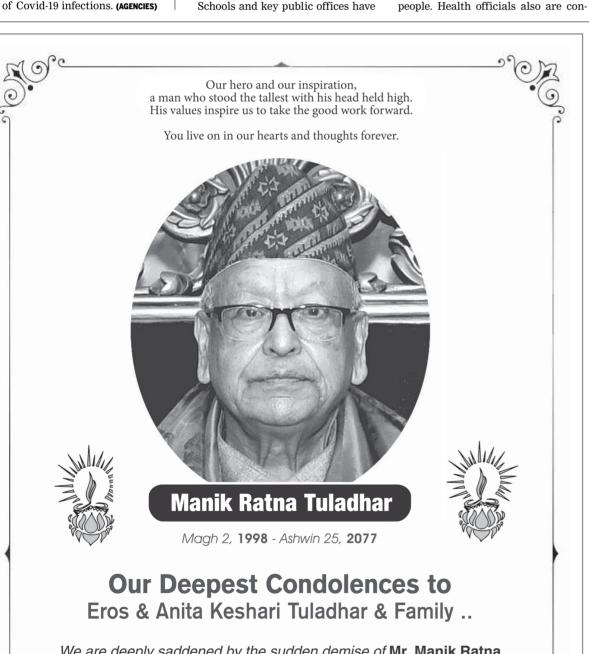
Beijing and the Vatican announced the two-year renewal in separate statements. "It must be recognised that there are still many situations of great suffering. The Holy See is very aware of this, it acknowledges it, and will not fail to bring it to the attention of the Chinese government in order favour a more fruitful exercising of religious freedom," the Vatican said in an article in the official newspaper Osservatore Romano.

It did not elaborate, but Church groups in Hong Kong have said Catholics and other Christians in China have faced restrictions such as not being allowed to bring their children to Mass.

"The road is still long and not with out difficulties," the article said.

The article said the accord was the result of a "continuation of thought" by Pope Francis' predecessors and that the draft "had already been approved by Pope Benedict XVI' before he retired in 2013.

This appeared to be addressed to conservative Catholics, many of whom continue to revere Benedict and distrust Pope Francis. When Vatican's Secretary of State mentioned at a conference early this month that Benedict had approved the draft, Cardinal Joseph Zen accused Parolin of lying.



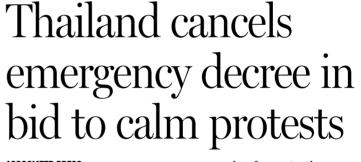
We are deeply saddened by the sudden demise of Mr. Manik Ratna Tuladhar, father of Eros R. Tuladhar & grandfather of Vardan & Deven R. Tuladhar. We express our sincere and heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family on this 13th day of the untimely loss.

In this hour of grief, we pray for the eternal peace of the departed soul and offer our heartfelt condolences. We pray to God to shower his abundant blessings to the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss. We will all miss him dearly, but his memories will live forever.

Rajesh & Rohini Shrestha Sugandha & Anju Tuladhar **Sudersan & Anita Tuladhar** Bimal & Karuna Tamrakar Nabin & Sirjana Tuladhar Vikram & Vaishali S. Tuladhar Bhavna S. & Rupesh Kunwar

Anil & Srijana T. Shrestha Pravin & Sarupa Shrestha Ishwar & Pramila Rajbhandari Brijesh & Liza Tuladhar Neetu S. & Prajwol Karmacharya Rakesh & Pinky S. Tuladhar

From Virginia / Maryland, USA



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Thailand's government on Thursday cancelled a state of emergency it had declared for Bangkok last week after the embattled prime minister suggested the gesture to cool massive student-led protests seeking democracy

The revocation of the emergency decree was published in the government gazette, and took effect at noon Thursday. Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha went on national television on Wednesday night to appeal to pro-democracy protesters to reduce political tensions and promised to lift the emergency measure.

Protesters threaten to return to streets if demands are not met in three days.

As he was speaking, protesters marched near Government House, his office, to demand he step down. They also asked for the release of their colleagues who were arrested in connection with earlier protests.

They said that if their demands were not met, they would return in three days. The protesters are pressing for a more democratic constitution

and reforms to the monarchy. The implicit criticism of the royal because it traditionally has been treated as sacrosanct and a pillar of national identity.

Wednesday marked the eighth straight day of demonstrations by a movement that was launched in March. It went into a lull as Thailand dealt with a coronavirus outbreak, and slowly revived in July. In the past week especially, protest have spread to other provinces.

