

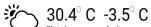
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Prime Minister Deuba has over the past few months assured several US officials that the compact would be passed through Parliament.

starting next week

TIKA R PRADHAN

KATHMANDU, DEC 8

After proroguing Parliament to introduce an ordinance to amend Political Parties Act on October 29, the Sher Bahadur Deuba government on December 3 recommended starting the winter session from December 14. The recommendation came a day after the government issued half a dozen

The House session has been called about two weeks earlier than the usual schedule, which has left many wondering if it has to do with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact, a \$500 million American grant, which is awaiting parliamentary ratification.

MCC headquarters in Washington is also holding a board meeting to discuss the

Nepal Compact on December 14. Prime Minister Nepali Bahadur Deuba's Congress has always been in favour of the MCC's parliamentary ratification, but his coalipartners—Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) and CPN (Unified Socialist)have sought amendments to

some clauses The CPN-UML, which was for MCC endorsement, has, however, changed its stance since it was ousted

from power. With the MCC becoming a hotly debated and divisive issue in Nepal, the US frustration has been growing, which has lately sent a host of officials, including MCC vice president, to Kathmandu to hold talks with Nepali political leadership and take stock of the status of their

Some Nepali Congress leaders say discussions on the MCC are likely to take place during the winter session of the House.

"Our party has always maintained that the MCC should be endorsed. So we want to move it for discussions," said Min Bishwakarma, a Congress lawmaker who is close to

The MCC has been in Parliament for over two years now. It was registered in the Parliament Secretariat on July 2, 2019 by Yubaraj Khatiwada, the then finance minister in the KP Sharma Oli Cabinet.

It's not clear how the discussions could take place though, as the UML has vowed to obstruct the House proceedings with its old agenda. The UML had obstructed House meetings during the earlier session also.

>> Continued on page 2



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A man inspects fresh fish put to dry in the sun at Domukhghat in Humla district in this recent photo. A kilo of fresh fish caught from the Karnali river sells locally for Rs500, and Rs3,500 if dried

INSIDE

India armed forces head among 13 dead in air crash

NEW DELHI: The head of India's armed forces, General Bipin Rawat, was among 13 people killed on Wednesday when the military helicopter they were travelling in crashed the air force said. They were en route from an air force base to a hillside military college in the southern state of Tamil Nadu when the Russianmade Mi-17V5 helicopter came down near the town of Coonoor, Only one of the 14 people on board survived and was in hospital with injuries. "With deep regret, it has now been ascertained that Gen Bipin Rawat. (his wife) Mrs Madhulika Rawat and 11 other persons on board have died," the Air Force said in a statement

High courts intervene after police refuse to register conflict-era complaints

KATHMANDU: The families of the victims of enforced disappearances are turning to the regular justice system following the failure of the transitional justice mechanism to make any significant progress in investigating the conflict-era cases. From August, the kin of those who were forcibly disappeared either by the state security forces or the then Maoist rebels during the decade-long insurgency started filing first information reports (FIR) with the police. The families of 14 disappeared persons from eight districts attempted to register complaints against the alleged abductors at the respective district police and district attorney (Details on Pg 3)

Distribution of fortified flour on hold in Makawanpur

HETAUDA: Ramila Neupane of Hetauda Sub-metropolitan City-4 visited a health institution in her ward last month to get Balvita, fortified flour, for her seven-month-old daughter. But the health workers at the institution sent her back without it, citing that the current batch of fortified flour is of substandard quality. The health workers of Mohan Bajracharya Memorial Urban Health Institution at Hetauda-4 told Neupane that the Balvita available at the health institution was substandard and could be harmful to the child's health. "Although the expiry date on the package of Balvita reads 2022, the flour has turned to dough and is not for consumption," said Bishnu Maya Shrestha, a health worker at the institution. "It tastes sour so we stopped distributing the fortified flour." Almost all the health institutions in Makawanpur district have reported receiving spoiled Balvita meant for children aged six months to two years old. Because of this, the health institutions in Makawanpur have halted the distribution of

Balvita for the past four months.

All in a day's work

Rejina Basnet finds her job as a ticket collector, something considered men's province until a few years ago, rewarding, which she says earns her livelihood and respect.



ANUP OJHA

KATHMANDU, DEC 8

Rejina Basnet starts her day as early as five in the morning. She needs to report to work by seven

Twenty-seven-year-old Basnet at work on a recent afternoon

Just as the clock hits seven, she enters her office, a moving one. It's a 41-seater green Sajha Yatayat bus. She is a ticket collector.

"Today, I am assigned a bus on the Lagankhel-Budhanilakantha route,' Basnet told the Post on Sunday. Basnet, 27, joined Sajha Yatayat as a

helper some four years ago. "Before that, I worked at a shop that sold gold-plated jewellery," she said. "I found out about this job at Sajha through a vacancy announcement. I

applied and landed the job.' Basnet, one of the five women at Sajha working as ticket collectors, is an example of how women are entering into jobs that until a few years ago

were considered men's province. Dil Bahadur Thing, 39, the bus driver, said Basnet is extremely efficient at her work.

"She is sincere, she is reliable," said

Thing. Her job entails collecting fare and issuing tickets. "I also make sure that the door is closed and no one is hanging on the door before signaling the driver to move," she said.

Originally from Mamling of

Sankhuwasabha, Basnet first came to Kathmandu in July 2017.

With just a 10th class certificate, jobs were hard to come by, said the single mother. Her daughter, Reshika, was just four then. "I was in search of a job so that I

could pay for my daughter's educa-

tion," she said. Her fourth-grader daughter goes to a school which is near her rented apartment in Kupondole. She shares a flat with her brother and sister in-law, who take care of her daughter when

She says she was not sure about doing the job when she first applied

"I had seen some women helpers in buses though. Why not give it a try, I thought. And it didn't take me long to get the hang of it," she said. "Now I enjoy this work. I make a decent earn-

Apart from the regular salary, she

receives a daily allowance as well. But it's not that her work is hassle-free; dealing with hundreds of people of different nature itself is a task that needs patience.

"Then which work in the world comes without some trouble?" she chuckled. "There are some passengers who haggle. Some want to take the seats that are reserved for women, elderly and the disabled and I have to convince them to allow the designated people to sit. Traffic jams are frustrating. Sometimes I have to deal with traffic police personnel. But it's part and parcel of my job."

Every day, the bus makes around 4 trips on the designated route, covering over 60 kilometres. Her duty route also changes.

She is assigned Lagankhel-Budhanilakantha and Lagankhel-New Bus Park routes on alternate weeks. It's a 7am to 7pm job for 18 days a

The pandemic, however, had changed her routine for a while last year and this year. The lockdown meant everything was closed. "I was lucky that the company paid us in full during the first lockdown and partially during the second lockdown," she

Even though she has received two shots of vaccine, she is concerned she could be a virus carrier to her daughter, as her job means dealing with hundreds of passengers every day.

>> Continued on page 2

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NATIONAL

All in a day's work

>> Continued from page 1

"I am very particular about masks. I also make sure passengers have their masks on when they get onto the bus," she said. "The virus risk is there and it looks like this corona will continue. We need to be careful and take precautionary measures. This is my job. I got to do what I got to do."

Now after four years on the job, Basnet aspires to become a driver.

"I found on this big four-wheeler a new ground to stand on my feet. This job has helped me earn money as well as love and respect," said Basnet. "No job is small or big. A job is a job and we must respect what we do."

Sajha Yatayat, which currently operates 36 buses in the Valley on different routes, has five women helpers, including Basnet.

"Basnet is the longest-serving one," said Hari Ram Mishra, a supervisor at Sajha. "We are happy to see women work as ticket collectors, which in the past was considered to be a job done only by men."

Basnet's regret, however, is she has not been able to manage time to learn driving.

"I need to give time to my child also. I will see how I can work around time to learn to drive," said Basnet.

"Some day I want to see myself behind the wheel. Hopefully, I will have a young woman working in my place, assisting me as a ticket collector."



A man ties strings of prayer flags to the spire of the Swayambhunath stupa in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

BRIEFING

Idols stolen from Tripurasundari temple

SINDHUPALCHOK: Three idols were stolen from Tripurasundari Temple at Tauthali Bazaar in Sindhupalchok district on Tuesday night. According to Bishnubhakta Shrestha, the ward chairman of Tripurasundari Rural Municipality-5, a bronze idol of Bhagawati, which was built around 100 years ago, and two bronze idols of Bishnu were stolen from the temple. The local people found out about the incident on Wednesday morning and immediately informed the police.

Murder convict held 16 year after crime

BAJHANG: A murder convict from Jayaprithvi Municipality-7 in Bajhang district was arrested 16 years after committing the crime. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Gyan Bahadur Bista, Prakash Rana, 39, was arrested from Dhangadhi-8 on Monday. The Bajhang district court in 2010 had sentenced Rana to 20 years in prison on the charge of killing his neighbour Min Bahadur Bhandari 16 years ago. The convict was sent to the district prison on Wednesday, said Bista.

Eight inmates at Birgunj prison infected with TB

PARSA: Eight inmates—seven male and one female—at Birgunj Prison in Parsa have been found infected with tuberculosis, leaving other prisoners at high risk of the disease. "Eight prisoners were diagnosed with tuberculosis during the recent regular health checkup. The tuberculosis patients have been instructed not to come into contact with other prisoners," said Deepak Yadav, health unit chief at the prison. There are currently 1,300 inmates at Birguni Prison.

Distribution of fortified flour on hold in Makawanpur

Almost all health institutions in the district have reported receiving Balvita, fortified flour meant for children aged six months to two years, of substandard quality.

HETAUDA, DEC 8

Ramila Neupane of Hetauda Submetropolitan City-4 visited a health institution in her ward last month to get Balvita, fortified flour, for her seven-month-old daughter. But the health workers at the institution sent her back without it, citing that the current batch of fortified flour is of substand-

The health workers of Mohan Bajracharya Memorial Urban Health Institution at Hetauda-4 told Neupane that the Balvita available at the health institution was substandard and could be harmful to the child's health.

"Although the expiry date on the package of Balvita reads 2022, the flour has turned to dough and is not

for consumption," said Bishnu Maya Shrestha, a health worker at the institution. "It tastes sour so we stopped distributing the fortified flour."

Almost all the health institutions in Makawanpur district have reported receiving spoiled Balvita meant for children aged six months to two years old. Because of this, the health institutions in Makawanpur have halted the distribution of Balvita for the past four months.

The federal government started the Balvita distribution programme in several districts in 2015 with an aim to control malnutrition among children. The nutrient flour is distributed to children through the health institu-

tions of the local units.

Raksirang, a remote rural municipality in Makawanpur with serious

malnutrition problems among children, has also halted the distribution of fortified flour due to its quality issue. Bijaya Kapari, the health unit coordinator of Raksirang Rural Municipality, said that the health workers have stopped distributing the nutrient flour as it was found to be of substandard quality.

