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A woman, along with her son and daughter, breaks down while receiving the body of her husband that arrived from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu on Saturday. A Nepal Airlines plane had repatriated 24 bodies and the mortal remains of three migrant workers from the East Asian country after international flights resumed following months of restrictions owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

INSIDE

Unregulated cross-border movement increases risk of Covid-19 in Morang

MORANG: Hordes of people are seen crossing the Nepal-India border in Morang through porous border points without undergoing any security check ups. The people do not follow even the most basic health security protocols, leaving health workers worried about the possible risk of coronavirus infection. The main bor der point in Biratnagar, which was sealed in March last year to contain the spread of the coronavirus, is still closed. "Security personnel deployed at the border do not stop people from crossing the border. They take bribes from local traders and let them

With Congress leading government, its general convention becomes uncertain

Dispute over party membership, focus on governance, pandemic, natural calamities and Deuba's desire to lead party for another term could mean it will be postponed.



Deal to buy 6 million vaccine doses from China likely soon, officials say

The deal, like the earlier one with a state-backed company, will be under a non-disclosure agreement. The 1.6 million AstraZeneca doses from Japan are due to arrive in a week.

ARJUN POUDEL KATHMANDU, JULY 24

As Nepal's vaccination campaign gathers pace, the government is preparing to sign a deal to purchase an additional 6 million doses of Vero Cell vaccine from China.

Multiple officials the Post talked to confirmed that the government will reach a deal shortly with the Chinese state-backed pharmaceutical giant Sinopharm that manufactures the Covid-19 vaccine.

"We are very close to a deal to procure an additional 6 million doses of vaccine from China," a senior official at the Health Ministry told the Post, asking not to be named.

Earlier in June, the government purchased 4 million doses of the vaccine under a non-disclosure agreement with the Chinese company and they are being delivered.

Nepal has so far received the delivery of 1.6 million doses and the remaining shots are likely to be flown in from Beijing over the next few days.

The first consignment of the vaccine was delivered on July 9 and the second consignment on July 22. China, which has already provided 1.8 million doses of BBIBP-CorV vaccines produced by Sinopharm under grant assistance, has announced that it will provide an additional 1.6 million doses.

"We have requested the vaccine manufacturer to give additional discounts, as we are procuring more doses from them," Dr Tara Nath Pokhrel, director at the Family Welfare Division under the Department of Health Services, told the Post.

"As the government is committed to inoculating the maximum number of people at the earliest, a deal to procure additional doses of the Vero Cell vaccine is likely to be reached soon."

The Health Ministry said that the new deal to procure 6 million doses will also be under a non-disclosure agreement, meaning that the price per dose will not be revealed, as per the condition of the Chinese vaccine manufacturing company.

Besides deliveries from China, officials are also expecting 1.6 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine to arrive from Japan through the COVAX facility, the UN-backed international vaccine sharing scheme, within a week.

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import goods through illegal border points," claimed Mohammad Aslam of Biratnagar-17. According to him, thousands of people cross the border through Islampur and Materuwa each day. (Details on Pg 2)

Government promotes police officer involved in extrajudicial killings

KATHMANDU: The National Human **Rights Commission on October 16 last** year recommended action against five police officials after its probe found their involvement in an extraiudicial killing. An expert team formed by the commission, after two years of investigation, had found that a police team led by Deputy Superintendent Rugam Bahadur Kunwar arrested Gopal Tamang, 23, and Ajay Tamang, 24, from Nuwakot for their alleged involvement in an abduction case and shot them dead at Doleshwor jungle in Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur on August 6 2018 The team had claimed that the two men were killed in retaliation when they tried to attack the personnel searching for Nishan Khadka-an 11-year-old boy who was abducted from Kandaghari. The commission had asked the government to book Kunwar along with Subinspectors Dipendra Chanda Prashnna Malla and Ranjit Tamang and Assistant Sub-inspector Rajan Khadka, as the investigation showed they had killed the alleged abductors after arrest and attempted to cover up the incident. (Details on Pg 3)

Digital payments drop as lockdown restrictions eased

KATHMANDU: Digital payments dropped by 12 percent in the 11th month of the last fiscal year ended mid-July, right after stay-home orders were relaxed allowing people greater freedom of movement, Nepal Rastra Bank said. According to industry insiders, fewer people made payments electronically during the period mid-May to mid-June as they could go out and pay cash compared to when they had to stay indoors, forcing them to make greater use of mobile and internet banking, mobile wallet, Connect IPS and other online platforms.



POST FILE PHOTO

Ward level conventions of Nepali Congress, scheduled for Wednesday, have been postponed.

ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, JULY 24

The 14th General Convention of the Nepali Congress, already delayed by six months, is likely to be further pushed back after the party decided on Saturday to reschedule its ward conventions with disputes over the distribution of active membership.

The general convention was scheduled to be held in Kathmandu from September 1 to 4 and the ward level conventions on Wednesday.

"The meeting of the party's senior leaders has decided to reschedule the ward convention," said party spokesperson Bishow Prakash Sharma. "But this does not mean that we have postponed the scheduled general convention of the party."

However, other party leaders said that the general convention on the scheduled date is unlikely as election schedules of the local level, electoral constituency level, district level and provincial level will also be affected.

"Although the party and our senior leaders have committed to holding the 14th General Convention on the stipulated date, I see little chance of that happening," Arjun Narsingh KC, a Central Working Committee member of the party, said.

A meeting of the party's incumbent

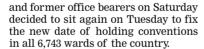
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At the meeting, a seven-member probe committee headed by Ramesh Lekhak is expected to submit a report on the row over the distribution of active membership certificates.

Controversies over the distribution of active membership have been reported in at least 10 of the country's 77 districts.

Hunger strikes by different groups of the party are being staged at the party headquarters in Lalitpur for one week now demanding a settlement of the dispute.

Active members of the party elect ward representatives who in turn elect local unit representatives. The local unit representatives elect representatives at 165 electoral constituencies and these elect the central leadership of the party as well as in the districts and the provinces.

Only if the findings of the Lekhak report are accepted by party President Sher Bahadur Deuba and his rival faction led by Ram Chandra Poudel, will the new date for ward level convention be announced, according to party leaders.

"If the dispute continues, the possibility of holding ward level conven-

tions becomes even more uncertain," said a member of the probe committee on condition of anonymity.

At present the proposed dates of holding conventions to choose representatives at local units—metropolitan cities, sub-metropolitan cities, municipalities and rural municipalities—electoral constituencies, districts and provinces have not been changed.

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Unregulated border movement increases risk of coronavirus spread in Morang

Local administration says cross-border movement has increased after the relaxation of prohibitory orders.

DEO NARAYAN SAH MORANG, JULY 24

Hordes of people are seen crossing the Nepal-India border in Morang through porous border points without undergoing any security check ups. The people do not follow even the most basic health security protocols, leaving health workers worried about the possible risk of coronavirus infection.

The main border point in Biratnagar, which was sealed in March last year to contain the spread of the coronavirus, is still closed.

"Security personnel deployed at the border do not stop people from crossing the border. They take bribes from local traders and let them import goods through illegal border points," claimed Mohammad Aslam of Biratnagar-17.

He claimed that thousands of people cross the border through Islampur and Materuwa everyday.

Many local people go to Jogbani, a market place in the border area of India, to buy essential commodities. The local people claim that the security personnel deployed for border security turn a blind eye to people crossing the border illegally.

"The security personnel at the border take money from people and let them cross the border," said a local resident of Biratnagar preferring anonymity.

The local residents and health workers are worried about the possible spread of Covid-19 due to the unregulated flow of people through various border points in Biratnagar.

"The security personnel should regulate cross border activities at a time when the government authorities have warned of a third wave," said Mohammad Rasul, a resident of Biratnagar-17.

He urged the security personnel and concerned authorities to maintain border security to control the illegal movement of people.

According to Mukesh Khadka, a resident of Biratnagar-16, around 3,000 people cross the border through the southern gate of Biratnagar Jute Mill and Daraiya every day.

"The government should restrict unusual movement of people from the porous border points or it could lead to an outbreak of the coronavirus," said Mohammad Rasul, a resident of Biratnagar. According to Dr Kamal Kishor Yadav, chief at the health desk in Rani border point, health workers conduct health check-ups of all those who enter Nepal through the hearder resint

border point. "Suspected individuals have to undergo antigen tests before entering

into Nepal," Yadav said. According to the record of the health desk, 20 to 25 individuals enter Nepal from the Rani border point on a daily basis.

"None of the arrivals have tested positive for Covid-19 in the last two weeks," said Yaday.

Meanwhile, Shiva Katuwal, assistant sub-inspector at the temporary police post in Materuwa, says that his office has tightened security at the border point. However, some people might have entered or crossed the border illegally, he added.

Many people from Biratnagar go to Jogbani, a border town in India, to buy daily essentials.

"We are making efforts to stop cross-border movement. However, we are unable to put a complete stop to it," said Prakash Raut, inspector at the Area Police Office in Rani.

Superintendent of Police at the District Police Office in Morang Janadradan GC vows to regulate border movement to limit the spread of the virus.

"I have directed my subordinates accordingly," GC said.

Chief District Officer in Morang Kosh Hari Niraula also admitted that cross-border movement has increased after the relaxation of prohibitory orders.

"Markets, transportation services and businesses among other sectors have resumed services. This has increased people's movement in the border points as well," Niraula said.

"The local administration is taking initiatives to control people's movement in the border area," he added.

Going digital eases forest management

The transition from paper to digital platform has ensured speed of work, transparency and uniformity, officials say.

MANOJ PAUDEL Kapilvastu. July 24

Data entry and record keeping have become easy for forest officers in Kapilvastu after the forest offices turned to technology a year ago.

The forest offices in Kapilvastu have transitioned from paper to digital platform, with officers like Basanta Thapa, the assistant forest officer of Gorusinghe-based Sub Division Forest Office in Kapilvastu, using tablets with ease to enter data such as names, sizes, GPS locations and other details of trees that are marked to be felled.

The details are then immediately sent to the Division Forest Office in Kapilvastu, the head forest office in the district, says Thapa.

"The forest offices have become technology friendly and this has made our work a lot easier," said Thapa. "I had to keep a diary to take daily notes on my visits to forests. It took some time to get used to technology, but after one year of daily use, we have made progress."

A team of forest officials, including technicians, regularly go on field visits to monitor the trees in the forests.

"We enter all necessary details of our visits onto the software named Scientific Forest Management Support System," said Thapa. "This has increased efficiency in our daily work."

The entered data is saved in the main server of the Division Forest Office in Kapilvastu district headquarters through an application.

"Officials in the district headquarters verify the details and issue permission to cut down trees after completing the process. We receive a digital copy of the permission and don't have to wait for lengthy paperwork," said Thapa. "It saves a lot of time and effort."

