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A young girl from the Newa community dressed as Living Goddess Kumari reacts during a mass Kumari Puja at Hanumandhoka Durbar Square on the first day of Indra Jatra Festival in Kathmandu on Saturday.

A new train last year was welcomed with much fanfare. It never ran

Political, legal and technical issues have prevented the brand new locomotives that Nepal bought from India from coming into operation—on a new track.



Two trains that Nepal bought from India last year lie unused at Inarwa platform in Dhanusha.



People who saw colonial era train chugging along Nepal-India narrow gauge were elated to see Nepal's first modern train.



SANGAM PRASAIN, PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA

& SHUVAM DHUNGANA KATHMANDU. SEPT 18

Exactly a year ago, on September 18, when two brand new train sets arrived at Janakpur station, Kedar Thakur of Bhanu Chowk, near the station, was thrilled.

Thakur, along with hundreds of other people, could not resist the temptation of going to see the new machines of which they had been hearing for quite a while.

These were the country's first broad-gauge trains, a new avatar of the historic Janakpur-Jaynagar railway between Nepal and India which was once a major means of border crossing for citizens from both sides. First built as a cargo line to carry timber from Nepal to India in 1937, the 35km railway from Janakpur in Nepal to Jaynagar in Bihar, India was a lifeline for people in Janakpur.

"Everyone was excited. We didn't even care about the coronavirus lockdown. We just wanted to see the train," Thakur, 51, told the Post.

"It was Friday [September 18]," Thakur remembers. "I, along with some of my friends, had gone to the station. There was a huge crowd, all people eagerly waiting for the train to arrive.'

People who had seen the colonial-era train chugging along the Nepal-India narrow gauge track were excited to see Nepal's first modern train. The train came.

"And since its arrival, it's been there... stationary," said Thakur. "It was covered with yellow plastic sheets. Now the plastic sheets have been tattered."

Saturday marks the first anniversary of the arrival of the gleaming new train. And had it started rolling on the new broad-gauge tracks, it would have marked a new

era in Nepal's railway history. Dubbed Janaki Rail, it has five coaches and can carry 1,000 passengers, sitting and standing, at a time. The train, with a maximum speed of 110 km per hour, was procured at Rs850 million.

Supendra Kumar Kushwaha, another local, said he too was very excited that resumption of the service would bring back the lost glory of Janakpur.

Many had hoped that the railway service would create employment for locals, boost business activities and give a fillip to tourism in Janakpur, the birthplace of goddess Sita, where the Ram Janaki temple is a major religious and tourism attraction.

Kushwaha is one of the applicants for a job at the railway. He is still waiting for the railway authority to conduct the exams.

"Vacancies were announced but the Department of Railways is yet to schedule the exams despite taking fees from the applicants,' Kushwaha told the Post. A vacancy notice was issued for

129 employees and more than 32,000 people had applied. The Department of Railways had collected up to Rs1,000 per person as "I applied for a job months ago.

There is no update on exams," said Kushwaha. He does not know why the train service has not come into operation even one year after it arrived in Nepal.

In Nepal, railway is one of those many things promised by governments that stir up emotions among people and inspire hope.

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At six, constitution's fragility has only grown, observers say

Those who promulgated the charter have remained non-committal on its implementation and those who once objected to it lack the heft to push for amendments.

Nepal's political parties remember the constitution once a year—on the anniversary of its promulgation. They will do so on Sunday, as the constitution turns six. Concerns still remain over the wider acceptability of the charter adopted in 2015.

Observers say Nepal's major political parties rushed the constitution despite knowledge that various sections of the society were opposed to it. Over the years, the political parties that pushed the constitution through the Constituent Assembly have shown minimal commitment to safeguarding it. Parties, many say, instead have used the constitution as a bargaining tool.

Tula Narayan Shah, a political commentator who follows Madhes and national politics closely, said Madhesbased parties were opposed to the constitution from the very beginning, but

those parties who pushed for its adoption too seem to have lost

faith in it. Loktantrik Samajbadi Party led by Mahantha Thakur has already announced that it would continue to observe the constitution anniversary as a

The Janata Samajbadi Party, yet another political force with its base in Madhes, has not announced any protest programme, but it has said it won't

mark the Constitution Day. Leaders of these two political parties were the ones who objected to the constitution when it was promulgated in 2015. The Janata Samajbadi is organising an interaction on Sunday to discuss the

need for constitutional amendments. Tharu and other indigenous communities have been saying that the agreements forged with successive governments to incorporate their concerns in the constitution remain unaddressed.

Observers say the onus to ensure wider acceptability of the constitution lies on those who pushed for itthe Nepali Congress, the CPN-UML and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), as they had banded together to adopt the charter even as protests grew along the plains.

The adoption of the constitution on September 20, 2015 clearly left the country divided. While celebrations erupted in Kathmandu and other parts of the country, mostly hills, most of the Tarai mourned what they called further marginalisation of the already marginalised communities

Shah, however, says the Madhesbased parties' sincerity towards constitutional amendments has already

come into question. "The worry is that over the past six years, rather than becoming stronger, the fragility of the constitution has

increased," said Sah.

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JAMES BOND'S CHOICE

On the trail of a mysterious villain, James Bond faces his latest mission in No Time To Die wearing the OMEGA Seamaster Diver 300M. This 007 timepiece comes ready for action with a lightweight titanium design and a high standard of Master Chronometer precision and anti-magnetism that can always be



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NATIONAL

THE KATHMANDU POST

Five years on, Ramghat bridge construction remains incomplete

Local residents face difficulties transporting daily essentials in the absence of a bridge



POST PHOTO: CHANDANI KATHAYAT

There is a suspension bridge linking Dasharathpur to Ramghat but it is in a dilapidated state.

CHANDANI KATHAYAT BIRENDRANAGAR, SEPT 18

The construction work of a bridge in Ramghat, Bheriganga Municipality of Surkhet has been left incomplete for the last five years.

The bridge, when completed, will connect Dasarathpur of Lekbeshi Municipality to Ramghat in Bheriganga Municipality.

According to the Division Road Office in Surkhet, the proposed site of the bridge construction is not suitable for construction works, as the area does not have a rocky surface to stabilise the pillars.

Ramesh Lekhak, the then Minister of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, had laid the foundation stone of the bridge on December 17, 2016. Ashish JV, the contractor company, had received the contract to construct the bridge at a total cost of Rs 200 million. According to the contract agreement, the deadline of the 157 metres bridge project was mid-February 2020.

The contractor company had asked the Division Road Office to review the design of the bridge after finding that the site was not suitable for bridge construction. However, the bridge division of the Department of Roads took three years to review the design.

"The pillars of the bridge cannot be constructed in the absence of a rocky surface. The agreement with the contractor company has already been scrapped," said Bijaya Kumar Thapa, chief at the Division Road Office in Surkhet.

The construction company then went to the High Court in Surkhet, challenging the government's decision to cancel the contract. The company had demanded that it be provided Rs 30 million as compensation for the contract cancellation.

According to the Division Road Office, the case is pending at the High Court. The office said the project contract was scrapped, as the construction company did not carry out the project work even after receiving Rs 20.9 million in advance

"The division office has issued a letter to the construction company to pay Rs 50 million, including interest, to the government, as the company did not work even after the design review. Now with the case pending in court, there is uncertainty about the project," said Thapa.

"Whether to continue the bridge construction work or not will be decided only after the court's verdict."

The delay in the bridge's construction has affected the locals, making it difficult for them to transport daily essentials

There is a suspension bridge linking Dasharathpur to Ramghat but it is in a dilapidated condition, according to locals.

"The existing suspension bridge is in a poor condition," said Hari Gurung, a local man. "And the construction of the concrete bridge is far from complete. We just want the bridge to be completed soon." Local farmers have also been facing

hardships in supplying their agricultural produce in the absence of a concrete bridge. "We have to risk our lives and carry

our agricultural produce across the decrepit suspension bridge," said Lalmati Oli, a local farmer. According to her, around 1,000 people cross the suspension bridge on a daily basis.

The alternate route for local farmers and traders to transport goods is a motorable bridge in Mehalkuna, a few kilometres from Dasarathpur.

At six, constitution's fragility has only ...

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"When the principal actors responsible for implementing the constitution competed to flout it for their petty interests, this was bound to happen."

The first elections under the constitution in 2017 installed UML's KP Sharma Oli as prime minister. It was Oli who had played a key role in cobbling together a coalition to push for the constitution. His government was mandated to strengthen federalism and implement the charter. However, Oli left no stone unturned in trampling upon the constitution.

The Congress and the Maoist Centre which took umbrage at Oli's actions against the constitution managed to return to power in July this year. The current government led by Congress' Sher Bahadur Deuba, however, has little time to invest in the constitution's implementation.

Experts on constitutional matters say the tendency among the parties to undermine constitutional provisions for power has led many to wonder who actually are the defenders of the country's top law.

"It is unfortunate that we are in a situation where questions have arisen over the commitment of those to the constitution, who played a key role in its constitution," said Bipin Adhikari, a former dean at the Kathmandu University School of Law.

Adhikari, the editor of the book "A Treatise on the Constitution of Nepal 2015", says it is quite disappointing that the parties that rose to power criticising Oli's moves as unconstitutional and undemocratic are now failing to stick to constitutionalism and democratic principles.

The Madhes-based parties that had vehemently opposed the constitution in 2015 were quick to join the Oli government in 2018. They argued that they agreed to support the Oli government hoping that their constitutional amendment demands would be addressed.

However, they quit the government after the Oli government showed no signs of amending the constitution.

In May this year, the Mahantha Thakur faction of the Janata Samajbadi Party decided to support Oli, saying the government "is ready to address their demands". But the Oli government fell in July after a court order. Thakur has now formed the Loktantrik Samajbadi Party.

The Upendra Yadav-led Janata Samajbadi Party is Deuba's coalition partner. It is waiting to get hold of some ministerial berths rather than making a push for constitutional amendments.

Now after Deuba's return to power, backed by the Maoist Centre, the House of Representatives has, by and large, remained dysfunctional—so much so that it could not even get the budget through Parliament, resulting in a government shutdown.

As many as 55 bills, many of them necessary for the implementation of federalism, are pending in the federal parliament. Some of the bills have been left unapproved since the first session of the federal parliament that commenced in March 2018. The delay in passing the laws has hampered effective functioning of federalism, which is one of the core pillars of the constitution.