The demonstrations have continued even though many top protest leaders have been detained and the state of emergency banned public gatherings of more than four people.

Prayuth, in the taped speech, pleaded with his countrymen to resolve their political differences through Parliament.

"The only way to a lasting solution for all sides that is fair for those on the streets as well as for the many millions who choose not to go on the streets is to discuss and resolve these differences through the parliamentary process," he said, according to an official English-language text of his remarks. The government on Tuesday approved a request to recall Parliament to deal with the political crisis in a special session from Monday to Wednesday.

"While I can listen to and acknowledge the demands of protesters, I cannot run the country based on protester or mob demands," Prayuth said.

United States urges countries to withdraw from UN nuke ban treaty

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The United States is urging countries that have ratified a UN treaty to ban support as the pact nears the 50 ratifications needed to trigger its entry into force, which supporters say could happen this week.

The US letter to signatories, obtained by The Associated Press, says the five original nuclear powers-the US, Russia, China, Britain and France-and America's NATO allies "stand unified in our opposition to the potential repercussions" of the treaty.

It says the treaty "turns back the clock on verification and disarmament and is dangerous" to the half-century-old Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, considered the cornerstone of global nonproliferation efforts.

"Although we recognise your sovereign right to ratify or accede to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), we believe that you have made a strategic error and should withdraw your instrument of ratification or accession," the letter

The treaty requires that all ratifying countries "never under any circumstances ... develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.'

It also bans any transfer or use of nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices-and the threat to use such weapons—and requires parties to promote the treaty to other countries.



Government of Nepal Ministry of Finance Financial Comptroller General Office

Addendum on Notice of REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST (REoI) for Consulting Services of **Chartered Accountant**

> Reference No: -NP-FCGO-189914-CS-INDV Date of Amendment publication: October 23, 2020

Now Revised in REoIs Notice As published in REoIs Notice **Amendment on Notice** Interested Consultants must submit their Interested Consultants must submit their **Experience and Qualification Experience and Qualification Certificates** Para 3 along with CV, Certificate of Citizenship and Certificates along with CV and Certificate of Citizenship. Self declaration Letter of not being in Practice

BRIEFING

Australia cancel plans for England, US friendly

MELBOURNE: Football Federation Australia (FFA) said on Thursday it has called off a training camp in Europe and scrapped plans for matches against England and the United States in London next month due to the worsening Covid-19 crisis on the continent. The FFA had been close to confirming dates for the November friendlies but said the "ongoing and worsening Covid-19 landscape across Europe" had forced it to reconsider. "Following the latest advice from medical professionals, FFA will not be proceeding with activities in Europe at this time," the governing body said in a statement. The decision means the Socceroos will not play a competitive match in 2020.

Man City keen to extend defender Garcia's contract

MANCHESTER: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said he hopes to convince defender Eric Garcia to extend his contract after handing the 19-year-old a rare start in Wednesday's 3-1 Champions League victory over Porto. Spain international Garcia is in the final year of his contract at City and was linked with a switch back to his boyhood club Barcelona during the close season but Guardiola is keen to keep him in Manchester, "I know he wanted to leave but he's going to stay and maybe we can seduce him in this year to extend the contract with us,' Guardiola told reporters.

Arsenal playmaker Ozil unhappy with axing

LONDON: Arsenal's out-of-favour playmaker Mesut Ozil said his loyalty to the north London club was not reciprocated after he was left out of their Premier League squad for the 2020-21 season. Ozil, who is under contract with Arsenal until June 2021 and earns a reported 350,000 pounds per week, has not played for manager Mikel Arteta's side this season. The German, who last played for the Gunners in March, was also axed from their Europa League squad ear lier this month. "I'm really deeply disappointed by the fact that I have not been registered for the Premier League season for the time being," he said in a statement on Twitter on Wednesday. "Upon signing my new contract in 2018, I pledged my loyalty and allegiance to the club that I love. Arsenal, and it saddens me that this has not been reciprocated. Arteta said he remained comforta ble with his decision to leave out Ozil. "It was just a football decision and my conscience is very calm because I have been really fair with him." Arteta told reporters "It's nothing related to (Ozil's)

behaviour. It's my decision." (AGENCIES)

Real Madrid seek Clasico response to avert early crisis

The 13-time winners Real Madrid succumb to a shock 3-2 defeat at home against Ukraine's Shakhtar Donetsk in their Champions League opening match.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Real Madrid won La Liga only three months ago because of their defensive steel and a relentless will to win but ahead of Saturday's Clasico against Barcelona, they appear to be a team unravelling

After losing 1-0 at home to Cadiz for the first time in their history last weekend, Madrid fell 3-2 in the Champions League on Wednesday to Shakhtar Donetsk, who had 10 first team players and nine staff missing due to coronavirus infections.