For the past year, sub divisional forest offices in Patana, Pipara,

The Division Forest Office has invested Rs600,000 for a data keeping software.

Badhara, Motipur, Gorusinghe and Chetaradenhi of Kapilvastu have been using the software for data keeping. Like Thapa, officials in these offices

use tabs for data collection. "The new system has reduced our workload," said Thapa. "The software allows us to keep records of the length and circumference of trees, which is really helpful. It also leaves minimal room for mistakes when it comes to record keeping and keeping track of trees in different community and collaborative forests."

Sixty-nine community forests and two collaborative forests use the soft-

ware in Kapilvastu district.

According to the Division Forest Office in Kapilvastu, it invested Rs600,000 to introduce the software across all forest offices.

"Data keeping has become easier since the introduction of the software. The collected data is also safe and reliable. The use of software has brought speed of work, transparency and uniformity in our work across all levels," said Ishwori Prasad Paudel, division forest officer in Kapilvastu.

According to Madan Mohan Shandilya, assistant forest officer and also coordinator of the software programme, despite the initial reservations of forest officials, the software has come as a boon.

"In the beginning, it was hard to learn to use the software and the tablet but now everybody has become adept at it," said Shandilya. "We no longer have to rely on old files to see our records. Work efficiency of our employees has also increased."



Farmers weed their rice fields at Khokana, Lalitpur on Saturday.

POST PHOTO: ANISH REGMI

With Congress leading government, its general ...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

vaccines and man. This could invite legal complication party's over



People enter Nepal through the border check post at Materuwa, Morang.

Besides the dispute over the active membership, other issues also make the general convention on the scheduled date unlikely, according to party leaders.

"Covid cases are rising, and the country is facing several kinds of natural calamities due to rain," said KC.

With party President Deuba becoming the prime minister his focus is now on governance.

"Had we not had a chance to lead the coalition government, we could have held the convention on time but I see it next to impossible to complete the conventions of all layers by September because the prime minister is still struggling to expand the Cabinet and is yet to form his team of advisers," said a senior Nepali Congress leader who did not want to be named.

"His priority is also to maintain rapport and good relations with alliance partners and most importantly, the Deuba government has the Herculean task of containing the panaging other pressing governance issues."

Deuba is also eyeing another term as party president.

"He is therefore carefully weighing different options before choosing ministers in the government," said a leader close to Deuba.

As things stand, leaders see the whole election process beginning only in September.

"We have to provide the lists of active members to all wards from Karnali to Darchula to Taplejung. Then we have to hold ward level conventions across the country in one day. Then we have to complete all other conventions of local units in one former general secretary Krishna Prasad Sitaula told the Post. "In my estimate, we can begin holding the ward conventions from September 1, the day we were planning to hold the general convention to elect the new party leadership. This means the date of the central general convention will be pushed back to October-November."

tions. If the party cannot hold its general convention before mid-September, the legitimacy and legality of the party will be under threat as per the provisions of the constitution and the Political Party Act-2017.

Although, according to the Political Party Act, a political party must renew its central and provincial party committees within five years, the Nepali Congress statute requires its convention to be held every four years. If any political party cannot hold its general convention within five years or the due date, the party's elected bodies' tenure can be extended by one year.

As per the constitution, political parties that cannot hold their general conventions after the one-year extension shall be given six months of grace period to renew their central and provincial committees.

Nepali Congress held its 13th General Convention in the first week of March, 2016. After all elected bodies of the party completed four years, the one year expired in February.

Some Nepali Congress leaders close to Deuba have already started consultations with the Election Commission and some senior constitutional and legal experts about the possible consequences if the party misses the September deadline to hold the general convention, according to the leader close to Deuba.

Senior leader Poudel, who leads Deuba's rival camp in the party, told the Post that the general convention should be concluded by the scheduled date in September or else the party registration will be scrapped.

"We do not have the luxury of postponing the general convention from September. If we cannot conclude the conventions of all levels in time to meet the constitutional and legal requirements, we can only hold conventions of provincial and central levels," said Poudel. "Otherwise we will face serious constitutional and legal questions and party registration will be at risk."

Deal to buy 6 million vaccine doses from China likely soon, officials say

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"We will administer those vaccines to around 1.4 million people aged 65 years and above, who have taken the first doses of the Covishield vaccine but have been deprived of booster shots for a long time," said Pokhrel.

The Health Ministry had administered the first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine to the elderly between March 7 and 15 with the delivery of 1 million doses of the vaccine from the Serum Institute of India and 348,000 provided by the COVAX facility.

Although Nepal had paid for 2 million doses of the vaccine that Serum Institute markets under the brand name Covishield, the company did not deliver the remaining doses, as India restricted export of vaccines following a devastating second wave of the coronavirus in the country in April which infected millions and killed hundreds of thousands.

"We are still unaware as to when the Serum Institute of India will deliver the vaccine we purchased," said Pokhrel. "We heard that the talks held at the political leadership level were positive but we don't know when that will translate into action."

On Monday, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his telephone conversation with Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had said that India would resume the supply of vaccines soon.

An official at the Health Ministry said that talks are also being held to purchase the Pfizer vaccine and the manufacturing company is positive about selling them to Nepal.

"To purchase the Pfizer vaccine, we have to improve our vaccine storage," an official at the Department of Health Services told the Post, asking not to be named.

The US Food and Drug Administration allows the storage of Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine at normal refrigerator temperature (2 to 8 degrees Celsius) for up to a month. Earlier it was said that vaccines made by Pfizer needed to be kept at minus 70 degrees Celsius.

As Nepal has been getting vaccines, storage capacity has been an issue as the central vaccine storage facility in Kathmandu can store only 1 million doses of the Chinese vaccine, which come in a dose per vial, at temperatures between 2 and 8 degrees Celsius.

"We can no longer make excuses that we have no vaccine storage capacity," said the Department of Health Services official. "We have to make it and we will do it, as we have to immunise a huge number of our population."

The Health Ministry has been preparing to administer the Covid-19 vaccine to all those over the age of 18.

"We are preparing to give vaccines to all people aged 18 years and above,"

Dr Roshan Pokhrel, the newly promoted secretary at the Health Ministry, told the Post. "Those who've applied for the vaccine through online registration will be the priority."

But only 1.4 million people have

so far registered their names for vaccination.

"I would like to request everyone to fill an online form to get the vaccine," he said.

According to P0khrel of the Family Welfare Division, the government plans to give the first dose to as many people as possible if the timely arrival of the second dose is assured by the manufacturing company.

So far, 3,377,228 people have been administered the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine and of them 1,366,046 have been fully immunised. Those administered single shots of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine with the 1.5 million doses given in grant by the United States through the COVAX facility are counted as fully immunised.

Besides priority groups like health workers, people's representatives, employees of banks and financial institutions and migrant workers, the government has included those aged 50 years and above in the vaccination campaign so far but inoculation has been uneven with reports of people using influence to get the Covid-19 vaccine.

Nepal witnessed a second wave from April in which more than 6,500 people lost their lives. The government imposed prohibitory orders in most of the country and in Kathmandu it was imposed from April 29. But from June the orders were gradually relaxed with long-distance bus services resuming from Saturday.

However, as life has returned to more or less normal with the resumption of public transport and reopening of the market, the number of new cases continues to grow.

On Saturday, 2,309 people tested positive in 10,625 polymerase chain reaction tests and an additional 805 tested positive in 4,285 antigen tests. Daily case positivity rate of the PCR tests is over 22 percent, which doctors say is very high.

So far, 679,019 people have been infected with the coronavirus and 9,695 have lost their lives to Covid-19

related complications. The fatality count for Saturday is 16.

According to the ministry, 10 districts including the three Valley districts—Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur—have more than 500 active cases each and 26 districts have active cases exceeding 200.

The number of districts having active cases more than 500 and 200 has increased over the last week, the ministry said.

Public health experts say that authorities should make every effort to buy vaccines and administer them to the population at the earliest, as the country could be in the initial stage of the third pandemic wave.

"Vaccines should be administered to as many people as possible and as soon as possible," Dr Biraj Karmacharya, an epidemiologist, told the Post. "We don't know how bad the third wave will be. Before the third wave hits the country, we should try to inoculate a maximum number of people."

BRIEFING

11 pregnant women died in two years for want of medical care

OKHALDHUNGA: As many as 11 pregnant women died for want of treatment in Solukhumbu district in the past two years. According to the District Health Office, four women of Khumbu Pasanglhamu, three of Mapya Dudhkoshi, two of Mahakulung and one each of Likhu Pike and Sotang rural municipalities lost their lives due to delivery complications. They could not be taken to health facilities in time. A local government official said 21 pregnant women were rescued using helicopters in the last two fiscal years.

ICU services to start at Sankhuwasabha hospital

SANKHUWASABHA: District Hospital, Sankhuwasabha, is all set to operate five Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds with two ventilators. The procurement process to buy various medical equipment and tools has already commenced and the ICU services will start within a few weeks, said Sundar Shyam Jha, chief at the hospital. Earlier, in the absence of the ICU facility at the hospital, patients who needed to be treated in the ICU ward had to be taken outside the district.



A worker cleans a bus at Gongabu Bus Park in Kathmandu on Saturday, a day after the government decided to allow long-route vehicles to operate after months-long restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Government promotes police officer involved in extrajudicial killings

Sub-inspector Dipendra Chand is promoted despite the national rights body recommending action against him.

BINOD GHIMIRE KATHMANDU, JULY 24

The National Human Rights Commission on October 16 last year recommended action against five police officials after its probe found their involvement in an extrajudicial killing.

An expert team formed by the commission, after around two years of investigation, had found that a police team led by Deputy Superintendent Rugam Bahadur Kunwar arrested Gopal Tamang, 23, and Ajay Tamang, 24, from Nuwakot for their alleged involvement in an abduction case and shot them dead at Doleshwor jungle in Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur on August 6, 2018.

The team had claimed that the two men were killed in retaliation when they tried to attack the security personnel who were searching for Nishan Khadka—the 11-year-old boy who was abducted from Kandaghari.

The commission had asked the government to book Kunwar along with Sub-inspectors Dipendra Chand, Prashnna Malla and Ranjit Tamang and Assistant Sub-inspector Rajan Khadka, as the investigation proved that they had killed the alleged abductors of the subto face criminal charges. Chand along with 98 others got promotion to inspectors. His ranking stands at 62.

"It is unfortunate that the government has promoted a person who should be behind bars. This is nothing but an example of how impunity is being promoted in the country," Bed Bhattarai, a former secretary at the commission, told the Post. "This proves that successive governments are trying to prove the national rights commission irrelevant." mandate to investigate and recommend action in cases of human rights violations. It can recommend and even direct the government to take actions in the cases it has investigated.

