



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXIX No. 59 | 8 pages | Rs.5  
Sunday, April 18, 2021 | 05-01-2078

37.2°C 6.5°C  
Nepalgunj Juma



POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Spectators at the Tribhuvan University cricket ground watch the Nepal-Netherlands match of the Tri-Nations Twenty20 International Series on Saturday. Even as the coronavirus infections are surging in the country, there have been no checks on crowds including at sporting events. Nepal made a flying start defeating the Netherlands by nine wickets. (Report on Pg 7).

## Officials forgot duty, public dropped masks; now second wave is here

New variants of the coronavirus are more transmissible and deadlier, but people are not taking precautions and there is not enough testing and monitoring of those in home isolation.

ARJUN POUDEL  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 17

After attending to Covid-19 patients for months at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital, Shankar Pandey, a senior auxiliary health worker, got infected with the coronavirus in September last year.

With his blood oxygen level going down his health deteriorated.

"I had almost all the symptoms of Covid-19—fever, bodyache and respiratory problems and others," Pandey told the Post.

But he continued to stay at home as most of the health facilities in Kathmandu Valley, including the gov-

ernment hospital he worked at, were overwhelmed with those seriously ill with Covid-19 complications.

Pandey contacted doctors and they counselled him not to worry, assuring him that they would send an ambulance and arrange for an oxygen bed, if his oxygen level further declined.

Then officials at the Health Ministry stopped responding to the calls of distressed relatives of patients given the lack of hospital beds. Officials had asked the infected to go to hospital, only when they became unconscious.

"At one point I thought I would not survive," added Pandey.

Luckily for him, he didn't have to be admitted to hospital as he gradually

recovered. Pressure on hospitals has increased once again as new Covid-19 cases have started to surge in the past three weeks. Hospitals are getting packed with seriously ailing patients.

Despite the grave situation, authorities are yet to take decisions to contain the growing number of infections. A meeting of Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre held at Singha Durbar on Saturday did not make any decisions on the measures that need to be taken to check the spread of the virus.

"We discussed various measures including school closures but no decision was made today," Deputy Prime Minister Ishwar Pokhrel told the Post.

"We will recommend the suggestions of experts to the Cabinet, which will take a final decision."

Among the measures discussed on Saturday were school closures in big cities until May 14 and some kind of restrictions on the night business, restaurants, and public transport, according to Pokhrel, who heads the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre.

Besides school closure and early restaurant closure in 14 districts, the Health Ministry has also recommended that the general public avoid places like health clubs, malls, movie theatres, places of worship and festival processions to reduce their risk of catching the virus.

Public health experts are worried that this time the condition could be disastrous, as neither the government nor public are taking the growing risk seriously.

"People have even stopped wearing face masks, in spite of warnings of experts not to let the guard down as risk of infection is rising," Dr Tulsi Ram Bhandari, a public health expert, told the Post. "Authorities too have overlooked the risks and have not thought it necessary to enforce safety measures strictly."

Authorities are aware that the fast-spreading UK variant of the coronavirus, known as B.1.1.7, is responsible for the recent spike in new cases,

but have not stepped up the surveillance, increased tests, resumed contact tracing and launched an effective awareness drive against the growing risks.

According to scientists, the UK variant is 40 to 70 percent more transmissible than the virus that caused the first wave of coronavirus infections. They have also said that the virus is 64 percent deadlier than its previous strains.

Bhandari, who is also an assistant professor at Pokhara University, said that the countries which have taken the risks lightly have witnessed the worst outbreak.

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### INSIDE

#### Oli asks parties for support to ratify MCC Compact in House

**KATHMANDU:** Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli during the all-party meeting he called on Saturday asked political parties to support the House ratification of the Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact under which Nepal would receive a \$500 million infrastructure grant from the United States. The deal was signed between Nepal and the United States in 2017 but it needs to be ratified by Parliament. The next meeting of the House of Representatives is scheduled for Tuesday and Oli urged the parties to push Speaker Agni Sapkota to include it for voting. "Though the prime minister also spoke about seeking cooperation to fight against the Covid pandemic and holding by-elections at different levels, the major reason behind holding the meeting was to seek support to ratify the MCC," Nepali Congress Vice President Bimalendra Nidhi told the Post. (Details on Pg 3)

#### Modi appeals for low-key Hindu festival as infections surge

**MUMBAI:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday appealed to devotees to keep a key Hindu festival symbolic, amid worries about the spread of Covid-19 infections as the country reported more than 200,000 new cases for a third straight day. Criticism has mounted over the Indian government's handling of the health crisis, as religious festivals and election rallies continue despite reports of shortages of hospital beds, oxygen cylinders and vaccination doses. India reported 234,692 Covid-19 infections over the last 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to nearly 14.5 million, second only to the United States. Deaths from the disease rose by 1,341 to 175,649. After hundreds of thousands of ascetics and devout Hindus gathered for several days along the banks of the Ganges for a religious festival Kumbh Mela, Modi on Saturday called for restraint, saying on Twitter the festival should now be kept "symbolic". (Details on Pg 6)

## In the CPN-UML, Oli has found a new spin doctor—Pradeep Gyawali

The foreign minister lectured on 'democracy with Nepali flavour' and morality as he defended House dissolution. Now he says Karnali incident is against parliamentary system.



Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali

BINOD GHIMIRE  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 17

In a television interview on December 28, a week after President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the House of Representatives on the recommendation of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, Minister for Foreign Affairs Pradeep Gyawali said it would be morally wrong to be in power "if the House is reinstated".

In an interview with AP1 television, Gyawali said it would be morally wrong for Oli and "all of us" to be in the government if the lower house is reinstated. Oli's December 20 House dissolution move at that time was being heard by the Supreme Court.

"Naturally, the prime minister won't remain after that [reinstatement]. He cannot be prime minister morally," said Gyawali who appeared on the show with an iPad on his hand, all geared to respond to the interviewer.

"Even we will lose our posts because we are part of the [dissolution] decision [taken] by

the Cabinet." Gyawali, a long-time CPN-UML leader, has always been known as an articulate person—a soft-spoken person who often puts his points across with arguments and facts. He has been also known as a person who maintains a friendly demeanour.

When Oli once appointed Gokul Baskota as the government spokesperson, many wondered why he had not chosen Gyawali for the post, as Baskota had his own way of not only making tongue-in-cheek remarks but belittling others, especially his opponents.

Gyawali, however, was said to be carrying that panache of saying things in a manner which looked convincing and reassuring.

But not anymore, it seems. Gyawali lately has emerged as the best spin doctor for his master—Oli.

Weeks after his statement to the television channel and the Supreme Court decision to reinstate the House, Gyawali, who bragged about "morality", continues to remain the foreign minister in the Oli Cabinet.

>> Continued on page 2

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Two men are perched on a makeshift ladder as they paint a building at Thapathali, Kathmandu on Saturday.

POST PHOTO: ANISH REGMI

## Ultrasound service in rural Kalikot a relief to local women

Khandachakra Municipality invested Rs500,000 for the operation of an ultrasound machine in Dahan Health Post, the first in the area to provide the service.

TULARAM PANDEY  
KALIKOT, APRIL 17

Bhawana Shahi of Dahan in ward 5 of Khandachakra Municipality went to Dahan Health Post on Sunday for an ultrasound scan. The 30-year-old, who is six months pregnant, was relieved to know that her foetus is healthy and in a normal position.

This is Shahi's second pregnancy. During her first one, she had to go to a Surkhet-based hospital for medical assistance due to delivery complications. She delivered her first baby at the then Mid-western Regional Hospital in Kalagaun, Surkhet. Those were difficult times, says Shahi. Her family had to borrow Rs 40,000 for her month-long stay at the hospital.

"The availability of ultrasound services at the local health post has come as a huge relief. We don't have to go to Surkhet or Nepalgunj now for prenatal checkups," she said.

Dahan Health Post in Khandachakra started the ultrasound service—a first in the area to provide such a service outside Manma, the district headquarters of Kalikot—on Sunday.

"Pregnant women do not have to go to the district headquarters or other parts of the country to get an ultrasound scan. Now, we can diagnose pregnancy-related complications and save both mother and child with timely medical intervention at the local health post," said Rupa Bhandari, chief at the health post.

The health post conducted ultrasound scans on 23 pregnant women from across the municipality on Sunday.

According to Bhandari, pregnant women from Dahan, Pakha, Chhapre, Jubitha, Ranchuli, Phoimahadev, Chilkhaya, Odanku, Gela, Kalika, and Mugraha, among other villages in the municipality, will benefit from the ultrasound service at the health post.

Khandachakra Municipality has



According to the District Health Office in Kalikot, around seven to eight pregnant or postpartum women die due to delivery-related complications every year.

POST PHOTO

also managed uninterrupted electricity supply through solar power to run the ultrasound machine.

According to the municipality, around Rs 500,000 was invested in the operation of the ultrasound machine.

Shanti Shahi, a staff nurse at the health post, and Sujita Shahi, another staff nurse from the District Hospital, received training to operate the machine. They have started providing necessary consultations after conducting ultrasound scans of pregnant women.

Bijaya Bista, deputy mayor of Khandachakra Municipality, said the local unit decided to deliver ultrasound services from the health post to avoid pregnancy-related deaths in remote villages.

"Timely medical consultation can save the lives of both mothers and newborns. The rate of maternal and infant mortality can be reduced," said Bista.

In a bid to reduce infant and

maternal mortality rate and to curb frequent pregnancies in women for want of a son, the municipality provides a Rs 100,000 cash prize to couples who undergo permanent family planning measures after delivering daughters.

Twenty-one-year-old Darshana Bishwakarma, who is seven-month pregnant, says the latest service at the health post has saved expecting mothers like her from worrying about the condition of the foetus.

"In our village, women are taken to health posts or hospitals only in case of complications during home births," said Bishwakarma. "We are unaware of the health of our baby until it is born. Now that the ultrasound service is available in the village itself, I can rest easy knowing that my baby is safe and healthy."

According to the data of the District Health Office in Kalikot, around seven to eight pregnant or postpartum women die due to delivery complications in the district every year.

## In the CPN-UML, Oli has found ...

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

According to constitutional experts, Oli should have, in principle, stepped down after the Supreme Court February 23 decision to overturn his December 20 House dissolution move. By extension, Gyawali should not have been a minister.

He, however, started challenging the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) to withdraw the support it lent Oli back in February 2018, if "it can".

On April 5, almost a month after the House convened its first meeting as per the court order, Gyawali, who is also the UML spokesperson now, said the government would face the no-confidence motion if it is filed.

He would not say a word on the morality that he was preaching publicly through the television channel.

Hours before the House meeting convened on March 7, the Supreme Court, in a dramatic decision, had revived the UML and the Maoist Centre by scrapping the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), which was formed after the merger of the two pirates in May 2018.

Analysts say the way the UML has lost its moral ground is one thing of late but what is spectacular is Gyawali has been badly exposed.

"I have no doubt Gyawali, Subas Nembang and Shankar Pokharel among others are giving a boost to the Oli tendency," said Rajendra Maharjan, a political analyst who is also a columnist for the Post's sister paper Kantipur.

Nembang, who chaired the Constituent Assembly for both of its terms, refused to speak a single word after Oli dissolved the House. A video clip of Nembang had gone viral, in which he was heard saying the constitution does not allow a majority prime minister to dissolve the House and such a provision was included in view of the past experiences of prime ministers dissolving the House at their whims.

While Nembang refused to comment on the matter saying that the House dissolution case was sub judice in court, Gyawali continued to defend Oli.