Just as Cadiz had waltzed almost at will through the same Madrid defence that conceded only 25 league goals last season, Shakhtar wreaked havoc in Zinedine Zidane's back-line that was missing injured Sergio Ramos.

The three goals they did chalk up in 13 wild first-half minutes was the same number Madrid shipped in their first nine games following La Liga's resumption last season.

And while there is no measure for commitment or concentration, it was clear both against Cadiz and Shakhtar that some of Madrid's players had lost

Lethargic performances, where the pressing was slack and the passing imprecise, suggest this team is not as tuned in as they were in June and July. "We lacked a bit of everything but above all our confidence, which is the most important thing," said Zidane, whose side have now won just one of their last seven Champions League

Before lockdown in Spain compressed the run-in and sharpened



Shakhtar's Manor Solomon (centre) scored his side's third goal against Real Madrid as they lead 3-0 in the first half despite missing 10 players.

their focus, Madrid were already a team suffering from inconsistency. In February and March, they won only three times in eight games, slipping up against opponents such as Real Sociedad, Celta Vigo, Levante and

Like Barcelona, Madrid have found the financial implications of the pandemic made swift or serious change impossible. The transfer window was largely a cost-reducing exercise for Spain's leading clubs and their quality has certainly stagnated, as Atletico

Madrid demonstrated on Wednesday in their 4-0 humbling at the hands of Bayern Munich, their 12th consecutive Champions League win, thanks to Kingsley Coman double, Leon Goretzka's late first half goal and Corentin Tolisso's long-range stunner.

It might not be a vintage Clasico this weekend but for Madrid it has become more important now, and for

Two defeats in a week is one thing but three, the last of them against Barcelona, would the alter the dynamic. "I'm the coach, I have to find the

solution, I didn't find it today and it

was difficult for my players," said Zidane has credit in the bank but he will also know this run cannot continue, especially with Champions League games coming thick and fast over the next few weeks. The demanding schedule appeals to Zidane's inclinations to rotate but he may have learned this week that his squad has

limitations. Ferland Mendy has proven himself a significantly more reliable option at left-back than Marcelo. Casemiro is the only suitable defensive midfielder. Luka Jovic is not able to cover for Karim Benzema. Sergio Ramos should return as well against Barcelona, after being left out of the loss to Shakhtar with a knee injury. Madrid have lost seven out of their last eight Champions League games without him.

If Zidane has Ramos and his best team available, it would not be a surprise to see them respond at Camp Nou, where Barca will have the pressure to assert themselves as the home team, but without the spur of a home

And Madrid will have critics to answer and pressure to feed off. Doubts, though, will remain about their stomach for the fight longterm. Cadiz and Shakhtar have made

England to travel to South Africa for limited-overs series

CAPE TOWN, OCT 22

England will travel to South Africa for a fourmatch limited overs tour starting in late November, with all matches to be played without spectators in Cape Town and nearby Paarl, Cricket South Africa (CSA) confirmed on Wednesday.

CSA has received government approval for the tour, which will consist of three One-Day Internationals and three Internationals between November 27 and December 9, with the players to first face a 10-day quarantine period.

CSA acting chief executive Kugandrie Govender said the governing body had drawn on the experience of England, who recently hosted Ireland, the West Indies, Pakistan and Australia in bio-bubble environments, to develop their own plans.

"This is a first for us and we commit to

learn quickly and with great responsiveness as we have an action-packed international season ahead of us," Govender said in a media release from CSA on Wednesday. "The fact that England are the current [ODI] World Cup champions will add tremendously to the two series and will give our own players every motivation to perform at their very best to challenge the reigning champions.'

Chief executive of the England and Wales Cricket Board, Tom Harrison, confirmed that the team would fly to Cape Town on a chartered flight and praised the plans of CSA for the bio-bubble. "I would like to personally thank Cricket South Africa for their efforts in ensuring this tour goes ahead and their diligent work to create an environment that is safe for our players and staff," he said.

England also toured South Africa in February. The three-match ODI series was draw 1-1, but England claimed the T20 honours with a 2-1 win.