According to Adhikari, effective implementation of the constitution is not possible unless democratic institutions, including Parliament, function effectively.

"Parliament has a constitutional role to hold the government to account but it has been dysfunctional," said Adhikari. In the lead-up to Constitution Day this year, Nepal's political parties, those currently in power, made themselves objects of ridicule. Amid controversy over the Millennium Challenge Corporation Nepal Compact, an American programme under which Nepal is to receive \$500 million in grants, the government, as per an understanding among the ruling parties, asked the Millennium Challenge Corporation if the agreement is "above Nepal's constitution". Many were quick to criticise the parties for undermining the constitution they promulgated six years ago.

Last week, Nepali Congress Vice President Bimalendra, Nidhi in an interview with Naya Patrika, said there is still displeasure that India hasn't welcomed Nepal's constitution and that Delhi should do so as the sixth anniversary was approaching.

Nidhi's statement may be personal but among a large section of Nepal's political leadership, there seems to be this feeling that India has not welcomed the constitution yet. New Delhi's displeasure was apparent in 2015 when it said it had "noted" the promulgation of the constitution in Nepal. Subsequently, India imposed a border blockade.

Experts say an immediate neighbour welcoming the constitution is always good but statements by some leaders like the one by Nidhi are indicative of inferiority complex and their lack of faith in the constitution they themselves promulgated.

"Such things clearly reflect the immaturity of the

government and its lack of understanding of its own constitution," said Adhikari.

That the Constituent Assembly failed to give enough time to people to present their feedback is an established

time to people to present their feedback is an established fact. The earthquakes in April and May, 2015 had created an urgency among the Nepali leaders to push the constitution, as it was in the making for seven years.

Observers say since the constitution was promulgated amid protests by some sections of the society, it was incumbent on major political forces to listen to the concerns of the aggrieved parties and make gradual attempts to address their demands. This was the only way to ensure wider acceptability of the constitution, according to them.

"The constitution was disputed from the very first day. Against their responsibility to work to strengthen and increase its acceptability, the major parties are busy weakening it," Daman Nath Dhungana, a former Speaker and civil society member, told the Post. "The constitution has become more fragile over the last few years. The only way to strengthen it is its revision through consensus."

Those involved in the constitution drafting process, however, say the constitution has become stronger and that its acceptability has increased.

Subas Nembang, who chaired the Constitution Assembly for both of its terms, said the unanimity seen while passing a constitution amendment bill to incorporate Nepal's new political map showed every party has taken ownership of the constitution.

According to him, the parties that were objecting to the constitution had hit the streets in the name of protecting it, which also shows how they have embraced it.

"I firmly believe the acceptability of the constitution has increased," Nembang told the Post. "However, if it needs revision to further broaden its acceptance, it can be done based on the need."

A new train last year was welcomed with much fanfare. It never ran

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After KP Sharma Oli came to power in 2018, connecting Nepal with both its immediate neighbours—India and China—by trains was his common refrain. When the train arrived last year, the Oli government boasted it as one of its biggest achievements.

But locals say what is the use of a machine that sits immobile.

Like every other development project that often falls victim to political games, Nepal's railway dreams were also shattered by political wranglings. To operate the trains, Nepal needed laws. And there were none.

Three months after the train arrived, Oli on December 20 last year dissolved the House, after protracted internal disputes in the then ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP), and declared polls. Amid political uncertainty, railway service was not the government's priority. On February 23, the Supreme Court restored the House of Representatives, but political bickering continued.

Oli continued to threaten to dissolve the House again as he went for a floor test, lost it, got appointed again and created more confusion by asking the President to invoke Article 76 (5), a move that constitutional experts were

quick to call unconstitutional.

On May 5, the government introduced an ordinance on railway operations. But on May 21, Oli dissolved the House for a second time, throwing the country into uncertainty again. About two months later, on July 12, the Supreme Court not only restored the House but also threw Oli out of office and ordered the appointment of Sher Bahadur Deuba as new prime

The Deuba government on July 18 presented the ordinance on railway operations before Parliament. The ordinance has now become invalid because it failed to get Parliament's nod within 60 days since it was tabled. The deadline ended on September 16.

"Laws are a must. Without laws, we cannot operate the trains," said Niranjan Jha, general manager at Nepal Railway Company Limited. "There is uncertainty now."

Jha was appointed on August 19

Even more than two months after his appointment, Deuba has not been able to expand his Cabinet. There is no dedicated minister at the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, which oversees the Department of Railways.

"Once we get the minister, we have plans to complete all formalities within a day. We are ready from our side," said Keshav Kumar Sharma, joint-secretary at the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport. "As railway is of paramount importance, we have accorded high priority to this project."

roject." According to him, the Cabinets of both Nepal and India have approved the standard operating procedures for the cross-border railway service. "Our Cabinet has authorised the director general of the Department of Railways to sign the document while India may also assign an official," he said. According to him, Nepal's plan is to

sign the standard operating procedure, take over the Kurtha-Jaynagar railway infrastructure from India and operate the railway service at the same time.

"Instead of organising separate events for these tasks, we plan to do them by organising a single event," said Sharma.

After the railway infrastructure was prepared from Kurtha to Jaynagar last year, two rail coaches were brought. There are two other sectors—Bhangaha in Mahottari and Bangaha to Bardibas, 17 kilometres each.

The plan to bring trains had started soon after Oli was appointed prime minister in 2018.

On May 10, 2019, the Department of Railways signed an agreement with India's Konkan Railways Corporation Ltd to supply two diesel-electric multiple unit train sets for passenger services from Kurtha in Janakpur to Jaynagar in India.

The two sets of trains arrived in the country on September 18 last year, as per the agreement signed between the two sides.

"The one-year warranty of the rail sets has also expired, and there are concerns about their maintenance,"

The Indian company had trained some Nepalis in April for 10 days before the second wave of pandemic hit the country. As per the agreement, Konkan Railway would assign 26 staff members for operating Nepal's rail-

"They are supposed to work in Nepal for one year after the railway service starts," said Sharma.

But there is a lack of local staff, both technical and administrative, to operate the trains.

"Nepal doesn't have staff to operate the train. Everyone knew that," said Ananta Acharya, former director general at the Department of Railways. "But no one paid attention to this simple fact. Don't we need to prepare a workforce to operate the trains before their arrival?"

According to him, right after the agreement was signed with the Indian side to purchase the rail sets, staff should have been recruited.

"When we met then Indian ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri in early 2018, he had assured us that the Indian side was ready to provide training for the Nepali staff," he said.

The Nepal Railway Company had announced vacancies only on September 14 last year, even as authorities knew that the trains would arrive on September 18.

ompany tried to hire staff on a contract basis. But there were no bylaws to do that.

The Public Service Commission, the agency tasked with hiring staff in government bodies, held it back, asking the company to hire staff only by introducing the recruitment bylaws. The bylaws consist of procedures that require the company to form a recruitment committee, which shall have a Public Service Commission representative as member.

"The government can recruit staffers by itself on contract, but a commission representative needs to be involved in the recruitment process. In the case of permanent staffers, the commission does the recruitment," an official of the commission told the Post last year.

Several months after the trains arrived, the railway company did recruit a little over 150 staff members on a daily-wage basis. This was bound to become a political issue. As soon as the new government came, all the staffers were removed, saying they were "politically appointed".

They were trained by the Indians. "How is the new government planning to operate the rail service after removing staff who had at least received some training to help operate the railway service?" said Acharya.

The staff recruited on a daily-wage basis were supposed to work in track stations as signal staff.

Jha, however, claimed that the daily-wage workers were dismissed as the company had to spend Rs6 million a month on them without any work.

"I have been discussing with the Public Service Commission for the recruitment of permanent staff," Jha told the Post.

For the incumbent government,

which appears to be completely disoriented, railway does not seem to be a priority though.

The former and incumbent general managers of the Nepal Railway Company gave conflicting statements

regarding preparations for operating the trains.

While Jha, the general manager, said that preparation for railway operation is "still at an early stage", Guru Prasad Bhattarai, former general manager of the company, said that he

on July 9.

"I had to leave the company after the change in government," he said.

Bhattarai was removed by the

had invited the then prime minister

Oli to inaugurate the railway service

Deuba government.

"Now there is uncertainty. There is no law as the ordinance on railway operations has lapsed. And there is this risk of our contract with Konkan getting terminated due to prolonged delay," said Bhattarai.

Bhattarai said that Konkan may demand cost adjustment if railway service continues to face delays. The two sides had signed an agreement worth IRs 220 million (Rs350 million) for the procurement of equipment, human resources supply, rail and track maintenance and other operating systems.

The government was supposed to pay an advance to the Indian company for the work, but the government is yet to release the budget. Deepak Kumar Bhattarai, director

general at the Department of Railways, said that the government has already decided to release the budget. "This budget is for paying for equipment and manpower," he said. Jha, however, said the Nepal

Railway Company has started a new process for making payment to Konkan after the cheque issued by Nepal Rastra Bank expired.

"With the replacement bill on budget failing to get through, there is uncertainty about whether we can make payment immediately," he said.

With no law, no staff, no handover of railway infrastructure and no signing of standard operating procedure, the fate of Nepal's railway service continues to hang in the balance.

"Railway service is unlikely to begin anytime soon," said Jha.

The Janakpur-Jaynagar Railway was originally built in the 1930s to move timber from the Tarai, just above Janakpur, needed for the Indian Railway. After there was no timber left to move, the railway line was gifted to Nepal for continued operation, according to a World Bank's report on the National Transport System for Nepal

published in 1965.

The report said that the line has never been well maintained, but it has not fallen into complete disrepair. Two new locomotives were purchased in 1962.

Three railways were built in Nepal, all narrow-gauge (2 ft 6 inches) lines. They were: the Nepal Government Railway (NGR) from Raxaul in India to Birgunj and Amlekhganj (46 kilometres); the Nepal-Janakpur-Jaynagar Railway (NJJR) from Janakpur to Jaynagar (29 kilometres); and the Koshi Railway, a construction railway running from Bathnaha and Birpur in India along the Koshi river to Chatara and Dharan Bazaar (74 kilometres).

The first two railways were owned and operated by the government. The report at that time said that the efficiency of both railways was low, primarily due to the lack of competent management.

