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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Nepalgunj Jomsom



POST PHOTO: DEEPAK KC

Youths bound for foreign jobs walk to the airport as vehicles remain off the roads amid raging coronavirus infections in Kathmandu on Thursday. All international flights—except two per week between Nepal and India—were suspended effective from midnight Thursday.

Oli's preference for politics to virus crisis is an affront to people, analysts say

The UML chair and prime minister is paying no attention to soaring coronavirus cases, as he busies himself with political schemings ahead of his May 10 trust vote.

TIKA R PRADHAN & ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, MAY 6

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli is a busy man. He starts his day as early as eight or nine at times. He holds a series of meetings—party meetings as well as government meetings. Sometimes, his Cabinet meetings are extended till late in the evening.

Consider Thursday. At around 8 am, Oli decided to call an emergency meeting of the Standing Committee of his party, CPN-UML, for 10 am. After presiding over the meeting for about an hour and a half, he made a dash for Sheetal Niwas at around 11:30. At around noon, it came to public knowledge that he called a Cabinet meeting for 5pm, from Sheetal Niwas.

Oli spent the entire Thursday talking politics. He discussed his party politics at the Standing Committee meeting, including his vote of confidence plan on May 10. He briefed President Bidya Devi Bhandari on “contemporary political issues”.

He is too busy to pay attention to the raging coronavirus pandemic that on Thursday claimed 54 lives. A record high of 8,970 new cases were reported from

across the country in the last 24 hours. The country's death toll now stands at 3,529. The countrywide infection tally has now reached 368,580, with the number of active cases at 72,561.

Oli is clearly under pressure. Not because of the pandemic that is ravaging the country, but because of a political crisis that is looming over his head.

While the opposition forces, the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), appear resolute to remove him, a section within his own UML party, led by Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhala Nath Khanal, has upped the ante.

The Nepal-Khanal faction now holds the key when voting takes place on Oli's trust motion.

Political analysts say the Oli-Nepal feud has escalated to such a level that they are unlikely to remain under the same roof anymore. And this could lead to further escalation of the political crisis, thereby putting the pandemic crisis out of focus.

“I don't think Oli will easily allow Nepal into his party. Nepal has become stronger and he won't support Oli so easily,” said Hari Roka, a political economist. “There is an Oli versus Nepal conflict going on.”

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INSIDE

Malaysia announces travel ban on Nepalis citing the pandemic

KATHMANDU: Nepal's labour migration sector is set for yet another blow as Malaysia is working to temporarily ban Nepalis from entering the country citing the Covid-19 pandemic. Malaysia is a major labour destination country for Nepali migrant workers. Amid soaring Covid-19 cases in Malaysia in recent weeks, the Malaysian government is working to ban Nepalis and the citizens of three other South Asian countries—Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The Southeast Asian country has been seeing a steady surge in Covid-19 cases over the past few days. The country reported 3,551 new cases on Thursday, taking the national Covid-19 tally to 427,927 cases. Thursday's Covid-19 infection numbers marked the three consecutive days of the country crossing the 3,000 mark. According to The Star, a local English-daily, Senior Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob on Wednesday made an announcement about the impending ban. (Report on Pg 3)

Support grows for intellectual property waiver on virus vaccines; snags remain

GENEVA: France joined the United States on Thursday in supporting an easing of patent and other protections on Covid-19 vaccines that could help poorer countries get more doses and speed the end of the pandemic. While the backing from two countries with major drug makers is important, many obstacles remain. The move to support waiving intellectual property protections on vaccines under World Trade Organization rules marked a dramatic shift for the United States—and drew cheers from activists, complaints from Big Pharma, and a lot of questions about what comes next. Washington had previously lined up with many other developed nations opposed to the idea floated by India and South Africa. (Report on Pg 6)

In the high spirits of doing what you love

KATHMANDU: When Ulrich von Schroeder looks at his own books—his eyes glint with joy and his sincerity towards his work and love for documentation of sculptures is clearly visible. On a recent warm, sunny afternoon, Schroeder, who was lodged at Kathmandu Guest House, turns the pages of 'Nepalese Stone Sculptures-Volume 2- Buddhist', one of his new books, to show the documentation he has done over the decade. The Swiss art historian looked like a lover reading his own love letter in relish that his lover, perhaps his readers, will feel what he feels. Schroeder came to Nepal at the invitation of Museum of Nepali Art, part of the Kathmandu Guest House. He turns the pages gently and keenly. “I love what I do. I do nothing else but this. For me, this is not work, this is life. Documenting sculptures is my secret to happiness,” says Schroeder. (Details on Pg 8)

Pandemic is getting out of hand, as government has its focus misplaced

Officials fail to heed fundamentals like increasing contact tracing and testing as they see lockdowns as only option.



POST PHOTO: ELITE JOSHI

Hospitals have come under pressure due to inadequate supply of essential resources.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, MAY 6

Test, trace, isolate and treat.

That was the World Health Organization's mantra for countries to check the spread of infections when the Covid-19 pandemic first hit the world early last year.

In Nepal, with the number of new cases within manageable limits, contact tracing was conducted up to an extent when the country was in lockdown between March and July last year. There was free testing and treatment too.

But when restrictions were lifted, the number of cases gradually grew. Unable to cope with the surge in infections, the Ministry of Health decided to stop free testing and along with that contact tracing. Although the Supreme Court overturned the decision and the government was forced to resume free testing, contact tracing was never resumed.

That remains the case now even as the country sees a record number of new cases every day.

On Thursday, Nepal recorded 8,970 new cases—a new record and the second consecutive day when cases surged past 8,000. The positivity rate was 44 percent.

The Health Ministry said that 54 people succumbed to Covid-19 in the last 24 hours taking the death toll to 3,529.

Of the total new cases Thursday, 3,972 are from the Kathmandu Valley—3163 in Kathmandu, 567 Lalitpur and 242 in Bhaktapur. The number of active cases stands at 72,561.

And hospitals continue to feel the pressure.

From a total capacity of 60 beds, Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital in Kathmandu has

extended it to 90. All rooms, corridors and emergency departments of the hospital have been occupied by beds of the infected.

“We are not in position to extend further,” Dr Sagar Rajbhandari, director at the hospital told the Post. “Neither do we have the human resources, nor the space to extend the number of beds.”

Reports from across the country suggest similar situations. In Banke, one of the worst-hit districts, Covid-19 patients are being turned away for a lack of beds and oxygen.

Doctors have been seeing the crisis could soon become unmanageable if the authorities fail to take immediate measures to flatten the curve. The country is seeing 1,200 percent rise in Covid-19 cases, with many health care workers infected with Covid-19.

On Wednesday, Dr Chakra Raj Pandey, director of Grande International Hospital, said the fight against the coronavirus has become difficult.

“Covid prevention has been out of control. As hospitals and medical team have been overwhelmed, patients and public hopelessness is the highest [sic],” Pandey wrote on Twitter on Wednesday night. “As we cannot keep on crying, we need to stay inside our house until things get better. Family interaction helps psychological boost.”

Authorities, however, have failed to figure out what steps they can take to control the spread. The prohibitory orders that were put in place in the Valley's Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur from April 29 have been made stricter from Thursday. The current lockdown has been enforced for another seven days. No one knows what after that.

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COVID-19
IS SPREADING RAPIDLY

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NATIONAL

Covid-19 hospital in Janakpur caught off guard by second wave

None of the ventilators at the hospital are in working order, officials say.

SANTOSH SINGH
DHANUSHA, MAY 6

On Wednesday noon, a Covid-19 patient from Mathani in Mahottari got admitted to Provincial Covid-19 Hospital in Janakpur for treatment. The 54-year-old woman was immediately put on ventilator support because of her critical condition.

But her condition worsened after the ventilator went out of order after some time.

"We requested doctors to manage another ventilator, but the doctors told us that all the ventilators at the hospital were not in working condition," said the woman's son.

The patient was still in the ventilator ward of the hospital on Thursday but without ventilator support. Her condition is still critical, her son told The Post.

Dr Manish Pandey, spokesperson of the hospital, says the hospital has five ventilators but all of them are out of order. "The ventilators were purchased last year. None of them are working now. The hospital is trying to get them repaired."

There were 31 critical Covid-19 patients from Dhanusha and Mahottari districts at the hospital on Thursday.

The Health Ministry has put Dhanusha among 19 districts outside Kathmandu Valley where coronavirus infections are spreading "dangerously".

According to Pramod Yadav, medical superintendent of the Provincial Hospital, they have asked the provincial government to send new ventilators. "The government sent two new ventilators on Wednesday. We are preparing to install them and hopefully will be able to run them," he said.

On Thursday, Provincial Covid-19 Hospital, set up last year by the provincial government inside the premises of Janakpur Nursing College, was crowded with Covid-19 patients and their attendants.

Some patients' attendants said they were buying medicines even though



The hospital is currently crowded with Covid-19 patients and their attendants.

the treatment for Covid-19 is free of cost at government hospitals.

"We are purchasing medicines from outside," said the son of the 54-year-old Covid-19 patient from Mathani.

According to him, the same health workers who are assigned to non-Covid-19 patients are tasked with the treatment of the Covid-19 patients. "I have to run and call for a doctor from the other wards to take a look at my mother in the Covid-19 ward. It's chaos here," he said.

Dr Manish Pandey, spokesperson of the Provincial Covid-19 Hospital in Janakpur, says the shortage of health workers has hit the hospital hard.

"Health workers of Provincial Hospital in Janakpur have been assigned to work at the Provincial Covid-19 Hospital here. They are working at both hospitals," said Pandey. "The provincial government did not manage human resources, medical equipment and necessary medicines on time. Now we are pooling all our resources together to run the Covid-19 hospital."

According to him, both Provincial Hospital and Provincial Covid-19 Hospital are being operated with a limited manpower.

"The Covid-19 hospital has only provided supplemental oxygen and beds free of cost," said Pandey, adding that medicines, meals, drinking water and other necessary items are being managed by Covid-19 patients themselves.

However, Gyanendra Yadav, minister of internal affairs and law for the province, also the spokesperson of the provincial government, claimed that the government has been providing treatment and medicines to Covid-19 patients free of cost "We haven't been able to provide meals to patients due to staff shortage."

The Provincial Hospital had demanded 91 health workers to operate the High Dependency Unit and 91 employees for the Provincial Covid-19 Hospital.

The initial plan for the Provincial Covid-19 Hospital had 100 beds but only 63 beds were set up due to a lack of infrastructure and health workers.

Pramod Yadav, medical superintendent at the Provincial Hospital, said: "Currently, the Provincial Covid-19 Hospital is running only 63 beds out of which 12 are ICU beds and 41 have oxygen supply. The rest are being operated as general beds."

Oli's preference for politics to virus crisis is an affront to people, analysts say

>> Continued from page 1

Finding himself cornered, Oli who since March 7, when the Supreme Court revived his UML and the Maoist Centre, had been on a clarification seeking spree against his opponents, is now sending feelers to the Nepal-Khanal faction.

At Thursday's Standing Committee meeting, Oli said that he would telephone Nepal to discuss how his faction's grievances could be addressed, according to Subas Nembang, deputy leader of the UML Parliamentary Party and a close aide to Oli.

"What has stopped Nepal from raising his issues in the party committees?" Nembang told the Post. "We are always ready to discuss if they have any issues but they are expressing their viewpoints through the media. They should come through proper party channels."

What has left Oli worried is the Nepal-Khanal faction's recent discussions whether to resign en masse as lawmakers. Oli so far has sought clarification from as many as 27 lawmakers from the Nepal-Khanal faction, which claims to control around 30 seats in Parliament.

If all the lawmakers from the Nepal-Khanal faction resign, Oli's position will become untenable, as the Janata Samajbadi Party which has 34 seats (two suspended) is a divided House.

On Wednesday, Oli met with Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba to seek his party's support. The Congress refused. His meeting with Deuba came after the Maoist Centre withdrew the support it lent Oli back in February 2018, thereby turning his government into a minority.

"Chances of Oli and Nepal joining hands have diminished now," said Krishna Pokhrel, a professor of political science at the Tribhuvan University. "There seems to be a better prospect of the Nepal faction, the Maoist Centre and the left leaning group of the Janata Samajbadi Party coming together."

The Upendra Yadav-Baburam Bhattarai faction of the Janata Samajbadi Party is making an all out effort to form an alliance to unseat Oli. The faction controls around 16 seats in Parliament of the 34 lawmakers (two suspended) it has. This leaves the Mahantha Thakur-Rajendra Mahato group with 14 seats, as two are sitting on the fence.

The Thakur-Mahato faction is ready to extend support to Oli but he won't be able to garner a majority if the lawmakers from Nepal-Khanal faction resign.

Analysts say Oli is largely to blame for inviting a political crisis in the country. But ignoring the pandemic that has created a serious public health crisis is an affront to basic standards of morality and decency and the people and the country, accord-

ing to them.

"Prime Minister Oli can be compared with Nero, the fifth Roman emperor who earned notoriety for fiddling when Rome burnt... for his indifference towards people's plight," said Rajendra Maharjan, a political commentator. "He is not a bit worried even though people are dying for a lack of beds and oxygen."

