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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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POST PHOTO: KESHAV THAPA

Workers construct a sewer manhole at Sitapaila in Kathmandu on Sunday.

In UML split, Maoist Centre sees chance at regaining its relevance

As Madhav Nepal moves to register new party, the former rebel party, under threat of being wiped out of political scene, appears to be major beneficiary besides Congress.

TIKA R PRADHAN
KATHMANDU, AUG 22

Once registered with the Election Commission, Madhav Nepal's CPN (Unified Socialist) party is most likely to extend support to the Sher Bahadur Deuba government, in return for some ministerial berths. Nepal has already applied for registration after splitting from the CPN-UML, which he led for 15 years from 1993 to 2008. Nepal's decision to part ways with KP Sharma Oli, the UML chair, makes Deuba, or the Nepali Congress for that matter, the beneficiary.

However, in the long run, the party that is going to benefit is the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) and the leader that is going to have a field day is its leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal. After the Supreme Court on March 7 revived the Maoist Centre and the UML, invalidating the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) they had formed in May 2018 after a merger, Dahal was looking for a plank for survival. Competing with a strong UML, which has a strong organisational base across the country at various levels, during elections would have been an uphill task for him.

Observers say while the Nepali Congress is likely to make a comeback after its massive loss in the 2017 elections as the first party due to the UML split, the Maoist Centre can make an attempt to prove its relevance.

"A split in the UML was Dahal's interest, rather than Deuba's. That's why Maoist chair Dahal was making a push for it," said Lok Raj Baral, a professor of political science.

"There is a realisation in the Maoist Centre that its relevance is over and it does not have any agenda to sell during the elections."

According to Baral, the Maoist Centre now will try to forge an alliance with Nepal as well as the Janata Samajbadi Party led by Upendra Yadav and Baburam Bhattarai.

"It's always good for parties like the Maoist Centre when the direct competitor is weakened," said Baral.

The Maoist Centre has already launched initiatives to explore the possibilities of forging a left alliance with like-minded forces.

On Sunday, the party's Standing Committee meeting decided to forge unity of revolutionary forces, if possible, or at least an alliance, after strengthening the party's organisational structures.

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INSIDE

Surma Sarovar sees thousands of devotees despite pandemic

BAJHANG: Health officials in Bajhang have rung the warning bells for the spread of coronavirus in the district given the recent influx of people to Surma Sarovar Lake to observe the annual festival of Birijaat Mela in the middle of a still-raging pandemic. The five-day affair started on August 18 and culminated on August 22. "The preparations for the festival started 15 days prior to the festival. The foot-fall in Chainpur, the district headquarters, alone was in the thousands in the last two weeks of those en route to Surma Sarovar Lake," said Narayan Joshi, information officer at Bajhang Health Office in Jaya Prithvi Municipality. "Gathering in one place to celebrate a festival in times like these is dangerous." (Details on Pg 2)

Festive season is here. Experts urge caution against virus

KATHMANDU: It's 8am at Samakhushi on Sunday, the Janai Purnima festival also known as Rakshya Bandhan. An awareness message about Covid-19 is repeating on a loudspeaker at the Metropolitan Police Circle saying 'don't come out of your homes, maintain a distance of at least two metres from people, wear a mask, don't cause crowding...'. Signboards with similar messages line the walls of the help desk set up in front of the circle. But a few meters away from the circle, on the roadside at Ranibari, four priests are tying Rakshya Bandhan, a sacred thread, on people's wrists. There are around 50 people waiting for their turn. Offering rituals at shrines, wearing Raksha Bandhan either from priests or sisters and changing the Janai, which is a thread worn across the torso by the tagadhari community, and feasting are major parts of the festival. "I am fully vaccinated with two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine. The virus can't do me any harm," said Bishnu Hari Adhikari, 61, one of the priests as he tied sacred threads around his clients' wrists. (Details on Pg 3)

Goat farming flourishes with Nepalis eating more meat

SALYAN: Four years ago, Krishna Raj Upadhyaya of Sarada Municipality-2, Dadagaun started commercial goat farming with seven animals. Now he has 100 local and Boer goats including kids on his farm. Upadhyaya makes Rs700,000 annually by rearing goats, which not only covers his household expenses, but also allows him to enlarge his savings. He said that he has received further encouragement with greater market access. Jibraj Bohara of Sharda Municipality-8 is also engaged in goat rearing which is his major business. He got into commercial goat farming by opening Srijanshil Bakhra Farm, and now has 70 goats and kids in a loafing shed. Bohara has been raising a family of six with the income from this business, and he has also provided jobs to two youths in the village. (Details on Pg 5)

Socialist centre in Nepal: A realistic vision or an ambitious idea?

Some politicians, including Baburam Bhattarai, a former Maoist leader, have been making a pitch for bringing like-minded forces to build a new model of socialism.



POST ILLUSTRATION

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, AUG 22

Baburam Bhattarai, a former prime minister, former Maoist leader and currently a senior leader of the Janata Samajbadi Party, recently called for bringing "like-minded" forces under one umbrella, which he termed a socialist centre.

"My request to comrades of various communist parties in Nepal: why has the objective of ending all kinds of repression and discrimination against people by people taken a regressive path?" Bhattarai wrote on Twitter, who has 1.3 million followers on the social media platform. "How will we reach a new destination by pursuing the same old path? Shall we march towards a new direction with new ideas."

Only time can tell whether Bhattarai's idea will get traction at a time when communist forces, or leftist politicians for that matter, have been scattered.

Bhattarai himself has drifted afar after severing his ties with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). After forming Naya Shakti, or new force, in June, 2016, he decided to join hands with Upendra Yadav's Sanghiya Samajbadi Party (or Federal Socialist Party) in 2019. The Sanghiya Samajbadi then in April last year merged with the Rastriya Janata Party to form the Janata Samajbadi Party, which now has split again. The former chair of the party, Mahantha Thakur, has applied for a new party—Loktanatrik Samajbadi Party Nepal (Democratic Socialist Party Nepal).

The CPN-UML, the largest party too, has split, with Madhav Nepal applying for a new party proposing the name as CPN (Unified Socialist).

There already are three parties now, led by prominent politicians, that have "socialist" in their names. There are at least seven other parties registered

with the Election Commission, which have the "socialist" tag.

Bhattarai's call for a socialist centre appears to be an attempt to bring the scattered communists under one roof.

"Our country has been ruled by traditional forces like the Congress and communist parties but they have failed to bring about any substantial changes," said Bhattarai in an interview with the Post.

"So I have been proposing a new kind of socialist force in the country that can really transform the nation in the changed context."

Not many may counter Bhattarai's idea. That the Congress and communist forces—the UML and the Maoist Centre—have ruled the country for decades ever since democracy was restored in 1990 is a fact. It would be wrong to say the country has not seen any changes over the decades, but status quoism does continue. Even after the promulgation of the constitution, transforming the country into a federal secular republic, threats to the achievements persist. The issues of the marginalised have yet to be resolved.

According to some leaders from the left block, some initial talks did take place between Maoist Centre chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Bhattarai on the socialist centre idea and both had then discussed the issue within their respective parties.

Dahal too has lately been in talks with Madhav Nepal to explore the possibility of a new "left alliance", as the Maoist tag appears to have become a burden for him.

A Standing Committee meeting of the Maoist Centre on Sunday decided to initiate talks with like-minded leftist and communist forces, including with Nepal, for a larger left unity.

"We have decided to start talks with all like-minded leftist parties including Bhattarai, Nepal, Mohan Baidya, Netra Bikram Chand and Gopal Kirati among others whose ultimate goal is to establish socialism," said Devendra Poudel, a Standing Committee member.

In the past, Baidya, Bhattarai, Chand and Kirati were senior leaders of the Maoist party. But after differences, they gradually deserted the Maoist Centre.

"The objective is to bring the like-minded forces under one roof," said Poudel.

But whether Dahal and Nepal will share the same platform with Bhattarai is doubtful, as the latter has been making a pitch for something that would mean drifting away from communism, on which both Dahal and Nepal have done their politics all their lives.

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Surma Sarovar sees thousands of devotees for Birijaat Mela despite pandemic

At least 8,000 individuals visited Surma Sarovar Lake in the last two weeks, according to Surma Rural Municipality office.

BASANTA PRATAP SINGH
BAJHANG, AUG 22

Health officials in Bajhang have rung the warning bells for the spread of coronavirus in the district given the recent influx of people to Surma Sarovar Lake to observe the annual festival of Birijaat Mela in the middle of a still-raging pandemic.

The five-day affair started on August 18 and culminated on August 22.

"The preparations for the festival started 15 days prior to the festival. The footfall in Chainpur, the district headquarters, alone was in the thousands in the last two weeks of those en route to Surma Sarovar Lake," said Narayan Joshi, information officer at Bajhang District Health Office in Jaya Prithvi Municipality.

"Gathering in one place to celebrate a festival in times like these is dangerous. The chances of a virus outbreak are still high but neither the devotees nor the local administration seemed keen on preventing the spread of the virus," he said.

According to Surma Rural Municipality Chairman Nar Bahadur Bohora, at least 8,000 individuals visited Surma Sarovar Lake in the last two weeks.

The residents of Darchula and Bajhang districts take the annual pilgrimage to the holy lake, also known as Mini Kailash among Hindus, towards the beginning of August until the middle of the month.

According to devotees, they must make the journey on bare feet and abstain from worldly comforts, even going to lengths such as refusing umbrellas to shelter from the rain. Bajhang experiences moderate to heavy rainfall during the monsoon season.

Devotees from Bajhang and Darchula converge at Biruodra, a cave in Surma Rural Municipality, and serenade the Surma goddess with songs of piety while they make their way towards the holy lake.

Although the second wave of Covid-19 infections, which began in April, wreaked havoc across the nation with thousands of hospitalisations and over 6,000 deaths recorded from April onward, people seem to be disregarding all health safety protocols in their efforts to reach the lake to pay homage to their deity.

Despite the health safety warnings, both the local and district authorities failed to set up mechanisms to monitor the safety protocols for the passing pilgrims merging in one location in



Health officials worry that the negligence of the authorities in monitoring the movement of people could fuel Covid-19 infections.

huge numbers.

Chairman Nar Bahadur Bohora attributes their lack of control over the situation to the sheer volume of people involved in the pilgrimage.

"There were so many people that it became impossible to keep track. It was beyond our control to make people follow health safety protocols," he said.

Mangal Khadka, a resident of Khaptadchhanna Rural Municipality, says the influx of people from outside the rural municipality has put the local people at risk of Covid-19 infection.

"The market places are crowded and no one is following safety measures," said Khadka. "Although the police had closed shops and businesses after 8pm in Chainpur, there was an overwhelming crowd during the day. If this is to continue, the infection rate will rise again and we will be confined inside our homes."

Health officials worry that the negligence of the concerned authorities in monitoring the movement of people during the pandemic could give rise to the number of Covid-19 cases in the coming weeks.

"People, both local and those from

outside the district, are behaving like there is no pandemic," said Naresh Khadka, laboratory in-charge at the Bajhang District Hospital.

"The number of PCR and RT-PCR tests being conducted has decreased in the past month, which means there is no actual data to gauge the extent of the virus spread," he said. "People have stopped getting tested. It could be vaccine confidence or the fear of being marked as a coronavirus patient."

According to the District Health Office, as of the third week of August, 35,112 individuals have so far taken a single dose of Covid-19 vaccine in the district while 5,121 have received both doses.

According to Khadka, the laboratory in-charge, they received only four samples for Covid-19 testing in the third week of July. "Since then we haven't received a single sample for testing," he said.

The total number of coronavirus cases in Bajhang is 1,509 with 20 deaths while the active cases stand at zero, the data of the District Health Office showed.

