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Workers paint the seats on the grandstand of the Chyasal football stadium, which is undergoing renovation, in Lalitpur on Wednesday.

Sharma could return to the ministry, many say citing the turn of events

Maoists say Sharma likely to come back after probe; some in Congress don't rule that out.

ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, JULY 6

With the resignation of Janardan Sharma as finance minister "to pave the way for a probe" into charges against him, questions have arisen who will lead the Finance

For the time being, Prime Minister Deuba himself will head the ministry.



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Sharma announced his resignation during his address to Wednesday's meeting of the House, which was boycotted by the main opposition CPN-UML

Sharma is facing charges of bringing in two unauthorised persons in the Finance Ministry on the night of May 28 to change tax rates. A parliamentary committee also has been formed to investigate the allegations

> Just as Sharma stepped down, the Election Commission recommended November 18 as the date for the federal and provincial

> A minister from the Nepali Congress said that since the economy is in bad shape and the new budget was announced only recently, the prime minister must be careful while choosing a

> new finance minister. "We have advised the prime

minister to pick an experienced hand as soon as possible," the minister told the Post on condition of anonymity.

The way Prime Minister Deuba, also the Congress president, maintained silence despite Sharma facing criticism for failing to address the economic crisis and charges that he had changed the tax regime to benefit certain interest groups, some say, indicates he was reluctant to

Insiders say there was pressure also from Maoist chair Dahal, Deuba's key coalition partner, not to initiate action against Sharma.

As per a power-sharing deal among the five coalition partners, the Finance Ministry was given to the Maoist Centre.

Sharma was appointed finance minister on July 13, the day Deuba took oath as prime minister and formed a four-member Cabinet.

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Poll commission suggests November 18 for federal and provincial elections

Holding both elections in a single phase is possible, cost-effective and easier from the management point of view, the commission says.



The Election Commission has put forth its proposal to use electronic voting machines.

KATHMANDU, JULY 6

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA

Election Commission on Wednesday recommended the government hold federal and provincial elec-

tions on November 18. Although the last federal and provincial and local elections in 2017 were conducted on two different

dates-November 26 and December -the commission this time is aiming the two polls in a single phase.

The commission recommended the date during the meeting with Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on Wednesday.

"We recommended November 18 for federal and provincial elections,' Chief Election Commissioner Dinesh Thapaliya confirmed to the Post. "We can hold both elections in a single day across the country."

The commission said in a statement that holding the elections in a single phase would be cost effective as well as easier from the management point

As per the Election Commission Act 2017, the government announces election dates in consultation with the Election Commission.

The commission said that election was recommended also assuming that tenure of the existing House of Representatives and Provincial Assembly would end on December 8, the day when the commission had declared the winners of the second phase of the elections in federal and provincial elections in 2017 under the first-past-the-post

"The prime minister also agreed to hold elections in a single phase,' Thapaliya said.

He said that they suggested the date considering that it would be convenient for the commission because there would be enough time for the commission to make preparations.

>> Continued on page 2

Finance minister resigns after public outcry and probe panel

Main opposition UML boycotts the House meeting where Janardan Sharma announced his resignation. Parliamentary panel has 10 days to submit its investigation report.

BINOD GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, JULY 6

Finance Minister Janardan Sharma resigned on Wednesday, weeks after allegations that he allowed two unauthorised persons to tweak tax rates on May 28, a day before he presented the national budget in Parliament.

There was public outcry and widespread criticism after Annapurna Post, a vernacular daily, on June 20 reported that Sharma had directed the officials at his ministry to follow suggestions of the two individuals in changing tax rates.

However, he had rubbished the allegations, claiming that he hadn't done anything wrong.

Sharma has been charged with breaching the budgetary discipline, which experts say amounts to financial crime

He announced his resignation in an address to the House of Representatives on Wednesday soon after an 11-member parliamentary committee was announced to probe the charges against him.

Pressure was building on Sharma to resign after the Finance Ministry said that the CCTV footage of the night of May 28 got erased as the system could store only 13 days of recording. It was viewed as Sharma's attempt to destroy the evidence.

Political parties earlier on Wednesday deliberated on forming a parliamentary probe committee, a demand by the main opposition CPN-UML, for the last few weeks. On Tuesday, Nepali Congress President and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and CPN (Maoist Centre) chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal also discussed



Finance Minister Janardan Sharma had been defiant despite growing calls for his resignation.

the controversy surrounding Sharma. Sharma represents the Maoist Centre. Soon after the probe committee was formed, Sharma was allowed to address the House. The UML, however, objected to it, saying its lawmakers would boycott the meeting if he was allowed to speak in the capacity of finance minister.