According to Maharjan, if Oli is facing a political crisis, it was brought upon to him by himself.

"If Oli as the prime minister really cared about the citizens, he would have employed the whole state machinery to control the pandemic instead of playing such dirty politics just to cling on to power," said Maharjan.

The fresh political games Oli has currently launched come at a time when a vaccine import scam surfaces, with some media suggesting businesspersons close to Oli scuttled the plan to procure the jabs against Covid-19.

Oli's ministers last year also came into spotlight when they were accused of corruption in import of medical supplies needed to fight the pandemic.

The situation at present is more dire compared to last year's. And the government's own projection shows as many as 11,000 people will be infected on a daily basis, come July.

Oli's peddling of pseudoscience and disregard for experts' advice have already met with massive criticism. The coronavirus and Oli's self-centric politics now make a lethal combination, analysts say.

"Pandemic never became Oli's priority. And it was evident from his statement asking people to drink turmeric water or gargle with guava leaves to get rid of the coronavirus," said Shree Krishna Aniruddh Gautam, a political analyst. "Something called accountability he has thrown out of the window. He has abdicated his responsibility as prime minister and he is solely focusing on elections."

Had Oli's December 20 House dissolution move not been overturned by the court, the country right now would have been in the middle of the two-phase snap polls he had declared.

Though the House was revived, Oli has been making every effort to justify that Parliament has become irrelevant. His sudden plan to seek a vote of confidence on May 10 also stems from his intentions to get the House dissolved, this time constitutionally, and take the country towards polls.

Many say with the coronavirus sweeping across the country, with no substantial efforts by the government to control the spread, an election will be a recipe for disaster. India's Covid-19 explosion is blamed on the state elections.

"Oli still thinks he could win the elections and in a bid for early polls,

he has left the people to fend for themselves," said Gautam. "His priority should be saving the lives of the people, not elections. No political leader with the most basic standards of morality sets priorities the way Oli has been doing."

Even though the government claims hospitals have enough beds, people have been dying for want of them. There are no vaccines to administer to around 1.3 million people who took their first shots between March 7 and March 15.

Experts say the way the virus is spreading shows the only way to save lives is vaccinating as many people as possible. Nepal needs to inoculate 72 percent of its 30 million total population (around 22 million people), and it needs 44 million doses.

The government's over-reliance on India has backfired as the country of 1.3 billion people itself is at the mercy of the world community, as it is reporting more than 350,000 new cases every day with daily death count averaging over 3,000. There are already concerns Nepal could run out of basic medical supplies as international flights have been suspended.

While failure to regulate and manage the Nepal-India border in time is partly to blame for the surge in virus cases, experts mostly blame Oli's bad governance for the explosion.

Cases have been soaring at such an exponential rate that international media has now turned its focus to Nepal.

"Nepal's cases skyrocket, prompting concern the country's outbreak could mimic India's," CNN wrote on Thursday.

"Nepal facing 'human catastrophe' similar to India's amid Covid surge," said the Guardian.

The New York Times led its web front page with an AFP image of burning funeral pyres of the Covid-19 dead, at Pashupati Aryaghat.

Amid criticism of his government's poor response to the pandemic and inaction to save people's lives, Oli on May 3 made a clarion call to the international community, urging it to supply vaccines and lend other support.

Analysts, however, say despite the country plunging deep into a virus crisis, Oli has shown no urgency to make genuine efforts to control the pandemic. The callousness Oli has demonstrated towards the plight of the people who are suffering and dying from the coronavirus is stark, they say.

"For Oli, people don't matter; they are mere voters for him," said Surendra Labh, a political commentator. "People's sufferings do not worry him. He is just worried about protecting his chair and his politics."

(Binod Ghimire contributed reporting)

Government of Nepal
Ministry of Water Supply
Department of Water Supply and Sewerage Management
Urban Water Supply and Sanitation (Sector) Project
PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE
Panipokhari, Kathmandu

Notice of Intent to Award Contract
(Date of publication: 7 May 2021)

As per Invitation for Bid published on 25 February 2021, the employer hereby publishes this notice of intent to award the contract to the following mentioned lowest evaluated substantially responsive bidder as per Clause 27 of the Public Procurement Act 2063 and Clause 40.1 of Instruction to Bidder's. Following the deadline of this notice, the employer will go on recognizing the bid eligible to be approved.

Contract Number	Details of Work	Lowest Evaluated Substantially Responsive Bidder	Corrected evaluated bid amount NPR (inclusive of 13% VAT)
UWSSP/OCB-15/Sharadanagar_Chitwan	Construction of Sharadanagar Water Supply and Sanitation Project, Chitwan	M/S Sharma & Co. Pvt. Ltd.	NPR 339,084,869.97

Project Director

Government of Nepal
Ministry of Physical Infrastructure & Transport
Department of Roads
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IMPLEMENTATION DIVISION
STRATEGIC ROAD CONNECTIVITY AND TRADE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
Jwagal, Lalitpur

Amendment to the Invitation for Prequalification

Notice No.: SRCTIP/8/2077-78, RFP Notice No. : SRCTIP/5/077-78 and REOI Notice No. : SRCTIP/9/2077-78
Amendment Notice Publication : May 7, 2021

It is notified that the deadline for submission of (i) Applications for prequalification (ii) RFP and (iii) REOI for following contracts are extended as mentioned in the table below. Furthermore, details of the amendment are also available in the website mentioned below.

Notice No	Contract Identification Number	Amendment on	Details of the amendment available on
SRCTIP/8/2077-78 (First Publication Date 25 th March, 2021)	SRCTIP-DOR-W-NNM-ICB-3	Deadline for Prequalification Application Submission and Opening. Application submission deadline is 27 th May, 2021 Time 12:00 Hours Local Time. The opening of the Applications - 27 th May, 2021 Time 14:00 Hours Local Time	Public Procurement Monitoring Office website http://bolpatra.gov.np and DoR's website: https://dor.gov.np/home/notices
SRCTIP/5/077-78 (First Publication Date 25 th December, 2020)	SRCTIP-DOR-CS-QCBS-11; Consultancy Service for Conducting Road User Satisfaction Survey and Preparation of Necessary Reports	RFP Document Deadline for RFP 1st June, 2021 Time : 13:00 Hours Local Time; Opening on 1st June, 2021, Time: 14:00 Hours Local Time.	Submission is DoR's website: https://dor.gov.np/home/notices
SRCTIP/9/077-78 (First Publication Date 26 April, 2021)	SRCTIP-DOR-CS-IND-13; Hiring of Individual Consultant - Financial Management Consultant (FMC) SRCTIP-DOR-CS-IND-15; Hiring of Individual Consultant-Social Development Advisor (SDA) SRCTIP-DOR-CS-IND-16; Hiring of Individual Consultant-Environmental Advisor (EA)	REOI Notice The Expression of Interest submission deadline is extended up to 31 st May, 2021.	DoR's website: https://dor.gov.np/home/notices

Project Director

Pandemic is getting out of hand, as government has its focus misplaced

>> Continued from page 1

"As we are not working with any other options, extending prohibitory orders is the only choice we have at present," said an official at the Health Ministry who spoke on condition of anonymity.

A Cabinet meeting presided over by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli on April 19 had decided to resume contact tracing, increase testing, and set up quarantine, isolation and holding centres. But even after 17 days neither contact tracing has resumed nor quarantine, isolation centres and holding centres have been set up.

The Ministry of Health has issued a statement requesting local levels to resume contact tracing but they haven't done so. Local level representatives say they lack resources.

"When a decision made by the Cabinet itself is not implemented, what else can be implemented?" said the official who spoke anonymously.

After hospitals started to get overwhelmed, the Health Ministry last week threw its hands up, saying the situation had become unmanageable. After much criticism, the ministry, in a damage control bid, said it was adding beds and isolation centres.

Experts, however, say without fulfilling the basic requirements like contact tracing and testing, the chain of infection cannot be broken.

Government officials have another excuse for not resuming contact tracing.

"We do not have sufficient antigen test kits to conduct tests after contact tracing," said Mahendra Shrestha, chief specialist at the ministry.

When the Post spoke with Shrestha, there was a meeting going on at the ministry on how to fly in antigen test kits now that international flights have been halted.

Antigen tests are helpful in identifying cases quickly so as to curb the virus spread.

But such tests need to be done in huge numbers. As the second wave hit India in early April and cases started to rise in Nepal, authorities ordered antigen tests at border points. But they were done in limited numbers.

Public health experts say allowing people to go home without testing will spell catastrophe.

"Didn't they know tests are necessary and for that testing kits are required? Sufficient testing kits in stock should have been ensured before enforcing a ban on international flights," Dr GD Thakur, former director at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division told the Post.

"No agency is taking the issue seriously and coordination is lacking not only between the inter-government agencies but also within the different agencies of a particular ministry."

With no testing, there is no contact tracing. Authorities are therefore focused on increasing the number of hospital beds, whether it is Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli or Kathmandu Metropolitan City Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya.

Unless there is widespread testing and contact tracing, for now, lockdown seems to be the only answer.

Officials as of now see lockdowns as the only way to check the spread.

But despite the prohibitory orders enforced in most of the districts, the number of new cases has not been declining. Almost half of the people tested have positive results.

"Situation has become very grave," admitted Shrestha, the chief specialist at the Health Ministry.

Some Health Ministry officials say even the prohibitory orders came a bit late.

According to them, had the agencies concerned implemented their recommendations and enforced lockdown some three weeks earlier, infections would not have been widespread in communities and health facilities would not have been overwhelmed.

The Ministry had issued a statement about a month ago to shut down schools but the Education Ministry issued another statement asking schools to continue in-person classes.

Experts had warned against large crowds, but political leadership encouraged rallies. Besides, festivals were held and an international cricket tournament was organised in the Capital.

But unless there is widespread testing and contact tracing, for now, lockdown seems to be the only answer. Officials say prohibitory orders could be in place for as long as three months.

"Lockdown has to be extended to lessen the pressure on hospitals." Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, chief of the Clinical Research Unit at the Sukraraj Hospital told the Post.



A woman and her children wait for a bus to their home district at Kalanki, Kathmandu on Thursday, the eighth day of the lockdown in Kathmandu Valley.

POST PHOTO: PRAKASH CHANDRA TIMILSENA

Active cases in Kathmandu Metropolitan City cross 4,000 mark

Officials say isolation centres will come into operation from next week.

ANUP OJHA

KATHMANDU, MAY 6

On Thursday active cases of Covid-19 in Kathmandu Metropolitan City crossed 4,000 with the number of cases since the pandemic totalling over 400,000.

Starting this week, officials at the City's Public Health Department say, new infections have been increasing by 1,000 on a daily basis with over 280 deaths recorded till Thursday.

The ward representatives are already in a state of panic about how to handle the rising infections in their respective wards as the government hospitals are already overwhelmed. Unable to handle the flurry of phone calls from people asking for hospital beds and oxygen, some ward officials were recently found to have gone out of contact by switching off their phones.

Amid widespread criticism of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City for its poor handling of the pandemic, City Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya on Thursday held a meeting with municipal officials to thrash out strategies to manage the situation. The meeting was attended by Deputy Mayor Hari Prabha Khadgi, Chief Executive Officer Rajeshwar Gyawali and several ward representatives.

Even though the 61st municipal executive committee meeting held on Sunday announced Kathmandu Metropolitan City's plan to build a separate Covid-19 hospital, Thursday's meeting didn't make any decision in this regard. A few days ago, the mayor had formed a seven member committee with Ward 13 chair Deepak KC as coordinator to tackle the Covid-19 crisis in the city.

Deputy Mayor Khadgi said the City has made arrangements with Bir Hospital for setting up 100 oxygen beds, which she said will come into operation next week. According to her, an additional 180 to 200 oxygen beds will come into operation at Radha Soami Satsang Kendra at Samakhushi from Sunday. Thursday's meeting has also announced that the City will provide 10 ventilators along with 150 isolation beds to the TU Teaching Hospital, Maharajgunj, according to Khadgi.

Meanwhile, the City has also announced to set up 50 isolation beds at Nardevi Ayurvedic Hospital, and officials expect these beds will be operational from May 15.

Officials said the KC-led seven-member committee will make further arrangements in coordination with Kathmandu's private hospitals for treating Covid-19 patients.

On Thursday the country reported its highest ever single-day spike of 8,970 positive cases, and 54 deaths. Of the new infections, Kathmandu district alone reported 3,163 new cases. Officials say, over 60 percent positive cases of the district are from the Kathmandu Metropolitan City.

When asked about the widespread criticism of the City's poor response to the pandemic, Deputy Mayor Khadgi said, "After the situation in India worsened, I sensed the infections here too will escalate. Three weeks ago I warned the mayor and other officials about the impending crisis but nobody listened to me," said Khadgi with a resignation in her voice.

Ward No. 32, with 427 active cases until Wednesday, has the most number of active Covid-19 cases among the total 32 wards in the City, according to the City's Health Department.