The Koshi Railway was built in 1957 to move gravel and stone from the quarries near Dharan and Chatara to the site of the new Koshi barrage and to carry construction materials and machinery from Bathnaha, where it connects with the metre-gauge Jogbani line of the Indian Railways, to Birpur and Bhimnagar (site of the Koshi Barrage).

learned how to reduce and simplify the paperwork involved in shipping by rail, thereby making the service difficult and unattractive to the shipper," said the report. Following the opening of Tribhuvan

"Further, the management has not

Highway linking Tarai with Kathmandu in 1956 and the construction of the road from Birgunj to Amlekhgunj in 1962, rail traffic and revenues fell sharply.

However, for people from Janakpur, the slow-moving passenger train, worn out and in desperate need of repair, continued to provide services.

And in January 2014, the decrepit train made its last trip, marking the end of an era. Nearly 150 people lost their jobs. The closure hit Janakpur hard and moved the trade elsewhere.

Thakur recalls a trip to Jaynagar by train some seven years ago, just before the service was halted.

"Even though the trains at that time didn't have much facilities, it was still faster and cheaper than travelling by bus," said Thakur. "In the old train, it would take an hour to reach India. Travelling by bus, it's almost a sixhour long journey. The roads are also not that good."

Despite all political, legal and technical hiccups, Thakur, who once worked outside the railway station managing local buses before the previous railway service was closed, is still optimistic.

Thakur hopes the operation of the railway services would increase business activities, eventually making the sleepy town vibrant.

"Railway service means a lot for Janakpur. It will not only make the journey easy, convenient and cheap, it will also boost economic activities," he said. "We hope the trains will start chugging soon... we hope our city will come alive with the whistles, and the hissing of the engine."



The Janakpur-Jaynagar train service was hugely popular in the region.

NATIONAL



A vendor arranges woollen shawls at his outdoors shop at Indrachowk, Kathmandu on Saturday.

Pfizer shots likely to be administered to immunocompromised people

With Pfizer and Moderna, eight vaccines have got emergency use approval in Nepal.

ARJUN POUDEL

With Pfizer-BioNtech Covid-19 vaccine all set to arrive in Nepal, authorities are mulling over giving the jabs to people with their immunity compromised.

These include patients of cancer, renal failure and heart disease, among others, officials at the Ministry of Health and Population said

"Due to limited doses of the vaccine offered to us by the COVAX facility, we are thinking of administering them to those taking immunosuppressants or those who are immunocompromised, an official at the Health Ministry told the Post, asking not to be named. "We think that the vaccine will be suffi-

cient only for the said group. After confirmation that COVAX would deliver the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine to Nepal, authorities have started the preparations for storing and rolling out the vaccine by preparing guidelines for immunisation workers.

"A kind of understanding has been forged in an expert panel discussion to provide the Pfizer-BioNtech Covid-19 ımmunocompromisea Dr Shyam Raj Upreti, coordinator of the Covid-19 Vaccine Advisory Committee, told the Post. "But the Health Ministry will take the final decision regarding the priority

COVAX, a UN-backed vaccine-sharing scheme, has confirmed that it is delivering over 100,000 doses of Pfizer-BioNtech to Nepal, officials at the Health Ministry said.

The facility has committed around 13 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines, which will be sufficient for 20 percent of the Nepali population.

So far, the facility has supplied 3,497,490 doses of vaccine (1,534,850 doses of single-shot Johnson and Johnson vaccine, 1,614,740 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine, and 348,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine manufactured in the brand name Covishield).

Pfizer-BioNtech will be the first mRNA-based Covid-19 vaccine to be used in Nepal. The vaccine developed jointly by the US-based Pfizer and the German firm Biontech uses a copy of molecule called messenger RNA(mRNA) to produce an immune

It is said that the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine was 95 percent effective at preventing laboratory-confirmed

infection with the coronavirus. According to the US Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was also highly effective at preventing laboratory-confirmed Covid-19 infection in adolescents between 12-15 years old, and the immune response in these adolescents was at least as strong as the immune response in people 16-25 years old in clinical trials

"Evidence shows mRNA Covid-19 vaccines offer similar protection in real-world conditions as they have in clinical trial settings—reducing the risk of Covid-19, including severe illness by 90 percent or more, among people who are fully vaccinated," the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on its website.

The vaccine needs to be stored in minus 70 degrees Celsius, which is not supported by Nepal's existing vaccine storage facilities.

The Covax facility has provided us with four ultra cold freezers to store the Pfizer-BioNtech Covid-19 vaccine. The four freezers can store over 100,000 doses, according to Upendra Dhungana, chief of the Logistic Management Section under the Department of Health Services.

they are working to clinch a deal with the vaccine manufacturing company (Pfizer-BioNTech) to purchase 6 million doses of the vaccine.

After a request by the Department of Health Services, the Department of Drug Administration, which is the national regulatory body of the drugs market, has given emergency use authorisation for the Pfizer-BioNtech Covid-19 vaccine. Normally, the vaccine manufacturer makes such a

Meanwhile, the department has also provided emergency use authorisation to the Moderna vaccine.

"Yes, we have provided emergency use approval to the Moderna vaccine at the request of the Department of Health Services," said Narayan Dhakal, director general at the department.

Eight Covid-19 vaccines have got emergency use approval in Nepal in total. Earlier, the department had given emergency use authorisation to Covishield, developed by the University of Oxford and the pharmagiant AstraZeneca, AstraZeneca's vaccine manufactured in Japan and Europe, COVAXIN, developed by an Indian firm, Sputnik V developed by a Russian company, Vero Cell of China's Sinopharm, Sinovac, and Johnson and Johnson

"Two other Chinese vaccines have applied for emergency use authorisation," said Dhakal. "We have been reviewing their documents.'

The Department has also given import approval for clinical trials to

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry said it has already started the supply of Vero Cell vaccine across the country upon delivery from China

"The vaccine will be rolled out from Monday," Dahal, chief of the National Immunisation Programme, told the Post. "Vaccines have already reached some provinces and are on the way

He said second doses will be administered to those who have already taken the first, and the first to those who have not taken a jab yet.

China's Sinopharm delivered 4.4 million vaccine doses on Friday. It is part of the 6 million doses the government purchased of late. So far the government has bought 10 million doses of Vero Cell vaccine from China, under a non-disclosure agreement.

China has also provided 1.8 million pledged to provide an additional 1.6 million doses but the delivery has yet to be scheduled.

Nepal so far has received a total of 17,755,590 doses of Covid-19 vaccines. Of them, 4,422,740 doses were AstraZeneca type, 11,800,000 doses were Vero Cell, and 1,534,850 doses were the Janssen vaccine produced by Johnson & Johnson.

Of the 4,422,740 doses of the AstraZeneca type vaccine, 2,448,000 were Covishield, manufactured in India. India had provided 1.1 million doses to Nepal under grant assistance. Of the 2 million doses of the Covishield vaccine Nepal purchased from the Serum Institute of India in February, only 1 million doses have been delivered. Besides this, Covax had supplied 348,000 doses of the Covishield vaccine.

Bhutan supplied 230,000 doses, Japan provided 1,614,740 doses and the United Kingdom 130,000 doses of the AstraZeneca type vaccine to Nepal.

China has so far supplied 11,800,000 doses of the Vero Cell vaccine.

Apart from this, the United States had supplied 1,534,850 doses of the single-shot Janssen vaccine.

The government has already paid for 4 million doses of Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine through the World Bank to the US manufacturer, and delivery is expected by mid-February.

POST FILE PHOTO



Talks on to clear Parliament impasse, but no deal in sight

There is a rumour in the political circle that Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli are aiming for early elections.

KATHMANDU. SEPT 18

Nepal's state of affairs is in disarray. The country is currently facing a government shutdown situation, which means the Sher Bahadur Deuba administration has limited spending power to run the state entities.

The shutdown situation was created as the primary opposition, CPN-UML, has been obstructing the sessions of the lower house of Parliament in protest of Speaker Agni Prasad Sapkota. The UML is furious at Sapkota for not stripping the parliamentarian status of 14 of its lawmakers, including Madhav Kumar Nepal, who were expelled before they went on to form their own party.

The opposition protest continued even when Finance Minister Janardan Sharma presented the replacement budget in the House on September 11.

The next House session is set to convene on Monday. But there is still confusion whether the government will be able to pass the funding legislation amid a political impasse.

To avoid the situation, sources say the ruling Nepali Congress is engaging with the UML both at formal and informal levels.

However, the two parties have not reached any understanding yet on letting the House function smoothly.

There is a rumour in the political circles that both UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli and Prime Minister Deuba want to take the country to early elections because the former believes that his party's popularity among voters has not waned and the latter sees the Nepali Congress emerging as the largest party with the communist forces weakened by splits.

"Oli still wants the House dissolved just to see himself vindicated for dissolving the House twice when he was the prime minister," said Bishwa Prakash Sharma, the Nepali Congress spokesperson.

He confirmed that the Nepali Congress is in talks with the UML to find a way out of the current impasse and there had been no concrete progress as of yet. Anand Pokhrel, a UML leader close to Oli, also said the Nepali Congress is seeking an early deal for resolving the House deadlock but Oli is not ready.

"If the House obstruction is to continue, the country will go for early elections. And this is something Chairman Oli and Congress President and Prime Minister Deuba want,' Pokhrel said.

He said that Deuba might declare early elections before or after the 14th general convention of the Nepali Congress, slated for November-end, as per his comfort.

With his struggle to keep the ruling coalition together, failing to give his government a full shape even after two months of assuming office, and the looming Nepali Congress general convention with so many rivals challenging his leadership, Pokhrel's claim that Deuba is after early elections

Oli wants the House dissolved to see himself vindicated, Nepali Congress spokesperson says.

However, a leader in the ruling coalition rubbished the notion of early elections.

"The fundamental understanding of this alliance is to run the government and Parliament for another 16 months. Deuba will not make the mistake of announcing early elections," said the leader, who represents CPN (Maoist Centre), a key partner in the ruling coalition.

Nepal conducted its last general elections on November 26 and December 7 2017. So as per the schedule, the next general elections will have to be conducted by the end of 2022.

For early elections, the current coalition should break, the governing party should plunge into a minority

and there should be no possibility of new government formation.

It's a long shot, but not entirely impossible, say some leaders.

They said if Deuba tries to approve Washington's \$500 million Millennium Challenge Corporation grant, through Parliament—a sore issue among his coalition partners including CPN (Maoist Centre), the coalition could break.