"There are zero active cases in the district but that can be attributed to

the fact that hardly any tests are being conducted," he said. "The local authorities should increase testing in the district to decrease the risk of Covid-19 infections."

Health officials say that with almost no testing being conducted and the relative infection numbers reaching nil, people have become careless and complacent in following safety protocols.

They advise prevention of all large gatherings such as the one recently witnessed in Bajhang to ensure health safety of the locals and visitors.

Birendra Bohora of Surma Rural Municipality, who is at the five-day annual festival along with thousands others, is not worried about the ongoing pandemic. Bohora has not been taking any precautions such as wearing a mask or maintaining social distancing.

"The pandemic is not serious in our area so I don't think there is a need to wear a mask," said Bohora. "The festival comes once a year and like me, many are here to pay respect to the deity even during a pandemic. We trust in our deity to keep us safe."

In UML split, Maoist Centre sees chance at regaining its relevance

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"Actually we did not want to part ways and remain as Nepal Communist Party," said Haribol Gajurel, a Standing Committee member of the Maoist Centre. "It was the court that forced our split. So we will again join hands with Madhav Nepal."

Though Nepal has applied for CPN (Unified Socialist) at the Election Commission, a seasoned politician like him is well aware of the fact that making it a strong party for the upcoming elections is a herculean task. While local elections are just seven months away, general elections will be held in about 14 months.

Historically also, breakaway communist factions have fared badly in elections. One of the examples is the CPN-ML.

In 1997, Bamdev Gautam, a long-time communist leader, had broken away from the UML to form the CPN-ML. After failing to win a single seat in the 1999 elections, Gautam returned to the mother party, UML. CP Mainali, however, decided to remain in the CPN-ML, but it is nowhere to be seen in Nepali politics.

It will take a while before Nepal's CPN (Unified Socialist) comes up with its party ideology and agenda. And if it continues to follow what the UML follows, it will hardly have anything to tell the public when during the election campaign, according to observers.

Despite deciding to form a different party, Nepal himself has not ruled out alliance possibilities, even with Oli's UML.

Observers say Oli might not be much wary of possible alliances between Dahal and Nepal, as he feels confident about his UML's strong organisational base. During the polls, the UML's direct fight will be with the Nepali Congress. Oli still has some agenda items up his sleeve, including the new Nepal map that his government had unveiled in May last year. Oli may not hesitate to resort to Hindutva—he has already given some indications—an issue that strikes a chord with a sizeable section of voters.

And there is an anti-incumbency factor, which could come to Oli's advantage.

"I don't think the Nepali Congress will be able to cash in on the opportunity provided by the split in the UML, given the tendency of its leaders," said Baral. "Much depends on how Deuba fares in governance."

So in the fight between the UML and the Nepali Congress, Dahal sees a chance for stealing some constituencies. The 2013 Constituent Assembly

elections came as a hard lesson for Dahal, as his party was relegated to the third party, just five years after emerging as the single largest party in 2008.

The Nepali Congress and the Maoist Centre had formed an alliance in the past too, but after the first phase of local elections in 2017, Dahal decided to lean on the UML. For the Nepali Congress, sharing constituencies with any other party is not easy because of the sheer number of aspirants. And Dahal knows this well.

For Dahal's Maoist party, contesting the elections on its own also won't be easy. That's why Dahal was desperately trying to break the UML.

"Even if the Congress emerges victorious, it is unlikely to secure a majority in the upcoming polls," said Krishna Pokharel, who teaches political science at the Tribhuvan University. "Oli's UML and other left parties in the current coalition will fight for the second and third positions."

The Maoist Centre which was looking at a hopeless future after it was revived now is heaving a sigh of relief after the split in the UML, as it has found some breathing space.

During the party's Central Committee meeting, which concluded on August 15, Dahal, according to insiders, himself had admitted that they were on the verge of losing significance.

"If we continue with our current activities, this party will be of no use. Communist parties in the world have fallen," a central committee member quoted Dahal as saying at the meeting. "If we cannot be honest with our principles and people of our class, we should rather involve ourselves in some research work or start writing books by dissolving the party."

According to Pokharel, there could be two possible alliances in the country by the next elections—one left alliance of the Maoist Centre, Nepal's CPN (Unified Socialist) and Bhattarai-Yadav's Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP) and the other of Oli's UML, Rastriya Prajatantra Party and Mahantha Thakur's Loktantrik Samajbadi Party.

Since the Congress and the UML have their consistent vote shares, the Maoist Centre will try to take benefit from the gaps created by the splits in the UML and the JSP.

"The UML split in particular could also give rise to a left alliance of a sizeable size that can have a significant influence in the country's politics," said Pokharel. "Politically, the Maoist Centre is the beneficiary, as it will try to assert its relevance."

Socialist centre in Nepal: A realistic vision or an ambitious idea?

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Bhattarai, on his part, had detached himself from communism soon after the promulgation of the constitution in September 2015.

A senior politician from the Maoist Centre said the socialist centre had been in discussion for some months but no talks have been held of late on the issue.

"An electoral alliance among the like-minded forces is possible," said Narayan Kaji Shrestha, spokesperson for the Maoist Centre. "But I don't see any chance of forming a socialist centre or socialist alliance."

Whether Nepal's communist parties indeed follow communism has been debated for quite a long time, but the leftist politicians harbour a penchant for having "communist" in their party names.

The Maoist Centre itself neither believes or follows Maoism. Bhattarai's partner in the Samajbadi Party Nepal, Upendra Yadav also comes from communist school.

Beduram Bhusal, a Standing Committee member of the UML who is currently with the Nepal faction, said a socialist alliance or a socialist centre is not an issue at present.

"We had heard that the idea was initially forwarded by Dahal," Bhusal told the Post. "But the issue is not being discussed in our faction at present."

Bhusal, however, does not rule out the possibility of a socialist centre.

"Politics is a game of possibilities," said Bhusal. "What I am saying is this is not our priority at the moment."

Last week Bhattarai again reiterated the need for a new model of socialism.

Speaking at a function in Kathmandu, Bhattarai urged Dahal and Nepal to stop focusing on immediate election dividends.

"If all of us work hard, we can find a new refined thought," said Bhattarai. "In the past, some of us became Maoists, others became the UML. Now we must make efforts to depart from those. We must devote ourselves to building a new model of socialism."

But many within the Maoist Centre do not agree.

A Maoist leader said Bhattarai is trying to recoup his political career,

and his statements are aimed at maintaining his relevance. After quitting the Maoist party, Bhattarai had formed the Naya Shakti with a slogan that the country needed a new party that was different from traditional Congress and communist forces.

However, after failing to sustain his party, Bhattarai was left with no option than to merge with any other existing party. So his Naya Shakti was merged with Upendra Yadav's Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum Nepal. With his declaration that communism is not the ideology a new party should follow any longer, his return to the Maoist Centre was not possible.

For Dahal also, things were looking bleak after the Maoist Centre was revived by the Supreme Court on March 7 when it invalidated the Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

Insiders in the Maoist Centre admit that Dahal too was facing an existential crisis.

"Now that the UML has split, the Maoist Centre sees some electoral chance," a Maoist leader who wished to remain anonymous told the Post. "Both Dahal and Bhattarai may seek some working alliance targeting elections, but both coming under a socialist centre per se looks unlikely anytime soon."

Bhattarai, however, refuted charges that his pitch for a socialist centre was aimed at salvaging his political career.

"This is the necessity in our country now as we have learned from our past," Bhattarai told the Post. "My proposal is to have a socialist system with democratic and inclusive characters... with a participatory approach. It has become apparent now that old, traditional and monolithic political parties have failed to meet people's aspirations."

Ram Karki, a Maoist leader who is considered a well-versed politician on Marxism, said talks were held among some communist forces to form a new alliance, but even if it materialises, it is not going to become "a new force" as claimed by some.

"If an organisation or an alliance or a front is going to be set up and leaders like Dahal, Bhattarai, Yadav, Mohan Baidya and Netra Bikram Chand are included, how can it become a new force," Karki told the Post. "Since

some leaders in our party want to shed the Maoist tag, they are participating in such talks and putting the idea on the table as a socialist centre."

According to Karki, a new force cannot be built unless politicians can think of new ideas and connect the masses with that idea.

As per textbook definition, there are some fundamental differences between communism and socialism.

Communism aims to set up a system where there is no such thing as private property. Property is communally owned and each individual receives a portion based on their needs. This set-up envisions a strong central government (the state) that controls all aspects of economic production, and provides citizens with their basic necessities, including food, housing, medical care and education.

Socialism calls for a system where industrial production, or the chief means of generating wealth, is communally owned and managed by a democratically elected government. Individuals can still own property. Socialism is considered a less rigid ideology. Its proponents insist on reforms and changes through democratic processes within the existing social and political structure, not overthrowing that structure, something communism attempts to do.

Karki says a front or an alliance does not become socialist just because it calls itself so.

"We can give a [false] impression of creating a socialist force by bringing together old communist faces under one umbrella but unless there are new ideas, the changes we are seeking are impossible to achieve," said Karki.

"In the absence of pro-poor policies and programmes to uplift the marginalised and oppressed and working class people, any new alliance cannot claim to be a new or socialist force."

According to Karki, the scattered communist parties in Nepal have their own electoral challenges.

"Whatever alliance under whichever name some leaders are discussing lacks ideas," said Karki. "Everyone has been tried and tested. Those talking about any kind of alliance under the socialist banner are desperate to win elections. A new force starts from an idea."



Farmers herd cattle at Khokana, Lalitpur.

Primary health centre in Salyan of little use

BIBLAP MAHARJAN
SALYAN, AUG 22

The primary health centre in Lekhpokhara of Chhatreshwori Rural Municipality was established some 15 years ago to provide quality health services to the residents of Lekhpokhara, Jhimpe, Syanikhal, Dahakhola and Lanti, among other surrounding settlements. But the health centre has been of little help to the local residents for a lack of trained human resources and proper medical equipment at the health centre.

The residents of Chhatreshwori Rural Municipality Ward No. 5 in Salyan have to visit the District Hospital in Khalanga or private hospitals in neighbouring towns to get basic medical services despite having an established primary health centre at the local unit.

"Treatment expenses rise significantly when one has to visit health institutions in other towns," said Nandaram Pun, a resident of Chhatreshwori Rural Municipality Ward No. 5.

Although the primary health centre in Lekhpokhara installed an X-ray machine four years ago, the machine remains unused due to a lack of human resources and other additional equipment.

"Getting an X-ray costs around Rs 200 but the travel expenses add up to Rs 2,000. Especially pregnant women, children and senior citizens have been hugely affected by the lack of proper medical services at the primary health centre," Pun said.

The monsoon season brings additional problems with vehicular movement obstructed along most rural roads due to landslides.

"Vehicular movement along several rural roads comes to a halt during monsoon. There's no other option than to walk for hours to reach the district headquarters to receive health services," said Purna Bahadur Gharti, a resident of Lekhpokhara in ward 5. "Able-bodied villagers can make the journey, but when our elders and children fall ill, we don't have much choice but to carry them on our backs."

Pun of Chhatreshwori complained

that patients have to be carried on stretchers to the district headquarters, as rural roads have been obstructed by multiple landslides.

"We can't receive proper diagnosis in the primary health centre. That's why even patients with minor illnesses have to be taken to Khalanga or Shreenagar for treatment," said Pun.

Local residents also complain of the absence of health workers at the health centre.

"Most days, the health centre is unmanned. Not every villager can afford to seek treatment outside the rural municipality. They end up relying on traditional healing," said Jhupa Khatri, a local health volunteer.

Bir Bahadur Oli, the senior Auxiliary Health Worker at the centre, admits that the facility lacks trained human resources and other necessary medical tools to operate its X-ray machine.

"The federal health ministry provided the X-ray machine in 2017. We asked the rural municipality to release a budget for the hiring of technicians but they paid no heed to us," Oli said.