"The situation in our ward is getting really grim," said Nabaraj Parajuli, Ward-32 chairperson. "I heard today that the City has decided to set up isolation centres. That is a good decision but that's not enough," said Parajuli. His ward with the most number of active Covid-19 cases includes Koteswar, Jadibuti and Sinamangal areas.

"The City should set up an isolation centre and oxygen therapy facility in every ward," he said. Until now, 14 people have died of Covid-19 in his ward.

Records at the City's Health Division show over 280 people have succumbed to Covid-19 in the City since the start of the pandemic last year.

Meanwhile, Ram Krishna Shrestha, the chairperson of Ward No. 9, which is the second most infected ward in the City, accused the federal government of non-cooperation.

"The City tried to work with the central government to tackle the rising infections, but they didn't cooperate. Now that the City has decided to set up isolation centres, that would provide some relief to the infected," said Shrestha on the phone, adding, "But these centres should be set up overnight, without any delay."

Malaysia announces travel ban on Nepalis over rising cases of coronavirus infection

Citizens of Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan will be barred entry. Nepali recruiting agencies fear other countries may follow suit.

CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL

KATHMANDU, MAY 6

Nepal's labour migration sector is set for yet another blow as Malaysia is working to temporarily ban Nepalis from entering the country citing the Covid-19 pandemic. Malaysia is a major labour destination country for Nepali migrant workers.

Amid soaring Covid-19 cases in Malaysia in recent weeks, the Malaysian government is working to ban Nepalis and the citizens of three other South Asian countries—Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The Southeast Asian country has been seeing a steady surge in Covid-19 cases over the past few days. The country reported 3,551 new cases on Thursday, taking the national Covid-19 tally to 427,927 cases. Thursday's Covid-19 infection numbers marked the three consecutive days of the country crossing the 3,000 mark.

According to The Star, a local English-daily, Senior Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob on Wednesday made an announcement about the impending ban.

"The travel restriction imposed on the citizens of these countries involved all categories holding long-term social visit passes, business travellers and for social visits," Yaakob, the minister, was quoted as saying by The Star. "Exemptions are, however, given to holders of diplomatic passports and officials as stated in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961. This category will be considered to enter Malaysia using the existing standard operating procedure."

The ban on Nepali citizens will further hurt Nepal's foreign employment sector, which is already headed for a spell of uncertainty with an eight-day suspension of international flights, which starts from the mid-

night of May 6, and domestic travel restrictions owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Malaysian move may lead to other destinations countries imposing similar restrictions on Nepali migrants, says Sujeet Shrestha, general secretary of Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA), an umbrella organisation of Nepali recruiting agencies involved in hiring and supplying Nepali migrant workers to foreign employers.

"Other destination countries can follow suit if the situation continues to worsen in

In the first nine months of the current fiscal year, 990 labour permits were issued for Malaysia.

Nepal," said Shrestha. "In that event, Nepali foreign employment sector will suffer huge losses."

In a bid to contain the spread of the virus, the Malaysian government, on Wednesday, enforced new movement restrictions in the capital Kuala Lumpur for two weeks—starting from Friday. Many parts of the country have already been implementing lockdowns.

The Malaysian ban on the four South Asian countries follows its temporary ban on flights to and from India, which is battling one of the world's worst Covid-19 outbreaks. Malaysia suspended India flights from April 28.

Although the government has not said when would the ban come into effect, the

move has further eclipsed the prospect of reviving labour migration to Malaysia which is already at its all-time low.

In the first nine months of the ongoing fiscal year, when 117,592 labour permits were issued to aspirant migrant workers for various countries, a meagre 990 were issued for Malaysia-bound workers, according to the records at the Department of Foreign Employment.

The number of people leaving for Malaysia in the last nine months looks small also because Malaysia has remained one of the most preferred labour destinations for Nepali migrants with around 400,000 Nepalis currently employed in the country.

"New workers had not been going to Malaysia for over a year now," said Chhatra Bahadur Shah, director at the Foreign Employment Office, Tahachal, the government body that issues labour permits. "Bulk hiring has stopped but a small number of workers are still going in their individual capacity. But once this travel ban comes into effect, even that small flow will stop."

Even in the fiscal year 2019-20, which was a disastrous year for Nepal's foreign employment sector when the country saw a remarkable drop of 27.5 percent in overall labour migration numbers, 59,714 Nepalis still departed for Malaysia.

In October last year, the Malaysian government had rolled out a plan to impose a cap on foreign workers to secure more jobs for local citizens. This will lead to more jobs cuts for Nepali workers.

"Even when labour migration had resumed with the resumption of international flights last year, Malaysia was not fully open for Nepali workers. There is demand for Nepali workers in Malaysia, but

Nepali could not go to Malaysia in big numbers," said Shrestha. "The country had been going through several political turmoils. Even now, we cannot do anything other than wait and watch."

The political crisis that started in February last year has resulted in the resignation of Mahathir Mohamad and the downfall of the coalition government of Pakatan Harapan, after being in power for 22 months following their remarkable victory in the 2018 Malaysian general elections.

The crisis led to the appointment of Muhyiddin Yassin as the country's eighth prime minister in March. However, the political problems have continued even when the country is in the midst of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, in Nepal, citing the spike in Covid-19 cases, the Foreign Employment Office, on Thursday decided to halt all its services that require beneficiaries to visit its Tahachal office in person.

Issuing a notice, the office said starting Friday, it has indefinitely suspended its services like issuing of new labour permits, final labour permits, status legalisation, and re-entry labour permits, for which migrant workers need to be physically present at the office. A re-entry labour permit, which can be provided online, however, will be available, the office said.

"The government has decided to suspend all the non-essential services. As per the government decision, we have halted these services for now," said Shah. "The number of people visiting our office for labour permits was already nominal since the imposition of prohibitory orders. On Thursday afternoon, only seven had applied for labour permits online and 36 others visited the office at Tahachal."

BRIEFING

Police guard oxygen plants

SUNSARI: The District Administration Office in Sunsari has deployed police personnel at three oxygen plants in the district. Chief District Officer Umesh Kumar Dhakal said police personnel have been guarding the oxygen plants for the last four days to stop possible theft amid the shortage of oxygen due to a surge in Covid-19 cases.

Bheri Hospital hires 41 staff

NEPALGUNJ: Bheri Hospital has hired 41 additional health workers to cope with the rising number of Covid-19 cases. The hospital has appointed health assistants, staff nurses and paramedics, among others. Meanwhile, Nepalgunj Sub-metropolitan has set up a 50-bed temporary hospital at Ramlilamaidan for Covid-29 patients.

Blacktopping of Beni-Jomsom road starts

MYAGDI: The blacktopping of a 16-km section of the Beni-Jomsom road has started in Thasang Rural Municipality, Mustang. Deepak Gautam, a representative of the contractor company, said, "We will complete blacktopping the entire 36-kilometre stretch within a month if everything goes well."

With hospitals occupied, Covid-19 patients are dying at home

At least four persons have died in home isolation over the past few days, as they could not find hospitals that would take them in.

THAKUR SINGH THARU & RUPA GAHATRAJ

NEPALGUNJ, MAY 6

On Monday evening, a 69-year-old man of Khajura Rural Municipality Ward No. 2 in Banke complained of difficulty in breathing. He died on his way to a hospital in Nepalgunj the same night.

The man had stayed in home isolation after testing positive for Covid-19 on Sunday. Since Bheri Hospital in Nepalgunj and Nepalgunj Medical College Teaching Hospital in Kohalpur were fully occupied, he chose to self-isolate at home. His family took him to the hospital for treatment only after his condition worsened.

Another 55-year-old Covid-19-infected man in Ward No. 3 of Khajura, who had stayed at an isolation centre of Khajura Rural Municipality, died on Saturday. Family members of the deceased say he died for want of treatment at the isolation centre.

After showing symptoms similar to that of Covid-19, the man had been taken to Nepalgunj-based Teaching Hospital for treatment. But health workers at the hospital did not admit the patient citing bed shortage, according to the family of the deceased. He was then admitted to the isolation centre on April 30.

"Only two employees are on duty at the isolation centre and there are no



Health workers attend to a Covid-19 patient at a hospital in Nepalgunj.

POST PHOTO

doctors. My father did not receive proper treatment," Anil Tiruwa, the son of the deceased man, told the Post. "My father had low concentration of oxygen. He died for want of treatment."

The number of Covid-19 patients in Banke staying in home isolation has increased in recent weeks, according to health workers. As many as 3,559 patients are staying in home isolation across the district.

In Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City alone, currently, as many as 1,290 people are staying in home isolation, according to the City office. Of the 23 wards in the sub-metropolis, ward 10

has the highest figure with 235 people staying in home isolation.

Since mid-April when the second wave of the pandemic hit the country, a total of 6,840 persons from Banke have tested positive for the coronavirus, according to the data at the Ministry of Health and Population.

Almost all Covid-19 designated health institutions in Banke have been overcrowded with patients and most hospitals are reeling under a shortage of oxygen and ventilators.

Health workers are overwhelmed in hospitals as patients continue to arrive.

The sub-metropolis has set up an

isolation centre at the White House Hotel for those with mild Covid-19 symptoms. Another isolation centre with oxygen beds has been set up at Ramlila Maidan.

A 51-year-old man of Ward No. 5 in Baijanath Rural Municipality, who had stayed in home isolation after testing positive for Covid-19 on April 25, also died last week. He died while being taken to a hospital, according to family members.

On April 29, a 32-year-old woman of Khajura Rural Municipality Ward No. 7 also died of Covid-19 at Bheri Hospital. She had been staying in home isolation after testing positive

for Covid-19 on April 23. According to health workers at Bheri Hospital, her condition had already worsened when she arrived at the hospital six days after testing positive for the virus.

Health workers of the respective local units should be deployed to inquire about the condition of those staying in home isolation.

According to the health guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Population for the isolation of Covid-19 patients, health workers of the local units concerned should call or send text message to Covid-19 patients at least twice a day to keep track of their condition.

But Ram Bahadur Chand, the health unit chief at the Nepalgunj Sub Metropolitan City, said that monitoring the conditions of the people in home isolation has been difficult due to a shortage of staff.

"The health workers of the respective ward office follow up on the people staying in home isolation. We refer patients to Covid-19 wards if their condition is found to be serious," said Chand.

Deputy Mayor Uma Thapa Magar of Nepalgunj said the local unit has instructed health workers to regularly inquire about the condition of people in home isolation, provide them with counselling and have them admitted to hospitals whenever needed.

EDITORIAL

Virus in the Himalaya

Without testing, there is no way to rule out coronavirus transmission on Everest.

On April 15, a Norwegian mountaineer who complained of cough and fever at Everest base camp was airlifted to a hospital in Kathmandu. He was later diagnosed with Covid-19. More than two dozen high-altitude rescues have been conducted since then, "all related to" severe high-altitude illness, according to the Himalayan Rescue Association and helicopter companies. As a precautionary measure, authorities had issued circulars two weeks ago asking expedition groups to stay within their bubble, but the evacuations have rung alarm bells loud and clear.

There have been a dozen other suspected cases, but government officials and the Nepal Mountaineering Association have simply dismissed them. But things could change. On Tuesday, four sherpas were evacuated from Dhaulagiri base camp after developing Covid-19-like symptoms. They all tested positive on Wednesday, leaving the expedition agency no choice but to evacuate nine other climbers. The fresh incident has stoked fears of infection at Everest base camp, where expedition groups have installed boundary ropes to separate one tent from another, and people's movement has been restricted.

On Thursday, Nepal reported yet another record single-day new infections with 8,970 cases and 54 deaths. While the government and mountaineering officials continue to dismiss coronavirus cases at base camp, at least two dozens climbers are said to be suffering from "serious coughing", and it is unclear whether the cough is due to a combination of high-altitude and low relative humidity or Covid-19. Without testing, which is not available at base camp, there is no way to rule out coronavirus on Everest, but doctors stationed at the camp say there have been many altitude cases this season, which have symptoms similar to Covid-19, and climbers should be evacuated should illness last for five days.

Earlier in January, the local administration in Nepal's Everest region lifted all Covid-19 restrictions in an attempt to woo back trekkers to its popular trails. Tourists were no longer required to submit a 72-hour negative PCR test report or meet quarantine provisions. The municipality decision had followed a drop in new infections and the lifting of restrictions at large as the government prepared to launch the first phase of the vaccination drive. As a Plan B, local officials told this paper that antigen tests would be arranged if travellers were suspected of developing Covid-19 symptoms.

All this followed the government decision in September last year to allow tourists into Nepal for trekking and mountaineering, nearly seven months after imposing a nationwide lockdown. Last month when the Department of Tourism issued a directive introducing a quota system in a desperate measure to prevent overcrowding on the world's tallest peak amid the second wave of the pandemic, the department had already issued 377 climbing permits. A record 408 mountaineers have been granted permission this year. This is an all-time high number of permits issued in a season, and expedition members have all assembled at Everest base camp at an altitude of 5,500 metres.