In an interview with Setopati, Gyawali even went on to describe the country's current political system as "democracy with Nepali flavour", something which many failed to decipher. Some tried to draw a parallel with what King Mahendra asserted after seizing power in 1960, saying Nepal needed a partyless Panchayat system to suit the country's "air, water and soil".

After the court revived the UML and the Maoist Centre, a struggle has been going on within the UML, as the Madhav Kumar Nepal faction is challenging Oli.

So powerful has Oli become in the UML with the sweeping powers authorised to that on March 29 he suspended Nepal and Bhim Rawal as general members of the party for six months. Days later, Oli similarly suspended Ghanashyam Bhusal and Surendra Pandey on April 1.

The Nepal faction, which also has the backing of senior leader Jhala Nath Khanal, has been building "parallel" party committees.

On Friday, four UML leaders belonging to the Nepal-Khanal faction decided to cross the floor in Karnali to save Chief Minister Mahendra Bahadur Shahi, a Maoist Centre leader, from losing his post.

Once again, it was Gyawali who quickly reacted.

In an interview with the Post's sister paper Kantipur, Gyawali said the four leaders' action "is inexcusable" as it was aimed at weakening the party.

The four UML leaders had defied the party whip to vote in favour of Shahi.

"This is an unpardonable step in the parliamentary system," said Gyawali.

Analysts say if Gyawali really stood for the parliamentary system, he should have objected to Oli's House

dissolution move first.

"Gyawali, therefore, lacks authority to ask questions about political values, principles and norms," said Maharjan.

Analysts say what happened in Karnali Province is also a strong message to Oli and his confidantes including not only Gyawali but also Gandaki Chief Minister Prithvi Subba Gurung.

While Shahi decided to seek a vote of confidence after the UML withdrew its support on March 17, Gurung in Gandaki Province prorogued the Provincial Assembly on Wednesday night fearing that a no-confidence motion was being filed against him.

According to analysts, Gurung followed in his master Oli's footsteps. Oli too had prorogued the House of Representatives on July 2 suddenly after sensing that moves were being made to unseat him. On December 20, Oli went a step further—he dissolved the House altogether.

"The Oli faction should answer about its move in Gandaki Province before raising questions about the move of its Provincial Assembly members in Karnali," Surendra Labh, a political commentator, told the Post. "There is a sheer lack of political culture in parties across the political spectrum, but the UML simply tops the chart."

According to experts, while it may be a serious issue when lawmakers disobey the party directives, the UML-led government, which has made records in breaching the system, holds no moral grounds to criticise the move by its members in Karnali.

"It is an irony that the UML, which has left no opportunity to attack the constitution, governance and the parliamentary system as long as it suits it, is talking about democratic and parliamentary principles," Shyam Shrestha, a political analyst who follows the left politics closely, told the Post. "One should lead by example to raise such moral questions against others."

## Restoration of quake-ravaged Sital Pati at Gorkha Durbar completed

Reconstruction works started in January last year, nearly five years after the disaster.

HARIRAM UPRETI  
GORKHA, APRIL 17

The reconstruction of the earthquake-ravaged Sital Pati, a rest house for special guests and devotees on the premises of Gorkha Durbar, has been completed just ahead of the sixth anniversary of the devastating earthquake.

"The reconstruction of the historical Sital Pati has been completed at the cost of Rs 5 million provided by the Department of Archaeology," said Hari Bhusal, chief at the Gorkha Durbar Herchaha Adda, the government office that oversees the maintenance of the historical palace.

The Gorkha earthquake of April 25, 2015 had damaged Sital Pati and other structures on the premises of the Gorkha Durbar. The walls developed cracks and the tiled roof was partially damaged.

"We are glad that the reconstruction of Sital Pati has been completed. Only some final finishing touches remain which should be completed within a week," said Bhusal.

The reconstruction of Sital Pati was started in January last year, nearly five years after the earthquake. "The delay in the reconstruction of the Gorkha Durbar held up the reconstruction works of Sital Pati. Issuance of the funds by the Department of Archaeology was also delayed because the department had to prioritise the repair and reconstruction of the main Durbar," said Bhusal.

Similarly, Damai Pati, another rest house on the premises of the Palace, built some 55 years ago has also been repaired. Musical instruments like

Nagara [giant drums], Karnal [large brass trumpet] and Rasa, among others, that are used during religious ceremonies are stored in the Damai Pati.

Likewise, the restoration of Upalokot Sattal, Vidyamandir, Gorakhnath Temple and Gorakhnath Pati have also been completed.

However, the reconstruction of Kalika Temple and Rangamahar is yet to be started. The earthquake had severely damaged both the structures situated on the Durbar premises.

### Rs5 million was spent on the restoration of the temple.

Gorkha Durbar, Kalika Temple, Rangamahar and Sital Pati, among other structures, lie atop a narrow hill. The difficult topography makes it challenging to initiate simultaneous reconstruction works of all the structures, says Rameshwar Kattel, a former government officer who worked for nearly two years at the Gorkha Durbar Herchaha Adda.

"We cannot carry out the reconstruction work of all the structures at the same time due to the difficult topography. Furthermore, many valuables and goods of Gorkha Durbar are stored in Kalika Temple. It will be easier to initiate the reconstruction of Kalika Temple after the completion of the Gorkha Durbar's reconstruction work," said Bhusal.

"Rs 10 million was issued to reconstruct Kalika Temple and Rangamahar in the last fiscal year but we could not utilise the money. The budget froze," said Bhusal. "This year, Rs 5 million has been allocated but we are not sure if we will be able to utilise it this year as well."

Meanwhile, the reconstruction of Gorkha Durbar is going at a snail's pace. Only about 75 percent of reconstruction has been completed so far. The palace with historical, archaeological and religious importance was built by King Ram Shah, well known for his judicial reforms, in 1666 BS.

The reconstruction work of the palace was initiated by the Pachali Siwa JV Construction on December 17, 2017. As per the contract, the construction company should have completed the work by mid-December 2019. The deadline was then extended by six months and then further until mid-December 2020.

"A new deadline is yet to be set. We heard that the deadline extension process is underway," said Bhusal.

An abode of kings from Ram Shah to Prithvi Narayan Shah, the palace was a witness to the unification of the present day Nepal. Local residents and visitors complain about the lackadaisical attitude of the authorities in expediting the reconstruction process.

"It's disappointing to see the state in which the palace and other structures lie in today. We visited Kalika Temple, which is also in a dilapidated condition. It's been more than five years since the earthquake and the palace is still in ruins," said Suman Shrestha, a visitor.

## Officials forgot duty, public dropped masks; now second wave is here

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In India new cases have been exploding especially in cities like Delhi and Mumbai with new records being set every day as political rallies continue to be held and the Kumbh Mela going on where millions of devotees are congregating.

On Saturday it reported 234,692 new cases.

Thousands of Nepali migrant workers have been returning from India of late without much monitoring over the 1,800-kilometre-long open border.

In Nepal 843 new cases were reported throughout the country and five deaths on Saturday. Of the total cases recorded in 24 hours, 312 are from Kathmandu district alone. Active cases stand at 5,545. So far 283,658 people have tested positive and the death

toll since the pandemic began has reached 3,075.

Given the growing pressure on hospitals, most of the infected people are in home isolation but no agency is monitoring their health condition and movements. Tests are being performed only on the symptomatic people and even infected people returning from India are being allowed to go home on public vehicles.

Authorities concerned have handed over the responsibility to enforce restrictions in the disease-hit areas to the local level.

But there is a lack of coordination among the various agencies responsible for responding to the public health crisis with other ministries resisting to follow the Health Ministry's recommendations.

"The fight against the coronavirus is not only the responsibility of the Health Ministry but without coordination among the government agencies and public support, we cannot contain the spread of infections," Dr Janak Koirala, an infectious disease expert, told the Post.

"As a new variant of the virus is responsible for the rapid surge in new cases, and children are also getting infected in increasing numbers, we should shut down schools and lessen the crowds."

Young people have been getting seriously ill due to infections in significant numbers, doctors say.

In the last 24 hours, 79 people under 20, including children, tested positive for the coronavirus.

Experts say mutations in the virus

and change in season can exacerbate the situation in the coming days.

Officials had believed that infection rates would surge in the winter and decline in the summer but exactly the opposite is happening. It was also believed that elderly people are vulnerable but the new variant of the virus is equally affecting the youth and children.

While only 4 percent of the infected last year were children, during the present surge the figure stands at more than 14 percent.

"Without breaking the transmission chain, we cannot stop the contagion," said Koirala. "The number of tests should be increased, contact tracing must be made effective, and infected patients should be isolated if we have to slow down the spread of infec-

tions. Along with this, we should expedite the vaccination to protect the vulnerable groups."

Nepal has suspended the immunisation campaign against the coronavirus for an indefinite period due to its failure to secure sufficient doses of vaccine.

So far, only around 1.9 million people have taken their first vaccine dose.

Officials say they are not in a position to say anything about the resumption of the vaccination campaign, due to the uncertainty over supplies.

Dr Sameer Mani Dixit, director of research at the Center for Molecular Dynamics Nepal, said while the government is responsible, the general public too is to blame for the spread of infections of late.

"This time the people are even more

responsible than the government. Experts asked not to let the guard down, but we even stopped wearing face masks, we are participating in all functions, assemblies, gatherings, jatras and others," said Dixit.

"Authorities concerned too failed to fulfil their responsibilities."

Most of the doctors the Post talked with said the country will reach the same situation or even worse than last year, if both the authorities and general public do not adhere to experts' suggestions.

"Sooner or later cases will rise and if we do not follow the safety protocol, we will have similar situations as in the past," added Dixit. "But we can lessen the loss by following safety measures and start preparations to prevent the worst."



A tempo is seen carrying passengers beyond its ten-seat capacity at Anamnagar, Kathmandu on Saturday. Government advice to follow Covid-19 health and safety protocols in public vehicles is largely being ignored by transport operators as well as passengers.

POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

## Hungry and shelterless, Thapathali monkeys getting more venturesome

Unlike those in Pashupati and Swayambhu, monkeys at Kalmochan Ghat do not get much to eat.

ANUP OJHA  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 17

Last Friday Shanti Dhakal and her husband Parbat, both teachers by profession, left their rented flat at Kupondole for school in the morning. They had forgotten to unlock the kitchen windows. Upon returning home in the evening both were shocked to find that the kitchen was a mess.

"The bananas kept in the basket on the dining table were all gone and half-eaten were thrown everywhere on the floor," said Shanti, 39, a secondary-level teacher. "Later I learnt from my landlord that a troop of monkeys had come to the area in the afternoon," she said.

Devendra Mahato, 48, owner of a fruit shop at Kupondole, says these days he needs to be extra careful as a big number of macaques from Thapathali's Kalmochan Ghat, which lies just across the bridge, are regular visitors.

"As I do not go anywhere from the shop, I haven't let them come here but many residents have started complaining about the troublesome monkeys, so I need to be on extra alert," said Mahato. When Mahato was speaking with the Post on Wednesday, two monkeys were walking on the telephone cables just above Mahato's shop.

Other residents in the neighbourhood complained that the monkeys have destroyed their vegetable patches on the rooftops and flowers.

"I had grown some cucumbers at my home, but the monkeys ate them all. They even enter our rooms and now I am more fearful of getting a monkey bite," said another local, who was buying fruits at Mahato's shop.