"We have urged the concerned authorities to send a fresh lot of Balvita. We have to halt the Balvita distribution until the new packets arrive," said Kapari.

According to Bhola Chaulagain, the health coordinator of Hetauda Submetropolis, the latest lot of Balvita supplied by the Supply Management Centre in Hetauda is also of substand-

ard quality.

"The consignment sent to the health institutions and the one in the godown of the district health office is of substandard quality. We have instructed health workers in all health centres not to distribute Balvita and have urged the concerned authority to send us fresh stock immediately," said

The Supply Management Centre in Hetauda says it is investigating the reason behind the supply of the substandard product.

"We have apprised the authorities of the problem," said Dr Arjun Sapkota, chief at the centre. "We are looking into the matter seriously."

The local units of Makawanpur have been distributing Balvita to infants aged six months to two years free of cost. Three different nutrient flours are distributed by the government—the first for children aged 6-11 months; the second for children between 12-17 months of age; and the third for children between 18-23 months.

MCC likely to be main agenda of the ...

>> Continued from page 1

The party has accused Speaker Agni Sapkota of not taking action on its decision to expel 14 of its lawmakers.

The same lawmakers had later on August 25 formed a new party—the CPN (Unified Socialist) led by Madhav Kumar Nepal.

Officials at the Parliament Secretariat said that the agenda for the first day of the meeting is yet to be set.

"Yes, the winter session has been called around two weeks early this year. Maybe that's why there is an increased interest among people about the MCC and discussions of the issue," said Gopalnath Yogi, secretary of the House of Representatives. "We have no information on the agenda yet."

Lately, US officials have made a flurry of visits to Nepal to discuss MCC with Nepali politicians in the lead up to the MCC board meeting.

The Nepal Compact is one of the agenda items of the December 14 meeting of the Board of Directors, according to the MCC website.

Prime Minister Deuba over the last few months has assured various MCC officials—MCC vice president Fatema Sumar in Kathmandu in September and Alexia Latortue, deputy chief executive officer of the MCC in Glasgow and Donald Lu, assistant secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, in Kathmandu in November—that the compact will be ratified through parliament.

Days before Sumar's visit to Kathmandu, Nepal's Finance Ministry had written to the MCC headquarters on September 3, spelling out as many as 11 concerns and questions regarding the American grant.

In its 13-page response, the MCC had attempted to provide clarifications to 11 major questions and supplementary concerns raised by the Finance Ministry, including whether the MCC agreement was above Nepal's constitution and whether it was part of the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Regarding the concern, if the MCC agreement is above the Nepal constitution, the MCC has said, "no."

"The Constitution of Nepal prevails over the MCC Compact," the MCC said in its response.

During her visit to Nepal on September 9-12, Sumar and her deputy Jonathan Brooks had held a whirlwind of meetings with all top politicians, including Maoist Centre chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal. CPN (Unified Socialist) chair Madhav Nepal and Janata Samajbadi Party leaders Baburam Bhattarai and Upendra

During all the meetings, they made but one push: ratify the MCC Nepal Compact from Parliament. During his visit to Kathmandu,

Donald Lu, assistant secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, who also met with the top leaders, gave a clear message that Nepal should either take the US grant or leave it.

Congress leaders say failure to approve the MCC grant, which was signed in 2017, could not only mean a massive loss to Nepal but would also hamper the country's image.

"This is a prestige issue for Nepal," said Bishwakarma. "That's why the prime minister is keen on moving the MCC for discussions.

When the MCC was signed in

September 2017, Deuba was prime minister leading a coalition government backed by Dahal's Maoist party. Currently Deuba's coalition government has the support of the Maoist

Socialist), the Janata Samajbadi Party and the Rastriya Janamorcha. For the MCC's ratification in the House, it needs to be endorsed by 136 votes. Unless the Maoists and the CPN

party, along with the CPN (Unified

(Unified Socialist) vote in favour, it cannot get through Parliament. Dev Gurung, chief whip of the Maoist Centre, said no discussion has

taken place about moving the MCC for discussions in Parliament. "At least I have not heard about it yet," Gurung told the Post. "I think it ssue. If the government makes a push

and the UML decides to vote to endorse the MCC compact, the current coalition runs the risk of breaking down. But a lot will depend on Speaker Scaplete also

all depends on how the UML views the

Sapkota also.
Whether to move any agenda for discussion is the Speaker's prerogative. Questions remain if Sapkota, a

long-time Maoist leader and Dahal's ally, would do so unless there is a nod from the Maoist Centre. In the past, Oli on more than one occasion had accused the then Speaker

occasion had accused the then Speaker Krishna Bahadur Mahara of delaying the MCC compact in Parliament.

Congress leaders say the MCC compact has been in limbo for too long and that Deuba now will pull out all the stops to get it endorsed. After the party's general convention, things are likely to move at a rapid pace, according to them.

The Nepali Congress is holding its 14th general convention on December 10-12. The result for the post of party president is likely by December 13.

Whether the Deuba government will put the MCC to vote during the winter session is not clear yet. But many say by calling the House and initiating discussion on the American grant just when the MCC board meeting is scheduled to discuss Nepal Compact as its agenda can send a message across to Washington to wait for some more time.

"Though I have not got a chance to talk to party leaders due to the upcoming general convention, I can say that there is no significance of convening the House on December 14 if the MCC was not in leaders' mind," said Radheshyam Adhikari, a member of the National Assembly representing the Nepali Congress. "It is not a coincidence that the date to begin the new session of the House matches the MCC board meeting. It was a conscious move to give a message to the US to wait for some time, at least until this new session of the federal Parliament."



The local units of Makawanpur distribute Balvita fortified flour to infants free of cost.



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FILE PHOTO: RS

US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu meets Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in Kathmandu on November 18. During his visit, Lu gave a clear message that Nepal should either take the US grant or leave it.

NATIONAL

High courts intervene after police refuse to register conflict-era disappearance complaints

The Penal Code introduced three years ago lists enforced disappearance as a criminal offence

BINOD GHIMIRE KATHMANDU, DEC

The families of the victims of enforced disappearances are turning to the regular justice system following the failure of the transitional justice mechanism to make any significant progress in investigating the conflict-era cases

From August, the kin of those who were forcibly disappeared either by the state security forces or the then Maoist rebels during the decade-long insurgency started filing first information reports (FIR) with the police. The families of 14 disappeared persons from eight districts attempted to register complaints against the alleged abductors at the respective district police and district attorney offices

After the police and district attorneys refused to entertain even a single complaint saying they do not fall under their jurisdiction because the transitional justice commissions were looking into the cases, two high courts have intervened in the matter.

Responding to the petitions from the victims, Biratnagar High Court and the Baglung bench of Pokhara High Court have directed the district police offices in Morang and Baglung as well as the attorney offices of the two districts to furnish written clarifications within 15 days for their refusal to register the

One of the victims had first tried to register a complaint with police but as they refused, the victim turned to the district attorney. However, there was no

"It is their responsibility to accept the complaints and start investigation. We had to knock at the court's door following their refusal," said Bimal KC from Baglung whose son Ganesh was arrested by the then Royal Nepal Army in November, 2001. "The court's ruling has

given us some hope.' KC said they had to opt for the regular criminal justice system as he had no hope that the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons would reveal the whereabouts

Ganesh KC was just thirteen when he



The disappearance commission has 2,494 cases in its docket

joined the Maoist rebellion. In 2001, the teenager had returned home for a vacation from New Delhi, India when a 'cultural team' of the CPN (Maoist) wooed him into joining them. Being of an impressionable age, Ganesh agreed to join the Maoists and left his home at Jaimini, Baglung.

He was arrested when he and his fellow comrades encountered an army patrol but he was never released. Two decades have passed and Bimal's fight for justice hasn't stopped.

The lawyers supporting the victims say they moved the court based on the provisions of the Penal Code that came into effect three years ago. The code, for the first time, has criminalised enforced disappearance.

Section 206 (1) of the Penal Code prohibits enforced disappearance and lists it as a criminal offence. Anyone convicted of a criminal act could face 15 years of jail and Rs 500,000 fine or both, as per the code. If the victim of the enforced disappearance is a child or a woman, the jail sentence can be increased to 17 years.

A team of Nepal Army soldiers took Dhak Bahadur KC, from Galkot Municipality -2, Baglung under control on March 15, 2002 for his alleged support to the Maoist party. However,

the army never made his status public. His wife Chham Kumari registered a complaint at the disappearance commission. As the commission did little to investigate her husband's status, she is seeking recourse from the regular justice system.

"The police have to register FIR and start investigation based on the penal code and a Supreme Court ruling," Ram Sharma, who fought for Chham Kumari, told the Post. "There is no doubt that the court will issue a ruling to this effect although we still doubt that the police will investigate the matter.'

The Supreme Court in its ruling on a writ petition filed by advocate Madhav Kumar Basnet has said that the act of disappearance is a gross human rights violation and the alleged perpetrator(s) needs to be prosecuted under the criminal law.

In the last six years the commission has received 3,223 complaints of enforced disappearances perpetrated both by the security forces and the Maoists. After looking into the complaints, the commission has identified 2,494 cases as genuine.

The latest report by the International Committee of the Red Cross, however, says 1,333 people are still missing in connection with the armed conflict.

Schools could become next epicentre of Covid outbreak, experts warn

Poor monitoring mechanism and lack of seriousness of school administrations to enforce safety measures could invite catastrophe.

ARJUN POUDEL

Karuna and her brother Aditya, fifth and first grader students at a Kupondole school, have been at home for the last two days after their school was shut when three of the teachers tested positive for Covid-19.

"The children are home because the school decided to close down after three of the teachers caught Covid," Sobita Ghimire, the mother of two, told the Post.

The school administration has shut the school for four days (until Friday) and a new decision could be taken regarding extension of the closure, according to the teachers.

"All the teachers and staff underwent coronavirus tests today and all results came negative except the three," Nisha Timalsina, a teacher at the school, told the Post. "As students do not have Covid symptoms,

we have not tested them. The school administration has asked students to report to school if anyone feels sick or develops Covid-19 like symptoms—fever, sore throat, bady ache, and loss of smell, among others.

This is not an exceptional case. Several schools throughout the country have recorded coronavirus cases after they resumed in-person classes. And what is concerning is neither the school administration, nor the agencies concerned have conducted regular Covid tests of students and teachers.

"Schools could be the next epicentre of the Covid-19 outbreak," Dr Biraj Karmacharya, an epidemiologist, warned. "Due to poor monitoring and negligence to enforce health measures, the next epicenter of the virus outbreak could be schools and academic institutions.'

Last week, 28 students and teachers at the Tribhuvan Secondary School in Baglung Municipality of Baglung district tested positive for Covid-19. Coronavirus tests were performed on students after a few teachers tested positive.

Bhumeshwar Secondary School in Patan Municipality of Baitadi district has been shut after two students tested positive for the coronavirus.

Despite the risk of an outbreak of the coronavirus, most of the schools and academic institutions have resumed in-person classes after the Dashain holidays.