As the window to begin the ascent starts on Sunday, concerns are now growing that the coronavirus has made it to base camp, where some 2,000 expedition members have gathered. While expedition agencies claim that their clients are all isolated and safe, and health safety measures are being enforced in the respective camps, it is important to note that although the mountaineers were required to submit a negative PCR report before hitting the trails, it wasn't mandatory for Nepalis and high-altitude climbing guides. This is a huge margin of error, one that risks lives and a lost opportunity to ensure a safe bubble for the Everest season.

Could Covid-19 be nature's response to man's destruction of the earth's ecology?

NARESH KOIRALA



'We are not at the top of the food chain; Covid has proved that,' said Steve. He takes care of the security alarm in our house. A tall lean man in his early 50s, he speaks with a slight lisp and carries the demeanour of an easygoing schoolmaster. He is direct and forceful; unafraid of the unconventional. "This vaccine thing makes no sense," he continued. "That does not mean I won't take it. I will. I don't want to die, but..." Our conversation had veered off from Canada's vaccine rollout debacle to humanity's existential concerns the pandemic has evoked. In Steve's words, "Our diminishing natural immunity against pathogens and increasing vaccine/drug dependency is an existential threat to our species."

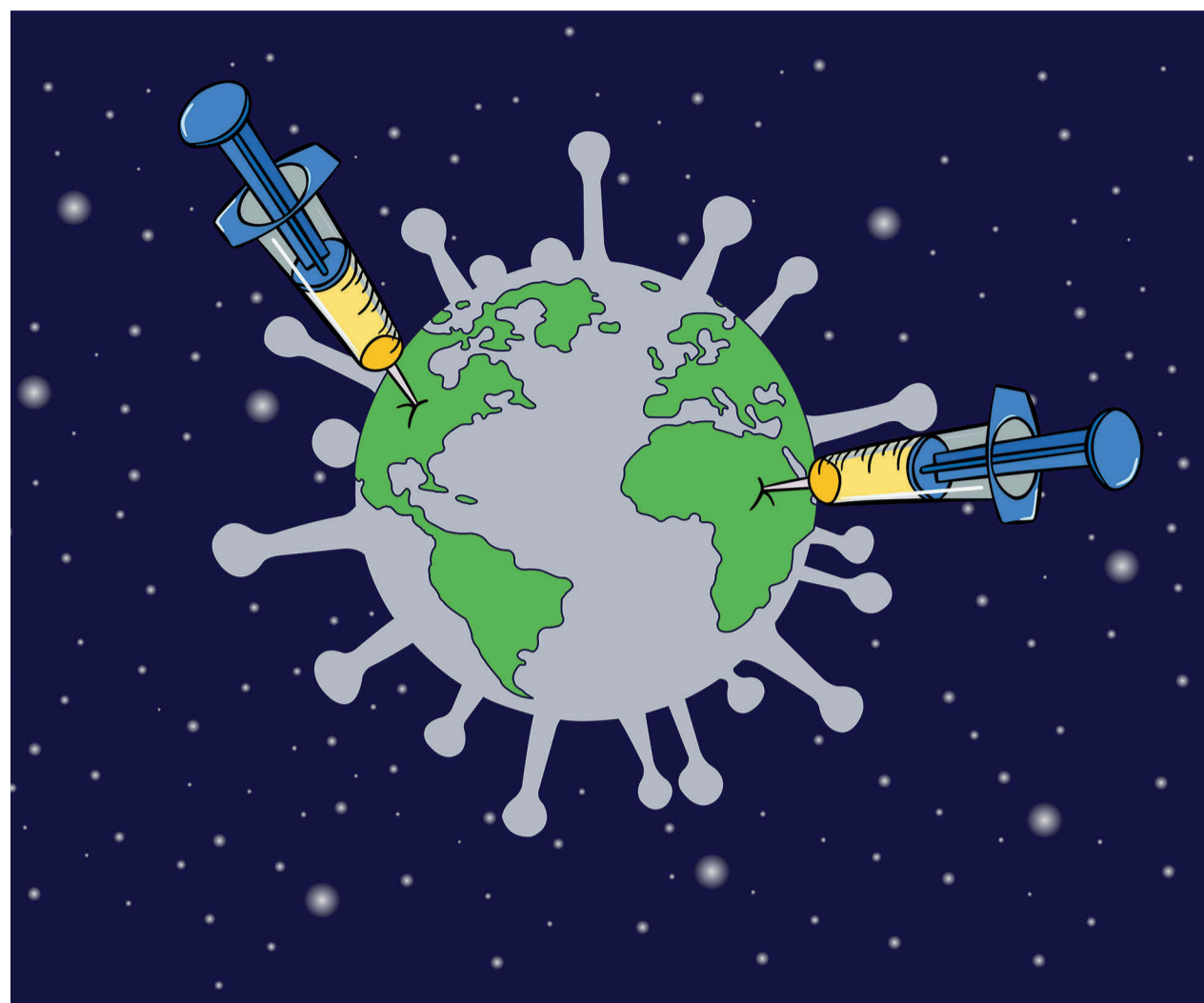
Numerous research reports validate Steve's observations. The Gerontological Society of America reported in 2015: 'Between 1988 and 2010, the median number of prescription medications used among (American) adults aged 65 and older doubled from two to four, and the proportion taking more than or equal to five medications tripled from 12.8 to 39.0 percent.' The United States is just one example. The fact is drug dependency is increasing all over the world.

Even more worrying is the growing frequency of infectious disease outbreaks. According to researchers from Brown University, US, the total number of outbreaks in viruses and casual diseases increased globally by almost 400 percent between 1980 and 2010—from 750 to over 3000. Scientists are predicting more pandemics. The future is likely going to be repeated cycles of pandemics, deaths, economic pain, short-term recovery, and more pandemics, more deaths, more economic and social disruptions. Humanity seems to be in a losing battle with pathogens, viruses in particular.

How did we get here?

I don't think anyone has a definitive answer, but one thing that immediately jumps out is whether the way we interface with nature is a factor. Yuval Harari, a professor of ancient history and the author of the internationally acclaimed book, *Sapiens*, says human civilisation developed around myths; with time, myths turned into beliefs, and beliefs became unassailable truths. The myth of the omniscient, creator God, religion and associated scriptures has defined our relationship with nature for centuries, and has become the basis of the modern development model.

Perspectives on pandemics



SHUTTERSTOCK

Consider Christianity and Islam, two religions with a total following of nearly 55 percent of the world population. Christianity commands its followers to multiply, fill the earth, and rule over nature. Quran, the holy book of Islam, assures Muslims that Allah created the world to 'serve men and women, so that human beings can profit from all gifts and bounties which God has given to us in the world, to serve Him'.

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, that man evolved from a natural process, challenged the creationist argument that mankind was created by God. But it did nothing to dismantle the deeply rooted, God-sanctioned, belief in man's exclusive authority over earth's resources. Even the sagacious Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) of the United Kingdom seemed to endorse the idea. The ICE, the first engineering institution in the world established in 1818, defined civil engineering as 'the art of directing the great sources of power in nature for the use and convenience of man...' in its founding document. (The definition was changed years later and made more respectful to nature.)

The belief in man's supremacy over nature became the basis for our current anthropocentric development model, and the justification for the consequent destruction of the earth's ecology. According to Scientific American (2009), we are degrading upwards of 160,000 acres of rainforests daily and, in a year, making some 50,000

species extinct. When it comes to the abuse of nature, one may think the Hindus would be different. After all, they worship the divine in nature including rivers, mountains, trees, animals and the earth. Yet, they have adopted the same development model as other religionists and development doyens; they treat nature with no less crudity than Christians and Islamists. India and Nepal have some of the most polluted water and air in the world.

Could it be that, like climate change, Covid-19 is nature's response to man's destruction of the earth's ecology? There is no scientific evidence to support this view, but there should be no argument that over the years we have destroyed the habitat of billions of viruses that live on earth, and to wonder if nature is striking back is not unreasonable.

The way forward

We had pandemics and millions of deaths before Covid-19. They were perhaps nature's way of warning us against abuse; a call to collaborate or otherwise. Our hubris left no room to listen and reflect. Now we have Covid-19. To date, medical science has advanced largely by the reactive response to new diseases. We get sick and develop remedies. The vaccines against smallpox, flu, chickenpox, measles and many others were developed after the diseases were identified. The availability of vaccines saves millions

of lives, but hundreds of thousands of lives are lost before the vaccines are developed. We have seen this happen over and over again. Covid-19 is just the latest in this cycle. The only way to prevent the loss before the vaccines become available is to understand the conditions that facilitate the evolution of new viruses and pre-empt their outbreaks.

Albert Einstein said, 'We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.' The solution to the problem of increasing frequency of outbreaks of infectious diseases must start with some fresh thinking. This includes assuming responsibility for creating conditions for new outbreaks of lethal infectious diseases, and recognising that we share the earth with nature's other habitats.

Alongside the efforts to develop vaccines for viruses already known, our vaccine research should expand to include an integrated effort of doctors, economists and environmentalists so that we can understand whether our development activities are impacting nature's other habitats and creating conditions for new viruses to evolve. We need to urgently re-examine our development model, and revise it to make it compatible with others with whom we share the earth. Mankind has no monopoly on the earth's resources.

Koirala is a geotechnical consultant in Vancouver, Canada.

Reimagining education for all in Africa

Policymakers should pay much closer attention to what and how children learn.

CONNIE NSHMEREIRWE



International concerns over the state of education in Africa centre on the large number of children who are out of school—currently about one-third of the global total. But while expanding access to education on the continent must clearly remain a priority, policymakers should also pay much closer attention to what and how children learn.

Today, even the many African children in school experience problems. In Sub-Saharan Africa, up to 40 percent leave primary school without basic skills. The many over-age children within the system are more likely to drop out overall. And girls and the very poorest children fare the worst on international comparisons of educational performance. The Africa Learning Barometer reports, for instance, that 'in Malawi, 52 percent of girls are not learning basic competencies at the end of primary school compared to 44 percent of boys,' and that 'in Botswana, 7 percent of the wealthy are not learning compared to 30 percent of the poor.'

Moreover, Sub-Saharan Africa has the world's fastest-growing school-age population. At current rates, about 20 percent of children in the region will still be excluded from schooling in 2030, the quality of education will decline further, and the



SHUTTERSTOCK

proportion of qualified teachers will likely continue to fall, as it has for the last two decades. On top of all this, disruptions caused by Covid-19 have fueled fears that many children who have had to stay out of school may never return.

UNESCO and the Global Education Monitoring Report have outlined several policy options to address these challenges, including increasing the supply of classrooms, eliminating school fees, and easing obstacles to progression such as national examinations. To encourage greater secondary-school enrollment, governments could consider increasing the number of years of compulsory schooling and enforcing international conventions against child labour more strictly. Above all, the options presented—more schools and trained teachers, and wider reach—would require at

least a six-fold increase in current funding levels.

But this decades-long focus on expanding access and 'catching up' with the rest of the world leaves many other important questions underexplored. In particular: do current African school systems prepare individuals to thrive in a rapidly changing world? To what extent should we address other, more basic concerns, such as the appropriateness of curriculum content, the mode of delivery, and even the very idea of the traditional classroom or school as the only location for learning?

Educational reform in Africa that goes beyond increasing access has had mixed results. Curricula still largely resemble those inherited from former colonial powers, which were aimed at training clerical and technical workers for colonial administrations, and,

as such, focused on imparting European economic, social, and cultural norms. But the purpose of education today has expanded to enable the development of the whole person within their context, and to equip them with the skills to succeed.

The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All recognised that basic education should, first and foremost, aim to situate a child within their environment, and enable them to develop their skills fully in order to respond appropriately to that environment's opportunities, constraints, and inconsistencies. Besides seeking to expand access to education, therefore, policymakers should also contextualise, simplify, and democratise school curricula and teaching methods.

Locally relevant education in a language that the child understands offers the best hope for improving

their acquisition of basic skills, which is critical for attaining the higher-level skills needed to build a scientifically literate society. There are efforts across Africa to design curricula that better reflect local conditions, but many fail at the implementation stage, owing to inadequate development of accompanying pedagogical resources and support for teachers through the transition.

Closely related to contextualisation is the need for simplification. Current African school curricula are overloaded with content—a legacy of the colonial era, when most of what people needed to learn in order to get a job had to be learned at school. But not all education happens only in schools, where the focus should be on the learning that schools can best offer, such as mastering foundational numeracy and literacy skills. Vietnam,

for example, has concentrated successfully on teaching a few things, and its education system now compares favourably with the world's best.

As for democratisation, Covid-19 has revealed deep inequalities in education systems, but it has also created an opportunity to consider additional ways of expanding access to schooling. Innovations in digital platforms and teachers' adaptation to the 'new normal' indicate the potential benefits of expanding education beyond schooling, while also closing gaps in learning provision. In addition to broadening access to basic education, democratisation also means giving all children an equal opportunity to pursue further and specialised education. This requires identifying clear educational pathways, and providing every child with the necessary facilities within a reasonable distance.