However, successive governments have paid little attention to implementing its recommendations. Over the years, hundreds of people who were found guilty by the commission's investigation have gone unpunished. In several cases they have been rewarded by the governments through the past despite the commission having recommended action against them," Mohna Ansari, a former member at the commission, told the Post. "However, this proves that no government is serious about protecting human rights and respect-

ing the dignity of the commission." Among the total human rights violators implicated by the commission since its formation in 2000, the highest number—98—is from the Nepal Police, followed by 85 from the Nepal Army and 65 from the then CPN (Maoist). The commission has also implicated 16 civil servants, eight Armed Police Force personnel and four teachers. However, no government cared to act as per the commission's recommendations and directives.

Ansari said the government's reluctance in taking actions in severe human rights violations has led to an increase in cases of extrajudicial killings and torture at the hands of police and custodial deaths.

"The police seldom investigate the cases where their own officials are involved," she said. "It is the commission that has to take up such cases but its recommendations aren't implemented. This is going to challenge the

Maintaining health safety protocol during exams is impossible, colleges say

There is a risk of the virus situation going out of control again if precautions are not taken, health experts warn.

SHUVAM DHUNGANA Kathmandu, July 24

On June 24, Tribhuvan University published the routines for the stalled exams of various bachelor's level programmes. As per the time table, bachelor's second year exams were held on July 20 while the first year exams (old batch) are scheduled to start on July 25.

The authorities had issued a notice to assure students that the exams would be conducted adhering to all safety protocols. However, according to the students, there were no safety protocols at exam centres.

Anisha, 22, whose exam centre was at New Millennium College in Sukedhara, Kathmandu said she was surprised to see a crowd of students outside the college gate, waiting to enter inside.

"Hundreds of students had gathered outside the college gate to see the seating plan," said Anisha, who wished to be identified by only her first name. "Fifteen minutes before the test, the college opened a small gate and the students started pushing one another to enter."

Many students are not vaccinated, making them vulnerable.

It seemed like neither students nor college authorities were worried about the Covid-19 pandemic, she added.

According to Anisha, although most of the students were wearing masks, there was no one to monitor social distancing and there were no sanitisers in sight.

The Tribhuvan University has designated as many as 59 exam centres in Kathmandu Valley to conduct first year examinations of various programmes. Almost all colleges have failed to abide by safety protocols and they admit it.

According to Ram Krishna Simkhada, principal of Vinayak Siddha College, Chabahil, it is almost impossible to conduct exams by maintaining social distance and other safety measures as the number of students is very high.

"Almost 400 students from different colleges gather at the exam centre. During such chaos, it's impossible for us to enforce safety measures." University, they have increased the number of exam centres to avoid overcrowding and have allowed students to take exams from the nearest centre by informing the TU office.

"Since we cannot monitor everywhere, we have appointed a chairperson at each centre to ensure that the safety protocols are followed," said Bhusal. "Besides, local authorities also mobilise monitoring officials to ensure the protocols are followed."

The final exams of various disciplines and programmes at the country's oldest and largest university were delayed by over a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, subsequent restrictions in movement and the university's insistence on holding in-person exams.

Although the university has switched to virtual lectures, it is still reluctant to hold the exams online.

Other universities, including Kathmandu University, Pokhara University and Agriculture and Forestry University, have conducted their exams virtually.

After the exam notice was published by the Tribhuvan University, many students through social media had criticised the plan to conduct in-person exams amid the threat of the pandemic.

Public Health experts have long been warning of a possible catastrophe, as Nepal's case positivity rate is still too high and the percentage of fully immunised people against the coronavirus is very low at just 4 percent.

According to Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, clinical research chief at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital, there is a growing risk of new variants of the virus.

"As many students are not vaccinated due to their category, it's a huge risk not only for students but their families too," said Pun. "There is a high risk of the situation going out of control again if proper precautions are not taken."

Nepal on Saturday reported 2,309 new coronavirus cases taking the nationwide infection tally to 679,017, according to the Health Ministry.

As many as 805 people tested positive in a total of 4,285 antigen tests.

In its regular situation report, the ministry did not mention the death toll over the past 24 hours. It, however, reported 16 Covid-19-related fatalities, which included the number of deaths managed by Nepal Army on different deter

FILE PHOTE Successive governments have disregarded the recommendations made by the commission.

The Nepal Police says Chand was pro promoted as he has fulfilled the In

promotions and other positions. In order to build pressure on the government to act, the commission on October 15, 2020 published a list of 286 people including former top government and security officials implicated in serious human rights violations ever since the formation of the commission in 2000.

cover up the incident.

A team led by Tahir Ali Ansari, a former justice at the Supreme Court, and Bigyan Raj Sharma, a former additional inspector general of Nepal Police and Dr Harihari Osti, a forensic expert, as members had conducted a detailed investigation into the case.

The commission's recommendation was left unaddressed by the government. Instead, seven months later on Thursday, the government promoted one of its officials who was supposed

"Only those who meet the set criteria get promotion," Senior Superintendent Basant Bahadur Kunwar, the Nepal Police spokesperson, told the Post.

"The promotion and the commission's recommendation are two different things. I believe the commission's recommendation is being studied." Kunwar said. "Nepal Police carries out its internal probe even if the commission makes the recommendation." The commission has the judicial

The list includes former Chief of Army Staff Pyar Jung Thapa, former home secretary Narayan Gopal Malego and former chief of Nepal Police Kuber Singh Rana.

"Chand's case is not the first. Several others have got promotions in rule of law. I for

Ansari says the commission must take Chand's promotion seriously and draw the government's attention. Following its reluctance to follow the commission's recommendations, the Supreme Court in March, 2013 directed the government to implement the recommendations unconditionally.

The bench led by Justice Kalyan Shrestha had said the government must implement the commission's recommendations without 'ifs' and 'buts'. said Simkhada.

The health safety protocols announced for the exams are impossible to follow, said Simkhada. "If we start seating the students by following the physical distance rule, only 20 students will fit in one class. Adjusting as many as 400 students in one exam centre would become impossible not only in this college but in every college."

However, according to Shiva Lal Bhusal, the rector of Tribhuvan

different dates.

The nationwide death toll has now reached 9,695. The number of active cases stands at 27,757.

The Tribhuvan University, which has 1,124 affiliate and 61 constituent colleges, is the largest university in the country with over 400,000 regular students. The number of examinees, however, exceeds 500,000 as there are students sitting exams for back papers. The university runs 125 programmes in the bachelor's and master's levels.





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OPINION

The missing debt money



A thorough study of the debt resources received and their (mis)use needs to be done.

TULA RAJ BASYAL



When government spending exceeds revenue, the shortfall is met through domestic and external debt, which is repaid by generating additional revenue. More debt in the present implies more taxes in the future, making the economy less attractive to domestic and external investors. As economies across the globe compete for foreign investment, potential investors will look for environments where there are fewer expectations of future tax increases. More spending is needed to expedite economic development. And that is financed by increasing revenue and debt on the part of the government. However, besides discouraging investment, excessive debt could lead to internal, external and financial sector instability and debt servicing problems in the future.

Suppose the rate of growth of debt is higher than the nominal growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) and the growth of exports of goods and services. In that case, we can surmise that the debt cannot contribute to the expected expansion of the economy, which could create unsustainability in future debt financing and debt servicing. Hence, debt is not only a source of spending; but if not managed properly, may also serve as a source of fiscal, financial and economic crises. Imprudence and unprofessional debt management, therefore, could lead to severe economic disaster.

In developing countries, debt management is least prioritised by governments as if debt comes as a free lunch and the need for servicing it will not arise in the future. During their available uncertain tenure, insensitive governments contract all accessible debt resources as the responsibility for servicing these debts will fall on future

governments. When debt liabilities pile up every year due to inadequate mobilisation of internal non-debt resources, there could be fiscal or debt-related disasters sometime in the future. Thus, irresponsible governments can easily drive the country into a situation of debt trap or debt crisis.

The government will easily escape accountability for the debt-related crisis in the name of development. Consequently, the development process will suffer a severe setback and the under-developed status of the country will hardly see any improvement. So, extreme care, transparency, and accountability should be ensured in designing the debt management objective, strategy and process, and execution. In Nepal, gross irresponsibility in fiscal practice in general and debt management in particular during the last four years means that its future debt servicing problems will become severely acute, if not unsustainable.

The data

The government of Nepal's outstanding debt rose from Rs540.4 billion in mid-July 2013 to Rs697.7 billion in mid-July 2017 and to Rs1,608.4 billion

in mid-June 2021, registering an annual compounded increase of 6.6 percent in the previous four years (2013-14 to 2016-17) and 23.2 percent in the latter four years (2017-18 to 2020-21). Of the outstanding debt in mid-June 2021, domestic debt comprised 45.1 percent and external debt comprised 54.9 percent. The real GDP growth averaged 4.0 percent during the latter four years while such growth during the previous four years averaged 4.8 percent. Further, as a percent of the GDP, outstanding debt declined from 27.7 percent in mid-July 2013 to 22.7 percent in mid-July 2017, which, however, rose by a whopping 15.0 percentage points to 37.7 percent in mid-June 2021.

Similarly, the per capita outstanding debt, which amounted to Rs19,868 (outstanding debt Rs540.4 billion divided by the population of 27.2 million) in mid-July 2013, increased by an annual rate of 5.2 percent to reach Rs24,310 (outstanding debt Rs697.7 billion divided by the population of 28.7 million) in mid-July 2017. Further, during the latter four-year period, the per capita outstanding debt soared by an annual rate of 21.6 percent to reach Rs53,083 (outstanding debt Rs1,608.4 billion divided by the population of

30.3 million) in mid-June 2021. Despite such a rise in debt, the public sector gross fixed capital formation/GDP ratio (in percent) decelerated from 12.5 in 2016-17 to 9.9 in 2017-18, 8.3 in 2018-19, 7.7 in 2019-20 and 7.0 in 2020-21, marking a reduction of 5.5 percentage points between 2016-17 and 2020-21.

The lesson

The latter four years witnessed a rapid growth of the outstanding debt with an annual average increase at 23.2 percent, 15 percentage points rise as a ratio of GDP and 21.6 percent annual average growth of per capita outstanding debt. During the previous four years, there was an average yearly rise of outstanding debt at 6.6 percent, 5.0 percentage points decline as a ratio of GDP and 5.2 percent average yearly growth of per capita outstanding debt. Despite the substantial rise in debt during the latter four years, the average annual GDP growth at 4.0 percent was lower than the 4.8 percent growth during the previous four years.

The public sector gross fixed capital formation/GDP ratio (in percent) consistently decelerated from 12.5 in 2016-17 to 7.0 in 2020-21, showing a reduction of 5.5 percentage points between

SHUTTERSTOCK

2016-17 and 2020-21. The deficit in goods and services trade worsened. with the deficit as a percent of GDP averaging 37.2 in the latter four years, compared to 35.8 percent in the previous four years. The continuation of such trends could ultimately lead to problems in debt servicing. This discussion raises a pertinent question: Where did the debt money go or who stole the debt money? There could be an attempt to find an excuse by shifting one's irresponsibility to the Covid-19 lockdown, which adversely affected private-sector movement more than government sector movement which was largely unrestricted.

