



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXIX No. 288 | 8 pages | Rs.5

Thursday, December 09, 2021 | 23-08-2078

30.4°C -3.5°C  
Bhairahawa Jumla



POST PHOTO: PRAKASH CHANDRA TIMILSENA

A man inspects fresh fish put to dry in the sun at Domukghat 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 Russian-made 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.

(Details on pg 6)

### 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 offices.

(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.

(Details on pg 2)

## 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.



POST PHOTO: KESHAV THAPA

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

**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.

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 education," 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 is at work.

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

"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 earning."

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 month.

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 said.

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

## MCC likely to be main agenda of the winter session of the House starting next week

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

**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 ordinances.

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.

The MCC headquarters in Washington is also holding a board meeting to discuss the Nepal Compact on December 14.

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's Nepali Congress has always been in favour of the MCC's parliamentary ratification, but his coalition partners—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 grant.

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 Deuba.

The MCC has been in Parliament for over two years now. It was registered in the Parliament Secretariat on July 2, 2019 by Yubaraj Khatriwada, 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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# 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.

POST PHOTO: ELITE JOSHI

## 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 Birgunj 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.

PRATAP BISTA  
HETAUDA, DEC 8

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.

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 institutions 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 Sub-metropolis, the latest lot of Balvita supplied by the Supply Management Centre in Hetauda is also of substandard 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 Chaulagain.

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 Yadav.

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 party, along with the CPN (Unified 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 (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

all depends on how the UML views the issue.

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 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.

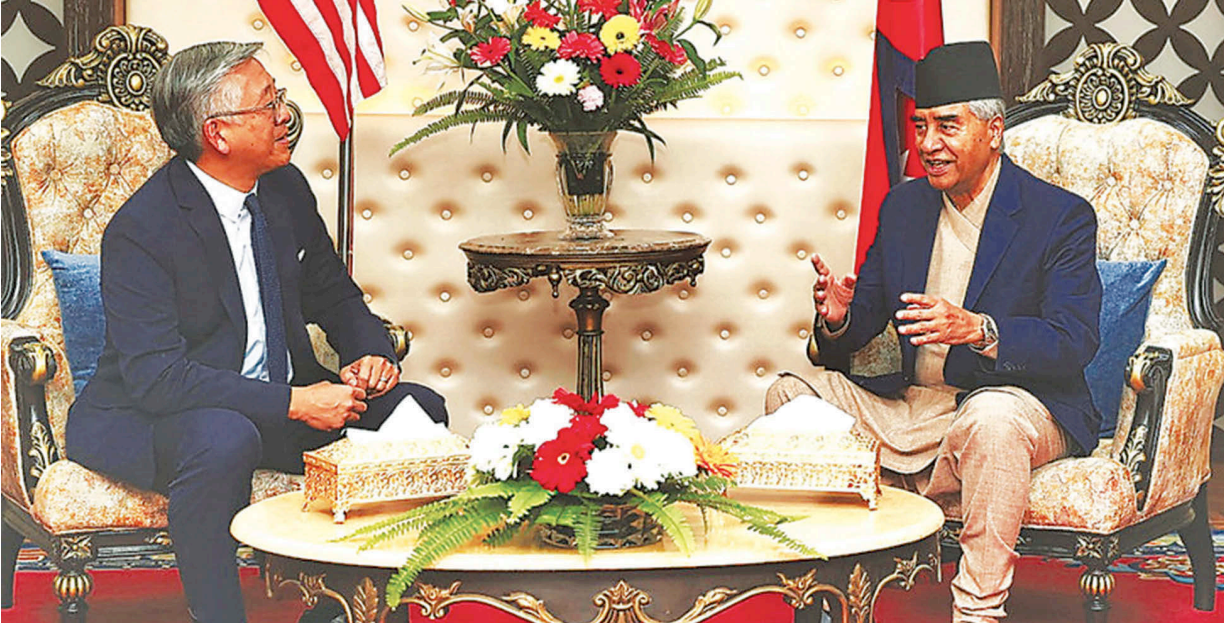
In the past, Oli on more than one occasion had accused the then Speaker Krishna Bahadur Mahara of delaying the MCC compact in Parliament.

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."



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.

FILE PHOTO: RSS

नेपाल सरकार नेपाल कृषि अनुसन्धान परिषद् <b>राष्ट्रिय मकैवाली अनुसन्धान कार्यक्रम</b> रामपुर, चितवन				
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# Airlines flying to and from Kathmandu 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 PRAISAIN**  
KATHMANDU, DEC 8

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 airlines reads.

“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 the policy.”

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 hotels.

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 Omicron.

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.