Today, children account for almost half of Africa's population, and their total will reach one billion by 2055. If properly skilled, this vast human resource could help to lift hundreds of millions of Africans out of poverty—a dividend that would benefit both the continent and the world.

The education picture in Africa is not uniformly bleak; some experiments with approaches such as mother-tongue instruction and differentiated incentives for teachers are beginning to yield results, and can be built upon. But alongside enhancements to existing systems, policymakers need to recognise and change what no longer works, even as they focus on expanding access.

Nshemereirwe, a member of the Steering Committee of the Africa Science Leadership Programme at the University of Pretoria's Future Africa campus, is an independent science and policy facilitator, educational researcher, and a former co-chair of the Global Young Academy.

—Project Syndicate

FOREX

US Dollar	118.32
Euro	142.52
Pound Sterling	164.65
Japanese Yen	10.84
Chinese Yuan	18.28
Qatari Riyal	32.50
Australian Dollar	91.72
Malaysian Ringgit	28.70
Saudi Arab Riyal	31.55

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

Shares

Nepse		2,637.15	+0.47%		
HIGHEST LOSERS					
RBC	SHEL	NGPL	SFOL	KPCI	SSHL
-10%	-9.07%	-8.57%	-4.64%	-4.24%	-4.02%
MODERATE LOSERS					
MHNL	ALBSL	UPCL	HDHPC	SFOL	MSLB
-3.7%	-3.6%	-3.4%	-3.28%	-3.27%	-3.07%
MODERATE GAINERS					
MERO	HIDCL	RRHP	DHPL	LBL	JOSHI
5.51%	7.8%	7.86%	8.5%	9.49%	9.49%
HIGHEST GAINERS					
LNHPL	RURJ	SMATA	MLBSL	KRHC	JSLBB
9.52%	9.91%	9.92%	9.99%	10%	10%

BULLION

PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 90,600
Silver	Rs 1,315

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

GASOLINE WATCH



100% PERFORMANCE. EVERYTIME.

Petrol (Per Litre)	Rs 121.00/-
Diesel (Per Litre)	Rs 104.00/-
Kerosene (Per Litre)	Rs 104.00/-
LPG (Per cylinder)	Rs 1400/-

Source: Nepal Oil Corporation

Factories face shortages of raw materials as prohibitory order cuts supply lines

Entrepreneurs say they can handle a short period of immobility, but worry the lockdown may be prolonged.

MADHAV DHUNGANA
BHAIRAHAWA, MAY 6

Factories in western Nepal are having a hard time getting raw materials to keep their machines running, and they say they are alarmingly low on inventory.

The prohibitory order issued by the provincial government has hit transportation services in Bhairahawa and nearby areas and disrupted supply lines. Traders and industrialists say they can handle a short period of immobility, but they are worried the lockdown may be prolonged.

Business and industry associations say they are ready to operate the factories and manufacture goods by following strict health protocols set by the government, but storage has become a problem with unsold inventory piling up as the markets and shops are closed completely.

They are asking how long they are supposed to store the finished products in their warehouses and feed and house hundreds of workers on the factory premises.

The local government has permitted factories to operate provided they keep their workers indoors.

Rajesh Agrawal, managing director of the Siddhartha Industrial Group and central member of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said that it had become difficult to keep the factories running due to the prohibitory order which has strangled the supply chain.

"We have a responsibility to keep the factories running by adhering to the safety standards set by the government," he said. "Otherwise the market may face shortages of goods in the middle of the pandemic."

But only around 80 percent of the factories will be able to remain open under the existing health protocols fixed by the government. The rest don't have enough space to accommodate the workers and store the manufactured goods, he said.

The government has set several conditions for operating factories during the prohibitory period which include keeping all employees on the premises and feeding and housing them, maintaining physical distance between people, checking the health of all



POST FILE PHOTO

The local government has permitted factories to operate by housing their workers indoors.

workers daily for fever, and using masks and sanitisers. In case workers become infected, they should be put in isolation. Bidur Dhungana, general secretary of the Western Cement Producers' Association and general manager of Jagdamba Cement Industry, said they were operating the factory by keeping all workers within the plant compound.

"But there are many problems as the government has not allowed transportation. Besides, factories are facing a shortage of labour," he said. "We decided to face the problem for a few days as it helps to prevent the spread of Covid-19," he said. "But if the situation prolongs, it will become difficult."

During last year's lockdown, domestic factories suffered labour shortages for a long time as their Indian workers returned to their homes, he added.

Companies have been providing training to local workers. Nepali migrant workers who returned home during last year's lockdown also received training after getting jobs at local factories.

Dhungana said that things were easier this year for factory owners as the local workers they have hired had not left for foreign jobs. He said there

was no labour shortage this time. "We don't have to shut down the factory for lack of workers," he said.

The Bhairahawa-Lumbini corridor contains 26 factories. They include cement, synthetics, steel, paper and plywood plants, and spinning and grain mills. They employ around 5,000 workers.

Besides, there are about five dozen factories at the Bhairahawa-Parasi and Bhairahawa-Butwal industrial corridors. There are 11 steel factories in operation in Rupandehi, Nawalparasi and Kapilvastu.

Local workers from Dhakdahi, Marchwar, Suryapura and Lumbini areas used to travel daily to work at the cement and steel factories in

Rupandehi. Now it is not easy to commute to the factory due to the travel restriction.

"The prohibitory order has not had a big impact on industry so far, and entrepreneurs are ready to bear the minor hardships at a time when the country is fighting the Covid-19 pandemic," said Kul Prasad Neupane, immediate past of the Siddhartha Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"Industrialists are ready to operate their factories by respecting the restrictions and following the health protocols," he said. "If the prohibitory order is extended and problems arise, entrepreneurs will move ahead by coordinating with the local administration."

World food price index climbs in April, highest since mid-2014: UN

REUTERS
ROME, MAY 6

World food prices increased for a 11th consecutive month in April, hitting their highest level since May 2014 with sugar leading a rise in all the main indices, the United Nations food agency said on Thursday.

The Food and Agriculture Organization's food price index, which measures monthly changes for a basket of cereals, oilseeds, dairy products, meat and sugar, averaged 120.9 points last month versus a revised 118.9 in March.

The March figure was previously given as 118.5.

The Rome-based FAO also said in a statement that new forecasts pointed to growth in both world wheat and maize output in the coming season.

FAO's cereal price index rose 1.2 percent in April month-on-month and 26 percent year-on-year. Worries about crop conditions in Argentina, Brazil and the United States pushed maize prices up 5.7 percent last month, while wheat prices held largely steady. By contrast, international rice prices slipped, FAO said.

FAO's vegetable oil price index rose 1.8 percent on the month, pushed higher by rising soy, rapeseed and palm oil quotations, which offset lower sunflower oil values.

Dairy prices rose 1.2 percent, with butter, skim milk powder and cheese all lifted by good demand from Asia, while the meat index climbed 1.7 percent. FAO said both bovine and ovine meat quotations rose, supported by "solid demand" from East Asia.

After a sharp drop in March, sugar prices rebounded in April, posting a 3.9 percent increase on the month and an almost 60 percent surge on the year.

Dubai luxury home market soars as world's rich flee pandemic

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DUBAI, MAY 6

After nearly three decades in London, Christophe Reech was fed up with the city's pandemic lockdowns. This spring, he sold his luxury townhouse and jetted off to the desert sheikhdom of Dubai to start a new life with his family.

"There was no turning back, he said. The French business magnate's super wealthy foreign friends were doing the same, driving an unprecedented surge in sales of Dubai's most-exclusive properties.

"Here in Dubai, there's only one strategy: Business as usual," said Reech, the chairman of an eponymous group that owns real estate and financial technology companies. The philosophy is simple: "Let's make sure everyone's vaccinated and keep everything open."

"Of course that attracts people like me," he said.

As vaccines roll out unevenly worldwide and waves of infections force countries to extend restrictions, foreign buyers flush with cash have flooded Dubai's high-end property market, one of the few places in the world where they can dine, shop and do business in person.

They're snapping up record numbers of luxury villas and penthouses, sending prices rocketing in this boom-and-bust market.

Dubai has pitched itself as the world's pandemic-friendly vacation spot.

Sales of Dubai's upscale properties, once slow, soared 230 percent in the first quarter of 2021, compared to the same period last year. Prices in some top-end areas rose as much as 40 percent, according to Property Finder, the country's largest real-estate website.

A record-breaking 90 properties worth 10 million dirhams each (\$2.7 million) changed hands last month, on top of 84 in March, surpassing heights hit eight years ago, according to real estate consultancy Property Monitor. For comparison, there were 54 such transactions in all of 2020.

As with previous cycles, cash buyers started snatching up homes at bargain prices and flipping them for profits.

Analysts say that will continue until prices rise too high and returns diminish.

How long the craze lasts and what awaits the skyscraper-studded city then remains unclear.

Home prices are still falling in the middle tiers of the city's saturated property market, which has seen val-

ues drop sharply since peaks reached seven years ago due to overbuilding. Average residence sale prices in the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, collapsed to \$400 per square foot this month from \$1,300 in 2013.

"The market is going through a boom time ... but people are very aware that Dubai can run too quickly and it all falls apart," said Jackie Johns, partner at Premier Estates, an affiliate of Christie's International Real Estate, referring to the debt-driven crisis that brought the city to its knees in 2008.

Since first reopening to tourists last summer, Dubai has pitched itself as the world's pandemic-friendly vacation spot.

With no mandatory dayslong quarantines, foreign visitors now party in Dubai's bustling bars and on its beaches, their selfies at hotel-resorts and helicopter pads stirring resentment back home.

The tourist influx helped drive the country's dramatic surge in coronavirus cases in January, prompting the UK to suspend flights. But the United Arab Emirates, with its young population and low mortality rates, has fared relatively well during the pandemic.

The country of over 9 million, which relied heavily on the Chinese state-backed Sinopharm vaccine for its inoculation campaign, has administered 10.6 million vaccine doses.



Re-Invitation for Bids

Government of Nepal (GoN)
Ministry of Home Affairs

Department of National ID and Civil Registration

Invitation for Bids for the Procurement of NID Smart Cards

Contract Identification No: DoNIDCR/ICB/02/077-78

Date of publication: 07 May, 2021

- The Department of National ID and Civil Registration, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Nepal invites electronic bids from the eligible bidders for the Procurement of NID Smart Cards (Design, Manufacture, Supply, Delivery, Test and Production Support of Multipurpose Biometric Smart Cards) under International Competitive Bidding Procedures as specified in Public Procurement Act, 2007 and Public Procurement Regulations, 2008.
- Eligible Bidders may obtain further information and inspect the bidding documents at the office of Department of National ID and Civil Registration, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal telephone number: +977-01-4211941 facsimile number: +977-01-4211563, email: info@donidcr.gov.np or may visit PPMO egp system www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp.
- A complete set of Bidding Documents may be purchased from the office Department of National ID and Civil Registration, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal by eligible Bidders on the submission of a written application, along with the copy of company/firm registration certificate, and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of NRs. 20,000.00 till 27 May, 2021 during office hours.

Or

- Bidder who chooses to submit their bid electronically may purchase the hard copy of the bidding documents as mentioned above or may download the bidding documents for e-submission from PPMO's e-GP system www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp. Bidders, submitting their bid electronically, should deposit the cost of bidding document in the following Rajaswa (revenue) account as specified below:

Account Details for Depositing the Cost of Bidding Documents:

Name of the Bank: Everest Bank Limited, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu

Name of Office: Department of National ID and Civil Registration, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal

Office Code no.: 314013501

Rajaswa (revenue) Account no.: 00100106200000

Rajaswa (revenue) Shirshak No.: 14229

Rajaswa (revenue) Shirshak (Head): Anya Prashasanik Sewa Shulka

- Pre-bid meeting shall be held at Department of National ID and Civil Registration, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal at 14:00 hrs (NST) on 14 May, 2021.
- Electronic bids must be submitted to the office of Department of National ID and Civil Registration, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal through PPMO's e-GP system www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp on or before 12:00 hrs (NST) on 28 May, 2021. Bids received after this deadline will be rejected.
- The bids will be opened in the presence of Bidders' representatives who choose to attend at 12:30 hrs. (NST) on 28 May, 2021 at the office of Department of National ID and Civil Registration, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal. Bids must be valid for a period of 120 days from the date of bid opening (i.e., 24 September, 2021) and must be accompanied by a bid security or scanned copy of the bid security in pdf format in case of e-bid, amounting to a minimum of NRs 5,10,00,000.00 (Nepali Rupees 51 Million) or US\$ 440,000.00 (US Dollar Four Hundred Forty Thousand), which shall be valid for 30 days beyond the validity period of the bid (i.e., 23 October, 2021). The Bid Security issued by foreign Bank must be counter-guaranteed by "A" class Commercial Bank eligible to issue Bank Guarantee as per the prevailing Laws of Nepal.
- All the required documents for bidding process have been mentioned in bid documents. Hence, the Bidders are requested to carefully examine those documents needed for the submission of the bid.
- If the last date of purchasing and/or submission falls on a government holiday, then the next working day shall be considered as the last date. In such case the validity period of the bid security shall remain the same as specified for the original last date of bid submission.
- The rates quoted shall be clearly mentioned both in figure and in words. In case of non-conformity or ambiguity of the amount in words and in figure, the rates written in words shall prevail. Conditional rates shall not be entertained.
- The Department reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bids without assigning any reason, whatsoever.
- This notice can also be viewed at the Department's website-http://donidcr.gov.np and at the PPMO's website https://ppmo.gov.np/home

Government of Nepal

National Reconstruction Authority

Central Level Project Implementation Unit (Building)

District Level Project Implementation Unit (Building)

Dhunge, Rasuwa

First Date of Publication: - 7th April, 2021

Second Date of Publication: - 7th May, 2021

Notice for Extension of Time for Bid Submission

Due to prohibitory order issued by District Administration offices in different districts, current Covid situation and lockdown, last date of bid submission of Contract No. NRA/DLPIU/ Rasuwa /2077-78/ NCB- 04, NRA/DLPIU/ Rasuwa /2077-78/NCB- 05, NRA/DLPIU/ Rasuwa /2077-78/NCB- 06 & NRA/DLPIU/ Rasuwa /2077-78/NCB- 07 has been extended from 7th May, 2021 to 14th May, 2021 12:00 hours and Bid opening date and time will be 14:00 hours on the same day .