Covid-19 did not eat up the debt money, did it? A thorough study of the debt resources received and their (mis)use during the last four years, therefore, needs to be undertaken to identify the truth behind the missing debt money and punish those guilty of bringing about such an irresponsible state in the country's debt situation.

Basyal is a former head of the economic research department, Nepal Rastra Bank, and former senior economic advisor to the Ministry of Finance.

An anarchist's guide to the mask and vaccine debate

If scientists can't communicate why masks are still needed, people can't be expected to wear them.

MICHAEL LOCKE MCLENDON



Americans who refused to don masks or get vaccinated during the pandemic don't have an easy task constructing a valid philosophical defence of their behaviour

The go-to philosophical authorities typically cited to defend individual liberty in the US-John Locke and John Stuart Mill-do not provide compelling reasons for ignoring public health messages.

Locke's doctrine of natural law states that people are endowed with natural rights to "life, liberty, and estate," premised on duties to God of self-preservation, and any behaviour that risks survival constitutes a violation of that natural law. As such, there is no justification to refuse a safe and effective vaccine during a deadly pandemic.

Similarly, Mill's "harm principle" which broadly states that people are allowed to do whatever they want provided they do not directly harm others -doesn't help those opposed to vaccines and masks. Their actions might prolong the pandemic, allowing the virus an opportunity to mutate and potentially render vaccines ineffective-behaviour that puts everyone at risk.

There is, however, another ethical framework that people refusing to be vaccinated or wear masks might turn to, although it comes from an unlikely source: the 19th-century Russian anarcho-communist Mikhail Bakunin.

Perhaps most famous for his lengthy and bitter tiff with German philosopher Karl Marx, Bakunin's philosophy of anarcho-communism consisted of the abolition of government, private property and indeed all means of coercion.

As a professor of political theory, I believe Bakunin has been overlooked in the current debate about masks and vaccines. Some of his views are consistent with at least the libertarian-based criticisms of mask and vaccine requirements. Indeed, despite meaningful differences, many libertarians in the US share with Bakunin the belief that freedom is the most important value and governments are by nature coercive. They may distrust Bakunin's insistence on linking freedom and rationality and certainly would reject his embrace of communism, but libertarians would likely nevertheless admire his scepticism of authority.

Science as a threat to freedom

Bakunin might not be an obvious source of support for many in the anti-mask and anti-vaccine camp. His classic 1871 text, "God and State," begins in a manner sure to offend certain elements of the religious right, who make up a sizable number of those refusing to follow public health advice on vaccines.

Bakunin attacks Christianity as the enemy of rationality and freedom. If humans wish to be free, he argues, they should learn the physical laws of the universe and social laws of society to inform their decision-making. If guided by genuine knowledge, Bakunin says, people can make smart decisions and become rational agents in charge of making choices for themselves.

But science, too, can be a great threat to freedom, Bakunin suggestsand it is here that many of those opposed to mask and vaccine mandates may warm to his argument.

Beyond the fact that there are limits to scientific knowledge, Bakunin believed that there is always the possibility that scientists themselves will be invested with coercive authority.

If rationality and knowledge are requisite for freedom, Bakunin argued, then those with knowledge are in a position to force people to do, or not do, certain things.

As such, Bakunin worried that scientists, emboldened by their importance in society, will "arrogantly



claim the right to govern life."

"We must respect the scientists for their merits and achievements, but in order to prevent them from corrupting their own high moral and intellectual standards, they should be granted no special privileges and no rights other than those possessed by everyone – for example, the liberty to express their convictions, thought and knowledge. Neither they nor any other special group should be given power over others. He who is given power will inevi-

tably become an oppressor and exploiter of society," he wrote in 1873.

Sceptical consumers of knowledge Bakunin's solution to the risk of coercion by scientists was to lessen their authority without diminishing the value of scientific knowledge. To do so, he makes each individual responsible for learning and acting on whatever knowledge they have. The idea is for people to consult scientists for knowledge with the understanding that no one scientist has all the answers and that the accumulated knowledge of all scientists likewise is limited and cannot give perfect answers

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To apply Bakunin's theory of freedom to pandemic America, no one should be required to get a vaccine. Rather, the population should be encouraged to investigate the efficacy and safety of the vaccines.

For its part, the scientific community needs to vigilantly scrutinize itself

and present knowledge in an honest fashion, eagerly volunteering to the public what it knows and does not know

Bakunin would be highly critical of both naïve optimists and doom-andgloom pessimists in the scientific community. People need the unvarnished truth presented in simple and clear terms. If the answer is "we scientists don't know," then so be it.

Ask questions...but be reasonable

Bakunin's theory of freedom asks much of the population. It requires individuals to know something of the nature of scientific knowledge, ask sensible questions and then make a rational analysis of the available evidence. It requires scientists to check their egos and desire for quick celebrity and soberly present their knowledge in accessible and honest terms.

And granted, Bakunin did not account for disinformation campaigns of the sort found on the internet that undermine access to reliable scientific data. He did, however, have faith in people to sort through information and make rational decisions. This ability, according to Bakunin, is a precondition for freedom.

Vaccine sceptics, thus, might find comfort in Bakunin. If they ask good questions and do not find satisfactory answers, then his philosophy suggests they should absolutely refuse a vaccine. The same goes for masking: If the scientific community cannot effectively communicate why masks are still needed, then people should not be expected to wear them, Bakunin might argue.

At the same time, those opposing masks and vaccines need to sincerely follow the science and allow themselves to be convinced by data, Bakunin's philosophy suggests. Refusing to wear a mask based on an uneducated hunch or because of a belief that the "government wants to control me" constitutes folly, not freedom. In short, anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers, to claim their freedom, need to be reasonable.

Michael Locke McLendon is Professor of Political Science at the California State University, Los Angeles.

- The Con

MONEY

Digital payments drop as lockdown restrictions eased

Fewer people made payments electronically during the mid-May to mid-June period as they could go out and pay cash, insiders say.

KRISHANA PRASAIN KATHMANDU, JULY 24

Digital payments dropped by 12 percent in the 11th month of the last fiscal year ended mid-July, right after stay-home orders were relaxed allowing people greater freedom of movement, Nepal Rastra Bank said.

According to industry insiders, fewer people made payments electronically during the period mid-May to mid-June as they could go out and pay cash compared to when they had to stay indoors, forcing them to make greater use of mobile and internet banking, mobile wallet, Connect IPS and other online platforms.

Digital transactions recorded an alltime monthly high of Rs368.66 billion during the period mid-March to mid-April 2021 since the government began keeping payment records at the start of the last fiscal year.

The second lockdown was imposed on April 29 after a surge in infections. During the period mid-April to mid-May, digital transactions dipped to Rs314.89 billion. They dropped further during the period mid-May to mid-June, the 11th month of the fiscal year, by 12 percent to Rs276.43 billion.

According to the central bank, the total value of digital transactions in the first 11 months of the last fiscal year 2020-21 was Rs3.19 trillion.

Bhuban Kadel, executive director of the Payment System Department at Nepal Rastra Bank, said that immediately after the second prohibitory order was lifted, digital payments for business transactions started to drop. Electronic payments gained trac-

tion since the first lockdown in March 2020. The statistics show that during the Dashain season, mid-October to mid-November, when Nepalis go on a holiday spending spree, transactions through digital payments reached an all-time monthly low of Rs205.82 billion.

Industry insiders say that less people used electronic means to pay for their purchases during the festival period. Transaction figures also show that a majority of people were reluctant to go shopping during the Dashain festival last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they added.

With increasing Covid-19 cases and death rates, people were psychologically impacted and feared to go outside during the Dashain festival, leading to a slowdown in economic activities.

But there is a silver lining.

"Looking at the current trend, we expect that there will be a massive expansion in the electronic payment system in the near future with an increasing number of smartphone users and internet penetration,' Kadel said. The rising number of smartphone users and increasing internet penetration has boosted digital payments overall.

According to the Department of Customs, Nepal imported 6.55 million mobile phones worth Rs34.14 billion in the first 11 months of the fiscal year 2020-21. The latest management information system of the Nepal Telecommunications Authority shows that 90.56 percent of the total population has internet access with 65.47 percent subscribing to mobile broadband.

In mid-May to mid-June 2021, there were 855,522 transactions worth Rs144 billion through Interbank Payment System (IPS) alone, a system to transfer funds from one account to another account at any of the participating member banks and financial institutions

Similarly, there were 9.7 million

Digital payment systems started

online business transactions and digital payment systems started to flourish. "The online market is returning to normal levels as the lockdown has been eased," said Amun Thapa, founder of Sastodeal.

ly in recent days, but we expect that with the festive season starting from mid-August, online demand for goods will increase," Thapa said. "We expect good growth in the coming three months," he added.

According to Thapa, consumption patterns are expected to rebound as the middle class has not been impacted by the second wave of Covid-19.

"There is no decline in the buying habits of people, mostly middle-class people. But there has been a dramatic shift in people's preferences. They are not only spending on luxury items and fast moving consumer goods, but also buying books and health and fitness related products. The pandemic has changed people's buying habits."

India's central bank looking at phased launch of its own digital currency

REUTERS MUMBAL IULY 24

The Reserve Bank of India is considering a phased introduction of its own central bank digital currency (CBDC), deputy governor T Rabi Shankar said, and is examining various issues including the underlying technology and issuance method.

"CBDCs are likely to be in the arsenal of every central bank going forward. Setting this up will require careful calibration and a nuanced approach in implementation,' Shankar said according to a speech released late on Thursday.

"As is said, every idea will have to wait for its time. Perhaps the time for CBDCs is nigh," he added.

According to a 2021 survey by the Bank for International Settlements, 86 percent central banks were actively researching the potential for CBDCs, 60 percent were experimenting with the technology and 14 percent were deploying pilot projects.

China leads the space and has already started trials of a digital currency in several cities while the US Federal Reserve and Bank of England are looking into it for a future launch.

RBI has been working on the idea of CBDC for years. Virtual currencies (VCs) like bitcoin have gained popularity in India in recent years and unofficial estimates suggest the country has around 15 million investors holding over 100 billion rupees (\$1.34 billion) in crypto assets.

The RBI has repeatedly voiced its concern over the spread and use of cryptocurrencies which it sought to outlaw in April 2018.