Mukesh Chalise, a zoologist who has done an extensive research on rhesus macaque (a pale brown asian macaque), the same monkey species found in Thapathali, says there are over 90 monkeys in Thapathali and they have lately started travelling longer distances in search of food.

"I have noticed that nowadays they reach up to Patan Campus and Mangalbazar in search of food," said Chalise.

Ramananda Giri, 60, the head priest at Snyashi Aakhada who has been living at Kalmochan, Thapathali for the past 16 years, says the monkeys have started moving from the area as the old sattals (public rest houses) that provided shelter for the monkeys have been demolished for restoration. Also, there aren't enough trees and food is getting more scarce for the monkeys, he said.

At present, the High-Powered Committee for Integrated Development of the Bagmati Civilization is working to renovate and restore 26 quake-ravaged monuments, including the sattals and temples on a three-kilometre stretch from Kalmochan Ghat to the Teku Dovan (confluence).

"Until a year ago, no monkey would cross the Bagmati bridge, but after the government announced a nationwide lockdown in March last year, the animals started crossing the bridge in groups as the roads were empty and now they regularly go to the other side of the bridge," said Giri.

When asked about the possible reasons for the monkeys entering human settlements and stealing food, zoologist Chalise said humans themselves are responsible for the monkeys' behaviour because they taught the monkeys to eat human food, especially

junk food. "Food is scarce for them and forests are gone. People offer them biscuits, noodles and ice cream among other things, and now the monkeys have developed a taste for such foods," said Chalise.

Chalise, meanwhile, warned against the animals infecting humans with diseases. He thinks the only solution to the problem is their translocation to some safer place away from the city. "Or we can grow more trees including fruit trees for the monkeys, but that is not possible as the city does not have space for that," he said.

Last year to curb the monkey menace in the Gandaki Province, locals had turned to innovative methods such as setting traps, hiring trappers and playing loud music among other things, but employing those methods would be difficult in big cities like Kathmandu, according to experts.

According to Chalise, there are around 1,500 monkeys in the Kathmandu Valley and unlike those residing in the Pashupati and Swayambhu areas, the monkeys at Kalmochan Ghat do not get much to eat. "Major shrines like Pashupati and Swayambhu are visited by hundreds of people every day and many people regularly feed the monkeys, but that is not the case at Kalmochan Ghat, which sees fewer visitors," said Chalise.

He said the Kathmandu Metropolitan City must find ways to manage the monkeys.

When the Post asked ward-11 chairperson Hiralal Tandulkar if his office has done anything to address the problem, he didn't have a definitive answer: "We are also looking for a solution, because they have created a kind of terror in the Thapathali area itself, besides many of the monkeys are diseased and disabled and could spread diseases," said Tandulkar.

Last year, Tandulkar had suggested caging all those monkeys and he was ridiculed for the idea.

But this week in conversation with the Post, Tandulkar appeared to have dropped that idea. "If anyone has a solution, we request them to come to our office. We are ready to work with them to manage the monkeys," he said.

Talking about the diseases in monkeys, zoologist Chalise said monkeys in Kathmandu in general suffer from respiratory problems including asthma and gastrointestinal diseases.

"When these diseased monkeys reach human settlements, they could spread the viruses and some of them could prove fatal. The government needs to take the monkey menace seriously," said Chalise.

Dr Sagar Raj Bhandari, director at the Teku-based Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital said the hospital seldom receives monkey bite patients from the Kathmandu Valley. "Nobody from the Thapathali or Kupondole areas has ever come here with a monkey-bite. But people come from outside the Valley and we use anti-rabies vaccines for such cases," said Bhandari.

Meanwhile, Dr Krishna Prasad Paudel, director general at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division echoing Chalise stressed the need for prompt action against the monkey menace.

According to Paudel, monkeys can transfer Herpes virus (easily spread from skin-to-skin contact) and others include bacteria, fungi, and parasites among other things to humans.

## BRIEFING

### Hailstorms damage vegetables

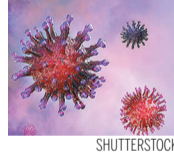
**DHANKUTA:** Hailstorms have damaged crops and vegetables worth millions of rupees in various parts of Dhankuta and Tehrathum districts. According to the preliminary estimation of the District Agriculture Office, crops worth around Rs 150 million were damaged by rains coupled with hailstones in Chhathar-jorpati Rural Municipality and Mahalaxmi Municipality of Dhankuta and Chhathar Rural Municipality of Tehrathum. Vegetables like spinach, peas, cabbage, cauliflowers and tomatoes, which were ready to be harvested, were damaged by the hailstones. The area witnessed hailstones for about an hour.

### Lack of employees in Province 2 public health laboratory

**JANAKPUR:** PCR testing has been affected due to a shortage of employees at the Provincial Public Health Laboratory in Province 2. Thirty-six employees have not come to work since mid-March as they have not received their full salary and allowances for the past year. Dr Shrawan Kumar Mishra, chief at the lab, said, "We have called three technicians on request. The lab is facing difficulties due to a shortage of employees."

### Four people die due to Covid-19 in Bagmati

**MAKWANPUR:** Four individuals died of Covid-19 in Bagmati Province in the last 24 hours. According to the data of the Ministry of Social Development in the province, two women and two men died of Covid-19 in the province on Saturday. The data showed that 436 individuals tested positive for the coronavirus in Bagmati Province in the last 24 hours.



## Oli asks parties for support to ratify MCC in Parliament

With the Nepali Congress and Janata Samajbadi Party in favour, the compact will likely be ratified but the Speaker has to agree to table it for vote in the House meeting.

ANIL GIRI  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 17

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli during the all-party meeting he called on Saturday asked political parties to support the House ratification of the Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact under which Nepal would receive a \$500 million infrastructure grant from the United States.

The deal was signed between Nepal and the United States in 2017 but it needs to be ratified by Parliament.

The next meeting of the House of Representatives is scheduled for Tuesday and Oli urged the parties to push Speaker Agni Sapkota to include it for voting.

"Though the prime minister also spoke about seeking cooperation to fight against the Covid pandemic and holding by-elections at different levels, the major reason behind holding the meeting was to seek support to ratify the MCC," Nepali Congress Vice President Bimalendra Nidhi told the Post.

While the Nepali Congress and the Janata Samajbadi Party support the ratification of the Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) and a section within the ruling CPN-UML as well as smaller parties like Nepal Majdoor Kishan Party and Janamorcha Nepal are against it.

Speaker Sapkota formerly was a lawmaker from the Maoist Centre before he was elected to the post.

The Maoist Centre wants some amendments in the compact. A three-member committee of the now defunct Nepal Communist Party (NCP) last year had suggested that the compact should not be ratified in its present form.

Chair of the Maoist Centre Pushpa Kamal Dahal was conspicuous by his absence at the all-party meeting on Saturday.

Before the meeting, Oli tried to reach a consensus with the Nepali Congress and Maoist Centre on the Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact but Dahal refused to attend such a meeting, according to Bishnu Sapkota, press advisor to Dahal.

Dahal later boycotted the all-party meeting, a leader close to Dahal said on condition of anonymity.

The deal was signed between Nepal and the US in 2017 but it needs to be ratified by Parliament.

But with the support of the Nepali Congress and the Janata Samajbadi Party, the compact is likely to get ratified.

During the meeting, senior Nepali Congress leader Ram Chandra Poudel and Nidhi said the compact should get ratified from the House as it was signed during the premiership of Nepal Congress President Deuba in 2017, according to Poudel.

As per the legal opinion given by the Law Ministry, this agreement can be endorsed with simple majority in the Lower House, to give it the status of a law, according to an official of Millennium Challenge Account, Nepal, the government body formed to implement the Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact programmes.

The five-year grant programme

under which the fund operates is provided to the countries that pass its eligibility criteria including democracy and transparency.

The government plans to implement two 400 KV transmission line projects—Lapsipedi-Ratmate-Hetauda and Lapsipedi-Ratmate-Damauli with the funding as well as maintenance of highways.

"Although Parliament has the authority to ratify the compact, the Speaker has not presented it in the meeting for vote," said Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali. "As the major parties have agreed that the Speaker should not hold back the MCC for a long time, he does not hold any prerogative to hold it for a long time."

During the all-party meeting, the Nepali Congress also urged the government to hold the election for the post of Deputy Speaker which has been vacant since January, 2020 when Deputy Speaker Shiva Maya Tumbahamphey resigned from the post.

Senior Nepali Congress leader Poudel told the Post that he also criticised the way of government functioning, asking why the House was not being given any business and made dysfunctional.

"We have to prioritise the strengthening of the system and not always look for power," said Poudel at the meeting.

Oli in turn replied saying some elements are trying to destabilise the political system and the politics of the country, according to Gyawali.

Leaders urged the prime minister to implement strong health protocols and measures against the Covid-19 pandemic and hold by-elections for seats vacant at local government, provincial assemblies and federal parliament.

## Bhimdatta municipal government has no place to manage town's waste

A proposed landfill project has failed to take off due to protest from some town residents who do not want a waste management facility near their homes.

BHAWANI BHATTA  
KANCHANPUR, APRIL 17

Bhimdatta Municipality in Kanchanpur has been grappling with waste management problems for the last two decades. Around 11 to 14 tonnes of garbage is generated within the municipality on a daily basis, according to officials at the local unit.

The municipality had issued several public notices in the past searching for five bigas of land to construct a dumping site. But none of the landowners in the municipality is willing to provide land plots for that purpose.

For a lack of a dumping site, the collected garbage is buried in large pits in the bazaar area.

"These garbage pits are also filled to their capacity now," said Ganesh Thagunna, an environment officer of Bhimdatta Municipality. "We need a long-term waste disposal solution."

The municipality, under the Rural Urban Development Programme funded by the Asian Development Bank, plans to construct a waste management centre. The local unit has been trying to get the programme off the ground for the last three years but has been unsuccessful for want of a land plot.

It had even selected a land plot in the Siddha Community Forest area for the construction of the waste management centre. But the project failed to take off due to protests by the local residents.

"The proposed site for the construction of the waste management centre is not appropriate. The local unit should search for other possible sites. In monsoon, floodwaters from the Chure hills enter settlements inside the municipality," Yagyaraj Joshi, a local resident of Ward No 7, told the Post. "The floodwaters will bring the garbage onto the streets. If such a situation arises, we will get displaced from the area."

Gorakh Bahadur Singh, the chief engineer of Bhimdatta Municipality Project Implementation Unit, says that the local people's concerns and protests have left the construction of the waste management centre in limbo.

"The municipality has been searching for land plots for waste management for the last 20 to 25 years. But it hasn't been successful in finding a location that's acceptable to all," Singh said.

According to Singh, at least 25 hectares of land is required for the construction of a waste management centre in the area.

"To assure the local residents, the municipality organised many observation

and sensitisation visits. Over 300 local people living in areas adjacent to the proposed site were taken to visit other dumping sites to make them understand that the construction of such a site in their locality will not have any adverse effects on the residents or the environment," said the environment officer Thagunna. "But the local people still have reservations which is why the construction of the waste management centre is still on hold."

Himal Bahadur Chand, the spokesperson of the municipality, says the local unit will continue its efforts to find a suitable dumping site.

"We will make efforts to coordinate with the local people and come to an agreeable decision," said Chand.

Around 36 kilometres of road network inside the Bhimdatta Municipality is currently being blacktopped under the Rural Urban Development Programme but development works may be put on hold if the local unit fails to construct a waste management centre.