Project Chief

WORLD

BRIEFING

Gunmen kill former TV presenter then escape in Afghanistan

KABUL: Gunmen killed a former Afghan TV presenter on Thursday as he was travelling in the southern city of Kandahar, a provincial official said, adding to fears for press freedom in the war-wrecked country. Nimat Rawan was shot at noon, provincial spokesman Baheer Ahmadi said, by two assailants who were able to escape with his mobile phone. Security officials have told several other journalists in the area that extremists are targeting them as well, he added. The killing heightens worries over the fate of Afghan journalists as US troops pull out.

France sends two patrol boats in fishing row with Britain

PARIS: France despatched two maritime patrol boats to the waters off the British Channel island of Jersey on Thursday, after Britain deployed two of its naval vessels in an escalating row over post-Brexit fishing rights. The European Commission called for calm over the dispute, which on Thursday also saw a protest flotilla of about two dozen French trawlers sail to Jersey's main harbour and demand a meeting with island officials. The French government was angered when Jersey issued new fishing permits which, according to Paris, impose unfair restrictions on French trawlers' access to Channel island fishing grounds, a sore point in relations since Britain's departure from the European Union.

Thai student jailed for insulting king gets bail, others denied

BANGKOK: A Thai court on Thursday granted bail to student protest leader Panusaya "Rung" Rithijirawattanakul, who has spent eight weeks in detention on charges of insulting the country's king, even as six fellow leaders remain in jail. Bail conditions require Panusaya, 22, to stay in Thailand, attend court sessions when summoned and refrain from offending the monarchy. Krisadang Nutcharat, one of her lawyers, told Reuters. Panusaya has been on hunger strike during her detention along with another jailed protest leader, Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak, 22, who was hospitalised last week.

(AGENCIES)

Support grows for intellectual property waiver on virus vaccines; snags remain

Attention is now turning to richer nations, notably in the European Union—and France was the first to voice its support.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
GENEVA, MAY 6

France joined the United States on Thursday in supporting an easing of patent and other protections on Covid-19 vaccines that could help poorer countries get more doses and speed the end of the pandemic. While the backing from two countries with major drug makers is important, many obstacles remain.

The move to support waiving intellectual property protections on vaccines under World Trade Organization rules marked a dramatic shift for the United States—and drew cheers from activists, complaints from Big Pharma, and a lot of questions about what comes next. Washington had previously lined up with many other developed nations opposed to the idea floated by India and South Africa in October.

Attention is now turning to those richer nations, notably in the European Union—and France was the first to voice its support. "I completely favor this opening up of the intellectual property," French President Emmanuel Macron said Thursday on a visit to a vaccine center.

But he also expressed doubt—as the pharmaceutical companies have—that the measure would be the panacea some hope. Even if patents are waived, he said, drug makers in places like Africa currently are not equipped to make Covid-19 vaccines—so donations of doses should be prioritized instead.

Another key hurdle remains: Any single country could block a decision at the WTO, a Geneva-based trade body of 164 member states, to agree to a waiver.

The EU Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said the 27-nation bloc was ready to talk about the US proposal—but cagily remained noncommittal for now.

"We are ready to discuss how the US proposal for waiver on intellectual property protection for Covid vaccines could help" end the crisis, she said in a video address. "In the short run, however, we call upon all vaccine producing countries to allow exports and to avoid measures that disrupt supply chains."



In this April 8 photo, a nurse fills a syringe with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in New York.

That echoed the position of the global pharmaceutical industry, which insists a faster solution would be for rich countries that have vaccine stockpiles to start sharing them with poorer ones.

Another key hurdle: Any single country could block decision at the WTO to agree to a waiver.

The industry insists that production of coronavirus vaccines is complicated and can't be ramped up by easing intellectual property protections. Instead, it insists that reducing bottlenecks in supply chains and a scarcity of ingredients that go into vaccines are the more pressing issues for now.

"A waiver is the simple but the wrong answer to what is a complex problem," said the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations. "Waiving patents of COVID-19 vaccines will not increase production nor

provide practical solutions needed to battle this global health crisis."

The industry also says an IP waiver will do more harm than good in the long run by reducing the incentives that push innovators to make tremendous leaps, as they did with the vaccines that have been churned out in a blistering, unprecedented speed to help fight Covid-19.

Supporters say a waiver would be important because it would allow manufacturers around the world to get access to the recipes for making the life-saving vaccines as well as the ingredients. They point to unused capacity—factories that could churn out vaccines but can't because of the intellectual property protections.

Some critics say developing countries have been seeking to water down those protections for years—long before the pandemic—and say it's not clear that there are any manufacturers standing by that are ready or able to produce Covid-19 vaccines. They note that the vaccines currently on the market can be incredibly difficult to make, and the know-how is a bigger obstacle to ramping up manufacturing.

Many experts and advocacy groups say any such waiver would need to be followed up by transferring the required technology to developing

countries, too.

Intellectual property expert Shyam Balganes, a professor at Columbia Law School, said a waiver would remove "a lot of the bureaucracy" around WTO rules, but it would only go so far because of other bottlenecks in the manufacturing and distribution of vaccines.

In closed-door WTO talks last month, the EU, Britain and Switzerland said pending or undermining IP rights was a "no-go" because those rights helped contribute to expanding production of Covid-19 vaccines, according to a Geneva trade official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Norway's Foreign Minister, Ine Eriksen Soeride, last month warned against "this type of experimental trade policy" during the pandemic when "we should rather be concerned with practical solutions that give us more vaccines."

After the Biden announcement, Eve Geddie, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office, called on Europe now to "put everyone's health and human rights before private profit" and add its support to the waiver idea.

"Today, Europe wakes up to a new political reality that its position on hoarding the rights to make Covid-19 vaccines is now untenable," she said.

She was but one voice among civil society, progressive groups and international institutions that were euphoric about the Biden administration's stance, which marks a nearly complete reversal in US policy under the Trump administration that was critical of both the WTO and the World Health Organization.

"A waiver of patents for #COVID19 vaccines & medicines could change the game for Africa, unlocking millions more vaccine doses & saving countless lives. We commend the leadership shown by South Africa, India & the United States, & urge others to back them," WHO Africa chief Matshidiso Moeti tweeted.

More than 20 million vaccine doses have been administered across the African continent, which counts some 1.3 billion people.

Blinken in Ukraine reaffirms US support amid Russia tensions

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KYIV, MAY 6

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with top Ukrainian officials in Kyiv on Thursday and reaffirmed Washington's support for the country in the wake of heightened tensions with Russia, fuelled by its recent troop buildup near the Ukraine border.

The top American diplomat met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and reiterated the US's commitment to Ukraine's "sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence," while also underscoring the importance of Ukraine's efforts to tackle widespread corruption and carry out reforms.

"Ukraine is facing two challenges: aggression from outside, coming from Russia, and in effect aggression from within, coming from corruption, oligarchs and others who are putting their interests ahead of those of the Ukrainian people," Blinken told a news conference after his meeting with Zelenskyy.

By visiting so early in his tenure, before any trip to Russia, Blinken signaled that Ukraine is a high foreign-policy priority for President Joe Biden's administration. His visit was highly anticipated in Ukraine, with hopes for increased military aid and strong support for NATO membership being voiced on the frontlines of the battle against Russia-backed separatists in the east and in the halls of government in Kyiv.

Ukraine has seen an increase in hostilities in the east in recent months. Ukraine's military says 34 of its soldiers have been killed by rebel attacks this year, a significant upswing from the quiet months of the latter part of 2020. Russia, which claims its soldiers are not on the ground in eastern Ukraine, fuelled the tensions further this year by massing troops and conducting large-scale military exercises near the border with Ukraine.

Zelenskyy has made it clear that he wants significant action—"a clear signal about the European and Euro-Atlantic prospect," as he said on Twitter on Monday, referring to Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO and the European Union.

Abducted Nigerian college students freed

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KANO (NIGERIA), MAY 6

Nearly 30 abducted Nigerian college students have been freed, government officials said, two months after heavily armed gunmen kidnapped them in the north of the country.

The abduction of the students from a college of forestry mechanisation in Kaduna state in March was one of a series of mass kidnappings to hit schools and universities in Nigeria since late last year.

Ten of the 39 students initially kidnapped were found by security forces in the weeks following the attack. But the whereabouts of the remaining 29 had been uncertain.

"The Kaduna State Police Command has reported to the Kaduna State Government, the release of the remaining students of the Federal College of Forestry Mechanization," local state security official Samuel Aruwan said in a statement.

The statement did not give any details about how the students were released or their condition.

President Muhammadu Buhari welcomed the students' release, and called for kidnappers to free other abducted victims.

"We are happy they have been released," the president said in a statement. "We express our deep appreciation to all the actors who contributed one way or the other to this happy outcome."

During the March attack in Kaduna, the military managed to rescue 180 other students on the outskirts of the state capital, Kaduna city, after a firefight with the gunmen.

Heavily armed criminal gangs have become an increasing security threat in northwest and central Nigeria, pillaging villages, raiding cattle and kidnapping for ransom.

Recently they have turned their focus to rural schools and universities, where they kidnap students or schoolchildren.

Kidnap victims are usually released shortly after during negotiations with local authorities, though state officials always deny that any ransom payments are made.

Mass kidnappings in the northwest are complicating challenges facing Buhari's security forces, who are also battling a more than decade-long Islamist insurgency in the northeast.

Covid-19 spreading in rural India; record rises in infections, deaths

REUTERS
NEW DELHI, MAY 6

Hopes that India's deadly second wave of Covid-19 was about to peak were swept away on Thursday as it posted record daily infections and deaths and as the virus spread from cities to villages across the world's second-most populous nation.

India reported a record 412,262 new Covid-19 cases in the past 24 hours and a record 3,980 deaths. Covid-19 infections have now surged past 21 million, with a total death toll of 230,168, health ministry data show.

Government modelling had forecast a peak in second wave infections by Wednesday.

"This temporarily halts speculations of a peak," Rijo M John, a professor at the Indian Institute of Management in the southern state of Kerala, said on Twitter.

With hospitals scrambling for beds and oxygen in response to the surge in infections, the World Health Organization said in a weekly report that India accounted for nearly half the coronavirus cases reported worldwide last week and a quarter of the deaths.

India has 3.45 million active cases. Medical experts say India's actual figures could be five to 10 times the official tallies. India's Covid-19 crisis has been most acute in the capital, New Delhi, among other cities, but in rural areas—home to nearly 70 percent of India's 1.3 billion people—limited public healthcare is posing more challenges.

"The situation has become dangerous in villages," said Suresh Kumar, a field coordinator with Manav Sansadhan Evam Mahila Vikas Sansthan, a human rights charity. In some villages where the charity works in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh—home to about 200 million people—"there are deaths in almost every second house", he said.

"People are scared and huddled in their homes with fever and cough. The symptoms are all of Covid-19, but with no information available many think it is seasonal flu." In India's Goa state, a hugely popular tourist destination on the western coast, has the highest rate of Covid-19 infections in the country, with up to one in every two people testing positive in recent weeks, government officials said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been widely criticised for not acting sooner to suppress the second wave, after religious festivals and political rallies drew tens of thousands of people in recent weeks and became "super spreader" events. The surge in infections has also coincided with a dramatic drop in

vaccinations because of supply and delivery problems, despite India being a major vaccine producer.

Several states have imposed various levels of social restrictions to try and stem infections, but the federal government has refused to impose a national lockdown.

India's southern state of Kerala, which has 376,004 active cases, announced it will impose nine days of curbs on movement from Saturday.

In the capital Delhi, fewer than 20 of more than 5,000 Covid-19 intensive care beds are free at any one time.

Student doctors like Rohan Aggarwal, 26, recruited to fight the second wave, are being forced to make life and death decisions.