BRIEFING

Abducted youths rescued from India

HETAUDA: Police, in coordination with Indian authorities, have safely rescued two abducted youths from Motihari in the Indian state of Bihar. Three armed persons from India had abducted Pawan Rana Magar, 22, and Gobinda Shrestha, 23, of Hetauda-9 from Hetauda Buspark on Thursday night. According to investigation officers, the abductors demanded Rs 500,000 ransom from the victims' families for their release. "Security personnel safely rescued the victims and handed them over to their families," said Deputy Superintendent of Police Jayashwar Rimal on Sunday.

Man held with loaded pistol

SARLAHI: Police arrested a 30-year-old man in possession of a pistol from Malangawa, the district headquarters of Sarlahi, on Saturday. Samsuddin Ansari of Malangawa-11 was found holding a loaded pistol during a dispute with his brother, said police. Security personnel reached the incident site after they were informed about the heated dispute between the two brothers. "We have taken Samsuddin into custody," said DSP Madhav Prasad Budhathoki.

300 thatched roofs replaced

HETAUDA: Raksirang Rural Municipality in Makwanpur district replaced the thatched roofs of 300 houses with corrugated zinc sheets in the last fiscal year. According to the local unit, the campaign to replace thatched roofs with corrugated zinc sheets in Raksirang was initiated with the joint effort of the federal, provincial and local governments. Raj Kumar Malla, chairman of the rural municipality, said, "There are still 490 houses with thatched roofs in the rural municipality. We will continue with the campaign."

Community forest group charged with illegal logging

MORANG: A community forest users' community in Belbari-11, Morang, has been charged with felling trees illegally. According to Prem Kumar Rai, Laxmi Community Forest Users' Committee cut down 14 trees on the premises of Kirat Dharma Samrakshan Samiti a month ago. "A team is investigating the incident. We'll take action as per the law," said Dipesh Mishra, an assistant forest officer.

Festive season is here. Experts urge caution against virus

Doctors say wrong belief among people that vaccination makes them immune to infection and gatherings may drive infections up amid lax restrictions.

ANUP OJHA
KATHMANDU, AUG 22

It's 8am at Samakhushi on Janai Purnima, also known as Raksha Bandhan, on Sunday. An awareness message about Covid-19 is repeating on a loudspeaker at the Metropolitan Police Circle saying 'don't come out of your homes, maintain a distance of at least two metres from people, wear a mask, don't cause crowding....'

Signboards with similar messages line the walls of the help desk set up in front of the circle. But a few meters away from the circle, on the roadside at Ranibari, four priests are tying Raksha Bandhan, a sacred thread, on people's wrists. There are around 50 people waiting for their turn.

Offering rituals at shrines, wearing Raksha Bandhan either from priests or sisters and changing the Janai, which is a thread worn across the torso by the tagadhari community, and feasting are major parts of the festival.

"I am fully vaccinated with two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine. The virus can't do me any harm," said Bishnu Hari Adhikari, 61, one of the priests as he tied sacred threads around his clients' wrists. With his mask around the chin, he chanted mantras while tying the threads.

From early morning on Sunday, most of the Hindu shrines across the country including the Kathmandu Valley were crowded with people observing the Raksha Bandhan rituals. In the Valley, Pashupatinath, Gorkarneshwar, Koteswar Mahadev temple, Kuleswar, Bagalamukhi and Mahalaxmishan among others saw devotees in large numbers until noon while many people visited their relatives to celebrate the festival.

"We tried our best to convince people to avoid crowding but nobody seems to be listening. And we can't shoot them or beat them up with batons," said Durga Prasad Dahal, chief of the circle. He said his office had deployed police in the morning to curb crowding.

"We can't detain them because they are so many and there is no place to detain all of them," said Dahal.

The season of festivals has begun in Nepal. On Monday it is Gajatra and several festivals are lined up for the next few months. Upcoming major festivals include Krishnajanmashtami, Teej, Indra Jatra and the biggest festivals of Dashain and Tihar, which fall



Devotees gather to receive raksha bandhan from Hindu priests on the occasion of the Janai Purnima festival at Bagalamukhi, Lalitpur on Sunday.

POST PHOTO: ELITE JOSHI

in October and November.

Also on Saturday, the eve of the festival, markets in the capital were crowded with shoppers. Major groceries, sweet shops and clothing stores were packed with social distancing being ignored and many people were seen without masks and those who had masks weren't wearing them properly.

After the Home Ministry issued a circular to the chief district officers across the country to control the mobility of people especially during festivals such as Janai Purnima and Gajatra to contain the spread of Covid-19, the District Administration Office, Kathmandu on Friday published a notice asking people to maintain all the health protocols. But people were not giving two hoots to such notices.

Doctors say crowding during festivals provides a perfect platform for the coronavirus to spread and could

lead the country into a third wave.

"If we look at last year, the Holi, Janai Purnima, Gajatra and other big festivals like Dashain and Tihar had fueled the second wave. And the ongoing public behaviour shows that the country will soon be gripped by a third wave," said Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, chief of the Clinical Research Unit at the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital.

Pun says that after a week, the country could see a surge of new infections. "As Gajatra, Teej and the biggest festivals of Dashain and Tihar are on the way, they will surely increase Covid-19 cases," said Pun. "And if a new variant comes in then the situation might turn worse," he added.

In the first week of August, Nepal's Covid-19 death toll crossed the 10,000 mark. Last week, the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre sent a circular to the chief district officers across the

country to enforce smart lockdowns, although health experts found the idea puzzling. The government also introduced a 'mask up' campaign but the campaign seems to have little effect on the public.

Dr Basudev Pandey, former director at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division says the festival season, people's negligence to health protocol and poor enforcement of the restrictions may lead to a third wave.

Meanwhile, a study by the Ministry of Health and Population shows that over 50 percent of the country's population has already been exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 that causes Covid-19.

"The antibody may protect some people but as the virus has been mutating into more infectious variants, I see the danger of a third wave. So both the government and the public should work hand in hand to fight the virus. The government should make necessary preparations and the public

should follow the health protocols," said Pandey.

The daily infection rate in the past few weeks has jumped to double compared to two months ago. On June 20, when the prohibitory orders were eased, Nepal recorded 1,421 new infections with 51 Covid-19 fatalities. In a span of two months, infections have doubled with the country reporting over 3,000 new cases until last week.

On Sunday, Nepal reported 1,702 new cases and 24 deaths. In the past 24 hours, Kathmandu Valley recorded 566 new infections—395 cases were confirmed in Kathmandu, 110 in Lalitpur and 61 in Bhaktapur.

"These festivals have led to an increased physical contact among individuals and at the same time the health protocols are not being observed," said Dr Pun. "The only way to protect ourselves is to learn from past mistakes."

Government yet to pay Nepal Airlines for last year's Omni chartered flights

Payment remains stalled while the carrier faces acute financial problems due to flight suspensions.

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU, AUG 22

It has been more than 16 months since Nepal Airlines conducted a chartered flight for the Omni Business Group to ferry Covid-19-related supplies from Guangzhou, China, but the national flag carrier has not yet received the payment for the flight.

The government had chartered the flight on behalf of Omni, which was controversially awarded a contract for the delivery of medical goods despite quoting prices higher than the government's own cost estimate and that of rival bidders.

The Department of Health Services had promised to pay the fee for the charter flight immediately after the delivery of the shipment, but that has not happened despite several follow-ups, officials at the national flag carrier said. The national flag carrier has failed to receive the payment at a time when its financial situation has deteriorated due to flight suspensions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The state-owned company is supposed to receive Rs19.42 million from the government which is deductible from the bill to be paid to Omni.

"We have sent requests for the payment at least 10 times to the Department of Health Services," said Dim Prakash Poudel, managing director of Nepal Airlines. "But, the government says that it could not make the payment as Omni has filed a case at the court against the government's early termination of the contract."

On April 1 last year, the department had terminated the contract with Omni after the deal signed with the company landed in controversy over alleged political influence to award the task to the company.

Earlier, the department and Omni had signed the contract on March 27 last year to deliver the medical goods worth \$10.03 million in three phases.

Before the termination of the contract, Omni had supplied medical goods worth \$2.33 million in the first instalment on March 29 last year. The rest of the goods on order were to be delivered by April 5 the same year.

Even though the department had prepared a cost estimate of \$9.07 million, it later approved the proposal of Omni, which had quoted \$10.03 million, and signed an agreement inviting controversy.

After the department terminated the contract unilaterally, withholding the payment of goods brought and confiscating the bank guarantee amount, the company moved the Patan High Court, and the case is sub judice.

Unable to receive the payment, Nepal Airlines has not been able to pay the instalment of loans it had borrowed from various government agencies including the Employees

Provident Fund and the Citizen Investment Trust to procure wide-body and narrow-body aircraft.

"It has been more than a year that we have not paid the instalment to the creditors," said Ganesh Bahadur Chand, deputy managing director of the corporation. "How can we pay the instalments when we are unable to collect the receivables?"

He said that the corporation's liabilities to creditors have been growing rapidly due to piled-up interests. "In fact, the liabilities have surpassed the amount the government had offered as a guarantee for the loans."

The government had offered a guarantee of

company," said Chand. "We have not been generating revenue to pay the instalments."

The national flag carrier employs around 1,400 people.

Chand said that the payment of the stalled fee of the Omni chartered flight would give some respite to the national flag carrier during these critical times.

The pandemic hit the tourism industry and the aviation industry also suffered badly due to travel restrictions. Nepal Airlines also became a victim of travel restrictions. In the fiscal year 2019-20, it incurred a net loss of Rs3.89 billion, according to the Annual Review of the Public Enterprises published by the



A Nepal Airlines flight was chartered by the Omni Business Group to import goods to fight the pandemic.

FILE PHOTO: RSS

Rs25 billion to the creditors to secure loans for the national flag carrier to purchase wide-body aircraft and Rs 10 billion to procure narrow-body aircraft.

The corporation had received loans totalling Rs33 billion (Rs24 billion from the Employees Provident Fund and Rs9 billion from the Citizen Investment Trust) to purchase the new planes for its international flights. But it has not been able to pay quarterly instalments on the loans since January 2020. By the end of the fiscal year 2019-20, it had failed to pay Rs534 million to the creditors, according to the Annual Review of the Public Enterprises published by the Finance Ministry.

Since the beginning of the autumn travel season in October 2019, full-fare passengers had been filling its flights which pulled the company back from the brink of bankruptcy. The autumn earnings allowed the teetering national flag carrier to repay creditors breathing down its neck.

Before the Covid-19 crisis befell the airline industry, it was paying the creditors more or less regularly. "Income generated from the limited flights has been just enough to cover the administrative expenditure of the airline

Finance Ministry.

Currently, it has been conducting three flights a week to New Delhi, two flights each to Dubai and Doha, and one or two to Kuala Lumpur per week. "Flights to Japan, Hong Kong, and Bangkok are not taking place," Chand said.

According to the latest Auditor-General Report 2021, the national flag carrier could not operate flights except chartered ones from March 24 to mid-July 2020. As per a study conducted by the Nepal Airlines itself, it was supposed to lose Rs10.76 billion in the fiscal year 2019-20 owing to the pandemic.

Due to the pandemic, it had to return the early payments made by passengers for flights and it also lost the income that it used to make from ground handling at the Tribhuvan International Airport.

As international flights were slowly recovering after the first wave of the pandemic, the second wave hit the country in early April this year which affected Nepal Airlines again leading to its financial woes.

"Without the government's support, Nepal Airlines cannot survive this crisis," said Chand.