FOREX	
US Dollar	119.35
Euro	140.39
Pound Sterling	163.84
Japanese Yen	10.80
Chinese Yuan	18.43
Qatari Riyal	32.78
Australian Dollar	88.04
Malaysian Ringit	28.24
Saudi Arab Riyal	31.82
	Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank
BULLION	PRICE PER TOLA
🧼 Fine Gold	Rs 92,100
Silver 🔊	Rs 1,280
	SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

GASOLINE WATCH



US drops tariff threat against Vietnam over currency practices

REUTERS WASHINGTON, JULY 24

The US Trade Representative's office on Friday said it had determined that no tariff action against Vietnam was warranted after its central bank agreed with the US Treasury not to manipulate its currency for an export advantage

In a statement, USTR said it found that the US Treasury-State Bank of Vietnam agreement earlier this week "provides a satisfactory resolution of the matter subject to investigation and accordingly that no trade action is

warranted at this time.' The State Bank of Vietnam on Monday pledged in an agreement with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen to refrain from "competitive devaluation" of its dong currency and make monetary and exc. cies more transparent. The deal follows months of US pressure on Vietnam over its currency practices and ballooning US trade surplus.



Plans for largest US solar field scrapped

ASSOCIATED PRESS NEVADA, JULY 24

The push to transition from carbon-emitting fuel sources to renewable energy is hitting a roadblock in Nevada, where solar power developers are abandoning plans to build what would have been the United States' largest array of solar panels in the desert north of Las Vegas.

"Battle Born Solar Project" developers this week withdrew their application with the federal Bureau of Land Management, which oversees the Moapa Valley hilltop where the panels were planned, KLAS-TV Las Vegas reported.

California-based Arevia Power told the television station that its solar panels would be set far enough back on Mormon Mesa to not be visible from the valley. But a group of resiur mesa argued such a large installation would be an eyesore and could curtail the area's popular recreational activities-biking, ATVs and skydivingand deter tourists from visiting sculptor Michael Heizer's land installation, "Double Negative." Solar Partners VII LLC, another California firm involved in the project, submitted a letter to the Bureau of Land Management saying it intended to withdraw its application "in response to recent communication" with the agency, the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported. The proposed plant would have spanned more than 14 square miles (37 square kilometres) atop the scenic mesa and had an 850 megawatt capaci-

The proposed plant would have 850MW capacity, enough to provide energy to 500,000 homes.

ty—roughly one-tenth of Nevada's total capacity and enough to provide daytime energy to 500,000 homes, according to the company.

The stalled project presents setback for the Western state, which aims to transition to 50 percent renewable energy by 2030 and currently generates roughly 28 percent of its utility-scale electricity from renewables.



year to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

wallet transactions in the same month with a total value of Rs8.35 billion, down from Rs10.1 billion during the period mid-April to mid-May.

According to the central bank, transactions on quick response (QR) based payment declined to Rs1.96 billion during the period mid-May to mid-June. In the previous month, total transactions were valued at Rs2.52 billion.

The point of sales (retail transaction) also declined to Rs1.54 billion in the review period from Rs2.61 billion. E-commerce transactions made

using cards also dropped to Rs161 million during the period mid-May to

mid-June from Rs768 million in the previous month.

gaining widespread popularity in Nepal after the government imposed a nationwide lockdown on March 24 last year to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Following the stay-at-home orders,

"Demand has not risen significant-

The Trump administration in its final weeks had declared Vietnam a currency manipulator and had threatened to impose punitive tariffs on imports from Vietnam over its currency practices.

The USTR determination, outlined in a federal register notice, only pertains to its Section 301 investigation into Vietnam's currency practices. It does not affect a separate Section 301 investigation into Vietnam's use of illegally harvested or traded timber that could lead to tariffs on A Vietnam Dong note is seen in this illustration photo.

furniture and other wood products imported from Vietnam. "American workers and businesses are stronger when our partners value their currency fairly and compete on a level playing field," US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in a statement.

"Going forward, in coordination with Treasury, we will work together with Vietnam to ensure implementation, and we will continue to examine the currency practices of other major trading partners," Tai added.

Vietnam welcomed the USTR's decision to take no action, its foreign minister, Bui Thanh Son, said.

"Constructive efforts and goodwill help resolve outstanding issues and contribute to the building of a better and stronger partnership," Son said on Twitter on Saturday.

The Vietnamese dong closed at 23,005 to the dollar on Friday, compared with 23,191 on October 2, 2020, the day that USTR launched its currency probe.

to federal officials in 2020 requesting they fast-track the project.

Although a majority of the state's voters approved an energy transition ballot question last year, large-scale projects like Battle Born Solar have drawn backlash from conservationists, endangered species advocates and local businesses that cater to tourists.

Nevada fulfils most of its energy needs using natural gas plants or through importing power produced elsewhere. But developers have rapidly scaled up their investments in solar and geothermal in the windswept lands north of Las Vegas, where sunshine and open land are abundant.

Global supply chains buckle as virus variant and disasters strike

REUTERS LONDON/BEIJING, JULY 24

A new worldwide wave of Covid-19. Natural disasters in China and Germany. A cyber attack targeting key South African ports.

Events have conspired to drive global supply chains towards breaking point, threatening the fragile flow of raw materials, parts and consumer goods, according to companies, economists and shipping specialists.

The Delta variant of the coronavirus has devastated parts of Asia and prompted many nations to cut off land access for sailors. That's left captains unable to rotate weary crews and about 100,000 seafarers stranded at sea beyond their stints in a flashback to 2020 and the height of lockdowns.

"We're no longer on the cusp of a second crew change crisis, we're in one," Guy Platten, secretary general of the International Chamber of Shipping, told Reuters

"This is a perilous moment for global supply chains.'

Given ships transport around 90 percent of the world's trade, the crew crisis is disrupting the supply of everything from oil and iron ore to food and electronics.

German container line Hapag Lloyd described the situation as "extremely challenging"

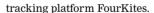
Vessel capacity is very tight, empty containers are scarce and the operational situation at certain ports and terminals is not really improving," it said. "We expect this to last probably into the fourth quarter-but it is very difficult to predict."

Meanwhile, deadly floods in economic giants China and Germany have further ruptured global supply lines that had yet to recover from the first wave of the pandemic, compromising trillions of dollars of economic activity that rely on them.

The Chinese flooding is curtailing the trans-

port of coal from mining regions such as Inner Mongolia and Shanxi, the state planner says, just as power plants need fuel to meet peak summer demand.

In Germany, road transportation of goods has slowed significantly. In the week of July 11, as the disaster unfolded, the volume of late shipments rose by 15 percent from the week before, according to data from supply-chain



Nick Klein, VP for sales and marketing in the Midwest with Taiwan freight and logistics company OEC Group, said companies were scrambling to free goods stacked up in Asia and in US ports due to a confluence of crises.

"It's not going to clear up until March," Klein said.

Manufacturing industries are reeling.

Automakers, for example, are again being forced to stop production because of disruptions caused by Covid-19 outbreaks. Toyota Motor Corp said this week it had to halt operations at plants in Thailand and Japan because they couldn't get parts. Stellantis temporarily suspended production at a factory in the UK because a large number of workers had to isolate to halt the spread of the virus

The industry has already been hit hard by a global shortage of semiconductors this year, mainly from Asian suppliers. Earlier this year, the auto industry consensus was that the chip supply crunch would ease in the second half of 2021-but now some senior executives say it will continue into 2022.

An executive at a South Korea auto parts maker, which supplies Ford, Chrysler and Rivian, said raw materials costs for steel which was used

in all their products had surged partly due to higher freight costs.

"When factoring in rising steel and shipping prices, it is costing about 10 percent more for us to make our products," the executive told Reuters, declining to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter.

"Although we are trying to keep our costs low, it has been very challenging. It's just not rising raw materials costs, but also container shipping prices have skyrocketed.'

Europe's biggest home appliances maker, Electrolux, warned this week of worsening component supply problems, which have hampered production. Domino's Pizza said the supply-chain disruptions were affecting the delivery of equipment needed to build stores.

Notice on Company Name Change

Please be informed that the company business name "DAI Europe Ltd", officially registered with its registration in Office of Company Registrar, Nepal, has recently changed its name to DAI Global UK Limited.

The changes took place with effect from Sunday 11 July 2021. Other information will remain same.



Men stand on a vehicle on a flooded road following heavy rainfall in Zhengzhou, Henan province, China.

BRIEFING

Drone attacks Iraq base hosting US troops

BAGHDAD: A drone attack has been carried out on a military base in Iraqi Kurdistan that hosts American troops, without causing any casualties, the US-led coalition said on Saturday. The attack comes with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi expected to meet US President Joe Biden in Washington on Monday to discuss a possible full US troop with drawal from his country. "An unmanned aerial system impacted a coalition base in Kurdistan" in the early hours of Friday, coalition spokesman US Colonel Wayne Marotto said in a statement.

Thousands march against Australia lockdown

SYDNEY: Thousands marched through Australia's two biggest cities in anti-lockdown protests on Saturday, sparking violent clashes with police in Sydney. Dozens of protesters were arrested after an unauthorised march flouted public health orders in Sydney, while several confrontations with police broke out during the hours-long rally. Officers were pelted with pot plants and bottles of water as opponents of Sydney's month-long stay-at-home order took to the streets in numbers. Thousands also crowded several streets in Melbourne after gathering outside the state parliament in the early afternoon.

China bans for-profit tutoring in core school subjects

SANGHAI: China is barring tutoring for profit in core school subjects to ease financial pressures on families that have contributed to low birth rates, a report in the official Xinhua news agency said on Saturday. The news confirmed a measure contained in a government document widely circulated on Friday and confirmed by Reuters that sent shockwaves through China's vast private education sector, hitting providers' share prices. Foreign investment in the sec tor will be prohibited under the rules set out by the State Council, Xinhua said. Curriculum-based tutoring institutions will be barred from raising money through listings or other capital-related activities, while listed companies will not be allowed to invest in such institutions, according to the rules. (AGENCIES)

Heavy rain in India triggers floods, landslides; death toll climbs to 125

Harsh weather has hit several parts of the world in recent weeks, with floods in China and Western Europe and heat waves in North America, raising new fears about the impact of climate change.

REUTERS MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, JULY 24

Rescue teams in India struggled through thick sludge and debris on Saturday to reach dozens of submerged homes as the death toll from landslides and accidents caused by torrential monsoon rain rose to 125.

Maharashtra state is being hit by the heaviest rain in July in four decades, experts say. Downpours lasting several days have severely affected the lives of hundreds of thousands, while major rivers are in danger of bursting their banks.

In Taliye, about 180 km (110 miles) southeast of the financial capital of Mumbai, the death toll rose to 42 with the recovery of four more bodies after landslides flattened most homes in the village, a senior Maharashtra government official said.

"About 40 people are still trapped. The possibility of rescuing them alive is thin as they've been trapped in mud for more than 36 hours," said the official, who declined to be identified as he is not authorised to talk to the media.

Harsh weather has hit several parts of the world in recent weeks, with floods in China and Western Europe and heat waves in North America, raising new fears about the impact of climate change.