Health experts say poor monitoring system and apathy of agencies concerned to enforce public health measures could spell another

"I buy a new mask every day for my son but he always returns home without one," said Sarala Kattel, a local of Tarakeshwar Municipality-5, Kathmandu. "School does not care whether the students are wearing masks or not."

Maintaining physical distance at school is not possible, as most of the schools have been running classes in a single shift.

Doctors say neglecting the risks could prove costly.

"Since the beginning, monitoring of the schools has not been done effectively," Dr Binjawala Shrestha, a public health expert, told the Post. "No one has taken this issue seriously, neither the local and provincial governments nor the central government agencies.'

Officials at the Ministry of Health and Population said that provincial as well as local governments are responsible for monitoring the compliance of the public health measures, as they have permitted the schools to resume in-person classes.

"We have been monitoring schools from time to time," said Janardan Adhikari, health coordinator of Tarakeshwar Municipality. "We send our employees for monitoring and also advise the school administrations to ensure that public health measures are strictly observed."

Adhikari conceded that implementation of safety measures-wearing of face masks, maintaining social distance and washing handsare not being implemented effectively at most schools. Doctors stress the need for effec-

tive monitoring of schools instead of carrying out perfunctory inspection visits. "Random sampling should be car-

ried out at schools on a regular basis

for coronavirus tests, and if anyone is found infected, the school should be shut down," said Dr Baburam Marasini, former director at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division. "Schools are one of the many sectors, where huge crowds gather and authorities have turned

a blind eye towards the risks.' Public transportation, public spaces and political gatherings are other sectors, which could turn into superspreading according to health experts.

Although new cases of coronavirus infection have declined of late, people are still getting infected and dying, which means the Delta variant is still circulating in communities.

On Wednesday, 280 people tested positive for Covid—255 in 9,168 polymerase chain reaction tests and 25 in 3,006 antigen tests.

Of the total infected, 134 were from the Kathmandu Valley-- 100 in Kathmandu, 31 in Lalitpur and three in Bhaktapur district. Two coronavirus related deaths

were recorded in the last 24 hours. The number of active cases stands at 6,239 throughout the country.

Nepal so far has received 25,049,840 doses of Covid-19 vaccines—Vero Cell, AstraZeneca, Janssen, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. As of Wednesday, 8,869,067

people (29.2 percent of the total population) have been fully vaccinated. Of late, the highly contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus has been spreading in many countries; two cases have been detected in Nepal too. The two infected persons, both

foreigners, tested negative for the infection on Tuesday after 12 days, according to officials.

Health experts have suggested more precautions to prevent a massive outbreak of the virus, which includes enforcement of safety measures at schools and public places.

"If we continue to allow crowding at schools and public places, we cannot minimise the infection risk,' said Marasini, the former director at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division.



For more information:

NTC: 16600122222 Ncell: 9801572222, 9801016850

INSIDE VALLEY: 9841166784 (Shishir), 9851098944 (Ram), 9841631473 (Dhirendra) OUTSIDE VALLEY: 9856030005 (Bishwa, Pokhara), 9856025885 (Rajesh, Bharatpur) 9858030677 (Ashok, Nepalgunj), 9852028123 (Anuj, Biratnagar)

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Nepal needs strategy

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EDITORIAL

Staring into the void

Medical students who completed their studies in China are in a bind as they can't intern in Nepal.

Of the many sectors severely hit by the pandemic, none suffered so much as the education sector. People pursuing higher education, in particular, require considerable involvement in sharpening their practical skills. In an unfortunate twist of fate, students pursuing medical studies at universities in China have had to bear the brunt of the policies adopted by the authorities, both in Nepal and China. The protracted effects of the pandemic causing the rules to make awkward choices have left the students staring into the void. And with each passing day, finding a middle ground has become an uphill task for them.

The medical students have been protesting to ensure that they are allowed to undertake internship programmes in Nepal, which would have taken place in China under normal circumstances. In July 2021, the Medical Education Commission ceding to the demands of the protesting students, took steps to allow those who had completed their MBBS by April 2020 to be eligible for internships in Nepal lifting over a decade-old ban that prevented medical students from foreign universities to intern in Nepal.

However, the beneficiaries are only those who began their studies before 2015. While those who started their studies in 2016 completed the theoretical portion at the beginning of 2021 via online classes, they still need to undertake a year of internship to graduate as doctors. China, pursuing a hard stance to eliminate Covid-19, has taken steps to ban international students from entering its country. The Nepal government, citing actions taken by governments in neighbouring countries to maintain acceptable standards, has shown reluctance in granting internships. Between all this commotion, the students have become unsuspecting casualties, and each passing day is extending the problems outwards with no apparent solution in sight.

Is there a way out of this sticky situation? Apart from the issue of providing internships, the problem appears to be revolving primarily on whether the online classes could be counted towards completion of studies. When electronic learning has become the norm worldwide, the authorities can come up with a solution to break the impasse. After all, what is the reason that is stopping the authorities from providing internships to eligible candidates who are set to complete or have just completed part of their studies (theoretical studies) online? There is however the issue of completing practical classes which usually go hand in hand with theoretical classes under normal circumstances.

The latest press release issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology stresses the need to raise the issue at the governmental level using diplomatic channels to ensure they complete their studies and mentions no other ways to resolve the issue. There is still a shortage of qualified professionals, especially in the remote corners of Nepal. Would it be possible to find common ground to allow students to practise at home rather than awaiting approval from third countries? And it is well known that diplomatic procedures cannot be counted on to provide a speedy resolution to tricky issues. Whatever steps are needed, they need to be carried out promptly because it involves the future of those who have everything to offer to society when it matters the most.

Hey Bhagwan

Politicising religion in Nepal has the potential to create major social and religious conflicts.

NARESH KOIRALA



Karl Marx, the founder and primary theorist of Marxism, viewed religion as the "opium of the masses". Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Union, said, "A true communist would always promote atheism and combat religion.' During the first two decades of the Soviet Union, "some 200,000 members of the clergy were murdered". Mao Zedong established state atheism in the People's Republic of China. He considered popular religious movements seditious. The Chinese Communist Party's national security agency monitors citizens' religious activity.

Until recently, atheism was quite popular amongst Nepali communists as well. Both KP Sharma Oli and Prachanda, two of Nepal's most prominent communist leaders and former prime ministers, have, on several occasions in the past, publicly disparaged religion. KP Sharma Oli is on record saying, "If there is any God, it is only in Karl Marx." During their insurgency, Prachanda's Maoist comrades slaughtered cows and forced devout Hindus to eat the meat. These leaders make all their important decisions under the watchful gaze of the trinity of atheism-Marx, Lenin, and Maowho adorn their official meeting rooms.

Lately, with the demand for declaring Hinduism the country's state religion getting louder, these leaders suddenly seem to be on the way to becoming reborn Hindus. This is an ideological apostasy, but it is happening. When did the turnabout start, and what will be its impact?

The turnabout

Oli's image building as a proponent of Hindu gods took a paradoxical route. It started about three years ago with the arrival of Hak Ja Han, the leader of a Korean Christian cult, the Unification Church. She had come to Kathmandu at Oli's invitation when he was prime minister. The finale of Han's programme was Oli and then his comrade, Madhav Kumar Nepal, publicly drinking wine blessed by Han (derisively described in Nepal media as "drinking holy wine").

This reverence to the leader of a Christian cult, previously prosecuted in the United States for criminal activity, by the prime minister of a secular country, did not go down well. It was severely criticised by the media and Oli's senior colleagues in the UML.

Oli's ongoing trouble within his party for poor governance, hubris and corruption started intensifying soon after Han's visit. Oli had to divert public attention from the troubles in his leadership, and he decided to use Hinduism as the means. Out of the blue, one fine day in July 2020, he declared that the Hindu god, Ram, was born in Nepal. This helped him find the diversion he needed: Whip up religious nationalism and win support from gullible Hindus. Until now, the Indians had claimed Ayodhya as the birthplace of Ram. The declaration

From here on, Oli's public acts of "dedication" to Hindu gods intensified. He ordered replacing the existing shower (jalahari), made of silver, at the Pashupatinath Temple with a shower made of gold at the cost of millions in public money, and building a new temple of Ram, Sita, Laxman and Hanuman in "Ayodhyapuri" in Chitwan district, the district of his political nemesis Prachanda.

was a direct challenge to India.

"Standing up to India" pays well in

Nepali politics.

Prachanda, the Maoist chairman, could not stay quiet. He had been seen before actively participating in some of the most traditional (Saptaha) and regressive Hindu religious practices (for example, votive offerings of a live buffalo). It garnered intense criticism at the time, but it was forgotten until his photographs with Ramdev recently appeared in the media. The controversial Indian yoga guru, billionaire businessman and proponent of Hindutva was visiting Nepal and had gone to see Prachanda the day he arrived.

One of the photos shows Prachanda, Ramdev, and Ramdev's assistant sitting in Prachanda's ornate living room which included, amongst others, several shiny Buddha idols. The juxtaposition of Buddha idols, a Hindu guru and a communist leader, stained with the blood of the thousands killed in the failed insurgency he led, raised numerous questions. Was the soul of the dead beginning to haunt him that he was seeking solace in god? Or was he using religion to further his political agenda? No one knows the answer, but desperate communists seeking religion to further their politics is not uncommon.

About eight years ago, the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Gennady Zyuganov, became a passionate supporter of the Russian Orthodox Church—his ploy to capture the votes of devout Russians. "Lenin wanted to build a society similar to what Jesus Christ wanted; Christ was the first communist," he says. Cuba is deeply Catholic. A 20-metre high The Christ of Havana overlooks the city of Havana from a hilltop. After denying Christians membership in the Communist Party for years, Fidel Castro called Christ a revolutionary and removed

atheism from the country's statute.

Deuba joins the fray

Sher Bahadur Deuba, current prime minister and president of the Nepali Congress, concerned with the communists targeting Hindu votes, would not be left behind. Cognisant of Ramdev's popularity in Nepal, he inaugurated the establishment of two television channels dedicated to the promotion of Hinduism. Both channels are owned by Ramdev. This was a rather hurried, clumsy show. Ramdev's TV has, as yet, no licence to operate in Nepal. A bureaucrat commented, "Deuba was just inaugurating the TV's logo, not the channel!"

If the leaders have turned to religion to recompense for their unsavoury past, it is their private matter and is a good thing. But for the government to promote any particular religion is against the spirit of the country's secular constitution. Politicising religion in a country with religious and cultural diversity like Nepal has the potential to create major social and religious conflict. This should worry us all.

My friend Hemesh captured the sentiments of many exasperated with the politicisation of religion and the hypocrisy of the politicians, "Hey Bhagwan," (Oh God) he sighed. "Hey Bhagwan" indeed!

Koirala is a geotechnical consultant in Vancouver, Canada.

Bright as a bird

Birdwatchers have long been at the forefront to protect wild species and their habitats.