"One of the conditions of the project's investors is that the municipality should prioritise the construction of a waste management centre," said Chand. "Infrastructure development projects also stand to be affected if we don't find a suitable land plot to build our dumping site."



Bhimdatta Municipality generates 11 to 14 tonnes of garbage daily.

POST PHOTO: BHAWANI BHATTA

## OPINION

## Blockchain technology and SDGs

The new system can also be used in reducing corruption and increasing transparency.

KUL KAPRI



Blockchain technology was developed by Satoshi Nakamoto in 2008. It is one of the emerging technologies that organisations are trying to implement into their systems and workplaces. At its core, blockchain is a decentralised ledger of all transactions across a peer-to-peer network without a need for a central clearing authority confirming transactions. Blockchain has many advantages over current database systems, such as increased efficiency and transparency, reduced costs, and immutability.

Organisations can build blockchain systems together and share information that does not need to be stored multiple times in separate databases. Data is stored in nodes that are cryptographically encoded, so they cannot be hacked, and can only be accessed with the use of a private key that works to decode the information. Blockchains add nodes, containing transaction data, to the chain constantly, through computing power. It allows digital identities to exist in a safe, convenient, secure, and practical manner. One of the areas where this technology could be used is sustainable development. The current conceptualisation of sustainable development has extended more widely to the needs of society. With its original focus being economic growth only, it has expanded to be economically viable, environmentally friendly, and socially equitable.

**Personal identity**

The United Nations-led process, involving civil society, national governments, and other actors, adopted 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 169 targets in 2015 with an expectation of achieving those targets by 2030. Hunger, poverty, inequality and environmental degradation continue to affect millions of people globally. Many people are also affected by a lack of personal identity, lack of access to healthcare or quality of healthcare, and lack of quality education.

People in the developed countries do not need to worry about being able to prove their identity. At birth, their names with the required information are documented and associated with national identity numbers, such as social security numbers. However,



some less fortunate people, mostly in the developing countries, do not have this kind of privilege. More than 1 billion people in the world do not have proof of identity. When people cannot prove their identity, this creates difficulties in multiple areas throughout an individual's lifespan. Some examples of those difficulties include creating and owning a bank account, purchasing property, getting social services and government subsidies and participating in global markets. Not having proper identity limits what individuals can do throughout their lifetime. That is why identification management could be the first step of achieving the SDGs.

Burdensome paperwork, expenses and lack of accessibility prevent many people from being able to partake in traditional identity systems, such as those run by centralised governments. Blockchain technology brings a new level of efficiency, trust and accessibility to the concept of identity management. Since about 50 percent of the world population already has smartphones, they can participate in digital

identity systems using their own devices. In the near future, a majority of people in the world will have access to smartphones or such kinds of digital devices. If some people do not have access to such devices, governments may provide some assistance to those individuals. Thus, the implementation of blockchain technology may not be difficult from the technical standpoint in identity management.

We can use blockchain technology to achieve most of the SDGs. First, it could make a significant change to the health and wellbeing of citizens by improving the distribution of medications and other health-related supplies. In the case of the developing countries, problems exist in the quality of medical products. Additionally, supply chain security is a big challenge. The nature of blockchain can offer significant benefits where parties can ship and monitor health-related products relying on blockchain's immutability and transactional integrity to assure improvements in health and wellbeing.

Second, the attributes of blockchain

could also deliver benefits in the areas of quality of education, gender equality and reduced income inequality. Financial and logistical commitments to quality education, gender equality and reducing inequality from public and private authorities would be nested within smart contracts between all parties. Third, contracts relating to the development of infrastructure required to assure clean water, sanitation and energy. It could be managed via blockchain technology ensuring fraud is minimised and higher levels of trust is developed between the parties. These factors can lead to greater levels of sustainability in cities and communities where blockchain-based contracts can integrate sustainability requirements as an integral contractual component.

Fourth, low-paid workers and migrant labourers are exploited by middlemen and third-party suppliers globally. The immutable nature of blockchain and transparency of transactions can cause wage protection and reduce exploitation amongst workers. This transparent and trusted approach could accelerate ethical moves toward

industry innovation and fairness to exploited workers. Fifth, peace, justice and strong institutions can also be strengthened by blockchain technology where the integrity of institutions and their directions can be absorbed within blockchain solutions. The benefit of this is enhancing trust by affected parties and impacted citizens due to the immutability and disintermediation aspects of blockchain. These aspects could reinforce faith in public institutions and directly impact peace and justice within communities.

**Some challenges**

Finally, partnerships for the goals can be achieved by utilising the smart contract elements of blockchain. Any agreements in the determination of the SDGs between all parties can be managed effectively. All incentives and partnerships developed between countries and organisations can be achieved via blockchain technology. However, there are some challenges in the use of blockchain technology. It requires digital infrastructure that leads to a huge amount of investment.

Likewise, it requires a cultural shift from paperwork to digital work. To do that, gaining trust or confidentiality from citizens may take time. Lack of skilled manpower could be another challenge, at least in the short run. Finally, the use of blockchain technology demands the change of many existing laws, regulations and policies. It might take time to address those issues and bring desirable changes.

Overall, blockchain technology supports achieving the SDGs by reducing economic inequality, gender inequality and poverty; promoting peace, justice and strong institutions; and increasing partnerships for the SDGs. In the context of Nepal, the use of blockchain technology could be a game-changer attribute not only in the case of achieving the SDGs, but also in reducing corruption and increasing transparency and accountability, mainly in the public sector.

*Kapri holds a PhD and is an assistant professor of economics at Rowan University, the United States.*

## Wanting to be famous

Why do we applaud the price of a painting and not the masterpiece itself?

EDYTA STEP CZAK

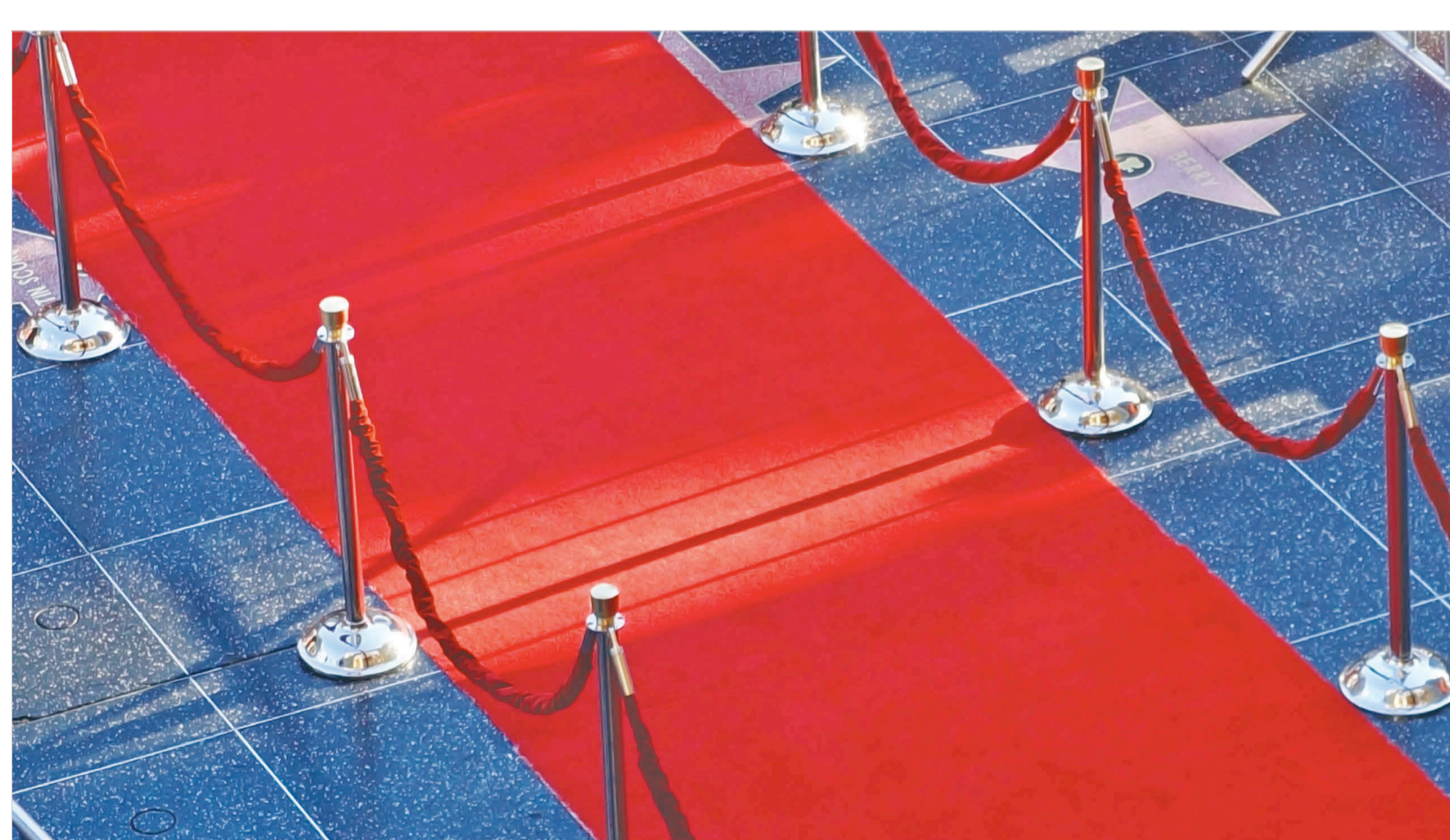


'It's an honour to be here,' said a neurosurgeon to a talk-show presenter on American television. This seemingly genuine phrase of courtesy made me reflect on today's values. Being on TV becomes the supreme goal since it is a direct path to fame, which, in turn, leads to validation that we crave so deeply. In such a culture, also a neurosurgeon who operates on brains saving lives on a daily basis finds it an honour to be interviewed by a late-night show host, who talks in an entertaining fashion for a living.

With social media, the channels diversified. The 'likes' are an alternative source of validation that earlier could only come from appearing on television, 'likes' that people literally die for to obtain. Hundreds of people have lost their lives while trying to take the perfect selfie to post it afterwards. Death-by-selfie, as it is recognised, happened when they were posing in dangerous locations or situations: in front of incoming trains, on cliffs, in zoo enclosures and airport runways. The spread of this trend is making governments declare no-selfie zones, or run campaigns to warn about the dangers.

**Accurate satire**

Woody Allen's movie *To Rome with Love* is an accurate satire of the phenomenon of 'famous for being famous'. Roberto Benigni plays Leopoldo who became famous out of the blue, without knowing why and how. He suddenly started to be venerated by the media and a growing num-



ber of fans, influenced and attracted by the media attention he was receiving. Allen ridicules the logic we tend to follow that whatever showcased on TV must be worth something, until it's not, when the '15 minutes of fame' is gone, as the media shifts its focus to someone else. Fame itself is not an issue here. The difference is that, unlike before where one was justifiably famous 'for', we are now living in times where fame is detached from any solid merit, and more often than not, comes alone.

A curious case is that of Time magazine and its choice of the Person of the Year 2020—President-elect Joe Biden and Vice-President-designate

Kamala Harris. One would think that the honour of becoming Person of the Year is about that, an honour, and shouldn't be granted in advance but rather afterwards, in recognition of someone's merit. The duo hadn't taken office when they were given this title, and hence hadn't done anything at this point to deserve such recognition.