# Omicron travel bans strike 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 workforce.

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 reconsider 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:

- i. Existing working rights in Nepal- priority will be given to Nepalese citizen
- ii. University degree in any subject or qualification in a relevant field
- 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 IELTS/SELT and GCE
- 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
- ii. Business Development skills evidenced by demonstrable increase in sales/revenue of training and assessment products at scale

#### 4. British Council Core Skills:

- i. Ability to form and manage strategic relationships with different stakeholders
- 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 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

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



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

BULLION		PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold		Rs 92,300
Silver		Rs 1,200

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

### GASOLINE WATCH

**Petrol (Per Litre)**  
Rs 136.00/-

**Diesel (Per Litre)**  
Rs 119.00/-

**Kerosene (Per Litre)**  
Rs 116.00/-

**LPG (Per cylinder)**  
Rs 1575/-

Source: Nepal Oil Corporation

# 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 drop prices.

“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 now-closed 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 to Qantas data.

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 percent previously.

Qantas Chief Executive Alan Joyce said the airline



Qantas planes are seen at Kingsford Smith International Airport in Sydney.

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 executive 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.



BRIEFING

**EU chiefs vow to work with Scholz for ‘strong Europe’**  
**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 moving to Brussels, while Scholz hails from the rival Social Democrat party. Separately Michel, who chairs EU summits and hopes to welcome Scholz to Brussels for a leaders’ meeting next week, tweeted: “Looking forward to working together for a strong and sovereign Europe.”

**Japanese tycoon takes off for International Space Station**  
**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 Soyuz MS-20 from the Russia-led 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 since 2009. (Agencies)

# 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.

**REUTERS**  
SYDNEY/BEIJING, DEC 8

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 attend.

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-

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 the 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 ministers to the global event.

“There will be effectively a 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 government 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 States.

“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 congressional 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 Covid-19.

## Vacancy Announcement

Vacancy Notice No.: GPH-EVA-11-2078-79



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.

<b>1. Position: Project Manager</b>	<b>Required Number: 1</b>	<b>Location: GPH , Pokhara</b>
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**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 no harm approach.

**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 in NGO/INGO setting.
- 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.
- Good understanding of, and in agreement with the vision, mission and values of INF Nepal.

<b>2. Position: Project Coordinator</b>	<b>Required Number: 1</b>	<b>Location: GPH Lamjung , Pokhara</b>
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**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.

<b>3. Position: Research &amp; Development Coordinator</b>	<b>Required Number: 1</b>
<b>Location: GPH , Pokhara</b>	

**Purpose of the Job:**  
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 Health 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](mailto: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 **20<sup>th</sup> December 2021**.

**INF Nepal, Pokhara**  
Email : [recruitment@nepal.inf.org](mailto:recruitment@nepal.inf.org)

Only shortlisted candidates will be invited to participate in final 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 may result to disqualify.*

# Omicron reported in 57 countries, hospitalisations set to rise, WHO says

Omicron variant can partially evade protection from two doses of the vaccine produced by Pfizer and BioNTech.

**REUTERS**  
GENEVA, DEC 8

The Omicron variant has been reported in 57 nations and the number of patients needing hospitalisation is likely to rise as it spreads, the World Health Organisation said on Wednesday.

The WHO, in its weekly epidemiological report, said more data was needed to assess the severity of disease caused by the Omicron variant and whether its mutations might reduce protection from vaccine-derived immunity.

“Even if the severity is equal or potentially even lower than for Delta variant, it is expected that hospitalisations will increase if 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 incidence of deaths,” it said.

On November 26, the WHO declared the Omicron variant, which was first detected in southern Africa, a variant of concern. It is the fifth SARS-CoV-2 strain to

## Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine neutralises Omicron with three shots

**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.

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 antibodies but that a third dose of 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 Research Institute in South Africa 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 three shots.

# 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**  
COONOR (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 his injuries.

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 destination in southern Tamil Nadu state.

“His untimely death is an irreparable loss to our Armed Forces and the country,” defence minister 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 improvised stretcher.

Rawat was headed to the Defence Services



Firemen and rescue workers stand next to the debris of the helicopter crash site in Coonoor, Tamil Nadu.

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

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 told AFP.

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 force said.

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 several generations having served in the Indian armed forces.

The general joined the army as a second lieutenant in 1978 and had four decades of service behind him, having commanded forces in Indian-administered 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: [ntbthutia535@gmail.com](mailto:ntbthutia535@gmail.com)

## राहदानी हरायो

मिति २०७८/०८/०२ गते नारायणस्थानदेखि रत्नपार्कसम्म जाँदा मेरो निम्न व्यहोरा भएको राहदानी हराएको हुँदा पाउनु हुने महानुभावले नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालय वा फोन नं. ९८२६३३६३७२ मा खबर गरिदिनु हुन अनुरोध गर्दछु ।  
नाम: सिला कुमारी कारक  
राहदानी नं.: १०००१०८९  
ठेगाना: महेन्द्रनगर-३, सुनसरी







# 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**  
KATHMANDU

At 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," says Tashi.

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 monasteries 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 Tashi.

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 Choelung 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 under-

stand 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 authorities 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

Netflix's most-watched 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 Gyu-seok, 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.



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

REUTERS

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.

For the creators—who on aver-

age 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 business 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 Hongjagca, 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.

— Reuters