As Sharma proceeded towards the rostrum, UML lawmakers walked out of the chamber.

While addressing the House, Sharma said that he had not done anything wrong.

"While I completely refute the allegations against me, I have decided to cooperate in the investigation," said Sharma. "I announce my resignation

to facilitate the probe process.'

Sharma has been embroiled in a series of controversies ever since he took the charge of the Finance Ministry on July 14 last year. In the latest one, he was accused of inviting two unauthorised persons to the ministry to change tax rates and deleting the CCTV footage.

In his 10-minute address, Sharma said a fabricated story was brought to the public domain to defame him. He also claimed that only authorised persons-secretaries, joint secretaries and director generals from the Department of Customs and the Department of Revenue—were involved in finalising the budget on the eve of the budget day.

>> Continued on page 2

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NATIONAL

BRIEFING

New curriculum to preserve Tilung language

KHOTANG: Bal Bikash Primary School in Chasmitar and Pipaltar Primary School in Halesi Tuwachung Municipality-3 have started conducting classes in Tilung language as an elective subject from grade one to three in the current academic session in order to preserve the endangered language. According to Mayor Bimala Rai, textbooks in the language have been prepared with the financial support of the municipality. "The majority of people here are Tilung speakers The municipality decided to take this step to prevent the endangered language from going extinct," said Rai.

Newborn found buried in forest

SARLAHI: The body of an infant was found buried in Sagarnath forest in Sarlahi on Monday. According to the police, a 17-month-old girl was found buried in the jungle near a cemetery. Police have mobilised teams in the surrounding settlements to identify the deceased. "During the investigation, the police found a poison bottle near the crime scene. The infant must have been poisoned. We are awaiting the postmortem report to determine the cause of death," said Roshan Thapa, inspector at the Area Police Office, Kesharganj.

Two held with 90 kg marijuana

PARSA: Two Indian nationals-30-yearold Ravikant Bharti of Gopalpur Nisfi in Uttar Pradesh and Sunil Bharti, 28, of West Champaran in Betiva of Bihar—have been arrested for smuggling a large quantity of cannabis near the Bagahi Gate of Birgunj Metropolitan City-28 on Tuesday night. According to the police, a joint team of the Province Police Office, Janakpur and the District Police Office, Parsa made the arrest after receiving an anonymous tip. "The police found 90 kg of canna bis hidden under the seat of the car. The arrested duo are charged for drug-related offences," said DSP Omprakash Khanal



Center at Khumaltar Lalitpur

client's website [www.nitc.gov.np].

but the time will be the same as stipulated.

prevent the opening of the EOI in anyway.

financial proposal through a request for proposal.

EOI evaluation process will be shortlisted as qualified firms.

qualifications.



Workers set up scaffolding on an earthquake-damaged building as part of the reconstruction work at Hanumandhoka, Kathmandu on Wednesday.

POST PHOTO: SUIAN GOPA

Boy goes missing in Mahakali River while using improvised cable crossing

The 17-year-old from Byas Rural Municipality fell into river after the tuin snapped at Dumling on Wednesday.

MANOJ BADU

Government of Nepal (GoN)

Ministry of Communication and Information Technology

National Information Technology Development Committee

National Information Technology Center

Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal

Request for Expressions of Interest (EOI)

(Publication Date 2079/03/23 (July 07, 2022)

Name of Project: Construction Supervision and Preparation of Detail Working

Drawing of Data Center at Kohalpur, Banke and Data & Internet Exchange

1. National Information Technology Center is planning to construct Data

Center at Kohalpur, Banke and Data & Internet Exchange Center building at

Khumaltar Lalitpur and intends to prepare separate lists of competent local

consulting firms for the Preparation of Detail Working Drawing and

Construction Supervision, for this purpose. This Invitation for Expression

of Interest (EoI) is made to invite applications from interested and eligible

National Consulting Firms registered in Nepal under GoN rules

2. Interested eligible consultants may obtain further information and EOI document free of cost at e- GP system www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp or visit the

3. Consultants may associate with other consultants to enhance their

4. Expressions of interest shall be delivered online through e-GP system

5. In case the last date of obtaining and submission of the EOI documents

6. The completed EOI documents received by the due date and within the

www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp before 12 Noon (NST-Nepal Standard Time)

happens to be a holiday, the next working day will be deemed as the due date

specified time shall be opened at 1:00 PM on the 16th day (2079/04/06) of

first date of publication of this notice in the presence of the applicants or

their authorized representative who-so-ever wish to attend. Absence of the

applicant or their authorized representatives, however, shall not obstruct or

Capacity [10%] of consulting firm and key personnel. Based on evaluation

of EOI, only shortlisted firms will be invited to submit technical and

basis of the approved eligibility and evaluation criteria. The evaluation of

EoI application of JV consulting firm(s) will be done in cumulative basis.