The fierce race towards fame is thus only a part of this process of changing values. It also brought a dramatic impoverishment of language: All the genres shrank to one—nowadays, everything is a 'show'. Not only the obvious and original one, a reality show, but also a play in a thea-

tre based on a classic drama, documentary, feature movie. As per current standards, political election events, town halls and conventions should aspire to be a good show as well. A candidate may lack vision and an inspiring programme, but the one thing the craving-for-entertainment electorate doesn't forgive is being bored.

American writer and social commentator Fran Lebowitz noticed that at art auctions, people don't applaud the paintings but the price they are sold for. When the piece of art is revealed to the attendees, the room is silent, she observed. But as soon as the auctioneer's gavel drops closing the

bidding, applause breaks out. It is, therefore, the wealth of the person who purchased it that is applauded, not the painter, sculptor or the masterpiece itself, she concluded. Owning an art collection is not only an investment, but also a symbol of status, important to people for the same reason fame is—validation. The need to matter makes people surrender to the pressure of having what is perceived as a status symbol and pursue it at almost any cost.

As author Manjushree Thapa recalls, 'Television came to Kathmandu in 1985, and the homes of the valley erected antennae on their roofs to show their neighbours that

they had a TV set (even when they did not).' Some paid the ultimate price to fit in: In 1998 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, a person talking on the phone was killed by a bus while crossing the street. Many accidents of this kind are being reported nowadays. The difference is that the phone wasn't real, it was a toy. That particular pedestrian died while pretending to be talking on his mobile phone, an object of social status at that time.

Recently, I spotted an example that goes counter to this trend of a fake, perfect, 'botoxed' life relentlessly promoted on Instagram—a label of one Spanish wine depicting the hands of an elder, wrinkled and fatigued by hard physical work. And whoever I speak to about it is absolutely loving it. Does it mean anything? Maybe that a majority of advertising agencies, caught up in the frenzy to cater to the public who bought into the artificial, idealised life, ignore the needs and taste of a segment of society that professes other values. That's why such examples are so rare.

**Ongoing discussion**

There is no final conclusion here to be drawn, though. This is just one voice in an ongoing discussion on the putrefaction of values; a claim that, in all fairness, is made with regard to every single generation. Frankly, the business of arguing about worth seems worthless. People make choices as per their values, just like it happens with taste: What is valuable for some is worthless for others.

A football player is better paid than an intellectual, scientist or doctor. For the same reason, to many people, a book costing \$20 seems expensive, but a \$100 ticket to a football game does not. The price or salary is determined on the basis of how highly the object or the work is esteemed, which is always a reflection of the dominant values. One can try to educate people about values, but not impose them. Instead, let's simply acknowledge the trends and engage in conversation about current values, until they get replaced by new ones.

*Stepczak is a journalist, author and activist.*

# Export of Nepali felt products surges 61.97 percent

Traders attributed the growth to products being competitive in the international market, in terms of price and quality.

**KRISHANA PRASAIN**  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 17

With the pandemic wreaking havoc on the global economy, the export of most Nepali handicraft products has also declined, as most in the industry predicted. But exports of Nepali felt products have continued to rise despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

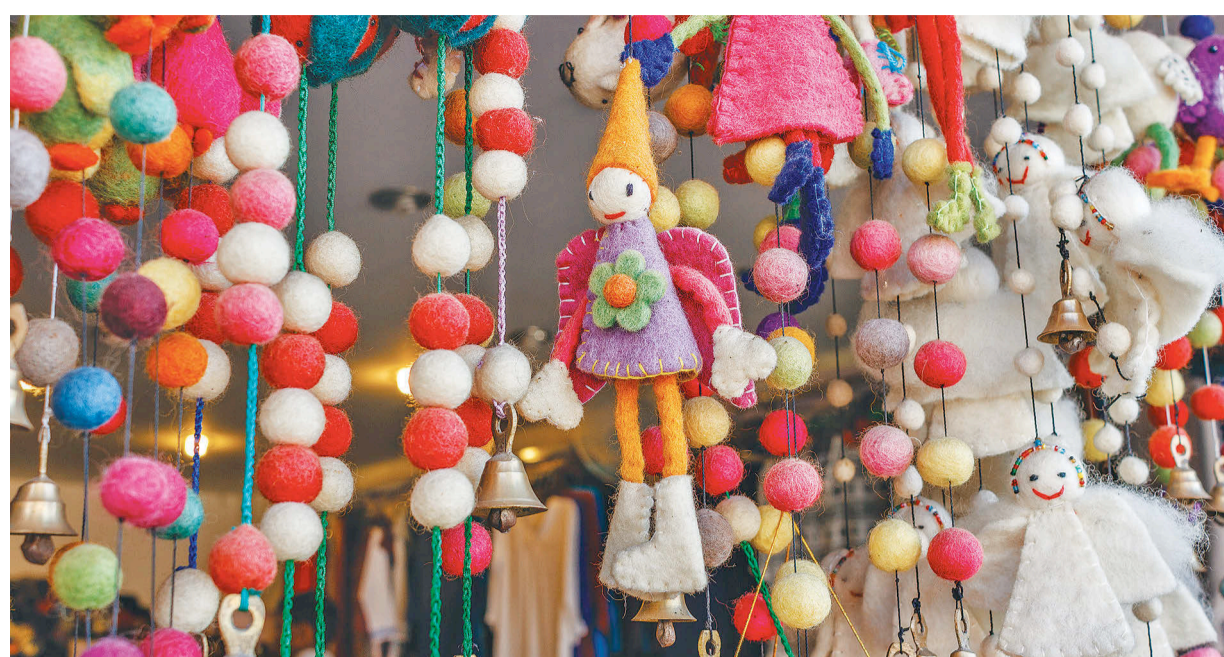
Traders attributed the growth to products being competitive in the international market, in terms of price and quality.

The major markets for Nepali felt products are the US and European countries.

According to the Trade and Export Promotion Centre, the country exported felt products worth Rs2.74 billion in the first eight months of the current fiscal year (mid-July to mid-March), a sharp rise of 61.97 percent as the export bill amounted to Rs1.69 billion in the same period last fiscal year 2019-20. The country exported felt products worth Rs2.15 billion in the last fiscal year.

Based on data for the last five years, the export of felt products have increased by 69.17 percent and traders are bullish on further growth.

"The demand for Nepali handicraft has been increasing as many types of products can be produced using felt and their designs continue to be updated," said Maheshwer Shrestha,



Felt products are seen on display at a shop in Pokhara.

CEO of Everest Fashion, a felt producer based in Kathmandu Valley.

Dharma Raj Shakya, immediate past president of the Federation of Handicraft Associations of Nepal said that Nepali felt products are competitively priced at reasonable prices compared to other countries that also produce felt products.

"There is good demand for Nepali felt products through online shopping portals operating in the US and European market where customers can buy the goods at low prices and demand has not been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic," he said.

According to felt traders, the major markets for Nepali felt products are

the US and European countries followed by Japan and Canada. Felt products are mainly used as decorative items.

Refined sheep wool is the main raw material for Nepali felt crafts. According to traders, most of the raw material is imported from New Zealand with imports from Australia and China as well. Shrestha said that the pandemic has not impacted the supply of raw material.

Shrestha, who has been in the felt business for over 22 years, said that production declined by 10 percent once the pandemic measures hit the nation. Before the pandemic, his company was producing 5.5 million prod-

ucts annually with all produced goods exported.

Everest Fashion employs 600 workers and produces 20 different varieties of products.

According to him, the demand for Nepali products started increasing in the international market after 2007.

Additionally, domestic felt manufacturers are delivering the ordered goods on time without compromising on quality, Shakya said.

According to the federation, there are 15 major producers in the country while 30 to 35 producers work under them and supply products to major producers. Around 10,000 workers are engaged in making felt

products where 90 percent are female workers.

Felt products are produced in Kathmandu valley, Dhading, Sindhupalchowk, Pokhara, Chitwan. The federation provides training to locals.

Shakya said that discussions were being held to patent Nepali felt products. "However, it is costly to register a patent for each handicraft product so the federation is working to register patents of different handicraft products under one handicraft patent," he said.

Besides felt products, the demand for products such as thanka painting, metal statue, wooden craft, natural fibre product has declined by 50 percent in the international market currently, Shakya said.

He also revealed that demand for handicraft items plunged by 85 percent when the pandemic was at its peak last year.

"Exports had started inclining gradually and moving towards recovery with a declining number of Covid-19 cases in the past few months. But as the second wave has started, the demand has started decreasing and if the second wave lasts longer, then it is possible that exports may see a similar plunge like last year."

Almost 85 percent of felt products produced in the country are exported to the international market and the remaining is supplied to the domestic market, Shakya said.

"The export potential of Nepali felt products remain unfulfilled due to the lack of sufficient government support in terms of felt production," Shakya said. "A regular training centre needs to be opened so that training can be provided throughout the year which in turn, helps increase demand and production."

## More electrical problems found on some Boeing 737 MAX, sources say

**REUTERS**  
WASHINGTON, APRIL 17

An electrical problem that led to dozens of Boeing 737 MAX jets being suspended from service has widened after engineers found similar grounding flaws elsewhere in the cockpit, industry sources said on Friday.

Airlines pulled dozens of MAX jets from service a week ago after Boeing Co warned of a production-related electrical grounding problem in a backup power control unit situated in the cockpit on some recently built airplanes.

Since then, suspected grounding problems have been found in two other places on the flight deck, the sources said. These include the storage rack where the affected control unit is kept and the instrument panel facing the pilots.

The glitch—which affects about a fifth of MAX jets in the market—is the latest issue to beset Boeing's most-sold model but is not related to design problems that contributed to a 20-month worldwide safety ban in the wake of two fatal crashes.

Boeing is expected to draw up bulletins advising airlines how to fix the problems with grounding, or the electrical paths designed to maintain safety in the event of a surge of voltage. US regulators must first approve the bulletins.

While most analysts say the fix is expected to be relatively straightforward, no details were immediately available on the timing of the repair bulletins needed to start the work on some 90 jets affected by the suspension.

FOREX	
US Dollar	119.27
Euro	142.86
Pound Sterling	164.34
Japanese Yen	10.96
Chinese Yuan	18.29
Qatari Riyal	32.75
Australian Dollar	92.43
Malaysian Ringgit	28.90
Saudi Arab Riyal	31.80

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION		PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold		Rs 90,500
Silver		Rs 1,300

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

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	<b>Diesel (Per Litre)</b> Rs 103.00/-
	<b>Kerosene (Per Litre)</b> Rs 103.00/-
	<b>LPG (Per cylinder)</b> Rs 1400/-

Source: Nepal Oil Corporation

## 'NASA rules,' Musk says as SpaceX wins \$2.9 billion moon lander contract

**REUTERS**  
WASHINGTON, APRIL 17

NASA awarded billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk's space company SpaceX a \$2.9 billion contract to build a spacecraft to bring astronauts to the moon as early as 2024, the agency said on Friday, picking it over Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin and defense contractor Dynetics Inc.

Bezos and Musk—the world's first and third richest people respectively, according to Forbes—were competing to lead humankind's return to the moon for the first time since 1972.

Musk's SpaceX bid alone while Amazon.com founder Bezos' Blue Origin partnered with Lockheed Martin Corp, Northrop Grumman Corp and Draper. Dynetics is a unit of Leidos Holdings Inc.

"NASA Rules!!" Musk wrote on Twitter after the announcement.

The US space agency awarded the contract for the first commercial human lander, part of its Artemis programme. NASA said the lander will carry two American astronauts to the lunar surface.

"We should accomplish the next landing as soon as possible," Steve Jurczyk, NASA's acting administrator, said during the video conference announcement.