How splits in parties may affect provincial politics

TIKA R PRADHAN
KATHMANDU, AUG 22

The electoral alliance between the CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist Centre) in the 2017 elections paid off in six of the seven provinces. Subsequently, it was agreed that the UML would lead the government in four provinces and the Maoist Centre in two. The two parties eventually merged in May 2018 and became Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

But on March 7, the Supreme Court invalidated the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) and revived the UML and the Maoist Centre. Last week, the UML also broke into two, with Madhav Nepal applying for a new party—CPN (Unified Socialist).

The split now can have an impact on Province 1 and Bagmati, as governments could collapse there anytime.

On Wednesday in Bagmati, as soon as an ordinance to amend provisions on party split was promulgated, Ashta Laxmi Shakya, who was with the Nepal faction, was appointed chief minister, replacing Dor Mani Poudel. But with the rise of the Congress-Maoist Centre alliance, backed by the Nepal group and Janata Samajbadi Party, Shakya's position could be in danger anytime soon.

"Our alliance will form a new government if the newly-appointed chief minister remains with the UML as some assembly members have already supported Madhav Nepal's party," said Shaligram Jamarkattel, a Maoist Centre leader and assembly member.

In the 109-strong Provincial Assembly in Bagmati, the UML had won 56 seats. Eight members were from the Nepal faction, which has not applied for a new party. For Shakya to save her government, she will need the support of 55 members. If she sticks with the UML, she might have to step down. The only way she can save her government is by joining the Nepal faction so as to secure the support from the Maoist Centre (23 seats) and Nepali Congress (22 seats).

"We will wait until the Election Commission registers the new party," said Jamarkattel who is also the Parliamentary Party leader of the Maoist Centre. "If Shakya joins our alliance we will support her."

In Province 1, where the UML had won 51 seats, Chief Minister Sher Dhan Rai could face an ouster, as 15 are from the Nepal faction. This is the only province where Oli's confidante is in power.

In Lumbini, Oli's yet another right hand, Shanker Pokhrel, was replaced on August 12 by Kul Prasad KC of the Maoist Centre on August 12. Like Shakya in Bagmati, Oli was preparing to replace Rai with Bhim Acharya, the party secretary.

"Sensing that he won't remain chief minister for even a month if appointed by Oli, Acharya has now been lobbying with Nepal to become chief minister," said Rajendra Rai, a provincial assembly member close to Nepal.

"We will have to share the provincial chief and chief minister with Nepali Congress. Let's see what happens after our party is officially registered."

In Gandaki, Oli lost his confidant Prithvi Subba Gurung in June after Nepali Congress' Krishna Chandra Nepali Pokharel replaced him.

The only province that is likely to remain unaffected amid the fast-changing politics in Kathmandu is Province 2.

It was the only province where the UML-Maoist Centre's electoral partnership could not win enough seats. The Rastriya Janata Party (RJP) and Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum Nepal had won a majority and formed a government. The Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum Nepal was later named Sanghiya Samajbadi Party (SSP) after its merger with Baburam Bhattarai's Naya Shakti.

The RJP and SSP had merged in April last year, but it has also now split into two, with Mahantha Thakur applying for a new party—Loktantrik Samajbadi Party Nepal. Thakur's party now controls around a dozen seats in Province 2 Assembly but the number is not clear yet.

Of the 21 seats won by the UML, 13 are with Nepal and eight, including Satya Narayan Mandal, are with Oli.

If more than eight members of the total 55 members of the Janata Samajbadi Party in the provincial assembly defect to Thakur's Loktantrik Samajbadi Party within 21 days after the party is duly registered, Mandal will become the leader of the main opposition party.

In Karnali and Sudurpaschim, the Maoist Centre controls power, with its leaders Mahendra Bahadur Shahi and Trilochan Bhatta as chief ministers, respectively.

In the case of Shahi, his chief minister's seat was saved after four of the Karnali provincial assembly members close to the Nepal faction sacrificed their assembly seats.

Out of 40 members in the Karnali assembly, one member from the Maoist Centre and four from the UML were removed from their parties, thus reducing the number of assembly members to 35. With 12 members from the Maoist Centre and six from the Nepali Congress supporting him, Shahi is in a comfortable position.

In Sudurpaschim, too, the UML infighting has strengthened the Maoist Centre's position. As many as 18 members of the UML faction close to Nepal had recently voted in favour of Bhatta.

Experts on federalism say Oli through his misadventures not only weakened himself and his UML party but also caused troubles in provinces which were trying to stand on their feet.

"At a time when provinces were to focus on development works, they were forced to spend their time saving and making their governments," said Khimlal Devkota, an expert on federal affairs and a member of the National Assembly.

OPINION

EDITORIAL

Shambolic management

Official ineptitude cost too many lives during the second wave. We cannot let a repeat show happen.

The Auditor General's Office released its 58th annual report on August 19, detailing anomalies in the management of Covid-19 by the KP Sharma Oli government. The report entitled "Special Audit Report on Covid-19 Management" categorically points out several shortcomings—in managing quarantine centres, in managing the flow of people in and out of the country, and in procuring medical equipment. People had to bear the brunt of the shambolic management in April and May this year at the peak of the second wave, which wreaked havoc in the country. People running from pillar to post to secure oxygen cylinders and hospital beds were a common sight. And the medical fraternity's decrying the government's nonchalant take on the shortages of equipment fell on deaf ears. The government's action seems reactionary at best, only working to provide lip service to the needs and concerns of the people.

It has been over 18 months since Covid-19 was first detected in Nepal, yet we see no concerted efforts by those at the helm to tackle the problem or even recognise its seriousness. For the most part, the Oli government spent its days downplaying the gravity of the matter, and issuing remedies that lacked irrefutable medical evidence. And, as we ominously slip in and out of the Covid-19 waves, the current government, led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, seems to be sleepwalking down the same path without a sense of urgency in tackling issues related to the pandemic.

The government's effort to purchase supplies was slow, to begin with. The purchase order for essential medical gear such as personal protective equipment (PPEs), protective goggles and testing kits were awarded to the now blacklisted Omni Business Corporate. Despite quoting significantly higher estimates than the Department of Health's own estimate—13.9 percent higher than other prospective suppliers as per the report—Omni Business still managed to bag the lucrative contract. Although the government rescinded the contract with Omni Business in April 2020, the report states that it overlooked a severe breach in forming the procurement committee. Does the question remain as to why it was awarded the contract in the first place?

For example, a pair of goggles with a market rate of Rs360 was supplied to the government for no less than Rs2,182 (a mark-up of an eye-watering 500 percent). Such anomalies can also be seen in the procurement of gowns, PPEs, masks and boots essential to the medical fraternity in the provision of their services.

Similarly, there was severe lack of coordination between the federal, provincial and local governments in managing quarantine centres along the southern border points, which saw a huge movement of people. The authorities turn a blind eye when people go missing from these centres. In fact, there seems to be tacit approval by the authorities, often citing lack of funds and basic equipment to run quarantine centres effectively.

So what now? The government's attention seems to be mired in petty politics, still unable to break the political deadlock. There is a lack of bold vision on the part of successive governments, and the responses have so far been reactive and inadequate. More importantly, there seems to be a lack of political will to solve the crisis. If we are to come out of this mess, the authorities who seem composed and unruffled by it should spring into action right away. We cannot sit back and be consumed by another wave in the offing, mainly due to the ineptitude of the government.

Going digital does not mean only enhancing public access to social media platforms.

ROSHEE LAMICHHANE



The Covid-19 vaccination drive is picking up in Nepal immunising close to 14 percent of the population, but what remains as a perennial challenge is the digital divide. This will eventually exclude the poor and vulnerable who are unable to even fill up the online form for inoculation. Similarly, ineffective management of vaccine certification, especially for migrant workers last month, created unnecessary hassles. The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the digital divide between the haves and the have nots. This challenge in managing the digital divide will act as an impediment to vaccine access, certification, patient care and data management. Narrowing the digital divide requires careful consideration of the availability, awareness, access and affordability of digital platforms.

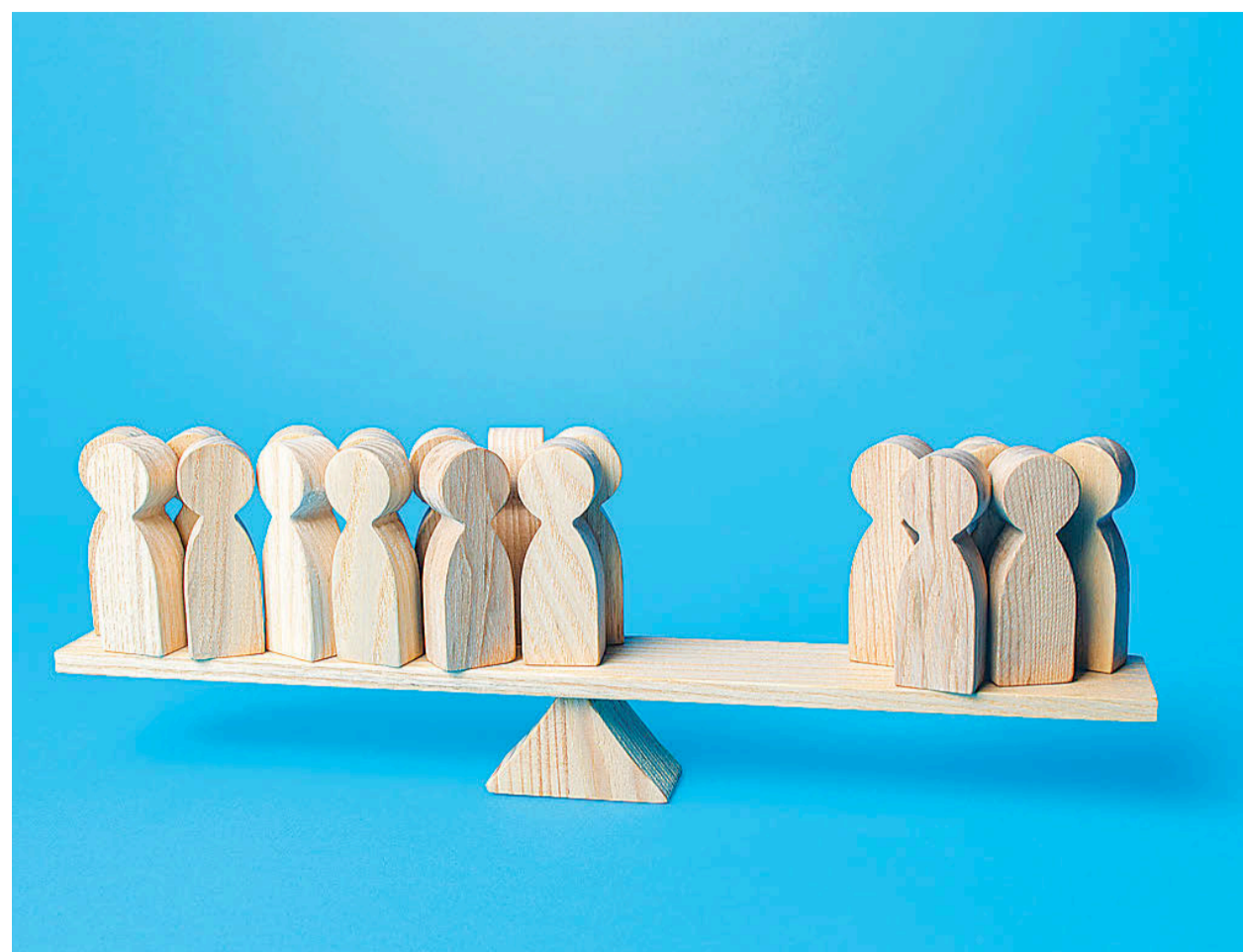
Mind the gap

One of the surest means of ensuring the availability of reliable data is having an integrated data management portal or system. The much-hyped and pompous Nagarik app, released by the government in 2019 but implemented in January 2021, could have come to resolve this issue of data management. A well-designed system should have been created whereby all details of an individual, including his Covid-19 status, health status, chronic illness, rate of recovery, medication record and vaccine certification could be integrated. For instance, the Aarogya Setu app in India integrated with the vaccine registration app has made tracing of Covid-19 infected persons relatively easy.