There is sharp division among the ruling alliance over whether to ratify the MCC from the House. While the Nepali Congress and Janata Samajbadi Party have more or less agreed to ratify the MCC compact from the House, the Maoist Centre, Janamorcha Nepal and CPN (Unified Socialist), the newly formed party led by Madhav Kumar Nepal, are opposed to the idea.

Narayan Kaji Shrestha, a senior Maoist Centre leader, did not discount the possibility of the coalition breaking up over the issue of MCC ratification.

"If Prime Minister Deuba tries to ratify the MCC through Parliament, the present alliance would break up and the country could go to early elections," Shrestha said.

Another coalition leader Upendra Yadav of the Janata Samajbadi Party also sees the possibility of early elections-but not because of the MCC dispute.

It will be because of the UML, he

"If the UML continues to obstruct Parliament, the relevance of Parliament will end, which Oli has been working to prove all along. Oli wants to fail this system by paralysing the House of Representatives' said Yadav.

Bishal Bhattarai, the UML chief whip, however, said that the UML does not want to be a source of instability and that their only disagreement is with Speaker Sapkota.

"Yes, we do stand against the MCC's ratification through Parliament in its current form, but our primary concern right now is the Speaker Sapkota," Bhattarai said. "We believe that he is not fit for the role of a Speaker."

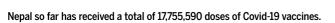












OPINION

Remote working has emerged as a strong option in managing offices, even in the public sector.

HIRAMANI GHIMIRE



Covid-19's most profound impact is being observed in how we manage our work. The increasing tendency to decouple the workforce from the workplace is creating both challenges and opportunities for managers. Amidst fears of a decline in productivity, the experience of this past year shows that employees working from flexible locations, including their own homes, are becoming more productive than previously thought. As a result, remote working has emerged as a strong option in managing offices, even in the public sector.

The world of work is undergoing four major shifts in this context. First, the concept of a fixed location for an office is giving way to the idea of hybrid working. Second the managerial focus has moved from efficiency to resilience, involving provisions for organisational resources to maintain supply chains. Third, control as a management principle is losing ground to trust, leading to disintermediation and de-layering of decision-making. Finally, organisational leaders are increasingly emphasising the need to complement technical skills with social skills such as emotional intelligence. It is very important that Nepali managers, in both public and private domains, adapt their organisational strategies to these emerging trends.

Flexible working

The workplace—or the office—evolved in the 19th century as a result of the industrial revolution. In today's service-oriented economy, people can work differently. Much of office work can be carried out remotely and from home. The influential writer Fareed Zakaria notes in his recent book *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World* that work is coming back to home, which it was like for much of history. In other words, the world of work is moving "back to the future".

Experience of the past year or so shows that employees working from home can be

The workplace after Covid-19



HUTTERSTOCK

Working from home is a good response to the pandemic, but it cannot be an alternative to the office forever. Going back to the 19th-century idea of the office as a fixed location is neither efficient nor desirable. The time has come for a hybrid model. It involves some combination of working remotely and from an office. The hybrid model is a plan that incorporates a mix of office-based and remote work in an employee's time plan. It enables employees to work from different locations—home, on the go or the office.

Many people tend to associate hybridity with organisations in the private sector. This may be attributed to the fact that private enterprises were the first to resort to remote work arrangements when the pandemic struck. Meanwhile, public

sector organisations are catching up. International experience of the past one and a half years shows that governments in several countries are formalising hybrid office arrangements.

The United Kingdom, known as the mother of parliaments, was the first country to introduce the concept of a "hybrid parliament" in April 2020. For this, Members of Parliament adopted a set of "hybrid proceeding measures" which enabled them to take part in oral questions and statements. They were also able to participate virtually or in-person in substantive proceedings under these arrangements. Brazil, Mongolia, Maldives, Canada and Poland have also adopted a hybrid parliament with different stages of development.

Other government businesses are also

being conducted from hybrid offices. In April this year, the UK government decided to open "drop-in" offices in 10 cities outside of London to enable Whitehall staff to work from any of these offices. Civil servants can work efficiently and flexibly from home without the costly overheads of office spaces and time-consuming commuting for employees. This also eases traffic conges tion, thereby reducing the impact of climate change, even if in a limited way. In India, the Department of Personnel and Training has issued a protocol for work from home for civil servants with flexi-time schedules. These examples show that the model is not only applicable but also desirable in government organisations.

Experience in Nepal

Covid-19 has affected the business of government in Nepal equally badly. During the past 18 months or so, Nepalis have had to face complete or partial lockdowns several times. This impacted the delivery of public services, including critically important ones. But there was a silent reluctance to introduce the hybrid model. For example, when several countries were finalising their working procedures for a hybrid parliament, Nepal decided to prorogue the House in the wake of some Covid-19 cases in April 2020.

This is not to suggest that government agencies are not aware of the benefits of remote working. The pandemic has augmented their "intention" to offer services online. And several government departments have introduced IT-based measures to enable people to access their services. This is in line with the Digital Nepal Framework, which the government has adopted to "leverage the potential of digital technologies to drive accelerated growth". This shows that there is significant technical capacity within the government

It is said that opportunities are usually disguised as problems. The pandemic has given public sector agencies an opportunity to use available technologies for improving business processes through flexible working arrangements, including the hybrid model. For this, two things need to happen simultaneously: The development of digital infrastructure and management capacity to use it. While these will take time, one step could be taken immediately, which is to formalise and build on what is already happening—hybrid work.

Ghimire is a governance specialist and holds a PhD in Public Administration from the German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer.

Call for columns

The Kathmandu Post invites well-researched, unapologetic opinion pieces. To make sure your articles get our attention, please keep the following things in mind when inquiring and submitting your pieces:

All your opinion pieces should be pitched to the Opinion desk—not to the editor. Email your piece or pitch (accompanied with a high-resolution headshot and a one-line bio) to tkpoped@kmg.com.np.

We will only respond to pitches that have original ideas. Plagiarism will lead to blacklisting. We suggest that you google your pitch before writing to us. If you're submitting an article that either the *Post* or other publications have already covered in the past, tell us why your piece offers something new.

Please let us know what your expertise is on the topic you're interested in exploring. The *Post* receives dozens of pitches every day from aspiring writers, students, political commentators, entrepreneurs and diplomats. We are not able to respond to every single email, but if we like your idea, we will get back to you within a week.

India's green growth imperative

The country should promote both decarbonisation and economic development through green investment.

as productive as those working from the

office, if not more. The myth of productivity

decline has been dispelled. In a McKinsey

research (2020), for example, 41 percent of

respondents said they were more productive

working at home than they had been before,

with 28 percent saying that they were as

productive. The UK Chartered Institute of

Personnel Development finds that 30 percent

of British employees felt they worked more

hours at home. A US Federal Work-Life

Survey shows that teleworkers are 16 per-

cent more engaged, 19 percent more satis-

fied, and 11 percent less likely to leave than

onsite workers. Closer to home in Nepal,

managers have indicated that their fear of

50 percent efficiency loss was unfounded,

and whatever loss was there could be attrib-

uted to logistics and connectivity problems.

DHURBA PURKAYASTHA



India's commitments under the 2015 Paris climate agreement, which aims to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius relative to pre-industrial levels, include three quantifiable objectives. By 2030, the country aims to reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 33-35 percent, ensure that renewable energy sources account for about 40 percent of its installed power capacity, and, through afforestation, create an additional carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.

International observers like Climate Action Tracker and Climate Transparency regard India as one of the few G20 countries to be "2 degrees Celsius compatible" and on track to fulfil its so-called nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris accord. But even if India achieves its NDC targets and adopts measures to help keep global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, on current trends its CO2 emissions in 2030 could be about 90 percent higher

than in 2015.

India must therefore decarbonise more, and fast. But India also needs to invest in manufacturing and infrastructure to improve its competitiveness, create enough jobs to lift one-third of its 1.3 billion people out of poverty, and increase its chances of meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Achieving these objectives without drastically increasing CO2 emissions will require India to pursue a radically different green

growth strategy. This will not be easy. True, with renewable energy sources currently accounting for 140 gigawatts, or 37 percent, of India's 380 GW of installed power capacity, the country looks set to achieve its 40 percent target by 2030. But only 15.5 percent of the electricity consumed in India is clean, while the remainder is sourced through fossil fuels. That is primarily because large additions of renewable-energy capacity do not translate into lower CO2 emissions in linear fashion. The effect instead depends on the capacity utilisation of renewable sources, the grid's capability to absorb variable power, and the flexibility of power systems to ramp up during peak loads.

Moreover, while India is the third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases (GHGs), its per



SHUTTERSTOCK

capita electricity consumption is among the world's lowest, at about one-third of the global average. But it is imperative that the country's electricity consumption increas-

es as the economy continues to develop.

The energy sector alone accounts for 78 percent of India's GHG emissions, while industry is responsible for 7 percent, and agriculture and land use 10 percent. Within the energy sector, industry is the biggest consumer of electricity, using 42 percent of India's output. As the country's low per capita resource consumption rises toward the global average, and with demand for carbon-intensive commodities such as steel, cement, and chemicals expected to grow, electricity consumption is likely to increase at least threefold between 2014

and 2030.

Structurally transforming the Indian economy will entail a shift in the share of GDP from agriculture to industry and services, accompanied by a reduction in energy poverty and improved access to reliable electricity. This would be the required development trajectory for achieving the SDGs, but it would result in India increasing its CO2 emissions.

So, how, and to what extent, can India decarbonise? The solution lies in deploying clean technology on a large scale, reducing the cost of finance, and pricing and paying for CO2 emissions mitigation.

To promote both decarbonisation and economic development through a green investment and growth strategy, policymakers should consider adopting a sequenced approach. They could start by investing in large-scale renewable-energy projects, before electrifying transportation, and then expanding and integrating distributed

green energy for cleaner electricity access. The next step would be to create additional rural non-farm livelihoods in agro-processing (such as milling, grinding, crushing, and packaging), storage, and warehousing. After that, policymakers should aim to increase energy efficiency in heating, cooling, lighting, and electric motors. India also will need to adopt clean technologies such as carbon capture and storage, hydrogen as a fuel and reducing agent for steel, and green cement manufacturing. And, it must expand its forestry-based carbon sinks on a massive scale.