PETER SINGER & DAVID S WILCOVE





Birds are found worldwide, in many different environments, from penguins in Antarctica to pigeons in Trafalgar Square, and from the familiar sparrows on our lawns to the great albatrosses who spend years at sea without ever touching land. There are more than 10,000 species totalling many billions of wild individuals. To this we must add the tens of billions of birds we raise for their meat or eggs, and others we keep

Unfortunately, nearly one in seven of those 10,000-plus bird species is currently at risk of extinction. Even common species are declining. A recent study estimated that the total population of birds of all types in the United States and Canada has dropped by 30 percent since 1970.

It is easy to dismiss their fate. The use of the term "bird brain" as an insult suggests that many people have a low opinion of avian intelligence. But they are wrong. Irene Pepperberg's work with Alex, a grey parrot who lived from 1976 to 2007, showed that a bird can learn concepts such as "colour" and "shape." Pepperberg would show Alex a red cube and a red sphere, and ask "What is the same?" Alex would reply "colour." When shown a red cube and a yellow cube, and asked the same question, Alex would

Parrots are not the only highly intelligent birds. In 2002, Betty, a New Caledonian crow, was faced with the

puzzle of trying to get a piece of meat out of a tube. She bent a piece of wire and used it to hook the meat and pull it out, thus becoming not only a tool user, but a tool maker—characteristics once thought unique to humans. More recently, other New Caledonian crows have shown that they can mentally represent a threestage task: Picking up a short stick, taking it around a corner to a place where it could be used to extricate a stone from a tube, and then taking the stone around another corner

release a door and provide the crow with food.

Pigeons—often viewed with disdain by urban pedestrians—can learn to distinguish between the paintings of Monet and Picasso, even when shown paintings the birds have never seen before. They also grouped paintings by Cézanne and Renoir with those by Monet, and paintings by Braque and Matisse with paintings by Picasso. When Monet's paintings were presented upside down, the pigeons failed to distinguish them from the cubists' paintings. Presenting the Picassos upside down,

however, made no difference.

Birds are very popular pets. Budgerigars, popularly known as "budgies" but also often referred to simply as "parakeets," were first imported to the United Kingdom from their native Australia around 1840 and quickly became a hit with people. Today, they are among the most popular pets in the world. Hundreds of other species, including canaries, lovebirds, zebra finches, and a host of less well-known species, are also kept as pets.

Unfortunately, many people who buy birds as pets treat them as living

ornaments, valued for their plumage or song rather than for their minds. They have little idea of how intelligent and complex their new companions are, and are unaware of basic care requirements. Budgies, for example, are long-lived (10-15 years if properly cared for) and highly social. Like dogs, they need a lot of one-onone attention and affection from their owners, plus toys and time outside their cages, to keep them happy while their owners are not at home. Typically, however, pet birds are allowed to interact far less with their owners than dogs or cats are. And because they are usually caged, they cannot go to their owners when they want attention.

The fact that some types of birds can be bought for a few dollars at a pet store with no questions asked or training required is, therefore, not something that a society that cares about animal welfare should tolerate. Many birds end up at "rescue centres" for adoption, often exhibiting harmful behaviours like feather plucking, which stem from mistreatment.

Some simple reforms could improve the lives of pet birds. One would be to require people intending to purchase one to take an online course and pass a concluding exam. These exams could be tailored to the main types of pet birds, such as parrots and parakeets, and canaries, finches, mynahs, and other songbirds. An alternative would be to require those who sell pet birds to provide, both verbally and in writing, and prior to finalising a sale, all the essential information the buyer will need to care for their new pet properly.

People can also thoroughly enjoy birds without owning them. Birdwatching is an increasingly popular hobby around the world, offering thousands of species to see and no cages to clean. It boomed during the coronavirus lockdowns, and it appears to be retaining many of the new-and often younger-followers it picked up then.

Let's hope that continues. Birdwatchers have long been at the forefront of efforts to protect wild species and their habitats. Our dwindling populations of wild birds need those efforts now more than ever.

Singer, Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, is Founder of the non-profit organisation The Life You Can Save. Wilcove, Professor of Ecology, Evolutionary Biology, and Public Affairs at Princeton University, is the author of No Way Home: The Decline of the World's Great Animal Migrations.

- Project Syndicate

it down another tube, it would

to a third place where, by dropping

MONEY

Airlines flying to and from Kathmandu | Omicron travel bans strike must enforce Covid-19 insurance

The policy covers hotel quarantine costs up to 14 days and medical expenses up to \$5,000, the CAAN says.



This insurance policy has to be done by the airline companies, not the passengers, according to Gyanendra Bhul, deputy manager at the Air Transport Department of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal.

SANGAM PRASAIN

All airlines flying to and from Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport must enforce the Covid-19 insurance policy from December 15, Nepal's civil aviation regulator said.

"The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal genuinely applauds your supports and efforts to make air travel much safer amidst global pandemic of different variants of Covid-19 and requests you to activate the Covid-19 insurance policy of all passengers (arriving to and departing from Nepal)," the circular dispatched to air-

"The Covid-19 insurance policy covers hotel quarantine costs up to 14 days and medical expenses up to \$5,000, if needed, for all age groups of passengers if they are diagnosed with Covid-19 whilst travelling," the circular said.

'We have requested all international airlines to activate the Covid-19 insurance coverage,' said Gyanendra Bhul, deputy manager at the Air Transport Department of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal.

"This insurance policy has to be done by the airline companies, not the passengers," he said. "The policy, in fact, will not bother travel agencies and passengers because the entire responsibility for the expenses of the passengers (hotel quarantine cost up to 14 days and medical expenses up to \$5,000) should be taken

by the airlines if the passengers get infected while travelling."

Bhul said that the insurance policy contract would be between the airlines and the insurance companies. "The airline may charge a certain fee from their passengers." According to him, from December 15 onwards, all airlines will insert a notification in the ticket issued to travellers: You are coming aboard with Covid-19 insurance.

This kind of insurance policy was introduced by some international airlines in some countries before, but was removed later following the vaccination drive, said Bhul. "With the concern of Omicron rising, some airlines have reintroduced

Nepal had also enforced Covid-19 insurance before, but for mountaineers and trekkers only.

Earlier, trekkers and mountaineers arriving in Nepal were required to undergo mandatory seven-day hotel quarantine, and have a second negative PCR test on the fifth day after arrival. The government had made it mandatory for trekkers and mountaineers to possess insurance coverage worth \$5,000.

However, on September 23, Nepal threw away the seven-day quarantine requirement and resumed issuing on-arrival visas to all vaccinated foreign travellers in a bid to bring its virus-ravaged tourism industry back to life. The insurance requirement was also removed.

Visitors should have received their last dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at least 14 full days prior to entering Nepal. Those who are not vaccinated or partially vaccinated will not get on-arrival visas. They have to get their entry permits from Nepali diplomatic missions, and also spend 10 days in quarantine in government-listed

A negative RT-PCR or Gene Expert or True NAAT test is required for all to travel to Nepal.

The new protocol was issued under the Infectious Disease Act 1964, after the Covid-19 Crisis Management Ordinance 2020, along with around a dozen ordinances, introduced by the government, became ineffective from September 16 when they failed to get through Parliament within the constitutional deadline.

According to Bhul, the civil aviation regulator had originally planned to enforce the insurance policy from January 1. "We had to prepone the decision following the Civil Aviation Ministry's request to bring it forward to December 15.'

The decision, however, was taken before the World Health Organisation declared Omicron a SARS-CoV-2 variant of concern.

The world is again dealing with a new variant of the novel coronavirus, this time called

Many countries swiftly imposed border restrictions and flight bans to buy some time as scientists try to decipher this new variant's implications for public health.

The first confirmed Covid-19 case with the Omicron variant-identified as B.1.1.529-dates to November 11 in Botswana

South African scientists detected a small number of the variant in samples collected between November 14 and 16, prompting them to report their findings to the WHO on November 24.

On November 26, the WHO declared Omicron a SARS-CoV-2 variant of concern.

Following the development, effective from December 2, Nepal issued travel restrictions for people arriving from South Africa, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Malawi and Mozambique as the first port of embarkation or transit or with travel history of such countries within the past three weeks.

Nepal on Monday reported two Omicron cases According to the Ministry of Health and Population, a 66-year-old foreign national, who entered the country via Tribhuvan International Airport on November 19, and a 71-year-old man, who came in close contact, have tested positive for the Omicron variant.

The ministry said that the polymerase chain reaction tests of both individuals had come back negative at the airport health desk. They were fully vaccinated.

The two foreign nationals who were infected with the Omicron variant have tested negative, the Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

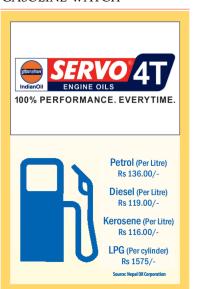


Finance Minister Janardan Sharma addresses the 45th Annual General Meeting of NADA Automobiles Association of Nepal in Kathmandu on Wednesday. NADA is electing its new executive committee on Thursday.

FOREX	
US Dollar	121.03
Euro	136.55
Pound Sterling	160.24
Japanese Yen (10)	10.66
Chinese Yuan	19.06
Qatari Riyal	33.24
Australian Dollar	86.33
Malaysian Ringit	28.65
	Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

PRICE PER TOLA **BULLION** Fine Gold Rs 92,300 Rs 1,200 SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

GASOLINE WATCH



Australian airlines gear up for price war as new challengers enter market

Rex, Bonza taking on incumbents Qantas, Virgin Australia.

REUTERS SYDNEY, DEC 8

Australia's domestic airline industry, held back during the pandemic by state border closings, is gearing up for a price war as new entrants into the jet market challenge dominant incumbents Qantas Airways Ltd and Virgin Australia.

Regional Express Holdings Ltd (Rex) is expanding on major routes while low-cost start-up Bonza will target thinner leisure routes that are unserved or underserved from next year.

The companies are bringing fresh competition to the market for the first time since Virgin bought independent budget carrier Tigerair Australia in 2013. Lower fares, like Rex's A\$69 (\$49) one-way tickets on its new Sydney-Brisbane route, are leading others to

'This market has never even had three large jet players in it for a sustained period," CAPA Centre for Aviation Chairman Emeritus Peter Harbison said at a conference hosted by his firm. "Who are the winners out of all of this? The Australian travelling public."

The domestic market, down to 17 percent of pre-Covid passengers in October, when Sydney and Melbourne were locked down, is on its way back as states are so far sticking with plans to open borders despite the threat of the Omicron variant.

The airlines are scrambling for a piece of nowclosed Tigerair's 7 percent market share in a domestic market that historically produced a profit pool of A\$1 billion (\$711.80 million) a year, according

Qantas expects to return to pre-pandemic domestic capacity by January and surpass it by April. It is now aiming for 70 percent market share, up from 62 per-

Qantas Chief Executive Alan Joyce said the airline



Qantas planes are seen at Kingsford Smith International

would "be competitive to defend our turf" with the best products and fares.