His Holy Family Hospital in Delhi normally has a capacity for 275 adults, but is currently caring for 385.

"Who to be saved, who not to be saved should be decided by God," Aggarwal told Reuters during a grim overnight shift.

"We are not made for that—we are just humans. But at this point in time, we are being made to do this."



Drivers stand near auto rickshaw ambulances, prepared to transfer people suffering from the disease and their relatives for free, in New Delhi.

In the office of a Hindu crematorium in Delhi, the floor and shelves are overflowing with earthen pots, plastic packets and steel containers filled

with the ashes of the city's many Covid-19 victims who have been cremated.

Practising Hindus collect the ashes

On the ground and afar, diaspora boosts the virus fight

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK, MAY 6

India's large diaspora—long a boon to India's economy—is tapping its wealth, political clout and expertise to help its home country combat the catastrophic coronavirus surge that has left people to die outside overwhelmed hospitals.

Around the world, people of Indian descent are donating money, personally delivering desperately needed oxygen equipment and setting up telehealth consultations and information sessions in hopes of beating back the outbreak.

Two humanitarian groups in the US led by people of Indian background raised more than \$25 million in recent days to help the teetering health care system. Indian American doctors, hotel owners and other entrepreneurs, some responding to requests for help from Indian leaders, have pledged or donated millions more.

In Britain, volunteers at three Hindu temples raised more than 600,000 pounds last weekend by racking up 20,127 kilometres on stationary bikes, or roughly three times the distance from London to New Delhi. And in Canada, Sikhs have donated between \$700 and \$2,000 to each of dozens of people in need of costly

oxygen cylinders.

The magnitude of the response reflects the deep pockets of many people in the overseas Indian community, as well as their deep ties to India, which have fuelled similar efforts to help the country in the past.

"I feel that this crisis has kind of sparked or triggered a fresh and new emotional affiliation to India," said Nishant Pandey, CEO of the American India Foundation. The group launched a fundraising drive on April 24 that raked in roughly \$20 million in a week, much of it from the Indian diaspora. The money will be used in part to expand hospital capacity and oxygen production in India.

Hemant Patel, a hotel developer from Miami, Patel travelled to his hometown of Navsari in the state of Gujarat in March to visit his mother after getting vaccinated and is now serving as a liaison between local hospitals and Indians in the US.

He has also donated eight oxygen machines—holding a religious ceremony to bless the first one—and paid to have a van outfitted with a stretcher and oxygen to serve Covid-19 patients. "God has put me in the right place at the right time," he said.

Some members of the overseas Indian community have appended harsh words to their support efforts,

accusing the Indian government of botching the fight against the virus.

Others, especially medical professionals, wish they could go to India but face travel restrictions there and new ones in the US, Britain and Canada.

Sunil Tolani, CEO of a hotel and real estate company in California, said he donated \$300,000 to help people in India during the surge and lobbied the Biden administration to step up its support. Other prominent Indian Americans have also pressed the White House for action.

"If India would have put their act together, they wouldn't need this help in the first place," Tolani said, accusing the government there of "total complacency and incompetence."

The surge in infections since February has been blamed on more contagious variants of the virus as well as government decisions to allow huge crowds to gather for Hindu religious festivals and political rallies.

A spokesman for the Indian government, Prakash Javadekar, said it is ramping up hospital capacity and supplies of oxygen and drugs but is facing a "once-in-a-century crisis."

The US last week began delivering treatments, rapid virus tests and oxygen along with materials needed for India to boost production of Covid-19

of the dead a few days after the funeral for immersion in a river or sea, one of the many rituals that they believe lead to salvation of the soul.

"Our lockers are full. We cannot store any more ashes. We used to get around 40 Covid-19 bodies a day. We are now telling relatives to take the ashes with them on the same day," Pankaj Sharma, a manager at the crematorium told Reuters.

While India is the world's biggest vaccine maker, it is struggling to produce enough product for the surge in infections. Its two current vaccine producers will take two months or more to boost total monthly output from the current 70 million to 80 million doses.

The country's top scientific adviser has warned of a possible third wave of infections.

"Phase 3 is inevitable, given the high levels of circulating virus," the government's principal scientific adviser, K VijayRaghavan told a news briefing on Wednesday.

"But it is not clear on what time scale this phase 3 will occur... We should prepare for new waves."

Oloumou hat-trick sends Kathmandu into playoff

The Cameroonian scored the first hat-trick of the tournament as Bal Gopal Maharjan's side edge Biratnagar 5-4 in a high scoring thriller.



Kathmandu Rayzrs' Messouke E Oloumou (third right) celebrates with his teammates after scoring a goal against Biratnagar City during their Nepal Super League match at the Dasharath Stadium on Thursday.

SPORTS BUREAU

Cameroonian winger Messouke E Oloumou scored the first Nepal Super League hat-trick as Kathmandu Rayzrs overcame a two-goal deficit to edge Biratnagar City 5-4 in a high scoring thriller and confirmed playoff spot in the first ever franchise football tournament of the country on Thursday.

Oloumou struck first two goals in the space of two minutes to level the scores 2-2 and added third after the break to join Dhangadhi FC's Oladipo Olawale Afeez in the list of highest scorers with four goals under his belt. Stephen Binong and Tshiring Gurung added other goals for former national coach Bal Gopal Maharjan-led Kathmandu at the Dasharath Stadium.

Spanish forward Pedro Javier Manzi Cruz scored in either half for Biratnagar taking his tally to four goals while captain Ranjit Dhimal and Adelaja Oluwawunmi were on targets for Biratnagar.

The outcome puts Kathmandu level on 10 points with leaders Dhangadhi but the former stay second on the goal difference, with the final round matches yet to play before the playoffs. They became the second team after Dhangadhi to confirm playoff berth. Biratnagar dropped one spot to third with seven points and they must beat Lalitpur City FC, who earlier edged Butwal Lumbini FC 1-0, in the final league match to advance.

"The players have been improving day by day and we were successful in executing our plans of winning the game," said Kathmandu coach Maharjan, whose side had scored just two goals in the previous four matches. He added that it was the best game of the tournament but criticised the referee decision. Maharjan claimed that the

second goal his side conceded was a clear offside and one of the team officials was sent off after he protested the referee decision.

Biratnagar looked a better side in the early stage and took an early sixth-minute lead as Nigerian forward Adelaja tactfully flicked skipper Ranjit Dhimal's left flank strike to send the ball at the back of net through the legs of custodian Bikesh Kuthu.

In the 33rd, forward Cruz doubled the advantage when he collected Santosh Tamang's through pass and beat goalie Kuthu before firing at the open net. But Kathmandu hit three goals in quick succession. Oloumou cut the deficit in the 35th with a powerful low drive and equalised a minute later after his left flank strike at the far post slipped just below the crossbar.

Kathmandu made the score 3-2 in 41st when Binong's curling freekick struck the far post after diminutive goalie Kishor Giri failed to meet the ball despite attempting to punch it. Biratnagar conceded all three before the break from the same direction in a similar angle.

In the 52nd Biratnagar wasted a golden chance to equalise when Ashok Thapa failed to beat goalie in a one-on-one situation in a short pass set by Cruz. Oloumou completed his hat-trick in the 68th with his individual display of brilliance as he beat two defenders and unleashed a powerful strike from a tight angle inside the six-yard box. The ball found the net after smashing upright.

In the 71st goalie Kuthu dropped Ranjit Dhimal long freekick inside the area but Kathmandu defenders cleared the ball. Two minutes later, Kathmandu's Binong's shot from the crowded box in a corner delivery rattled the crossbar.

Captain Ranjit Dhimal made it 3-4 for

NEPAL SUPER LEAGUE TABLE

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Dhangadhi	5	3	1	1	8	4	10
Kathmandu	5	3	1	1	7	7	10
Biratnagar	5	2	1	2	11	8	7
Lalitpur	5	1	3	1	3	3	6
Butwal Lumbini	5	1	2	2	6	6	5
Pokhara	5	1	2	2	1	3	5
Chitwan	4	0	2	2	3	8	2

Biratnagar in the 79th as his scorcher from the arch of the area beat goalie Bikesh Kuthu following a deflection at the pole. Biratnagar forward Chhiring Gurung restored two-goal lead in a counter attack in the 83rd. He sprinted the ball through four defenders from the centre area and played to Messouke before the Cameroonian set him up inside the box. Gurung then beat goalie Giri with a low strike to get on the scoresheet.

In the last minute of the four minutes injury time, Cruz scored his second after he smashed a ball chest-controlled by Adelaja inside the area in Dhimal's long pass.

Biratnagar's Indian coach Yan Law lamented defensive and goalkeeping lapses for the defeat. "We came up with good performance and we don't have problem in scoring goal but defensive and goalkeeping errors proved costly," said Law, who substituted defender Saroj Dahal, midfielder Nir Kumar Rai in the first half and defender Bikram Dhimal at the start of second half due to injuries.

Lalitpur reignite playoff hopes

A first-half goal from Nurlan Novruzov Zahid brought Lalitpur City FC back into

life as they registered their first win defeating Butwal Lumbini FC 1-0 to keep their playoff hopes alive in the day's early kickoff.

A match after removing their coach Pradip Humagain and promoting his assistant Raju Tamang at the helm, Lalitpur started with an offensive approach and were rewarded with a goal as early as the fifth minute.

Azerbaijan midfielder Zahid made a free header in a corner delivered by Kamal Shrestha at the crowded area after Niraj Basnet played an acrobatic shot and captain Anjan Bista headed to set the momentum for the goal.

The victory lifted Lalitpur to fourth with six points, potentially enabling them to secure a playoff berth through a win in their last fixture against Biratnagar City FC. Only the top four teams at the completion of the league will qualify for the playoffs. With just one victory, Butwal Lumbini FC fell one spot to fifth with five points. They must win their last match and pray for a favourable outcome in other matches to remain in contention for playoffs.

Lalitpur came closer to scoring during the half-hour mark but captain Bista's header in Zahid's pass went wide. Croatian forward Vilim Posinkovic wasted yet another scoring opportunity two minutes later as he ended up smashing wide from the area in Bista's pass.

Lalitpur thought that they doubled the advantage in the first-half stoppage time but skipper Anjan Bista's goal was ruled offside. Lalitpur came close to scoring in the fading moments but forward Dona Thapa's close range scorcher was saved by a diving goalie Bishal Shrestha.

Tuchel transformation takes Chelsea to brink of European glory

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE LONDON, MAY 6

Sacked by Paris Saint-Germain on Christmas Eve, Thomas Tuchel is going back to the Champions League final for a second consecutive season after his rejuvenated Chelsea cruised past Real Madrid in the last four.

Tuchel said he felt like he had found "the best present still under the tree" when Chelsea came calling in January after sacking their all-time top goalscorer Frank Lampard. The Blues' billionaire owner Roman Abramovich did not allow sentiment to get in the way of making the tough call when Lampard failed to get the best out of a £220 million (\$305 million) spending spree on new players last summer.

That investment has come good under Tuchel as Chelsea outclassed the might of Madrid in a 2-0 win on Wednesday to set up an all-English final in Istanbul on May 29 against Manchester City.

City's 4-1 aggregate win over PSG in the other semi-final means Tuchel won't get the chance for revenge. But his reputation as one of Europe's top coaches has been quickly restored, less than four months into his new role in west London.

Chelsea have lost just two of his 24 games in charge to also move into pole position to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top-four finish in the Premier League should they fail to upset City's quest for a treble.

"When we started with the manager we were ninth in the league and now we reach everything - on the road to the top four, we can win the Champions League and the FA Cup," said Timo Werner, who opened the scoring at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday. "Our team is incredible. We are young, but not stupid to make easy mistakes."

The turnaround in the Blues' season has been built on a solid foundation. For the 18th time under Tuchel, Chelsea kept a clean sheet with Madrid completely nullified bar one moment of magic from Karim Benzema midway through the first half that drew a fine save from Edouard Mendy.

One of tasks awaiting Tuchel at the turn of the year was to get the best out of compatriots Werner and Kai Havertz. Even under new management, the German international duo have still rarely shown the form that made them two of the Bundesliga's hottest properties.

But on a night Madrid's old guard—the staple of four Champions League wins—were swept aside with ease, the new pieces of Chelsea's overhaul all clicked into place. After just three goals in 38 games for club and country, Werner could have been discouraged when for once a clinical finish from Ben Chilwell's cross was ruled out for offside.

Instead, Havertz's ingenuity provided Werner with another chance he could not miss as he headed into an unguarded net after his teammate's lob over Thibaut Courtois came back off the bar.

As a series of Chelsea chances came and went after half-time, Real remained just a goal behind in the tie until five minutes from time. But a side that made stirring late comebacks a feature of four Champions League wins in five seasons between 2014 and 2018 this time had no response to Chelsea's greater energy and enthusiasm.

For all the money spent by Abramovich, nobody displayed those qualities more than a player developed by the club's own academy, Mason Mount. Handed his breakthrough in the first team by Lampard, it was Mount that finally landed the knockout blow to send his new manager back to the Champions League final.