Speeding up decarbonisation in line with India's NDC calls for massive investments totalling some \$2.5 trillion by 2030. Moreover, most emission-mitigation technologies require large upfront capital investments relative to subsequent operating costs, which is why India's relatively high cost of finance is an important factor. And increased risk perceptions of the country—including climate-related financial risks—make it difficult to reduce borrowing costs for climate investments. Large-scale green investments in India therefore may not provide adequate risk-adjusted returns.

That means India requires interventions from government and intergovernmental institutions to enable finance to flow toward decarbonisation investments. These measures could include creating pooled or specific risk-mitigation mechanisms to "de-risk"

finance; shifting investments from banks to financial markets; reducing reliance on credit ratings for lending and investment; measuring, registering, and pricing carbon mitigated incrementally beyond NDC targets; and compensation for additional perceived risks borne by banks and institutional investors.

The risks are indeed high. A long coastline, widely varying seasonal monsoons, and significant dependence on agriculture make India highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. This is evident from increasingly frequent cyclones, droughts, and erratic temperatures across the country.

India therefore requires climate-adaptation investments that would preserve ecosystems and reduce coastal erosion while protecting livelihoods. Because the private sector usually perceives core adaptation investments as economically unviable, the public sector must lead by making suitable investments and developing public-private partnership business models to attract pri-

vate investors.

Indian policymakers should thus regard meeting national climate targets under the Paris agreement as only a first step. The far bigger challenge is to foster sustainable green growth that provides a better future for India's people while also helping to protect the planet.

Purkayastha is India Director at the Climate Policy Initiative and Director of

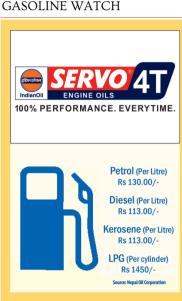
US-India Clean Energy Finance.
- Project Syndica

MONEY

FOREX US Dollar Furo Pound Sterling Japanese Yen Chinese Yuan 32.37 Qatari Riyal 86.13 Malaysian Ringit Saudi Arab Rival Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank PRICE PER TOLA **BULLION** Fine Gold Rs 89,100

Rs 1,170

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA



Nepal to sign deal with India for periodic airport checks

Airport surveillance and radar flight inspections have to be conducted every year, but it has not happened for two years due to Covid-19.

KATHMANDU. SEPT 18

The Tourism Ministry has given the green signal to the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal to sign a long-term government-to-government deal with India for periodic airport surveillance and radar flight inspections to avoid being possibly forced into contracting unreliable companies amid the endless Covid-19 crisis.

Nepal had recently asked India for help to conduct a flight inspection of the newly installed navigation and communication infrastructure at Bhairahawa international airport as the original contractor has been staying away due to the virus outbreak.

Raj Kumar Chettri, spokesperson for the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, told the Post the authority had also asked the Airport Authority of India whether it could support Nepal in conducting surveillance of navigation and communication infrastructure of all airports, apart from the new airport in Bhairahawa.

"Based on the positive response from India, Nepal decided to engage the Airport Authority of India for at least five years," he said, adding that the Tourism Ministry had consented to the proposal of Nepal's civil aviation body.

The project has to be passed by the civil aviation board which the tourism minister chairs. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who also holds the tourism portfolio, is the chairman of the civil aviation body.

"We had an appointment with Prime Minister Deuba for a board meeting this week, but could not meet him due to his busy schedule. Another meeting has been planned," said Chettri. But the aviation authority is not sure of the date.

Airport surveillance and radar flight inspections have to be conducted every year, but Nepal has not been able to do it for the last two years due to Covid-19.

Buddhi Sagar Lamichhane, joint secretary at the ministry who looks after aviation affairs, said the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal itself could initiate the process as per the law, but the board has to approve it.

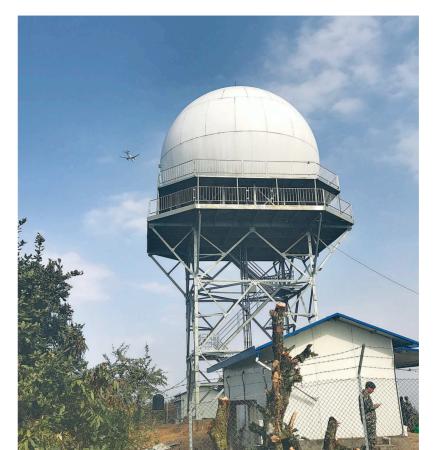
'The decision was made to avoid having to contract non-reliable companies amid the Covid-19 crisis. Nepal urgently needs to conduct the inspection, but it is difficult bringing foreign experts under the circumstances, and that could delay the periodic test," said Lamichhane. "The government-to-government deal will ensure testing of the equipment and airport in a timely manner.' According to him, the international

airport in Bhairahawa is fitted with the instrument landing system (ILS) and it needs to be tested every six months. "The deal will save us the hassle of conducting tenders at a time of crisis. Gautam Buddha International

Airport in Bhairahawa in south central Nepal is at the final stages of completion, and is slated to be ready for commercial operation by the beginning of 2022.

It will have a 3,000-metre-long and 45-metre-wide runway, and be the gateway to the international pilgrimage destination of Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal had awarded the Rs6.22 billion



Thai state-owned Aeronautical Radio of Thailand has informed the airport project that they can only begin the calibration of the equipment once the Covid-19 situation improves.

civil works component, the first package, to China's Northwest Civil **Aviation Airport Construction Group** in November 2013.

On March 7, 2019, a Thai govern-

ment-owned company Aeronautical Radio of Thailand won the \$4.83 million contract for the second package with a completion deadline of

The second package includes supply, delivery, installation and commissioning of Communication, Navigation and Surveillance/Air Traffic Management, including meteorological equipment and other related services.

Work stopped after the Covid-19 pandemic started in 2020. Despite the lockdowns enforced on different occasions, the installation of the equip-

The Thai company has informed the airport project that they can begin the calibration of the equipment only after the Covid-19 situation in Nepal That does not seem likely anytime

ment has been completed.

soon as Covid cases continue unabated following a relaxation of the prohibitory orders. Nepal on Friday reported 1,558 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, taking the nationwide infection tally to 783,075. The civil aviation body had

approached the South Korean and Indian governments and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) of the United States to conduct the tests, but only the southern neighbour responded positively. The FAA, an agency of the US gov-

ernment responsible for the regulation of aircraft and airports, had conducted flight inspections of the radar system at Bhatte Danda in Lalitpur in 2017.

A technical test or calibration needs to be done with a special aircraft at an altitude of 43,000 feet. Tests need to be conducted for each route.

"If the government-to-government deal is signed, the testing of the equipment will begin after the monsoon," according to civil aviation authority officials.

'Not true': IMF chief Georgieva denies pro-China pressure on World Bank report

WASHINGTON, SEPT 18

International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva on Friday denied allegations that she pressured World Bank staff to alter data to favour China during her time as World Bank CEO, as the IMF's executive board launched a formal review of Georgieva used a previously sched-

uled meeting with the IMF's 2,700-strong staff to address findings contained in an independent report issued on Thursday on data irregularities in the World Bank's now-canceled "Doing Business" rankings of country business climates

"Let me put it very simply to you. Not true. Neither in this case, nor before or after, I have put pressure on staff to manipulate data,' Georgieva told IMF staff, according to Her remarks went further than she

did in a statement issued on Thursday that said she fundamentally disagreed with the findings of the report, prepared by the law firm WilmerHale at the request of the World Bank's ethics committee.

The report found that Georgieva and other senior World Bank officials applied "undue pressure" on staff to boost China's ranking in terms of business climate. Georgieva told IMF staff that she

highly values data and analysis and does not pressure staff to change it, according to the transcript. WilmerHale said it is

on a second report that will address "potential misconduct of staff members" in connection with the data irregularities. The IMF's executive board ethics

committee is reviewing the report,

IMF spokesman Gerry Rice said on Friday. Georgieva briefed the board on the World Bank allegations on Thursday.

"As part of the regular procedure in such matters, the ethics committee will report to the board," Rice added, but gave no timetable for any conclusions

The World Bank, a Washingtonbased multilateral lender, was seeking China's support for a big capital increase at the time—an effort that Georgieva, as its CEO, and World Bank President Jim Yong Kim were

Georgieva has led the IMF and its roughly 2,500 staff since October 2019, playing a key role in the global

response to the Covid-19 pandemic while securing support for a \$650 billion distribution of IMF monetary reserves to the Fund's 190 member countries

Some IMF member countries, which fund its emergency lending and other projects aimed at alleviating poverty and bolstering global financial stability, voiced concern and said they are reviewing the ethics report. These included the United States, France, Britain and Japan.

The World Bank said on Thursday it would cancel the "Doing Business' report series, which has run since 2003—dismaying investors who rely on it to help them assess country risk while handing a victory to civil socie-



A file photo of International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva (right) talking to Chinese Premier Li Keqiang at the Diaoyutai state guesthouse in Beijing, China

ty groups that saw it as a troubled and politicized instrument that worsened inequality.

The cancellation and allegations were felt on Wall Street and Washington. "Those complicit should be held

accountable, and free nations need to seriously re-evaluate the role we allow Beijing to play in global institutions,' Senator Marco Rubio of Florida said in a statement to Reuters. Senator Bill Hagerty, the top

Republican on the Senate Banking Committee's international trade and finance subcommittee, asked for "restoration of this valuable report under conditions we can trust rather than its cancellation. Discontinuing these annual reports

could make it harder for investors to assess where to put their money, some investors told Reuters.

Paul Romer, a former World Bank lined" him from making the improvements for which he was hired to the bank's research integrity. Romer told Reuters that Georgieva "whitewashed" his concerns about the "Doing Business" report's data for Chile, which he said may have shown bias against a former socialist government.

Romer, a Nobel laureate economist at New York University, left the bank over the controversy in 2018.

"There was a willingness to do whatever worked or whatever seemed appropriate at any point without any guiding principles," Romer said of

A World Bank spokesman declined to comment on Romer's remarks.