Australia's competition regulator said on Tuesday that it was closely monitoring capacity and pricing, but analysts say the unusual trading environment could make it more difficult to prove whether activity

is anti-competitive or part of a recovery plan. Qantas says that it wants to generate cash and get idle planes and staff back in the air rather than turn immediate profits and that it has natural advantages

such as a strong loyalty programme. It has launched nearly 50 new domestic routes during the pandemic. Virgin is also adding routes like Perth-Launceston as it looks to keep around one-third of Tigerair's market share, according to chief execu tive Jayne Hrdlicka.

Rex Deputy Chairman John Sharp said his airline would add planes and expand to more big cities, while Bonza Chief Executive Tim Jordan said he believed there would be a profitable niche as an independent budget carrier given Jetstar is owned by Qantas.

South Africa's safari business

South Africa's tourism industry suffered a more than 70 percent drop in foreign tourists in 2020.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DINOKENG GAME RESERVE (SOUTH AFRICA), DEC 8

Recent travel bans imposed on South Africa and neighbouring countries in response to the discovery of the omicron variant in southern Africa have hammered the country's safari business, already hard hit by the pandemic.

South Africa's tourism industry suffered a more than 70 percent drop in foreign tourists in 2020, with Covid-19 blamed for the drop from about 15 million visitors in 2019 to less than 5 million in 2020. Tourism employs about 4.7 percent of South Africa's

Britain, the largest source of tourists to South Africa, lifted its "red list" travel restrictions on South Africa in October and safari operators were beginning to see an improved outlook for the holiday season and 2022. But then the news of omicron struck, bringing a new round of international restrictions on flights.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has criticised the travel bans imposed by Britain and many others, including some African countries as "hypocritical, harsh

and not supported by science." He denounced the restrictions as "travel apartheid."

South African safari lodges are experiencing cancellations and few new reservations said Fred Plachesi, owner of the Tamboti Bush Lodge in the Dinokeng Game Reserve, north of the Tshwane metropolitan area, which includes Pretoria. With only four guests over the weekend, Plachesi said his business is feeling the damage. He believes the travel bans imposed on South Africa are unfair and will have a negative impact on the people of South Africa.

"I really think it's very unfair for the country ... it's the South African people and businesses and that suffer," said Plachesi. He hopes that many countries will recon-

sider their flight bans and allow travel to and from South Africa again. 'The year 2022 was looking quite bright

because the borders were now open, and everybody was happy," said Plachesi. "We were starting to have confirmations of bookings. It was looking very good.'

But now he is gloomy about the coming year. "After this, omicron, it seems that [a slump] is going to happen again like in 2021," he said.



General Manager/Exams Director

British Council Services Nepal Private Limited is looking to select and source one General Manager who will also serve as Exams Director to support British Council cultural mission and ensure access to English and Education opportunity as part of a prosperous society agenda that enhances UK-Nepal relations. The role bearer is expected to lead on the delivery of training objectives including services on behalf of UK examinations boards and local partners, and to ensure alignment with British Council UK corporate requirements, global operating standards and commercial compliance in the local regulatory environment.

You will need:

1. Qualifications:

- Existing working rights in Nepal- priority will be given to Nepalese citizen
- ii. University degree in any subject or qualification in a relevant
- iii. Ability to demonstrate English Language skill at C1

2. Role Specific Knowledge and Experience:

- i. At least Five years of experience managing and achieving education objectives for international/multinational organizations
- ii. At least Three years of experience managing country-level assessments that includes a range of UK qualifications, including
- iii. Track record built up in more than one country which demonstrates positive impact for Ministry-level stakeholders
- iv. Ability to demonstrate experience of growing exams business in a competitive market v. Experience in managing multiple complex stakeholder
- relationships in a matrix of organization
- vi. Experience of performing successfully in a rapidly changing environment

3. Role Specific Skills:

- i. Direct experience leading and delivering training and assessment in the international education sector
- Business Development skills evidenced by demonstrable increase in sales/revenue of training and assessment products at

4. British Council Core Skills:

- i. Ability to form and manage strategic relationships with different
- ii. Demonstrable negotiation and motivation techniques
- iii. Ability to manage and lead larger projects
- iv. Ability to monitor and control agreed budget, producing report and analysis, and contributing to planning
- v. Ability to plan and deploy resources to meet goals

5. Selection Procedure:

Applicants who meet all requirements as mentioned in this post will be shortlisted and invited for interview.

To apply send your CV and Cover letter to the contact listed below:

Human Resources Nepal HR@britishcouncil.org.np

Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted and called for interview.

You can also email your queries to the given contact address.

Closing date of application:

Deadline by 16th December 2021.

opportunity. British Council Services Nepal Private Limited is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all of its partners to share this commitment. In line with the British Council's Child Protection policy, any appointment is contingent on thorough checks. In the UK, and in other countries where appropriate systems exist, these include criminal records checks

British Council Services Nepal Private Limited is committed to a policy of equal

WORLD

EU chiefs vow to work with Scholz for 'strong Europe'

BRIEFING

THE KATHMANDU POST

BRUSSELS: European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and European Council chief Charles Michel congratulated Germany's new chancellor Olaf Scholz Wednesday and vowed to work with him for a stronger EU. "Congratulations, dear Olaf Scholz on your election and appointment as federal chancellor, I wish you a good start and look forward to further trusting cooperation for a strong Europe," von der Leyen tweeted in her native German. The EU chief is a member of outgoing chancellor Angela Merkel's centre-right Christian Democrat party and served in her cabinet before mov from the rival Social Democrat party Separately Michel, who chairs EU summits and hopes to welcome Scholz to Brussels for a leaders' meet-

Japanese tycoon takes off for **International Space Station**

and sovereign Europe.

ing next week, tweeted: "Looking for-

ward to working together for a strong

MOSCOW: A Japanese billionaire and his producer rocketed to space Wednesday as the first self-paying space tourists in more than a decade. Fashion tycoon Yusaku Maezawa and producer Yozo Hirano, who plans to film his mission, blasted off for the International Space Station in a Russian Soyuz spacecraft along with Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin The trio lifted off as scheduled at 12:38 pm (0738 GMT) aboard Sovuz MS-20 from the Russia-leaded Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan, Maezawa and Hirano are scheduled to spend 12 days in space. The two will be the first self-paying tourists to visit the space station

Australia joins diplomatic boycott of Beijing Games

President Joe Biden's administration cited what the US calls genocide against minority Muslims in China's Xinjiang region. China denies all abuses.

Australia will join the United States in a diplomatic boycott of the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Wednesday, as other allies weighed similar moves to protest China's human rights record.

The United States has said its government officials will boycott February's Beijing Olympics because of China's human rights "atrocities", just weeks after talks aimed at easing tense relations between the world's two largest economies.

China said the United States would "pay the price" for its decision and warned of countermeasures in response, but gave no details.

Morrison said Wednesday's decision came because of Australia's struggles to re-open diplomatic channels with China to discuss alleged human rights abuses in the far western region of Xinjiang and Beijing's moves against Australian imports.

Announcing the plans, Morrison said Beijing had not responded to several issues raised by Canberra, including the rights abuse accusations.

"So it is not surprising therefore that Australian government officials would not be going to China for those Games," Morrison told reporters in Sydney. Australian athletes will

China has denied any wrongdoing in Xinjiang and said allegations are fabricated. Its foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing in Beijing that Australian politicians were engaged in "political posturing".

"Whether they come or not, nobody cares," he added.

The Australian Olympic Committee said the boycott would have no impact



A woman flies a ribbon near the logos of the Beijing 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Games in a park in Beijing, China, on Wednesday,

on athletes' preparations for the Games, which run from February 4 to 20, adding that "diplomatic options" were a matter for governments.

Other US allies have been slow to commit to joining the boycott.

Japan is considering not sending cabinet members to Games after the United States announced its diplomatic boycott, the Sankei Shimbun daily said on Wednesday, citing unidentified government sources

A South Korean presidential official said the country is currently not considering a diplomatic boycott.

President Joe Biden's administra-

REUTERS

GENEVA, DEC 8

on Wednesday.

reported in 57 nations and the num-

ber of patients needing hospitalisa-

tion is likely to rise as it spreads

the World Health Organisation said

The WHO, in its weekly epidemi-

ological report, said more data was

needed to assess the severity of

disease caused by the Omicron var-

iant and whether its mutations

might reduce protection from vac-

"Even if the severity is equal or

potentially even lower than for

Delta variant, it is expected that

more people become infected and

that there will be a time lag between

an increase in the incidence of

cases and an increase in the inci-

declared the Omicron variant,

which was first detected in south-

ern Africa, a variant of concern. It

is the fifth SARS-CoV-2 strain to

On November 26, the WHO

cine-derived immunity.

dence of deaths," it said.

tion cited what the United States calls genocide against minority Muslims in China's Xinjiang region. China denies all rights abuses

The Winter Games will begin about

six months after the Summer Games wrapped up in the Japanese capital of Tokyo following a year's delay because of the Covid-19 pandemic. "We always ask for as much respect

as possible and least possible interference from the political world," said Juan Antonio Samaranch, who heads International Olympic Committee's coordination panel for the Beijing event.

"We have to be reciprocal. We respect the political decisions taken by political bodies.

The United States is set to host the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and is preparing to bid for the 2030 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

The American diplomatic boycott, encouraged for months by some members of the US Congress and rights groups, comes despite an effort to stabilise the two nations' ties, with a video meeting last month between Biden and China's Xi Jinping.

Unless other countries joined the boycott it would undermine the

UK PM announces 'diplomatic boycott' of Beijing Olympics

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Wednesday the UK would diplomatically boycott the Winter Olympics being held in Beijing in February by not sending any minis ters to the global event.

"There will be effectively diplomatic boycott of the Winter Olympics in Beijing," Johnson told MPs when asked about the issue in parliament.

Johnson said he typically did not support "sporting boycotts", but revealed there were no plans for gov ernment ministers to attend the games over alleged human rights abuses by China.

"I do not think that sporting boycotts are sensible-that remains the policy of the government," he added.

The UK move follows similar steps by other Western countries, with Australia on Wednesday also announcing it would join the United States in a diplomatic boycott of the Games.

message that China's human rights abuses are unacceptable, said Bonnie Glaser, a China expert at the German Marshall Fund of the United

"The only option really that is available to us is to try to get as many countries as we can to stand with us in this coalition," Glaser told a US congres sional hearing on Tuesday.

Ties between Australia and its top trade partner, China, are at a low ebb after Canberra banned Huawei Technologies from its 5G broadband network in 2018 and sought an independent inquiry into the origins of

Vacancy Announcement



International Nepal Fellowship (Nepal) is Non-Government Organization established in 1952 and serving poor and disadvantaged people of Nepal to enable life in its fullness through health and development service. INF Nepal is currently working in health and community development service in Gandaki, Lumbini, Karnali and Sudurpashim provinces of Nepal.