Parts of India's west coast have received up to 594 mm (23 inches) of rain, forcing authorities to move people out of vulnerable areas as they released water from dams about to overflow. The hill station of Mahabaleshwar recorded its highest ever rainfall—60 cm in 24 hours.

Rescuers were searching for victims of landslides in four other places in the state, the official said.

"Around 90,000 people were rescued from flood affected areas," the Maharashtra government said in a statement, as authorities released water from overflowing dams.

Thousands of trucks were stuck for more than 24 hours on a highway linking Mumbai with the southern technology hub of Bengaluru, with the



Residents seek temporary shelter at a school following heavy rains that caused flooding in some areas in Marikina city, Metro Manila, the Philippines on Saturday.

Many migrant workers stranded in Chinese cities hit by floods

ZHENGZHOU: For many migrant workers caught up in severe flooding in the central Chinese city of Zhengzhou, crossing town to stay with relatives in less affected areas or returning to their homes in the countryside are not possible. They must stay put, tied to livelihoods in inundated parts of the city and living too far away from families to reach them when transportation is so badly disrupted. That means surviving without power and running water for days and counting, difficulty moving around Zhengzhou and mounting

road submerged in some places.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was in anguish over the loss of lives.

"The situation in Maharashtra due to heavy rains is being closely moniworry over how they are going to get back to work. China's estimated 280 million rural migrant workers often flock to cities like Zhengzhou in search of better jobs, leaving behind families and only returning home once a year for the Lunar New Year. The city of 12 million is still recovering from floods this week during which it received the equivalent of a year's worth of rain in just a few days.

The death toll in Henan province, where Zhengzhou is located, is 56 and five people are missing, according to state media.

tored and assistance is being provided to the affected," Modi said on Twitter on Friday.

In the southern state of Telangana, heavy rain caused flooding in the state capital of Hyderabad and other low-ly-

Thousands evacuated amid floods in Manila, provinces

MANILA: Philippine authorities moved thousands of residents in the capital, Manila, out of low-lying communities on Saturday as heavy monsoon rains, compounded by a tropical storm, flooded the city and nearby provinces.

The national disaster agency said about 15,000 people, most of them from a flood-prone Manila suburb, had moved into evacuation centres.

Harsh weather has hit nearly all corners of the globe in recent weeks, bringing floods to China, India and Western Europe and heat waves to North America, heightening fears about the impact of climate change.

The Philippines, a Southeast Asian archipelago of more than 7,600 islands, is hit by about 20 tropical storms a year but a warmer Pacific Ocean will make storms more powerful and bring heavier rain, meteorologists say. In some parts of the Philippine capital region, an urban sprawl of more than 13 million people, flood waters rose waist-high in places and cut off roads to light vehicles.

Indian environmentalists have warned that climate change and indiscriminate construction in fragile coastal regions could lead to more disasters.

"The rain fury that lashed Mahabaleshwar... is a strong warning against any more tampering with the ecologically fragile Western Ghats," environment economist Devendra Sharma said on Twitter referring to the range of hills along India's west coast.

Amnesty urges moratorium on Pegasus

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE PARIS, JULY 24

Allegations that governments used phone malware supplied by an Israeli firm to spy on journalists, activists and heads of state have "exposed a global human rights crisis," Amnesty International said, asking for a moratorium on the sale and use of surveillance technology.

In a Friday statement, the NGO warned of "the devastating impact of the poorly regulated spyware industry on human rights worldwide."

The NSO Group's Pegasus software—able to switch on a phone's camera or microphone and harvest its data—is at the centre of a storm after a list of about 50,000 potential surveillance targets was leaked to rights groups.

Amnesty International and French media nonprofit Forbidden Stories collaborated with a clutch of media companies, including the Washington Post, the Guardian and Le Monde, to analyse and publish the list.

"Not only does it expose the risk and harm to those individuals unlawfully targeted, but also the extremely destabilising consequences on global human rights and the security of the digital environment at large," Agnes Callamard, Amnesty's Secretary General, said in the statement.

Israel group NSO "is just one company."

"This is a dangerous industry that has operated on the edges of legality for too long, and this cannot be allowed to continue," she said. "Now, we urgently need greater regulation over the cyber surveillance industry, accountability for human rights violations and abuses, and greater oversight over this shadowy industry."

Amnesty called for an immediate moratorium on any export, sale, transfer and use of surveillance technology "until there is a human rights-compliant regulatory framework in place."

"The fact that world and other political leaders themselves may have come into the spyware technology's crosshairs will hopefully serve as a long overdue wake-up call for them and states worldwide to step up and regulate this industry," Callamard said.

To reach a peace deal, Taliban say Afghan president must go



Ghani has often said he will remain in office until new elections.



In this June 23 photo, Afghan militiamen join Afghan defence and security forces during a gathering to mobilise local militias across the country to try to stem the tide of the latest Taliban gains, in Kabul, Afghanistan.

ASSOCIATED PRESS ISLAMABAD, JULY 24

The Taliban say they don't want to monopolize power, but they insist there won't be peace in Afghanistan until there is a new negotiated government in Kabul and President Ashraf Ghani is removed.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Taliban spokesman, Suhail Shaheen, who is also a member of the group's negotiating team, laid out the insurgents' stance on what should come next in a country on the precipice.

The Taliban have swiftly captured territory in recent weeks, seized strategic border crossings and are threatening a number of provincial capitals —advances that come as the last US and NATO soldiers leave Afghanistan. This week, the top US military officer, Gen. Mark Milley, told a Pentagon press conference that the Taliban have "strategic momentum," and he did not rule out a complete Taliban takeover. But he said it is not inevitable. "I don't think the end game is yet written," he said.

Memories of the Taliban's last time in power some 20 years ago, when they enforced a harsh brand of Islam that denied girls an education and barred women from work, have stoked fears of their return among many. Afghans who can afford it are applying by the thousands for visas to leave Afghanistan, fearing a violent descent into chaos. The US-NATO withdrawal is more than 95 percent complete and due to be finished by August 31.

Shaheen said the Taliban will lay down their weapons when a negotiated government acceptable to all sides in the conflict is installed in Kabul and Ghani's government is gone.

"I want to make it clear that we do not believe in the monopoly of power because any governments who (sought) to monopolise power in Afghanistan in the past, were not successful governments," said Shaheen, apparently including the Taliban's own five-year rule in that assessment. "So we do not want to repeat that same formula."

But he was also uncompromising on the continued rule of Ghani, calling him a war monger and accusing him of using his Tuesday speech on the Islamic holy day of Eid-al-Adha to promise an offensive against the Taliban.

Shaheen dismissed Ghani's right to govern, resurrecting allegations of widespread fraud that surrounded Ghani's 2019 election win. After that vote, both Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah declared themselves president. After a compromise deal, Abdullah is now No. 2 in the government and heads the reconciliation council.

Asked about the Taliban demand that Ghani be removed as a condition of a peace agreement, White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Friday affirmed President Joe Biden's support for the Afghan president.

"The President and the administration supports the leadership of the Afghan people, including Ashraf Ghani," Psaki said.

In a phone call Friday, Biden told Ghani that he's included \$3.3 billion for Afghan security forces in his fiscal year 2022 budget request, according to the White House.

The military aid includes \$1 billion to support the Afghan Air Force and Special Mission Wing, \$1 billion for fuel, ammunition and spare parts, and \$700 million to pay salaries for Afghan soldiers.

The White House said in a statement that the two leaders agreed that the Taliban's military offensive "is in direct contradiction to the movement's claim to support a negotiated settlement of the conflict."

Ghani has often said he will remain in office until new elections can determine the next government. His critics—including ones outside the Taliban—accuse him of seeking only to keep power, causing splits among government supporters.

Last weekend, Abdullah headed a high-level delegation to the Qatari capital of Doha for talks with Taliban leaders. It ended with promises of more talks, as well as greater attention to the protection of civilians and infrastructure.

Shaheen called the talks a good beginning. But he said the government's repeated demands for a ceasefire while Ghani stayed in power were tantamount to demanding a Taliban surrender.

"They don't want reconciliation, but they want surrendering," he said. Before any cease-fire, there must be an agreement on a new government "acceptable to us and to other Afghans," he said. Then "there will be no war." Firefighters battle the Dixie Fire near Prattville in Plumas County, California, US on Friday.

Indonesia, Asia's Covid-19 epicentre, considers relaxing curbs

REUTERS

JAKARTA, JULY 24

Indonesia is suffering a devastating wave of coronavirus infections, driven by the Delta variant, but the government is already talking about relaxing social curbs enacted earlier this month - a move analysts say is largely led by economic considerations.

The impact of the outbreak has been brutal in Indonesia, with stories of people desperately trying to find hospital beds, oxygen and medicine for loved ones. The country's Covid-19 death toll has broken records four times this week, the latest on Friday with 1,566 deaths.

Nonetheless, and just over a week after Indonesia recorded its highest number of daily infections, President Joko Widodo flagged that current restrictions could be eased from as early as next week if cases start to drop.

Easing of restrictions is likely premature and potentially dangerous, say some public health experts. While cases have dipped—from more than 56,000 in mid-July to 49,000 on July 23—epidemiologists say testing rates also dropped in the same period, making it difficult to determine whether there has been a true decline.

Even if cases are flattening, relaxing curbs is inadvisable given hospital occupancy and death rates remain high, they say.

Indonesia's death rate is currently three times higher than the global average, according to Our World in Data, while nearly 2,500 people have died in isolation or outside hospitals since June, said independent data initiative, Lapor Covid-19.

Social restrictions in place since July 3 such as working from home and closed shopping malls are currently limited to the islands of Java and Bali and other designated 'red zones' across the country.

Senior Minister Luhut Pandjaitan has said these could be eased as early as Monday if cases continue to fall and other indicators improve. He also said the "sociological condition of the people" would be factored into the decision.

Concern about the livelihoods of the poor, and a series of small protests in the past week, have raised fears about the risk of social unrest, analysts and government sources say. With 60 percent of the workforce in the informal sector, experts say protests are a manifestation of frustration, not necessarily against restrictions but over how hard it has become to survive.

The government is counting on vaccinations, largely provided by China's Sinovac, to help reduce the impact of the pandemic.

While Indonesia worked hard to kick off an early vaccination programme, logistical hurdles, limited supplies and vaccine hesitancy have held back targets—so far only 6 percent of the population is fully vaccinated.

Pledges to reach 400,000 tests per day and boost contact tracing have also fallen short, while the positivity rate averaged 28.7 percent in the past week.

The government faces a tricky balancing act in making policy to protect both the economy and the health of 270 million people in the sprawling, developing nation.

But as cases have surged and graveyards have filled, the government has faced growing criticism that it has prioritised the economy over people's health.

ing areas.