"If they hit their milestones, we have a shot at 2024," Jurczyk added.

NASA said SpaceX's Starship includes a spacious cabin and two airlocks for astronaut moon walks and that its architecture is intended to evolve to a fully reusable launch and landing system designed for travel to

the Moon, Mars and other destinations in space.

SpaceX also responded on Twitter, writing, "We are humbled to help @NASA Artemis usher in a new era of human space exploration."

Unlike the Apollo landings from 1969 to 1972—the only human visits to the moon's surface—NASA is gearing up for a longer-term lunar presence that it envisions as a steppingstone to an even more ambitious plan to send astronauts to Mars. NASA is leaning heavily on private companies built around shared visions for space exploration. SpaceX will be required to make a test flight of the lander to the moon before humans make the journey, NASA official Lisa Watson-Morgan told reporters.

NASA had been expected to winnow the lunar lander contest to two companies by the end of April, but instead it picked only SpaceX, a move that deepens their cooperation. On Thursday, NASA said it would send its crew to the International Space Station aboard a SpaceX rocket on April 22.

The agency aims to create regular service to the moon and said it will have a separate competition for that contract.

"We have to be able to provide for recurring lunar services," said Mark Kerasich, deputy associate administrator for NASA's Advanced Exploration Systems division.

The announcement added to an extraordinary run for Musk, who has turned electric car maker Tesla Inc. into the world's most-valuable automaker, with a market capitalization of \$702 billion.



Workers load scrap metals on a truck in the Capital on Saturday.

POST PHOTO: SANJOG MANANDHAR

## Buying diamonds in lockdown? WhatsApp can be your best friend

**REUTERS**  
MILAN, APRIL 17

As Italy entered a new coronavirus lockdown and shut shops in March, Genoa-based jeweller Gismondi 1754 turned to messaging service WhatsApp to sell a 300,000 euro diamond ring to a wealthy Swiss client.

At the same time, sales assistants at luxury puffer jacket brand Moncler were arranging gourmet dinner deliveries to customers homes so they could dine in style while watching a video streaming of the brand's latest collection.

The pandemic has forced luxury goods companies to use social media, video and virtual showrooms to woo their wealthy customers in Europe and keep them shopping at a time when tourists, especially from China, have been absent for more than a year.

Retailers reopened in Britain and most of Italy on Monday, but they remain shut in France and access is restricted in Germany, where in Berlin, for example, a negative Covid test is required to go into most shops.

Senior executives in the industry said this trend of selling outside the traditional store network, while not

replacing the need for physical shops, is here to stay.

"We are learning that we can also have a high level of service with a low level of physical contact," Moncler's boss Remo Ruffini told Reuters. "Distant sales are a new frontier, something in the middle between e-commerce and a traditional store."

Analysts say that lockdowns and "staycationing" mean that wealthy Europeans have money to spend that they are not splurging on fancy hotels or Michelin starred restaurants.

Designer brands are keen to capture some of that cash.

High-end labels such as Hermes, which used to be more reticent to sell online, have had to fully embrace e-commerce. Online revenues for the industry have doubled to nearly 20 percent of sales in the past year alone, based on analyst estimates. Boston Consulting Group expects that percentage to rise to 25 percent by 2023.

Luxury labels have also invested in transforming store assistants into personal shoppers who pamper their VICs—very important clients—by sending them products at home and keep in touch regularly. Most brands now stream products on social media

and show customers specific product videos. Before the pandemic, Gismondi would not have sold a 300,000 euros, 10-carat diamond ring without showing it to the client in person. "I was on the phone chatting with the lady who is buying it, and it came up that this was the dream of a lifetime for her,"

Massimo Gismondi, chief executive of the jewellery group, said.

From that moment, an exchange started with the lady via WhatsApp and video-calls to find the perfect design for the ring that will be delivered to her home. "People are craving for leisure, for returning to savour life

and spending," Gismondi told Reuters.

French luxury group LVMH's star label Louis Vuitton in addition to online sales has started taking its shops to wealthy clients' doorsteps in the United States.

The "LV by Appointment" campaign essentially brings a tailor-made shop on wheels to the customer, curated with a personalised selection of pieces—from leather goods to watches and perfumes—for those who opt for the service.

LVMH, the first to report results for the first quarter, set a very bullish tone for the industry. Revenues bounced back strongly, with its fashion and leather goods division surging 52 percent—double analysts' forecasts. Sales in Europe remained in negative territory, but the 9 percent decline was a major improvement from the minus 24 percent seen in the fourth quarter. Luxury brands have had a strong recovery in China since shops began to reopen there last spring. But in Europe and the United States finding new ways to connect with customers has helped them to mitigate last year's sales declines.

Analysts say that improving sales in those two regions should also help



A file photo shows people queuing outside a Gucci store on via Condotti in Rome, Italy.

REUTERS

## WORLD

## BRIEFING

## Iran names suspect in Natanz attack, says he fled country

TEHRAN: Iran named a suspect on Saturday in the attack on its Natanz nuclear facility, saying he had fled the country "hours before" the sabotage happened. While the extent of the damage from the April 11 sabotage remains unclear, it comes as Iran tries to negotiate with world powers over allowing the US to re-enter its tattered nuclear deal with world powers and lift the economic sanctions it faces. Already, Iran has begun enriching uranium up to 60 percent purity in response—three times higher than ever before, though in small quantities.

## Pakistan PM says insulting Mohammed should be same as denying Holocaust

ISLAMABAD: At Western governments should treat people who insult the Prophet Mohammed the same as those who deny the Holocaust, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said Saturday. Speaking after a week of violent protests in Pakistan by a radical Islamist party outraged by French government support for magazines publishing cartoons of Mohammed, Khan said insulting the prophet hurt Muslims around the world. "We Muslims have the greatest love & respect for our Prophet," he tweeted. "We cannot tolerate any such disrespect & abuse."

## Kremlin critic Navalny at growing risk of kidney failure, medics union says

MOSCOW: Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny is at increasing risk of kidney failure and his vision is deteriorating after more than two weeks on hunger strike, a medical trade union with ties to the opposition politician said on Saturday. Navalny, 44, a prominent opponent of Russian President Vladimir Putin, started refusing food on March 31 in protest at what he said was the refusal of prison authorities to treat him properly for acute back and leg pain. "His condition is indeed critical," said Alexandra Zakharova, a representative of the Doctors Alliance trade union. She cited tests obtained through Navalny's lawyers, saying members of the union had not examined him themselves. (AGENCIES)

## Modi appeals for low-key Hindu festival as infections surge

Criticism has mounted over the Indian government's handling of the health crisis.

REUTERS  
MUMBAI, APRIL 17

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday appealed to devotees to keep a key Hindu festival symbolic, amid worries about the spread of Covid-19 infections as the country reported more than 200,000 new cases for a third straight day.

Criticism has mounted over the Indian government's handling of the health crisis, as religious festivals and election rallies continue despite reports of shortages of hospital beds, oxygen cylinders and vaccination doses.

India reported 234,692 Covid-19 infections over the last 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to nearly 14.5 million, second only to the United States. Deaths from the disease rose by 1,341 to 175,649.

After hundreds of thousands of ascetics and devout Hindus gathered for several days along the banks of the Ganges for a religious festival Kumbh Mela, Modi on Saturday called for restraint, saying on Twitter the festival should now be kept "symbolic".

Responding to Modi's appeal, one of the religious leaders Swami Avdheshanand urged devotees to not gather in large numbers. Devout Hindus believe bathing in the holy Ganges absolves people of sins, and during the Kumbh Mela, brings salvation from the cycle of life and death.

Those returning to Mumbai in western Maharashtra state from the Kumbh Mela will have quarantine in hotels, Mumbai's mayor Kishori Pednekar said. Maharashtra accounts for quarter of India's coronavirus cases and is the worst hit region.

Experts have warned about the spread of more contagious variants of the disease, especially during large-scale gatherings for religious festivals and political rallies.

On Saturday, Modi was scheduled to hold two rallies in eastern state of West Bengal where state polls are ongoing. In recent weeks, such rallies have attracted thousands of people.

"Stop spreader rallies," the Times of India said in an editorial on Saturday, adding: "Business as usual is an unaffordable luxury until this virus is conclusively tamed."

## India reported 234,692 Covid-19 infections over the last 24 hours.

India's daily Covid-19 vaccinations have slowed from their record high early this month and many state governments have requested more doses.

Federal Health Minister Harsh Vardhan assured states there were no shortages and 11.6 million doses would be made available in a week, adding that 125 million doses have already been administered.

Some state governments in India have raised concerns over hoarding and black marketing of anti-viral

drug Remdesivir.

Nawab Malik, a minister from Maharashtra, accused Modi's federal government on Twitter for restricting Remdesivir supplies to the state. A minister in Modi's cabinet, Mansukh Mandaviya, denied the allegation, saying adequate supplies were being arranged.

After imposing one of the world's strictest lockdowns for nearly three months last year, India's government relaxed almost all curbs by the beginning of 2021, although many regions have now introduced localised restrictions.

"This is Narendra Modi's biggest crisis yet. It is bigger than any security threat, external or internal, or even the economic attrition of 2020," prominent editor and political commentator Shekhar Gupta wrote in a column on Saturday.

## Worldwide Covid-19 death toll tops a staggering 3 million

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
RIO DE JANEIRO, APRIL 17

The global death toll from the coronavirus topped a staggering 3 million people Saturday amid repeated setbacks in the worldwide vaccination campaign and a deepening crisis in places such as Brazil, India and France.

The number of lives lost, as compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is about equal to the population of Kyiv, Ukraine; Caracas, Venezuela; or metropolitan Lisbon, Portugal. It is bigger than Chicago (2.7 million) and equivalent to Philadelphia and Dallas combined.

And the true number is believed to be significantly higher because of possible government concealment and the many cases overlooked in the early stages of the outbreak that began in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019.

When the world back in January passed the bleak threshold of 2 mil-

lion deaths, immunization drives had just started in Europe and the United States. Today, they are underway in more than 190 countries, though progress in bringing the virus under control varies widely.

While the campaigns in the US and Britain have hit their stride and people and businesses there are beginning to contemplate life after the pandemic, other places, mostly poorer countries but some rich ones as well, are lagging behind in putting shots in arms and have imposed new lockdowns and other restrictions as virus cases soar.

Worldwide, deaths are on the rise again, running at around 12,000 per day on average, and new cases are climbing too, eclipsing 700,000 a day.

"This is not the situation we want to be in 16 months into a pandemic, where we have proven control measures," said Maria Van Kerkhove, one of the World Health Organization's leaders on Covid-19.

## Raul Castro resigns, ending era in Cuba



In this 2011 photo, Fidel Castro (left) raises the hand of his brother Raul Castro as they sing the international socialism anthem during a Communist Party Congress in Havana, Cuba.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
HAVANA, APRIL 17

Raul Castro said on Friday he is stepping down as head of Cuba's Communist Party, ending an era of formal leadership that began with his brother Fidel and country's 1959 revolution.

The 89-year-old Castro made the announcement in a speech at the opening of the eighth congress of the ruling party, the only one allowed on the island.

He said he was retiring with the sense of having "fulfilled his mission and confident in the future of the fatherland."

"Nothing, nothing, nothing is forcing me to make this decision," said Castro, part of whose speech to the closed Congress was aired on state television. "As long as I live I will be ready with my foot in the stirrup to defend the homeland, the revolution and socialism with more force than ever."