Siraj was not in plans for opening the bowling, says captain Kohli

ABU DHABI, OCT 22

Mohammed Siraj's furious spell upfront tore apart the Kolkata Knight Riders' batting line up but Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Virat Kohli revealed that the seamer initially did not figure in their plans for opening the attack.

Siraj, who replaced Shahbaz Ahmed in Bangalore's playing XI on Wednesday, took three wickets in rare two wicket-maiden overs to decisively turn the match in his team's favour. He returned astonishing figures of 4-2-8-3 and was an easy choice for man-of-the-match award.

"It was a late call to be honest [to give Siraj the new ball]. It was a good toss to lose because we would have batted first. The plan was to bowl Washy [Washington Sundar] and Morry [Chris Morris], but then we thought let's go Morris and Siraj," Kohli said. "Last year Siraj had a tough year and a lot of people went hard at him. This year he has worked hard and was bowling well in the nets. He has seen

the results now but we want him to keep following the process," he said further praising his fast bowler. Sirah himself said that his hard work paid off.

"Thanks to Virat for giving me the new ball. I have been practising a lot with the new ball. We hadn't planned that I will open but when we went out, Virat bhai asked me to be ready," he said. Siraj was extremely pleased that his strategy to

dismiss Nitish Rana worked. 'The ball to Rana was very good. Executed exactly

what I had planned,' he said referring to the deceptive field set up that trapped the batsman. Kolkata skipper Eoin Morgan said they did not

put up much resistance and that was 'disappointing'. "Bangalore bowled well, but we should have countered that better. And with that dew, we probably should have bowled first."

Morgan also hoped that Andre Russell and Sunil Narine' will be fit and available around the corner'. Two guys of that calibre, particularly when they are all-rounders, is a big hole. Hopefully they will be available down the line.

HOROSCOPE



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

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) ***

with the emotions of others, and it's going to pay off. By being in sync emotionally with the people around you, you are showing folks that you're someone who is enjoyable to work with.



lesser mortal would let such confusion shake their confidence, but you should see it as an opportunity to appreciate how difficult everyday



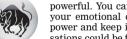
LIBRA (September 23-October 22) ***

business. How are you managing your output and input? If there is no balance, you will certainly start suffering, so you should make the adjustments



CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) *** id be a clash today, so keep and mind your own business. Getting caught up in a

power struggle between two giant personalities isn't going to be a good move. Even if you try to stay objective, it simply won't be possible.



Your fiery enthusiasm for what you believe in is powerful. You can always make things happen with your emotional conviction. But today, rein in that power and keep it to yourself. Controversial conversations could be filled with traps.



LEO (July 23-August 22) **** If you've been losing confidence in your intuitive powers, don't! Your faith is about to be restored by an unusual development. When it happens, check in with yourself about how you're thinking and



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

Your vision has been partly cloudy over the past few weeks, but today it's definitely going to clear up. Like a cold shower on a sweltering hot day, this wake-up call will refresh you, invigorate you, and prepare you for some hard work



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

Working on advancing your career can be a lot more fun than you think. Making social connections can often lead to making business connections, although you do need to keep a stern eye on where to



GEMINI (May 21-June 21) **** If you're put on the spot today, try not to act out of character. Don't do anything without thinking first. While it might seem like racing ahead will get you where you want to go faster, nothing could be further



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

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

Whether you consider yourself to be an intellectually curious person or not, you shouldn't be afraid to delve into complicated ideas now. You'll be able to break complex ideas down into more easily understood bits and pieces.



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

Staying with something (or someone) until it's over isn't quite as enjoyable as sticking with something (or someone) because they truly make you happy. Unfortunately, when something important is at stake, you have to forgo the fun and hang in there.



PISCES (February 19-March 20) **** Every storm ends. If today starts to get rough, remind yourself of that fact. There's a lot of drama going on in your life, although none of it really has the potential to drive you off track. Today is not the day to make major moves.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS "Hold the ---

10 Clock's front 14 Obi-Wan player 15 Got wrong 16 Dissolute fellow 17 Pretzel coating 18 Uses a beeper

19 Has bills to pay

Get more out of

20 Metric mile 22 Embers 23 Bleat 24 Squad car driver 25 Where Banff is

29 Legendary

kingdom 33 Queen's truck 34 Mutant heroes of comics (hyph.)