SPORTS | MEDLEY

BRIEFING

Youngest athlete in Tokyo 'happy' despite defeat

TOKYO: Syria's Hend Zaza—the youngest athlete at the Tokyo Olympics at just 12—said just reaching the Games was "an achievement" despite bowing out in the preliminary round on Saturday, Zaza, who shot to fame overnight in her war-torn country last year by qualifying for Tokyo, lost to Austria's Liu Jia 11-4, 11-9, 11-3, 11-5. But Zaza, the youngest Olympian since 11-year-old Romanian Beatrice Hustiu competed in figure skating at the 1968 Winter Olympics, said she was happy with her performance. "Reaching the Tokyo Olympics was already an achievement. I wasn't asked to win, I was asked to play well," she told Olympics.com. "I think I had a good performance and I learned from the loss. Hopefully in the next Olympics, there will be something in it for me.'

Toua becomes first five-time woman Olympian lifter

TOKYO: When women's weightlifting was introduced as an Olympic sport in 2000, Papua New Guinea's then 16-year-old Loa Dika Toua became the first-ever female Olympian lifter. On Saturday in Tokyo, the now 37-yearold athlete did it for the fifth time. Wearing her country's flag colours of red and black, Toua grabbed the bar with a scream, lifted 167 kg in total. You can dream of attending one Olympics, and if you're lucky enough, you can make it to two. But I've made it to five Olympic Games, you don't even dream about this," Toua told Reuters at the Tokyo International Forum, site for the event, where she finished well outside the medal positions. "This would have been my sixth, but in 2016 Rio Olympics I pulled out from the team to give my spot to my sister. Unfortunately due to financial con-(AGENCIES)

straints of the country, we couldn't send our team there.

Pariyar sets national shooting record in Tokyo

The shooter scores 616.8 points to finish 48th in the 10m air rifle and judoka Soniya Bhatta exits from the first round after losing to Russian opponent.



This combo picture shows shooter Kalpana Pariyar competing in the 10m air rifle (left) and judoka Soniya Bhatta vying with Russian Olympic Committee's Irina Dolgova at the Tokyo Olympics.

SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, JULY 24

Nepali shooter Kalpana Pariyar set a new national record but exited the qualification round in the women's 10m air rifle at the Tokyo Olympics while Soniya Bhatta bowed out from

the first bout of Judo on Saturday. Pariyar scored a total of 616.8 points to better her previous national record of 614.5 points in women's 10m air rifle at the Asaka Shooting Range. She, however, finished 46th among a total of 50 shooters in the qualification rounds. Only the top eight shoot-

ers qualify for the final round. Pariyar had finished fourth in the 13th South Asian Games (SAG) held in December 2019. She finished ahead of Bosnia and

Herzegovina's Tatjana Djekanovic (613.2), Kyrgystan's Kanyeki Kubanychbekova (612.8), Sri Lanka's

Tehani Egodawela (611.5) and Refugee Olympic Team's Luna Solomon (605.9). China's Qian Yang won gold scoring

251.8 points in the final, setting a new Olympic record while Russia Olympic Committee (ROC's) Anastasiia Galashina bagged silver with 251.8 points and Switzerland's Nina Christen took bronze scoring 230.6 points.

Yang (628.7), China's ROC's Galashina (628.5), Switzerland's Christen (628.5), Norway's Jeanette Hegg (632.9), France's Oceanne Muller (630.7), USA's Mary Carolynn (631.4), Korea's Eunji Kwon (630.9) and Heemoon Park (631.7) qualified for the final.

Pariyar scored 102.2 points in the first series, 105.4 in the second, 101 in the third, 104.1 in the fourth, 103.4 in the fifth and 100.7 in the sixth. The qualification round has six series where a shooter fires 10 shots in each series

Meanwhile, Judoka Bhatta lost her very first bout of the under 48 kg weight category to ROC's Irina Dolgova in the round of 32. She lost the game in 1 minute 16 second in the five-minute bout. The 19-year-old Bhatta conceded ippon, the highest score in the judo point system which alone is sufficient for a win or loss.

Bhatta is the bronze medallist of the 13th SAG.

Dolgova lost her next round bout against Chen-Hao Lin. Kosovo's Distria Krasniqi won gold in the event defeating home team Japan's Funa Tonaki 1-0. Ukraine's Urantsetseg Munkhbat and Israel's Shira Roshony were joint bronze medallists.

Both Pariyar and Bhatta had earned a place in the Games through wildcards.

Altogether five Nepali players are competing in the Olympics.

Swimmers Gaurika Singh and Alexander Gadegaard Shah will compete in women's and men's 100 m freestyle events. Shah will compete on Tuesday and Singh on Wednesday Saraswati Chaudhary will represent Nepal in the women's 100 m race. Chaudhary is scheduled to compete on Friday. Shah, Singh and Chaudhary have earned berths for the Games through universality place.

China wins early golds, Ecuador's Carapaz claims cycling crown

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE TOKYO, JULY 24

China claimed three gold medals on the first day of the Tokyo Olympics on Saturday and cyclist Richard Carapaz became just the second competitor in Ecuador's history to top the podium, with victory in the road race.

As the troubled build-up to the pandemic-postponed Games gave way to the first full day of competition, China secured victories in shooting and weightlifting. Yang Qian sparked the mini gold rush in the 10-metre air rifle pipping competition, Russia's Anastasiia Galashina with a dramatic last-shot victory to take the very first title of the Games.

There was more joy for China, with Hou Zhihui taking gold in the women's 49kg weightlifting event with an Olympic record total of 210 kilograms. Fencer Sun Yiwen added a third Chinese gold of the day with victory in the women's epee.

In cycling's gruelling road race, 2019 Giro d'Italia winner Carapaz outfoxed a heavyweight field led by Slovenia's Tour de France champion Tadej Pogacar. It was only Ecuador's second gold at the Olympics after Jefferson Perez's victory in the 50km race walk at the 1996 Atlanta Games

Japan celebrated the first goal medal of its Games when judoka

Naohisa Takato won the men's 60kg final at the iconic Nippon Budokan, beating Taiwan's Yang Yung-wei. But the host nation suffered disappointment when gymnastics great Kohei Uchimura's campaign came to an early end. The two-time all-around Olympic champion slipped up in qualifying for the horizontal bar competition, having battled a shoulder injury to be fit for the Games.

In another Japanese setback, world champion Daiya Seto failed to reach the final of the men's 400 metre medley in the pool, although he has two more events

With spectators barred from almost all Olympic venues due to Covid-19

HOROSCOPE

restrictions, the road race was a rare chance for domestic fans to glimpse the action. Tens of thousands lined the route of the brutal 234km (145-mile) course to watch as Carapaz prevailed in a thrilling tacti-

The spectre of Covid-19 continued to stalk the Games when German cyclist Simon Geschke was forced out of the road race while Dutch rower Finn Florijn has also tested positive. Seventeen new Games-related cases were announced, taking the total number to 123, of which 12 are athletes.

Elsewhere on Saturday, world number one Novak Djokovic stayed on course for a Golden Grand Slam with

a comfortable 6-2, 6-2 defeat of Bolivia's Hugo Dellien in the opening round of the men's singles tournament. Djokovic, who has already won the Australian Open, French Open and Wimbledon titles this year, is bidding to win all four majors in a calendar year as well as Olympic gold, emulating the feat of German great

Steffi Graf in 1988. The swimming events began with Britain's Adam Peaty blasting through his heat to kickstart the defence of his 100m breaststroke title. Peaty, 26, who has lowered the world record five times and is arguably the greatest ever over the distance, hit the wall in an eye-catching 57.56 sec.

Meanwhile, Hungary's evergreen fencer Aron Szilagyi made Olympic fencing history as he took the sabre title for a third time in a row.

In women's football, world champions USA thrashed New Zealand 6-1 to bounce back from a humiliating defeat to Sweden in their opener.

Britain booked a last-eight spot from Group E after a 1-0 victory over hosts Japan while Sweden also reached the quarter-finals with 4-2 success against Australia in Group G match. Canada moved into second place in Britan's group after beating Chile 2-1

The Netherlands and Brazil played a 3-3 draw. Zambia held China 4-4.

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

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

CANCER (June 22-July 22) ***

Sunday's skies aren't exactly a soothing walk in the

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) ***

As a Libra, you're notorious for trying to keep the

cal battle.



any words being exchanged on the home and family front today, Aries. Unspoken feelings are likely to emerge, as messenger Mercury duels with truth-revealing Pluto. Use this energy to clear the air but be mindful of being too sharp-tongued.

You've got a storm brewing in your brain today,

Taurus. Expressive Mercury locks into a tense opposi-

tion with emotionally-raw Pluto, helping you hone in

on what needs communicating. Aim to release your

thoughts in a constructive, honest fashion

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) ***



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



Give yourself room to breathe under Sunday's skies, Gemini. Your ruling planet, mentally-fast Mercury, locks into an intense opposition with truth-revealing Pluto. This pairing increases the likelihood of intimate and raw conversations in relationships

CROSSWORD

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park, Cancer. The moon treks through the tail-end of solution-seeking Aquarius and locks eyes with hot-headed Mars. This aspect is likely to stoke tensions around financial matters

LEO (July 23-August 22) ***

Important insights are emerging into your focus today, Leo. Even if it's easier to look the other way, try to keep your eyes fixed on the reality. Mercury butts heads with truth-seeking Pluto, helping you clear any mental or emotional debris around family-based matters.

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

Important truths are emerging under Sunday's skies, Virgo. Your ruling planet, expressive Mercury, locks into a hostile opposition with truth-revealing Pluto. This intense pairing can help you clear the air around any romantic issues or strained creative efforts

peace. Be mindful of this habit today. This intense opposition can bring dormant issues, especially those concerning your career path into full focus. Sit with your truth without being tortured by it.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) ***

Your mental environment is likely to be under some stress today, Scorpio. Messenger Mercury's squabble with truth-revealing Pluto might bring important conversations into the mix, however unpleasant they initially seem.

As a Sagittarius, you pride yourself on your ability

to be true. Of course, your truth is always dabbled

with a dash of exaggeration. Your truth is of utmost

skeletons out of the closet and into the light of day.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) ***



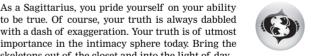
unday's skies aren't exactly soothing. Capricorn Brace yourself for some intense relationship conversations to emerge. This is a great aspect for clearing the air in relationships, but it can also take things a touch too far and become obsessive

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) ***



You're facing a few uncomfortable truths beneath Sunday's skies, Aquarius. Prepare to be radically honest about what stands in your way. This pairing intensifies conversations and your mental atmosphere, especially when it comes to issues concerning your efficiency.