Productive use of social media platforms helps lessen the digital divide by increasing awareness among the masses. Nearly 12.38 million among the 13 million social media users in Nepal use Facebook. Devising a suitable mechanism can integrate an app like Nagarik with the social media accounts of all genuine account holders and bring in more population into the purview of data integration. However, such an app can be made effective only when the consumer is educated about its usefulness as the general public is savvy about using social media than updating information on such apps.

To better integrate information, individuals need to be informed and educated about the value of such an app through well-designed awareness programmes made available on social

Digital divide mars quality of care



SHUTTERSTOCK

media. This would help in effectively tracking Covid-19 patients as people are conversant with social media. However, most Covid-19 infected persons are found to be hesitant to share their status. The creation of awareness groups on social media would encourage such people to share the same freely, and this would further facilitate tracing, tracking and treatment processes.

Digital literacy should not be limited to increased access to social media platforms and higher use of apps alone. It should include wider use of digital technologies across all spheres. Sadly, high digital illiteracy persists among low income and less educated users. The harsh reality is that nearly 90 percent of the schools in Nepal do not have digital connectivity and ICT devices for digital education. Even Digital Nepal Framework, 2019 mentions digital literacy as a national challenge.

The current level of digital infrastructure in Nepal is undoubtedly one of the major reasons for the digital divide. The affordability of digital platforms has also remained equally challenging. Our mobile internet charges are the highest in South Asia. Though we do not have precise data, Nepal ranks higher in consumer readiness but lowest in infrastructure and affordability in South Asia. The fact that access to the internet and digital literacy initiatives are confined to urban areas further aggravates the problem.

Issues regarding the inequitable dis-

tribution of vaccines across the provinces do persist. Readily available robust data management systems and the mobilisation and empowerment of local representatives could have lessened their severity. Effective implementation of an app requires high digital literacy and access to digital services, whether for maintaining personal records or managing a pandemic. The government has made repeated exhortations, most recently in the budget statement for the fiscal year 2020-21, to increase the quality and reliability of broadband internet service within two years.

However, the expansion of 4G services across the country and the reduction of the digital divide still remains a far cry. Nepal urgently needs one secure and publicly maintained integrated portal that doesn't infringe upon the privacy rights of individuals. Apps need to be designed by the government for digital data management purposes alone and never to spy or carry out any kind of surveillance on its citizens. They are required to keep benign intentions and safeguard them at all costs. For this, the use and success rate of similar apps also need to be monitored, taking a lesson or two from other contexts.

Reduce paperwork

The policy of the Ministry of Health and Population requiring people to fill up the requisite forms, which are available in both English and Nepali, for vaccination and their verification/certification is praiseworthy. However, the

sheer number of documents to be uploaded for verification makes the task cumbersome. By making e-signatures acceptable, one of the several scanned documents that need to be uploaded, namely the confession form that requires fingerprints, can be dispensed with. Proper mechanisms can be devised to obtain feedback about the functionality, user interface and user experience of such online forms, and the necessary modifications can be made to them in a timely manner.

Recently, several migrant workers missed their flights due to delays in the release of their certificates. This could have been averted had the government arranged better service delivery by distributing their certificates on the mere production of their boarding passes with a citizen-centric service orientation. Covid-19 is likely to be around for some time, and the country may need to provide booster doses to the people in the days to come. This requires effective data management, and this will remain a long-term challenge as long as the digital divide conundrum is left unaddressed. New variants of Covid-19 and the impending third wave are expected. Forewarned is forearmed. Merely issuing decrees and protocols will no longer help the country to resolve the digital divide issue. Innovation alone can keep these lurking dangers at bay.

Lamichhane is an assistant professor at the Kathmandu University School of Management, Lalitpur.

National egoism versus planetary responsibility

Humankind, particularly in developed countries, is responsible for global warming.

JOSCHKA FISCHER



The man-made climate crisis is generating headlines this summer. There were record-breaking heat waves along the US and Canadian west coast; torrential rain and floods (and significant casualties) in Central Europe and along the Yangtze River in China; and wildfires in Greece, Turkey, Southern Italy, Northern Africa, and even Siberia. And on top of all this, climate scientists warned this month that the Atlantic Gulf Stream—that great heat pump for Western Europe—may be slackening.

Moreover, amid this summer of extreme weather events, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its sixth assessment report (which had been postponed because of the Covid-19 pandemic). In much more explicit language than in the past, the world's premier body of climate scientists made clear that humankind—particularly in developed countries and large emerging economies—is responsible for global warming.

The report also raises serious questions about whether we can achieve the Paris climate agreement's goal of limiting the increase in temperature to 2 degrees Celsius (but preferably 1.5 degrees Celsius) above pre-industrial levels. The IPCC concludes that this is still possible, but only if we act decisively and immediately to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions (particularly carbon dioxide) substantially.

Unfortunately, there are few signs



SHUTTERSTOCK

that this is happening. And lest we forget, the Paris targets are relatively minimal goals that would only slow the climate crisis, not end it decisively. The countries that signed the agreement in December 2015 did so of their own volition and are free to set their nationally determined contributions as they see fit. Presumably, some signatories secretly hoped that the climate crisis would develop more slowly and less intensely than it has. They lost that wager, and now the time for action is growing scarce.

The central conundrum of the climate crisis is that we must rely on the structures of a global system based on the egoism of nation-states. Joint action to fend off a common threat on behalf of all humanity must be taken through the narrower, older channels of sovereignty. The idea of global responsibility to maintain the basis for our common survival is alien to such a system. Coming to grips with this disconnect will be the great challenge of the twenty-first century.

In its assessment of the fallout that

is yet to come, the IPCC implies that we must fundamentally transform the global economy within the space of the current decade. The technological and economic obstacles are enormous, but the political challenge is no less daunting.

The more obvious that the climate crisis becomes in people's daily lives, the clearer it will be that we are running out of time. The issue increasingly will drive international politics, forcing a realignment away from traditional geopolitics and toward a new

dispensation of joint planetary responsibility. After all, no state—no matter how powerful—can solve this problem alone. The task requires the solidarity and cooperation of all humankind.

Unfortunately, the history of our species shows that genuinely inclusive global cooperation is not one of our strong suits. Any chance of success under such time pressure will require the great powers to come together and demonstrate global leadership. That includes the two

superpowers of the twenty-first century, the United States and China, but also the European Union, India, and others.

The current rivalry between the US and China is playing out mainly in the field of technology, a sector that is particularly important for addressing the climate crisis. The idea that humankind bears a planetary responsibility presupposes that it has the knowledge and power to control the biosphere. That will require comprehensive structures for compiling, sharing, and leveraging data—in real-time, if possible.

But, again, there are no signs of progress in this direction. On the contrary, a great-power rivalry has once again become the dominant factor in global politics and international affairs. State egoism continues to reign supreme, and it is not reasonable to expect two powers that are moving toward confrontation in all other areas to carve out areas for cooperation on climate change. Attempting to do so would most likely undermine, rather than bolster, the mutual trust that is needed to address the climate crisis.

To be sure, the West has made grave errors in its behavior toward China. In nakedly pursuing its economic interests, it willfully overlooked China's geopolitical interests and intentions. But we should not amplify past mistakes by making new ones. Just as we should not return to the West's old, flawed China policy, nor should we deny that the climate crisis must be at the strategic heart of international politics in this century. Otherwise, all of humankind will pay the price for our failures of leadership.

This is not the time to pursue traditional power politics. Today's great powers must take steps toward embracing planetary responsibility. And to succeed, they must take these steps together.

Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998 to 2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for almost 20 years.

—Project Syndicate

FOREX

US Dollar	119.32
Euro	139.29
Pound Sterling	162.42
Japanese Yen	10.89
Chinese Yuan	18.36
Qatari Riyal	32.27
Australian Dollar	84.99
Malaysian Ringgit	28.16
Saudi Arab Riyal	31.82

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 90,900
Silver	Rs 1,180

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

GASOLINE WATCH

SERVO 4T
ENGINE OILS
100% PERFORMANCE. EVERYTIME.

Petrol (Per Litre)	Rs 128.00/-
Diesel (Per Litre)	Rs 111.00/-
Kerosene (Per Litre)	Rs 111.00/-
LPG (Per cylinder)	Rs 1425/-

Source: Nepal Oil Corporation

Goat farming flourishes with Nepalis eating more meat

An estimated 100,000 goats are sold during the Dashain festival in Kathmandu, according to the Department of Livestock Services.

BIPLAV MAHARJAN
SALYAN, AUG 22

Four years ago, Krishna Raj Upadhyaya of Sarada Municipality-2, Dadagaun started commercial goat farming with seven animals. Now he has 100 local and Boer goats including kids on his farm.

Upadhyaya makes Rs700,000 annually by rearing goats, which not only covers his household expenses, but also allows him to enlarge his savings. He said that he has received further encouragement with greater market access.

Jibraaj Bohara of Sharda Municipality-8 is also engaged in goat rearing which is his major business. He got into commercial goat farming by opening Srijanshil Bakhra Farm, and now has 70 goats and kids in a loafing shed.

Bohara has been raising a family of six with the income from this business, and he has also provided jobs to two youths in the village.

The government and other agencies have increased investment and subsidies in commercial animal husbandry, and this has helped farmers to start goat rearing commercially.

According to the Veterinary Hospital and Livestock Service Office, 133 goat farms have been registered in the district. Goat farmer Upadhyaya said his business flourished after traders started coming to the village to purchase goats, and meat prices rose in the market.

Demand for goats shoots up during the Dashain festival. Around 10,000 goats are sold daily in Kathmandu Valley from the first day of Dashain to the eighth day, according to the records of the Department of



Farmer Keshar Pun of Kalimati Rural Municipality-2, Badadhunga, Salyan, feeds his goats.

POST PHOTO: BIPLAV MAHARJAN

Livestock Services. Total sales during the festival come to around 100,000 animals.

The goats sold in the Valley are brought from Taplejung, Sankhuwasabha, Rolpa, Rukum, Mustang, Salyan, Pyuthan, Kailali, Jhapa, Morang, Panchthar, Bara and Khotang, among other districts.

According to the Department of Customs, the country imported 13,827 live goats worth Rs107.88 million from India in the last fiscal year 2020-21. In

fiscal 2019-20, imports reached 10,292 goats from India and Australia valued at Rs122 million.

There were 580,000 local and advanced breed goats in Salyan as of last year. This year the number has reached nearly 600,000, as per the Livestock Service Office.

Last year, the office issued grants to 75 farmers to build modern sheds for their animals. The statistics of the office show that the district produces Rs700 million worth of goats annually.

Suresh Gahamgar, 45, of Kalche, who has been engaged in goat rearing for seven years, said that the business has given him self-respect and satisfaction. He started goat rearing by buying nine goats in 2013, and now he has 108 goats and kids.

"There is no problem in feeding the goats as there is a forest nearby, and we cultivate grasses that have been grown in the fields," he said. "On the basis of phone calls, traders come to the home to buy goats," he added.

Ruplal Pariyar, a trader of Bangadkupinde Municipality, was able to sell goats worth around Rs10 million after the lockdown last year. "Until five years ago, the business was only subsistence-oriented," he said.

"Now the number of commercial goat farmers has increased in the villages." The price of goat meat, which was Rs700 per kg last year, has gone up to Rs800 this year.

Kapil Prasad Upadhyaya, chief of the Veterinary Hospital and Livestock Service Office, said that about 1,000 farmers in the district were engaged in commercial goat rearing. "The goat rearing business has improved the income of many families," he said.