The news and any fallout is likely to dominate the IMF and World Bank annual meetings that are held concurrently in Washington the second week

Courting startups: Singapore lines up funding to boost IPOs

SINGAPORE, SEPT 18

The Singapore government on Friday unveiled a S\$1.5 billion (\$1.1 billion) fund as part of a package to attract listings to the city-state's stock exchange, aiming to boost its exposure to the region's booming tech sector. The co-investment fund of the gov-

ernment and state investor Temasek will provide late-stage private finance and investment for initial public offerings (IPOs) on Singapore Exchange. While Singapore is considered one

of Asia's leading financial and business hubs, its bourse has struggled to capture big regional IPOs and has seen a wave of delistings. Given its relatively small base of

retail investors in a city of 5.7 million, nomegrown companies nave headed overseas to take advantage of higher valuations and trading "We have heard repeatedly that one

area where Singapore can do better is in making our public equity market more conducive for innovative growth companies," Gan Kim Yong, minister for trade and industry, said on Friday during an event at SGX. "As more of our start-ups mature

into regional and global companies, having a vibrant home equity market becomes more pertinent," he said.

SGX earlier this month unveiled new rules allowing listings of special purpose acquisition companies, or SPACs, marking the first Asian bourse to do so since the now-waning US SPAC frenzy began last year.

"The timing is right for this," said Vinnie Lauria, a founding partner at Singapore-based Golden Gate Ventures, about the new funding. "We

Its bourse has struggled to capture big regional IPOs and has seen a wave of delistings.

continue to see a strong upward momentum in SPAC interest that should last for the next 12-18 months.'

The new fund will be managed by 65 Equity Partners, a new fully-owned Temasek investment platform. Adding more firepower, the invest-

ment arm of the Singapore Economic Development Board, EDBI, will also 'Growth IPO Fund' to invest in later-stage companies, with a view towards an SGX listing.

Contrasting with its current early-stage investment, the new EDBI fund will invest mostly at around two or more funding rounds away from a public listing. "This interagency initiative further

sets Singapore apart as a capital markets hub," said SGX CEO Loh Boon Chye, adding that SGX will also offer customised services for issuers.

Rounding out the incentive package, the Monetary Authority of Singapore, the city-state's central bank and integrated financial regulator, said it will enhance the grants it provides to support SGX listings.

The regulator will also increase the co-funding of listing expenses for all companies and step up grants to hire equity research analysts to boost coverage of local-listed firms.

Ford wakes up badly burnt from its India dream

REUTERS NEW DELHI, SEPT 18

When Ford Motor Co built its first factory in India in the mid-1990s, US carmakers believed they were buying into a boomthe next China.

The economy had been liberalised in 1991, the government was welcoming investors, and the middle class was expected to fuel a consumption frenzy. Rising disposable income would help foreign carmakers to a market share of as much as 10 percent, forecasters said.

It never happened. Last week, Ford took a \$2 billion hit to stop making cars in India, following compatriots General Motors Co and Harley-Davidson Inc in closing facto-

ries in the country. Among foreigners that remain, Japan's Nissan Motor Co Ltd and even Germany's Volkswagen AG-the world's biggest automaker by sales-each hold less than 1 percent of a car market once forecast to be the third-largest by 2020, after China and the United States, with annual sales of

Instead, sales have stagnated at about 3 million cars. The growth rate has slowed to 3.6 percent in the last decade versus 12 percent a decade earlier. Ford's retreat marks the end of an Indian dream for US carmakers. It also follows its exit from Brazil announced in January, reflecting an industry pivot from emerging markets to what is now widely seen as make-or-break investment in electric vehicles. Analysts and executives said foreigners

badly misjudged India's potential and underestimated the complexities of operating in a vast country that rewards domestic

Many failed to adapt to a preference for small, cheap, fuel-efficient cars that could bump over uneven roads without needing expensive repairs. In India, 95 percent of cars are priced below \$20,000.

Lower tax on small cars also made it harder for makers of larger cars for Western markets to compete with small-car



A file photo shows Ford cars being assembled at a Ford plant in Chengalpattu, India

specialists such as Japan's Suzuki Motor Corp—controlling shareholder of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd, India's biggest carmaker by sales. Of foreign carmakers that invested alone in India over the past 25 years, analysts said only South Korea's Hyundai Motor Co stands out as a success, mainly due to its wide portfolio of small cars and a grasp of what Indian buyers want.

'Companies invested on the fallacy that India would have great potential and the purchasing power of buyers would go up, but the government failed to create that kind of environment and infrastructure," said Ravi Bhatia, president for India at JATO Dynamics, a provider of market data for the auto industry.

Ford's narrow product range also made it hard to capitalise on the appeal won by its best-selling EcoSport and Endeavour sport utility vehicles (SUVs), said analyst Ammar Master at LMC.

The carmaker said it had considered bringing more models to India but determined it could not do so profitably.

"The struggle for many global brands has always been meeting India's price point because they brought global products that were developed for mature markets at a high-cost structure," said Master

RE-NOTICE OF PRODUCTION OF SHORT MOVIES

Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD) is seeking proposals from company/organizations to prepare a short movie under the Information and Support to People Without Civil Documentation Project. The short movie should be made on the laws related to Legal Identity (Citizenship). The technical and budget proposals should be kept within a single envelope and must be sealed with red seal and should be submitted preferably on or before 28 September, 2021 during office hour, to FWLD's office.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Scope of Work

Prepare short movie of around 20-25 minutes

Content and story line will be provided by FWLD Eligibility

Prior work experience in preparing short movie.

Prior work experience in social issues Must be played by experienced actors

Kindly consider proposing budget scale

Ownership / Copyright

FWLD will own the final product and retain all rights to use, edit and

distribute it as it sees fit

Required document

Letter of interest

- Working plan
- Proposed budget CV of key people engaged
- Prior work sample Registration certificate under the law of Nepal Tax clearance certificate at least up to 2076/77 fiscal year



Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD) 72 Aadarsha Marg, Thapathali, Kathmandu, Nepal Ph: 5333525, 5333524, 5366415

WORLD

BRIEFING

Punjab's chief minister quits ahead of Indian state elections

NEW DELHI: The chief minister of Punjab, an Indian state on its northwest border with Pakistan, resigned on Saturday, deepening a crisis within the main opposition Congress party ahead of state elections scheduled before March. Amarinder Singh, 79, submitted his resignation to the state's governor after the party's central leadership called a meeting of its state leaders later on Saturday. "I feel humiliated," Singh told reporters after submitting his resignation, referring to doubts voiced by the party's central leadership over his ability to run the state. Singh's resignation could bolster the electoral chances for both regional parties and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party.

Iran looks east after China-led bloc okays entry

TEHRAN: Iran on Saturday hailed its acceptance into a China and Russia led bloc, an eastward turn it sees as opening access to major world markets and a counter to crippling Western sanctions. Conservative and reformist newspapers showed rare unity in welcoming the outcome of a conference in Dushanbe on Friday at which members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation endorsed Iran's future membership in the bloc. The eight-member group, created two decades ago and which also includes India, promotes itself as an antidote to Western dominance.

North Korea expanding uranium enrichment plant

SEOUL: Recent satellite images show North Korea is expanding a uranium enrichment plant at its main Yongbyon nuclear complex, a sign that it's intent on boosting the production of bomb materials, experts say. The assessment comes after North Korea recently raised ten sions with its first missile tests in six months amid long-dormant nuclear disarmament negotiations with the United States. "The expansion of the enrichment plant probably indicates that North Korea plans to increase its production of weapons-grade uranium at the Yongbyon site by as much as 25 percent," Jeffrey Lewis and two other experts at Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey said in a report.

In escalation over submarine deal, France recalls envoys from US and Australia

The strain in multilateral ties comes as the US and its allies seek additional support in Asia and the Pacific given concern about the rising influence of a more assertive China.

PARIS/CANBERRA/WASHINGTON, SEPT 18

France plunged into an unprecedented diplomatic crisis with the United States and Australia on Friday after it recalled its ambassadors from both countries over a trilateral security deal which sank a French-designed submarine contract with Canberra.

The rare decision taken by French President Emmanuel Macron was made due to the "exceptional gravity" of the matter, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said in a statement.

On Thursday, Australia said it would scrap a \$40 billion deal signed in 2016 for France's Naval Group to build a fleet of conventional submarines and would instead build at least eight nuclear-powered submarines with US and British technology after striking a trilateral security partnership. France called it a stab in

A diplomatic source in France said it was the first time Paris had recalled its own ambassadors in this way.

Australia said on Saturday morning it regretted the recall, and that it valued the relationship with France and would keep engaging with Paris. "Australia understands France's

deep disappointment with our decision, which was taken in accordance with our clear and communicated national security interests," a spokesperson for Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne said in a statement.

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said that France was a 'vital ally' and that the United States would be engaged in coming days to resolve the differences

The French foreign ministry statement made no mention of Britain, but the diplomatic source said France considered Britain had joined the deal in an opportunistic manner.

"We don't need to hold consultations with our [British] ambassador to know what to make of it or to draw any conclusions," the source added. Le Drian said the deal was unac-



French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian attends a joint news conference at the Bauhaus University in Weimar, Germany on September 10.

ceptable. "The cancellation [of the project] ... and the announcement of a new partnership with the United States meant to launch studies on a possible future cooperation on nuclear-powered submarines, constitute unacceptable behaviour between allies and partners," he said in a

The row marks the lowest point in relations between Australia and France since 1995, when Canberra protested France's decision to resume nuclear testing in the South Pacific and recalled its ambassador for consultations.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Friday rejected French criticism that it had not been warned about the new deal, and said he had raised the possibility in talks with the French president that Australia might scrap the Naval Group deal.

Morrison insisted he had told Macron in June that Australia had revised its thinking.

"I made it very clear about our very significant concerns about the capabilities of conventional submarines to deal with the new strategic environment we're faced with," he told 5aa The strain in multilateral ties

come as the US and its allies seek additional support in Asia and the Pacific given concern about the rising influence of a more assertive France is about to take over the

presidency of the European Union, which on Thursday released its strategy for the Indo-Pacific, pledging to seek a trade deal with Taiwan and to deploy more ships to keep sea routes open.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken tried on Thursday to calm the French outcry, calling France a vital partner in the region.

Pierre Morcos, a visiting fellow at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies, called France's move "historic."

"Reassuring words such as those heard yesterday from Secretary Blinken are not enough for Paris—especially after French authorities learned that this agreement was months in the making," he said.

World leaders descend on New York for UN General Assembly

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Some 100 world leaders descend on New York next week in a partial return of the annual UN extravaganza despite Covid-19 concerns, with progress sought on pressing global problems—starting with the pandemic.

The UN General Assembly will also look to build momentum to reach an ambitious climate agreement and seek unity after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, in the shadow of high tension between the United States and China

"We need to re-establish confidence. The current geopolitical division in the world is an obstacle," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told AFP ahead of the summit.