Castro didn't say who he would endorse as his successor as first secretary of the Communist Party. But he previously indicated he favours yielding control to 60-year-old Miguel Diaz-Canel, who succeeded him as president in 2018 and is the standard bearer of a younger generation of loyalists who have been pushing an economic opening without touching Cuba's one-party system.

Photographs released by the official Cuban News Agency showed Castro, dressed in an olive green uniform, entering the compound with Diaz-Canel by his side.

Castro's retirement means that for the first time in more than six decades Cubans won't have a Castro formally guiding their affairs and many had been expecting the change.

"One has to step aside for the young people," said 64-year-old retiree Juana Busutil, for whom Castro "is going to continue being the leader."

The transition comes at a difficult time for Cuba, with many on the island anxious about what lies ahead.

The coronavirus pandemic, painful financial reforms and restrictions imposed by the Trump administration have battered the economy, which shrank 11 percent last year as a result of a collapse in tourism and remittances. Long food lines and shortages have brought back echoes of the "special period" that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

Discontent has been fuelled by the spread of the internet and growing inequality.

Much of the debate inside Cuba is focused on the pace of reform, with many complaining that the so-called "historic generation" represented by Castro has been too slow to open the economy.

In January, Diaz-Canel finally

pulled the trigger on a plan approved two congresses ago to unify the island's dual currency system, giving rise to fears of inflation. He also threw the doors open to a broader range of private enterprise—a category long banned or tightly restricted—permitting Cubans to legally operate many sorts of self-run businesses from their homes.

This year's congress is expected to focus on unfinished reforms to overhaul state-run enterprises, attract foreign investment and provide more legal protection to private business activities.

The Communist Party is made up of 700,000 activists and is tasked in Cuba's constitution with directing the affairs of the nation and society.

Fidel Castro, who led the revolution that drove dictator Fulgencio Batista from power in 1959, formally became head of the party in 1965, about four years after officially embracing socialism.

He quickly absorbed the old party under his control and was the country's unquestioned leader until falling ill in 2006 and in 2008 handing over the presidency to his younger brother Raul, who had fought alongside him during the revolution.

Raul succeeded him as head of the party in 2011. Fidel Castro died in 2016.

For most of his life, Raul played second-string to his brother Fidel—first as a guerrilla commander, later as a senior figure in their socialist government. But for the past decade, it's Raul who has been the face of communist Cuba and its defiance of US efforts to oust its socialist system.

The fourth of seven children of a Spanish immigrant in eastern Cuba, Raul had joined his charismatic older brother in a nearly suicidal attack on the Moncada military barracks in the eastern city of Santiago in 1953 and survived the crackdown that followed from the forces of dictator Fulgencio Batista.

He led a major front in the ensuing guerrilla war led by Fidel that toppled Batista. And he served for the following generation or two as head of the armed forces. For many years, he was considered a more orthodox communist than his brother.

But it was Raul who reached accords with US President Barack Obama in 2014 that created the most extensive US opening to Cuba since the early 1960s—creating a surge in contacts with the United States that was largely reversed under Obama's successor, Donald Trump.

Now, with Raul Castro stepping down as party leader amid change and challenges, some say the island needs continuity going forward.

"All process have a continuity and I think Diaz-Canel should be there now," said 58-year-old driver Miguel Rodriguez.



Family members follow the coffin arriving at St George's Chapel for the funeral of Britain's Prince Philip inside Windsor Castle in Windsor, England on Saturday. Prince Philip died April 9 at the age of 99 after 73 years of marriage to Britain's Queen Elizabeth II.

## Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hing set to join ASEAN summit

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
YANGON, APRIL 17

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hing will join a special ASEAN summit next week, the Thai foreign ministry said on Saturday, his first official trip since masterminding a coup which deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The February 1 putsch triggered a massive uprising, bringing hundreds of thousands of protesters to the streets to demand a return to democracy, while civil servants have boycotted work in a bid to shutter the junta's administration.

The military has deployed lethal force to quell the anti-coup movement, killing more than 720 people and detaining some 3,100 activists, journalists and dissidents, according to a local monitoring group.

The international community has largely condemned the generals for use of force against unarmed civilians—imposing targeted sanctions against top military brass, their families and army-linked businesses.

But regional leaders have sought to open communications with the

regime, and on Saturday Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that a summit of Southeast Asian leaders in Jakarta on Myanmar's situation will include the senior general.

"Several leaders have confirmed their attendance including Myanmar's MAH [Min Aung Hing]," said spokesman Tane Sangrat in a message to reporters.

The meeting of the 10-country bloc of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is expected to address the ongoing crisis in post-coup Myanmar, and will be on April 24 in Jakarta.

The announcement drew dismay from activists, who have long beseeched foreign leaders not to recognise the junta.

"#ASEAN do not legitimise the Myanmar Military junta as a government by inviting MAH to attend the summit," said prominent activist Wai Wai Nu on Twitter. "[The] Junta is illegitimate and illegal."

The military has consistently justified the putsch by alleging widespread fraud in November's elections, which Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide.

They claim power will be handed



General Min Aung Hing, is set to visit Jakarta for a special ASEAN summit next week, his first official trip since masterminding a coup that deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

back to a civilian administration after elections are held in about a year—though they recently extended the timeline to a two-year period.

Saturday was the first day of

Myanmar's traditional New Year, and hundreds in commercial hub Yangon visited the famed Shwedagon Pagoda to pray as soldiers patrolled the streets.

Leading up to the Buddhist New Year, the Thingyan festivities were a sombre affair—a far cry from previous years when revellers would take to the streets for city-wide water fights.

Instead, activists sloshed crimson paint in Yangon to symbolise the bloodshed, while protesters wore red across the country in nationwide demonstrations.

More violence erupted Saturday in the central gem-producing city of Mogok, when security forces cracked down on protesters.

According to an AFP-verified video filmed by a resident, soldiers crouched on a street as their commanding officer shouted that he wanted "deaths".

A rescue worker told AFP at least one had died.

"He was shot in the stomach," he said, adding that six others injured had to be rushed to the hospital.

Despite the threat of violence, protesters have continued to gather across the country in defiance of the junta, carrying posters demanding for Suu Kyi to be freed.

Some demonstrations—like in Yangon and central Monywa city—

also touted support of the so-called "National Unity Government", a shadow administration formed by ousted MPs working in hiding to thwart junta rule.

"It has been more than 70 days since the coup... we can no longer see our future and goals," said 19-year-old Max in Yangon. "We have high hopes for a government that can compete with the military regime."

The country's jails are also releasing more than 23,000 prisoners nationwide, a prison official told AFP Saturday—part of its annual amnesty for Myanmar's New Year.

There have been two other mass releases since the coup.

The first was in mid-February, which rights groups feared was a move to free up space for military opponents, and the second on the eve of Armed Forces Day when the regime released around 900 detained demonstrators.

But its jails have continued to fill.

So far, more than 3,100 people—the bulk of them anti-coup protesters—have been detained, according to local monitoring group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

# Nepal off to flying start in Tri-Nation Series

Debutant openers Kushal Bhurtel and Aasif Sheikh complete half centuries each and share highest 116-run opening partnership in T20I for Nepal as they beat the Netherlands by nine wickets at TU grounds in Kirtipur.

SPORTS BUREAU  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 17

Debutant openers Kushal Bhurtel and Aasif Sheikh shared a record partnership as hosts Nepal made a flying start to their Tri-Nation Twenty20 International Series, defeating the Netherlands by nine wickets in the curtain raiser at the TU cricket grounds in Kirtipur on Saturday.

The duo shared a 116-run partnership for the first wicket and both completed half centuries in their first ever T20 International match as Nepal chased a 137-run target with five overs to spare losing just one wicket. The duo also surpassed the previous best first wicket T20I partnership of 108 runs set by skipper Gyanendra Malla and Paras Khadka against Bhutan in the 2019 South Asian Games.

Bhurtel scored 62 runs off 46 deliveries and Sheikh remained unbeaten for 54 runs facing 38 balls for the experimental Nepali side that invited the Netherlands to bat first after winning the toss. Bowler Shahab Alam also earned his first T20I cap while it was also the first official match for Nepal's World Cup winning Australian coach Dav Whatmore who was appointed in December last year.

"I am glad with the performance of our debutants. I would congratulate and wish them all the best as the captain," said Malla. "It is one of the best matches that we have ever played. Though there were some flaws in the fielding, we were able to restrict the opponents below 140 runs total due to good bowling and the wicket condition was also perfect. Coming up with such performance in the debut match is really outstanding."

The man-of-the-match Bhurtel got a lifeline in the third ball of the innings despite being caught in Vivian Kingma delivery as the bowler had overstepped to hurl a no ball. The 25-year-old cracked five boundaries and as many sixes before being caught by captain Pieter Seelaar off Julian De Mey in the 13th over. He reached his half century facing 30 deliveries.

"Bhurtel played a great innings and the no ball was the turning point of



Nepal's Kushal Bhurtel scored 62 runs in his T20I debut against the Netherlands at the TU cricket grounds in Kirtipur on Saturday.

the match," Netherlands captain Seelaar said. "Nepal were better than us but we will work out for cent percent results in upcoming matches."

Bhurtel's opening partner Sheikh hit four boundaries and as many sixes. The 21-year-old reached 50 runs off 36 deliveries. Captain Malla, who came to bat at number three, was not out for 13 runs facing seven balls. He hit a big six in the last delivery of the 15th over as Nepal made 141 runs in their chase.

Earlier, put into bat first, the Netherlands lost two wickets for 12 runs before posting 136-4. Wicketkeeper batsman cum opener Scott Edwards scored 30 runs off 32

deliveries and Bas de Leede contributed the highest 41 runs off 46 balls. Seelaar and Antonius Staal were unbeaten on 23 runs and 20 runs. Seelaar faced 17 deliveries and Staal nine balls.

Max O'Dowd, who contributed 10 runs, was the first wicket to fall after he was trapped leg before by spinner Sandeep Lamichhane in the last ball of the second over. Ben Cooper was the next batsman to depart as he was also trapped leg before by medium pacer Sompal Kami in the fourth ball of the third over.

Opener Edwards and De Leede gave some stability to the Dutch innings sharing a 61-run stand for the third

wicket. Edwards hit two fours and a six before he was caught by Bhurtel off Shahab Alam in the 14th over.

Middle order batsman De Leede hit three fours and two sixes before he was caught by Bhurtel off Lamichhane in the 17th over. Lamichhane, who also played his first T20I in the country, gave away 22 runs in his four-over spell claiming two wickets. Kami and Alam grabbed one wicket each. Kami, who made a comeback to the national fold after 17 months due to injury, conceded 13 runs in his four-over bowling. Alam gave away 45 runs in his four-over spell.

The Netherlands will vie against Malaysia on Monday.

# Newcastle boost Premier League survival bid

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
NEWCASTLE, APRIL 17

Newcastle moved closer to Premier League survival after Joe Willock's late goal capped a thrilling 3-2 win against 10-man West Ham that dented the visitors' bid for a top four finish in the Premier League.

Steve Bruce's side had squandered a two-goal lead in the closing stages at St James' Park, but Willock came off the bench to snatch a priceless winner. Newcastle are nine points clear of the relegation zone with just six games remaining in a turbulent season on Tyneside.

The Magpies had taken control in the first half thanks to Issa Diop's own goal and a blunder from West Ham keeper Lukasz Fabianski for Joelinton's strike. West Ham defender Craig Dawson was sent off for two bookings in between those goals. But the Hammers set up a tense finale when Diop got one back before Jesse Lingard equalised with a penalty 10 minutes from full-time.