Tuchel missed out on the big prize in August as his PSG side were defeated 1-0 by Bayern Munich. But he has a second chance when he faces one of his mentors, City boss Pep Guardiola, in Istanbul later this month.

"To have this passion as a profession, I'm more than grateful," said Tuchel. "To do it on this level, to coach a team like this and to reach the final for a second time, I'm very thankful."

HOROSCOPE

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

You're coming out of hiding today, Aries. After spending a few private days holed up in solitude, you're ready to re-enter the world. The moon careens into your sign, helping you focus on your personal needs and bring a fresh burst of energy.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) ***

You can't help but think about your place in the larger scheme of things, Cancer. It's an ideal day to push ahead with your personal projects and ambitions, as Luna's supportive link with expressive Mercury offers emotional balance and quick thinking.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) ***

Relationship matters are absorbing your attention today, Libra. The moon floats through excitable Aries, helping you tune into the undercurrent of your partnership story. It's the right moment to face an important conversation.

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

It's one of those days where you'd rather keep to yourself, Capricorn. The moon floats into individualistic Aries in the first part of the day, helping you meaningfully reconnect with your living environment. Stay low key, order food in, and unwind in your space.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) ***

Your social barometer is beginning to run low today, Taurus. The moon slides into individualistic Aries at the start of the day, signaling a strong need to pull away from the crowd to focus on your need for simplicity, rest, and recuperation.

LEO (July 23-August 22) ***

Friday's skies welcomingly hold little action in store, Leo. The moon cruises into excitable Aries in the first half of the day, bringing an energetic and uplifted mood to the day. It is an ideal day for collaborative efforts or having important conversations.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) ***

You've been tuned out from your workload in recent days, Scorpio. That's because it's been important for you to reconnect with things that bring you joy. Now that you've had some downtime, you're ready to kick things into high gear and tackle your workload.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) ***

You're a hot commodity under Friday's skies, Aquarius. Today you will have a whirlwind of incoming messages to respond to as well as conversations to have. If you have personal projects that need flair and stamina—today's your day to tackle them.

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

Get out and reconnect with your crew today, Gemini. The moon cruises into playful Aries in the first half of the day, encouraging you to put the brakes on your tireless career grind and to reach out to the people who matter to you.

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

You need some time away from the world today, Virgo. The moon dives into fiery Aries, directing your awareness towards any unspoken tensions taking place in the intimacy department. It's an ideal day to confide in someone close to you.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) ***

You're feeling like yourself again with the arrival of Friday's skies, Sagittarius. The moon roams through hyperactive Aries, propelling you to seek out a creative avenue for self-expression. Today aim your focus at personal projects that require mental stamina.

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

Spend some time overlooking your resources today, Pisces. The moon slips into eager Aries today, directing your immediate focus towards your talents and the reality of your finances. Friday's skies make it easy for you to hop into a productive mindset.

CROSSWORD

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED



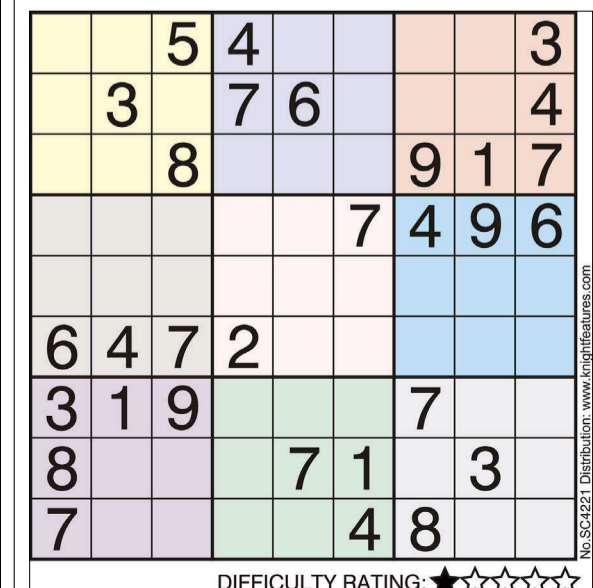
- 1 Fast transports
- 2 Where hackles rise
- 3 Moby Dick foe
- 4 Lawyer Wyatt
- 5 Sincere
- 6 Feudal estate
- 7 Goldfish abode
- 8 Egg yolk
- 9 Lawless of "Xena"
- 10 Soap opera
- 11 Gael republic
- 12 Huge amount
- 13 Mr. Spock's father
- 14 ISU location garden
- 15 Box a bit
- 16 Himalayan legend
- 17 Smudge
- 18 Former Denver QB
- 19 Burrito morsels
- 20 Ticked off
- 21 Latch onto
- 22 Asian capital
- 23 Making a bow
- 24 Bundle of grain
- 25 Traitor
- 26 Marinated Japanese dish
- 27 Sly glance
- 28 Type of socks
- 29 Motel staffers
- 30 Virginia caverns
- 31 Wingless insects
- 32 Brenner Pass locale
- 33 One-liner
- 34 Pac-12 team
- 35 Adult female horse
- 36 Flaccid
- 37 Hydrox rival
- 38 Compass reading
- 39 Bumped into

- 1 Boos and hiss
- 2 Gutter locale
- 3 Tijuana trio
- 4 Bit of holly
- 5 Journalist's milieu
- 6 Yes, to Rob Roy
- 7 Crusty desserts
- 8 Drew to a close
- 9 Front
- 10 Merry sound (hyph.)
- 11 The Bard's river
- 12 Emcee — Parks
- 13 Pita sandwiches
- 14 Almost, in verse
- 15 Els' game
- 16 Melody's words
- 17 Flying stingers

SUDOKU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

In the high spirits of doing what you love

Ulrich von Schroeder, a Swiss art historian, first came to Nepal in 1965 as a hippy trying to find his life's purpose and fell in love with Nepal's stone sculptures. His most recent books are a tribute to them.

SRIZU BAJRACHARYA
KATHMANDU

When Ulrich von Schroeder looks at his own books—his eyes glint with joy and his sincerity towards his work and love for documentation of sculptures is clearly visible.

On a recent warm, sunny afternoon, Schroeder, who was lodged at Kathmandu Guest House, turns the pages of 'Nepalese Stone Sculptures-Volume 2- Buddhist', one of his new books, to show the documentation he has done over the decade. The Swiss art historian looked like a lover reading his own love letter in relish that his lover, perhaps his readers, will feel what he feels.

Schroeder came to Nepal at the invitation of the Museum of Nepali Art, which is part of the Kathmandu Guest House.

He turns the pages gently and keenly. "I love what I do. I do nothing else but this. For me, this is not work, this is life. Documenting sculptures is my secret to happiness," says Schroeder.

When he turns the pages of 'Nepalese Stone Sculptures-Volume 2- Buddhist' to show one of his favourite images—an image of Avalokiteshvara Padmapani, the embodiment of Buddhist compassion—he shudders expressing the beauty of the sculpture.

"Look at the tones of the sculpture—it's just beautiful, isn't it? It's hard to describe in words what I feel. All I can say is I get so excited and happy from within," he says, smiling.

Schroeder understands that his way of looking at sculptures is different from how a local would look at the sculptures. To him, the deities are artistic in ineffable ways.

"To the locals, this is their 'bhagawan', god. They're not looking at it as art, creation or to understand its history. They look at them with reverence—as something that belongs to them. But how I look at sculptures is different. For me, it's important to know more. I look at the artistic aspect of sculptures—their details, iconography and stylistics," he says.

His most recent book Nepalese Stone Sculptures is divided into two volumes: Hindu and Buddhist. Together, the two volumes cover about 3,000 holy images of Kathmandu Valley with an additional 15,000 digital pictures stored on the SD card at the end of Volume two.

The books contain details of the sculptures' stylistics, iconography, material-used, size, inscriptions, their timeline and location. They also give references to the literature of the images' studies, making them handy and invaluable books for many future students and



It was in 1965 when Ulrich von Schroeder first came to Nepal. He has since visited Nepal more than 50 times.

researchers of Nepali culture and heritage.

"He has created an enormous inventory that no one will be able to beat—the quality and the standard of the book is incomparable," says Sunil Dongol, the photographer whose photographs of sculptures are also part of the books. "But it's also sad that our Department of Archeology couldn't come up with the kind of collection he has brought together in these years. After all, it is their work that Schroeder has done so beautifully and giving-ly."

Ram Bahadur Kunwar, the spokesperson of the Department of Archeology, says that his organisation has also compiled many photographs of different sculptures located in different neighbourhoods of Kathmandu Valley.

"It's just that the public doesn't know much about this. But we do have such collections with us. Regardless, works of documentations of any kind are important for further research studies, and Schroeder's work should be useful to many even though I haven't really had the chance to go through his work yet," says Kunwar, over the phone to the Post.

Schroeder's documentation of Nepali stone sculptures however is like no other and perhaps no one else will have to make a feat like

this ever again as the book covers almost everything that needs to be documented on Nepali stone sculptures. The books are also ten times bigger than the biggest books on Nepali stone sculptures.

What's also interesting to know is that the sculpture Laxmi Narayan of Patan, which was recently repatriated from the Dallas Museum of Art, is also part of his book. The book also features many other deities that have been stolen from the country.

In a way, Schroeder has now ensured the safety of the deities in the Valley—making his work significant and also troublesome to those who are in the trade of selling and collecting stolen deities.

"If you want to know about Nepali stone sculptures, you will need this book, and if you need any pictures, you have it all here," says a confident Schroeder. "For the next few decades, I don't think anyone will think of making an exhaustive book on Nepali stone sculptures because such a book already exists now. The documentation is a testimony of where the sculptures belong and the information in the books provide the evidence. Regardless of where the sculptures featured in the books are today, they are at least documented. And as



The image of Avalokiteshvara Padmapani in 'Nepalese Stone Sculptures-Volume 2- Buddhist' is one of Schroeder's favourite images.

long as they are documented, we will know where they belong."

Perhaps, that is why the book, priced at \$750, is expensive. But given the significance of the book's content, the price is maybe, even acceptable.

Schroeder considers his documentation a gift to Nepal that will with time become more meaningful and significant. He has gifted the two volumes to many institutions—the Lumbini Buddhist University, which is the institution that helped import the books into the country; Tribhuvan University; National Archives; the DoA; and many people who supported his endeavour.

He dedicates his book to Sukra Sagar Shrestha, the archaeologist, scholar and cultural expert who dedicated his life to the study of Nepal's archaeology.

"I don't exactly remember when I met him but I do remember he was a pivotal person who really supported me in my journey to document the sculptures in the Valley. You see I was not allowed to enter many temples, people would look at me sternly and chase me away," he says. "It was also Sukra Sagar Shrestha who

introduced me to Sunil (the photographer). Sunil wanted to take pictures of sculptures and record them by uploading them on the web. Our goals were common and we went on to collaborate."

Schroeder first came to Kathmandu as a hippy in 1965, and little did he know that the city would inspire him to spend his life documenting sculptures around the world. In 1965 he was just another eccentric foreigner who rejected the materialism of the world. That year, he went around the Valley on a bicycle with his Bronica 6*6 film camera—capturing the cultural settings of the valley and the deities the locals revered. He has since visited Nepal more than 50 times.

"I was looking for something that would give my life a purpose. As hippies, we had little money with us, and we slept wherever we could. But now documentation has become my life's purpose," he says.

Schroeder describes himself as a visually-oriented person who fell in love with sculptures as he travelled from India to Nepal and many Asian countries.

"The fascination was beyond infatuation—it was deep and magnetic," he says.

As an art historian, Schroeder has also helped build the collection of Berti Aschmann in Zurich's Museum Rietberg, Tibet Museum of the Alain Bordier Foundation along with other museums. He has also published many books like Indo-Tibetan Bronzes, Buddhist Sculptures in Tibet, Empowered Masters: Tibetan Wall Paintings of Mahasiddhas at Gyantse, 108 Buddhist Statues in Tibet, Buddhist Sculptures of Sri Lanka, etc.

And at 78, he still plans on bringing more books to people. At present, he is working on two projects—one on Chöying Dorje, the tenth Karmapa of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, and another one on Nepali copper images.

Nothing, he says, makes him happier than getting to work on his books and discovering images.

"I think it's important that we find what we love to do. There are many like me. It's not an uncommon story. So many people who love what they do have done wonders in their fields," he says. "I have been able to do what I do for such a long time because I love doing what I do."

For all the immeasurable contribution that Schroeder has made to Nepal's archaeological landscape, he says that he expects nothing out of his works.

"I just think it's extremely crucial to document things," he says. "If there's no documentation, we will never know the roots of things. What I do is document the past for the future."

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The raging coronavirus pandemic and the prohibitory orders issued to contain its spread have left people confined to their homes. During these trying times, many of us with medical concerns and emergencies are unable to visit hospitals, many of which are overwhelmed with Covid-19 patients. And since not everyone has direct access to doctors, we have taken an initiative to provide professional medical counselling to those in need. We have assembled a roster of health specialists to answer your medical queries. Every day at 5pm on eKantipur Facebook page, we will have one doctor LIVE to address your medical concerns.

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