The world "is really in a very dangerous situation," he said. "We need to sound an alarm to wake up political

US President Joe Biden will address the General Assembly for the first time on Tuesday and a day later will convene a virtual summit on Covid-19 as he seeks to show US leadership on vaccines.

With the Delta variant triggering renewed infection spikes, Guterres warned that the world was "heading in the wrong direction in all areas" on the pandemic.

"It's absolutely unacceptable that there are countries where 80 percent of the population is vaccinated and some where two percent are vaccinated," he said.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will come to New York on Monday to seek action on climate ahead of a UN conference in Glasgow in November as temperatures and severe weather rise to startling levels.

Other world leaders set to attend include Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who like Biden will be making his first appearance.

The United States discouraged heads of state from visiting and asked that delegations be kept small as a way to fight Covid-19. French President Emmanuel Macron, a frequent UN presence, will be among leaders who cited Covid concerns for

"We are concerned about the UN event being a super-spreader event," Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the United Nations, told reporters.

"Leaders have to be responsible, and they have to take responsibility for their actions.'

One leader who is not minding the guidance is President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, which by tradition is the first nation to speak.

The far-right leader said he plans to come to New York even though he is not vaccinated against Covid-19, defying New York city authorities who want everyone to present proof of vaccination.

Guterres defended the record of the United Nations, which quickly went mostly virtual last year at the start of the pandemic that has claimed more than 4.5 million lives worldwide.

"I am very proud this was never a centre of spreading Covid and I hope it will remain so," Guterres said.

But one UN official said under condition of anonymity: "Everyone's worried it's going to be a circus."

"The big nations aren't coming to see one another. It's the small ones who are coming to see the big ones, the official said. Russia and China, veto-wielding members of the Security Council, are not even sending their foreign ministers.

Richard Gowan, who follows the United Nations at the International Crisis Group, said that the two powers were also sending a message.

"The Chinese and Russians are not going to invest a huge amount in this General Assembly, perhaps to show that they are not really that bothered by Biden's arrival," he said.

Biden, accelerating an effort under

his predecessor Donald Trump, has identified a rising China as the paramount concern for the United States in the 21st century. Vowing to focus on the larger chal-

lenge of proving the democratic model, Biden has sought both to invest heavily at home and pulled the last US troops out of Afghanistan in August. Afghanistan remains represented at

the United Nations by the fallen government of president Ashraf Ghani, who fled on August 15.

Pakistan to prod Taliban on inclusive government

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Pakistan's prime minister says he has "initiated a dialogue" with the Taliban to prod them to form an inclusive govstability not only in Afghanistan but also in the region.

Imran Khan tweeted on Saturday that he took the initiative after his meetings this week in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, with leaders of countries neighbouring Afghanistan. The Taliban last week announced

an all-male interim government that includes no women or members of Afghanistan's minorities—contrary to their earlier pledges on inclusivity. They have also since moved to curb women's rights, harking back to their harsh rule when they were in power in

Khan says he had detailed discussions with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's meeting in Dushanbe. The economic and security group is made up of Kazakhstan, Russia,

Prime Minister Khan did not say what form his dialogue would take with Taliban.

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan

"After meetings in Dushanbe with leaders of Afghanistan's neighbours and especially a lengthy discussion with Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon, I have initiated a dialogue with the Taliban for an inclusive Afghan govt to include Tajiks, Hazaras & Uzbeks" Khan said in the tweet.

He said "After 40 years of conflict, this inclusivity will ensure peace and a stable Afghanistan, which is in the interest not only of Afghanistan but the region as well."

Khan did not say what form his dialogue would take or elaborate on



With the Washington Monument in the background, white flags are displayed as part of artist Suzanne Brennan Firstenberg's temporary art installation, 'In America: Remember,' in remembrance of Americans who have died of Covid-19, on the National Mall in Washington on Friday.

Indonesia's demographic dividend threatened by lengthy Covid-19 school closures



JAKARTA/DENPASAR, SEPT 18

Ni Kadek Suriani was looking forward to starting her second year of junior high school last year, before the coronavirus pandemic hit. Then her parents lost their jobs and she was forced to help scratch a living on Indonesia's holiday island of Bali.

"I had time selling tissues at traffic lights," the 13-year-old, wearing a black Metallica T-shirt, recalled at the headquarters of local charity Bali Street Mums, which now sponsors her studies.

Experts say a pandemic-induced economic shock and closing of schools for more than a year has been devastating blow for many of Indonesia's 68 million students.

It also threatens to undermine Indonesian President Joko Widodo's plan to create a top-five global economy by 2045 driven by a skilled

"Indonesia had a major learning crisis prior to the pandemic, and our model indicates that it has gotten much worse," Noah Yarrow, an education specialist at the World Bank and

co-author of a report released on Friday, told Reuters. "Children are learning much less

than they should for a competitive globalised economy." Highlighting Indonesia's shift from

bad education outcomes to dreadful ones, a World Bank report released on Friday calculated the pandemic will leave more than 80 percent of 15-year-olds below the minimum reading proficiency level identified by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

That's a sharp rise from the 70 percent of students who could not reach the basic literacy benchmark in testing by the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018, which put Indonesia in the bottom 8 percent of 77 participating nations.

Before the pandemic, and despite going to school for more than 12 years, the average Indonesian student had effective learning for only 7.8 years, the World Bank said. That fell to 6.9 years by July this year according to the Bank's most optimistic modelling.

The loss of learning during the pandemic will cost students at least \$253

billion in lifetime earnings, the report estimated. Indonesia's education ministry acknowledged school closures had a "great impact on children's learning results"

"It is a global phenomenon, not only in Indonesia," it said in a statement. "We are currently encouraging schools to start a limited face-to-face learning so that children will get back to school, interact with their teachers and friends, and have their spirit of learning rebuilt."

Indonesian schools were closed for 55 weeks to August 4, compared with 25 weeks in Vietnam, 37 weeks in Japan and 57 weeks in the Philippines, according to World Bank data. Many schools remain closed in Indonesia, with the remainder open for limited hours.

With schools shut, Indonesia developed an emergency, simplified curriculum and set up online lessons along with internet credits to help families defray the costs of distance learning. Educational TV and radio programmes augmented the distance learning.

But the World Bank study found, on average, students only learned for 2.2 to 2.7 hours per day. Less than half of students did any online lessons, although more than 90 percent received assignments, often sent by teachers via messaging apps.

Researchers and social workers told Reuters the assignments were often rudimentary at best.

Indonesia has widespread internet coverage but Florischa Ayu Tresnatri, a researcher at the Jakarta-based SMERU Institute, said access to online lessons was plagued by patchy connectivity. Many families only had one basic smartphone, often needed by a parent for work, she added.

ing cost of school fees and supplies were other reasons for students struggling to learn, or opting out of classes altogether during the pandemic, experts said.

Teacher absenteeism and the ongo-

Tresnatri said the learning deficit was concerning for elementary school students, and the future prosperity of

"Before the pandemic they were able to read a sentence but after the pandemic they were tested (on) the same sentence again and they were not able to read," she said.

Children study at a Bali Street Mums and Kids shelter during the Covid-19 pandemic in Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia on September 10.

Nepal lose opening match 2-1 against Philippines

Nepal take the lead in the 10th minute but the Philippines make a dramatic comeback scoring twice in the fading moments in the AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualification 2022.



Nepal's Saru Limbu (left) in action against Kristen Ryley Bugay (right) of the Philippines at the JAR Stadium in Uzbekistan on Saturday.

SPORTS BUREAU KATHMANDU, SEPT 18

Nepal national women's football team squandered an early lead to succumb to a 2-1 defeat against the Philippines in their Group 'F' curtain raiser

Qualification 2022 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on Saturday Nepal's dream of pulling off an upset victory slipped from their grip after they conceded a dramatic equaliser in the 90th minute and next goal

match of the AFC Women's Asian Cup

in the second minute of five-minute Nepal went ahead in the 10th minute with a Bimala Chaudhary header before Tahnai Annis restored parity in the last minute of the regulation time. Camille Wilson ensured victory

The outcome came as a hammer blow in Nepal's bid to qualify for the finals, as only group toppers in the

for Philippines two minutes later with

three-team group are guaranteed a place for the tournament proper, which will take place next year in India. Nepal will vie against Hong Kong, the other team of the group, on

Nepal, playing against the mighty opponents who sit 68 place above Nepal in FIFA rankings, made a bright start and took early lead through Chaudhary. The forward headed Sabita Rana's cross to stun Philippines goalie Inna Palacios.

But Chaudhary had to be replaced by Anita Basnet in the 39th minute after she picked up an injury when she collided with fellow teammate and goalkeeper Anjila Tumbapo Subba.

The Philippines piled up consistent pressure in the second half. Nepal suffered another injury in the 57th minute when defender Puja Rana had to be substituted following a knee injury. She was replaced by debutant

"Replacing Chaudhary and Rana

had a major impact on our performance," said Nepal's Australian coach Gary Phillips. "They were enforced changes and the replacements had difficulty adjusting with the team," he

The Philippines' push for goal was rewarded in the 90th minute when Annis turned McDaniels cross to level the scores. Two minutes later, Wilson converted McDaniels pass to make sure they walk away with victory.

Coach Phillips said that the last five minutes' performance cost his side

"We were really good for 85 minutes but we were sleepy at the last five minutes," said Phillips. "Probably lack of game and international exposure was the difference on the day against professional teams like the Philippines.

"The outcome was disappointing but we battled and showed really good spirit. We worked hard and I am proud of the performance. We take a lot of confidence going into the next game."

Rising Club and Sports Castle off to winning starts in 'A' division futsal league

The Rising Club of Dharan and the host city's Sports Castle made winning starts in the 'A' Division National Futsal League that kicked off at the Pokhara covered hall on

Rising overcame the first goal deficit to edge Machhindra Sky Goals of Kathmandu 5-4 while home team Sports Castle made a dominant start with a 7-0 thumping of the Kathmandu-based Prabhatpheri Youth Club.

Sri Krishna Shrestha scored the opening goal for Sky Goals against Rising as the match headed into break with a 1-0 cushion. Rising came into the restart

with an offensive approach and were rewarded with three goals in the first two minutes of the second half. Dorje Tamang, Milan Limbu and Sudip Gurung got on the scoresheet for Rising. Rewos Maskey scored fourth and fifth goals for the Province 1 team. Ashis Sunam struck second for Prabhatpheri and before Shrestha scored twice to complete his hat-trick. However, they failed to hit the fifth, the equaliser before the final whistle.