36 Roy Rogers wife 37 In addition 38 Arrowhead rock 39 JAMA readers

40 Oh, sure! (2 wds.) 42 Tenant's obligation

pattern 45 Recalls vividly 47 Household members

contraction

43 Behavior

49 Future fish

50 Poet's

51 Strong-arm 54 Lines of

Montez 61 Supply the

Iongitude

62 Bit of wood 63 Happily — after 64 Excel 65 Like a hermit

Thin stratum 67 Play at full 68 Gazed at

DOWN 1 Raccoon

feature 2 Asian mountains

3 Loud cry Fall month Do over

6 QED part Natural impulse

Crystal-gazer MŚ readers 10 Wilted

11 Midwest state 12 "The Clan of the Cave Bear"

13 Not so expensive 21 Queen of Scots

22 End of some

SIP GIILA H A R M O N I O U S L Y Y E M E N E E R S E P R E S S OLES NOB MIT KINSHIP S O W U T E WON! SEABIRD ROD A T E AM T Z E U S AMINOALITORTE CONGREGATION OVAL CAR RAKISH RIPE IDEATE SYDNEY

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

© 2020 UFS, Dist, by Andrews McMeel for UFS

24 Bevel 25 Place to wed 26 Disconnected 27 Grill

28 Wheel rods 29 Dollar fractions 30 Ewes' offspring 31 Elvis recording 32 Trial balloons Opposite of max

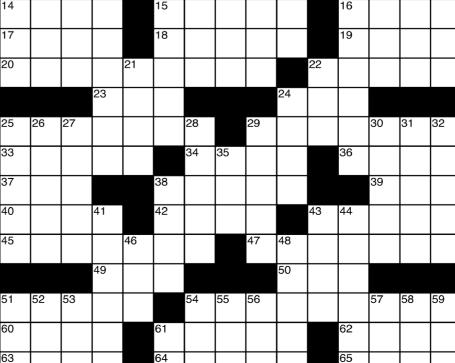
38 At large 41 Blunderbuss 43 Did a garden chore 44 Outer ear

46 TV control 48 Belgian sleuth Hercule 51 Seine moorages 52 Incite

53 Courtroom bargain 54 Sledgehammer 55 James or Kett 56 Half the checkers

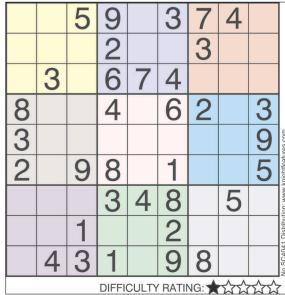
58 Playing card 59 Made haste 61 Male swan

Crow's nest cry



SUDOKU

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



65

68

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

Nepalis prepare for a subdued Dashain

When it comes to festivals, Dashain is as pandemic unfriendly as it can get. And many people do not want—and cannot afford—to take chances of contracting Covid-19.

TSERING NGODUP LAMA

or the past six years, Awas Thapa always left Kathmandu on the eve of Fulpati for his village in Kaski district. He would catch the 8 pm bus that leaves Gongabu Bus Park and by 7 the next morning, he would reach his village.

"Like every household in the country, Dashain in our family has always meant a time when the entire family gets together, wears new clothes, eats good food, visits temples and seeks blessings from elders," said Thapa, who moved to Kathmandu six years ago to work as a cook at a restaurant.

But for the first time in six years, Thapa says he won't be going to his village to celebrate Dashain.

"Since Covid-19 is spreading so rapidly in the country, I don't think it's safe to travel to my village for Dashain," said Magar. "Just thinking I might contract Covid-19 on my way to the village and infect my family and villagers gives me the chills. It's a risk that I am not willing to take."

Nepal recorded its first case of Covid-19 back in January, and on March 24, when the government declared nation-wide lockdown, the total number of cases in the country was only two. Fast forward to October 20, the total number of cases has reached 139,129 and 765 deaths. The rising number of cases means that for many Nepalis this Dashain will be unlike any they have ever celebrated

"Back in March when the government imposed the nation-wide lockdown, I don't think anyone thought that we wouldn't be able to celebrate Dashain. I thought that the virus would get under control in a month" said Thapa.

"But by July, as the number of new cases continued to climb, it was pretty evident that Dashain celebration would have to take a backseat."

At a time when social distancing has become the new norm, celebrating a festival like



For most Nepali families, Dashain reserves grand celebrations and get-togethers. But this year, things are different. Apart from the fear of contracting the virus, another reason people are downplaying the festival is because of the financial stress.

Dashain, which is all about gathering with family and friends, poses a lot of risks, says Sudip Umesh Bajagain, a resident of Inaruwa, Sunsari.