INF Nepal Green Pasture Hospital (GPH), Pokhara serving peoples with specialized treatment and rehabilitation services in leprosy, spinal cord injuries & other neglected trauma, ear care and palliative care is looking for qualified, skilled, service oriented and committed Nepali citizens who share our vision, missions and values

1. Position: Project Manager

Purpose of the Job:

The job holder is the lead person responsible for SUNITA project development and activity implementation, monitoring and reporting across INF Nepal and to the donors ensuring a

Required Qualifications, Skills and knowledge:

- Master's in Public Health or Rural Development/Development Studies or other relevant subject areas, with minimum three year experience in project management preferably
- Experience in project leadership, monitoring, evaluation and report writing. Good interpersonal skill with experience in collaborating with stakeholders.
- Able to lead and manage a team.
- Excellent speaking and written skills in both Nepali and English.
- Good facilitation skill and skill in the use of participatory tools and techniques. Willing and able to travel frequently within the project area.
- 2. Position: Project Coordinator Required Number: 1 Location: GPH Lamjung , Pokhara

Purpose of the Job:

The job holder is responsible for SUNITA project rural activities and activity implementation

ensuring a no harm approach, ensuring liaison with appropriate local authorities, and monitoring and supporting daily work in remote sites.

Required Qualifications, Skills and knowledge:

- Bachelor's degree in Development Studies or Public Health or other relevant subject areas with minimum two year experience in project coordination and management.
- Work experience in collaborating with other stakeholders essential.
- Experience in project monitoring, evaluation and report writing.
- Training and experience within the rural community health setting. Good interpersonal and communication skill at all levels
- Fluency in speaking and written skills in both Nepali and English.
- Good facilitation skill and skill in the use of participatory tools and techniques.
- Willing and able to travel frequently within the project area. Good understanding of, and in agreement with the vision, mission and values of INF Nepal

3. Position: Research & Development Coordinator

Required Number: 1

Location: GPH , Pokhara Purpose of the Job:

may result to disqualify.

The job holder is responsible for leadership and coordination of the SUNITA research program in rural sites and GPH and to coordinate development activities in rural sites (which will largely depend on research findings), ensuring a no harm approach.

Required Qualifications, Skills and knowledge:

- Master's in Public Health, Masters in Health Research or Health Related Development studies Or Masters in clinical background with training in Health Services Research (PhD highly desirable), with minimum three years' experience in designing, conducting, and reporting Health Services Research Projects.
- Experience using quantitative and qualitative research methods and use of quantitative research software programme e.g. SPSS or Epi-info. Experience in mixed methods research and experience with qualitative research software is advantage.
- Experience in research of proposal development and submission for ethical review and permissions e.g Nepal Heath Research Council.
- Experience of presenting research at academic meetings and successful submission of peer reviewed publication. Experience in leading a research team and managing research assistants, in rural health or community development is an advantage.
- Able to lead and manage a research team.
- Able to collaborate with other stakeholders including Government Health Network Fluency in speaking and written skills in both Nepali and English.
- Good facilitation skill and skill in the use of participatory tools and techniques.
- Willing and able to travel frequently within the project area. Good understanding of, and in agreement with the vision, mission and values of INF Nepal

For detailed JD please contact recruitment@nepal.inf.org. All eligible and interested candidates who meet the above criteria can send their application stating the post applied for with detailed curriculum vitae on given email address by 20th December 2021.

INF Nepal, Pokhara Email: recruitment@nepal.inf.org

Only shortlisted candidates will be invited to participate in further assessment and selection process INF Nepal encourages applications from persons with disabilities disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. INF Nepal reserves the right to hold partial or whole applications process any time without giving any reason whatsoever. Any effort by the candidates to influence the selection process

hospitalisations set to rise, WHO says Omicron variant can partially evade protection from two doses of the vaccine produced by Pfizer and BioNTech. Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine neutralises The Omicron variant has been

NEW YORK: BioNTech and Pfizer said on Wednesday a three-shot course of their Covid-19 vaccine was able to neutralise the new Omicron variant in a laboratory test and they could deliver an Omicron-based vaccine in March 2022 if needed.

Omicron with three shots

Omicron reported in 57 countries,

In the first official statement from vaccine manufacturers on the likely efficacy of their shot against Omicron, BioNTech and Pfizer said that two vaccine doses resulted in significantly lower neutralising their vaccine increased the neutralising antibodies by a factor of 25.

Blood obtained from people that had their third booster shot a month ago neutralised the Omicron variant about as effectively as blood after two doses fought off the original virus first identified in China.

"Ensuring as many people as pos-

sible are fully vaccinated with the first two dose series and a booster remains the best course of action to prevent the spread of Covid-19, Pfizer boss Albert Bourla said.

Though the necessity remains unclear, the companies said they would continue their effort to bring an Omicron-specific Covid-19 vaccine to market.

The findings are broadly in line with a preliminary study published by researchers at the Africa Health on Tuesday, saying that Omicron can partially evade protection from two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, suggesting also that a third shot might help fend off infection.

A lab analysis at the university hospital of Frankfurt, Germany, however found a reduced antibody response to Omicron even after carry such a designation.

The number of reported Covid-19 cases in South Africa doubled in the week to December 5 to more than 62,000 and "very large" increases in incidence have been seen in Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia and Lesotho

The spread of Omicron, coupled with enhanced testing and low vaccination rates may have played a role, it added.

Referring to the risk of reinfec-WHO"Preliminary analysis that the mutations in the Omicron variant may reduce neutralising activity of antibodies from natural immunity.

to assess whether the mutations present on the variant may result in reduced protection from vaccine-derived immunity and data on vaccine effectiveness, including the use of additional vaccination doses,'

India defence chief among 13 dead in helicopter crash

The 63-year-old was travelling with his wife and other senior officers in the Russian-made Mi-17 chopper.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE COONOOR (INDIA), DEC 8

Indian defence chief General Bipin Rawat and 12 other people were killed in a helicopter crash on Wednesday, with one survivor being treated for

Rawat was India's first chief of defence

staff, a position that the government established

in 2019, and was seen as close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The 63-year-old was travelling with his wife and other senior officers in the Russian-made Mi-17 chopper, which crashed near its destina-

tion in southern Tamil Nadu state. "His untimely death is an irreparable loss to our Armed Forces and the country," defence min-

ister Rajnath Singh said on Twitter Footage from the scene showed a crowd of people trying to extinguish the fiery wreck with water buckets while a group of soldiers carried one of the passengers away on an impro-

Rawat was headed to the Defence Services



Staff College (DSSC) to address students and faculty from the nearby Sulur air force base in

The chopper was already making its descent at

the time of the crash.

It came down around 10 kilometres (six miles) from the nearest main road, forcing emergency workers to trek to the accident site, a fire official

The sole survivor of the crash, a captain working at the DSSC, was being treated for his injuries at a nearby military hospital, the air

Indian foreign minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said he was "deeply shocked" by the accident and Rawat's death. "We worked closely together in the last few

years. It is a huge loss to the nation," he said. Rawat came from a military family with sever-

al generations having served in the Indian The general joined the army as a second lieu-

tenant in 1978 and had four decades of service behind him, having commanded forces in Indianadministered Kashmir and along the Line of Actual Control bordering China.

Public Notice

Ms. Tenzin kunsang Gurung an USA citizen, daughter of Mr. Chhapang Norbu Gurung and Mrs Urgen Gurung, Nepalese citizens, Manang Nepal and Mr. Ngawang Tsering Bhutia son of Late Dawa Gyaltsen Bhutia and Mrs. Pema Lhamo, Indian citizens of Darjeeling, India are getting married on 11 December 2021 at Ocean Inn Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal. They intend to get marriage certificate. If any, objections, may be conveyed to the Embassy of India, Kathmandu within 30 days on Tel:+9779808235020 or by email: ntbhutia535@gmail.com

राहदानी हरायो मिति २०७८/०८/०२ गते

नारायणस्थानदेखि रत्नपार्कसम्म जाँदा मेरो निम्न व्यहोरा भएको राहदानी हराएको हँदा पाउन हने महानभावले नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालय वा फोन नं. ९८२६३३६३७२ मा खबर गरिदिन हन अनुरोध गर्दछ नामः सिला कुमारी कारक राहदानी नं.: १०००१०८९ ठेगानाः महेन्द्रनगर-३. सनसरी

Machhindra level with Satdobato and MMC on top

Two early goals give holders a 2-0 win over Jawalakhel inflicting them their third defeat in a row while Himalayan Sherpa and Police settle for a 1-1 draw.

Champions Machhindra scored two early goals to bag a 2-0 victory over Jawalakhel Youth Club and inflict them their third defeat in a row while Himalayan Sherpa Club's hunt for first win continued as they failed to hold on to their first minute lead to settle for a 1-1 stalemate against Nepal Police Club in the Martyrs Memorial 'A' Division League on Wednesday.

An own goal and a freekick goal from defender Ranjit Dhimal inside 21 became sufficient for Machhindra in the late fixture at the Dasharath Stadium to level with leaders Satdobato Youth Club and Manang Marshyangdi Club on top of

In the early kick off, Suman Lama pulled an equaliser for the departmental team at the hour mark to cancel captain Bishwash Shrestha's 53rd second lead for Himalayan Sherpa, the fastest goal of the league. Shrestha beat Dinesh Rai's previous fastest goal timing of 11 minutes in Brigade Boys Club's 3-2 victory over APF Football Club.

Machhindra joined leaders Satdobato and MMC on top of table with seven points after the completion of the third round of the league while Jawalakhel are yet to open accounts in the standings. Police climbed jointly to fourth position with five points along with Sankata Club and Tribhuvan Army FC. Himalayan Sherpa remained unchanged at joint 10th with two points.

Machhindra went ahead in the 14th minute when defender Simanta Thapa turned the ball from the six-yard box into his own net in his effort to clear Avishek Rijal's cross. Jawalakhel replied two minutes later through forward Onguna Junior but goalie Bishal



Machhindra's Manish Dangi (right) battles for the ball during the Martyrs Memorial 'A' Division League match against Jawalakhel on Wednesday.

Shrestha denied his strike.

Dhimal poured cold water on Jawalakhel's comeback hopes after his freekick hit the back of the net. Machhindra were awarded the freekick after a foul on Azerbaijan forward Norlan Novruzov by Cameroonian defender Loic Kouahim.

"The boys played well, but we faced defeat due to flaws from the goalkeeper Tikendra Singh Thapa. We conceded both goals due to the custodian's mistake. He failed to judge how to play

in particular situations," said Jawalakhel coach Kishor KC who also openly criticised his players. "We have easy fixtures for upcoming matches. I hope it will be easy to play against them. But on the part of the player or

coach, whoever doesn't perform well will be fired.'

Machhindra coach Prabesh Katuwal said that he was happy to win against a tough side like Machhindra. "Early goals made it easy for us to play. Championship is the only target of the team but the road is not so easy,' said Katuwal.