The event played on a mat surface for the first time to meet the international requirement was inaugurated by Gandaki Province sports minister Rajiv Gurung.

Rising coach Yubendra Gurung expressed satisfaction with his team's performance. "We had training for only four hours on this mat after arriving in Pokhara as we don't have such a surface in Dharan. But the

players came up with a spirited show,"

Sky Goals coach Ramesh Sinkeman said that his side lost due to a lack of understanding between the teammates. "The players failed to grasp

CATCH LIVE ACTION ON A Simple Cineplex



will come up with a better performance in the upcoming fixtures," said

In another match, the home team Sports Castle gave a strong statement of their title intent as with a convinc-

ing win. Backed by roaring home supporters, Sports Castle scored three goals in the first half and four in the second half.

Sumit Shrestha scored in the third and 24th minutes while Khim Raj Gurung netted in the sixth and 21st minutes. Bijay Gurung, Dipesh Ghale and Kishor Gurung added one each.

Sports Castle deputy coach Arbin Gurung said that his players gave their cent percent. "We had the advantage of training on the mat surface and got more practice

sessions at our home town's court. The players also fulfilled their duty,' Prabhatpheri coach Saroj Thapa

said it was their first experience of playing on the mat surface. "We conceded the first three goals due to our own mistakes and we have learned a lot from this game. We will try to come out as a better side in the next game, Altogether 10 teams are vying in the

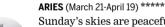
tournament being played in the round robin format. The teams winning top four positions will play qualifiers and eliminators for a place in the final.

The winners of the tournament will take home Rs1 million while the runners-up will get half the amount. All matches of the event are telecast live on Kantipur Television and the digital platform ekantipur.com



Rewosh Maskey (10) of The Rising Club Dharan netted twice in his side's 5-4 victory over Machhindra Sky Goals in the opening match of the 'A' Division National Futsal League at the covered hall of the Pokhara Stadium on Saturday.

HOROSCOPE



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

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



as you keep a low profile. The Pisces moon forms a supportive connection with Venus, making it an ideal day for soulful relationship

Luna's supportive link with Venus makes it

easy to cultivate a welcome sense of emotional

equilibrium. Elsewhere, Mercury's alignment

with Jupiter may open up pathways for career

The universe is working to hype you up and have

you thinking big. Use this uplifting energy to

engage in bringing your creative powers to life



PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

RUNES ENUNCIATE

BEGRUDGEDUNDID

NINESFIELDEAR

I N S T L A D L E I N C A M O E K E Y E D B O D E S

ARRANGER ARCADE

ELSE

EMOLLIENT

RENERANI

LION

tion with Jupiter. This pairing is ideal for seeking out new living spaces, roommates, or making future plans involving your home life.

Sunday's skies act as a soothing balm in your

love life as the dreamy Pisces moon's meeting

with lover Venus brings an uplifting energy to

Sunday's cosmic landscape works to reinvigor-

ate your love life. Your ruling planet Mercury

forms a harmonious alignment with Jupiter,

making it an ideal day to reap benefits from

CANCER (June 22-July 22) ***

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

matters of the heart.

work-related efforts.

LONE

DOLED

|T|R|E|A|D

HEADY

VIRGO (August 23-September 22) ***



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

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) ***

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) ***

aligns with bond-building Venus.

s put you in a You needn't devote yourself to some mindless labor. In fact, aim to invest your energy into a craft that you're called to.

Let yourself blissfully drift through Sunday's healing skies. You're in need of a bit of fun, and

the quirky Pisces moon offers you ample oppor-

tunities to immerse yourself in pleasurable

Sunday's skies remind you of the simple pleas-

ures of keeping things low-key and among your

closest of kin as the sweet Pisces moon quietly



CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) ***** easy-going. The moon drifts through Pisces and aligns with Venus, making it an ideal day to brunch with friends or do some local adventuring with a lover



AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) ***

Let yourself be set adrift in the sea of your imagination today. The moon's presence in dreamy Pisces encourages you to employ your talents and expand upon your personal vision ambi-





It's easy for you to get lost in helping others. Sunday's skies remind you of how good it feels to take care of yourself as the moon's presence

in your sign helps you dote on yourself.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Conspires 6 Frolic
- 11 Hindu title 14 Prove false
- 15 Urgent 16 Always, to Poe 17 Car model
- 18 "Beat it!" 19 PFC mail drop
- 20 Winter sports gear
- 22 "Annie Hall" director
- 24 Mountain antelope
- 28 Horrible 29 Half a round trip

Hamlet

- 30 Is stinky 32 Troubles, to
- 33 Scoundrel 35 Rain protector 39 Narrow board
- 40 Hard water? 41 Think-tank
- output 42 Sumptuous
- 43 Smile upon 45 Gists
- 46 Wheel rods
- 48 Viewpoints
- 50 Necktie 53 Coarse hair

54 Turn color,

maybe

- 58 Fridge maker 65 Each
 - 67 San Antonio landmark
 - station

 - "Annabel -
 - Well-worn
 - Tiiuana aunt 5 Motion detector
 - 6 Baia houses

 - Bank dep.
 - 8 Free of
 - contaminants
 - 9 Frat letter
 - 10 Comment
 - 12 Drive back
 - 13 Socrates' forte 21 Muscle twinge
 - items 24 Not soft or
 - wilted
 - starter 26 Mercator's tome

- 55 Hymn of praise 57 That senora
- 60 Chewed the fat
- 66 Generous one
- 68 Atlanta-based
- 69 Overturn 70 Antivenom
 - **DOWN** TV network
- 11 Zoo favorites
- 23 Yellow Page
- 25 Conversation
- essential (hyph.) 28 Turn right 30 Road rallies Arden and Curie

ENYA

27 Absolutely

- Egypt's river 37 Mutiny
- 38 Out-of-date 43 Diner sandwich 44 Ms. Teasdale 47 Coleridge

setting

49 Shogun's

50 Walked stealthily Out of the sack 52 Not together 53 Male adornment

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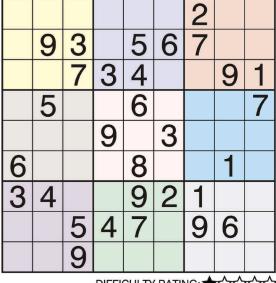
UTE

- 55 Glass square 56 In a while 59 Clean the floor 61 Pub order 62 Series of battles
- 63 Big bird 64 Sir, in Portugal

30 33 39 43 45 51 58 63 66 69 70

SUDOKU

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



DIFFICULTY RATING:

BLACKBOARD

Time is immortal

Everything will cease to exist one day. But the only thing that will remain is time.



SUGAM GAUTAM

here were days when I didn't want to go to school, but now I can't go even though I want to because I am a grown-up man. I understand that it's natural for time to pass and that it's impossible to rewind the clock and return to the past. Time has changed everything.

But what if I say time itself is the epitome of change? When I was two years old, I might have gladly hopped onto my mother's lap for comfort and milk. But now, I can't help but feel discomfort whenever I think about hugging her. I don't know what is it that stops me from hugging her. It would not be fair if I blamed time for this. Maybe, what is to be blamed is the growing-up stage. But it is also somehow related to time.

When I turned five, I might have finally begun making sense of the world and comprehending things I didn't understand until then. As I was physically developing and becoming stronger than ever before, I started getting into sports.

Time has made me realise that life is not a bed of roses. It has made me aware of life's harsh realities.

One of my favourite sports was football. One day, I asked my father for a football, and he gifted me one. My house's front porch became my playground. Since I was still relatively young, I would get tired into the control of the co

kicking the ball a few times. But now I can run several kilometres in one go and play for hours and still not get tired. I wonder at these changes time has brought.

On my first day at school, my schoolbag was so heavy that I couldn't carry it. It was my mother who carried it for me. Now when we have to refill our cooking gas cylinder, my mother asks me to take the heavy cylinder to the refill shop. Time

has made me physically stronger than my mother. $\,$

When I was younger, my sister used to assist me with my studies. Now, whenever she comes across a word she can't understand, she asks for my help. Time has made me more knowledgeable than my sister.

Whenever people stole my toys, I would get mad. Sometimes, I would even pick up fights. Now I share everything that can be shared. Time has taught me to be generous and to get along with people.

My world used to be limited to what was physically in front of me. I couldn't think beyond it. But now, I dream of heading to Mars and imagine all sorts of things. Time has given me the ability to broaden my imagination and my world.

However, time has not just given me positive things. Time has made me realise that life is not a bed of roses. It has made me aware of life's harsh realities. When I was a little child, everyone smiled at me, and I assumed they were well-wishers. Little did I know that only kids are loved unconditionally.

Growing up, I might have made many

mistakes, and with each passing year, I have seen my social circle grow smaller. I used to be a chubby baby with large eyes. Everyone found me adorable. But that adorableness has long left me. I now have a thick moustache and an even thicker beard.

When I was young, I used to think that those who love would love me forever. I was wrong. People change.

I have gained a lot, but I have lost a lot too. I believe time will help me regain everything that I have missed. My experiences have wounded me emotionally, but I strongly believe that time will heal everything. Time may bring me face to face with unforeseen circumstances, but I know that it will also equip me with the tools to handle all of them. One day, time will lead me to death, but it has also already taught me that death cannot be

I know we all will die, but time is the only thing that never ceases to exist. Time is immortal.

(Gautam is an IT student at GGMC, Pokhara.)

Dashain weather and joy

BARSHA HUMAGAIN

Mornings these days are pleasant, The sky is deep blue, And there's often a gentle breeze, The sun is also just warm enough.

This weather this time of the year, It is what we call the Dashain weather, This weather is uplifting and brings joy, It reminds us that our beloved festival Dashain is near.

Dashain is when families get together, Feast on delicious food and have a good time, Leave behind worries and focus on the now, Ah, Dashain, you give people reasons to be happy.

For many, this Dashain will be quite different, The pandemic has taken away loved ones from many, And this Dashain, many families will feel the absence of loved ones, We should all pray for their souls and for the pandemic to end soon.

I can't wait for Dashain to come, So I can spend time with people I love the most, I can't wait for Dashain to come, So I can get some happiness after what has been a bad year.



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