Salyan district alone supplied 42,800 goats worth Rs640 million last year. The animals are shipped to major cities of the country like Kathmandu, Narayanghat, Butwal and Nepalgunj.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, the country used to import up to 600,000 goats annually, and now this figure has been slashed by 97 percent.

The import of goats plunged due to Covid-19 related restrictions, as per experts. It also reflects a drop in imports during the Dashain festival when a large number of the animals are slaughtered. Last year, the celebrations were subdued, consequently demand fell, they said.

Based on current market prices, Nepal's annual meat, egg, fish and milk output is valued at Rs450 billion, as per the ministry. The country produces meat worth Rs275 billion, milk worth Rs122 billion, fish worth Rs37 billion and eggs worth Rs17 billion per year.



Fruit vendors wait for customers at Balkhu in the Capital.

POST PHOTO: KESHAV THAPA

Global cannabis firms show interest in Brazil

REUTERS
SAO PAULO, AUG 22

International cannabis companies are showing interest in Brazil, both its large consumer market for medicinal products and a proposal that could legalise planting of the crop.

Major producers like Colombia's Clever Leaves and Canada's Canopy Growth are developing and selling medicinal cannabis products to a Brazilian consumer segment estimated at 10 million to 13 million people. This results from a 2019 regulatory change allowing the import, sale and manufacturing of such products.

But permission for cultivation of hemp and cannabis in Brazil would be a bigger prize. If granted, the industry could blossom in four to five years, based on the experience of other countries such as Colombia.

"By 2025, I would like to be planting hemp in the interior of Pernambuco," said José Bacellar, founder of Canada's VerdeMed, referring to a northeastern state known for illegal marijuana growing.

A proposal that would legalise cultivation was approved in June by a congressional committee. Lawmakers are weighing if it could be fast-tracked to the Senate for approval. If passed there, President Jair Bolsonaro would have to sign it into law. While Bolsonaro's far-right positions may seem an unlikely match for the bill, the proposal has support from some

members of the powerful farm sector, a key constituency that helped him win the 2018 election.

In the quiet town of Viçosa in southeastern Brazil—which some call the Silicon Valley of cannabis—researchers are developing a hemp variety better suited to the tropics.

If the law is changed and research is successful, Brazil could become a top grower of cannabis and hemp, experts said.

Sérgio Rocha, director of ag-tech startup Adwa which is developing the hemp strain for Brazil, said about 3 million square kilometers of land would potentially be suitable for cultivating the new variety. Brazil could overtake China, the world's largest hemp producer, which has about 670 square kilometers (259 square miles) planted.

"Using a part of Brazil's agricultural land would be enough to give the country the title of world's largest producer and exporter of hemp fibers, seeds and flowers for medicinal and industrial purposes," said Dennys Zsolt, an agronomist specializing in the plant.

Brazil bans growing of Cannabis sativa L, the plant that produces hemp and marijuana. Hemp, which has less than 0.3 percent of the psychoactive compound THC, contains CBD or cannabidiol. This non-intoxicating ingredient has been touted as beneficial for many health conditions including childhood epilepsy.

The electric vehicle boom is pay-dirt for factory machinery makers

REUTERS
DETROIT, AUG 22

The investment surge by both new and established automakers in the electric vehicle market is a bonanza for factory equipment manufacturers that supply the highly automated picks and shovels for the prospectors in the EV gold rush.

The good times for the makers of robots and other factory equipment reflect the broader recovery in US manufacturing. After falling post-Covid to \$361.8 million in April 2020, new orders surged to almost \$506 million in June, according to the US Census Bureau.

New electric vehicle factories, funded by investors who have snapped up newly public shares in companies such as EV start-up Lucid Group Inc are boosting demand. "I'm not sure it's reached its climax yet. There's still more to go," Andrew Lloyd, electromobility segment leader at Stellantis-owned supplier Comau, said in an interview. "Over the next 18 to 24 months, there's going to be a significant demand coming our way."

Growth in the EV sector, propelled by the success of Tesla Inc, comes on top of the normal work manufacturing equipment makers do to support production of gasoline-powered vehicles.

Automakers will invest over \$37 billion in North American plants from 2019 to 2025, with 15 of 17 new plants in the United States, according to LMC Automotive. Over 77 percent of that

spending will be directed at SUV or EV projects.

Equipment providers are in no rush to add to their nearly full capacity.

"There's a natural point where we will say 'No'" to new business, said Comau's Lloyd. For just one area of a factory, like a paint shop or a body shop, an automaker can easily spend \$200 million to \$300 million, industry officials said.

"This industry is the Wild, Wild West right now," John Kacsur, vice president of the automotive and tire segment for Rockwell Automation, told Reuters. "There is a mad race to get these new EV variants to market." Automakers have signed agreements for suppliers to build equipment for 37 EVs between this year and 2023 in North America, according to industry consultant Laurie Harbour. That excludes all the work being done for gasoline-powered vehicles.

"There's still a pipeline with projects from new EV manufacturers," said Mathias Christen, a spokesman for Durr AG, which specialises in paint shop equipment and saw its EV business surge about 65 percent last year. "This is why we don't see the peak yet."

Orders received by Kuka AG, a manufacturing automation company owned by China's Midea Group, rose 52 percent in the first half of 2021 to just under 1.9 billion euros (\$2.23 billion)—the second-highest level for a 6-month period in the company's history, due to strong demand in North America and Asia.

"We ran out of capacity for any additional work about a year and a half ago," said Mike LaRose, CEO of Kuka's auto group in the Americas. "Everyone's so busy, there's no floor space."

Kuka is building electric vans for General Motors Co at its plant in

Michigan to help meet early demand before the No. 1 US automaker replaces equipment in its Ingersoll, Ontario, plant next year to handle the regular work. Automakers and battery firms need to order many of the robots and other equipment they need 18 months in advance, although Neil Dueweke,

vice president of automotive at Fanuc Corp's American operations, said customers want their equipment sooner. He calls that the "Amazon effect" in the industry.

"We built a facility and have like 5,000 robots on shelves stacked 200 feet high, almost as far as the eye can see,"

said Dueweke, who noted Fanuc America set sales and market share records last year.

Covid has also caused issues and delays for some automakers trying to tool up.

R.J. Scaringe, CEO of EV startup Rivian, said in a letter to customers last month that "everything from facility construction, to equipment installation, to vehicle component supply (especially semiconductors) has been impacted by the pandemic." However, established, long-time customers like GM and parts supplier and contract manufacturer Magna International said they have not experienced delays in receiving equipment.

Another limiting factor for capacity has been the continuing shortage of labour, industry officials said. To avoid the stress, startups like Fisker Inc have turned to contract manufacturers like Magna and Foxconn, whose buying power enables them to avoid shortages more easily, CEO Henrik Fisker said. Growing demand, however, does not mean these equipment makers are rushing to expand capacity. Having lived through downturns in which they were forced to make cuts, equipment suppliers want to make do with what they have, or in Comau's case, just add short-term capacity, according to Lloyd. "Everybody's afraid they're going to get hammered," said Mike Tracy, a principal at consulting firm the Agile Group. "They just don't have the reserve capacity they used to have."



An inventory of manufacturing robots waiting to be shipped to customers are seen in a FANUC American facility in Auburn Hills, Michigan, US.

REUTERS

WORLD

BRIEFING

Putin criticises placing Afghans in Central Asia

MOSCOW: Russia's president has criticized Western nations for seeking to temporarily house Afghan refugees in Central Asian countries, citing security concerns for Russia. Speaking at a meeting with top officials of the Kremlin's United Russia party on Sunday, Vladimir Putin blasted what he described as a "humiliating approach" by Western states. The Russian president noted that there are no visa restrictions between Russia and its Central Asian allies, and said that Moscow doesn't "want militants appearing [in Russia] again under the guise of refugees." "We don't want to repeat something that we had in the 90s and in the mid-2000s, when there were hostilities in the North Caucasus," Putin said.

US lends support to Lithuania against China pressure

VILNIUS: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Lithuania's foreign minister on Saturday and agreed on "bilateral coordinated action" to help the country withstand pressure from China over its decision to develop ties with Taiwan, Lithuania said. China on August 10 demanded that Lithuania withdraw its ambassador in Beijing and said it would recall China's envoy to Vilnius in a row over the Baltic state allowing Chinese-claimed Taiwan to open a de facto embassy there using its own name. Blinken and Gabrielius Landsbergis agreed "China's unilateral aggressive actions and political pressure on Lithuania" were totally unacceptable, a statement on the phone call published by the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry said.

Tropical Storm Henri bears down on US east coast

NEW YORK: Tropical Storm Henri was on course to make landfall on the US east coast on Sunday, with millions in New England and New York's Long Island preparing for flash flooding, violent winds and power outages. A US National Hurricane Center advisory said that Henri 50 miles southeast of Montauk Point in New York state. Forecasters downgraded Henri from a hurricane but warned heavy rainfall and the risk of surging seas as the storm churned in the Atlantic, packing maximum sustained winds of 70 miles per hour.

(AGENCIES)

China both worries and hopes as US leaves Afghanistan

A proximate threat may be the spillover of militancy into Pakistan and Central Asia, where China has invested heavily and sought to build alliances.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIJING, AUG 22

In the US departure from Afghanistan, China has seen the realisation of long-held hopes for a reduction of the influence of a geopolitical rival in what it considers its backyard.

Yet, it is also deeply concerned that the very withdrawal could bring risk and instability to that backyard—Central Asia—and possibly even spill over their narrow, remote border into China itself and the heavily Muslim northwestern region of Xinjiang.

The Taliban's takeover could certainly present political and economic opportunities for China, including developing Afghanistan's vast mineral riches, and Beijing has said it is ready to help rebuild the impoverished nation. But stability will be required to reap most of those benefits, and the immediate result of the American withdrawal has been more instability, not less.

"I think Beijing will play up the narrative of American fecklessness and decline of Empire, painting this as evidence of why Beijing will be a better steward for the Eurasian heartland," said Raffaello Pantucci, an expert on the region at the Royal United Services Institute in London. "But in reality, I am not clear that I see that many huge upsides for Beijing at the moment."

Like many nations, China is concerned about the risk of terrorism from a Taliban-led Afghanistan. Beijing has repeatedly told the Taliban that the country cannot become a breeding ground for militants to launch attacks in Xinjiang, much as Osama bin Laden used it as a base to prepare his 9/11 attacks on the US.

A more proximate threat may be the spillover of militancy into Pakistan and Central Asia, where China has invested heavily and sought to build alliances.

"The Afghan Taliban have promised that they will break from international terrorist forces, but we still haven't seen how they will do this because they are not officially in power," said Li Wei, an international security expert retired from the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations.

The Taliban could be an incongruent partner for China since their religion-based philosophy is diametrically opposed to Beijing's vision of atheist rule under the Communist Party that puts social stability and economic



In this July 28 photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi pose for a photo during their meeting in Tianjin, China.

US orders American airlines to aid Afghan evacuation

WASHINGTON: The United States on Sunday enlisted several American airlines in its chaotic evacuation of tens of thousands of Afghans and foreigners from Kabul following its fall to Taliban extremists.

The Pentagon said Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin had activated the rarely-used Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) to aid the onward movement of people arriving at US bases in the Middle East.

"The DOD's ability to project military forces is inextricably linked to commercial industry, which provides critical transportation capacity as well as global networks to meet day-to-day and contingency requirements," a

statement announcing the move said.

Eighteen civilian craft from American Airlines, Atlas, Delta, Omni, Hawaiian and United will aid dozens of military cargo transports involved in the evacuation, the statement said.

Rather than going in and out of the capital, the planes will transport people from US bases in Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates to European countries and, for many, onward to the United States.