Shrestha found Indian midfielder Moinuddin Khan's pass just outside the left side of the area and struck at the near post to send the ball to the back of the net. Himalayan Sherpa tried to keep the ball possession in the first half and denied the departmental team from creating remarkable chances. But Police came up with an offensive approach after the break and

piled up consistent pressure. They brought in veteran forward Jumanu Rai and winger Bhola Silwal in the second half. The pressure was rewarded during an hour mark when forward Lama, left unmarked inside the area, volleyed to turn in Rabi Paswan's cross exactly from the outer edge of the six-yard box. The pacey winger Paswan made an impressive run to collect Tej Tamang's through pass from the area to create the momentum

for the goal. Police's central defender Anjan Rai's failed to convert two attempts in quick successions as he struck above first on the first occasion and later he was denied by custodian Kishor Giri. Himalayan Sherpa's late freekick on

goal through skipper Shrestha went straight on Police goalie Satrughan Chaudhary's hand.

Himalayan Sherpa coach Yugal Kishor Rai was frustrated by the team's performance. "Win or defeat are natural in football, but the team failed to perform as per planning. After analysing the opponents' performance in the last two games, we have trained accordingly to stop their strategy of a high-pressing game. But the boys could not play how they were trained to play," said Rai, adding that two points from five matches would definitely put the team under

Police coach Ananta Tamang said that his side came under pressure after conceding early goal. "It is difficult to gain three points in every match. But we gained point as a result of the attacking game. We introduced experienced players in the second half and that gave a balance to the team," said Tamang.

The fourth round of the tournament will kick off on Wednesday.

STANDINGS

Р	W	D	L	GF	GA	PTS
3	2	1	0	5	1	7
3	2	1	0	4	1	7
3	2	1	0	4	2	7
3	1	2	0	5	4	5
3	1	2	0	3	2	5
3	1	2	0	2	1	5
3	1	1	1	4	2	4
3	1	1	1	3	3	4
3	1	1	1	2	4	4
3	0	2	1	2	3	2
3	0	2	1	2	3	2
3	0	2	1	2	3	2
3	0	0	3	0	4	0
3	0	0	3	3	8	0
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Khadka opens two-stroke lead

SPORTS BUREAU

Rabi Khadka opened a two-stroke lead going into the final round of the Surya Nepal Kathmandu Open, the season opening event under Surya Nepal Golf Tour 2021-22, at the par-68 Royal Nepal Golf Club on Wednesday.

Khadka played a card of two-under 66 to post the 54-hole total of seven-under 197. He is two strokes ahead of pros—Dinesh Prajapati, Jayaram Shrestha and Nepal No 1 Bhuwan Nagarkoti.

Prajapati carded three-under 65, while Shrestha shot one-under 67 and overnight leader Bhuwan played oneover 69 on the third day for 54-hole total of five-under 199.

Bhuwan Kumar Rokka leapfrogged to fifth from tenth at three-under 201 after he finished with best score of the day at five-under 63 while. The 13th South Asian Games twin gold medallist Subash Tamang is one stroke behind him and leads the amateur section at two-under 202. He shot two-over 70.

Dhana Bahadur Thapa carded even-par 68 to remain sixth among pros and seventh overall at even-par 204. Sukra Bahadur Rai (68), Kumar Kami (71) and Sanjay Lama (71) shared the eighth position at one-

Leader Khadka played even-par 34 on the front nine and two-under 32 on the back nine. He started the day with a birdie and dropped a shot on the ninth at the first half. After taking the turn, he carded birdies on the 10th and 13th holes on the back nine.

The event carries a cash purse of Rs640,000. The winner of the tournament will receive Rs110,000, while the runner-up will earn Rs74,000 and second runner-up get Rs60,000. Others in top 21 will also earn their share of

Atletico Madrid qualify for knockouts as Liverpool punish AC Milan

Simeone's men advance into the Champions League last 16 with a 3-1 win over Porto while the Rossoneri exit from the group stage following their 2-1 loss against perfect Reds.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Atletico Madrid won a bad-tempered game in Porto on Tuesday to qualify for the last 16 of the Champions League as Liverpool and Ajax both

completed the group stage with 100

percent records Diego Simeone's Atletico needed to beat Porto in Portugal to advance to the knockout phase and they duly triumphed 3-1 in a game which featured

Antoine Griezmann put the Spanish champions ahead in the 56th minute at the Estadio do Dragao but they then

had Yannick Carrasco sent off for wrestling Otavio to the ground. Porto were also reduced to 10 men as Wendell was sent off for elbowing Atletico's Matheus Cunha in the neck, before their substitute goalkeeper Agustin Marchesin also saw red.

With Porto pushing forward in search of the draw they needed to qualify, Atletico got their second goal on the break in the last minute through Angel Correa before Rodrigo De Paul scored their third in injury time. Sergio Oliveira's penalty was a mere consolation for Porto.

Atletico finish second in Group B, a huge 11 points behind group winners Liverpool, who made it six wins out of six in Europe this season by beating AC Milan 2-1 at San Siro despite fielding a virtual reserve side. Milan had to win to stand a chance

of going through and they went ahead midway through the first half through Fikayo Tomori. Mohamed Salah did start for the

visitors and he equalised in the 36th minute before Divock Origi made it 2-1 10 minutes into the second half, heading in after Sadio Mane's shot was

Milan finish bottom of the group in their first Champions League campaign since 2013-14, with Porto parachuting into the Europa League.

Elsewhere, Real Madrid secured top spot in Group D with a 2-0 defeat of Inter Milan at the Santiago

Both sides had already qualified for the last 16 and Real just needed a draw to top the group. They went ahead through an early Toni Kroos strike, and Inter had Nicolo Barella sent off just after the hour mark before substitute Marco Asensio sealed Real's victory with a stupendous strike.

debutants Sheriff Moldovan Tiraspol had already secured third place before Boban Nikolov's injury-time goal earned them a 1-1 draw at

bottom side Shakhtar Donetsk, for whom Fernando had opened the Ajax made it six wins out of six in

Group C by defeating Sporting Lisbon 4-2 in Amsterdam. Sebastien Haller put Ajax ahead

with an early penalty while Brazilian duo Antony and David Neres added further goals and Steven Berghuis was also on target.

Nuno Santos and Bruno Tabata netted for Sporting, who had already secured second place to qualify ahead of Borussia Dortmund. The Germans crushed 10-man Besiktas 5-0 with Donyell Malen getting the opener and

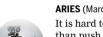
Marco Reus scoring a brace before Erling Haaland came off the bench to score two headers in the second half.

Earlier Manchester City, having already clinched first place in Group A, lost 2-1 at RB Leipzig, with Dominik Szoboszlai and Andre Silva on target for the Germans in their first game since sacking coach Jesse Marsch.

Riyad Mahrez pulled one back for City, who had Kyle Walker sent off late on as Leipzig took third place.

Paris Saint-Germain, who finished second in the group, crushed Club Brugge 4-1 with Kylian Mbappe and Lionel Messi both scoring twice.

HOROSCOPE



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



three red cards.

than push along productively, aim to get lost in good music, your favorite film, or a restorative meditation. Rest and solitude are the keys to your enjoy-



you bonkers, and fortunately Thursday's skies coax you into a creative mindset. Today let yourself float off into fantasies and dream up your next step.





Chursday's skies find you adopting a new change o

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) ***

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) ***

pace. The moon departs from eccentric Aquarius and slides forward into deep-feeling Pisces, turning your attention towards your work/life balance and

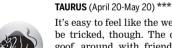


CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) **** íou may not be seeing reality as clearly as you'd like to today. The moon departs from intellectual Aquarius and bounces forward into deep-feeling Pisces, intensifying emotional responses and sensi-

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) ***

PISCES (February 19-March 20) ***

tivity in your environment



It's easy to feel like the weekend arrived early! Don't be tricked, though. The day has you preferring to goof around with friends and connect with your community rather than keep plodding away with



The universe is beckoning you into a world of your own imagination today. The day increases your sensitivity to your environment. It's an ideal day to take up a therapeutic endeavor and jot down your thoughts to provide an outlet.



Pleasure reigns supreme under Thursday's cosmic landscape. Save the heavy lifting for another time. you're in the mood for romance and creative self-expression. Keep things low key and enjoy the relaxed



Turn your focus towards the current state of affairs of your finances. The moon departs from your sign





Thursday's cosmic landscape encourages you to tune back into that narrative and sort out your goals. Aim to work on your projects that are already underway rather than launching into something new today.



VIRGO (August 23-September 22) **** Turn your attention towards the intimate relation-

CANCER (June 22-July 22) ***

LEO (July 23-August 22) ***

ships in your world, Virgo. The moon's presence in your opposite sign of empathic Pisces beckons you to take a closer look at the emotional give-and-take in your closest relationships



SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) *** As a Sagittarius, it's rare for you to stay in the same



place for too long. Let Thursday's skies coax you into a peaceful retreat from the world in your humble



and slides into deep-feeling Pisces, helping you grow your resources and activate your natural talents.



Tune into your body today, Pisces. Luna's presence in your sign intensifies your emotional responses and heightens sensitivities while also encouraging you to lean into self-expression based creative activities.

CROSSWORD

6 Northern duck Corp. execs 14 Everglades wader

16 Retiree's kitty 17 Flora and -18 Paradoxical problem

15 — donna

20 Almost-grads 21 Circus animal 23 Tanker cargo 24 Comforter 26 Household

member 28 Fountainhead 30 Typhoon

31 Hymn finales 32 Squawker 33 Whack 37 Hair goop

40 Wrathful feeling

41 "Paint the Sky With Stars' singer

38 Spacious

43 Thurman of "Gattaca 44 Athletes

46 Hackneyed 48 Most reliable 49 Ship or plane part

52 Antidote

51 Stone worker

53 Right, on a map 54 Mexican Mrs. 57 Fanfare 60 Expression

62 Cable network 63 Kemo Sabe's friend 64 Enthusiastic response

(2 wds.)

navigational 67 Moves little by

little

Cave, perhaps

DOWN

NBA officials 2 Thickening agent 3 In a curt manner

4 Poet — Jonson Slanted type

6 Orlando attraction Steel ingredient

8 Loud noise 9 Low-fat meat 10 Bitterness

11 Computer menace 12 Pietist 13 Like it was 19 Taps one's

fingers

22 Percent ending

A H E M GURU SALOON INDICATE SPLASH KNEAD EPICS BBC ETON ABACK DAYO WON SCALE TUBES ABREAST XII OUTMODED TUNICS

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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25 Ode inspirer 26 Mushroom part 27 Big pet

28 Philosopher 29 Comet, to an ancient

30 School of fish 34 Authorizing 35 Places of refuge 36 Housefly or ant 38 Viking letter 39 Sharif of film

42 Singer Paula

44 Fair treatment45 Spanish gold

47 Concedes 48 Airline to Stockholm 49 Be frugal 50 Citified 51 Town official

peel 53 Jazzy — James 55 Was driven 56 O.T. prophet 58 Dove's murmur 59 Rustic hotel

61 Role model

maybe

52 Something to

26 29 30 32 38 43 50 53 55 60 58 64 62 63 66 67

SUDOKU

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

A test of patience

Buddhist communities whose monasteries were damaged by the 2015 earthquakes express frustration at the delay in reconstruction.