On-loan Arsenal midfielder Willock settled a pulsating encounter with his thunderous header, putting Newcastle in position to avoid relegation. Staying up would be an impressive achievement for Bruce, who has battled with dressing room rifts and distracting takeover talk. The defeat was a big blow for West Ham as they chase an unexpected place in next season's Champions League.

David Moyes' side remain fourth, but Chelsea are just one point behind with a game in hand, while fifth-placed Liverpool would go above the Hammers if they beat Leeds on Monday.

**Injury shadows Kane double as Spurs, Everton share spoils**

**LIVERPOOL:** England forward Harry Kane suffered a worrying ankle injury ahead of next week's League Cup

final after scoring twice in Tottenham Hotspur's 2-2 draw away to Everton in the Premier League on Friday.

Gylfi Sigurdsson also grabbed two goals for Everton in a result that did little for either side's European hopes. Kane, expected to lead England's attack in this year's coronavirus delayed European Championships went off in stoppage time towards the end of the match after rolling his ankle when challenged in the box at an Everton corner.

"It is too early to say something," Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho told Sky Sports when asked afterwards about Kane's injury. For him to leave the pitch with a few minutes to go is obviously because he felt something. Let me be optimistic and believe that he has time to recover. Let's see."

Kane's 20th league goal of the season put Spurs ahead in the 27th minute at Goodison Park only for Sigurdsson to equalise soon afterwards from the penalty spot. It was the reverse story in the second half, Sigurdsson getting his second in the 62nd minute before Kane levelled six minutes later.

Spurs remain seventh, five points off the top four.

Mourinho said of Kane's double: "It was great finishing. Two beautiful goals but not a surprise for the ones who see him do it every day in training."

Meanwhile, Mourinho had little time for Paul Pogba's recent criticism of his management style when he was in charge of Manchester United. Pogba accused Mourinho of "going against players" and making them feel like "they don't exist any more." But Mourinho, who made France midfielder Pogba the world's most expensive player when he brought him to Old Trafford in 2016, insisted Friday: "I would like to say that I couldn't care less what he says. I am not interested at all."



Newcastle United's Callum Wilson (centre) in action with West Ham United's Vladimir Coufal in their English Premier League match at the St James' Park in Newcastle on Saturday.

# Diego Maradona World Cup jersey hits auction block

REUTERS  
NEW YORK, APRIL 17

A "once-in-a-lifetime" signed jersey worn by late football great Diego Maradona in his first-ever World Cup match has hit the auction block, with the potential to fetch a supersized purse equal to his enormous fame.

Maradona, who led Argentina to World Cup glory in 1986, is widely considered one of the greatest players ever, and his death at age 60 last year

plunged the world of international sport into a period of mourning.

The blue-and-white striped jersey, which Maradona wore in his World Cup debut in a group stage match against Belgium in 1982, features his signature on the front in black ink and is expected to pull in an estimated \$150,000 to \$200,000, according to New Jersey-based auctioneer Gotta Have Rock and Roll.

"As far as a public auction, there's never been a piece like this. And it's hard to say there will be

again," said Gotta Have Rock and Roll project manager Alex McNicholl. "Just knowing what Maradona has done for the game at an international level and how this jersey was the start of his international career, it's very remarkable and it really is a one-of-a-kind piece."

Former England midfielder Steve Hodge, who owns the item, has insisted, however, that it is not for sale. McNicholl told Reuters that the 1982 jersey, which came to the auction house from an Argentine journalist, is a museum-calibre piece.

## HOROSCOPE

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

Sunday's skies call for rest and relaxation after a chaotically busy week. The moon slides through nostalgic Cancer, focusing your attention on your local environment and the reality of family ties.

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

Sunday's skies find you involved in a variety of errands and conversations, Taurus. It's an ideal time to get out and reconnect with your local neighborhood; you're craving interaction and communication.

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

As a Gemini, you tend to be a jack of all trades. Sunday's skies work to reconnect you with those skills you possess that need a little more honing. The moon's presence in deep-feeling Cancer pushes you to activate these abilities.

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

This past week may have left you feeling disoriented and disconnected from your own needs, thus the moon's presence in your sign today suggests needing to pay significant attention to your needs.

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

The universe is giving you full permission to pull away from worldly demands today. The moon wades through receptive Cancer, focusing your attention on the undercurrent of emotions that you've been sidestepping all week.

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

Don't be afraid to lean on your friends today, Virgo. You're coming face to face with some difficult material in the dark recesses of your psyche, and it could be helpful to let other people in on your experience.

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

You can't help but tune in to the state of your career path today, Libra. The initiating Cancer moon focuses your energy on getting ahead with aspirations. Stick to small scale efforts or maintenance for the best results.

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

Sunday's skies are welcomingly lazy, Scorpio. That said, you're still in the mood for variety and a fresh change of scenery. Do whatever you can to get out of the same four walls in order to keep your mental health in check.

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

You may want to keep to yourself under Sunday's skies, Sagittarius. The moon wades through deep-feeling Cancer all day, pointing your attention to any unaddressed emotional needs that need further exploration and healing.

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

What's happening in your heart of hearts, Capricorn? The cosmos is working to get you focused on your love life today. It is an ideal day to let go of any pressing responsibilities and focus on fostering deeper connections romantically.

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

Sunday's skies have you feeling more productive than the rest of the zodiac, Aquarius. The moon floats through initiative-taking Cancer all day, prompting you to reconnect with your craft and hone your skills.

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

Sunday's cosmic landscape is built for your leisure, Pisces. It's been a difficult week and you deserve the play you so badly desire. Have fun and reconnect with activities that bring you unbridled joy.

## CROSSWORD

### ACROSS

- 1 Atlanta campus
- 6 Do road work
- 10 South African currency
- 14 Ill-fated lover
- 15 Smile
- 16 Online auction site
- 17 Money-hunger
- 18 Aussie rock group
- 19 Office assistant
- 20 Return address
- 22 Ushered in
- 24 Rights movement word
- 26 Takeover
- 27 Second to none
- 31 "October —" (1999 movie)
- 32 Cornered
- 33 Fosters a felon
- 36 Folkloric being
- 39 Keats' works
- 40 Zeroes
- 41 Garfield's housemate
- 42 Pet shop cutie, briefly
- 43 Tasty carbohydrate
- 44 Does a laundry chore
- 45 NBA coach — Unseld
- 46 Neptune's spear
- 48 Maps

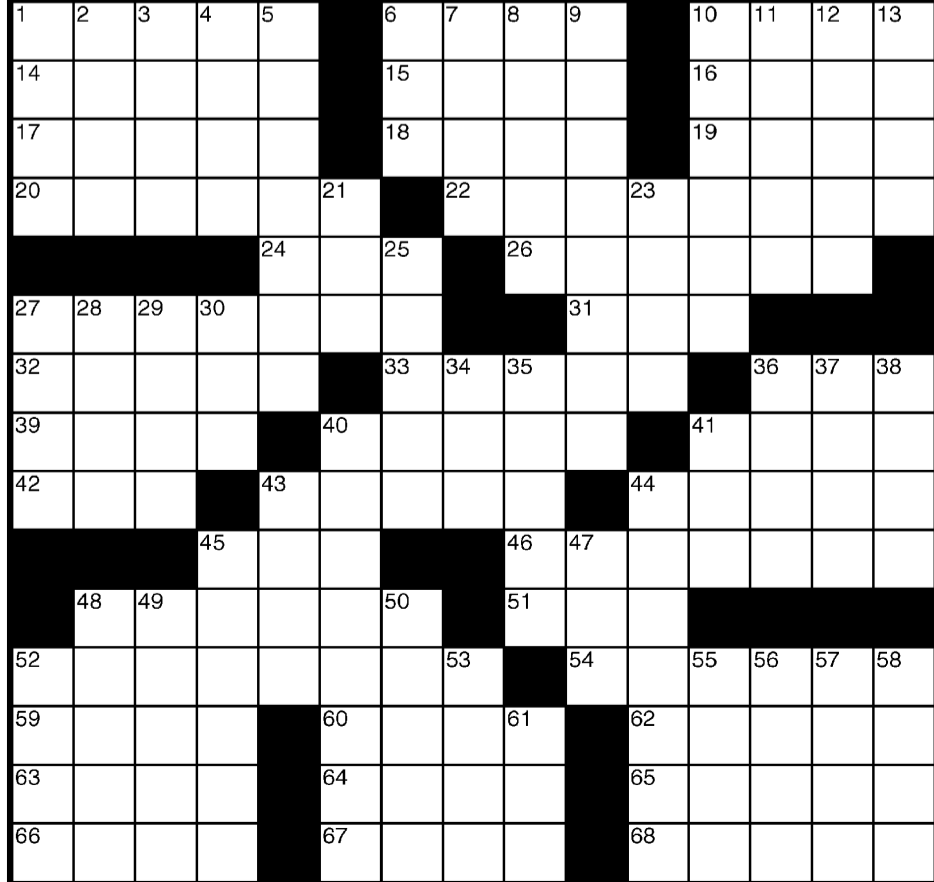
### DOWN

- 1 Joule fractions
- 2 Oliver Twist's request
- 3 Portent
- 4 Sax mouthpiece
- 5 Called from the Alps
- 6 Nicklaus' org.
- 7 Lean backward
- 8 Audio go-with
- 9 Forms a hard coating
- 10 Buildings and land
- 11 Stand for
- 12 Auto-safety advocate
- 13 Colored
- 21 Teacup part
- 23 Grills, maybe
- 25 Swains
- 27 Pause

### PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



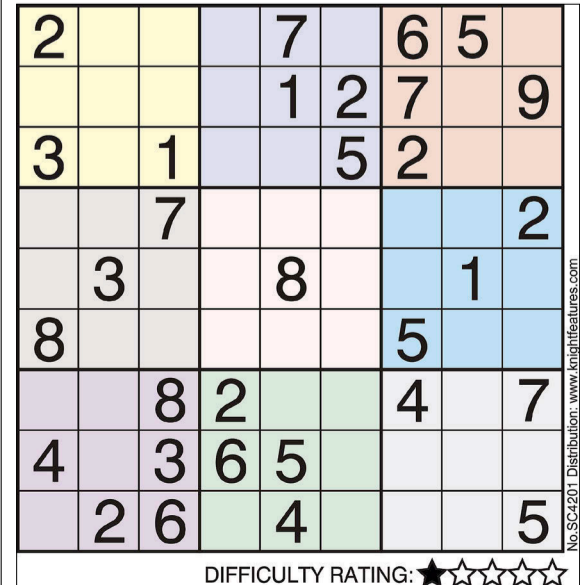
- 28 Karachi language
- 29 Baby chick sound
- 30 Matter, in law
- 34 Quick lunch
- 35 Make joyful
- 36 Adams or Brickell
- 37 Legal claim
- 38 Gala
- 40 Most disagreeable
- 41 California's Fort
- 43 Where Cuzco is
- 44 Local lingo
- 45 Holmes' sidekick
- 47 Country addr.
- 48 Heron
- 49 "— la vista!"
- 50 Wander
- 52 Blue
- 53 Tug sharply
- 55 Fix potatoes
- 56 Mellowed, as whiskey
- 57 Nursery buy
- 58 Air France hub
- 61 Informal wear



## SUDOKU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★



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9858030677 (Ashok, Nepalgunj), 9852028123 (Anuj, Biratnagar)

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and Send to 34001