"The pandemic is anything but festival-friendly. Actually, it is diametrically opposing. Dashain is all about friends and relatives, but this year we have no choice but to celebrate without them," said Bajagain.

"If we do not abide by safety protocols and celebrate Dashain the way we are used to, we might have to pay a huge price. I am not keen to see post-Dashain devasta"If we do not abide by safety protocols and celebrate the way we are used to, we may pay a huge price."

tion at the cost of a few exhilarating days."

Bajagain says that he and his family won't be visiting anybody this Dashain and won't be welcoming anybody into their home either. Apart from the fear of contracting and spreading the virus, another reason for not celebrating Dashain like previous years, say Thapa and Bajagain, is because of the financial impact Covid-19 has had on them.

On the eve of the nation-wide lockdown back in March, Thapa says his employer gave him a month's salary and advised him to return to his village.

"Since I lived at the restaurant and my owner wasn't sure when the lockdown would be lifted, he had suggested that I leave for my village and assured me that he would call me when things return to normalcy," said Thapa.

"I stayed in my village for five months, with no work and income. It was only in August that my employer called me and asked if I would want to resume work."

Resuming work has brought some financial relief for Thapa, who is the sole breadwinner in his family of four. But not enough to spend on celebrating Dashain.

"How my family celebrates Dashain has always depended on how much money I send them. But the months of unemployment left me with no disposable money to send home," said Thapa. "I felt terrible, so last week, I requested my employer to give me a month's salary in advance and I wired that money to my family. The money should cover a pair of new clothes for my sister and mother and a little something to spend on special food for the festival."

The decision to not go home for the festival, says Thapa, is a financial one. "By not going home for the festival, I save at least Rs1,000 in transportation expenses. My parents can now buy groceries with that money for the festival," said Thapa. "I have also urged my family to not go out much and to maintain social distancing and other safety measures as much as possible."

The truth is, says Bajagain, everyone has been hit financially by the pandemic.

"People who have lost jobs are lost and business owners are anxious about their business. I'm struggling too, and have been looking desperately for a 'stable' job other than the freelancing stuff I'm doing," said Bajagain. "This will impact the way people celebrate Dashain, because if there is anything Dashain is notorious for—it's the showing off og expenses for the sake of ephemeral pleasure. I can't imagine my family celebrating Dashain the same way as we used to."

Keeping in mind the alarming number of cases and the financial stress the festival demands, Thapa and Bajagain say it makes much more sense to have a tamped down Dashain celebration this year.

"My parents were gutted when I told them that I won't be coming home this Dashain but they understand the situation," said Thapa. "I hope that by next Dashain, things will get back to normalcy, and we could go all back to celebrating our most beloved festival the way we are used to celebrating it."

Hungarian restaurant reinvents the wheel for social distancing

Michelin-starred restaurant Costes has staged a skyline dining event on Budapest Eye ferris wheel to generate sales in a coronavirus-proof environment.

BUDAPEST

it by a plunge in turnover after foreign tourists vanished, Michelin-starred Hungarian restaurant Costes has staged a skyline dining event on the Budapest Eye ferris wheel to generate sales in a coronavirus-proof environment.

Costes owner Karoly Gerendai said that turnover at one of his reopened restaurants is down to about a tenth of pre-lockdown levels, forcing him to look for new ways to do business.

"Now that there are not many people either on the wheel or in the restaurant because there are no tourists, the opportunity arose that we could do this," he said of the event at the landmark attraction in central Budapest.

Tickets for the novel Costes dining experience cost up to 48,000 forints (\$154.40) each for a four-course meal.

"It is now especially important for people to be able to be separate from other guests to be safe, and the ferris wheel is ideal with its separate cabins"

Tickets for the novel Costes dining experience cost up to 48,000 forints

(\$154.40) each for a four-course meal and sold out within days, Gerendai said, as affluent local clients sought a rare escape from the constraints of coronavirus restrictions. Gerendai is planning to repeat the event when warmer weather arrives in the spring, though the cooler October night was no

deterrent for customers on Saturday.

"We wanted to get out a bit and enjoy eating out again because we have been living quite closed in," said Szabolcs Balazs, who took the meal with his wife and two children.

"We used to go to restaurants quite often; we have been to two Michelinstarred ones, but because of Covid we stopped going. So this is the only chance for us now because here we are really separated."

— Reuters



Owner Karoly Gerendai said that turnover at one of his reopened restaurants is down to about a tenth of pre-lockdown levels, forcing him to look for new ways to do business.

