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POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

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 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. 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 extrajudicial 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 Dolleshwor 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 Sub-inspectors Dipendra Chanda, Prashanna 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.

(Details on Pg 5)

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.



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

and former office bearers on Saturday decided to sit again on Tuesday to fix the new date of holding conventions in all 6,743 wards of the country.

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 conventions 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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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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Elegance is an attitude

Eddie Peng

LONGINES

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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.

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."

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 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.

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, Prashanna Malla and Ranjit Tamang and Assistant Sub-inspector Rajan Khadka, as the investigation proved that they had killed the alleged abductors after arrest and attempted to 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

to 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 respecting 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 rule of law."

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'.



Successive governments have disregarded the recommendations made by the commission.

The Nepal Police says Chand was promoted as he has fulfilled the criteria.

"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." Nepal Police carries out its internal probe even if the commission makes the recommendation." The commission has the judicial

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.

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



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