With thousands of troops trying to secure Kabul's airport, Washington has set a deadline to complete one of the largest evacuation missions the Pentagon has ever conducted

by August 31.

Up to 15,000 Americans need to be removed from Afghanistan, according to President Joe Biden, who says the administration wants to get at least 50,000 Afghan allies and their family members out of the country.

Widely criticised over the chaotic exit after a sudden Taliban victory, Biden has warned that the frantic effort to fly Americans, other foreigners and Afghan allies out of Taliban-occupied Kabul is dangerous.

The situation was further complicated on Saturday when the US government warned its citizens to stay away from the airport because of "security threats". (AFP)

development above all. That, however, has not prevented China's ultimately pragmatic leaders from reaching out to them.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi hosted a delegation led by the Taliban's political leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, late last month and pressed China's hopes for stability and an end to violence and terrorist threats. Chinese officials and state media

have been critical of what they call America's "hasty" retreat from Afghanistan. "Taliban's rapid victory embarrasses US, smashes image, arrogance," read a headline in the state-owned Global Times newspaper.

Despite the rhetoric, Wang told US Secretary of State Antony Blinken that China was willing to work with the US to promote the "soft landing" of the Afghan issue.

However, he added that "the US cannot, on the one hand, deliberately curb and suppress China to damage China's legitimate rights and interests, and on the other hand, count on China to offer support and coordination."

President Joe Biden has said leaving Afghanistan will prepare America to deal with bigger threats, including from China. "Our true strategic competitors—China and Russia—would

Yaakob invites opposition to join Covid-19 effort

REUTERS
KUALA LUMPUR, AUG 22

Malaysia's new Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said on Sunday he will invite opposition leaders to join the government's special committees to address the Covid-19 crisis, seeking to stabilise politics after years of turmoil.

Ismail Sabri took charge on Saturday with a slim parliamentary majority as the Southeast Asian nation battles its worst Covid-19 surge and public anger grows over mismanagement of the pandemic. He brings back to power a party tainted by massive corruption allegations.

The 61-year-old was deputy premier in the administration of Muhyiddin Yassin, which collapsed on Monday due to coalition infighting—the second government to fall since general elections in 2018. In a televised address, Ismail Sabri said he will invite opposition leaders into the

National Recovery Council and the Special Committee on Covid-19.

"I understand that the political turmoil that has besieged the country has distressed the public. Therefore, it is imperative that political stability is swiftly achieved through togetherness, and this includes cross-party cooperation," he said.

The new premier said he will enhance the previous government's Covid-19 strategy and purchase an additional 6 million vaccine doses by early September. He was a key minister in charge of framing Malaysia's pandemic response under Muhyiddin.

Malaysia's infections and deaths are southeast Asia's highest relative to population, with the pandemic also hurting the economy. The central bank slashed its 2021 forecast twice this year.

Ismail Sabri promised to focus on increasing consumer purchasing power and reviving the private sector for economic growth.



People—168 including 107 Indian nationals—evacuated from Kabul by a special military flight arrive at Hindon Air Force base near New Delhi, India on Sunday.

Lockdowns or vaccines? Three Pacific nations try diverging paths out of pandemic

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WELLINGTON, AUG 22

Cheryl Simpson was supposed to be celebrating her 60th birthday over lunch with friends but instead found herself confined to her Auckland home.

The discovery of a single local Covid-19 case in New Zealand was enough for the government to put the entire country into strict lockdown this past week. While others might see that as draconian, New Zealanders generally support such measures because they worked so well in the past. "I'm happy to go into lockdown,

even though I don't like it," said Simpson, owner of a day care center for dogs that is now closed because of the precautions. She said she wants the country to crush the latest outbreak: "I'd like to knock the bloody thing on the head."

Elsewhere around the Pacific, though, Japan is resisting such measures in the face of a record-breaking surge, instead emphasizing its accelerating vaccine program. And Australia has fallen somewhere in the middle. All three countries got through the first year of the pandemic in relatively good shape but are now taking diverging paths in dealing with outbreaks of the delta variant, the highly contagious form that has contributed to a growing sense that the coronavirus cannot be stamped out, just managed.

Professor Michael Baker, an epidemiologist at New Zealand's University of Otago, said countries around the world are struggling to adapt to the latest threat: "With the delta variant, the old rules just don't work."

The differing emphasis on lockdowns versus vaccines—and how effective such strategies prove to be in beating back the delta variant—could have far-reaching consequences for the three countries' economies and the health of their citizens.

Japan has never imposed lockdowns against the coronavirus. The public is wary of government overreach after the country's fascist period before and during World War II, and Japan's post-war constitution lays out strict protections for civil liberties.

Before the delta variant, the country managed to keep a lid on coronavirus outbreaks in part because many people in Japan were already used to wearing surgical masks for protection from spring allergies or when they caught colds.

Now, almost everyone on public transportation wears a mask during commuting hours. But late at night, people tend to uncover in restaurants and bars, which has allowed the variant to spread. Hosting the Tokyo Olympic Games didn't help either.

While strict protocols kept infections inside the games to a minimum, experts such as Dr Shigeru Omi, a key medical adviser to the government, say the Olympics created a festive air that led people in Japan to lower their guard. New cases in Japan have this month leaped to 25,000 each day, more than triple the highest previous peak. Omi considers that a disaster.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on Friday expanded and extended a state of emergency covering Tokyo and other areas until at least mid-Septem-

Israel launches antibody tests for as young as 3

NETANYA: Israel on Sunday launched antibody testing for children aged as young as three, seeking information on the number of unvaccinated youths who have developed protection against coronavirus ahead of the new school year. Despite surging daily infections caused by the highly transmissible Delta variant, Israel's government insists it wants to avoid the hardships and developmental setbacks caused by school closures.

Israel has already begun vaccinating children aged 12 and above. The national serological survey is focused on pupils between the ages of three and 12 who are not yet eligible for the jab, nearly 1.5 million children.

It is aimed at discovering how many children developed strong antibody protection against coronavirus after having an unrecorded or latent case,

according to the education ministry.

Those children with sufficient antibodies will not be forced to quarantine when exposed to a Covid patient, a move aimed at limiting school-year disruptions.

In a statement on Sunday from the Jerusalem municipality announcing Israel's "largest serological operation," its mayor urged parents to bring their children for the free 15-minute test done by finger pin-prick. The survey is being conducted jointly by the health and education ministries and by the army's Home Front command, which told AFP Sunday that its antibody testing operation had begun.

A pilot programme conducted last week focused in mainly ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities found that roughly a fifth of children had developed antibodies. (AFP)

ber, though most of the restrictions aren't legally enforceable. Many governors are urging the prime minister to consider much tougher restrictions. But Suga said lockdowns have been flouted around the world, and vaccines are "the way to go."

Daily vaccinations in Japan increased tenfold from May to June as thousands of worksites and colleges began offering shots, but a slow start has left the nation playing catch-up. Only about 40 percent of people are fully vaccinated.

love nothing more than the United States to continue to funnel billions of dollars and resources and attention into stabilising Afghanistan indefinitely," he said this week.

Yin Gang, a researcher in Middle Eastern Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the two countries share a common interest in a stable Afghanistan.

"If Afghanistan achieves stability, it will make the US look good and China will be invited to participate in reconstruction," Yin said.

China has chased commercial ventures in Afghanistan, but the prospects of such projects reaching fruition appear no closer now than they were over the past 20 years of the US presence. A consortium led by China Metallurgical Group Corp bid \$3 billion to develop what is one of the world's largest copper deposits at Mes Aynak, promising also to build a power plant, railway and other infrastructure. Years later, work has yet to start, largely because of insurgent activity in surrounding Logar province. China's state-owned National Petroleum Corp. suspended oil drilling in the Amu Darya basin because of a delay in the signing of a transit agreement with Uzbekistan to allow crude oil to be trucked to China. The Afghan government later voided the drilling agreement.

China has invested heavily in Pakistan, which borders Afghanistan, in hopes of extending its Belt and Road Initiative to broaden China's overseas reach by improving trade routes, but Afghanistan appears far from ready to serve as a link in that chain.

China's extensive economic interests in Pakistan and Central Asia could clearly be impacted by any terrorist resurgence in Afghanistan, said Henry Storey, a political risk analyst based in Melbourne, Australia.

"At the same time, China is loath to get involved with any boots on the ground presence, as it does not want to repeat the mistakes of the US—or be distracted from more pressing issues like Taiwan," Storey said, referring to the island China claims as its own and threatens to invade.

Chinese scholars echoed the government line that China will not insert itself into Afghanistan's domestic affairs, regardless of how the situation develops. At a briefing this week, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said China would provide assistance to Afghanistan within its means.

बिमालेख हरायो

मिति २०७८/०४/०५ गते
आठबिसकोट ९ अंश रुकुम
पश्चिमाञ्चल जंदाई गार्ड मेरो निम्न
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नाजिक को प्रहरी चौकीमा बुझाईदिनु
हान अनुरोध गर्दछु।
नाम :- जयिग बुढा
बीमालेख नं. :- ६३१९००३२४६८
ठेगाना :- स्यालाखुदी-९, रुकुम
सम्पर्क नं. :- ९८६६८७३४२८

BRIEFING

FIFA, FIFPro working together to help evacuate Afghan players

PARIS: FIFA and the player's union FIFPro are co-operating to evacuate male and female footballers who wish to leave Afghanistan...

Champions Lille, Monaco extend winless starts

PARIS: Defending champions Lille were left still looking for their first win of the new French season after Saidou Sow's late equaliser secured a 1-1 draw for Saint-Etienne...

Kane makes first Tottenham appearance as Alli penalty secures win at Wolves

The England captain, who wants to move to champions Manchester City, replaces Son Heung-min in the second half.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE LONDON, AUG 22

Harry Kane made his first appearance for Tottenham this season as Nuno Espirito Santo earned a 1-0 win against his former club Wolves...

Striker Kane came off the bench in the second half at Molineux after the Manchester City transfer target missed the first two games following his late return from his close-season holiday...

Kane said he has "never refused to train" with the squad, but the 28-year-old believes he has a gentleman's agreement with club chairman Daniel Levy...

Kane was left out of Tottenham's squad when they beat City in their Premier League opener last weekend and also missed Thursday's Europa Conference League defeat at Portuguese side Pacos de Ferreira...

Tottenham were already leading through Dele Alli's 10th minute penalty by the time Kane arrived on the scene. Alli was fouled by Wolves keeper Jose Sa and the midfielder picked himself up to convert the spot-kick...

Kane replaced Son Heung-min with 19 minutes left and received a largely



Tottenham's Dele Alli (left) scores the winning goal against Wolverhampton on Sunday.

positive reception from the travelling Tottenham fans, who sang "Harry Kane, he's one of our own" as Wolves supporters mockingly chanted "He'll be a Manc in the morning".

Kane had a golden opportunity to mark his return with a goal when Steven Bergwijn picked him out, but his shot was repelled by Jose Sa. Despite Kane's miss and his late booking for time-wasting, it was a winning return to Wolves for Nuno, who was back for the first time since leaving in the close-season after four years in charge.

Although Nuno was far from Tottenham's first choice, he has made a strong start with successive league victories.

At St Mary's, Manchester United failed to build on last weekend's 5-1 demolition of Leeds. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side needed a Mason Greenwood equaliser to rescue a point after Fred's own goal.

their humiliating 9-0 defeat ranked as the joint heaviest loss in Premier League history. There was never any chance of a repeat as the Saints competed well and took a controversial lead in the 30th minute.

Moussa Djenepo and Adam Armstrong worked the ball to Che Adams on the edge of the United area and his shot deflected off Fred's outstretched boot as it flashed past David De Gea.

Last season, United recovered 15 points when losing at half-time, coming from behind to win on five occasions. They staged another second half fightback as Greenwood equalised in the 55th minute...