PISCES (February 19-March 20) ***



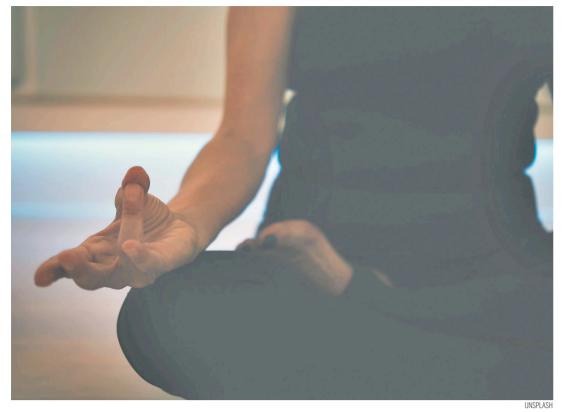
SUDOKU

Things are undoubtedly intensifying under Sunday's cosmic landscape. Pisces. Luna finds herself in a heated opposition with feisty Mars, increasing tensions on the work front. Rather than bottle up and explore later, work to get physically active today and release some tensions.

BLACKBOARD

How I got into meditation

I have been meditating since 2018 and it has benefited me immensely.



RAJU GURUNG

ntil a few years ago, I had never meditated in my entire life. Even though I had heard of meditation and of its many benefits, it had never really occurred to me to actually practise it. My real introduction to meditation began in August 2018. I was travelling to Lo Manthang from Kathmandu, and for the final leg of the journey, which was around for five hours, my only travel companion was a 50-year-old Buddhist monk. He told me that he left his village in Upper Mustang when he was 10 years old to join a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in India's Himachal Pradesh. He was on a month-long vacation and was heading back to his home village to see his mother.

If you have ever travelled in a jeep from Lower Mustang's Chussang to Lo Manthang, you will know that the ride is bumpy After meditating daily for a few months, I found myself being able to meditate for longer and more aware than ever of my own emotions.

and there's nothing much for one to do. I think this was what led the monk and me to start conversing with each other.

Soon, he was talking about the importance of mindfulness and how it helps one to stay calm and be aware of one's emotions. Perhaps it was because of the many things that I was dealing with at the time, I found myself genuinely interested to know more on the topic. Three months before the trip, one of my best friends had committed suicide. During the trip to Lo Manthang, I was still in the grieving phase and the sense of loss was still very deep. In a nutshell, I was in bad shape emotionally.

During the jeep ride, the monk taught me some meditation techniques. When the jeep driver stopped for a break at a tiny roadside cafe in a windswept village somewhere between the village of Ghilling and Ghami—the monk gave me a list of names of Tibetan and Western Buddhist masters and told me to check them out on YouTube.

For several months after the trip, I meditated almost daily. The first few days weren't easy at all. I was taken aback by the sheer number of thoughts that flooded my mind as I meditated. Having listened to teachings online, I was aware that this was part of the process and that I need not panic.

There were times, when I would get lost in thoughts for several minutes and suddenly become aware that I had drifted away and I would gently bring myself back to the 'now'. A few months after daily meditation, I found myself being able to meditate for longer and more aware than ever of my own emotions. On some occasions, I found myself aware of the emotions as they rose, and on other occasions, I would only become aware of them only after they had manifested fully. I was enjoying meditation beginning to see the benefits and changes. My family and close friends told me I had become calmer as a person and that I no longer reacted to things the way I did.

But by the end of 2019, I had completely stopped meditating. In June that year, I rejoined university to pursue my master's degree, which I had left mid-way back in 2018. University kept me so busy that I had very little time to do anything else. But when the pandemic hit in early 2020, I suddenly had time and that was when I began meditating again. It wasn't easy resuming after months of gap. During the first few days, it felt like I had never meditated before. Some sittings were so challenging and I found myself easily distracted. But a few weeks into it, I was beginning to get the hang of things. Like many, last year wasn't an easy year and the abrupt change in lifestyle was a shock to my system as well. But I am glad that I had meditation to seek refuge and clarity during what was a confusing year. At my insistence, I was also able to convince many to start meditation and impart them with whatever little I know about the form.

If you are reading this and haven't meditated ever, please give it a go. It changed me for the better at a very difficult phase in life. Sure, meditation isn't easy and it takes time to see the benefits. But if you trust the process and keep at it, you will see positive changes in yourself.

Gurung is a student at Delhi University.

The good life

SAVYA MAYA CHITRAKAR

Mother, father, daughter and son We all are having so much fun We love to laugh and play We care for each other every day!

I don't care if it's a girl or a boy Friends bring happiness and joy They fight sometimes or even cry But they will stop just give them time.

Grandfather and grandmother, we love to see And we will love them endlessly It's a good life for us We should be grateful, yes, we must It's a good life for us We should be grateful, yes, we must!

Chitrakar is a grade 5 student at Nisarga Batika School.



UNSPLASH

- FICTION PARK

Sukmaya's dhaka topi and shawl shop

A shrewd entrepreneur, Sukmaya single-handedly built her business only for her son to make it go bankrupt.



LB THAPA

ukmaya ran a small garment shop in Palpa bazaar and sold all kinds of dhaka topis. Her shop

up with tears. He had a giant galvanised shed constructed and installed the Chinese machines there.

A few months after construction began, the factory was up and running. All the

was the oldest one in Palpa bazaar and she was much respected in the locality. Everyone fondly called her Suku didi. Sukmaya started running the shop with her husband, Chabilal, in 1970. But one day, Chhabilal disappeared and two days later his dead body was found in the nearby forest.

After losing her husband, Sukmaya was heartbroken. But with two children to raise, she couldn't afford to spend a long time grieving. After a week of mourning, she got back to running her shop.

Sukmaya was not only a hardworking woman but was also a shrewd entrepreneur. A few years after her husband's death, she expanded her shop and established ten handlooms to produce dhaka topis and shawls. When her locally produced dhaka topis and shawls saw unprecedented demand, she stopped importing dhaka topis from Kathmandu.

By working hard, Sukmaya single-handedly raised her two children. At that time, her son, Birendra, was in his final year of college. Her daughter, Tilicha, was a second-year PCL Nursing student. Both of them were studying in Palpa. Even though Sukmaya never got an opportunity to go to school she was determined to provide the best possible education to her children.

Immediately after completing her nursing course in Palpa, Tilicha started applying for a student visa in Australia. Tilicha's happiness knew no bounds when her visa got approved.

Sukmaya drew a sigh of relief when she received a phone call from Tilicha saying she had landed safely in Australia and was on her way to her college-allocated room.

Unlike Tilicha, Birendra, after completing his Bachelor's degree, did not show any interest in pursuing further studies. Instead, he wanted to start his own business.

One day, Birendra suggested his mother replace the handlooms with new machines that can produce all kinds of modern garments. However, his mother declined. "These handlooms are too slow. They are too time- and energy-consuming. We need to move on with time, or else we will be left behind and our business will suffer. We need to upgrade our business, mother," advised Birendra anxiously.

"I have been doing well all these years with these ten handlooms and I still have



more than enough work in my hand. I'm struggling to meet the local demand for dhaka topis and shawls. In a situation like this, we don't need to replace handlooms with modern machines," said a confident Sukmaya.

However, Birendra didn't like those traditional handlooms. He wanted to get rid of them and import modern machines from China. Sukmaya tried her best to convince him to drop the idea of purchasing new machines but Birendra remained adamant. When Sukmaya did not agree with her son, Birendra, in protest, left home and began living in Kathmandu.

Birendra's leaving home deeply bothered Sukmaya. Out of desperation, she made a phone call to Tilicha and explained what her brother wanted. Upon hearing everything, Tilicha said, "I don't think my brother will be successful even if he goes ahead and starts his own business. He is the Mungerilal of Nepal. Ask him to complete his master's degree and find a job in a college in Palpa. This is what he should do instead. I will not be happy if you ever allow him to do what he wants."

For three consecutive nights, Sukmaya could not sleep. She didn't like that there was nobody else she could seek A day before the bank's deadline, Birendra told his mother that he was going to Kathmandu for some work and that he would return in a week.

advice from.

After much contemplation, Sukmaya finally made a decision. "All that I have earned is for my children. What they do with the property is their choice. At a time when I need my son's support, he has decided to live far from me," said Sukmaya to herself as she made up her mind to call her son back to Palpa.

Birendra was filled with excitement when his mother told him that he can replace the handlooms with machines. He wasted no time and caught the first bus to Palpa. Sukmaya was simply happy to see her son at home.

"I have put my heart and soul together to establish this small business. Now it is your responsibility to run it successfully. But, son, you should always be very careful while making financial decisions. Because it takes enormous time to develop a business, but it takes no time to bring it down," advised Sukmaya to her son.

"Don't worry, aama. You should come out of such an old mentality. Times have changed. I will show the people how to run a modern business," said Birendra, with an inflated self-confidence.

Birendra went to the bank and applied for a hefty loan. Because the amount of the loan was huge, the bank manager told him that he needs to furnish more collateral. Birendra then submitted the papers of the family's house and the plot of land, which was located at the heart of Palpa bazaar. Birendra didn't tell her mother that he had mortgaged the house and the land because he knew that his mother wouldn't approve of it.

Once the loan was approved, Birendra hired some labourers and dismantled all the handlooms and stored them in his house. When Sukmaya saw her handlooms being dismantled, her eyes welled

machines worked smoothly and p a variety of garments. For the first few months, Birendra business was good. Traders from all over Palpa and neighbouring towns came to place orders. But soon, Birendra started facing problems. Traders who had taken clothes from him were not paying back his money on time. When asked to pay the old dues, the retailers asked Birendra to take his clothes back complaining that the quality of the clothes was poor and people weren't buying them. When most of the retailers gave him the same reply, he reduced the prices of his garments. Despite the heavy reduction in the prices, no retailers came forward to place orders from him. This started worrying Birendra. With no cash coming in, he soon started having problems paying bank instalments on time.

After failing to pay the bank for three consecutive months, the bank manager started telephoning Birdenra to pay what the bank owed him. In the fifth month, the manager came to the factory and warned Birendra that he should pay up or face consequences.

"If you do not pay your due instalments in a week, we will have no option but to seize your house and land," warned the manager.

A day before the bank's deadline, Birendra told his mother that he was going to Kathmandu for some work and that he would return in a week. While Birendra was away, the bank manager came to his factory looking for him. When he could not find Birendra, he went to his home and met Sukmaya. She was shocked when she found that her son had mortgaged the family's house and land. She tried to contact Birendra several times but to no avail.

A few days later, the bank seized her house and the land. With no place to live, Sukmaya was forced to take shelter in one of her relative's houses. She felt as if the ground beneath her feet had slipped away. At the age of seventy, Sukmaya was homeless. Though she was old and had no money, she was still determined to not be a burden on anyone. She started living in a makeshift shack and sold all her jewellery and restarted her business.

If you go to Palpa bazaar today, you can find Sukmaya's shop at the end of the bazaar. She sells dhaka topis and shawls under a huge tree.

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