PHOTOS COURTESY: TASHI D HYOLMO

The earthquakes of 2015 did extensive damage to Sangag Phunstog Urgen Chholing Monastery, which is located in Helambu's Tahongsa-Sermathang. (Right) Community members discuss reconstruction of the monastery.

PASANG DORJEE

t his home in Arubari, Bouddha, Tashi D Hyolmo—a heritage activist—has more than hundreds of stamped passes that Singha Durbar issues to visitors. In the last five years, Tashi says he has visited Singha Durbar so many times that he has stopped keeping count.

During the earthquakes of 2015, Sangag Phunstog Urgen Chholing Monastery, which is located in Tashi's native village Tahongsa-Sermathang, Sindhupalchok, was structurally damaged. In his role as the chairperson of the monastery, Tashi was responsible for ensuring that the National Reconstruction Authority(NRA), the government body tasked with undertaking all of the reconstruction projects, fulfils its commitment to aid in the reconstruction work of his village's monastery. In 2020, Tashi stepped down from his role as the monastery's chairperson and assumed an adviser's responsibility.

"Even though seven years have passed since the earthquakes of 2015, our village's monastery is yet to be reconstructed. Despite many attempts to get the attention of the government authorities, we have failed to find anyone willing to listen and help our community build the monastery. Our community is yet to receive a single penny from the government for the monastery's construction,"

According to Tashi, his monastery's case is not an outlier and

that hundreds of Buddhist monasteries across the country that were damaged by the earthquakes of 2015 are yet to be fully

reconstructed.

As per the Buddhist Philosophy
Promotion and Monastery
Development Committee
(BPPMDC), which falls under
the Ministry of Federal Affairs
and Local Development (MoFALD),
a total of 1320 monasteries
were damaged by the 2015
earthquakes.

In 2016, BPPMDC wrote to the monasteries damaged by the earthquakes to study the extent of the damage done and come up with an estimated budget required for their reconstruction. After the study, the committee stated that a budget of Rs 8 billion was required for reconstruction purposes. The monasteries were divided into five categories depending on the extent of their damage, as per which category A monasteries were to be given Rs 10.5 million, category B Rs 8.2 million, category C Rs 7.1 million, category D Rs 6.1 million and category E monasteries Rs 5.1 million. And as per the plan, all the monas teries were to be reconstructed within five years

However, in 2017, NRA scrapped the assessment done by BBMPDC, claiming that the number of monasteries was yet to be verified, and that the estimated budget required for the reconstruction of monasteries was overestimated. It then unveiled its own action plan for the reconstruction of the damaged monasteries and allocated Rs 1 billion for the same.

Tashi speaks on behalf of one of several other communities that

have been adversely affected by the NRA's indifference towards these reconstruction projects.

"I am truly baffled at how a budget that has been estimated at Rs 8 billion gets reduced to Rs 1 billion. I believe that the NRA only factored in the costs of the monasteries' exteriors. But without several intricate elements—which include Buddhist mural paintings and wooden carvings—a monastery would completely be deprived of its true essence, and NRA has consistently showcased complete disregard towards this very

aspect," says Tashi.
The Post's repeated attempts to

Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA), in

coordination with the BPPMDC.

This is the factor that has unsettled Tashi the most. He believes that this transition of responsibility comes at further peril of the monasteries that have yet to be reconstructed. "The transition complicates the entire process even more because, first and foremost, we would have to navigate government bureaucracy all over again. To make matters worse, the Department of Archeology has absolutely no regard for the details that go into reconstructing these monasteries. Without its interior

'Our collective aim is for the monasteries to be rebuilt so that the communities can function the way they

always have,' says a heritage activist.

speak to Chandra Bahadur Shrestha, one of NRA's executive committee members, went unanswered

Phupu Dhembe Sherpa—the chairman of BPPMDC—says that once NRA's term ends this month, rebuilding works of monasteries that are older than 100 years will be handed to the Department of Archeology, which falls under the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation.

Whereas reconstruction works of monasteries less than 100 years old will be overseen by the Department of Local Infrastructure (DoLI), which falls under the Ministry of Federal

features such as Buddhist wall mural paintings and statues, the monasteries would be just like any other building, and that would defeat the entire purpose of refurbishing these sacred sites," says

This is why Tashi believes minority representation in the government is crucial because that would have at least enabled a more nuanced understanding of what those intricate details signify and the kind of value the hold towards its people.

"There's this other misconception among government authorities that monasteries are just religious sites that communities fre-

quent. But this is not the case. Monasteries are the nerve centre of many Buddhist communities where locals congregate for festivals and celebrations, as well as a site to kindle community spirit, discuss community issues, and develop plans to move forward," says Tashi, stressing how authorities have a rather skewed perspective on the significance of these monasteries. "When people in authority have no ground-level understanding of our communities, why should it be them dictating the terms and conditions for us? These officials have repeatedly trivialised this issue to the point where it has become tantamount to a children's game.'

In 2017, monks from various earthquakes-damaged monasteries formed a committee to pressure the authorities to speed up the reconstruction work of their monasteries.

Phurpa Singi Hyolmo, a monk from Tashi Choeuling Chhukla Khaang Monastery, based in the Thangpal Panch Pokhari Rural Municipality, echoes the same sentiment. The bureaucracy in local government has left him at his wits' end. "We have been trying to get in touch with the government authorities for years now, but have been repeatedly turned away. The officials usually claim that the reconstruction process will commence but, over the years, I have come to learn that they have only been buttering us up with empty promises. These monasteries play a vital role in the overall functioning of our villages, which the authorities clearly have failed to even comprehend. They have never made an effort to understand the important role these monasteries play for each community. We are, quite frankly, at the brink of losing all hope that the monasteries will ever be rebuilt," says Phurpa.

The importance of these monasteries goes beyond just the communities as Tashi emphasises how these sites can actually become a tourist attraction in these rural villages, which, ultimately, would benefit the local economy.

"The same authorities who are being dismissive of our issues are symbolic of a population that only boasts about this country being the birthplace of Buddha with no regard to the communities that actually practice Buddhism. We feel as though they have only ever valued Buddhist communities when it has catered to their organisational or individual interests," Tashi argues.

While being adamantly vocal about the issue, Tashi still tries to hold back from being excessively pedantic. "I do not condone religious extremism, and nor am I here to be a flagbearer of Buddhism. But to openly disregard economically vulnerable ethnic communities who have been relentlessly reaching out to authorities with this issue is something that needs to be addressed," says Tashi. "My only hope is that the concerned author ities do not get away with evading their responsibilities, and nor should they be undermining the socio-cultural significance of the monasteries for the communities. Our collective aim is for the monasteries to be rebuilt so that the communities can function the way they always have."

Webtoon' firms leverage low-cost stories with potential huge upside

The webtoon format, which began in South Korea two decades ago, has shaken up content creation for the movie industry around the globe.

JOYCE LEE SEOUL

etflix's mostwatched series in late November, "Hellbound", is making a splash on TV, but it first appeared on much smaller screens as an online comic, or "webtoon", optimised for smartphones.

The webtoon format, which began in Korea two decades ago, has shaken up content creation for the movie industry around the globe.

With relatively few overhead costs, webtoons have become a gold mine for tens of thousands of visual stories, with a growing number of adaptations on streaming services such as Netflix, Apple TV Plus and Disney Plus. And readership for webtoons themselves has become increasingly global.

"If a drama or movie fails, a bunch of people are in the red so they can't experiment in various ways. But here, when we fail, we fail alone. So we can experiment however we want," said Choi Gyuseok, the artist and co-creator of the "Hellbound" webtoon.

In South Korea alone, there are more than 14,000 webtoons by 9,900 creators, according to data provider Webtoon Analysis Service. Tech companies Naver and Kakao are facilitating adaptations and targeting global expansion through their webtoon units.

"Our strength is that we have a lot of ongoing works. On many platforms, when a hit series is over there aren't enough alternatives. We have hundreds of works that are live right now," said Lee Hee-youn, head of IP Business at Naver Webtoon.



Hongjacga, cartoonist of Kakao Webtoon Dr Brain, speaks during an interview with Reuters at a company studio in Seongnam, South Korea.

Each series usually has weekly updates, increasing the amount of material to draw from.

"It's a format you view in three minutes while waiting for your friend... so almost every scene must contain elements that can capture the reader. So there are a lot of ingredients to choose from when taking the source material to other formats." Choi said.

to other formats," Choi said. For the creators—who on average make 48.4 million won (\$41,000) a year - the payoff for getting a webtoon adapted can be huge. Only about 8 percent of creators say their income has been substantially improved by adaptation rights, according to data from the Korea Creative Content Agency.

"In a month or two, I made about three or four times the amount of money I could earn a year," Hellbound's Choi said about an adaptation of a previous webtoon. "It gave me freedom so I didn't have to immediately begin the next work."

Ownership of the intellectual property rights for an adaptation depends on the contract between the creator, platforms like Naver and Kakao, and any agencies in the middle. Payouts can be a single-digit percentage of revenue, a minimum guarantee or a mix of

the two, analysts said.

Global readership

Webtoons' PC and smartphone-specific innovations such as vertical scrolling instead of page-flipping are intuitive for people 24 years old or younger, who account for about 75 percent of the 14 million active monthly Naver Webtoon readers in the United States as of September. Naver's Webtoon app and Kakao's Tapas app are No 2 and 3 in US downloads in Google Play's free comics app category, while in Japan, Piccoma and Line Manga, backed by Kakao and Naver respectively, are No 1 and 2. Naver's global webtoon busi-

ness has seen quarterly sales jump 79 percent from a year ago as of July-September, and monthly active users grow from 50 million to 72 million in three years, with users outside Korea far outweighing those in Korea and global streaming services' adaptations helping expand the market, Naver's Lee said.

Webtoon creators work an average of about 10.5 hours a day, six days a week. The grinding schedule means a concept can take as little as a week to move from drawing board to market.

Immediate audience reaction in the form of views, payments and comments means webtoons can reflect ongoing trends or attempt ambitious subject material.

The Netflix-backed adaptation of "Hellbound", which comments on human fallibility, cost about 15-20 billion won (\$12.7-\$17 million) to make, South Korean media reported.

"In the past, the industry was small, so there were limitations in the kind of adaptations. Now, streaming services have made possible the inflow of new readers globally and more investment, so they are asking for bigger ideas" such as settings in space instead of earth, said Hongjacga, the creator of the webtoon "Dr Brain", which was adapted for Apple TV Plus.

Naver's Lee said 10 to 20 webtoons from its platform are expected to be remade into other media next year through partnerships with streaming services.

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