England forward Jadon Sancho came off the bench for his second United appearance after making his debut against Leeds following his £73 million move from Borussia Dortmund.

On Saturday, Jack Grealish scored his first goal for Manchester City as the champions thrashed Norwich 5-0.

Grealish marked his home debut following his British record £100 million move from Aston Villa with a close-range effort to double City's lead after Tim Krul's own goal opened the floodgates at the Etihad.

Teams showing more courage against Messi-less Barcelona, says coach Koeman

REUTERS BILBAO, AUG 22

Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman has admitted opposition sides are being bolder against his side now that they can no longer count on Lionel Messi...

A thumping late strike from Memphis Depay cancelled out Inigo Martinez's header to earn Barca a point but Koeman admitted his team were still keenly feeling the absence of their all-time top scorer and former captain...

"I don't like to keep talking about the same thing but we're talking about the best player in the world and opponents are always more scared when Messi is around," Koeman told reporters.

Barca had gotten off to a strong start in their first game without Messi by easing to a 4-2 win over Real Sociedad last week but were given a cold dose of reality against an intense Athletic side...

"I think we ran into too many difficulties at the start of the game. They put us under a lot of pressure and did very well and we couldn't play with any patience," Koeman added.

Chitwan Tigers retain Afghanistan's Shahzad

SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, AUG 22

Chitwan Tigers have retained Afghanistan batsman Mohammad Shahzad for the Everest Premier League Twenty20 cricket tournament to be held at the TU grounds from September 25 to October 9.

The 34-year-old was signed by Chitwan Tigers for the last edition of the game before it was cancelled owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We are thrilled to continue from where we left last time. His addition, a bonafide international cricket star, will add the much needed exuberance and experience in Tigers' young bat-

ting lineup," said Binita Chaudhary Bhattarai, the operations director of Chitwan Tigers in a statement on Sunday.

Wicketkeeper batsman Shahzad, known for his distinct style of hitting sixes, is one of the key players to help transform Afghanistan as a cricket powerhouse. The right-hander has played an influential role in guiding Afghanistan to ICC T20 World Cup on four occasions from 2010. He, however, has not played for Afghanistan national team since 2019 due to his differences with Afghanistan Cricket Board.

He is the first Afghani player to score a One-Day International (ODI) century when he scored 110 runs

against the Netherlands in 2009. He also scored a century against India during the 2018 Asia Cup. He has the experience of playing in the Bangladesh Premier League and Pakistan Super League, among others.

"Can't wait to hit some sixes at Kathmandu. The Nepal fans are among the most passionate ones in the world. I look forward to don the Tigers' colours and entertain everyone," Shahzad was quoted as saying.

He is the second international star Chitwan Tigers acquired after Pakistani international Danish Aziz.

The six-team franchise tournament is being organised by Zhora Sports Management.

Inter open title defence with thumping win

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MILAN, AUG 22

Inter Milan kicked off their Italian league title defence by cruising past Genoa 4-0 on Saturday in an encouraging display from the champions following a turbulent close season.

Simone Inzaghi's side were two goals ahead after 13 minutes thanks to Milan Skriniar and Hakan Calhanoglu, before second-half strikes from Arturo Vidal and Edin Dzeko completed the rout in front of just over 27,000 spectators at the San Siro as crowds return to stadiums in Italy.

Grounds have been permitted to open to 50 percent capacity by the

Italian government and although Saturday's crowd was some way down on the near 38,000 places made available at the San Siro, the roars from the stands brought some joy back to the 'Nerazzurri' after a difficult summer.

Financial problems led to coach Antonio Conte's departure and the sale of star players Romelu Lukaku and Achraf Hakimi, but they played as though their troubles were behind them under new boss Inzaghi.

Joaquin Correa, who wants to move to Inter, wasn't on the Lazio bench for Maurizio Sarri's first league match in charge of the Roman club at Empoli, but his teammates did not

appear to miss him as they ran out 3-1 winners. The match in Tuscany got off to a flying start with Filippo Bandinelli lashing the hosts ahead in the fourth minute, only for Sergej Milinkovic-Savic head Lazio level seconds later.

Milinkovic-Savic then laid on Manuel Lazzari to put the away side ahead just after the half-hour mark before Ciro Immobile scored the third from the penalty spot following a foul on Francesco Acerbi in the dying minutes of the opening half. In the other matches Sassuolo won an entertaining contest at 10-man Verona 3-2 while Roberto Piccoli's stoppage-time tap-in gave Atlanta a 2-1 win at Torino.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19) *** Things just come out badly sometimes, and sometimes your family and friends brings out the worst in you. Keep in mind that they have your best interests at heart...

CANCER (June 22-July 22) **** Today is about new beginnings and about figuring out all the new rules. Someone just opened a door for you, and now you're in an entirely different world.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) ** You're not running some giant factory—you're running your life. You set the schedule. So relax. You're not going to be able to check everything off your to-do list every day.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) **** Now is the time to stretch yourself beyond your comfort zone and cultivate new perspectives. Innovation can be intimidating, but be brave.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) **** Let your friends know how you feel. Invite one or a few of them out for dinner—your treat—and just unload and speak your heart out.

LEO (July 23-August 22) **** You're feeling excited and a little shy about a couple new prospects. That's exactly how you should feel. Excited and shy. After all, you're taking some risks these days—going down some paths you never knew existed.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) **** You don't always get what you want, but you get what you want enough of the time that people have started to notice. You have this pretty spectacular ability to make the world align in your favour.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) *** Focus in the weeks ahead on confronting commitment phobias and deepening bonds. Removed from your daily routine, you'll finally find the mission you're seeking.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) *** You might not get what you want today because everything is just going to be totally nuts, but don't worry about it. There's always tomorrow. And the next day. And so on. So, keep at the process.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22) **** You've been spending a lot of time with a lot of people lately and it's been really good for you. But spend time with other people out of your circle today.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) *** If you feel blue, follow your mood. Do whatever your emotions tell you to do. The week ahead sees you sending your energy towards advancing with your ambitions and making a name for yourself.

PISCES (February 19-March 20) *** The uncomfortable lunation shows you where deeper emotional renewal is necessary. Find creative ways of approaching a person and your work.

CROSSWORD

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes 'PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED' section with a completed grid.

Large crossword puzzle grid with numbers 1-64 indicating starting points for clues.

SUDOKU

Sudoku puzzle grid with numbers 1-9. Includes 'YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION' and 'DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★'.

Not just K-pop: Korean TV shows gaining US popularity

The awareness of K-dramas outside Korea has been growing and many streaming sites are also adding more Korean content with subtitles.

ALICIA RANCILIO
NEW YORK

Most nights around 10 pm when her family heads off to bed, Carol Holaday signs onto her computer. She's not falling down Internet rabbit holes of random information or combing through social media at her San Diego home. Holaday is signing on to volunteer with the subtitle translation of Korean TV shows—often referred to as K-dramas—on the streaming platform Rakuten Viki.

"It's my secret treat," said Holaday, who has helped to subtitle 200 titles for Rakuten Viki, commonly just called Viki.

Viki has both original and licensed content from Japan, Korea, China and Taiwan and subscribers around the globe. Its largest audience is from the US, 75 percent of which is non-Asian. It offers a tiered subscription, or limited content is available for free with ads.

The translator program enlists volunteers from beginners to contributors designated as gold status based on the quality and quantity of their contributions.

Holaday, who doesn't speak Korean, is an editor of subtitles. She looks at portions of videos that have already been translated to English and checks the grammar, word placement and spelling. Besides translators and editors, there are also "segmenters" who separate portions of the video to be subtitled, so one person is not translating an entire episode.

Another proud, qualified contributor is retired attorney Connie Meredith. She even enrolled at the University of Hawaii to study Korean to become a better translator.

"The grammatical structure is so different from English that it's really, really difficult," said Meredith, who has worked on more than 500 titles for Viki. She said translating a 10-minute segment can take about two hours.

"It's like a hobby to me. People say, 'You've done that much for free?' And I say, 'Why not?' I have nothing better to do with my time. And it's like doing a New York Times crossword puzzle for me, to solve the puzzle of language."

Makoto Yasuda, Rakuten Viki's chief operating officer, believes using a crowd-sourced method for its subtitles only helps with accuracy.

"If you have hundreds of people contributing to the quality of subtitles, then it becomes much better than a single professional translator working on the topics



Son Ye-jin (left) and Hyun Bin in scenes from the South Korean drama series 'Crash Landing on You.'

that they are not really familiar with."

He says the company's name Viki is derived from the words video and Wikipedia, the crowdsourced online encyclopedia site.

"Sites like Viki use fan translations, which is great, but it can be done in a hurry because people are anxious to see the dramas. So it's probably not as polished as you might get elsewhere," said Joan MacDonald, a Forbes contributor who covers Korean media.

Viki translations aren't just to English. "A drama can translate into 20 different languages within 24 hours," said Yasuda. He said there's also often waiting lists to help translate on more popular shows. There are a small number of translators who do get paid if it's on a show that doesn't have volunteers or a licensed series that already has subtitles.

The awareness of K-dramas outside Korea seems to be growing, said MacDonald. "The number of people that contacted me in the last year and a half to say, 'Oh, I just discovered K-dramas, what do you recommend?' It's significant."

Other streaming sites are also adding more Korean content to their offerings.

Apple TV+ has two Korean language projects in the works: one based on the animation series "Dr. Brain," and an adaptation of Min Jin Lee's novel "Pachinko" about four generations of a Korean immigrant family. That series will be available in Korean, Japanese and English.

This year, Netflix is investing nearly \$500 million to produce Korean content and has partnered with big studios there including Studio Dragon and JTBC.

Some of Netflix's popular 2020 series included "Start-Up," "It's Okay to Not Be Okay," and "What's Wrong With Secretary Kim?"

Another that caused a sensation is "Crash Landing on You" starring actors Hyun bin and Son Ye-jin. The romance about a North Korean and South Korean aired on the paid channel tvN in South Korea and also on Netflix.

Fans found their chemistry so believable, many believed there had to be a real relationship off-screen. The actors' representatives confirmed they were dating on

New Year's Day.

MacDonald laughingly recalls hearing the news of the coupledom and thinking, "Wow, I am irrationally excited about this."

Streaming services have made television more globalised where it's easy to watch a show from another country, but MacDonald believes one reason for the popularity of K-dramas is because they blend genres as K-pop does.

"It's kind of an overall thing like pop is not really one sound. A lot of things fit into it. You will have something like horror, rom-com that starts out as a gangster story but it's really a black comedy that keeps changing genres all the way through."

MacDonald says K-pop fans also gravitate to K-dramas because "a lot of K-pop stars are in dramas and a lot of actors that are in dramas sometimes go on to have singing careers."

"There's a band that's very popular, Astro, and one of the singers, Cha Eun-woo, was in a drama earlier this year called "True Beauty,"" said MacDonald. "I

saw "True Beauty" and thought, 'Wow, he is great and he's in a band. I have to check that band out.'" Another example: Bae Suzy, formerly of the girl group Miss A, starred in "Start-Up."

Sara Wagner of South Lyon, Michigan, grew up surrounded by Korean culture because her best friend of more than 40 years is Korean.

"I would hang out at their house a lot and eat Korean food. ... With the internet, it became a lot more accessible to watch dramas."

Wagner also believes "Parasite" winning best picture at the 2020 Academy Awards increased interest in Korean cinema. "People ask, 'What else would you recommend?' and I say "Train to Busan"."

She even keeps an Excel spreadsheet tracking K-drama storylines, themes, featured food, weather and endings of the shows she watches so she can recommend them to others.

A note by Wagner for "What's Wrong with Secretary Kim?" says: "There's a kiss in episode 12 that'll knock your socks off."

— Associated Press




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