Only six top ranked consulting firm obtaining at least 70% marks in the

Technology Center Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal, Phone Number +977

014211917 during office hours in all working days prior to the deadline of

9. Further information on this EOI can be obtained from National Information

7. EOI will be assessed based on Qualification [35%], Experience [55%], and

8. The EOI documents received from the applicants will be evaluated on the

®ulations and/or their joint ventures (JV) for the assignment.

within 16thday (2079/04/06) of first publication of this notice.

A 17-year-old boy has gone missing after he fell into the Mahakali river while crossing the river using an improvised cable crossing, locally known as tuin.

Sachin Budhathoki, a resident of Byas Rural Municipality in Darchula district, plunged into the river after the tuin snapped at Dumling in Byas-2 on Wednesday. The incident took place while Budhathoki was returning home from a neighbouring Indian town.

According to Dhiran Singh Budhathoki, the ward chairman of Byas Rural Municipality-2,

Budgathoki had gone to Garwadhar Bazaar in Dharchula, India, to buy cooking oil. According to him, the tragic incident took place as a wooden pole supporting the tuin collapsed. The incident site is about 45 km north of Khalanga, the district headquarters of Darchula.

Security personnel and the locals are searching for the body of the missing person, said the ward chief. Hundreds of people in the area go to India to buy basic essentials, get treatment for minor illnesses or injuries, and earn their livelihood.

On July 30 last year, Jaya Singh Dhami, 33, from Khangdang Malof Byas Rural Municipality-2 fell into the Mahakali river after Indian security

personnel allegedly untied the cable of the tuin Dhami was using to cross the river.

The local people of Byas and other remote villages of Darchula, a hill district of Sudurpaschim Province, risk their lives daily to cross the Mahakali river through cable crossings for a lack of suspension bridges in the area. Accidents and deaths while crossing the river using tuins, wooden boats, tyre tubes, and

wooden logs are reported every year.

The KP Sharma Oli government in 2015 had pledged to replace all tuin crossings in the country with suspension bridges but the people of Darchula have yet to see this plan come to fou



Accidents and deaths while crossing the river using tuins are reported every year in Darchula.

POST FILE PHOTO

Poll commission suggests November 18 for federal ...

>> Continued from page 1

Prime Minister Deuba also on different occasions had said that the elections would be held within November.

Local elections were also held in a single phase across the country on May 13 to elect a new set of representatives for 753 local units.

But holding elections of both House of Representatives and provincial assemblies in a single phase and on the single day could be challenging in terms of security arrangement.

Several cases of election-related violence were reported on May 13 when the local elections were held in the single phase unlike in 2017.

In May, the National Human Rights Commission, which had deployed seven high-level teams led by its chairman, members and former office bearers and 45 other teams including employees of the commission in all 77 districts for election observation, remarked that (local) polls were not peaceful as expected.

Ram Prasad Bhandari, an election commissioner, said the commission believes that managing security would not be a big problem during the federal and provincial elections based on the experience of recent local elections, which were held in a single phase in May.

From the upcoming elections, 165 members will be

elected to the House of Representatives under the first-past-the-post (direct election) and 110 will be elected under the proportional representation systems.

Similarly, for seven provincial assemblies, 330 members will be elected under the direct system and 220 will be elected under the proportional system.

While recommending the election date, the com-

mission has drawn attention of the government to its wish to use electronic voting machines during the upcoming elections.

"We sent a letter to the government on Monday conveying our wish to use FVMs at least in

conveying our wish to use EVMs at least in Kathmandu Valley," said Bhandari, the election commissioner. "We followed up on our proposal during the meeting with the prime minister on Wednesday. He said he is positive about the proposal."

As per its statement, the commission has requested

for certifying EVMs produced by domestic companies if they are used. In the case they are imported, the government has been requested to ensure supply of the EMVs by mid-August.

Officials at the commission, however, are not confi-

dent about using EVMs in the upcoming elections considering doubts among political parties about the reliability of the system.

"We are, however, in talks with the representatives of the political parties about the use of EVMs," said Bhandari.

Earlier this year, a team led by Anil Kumar Dutta, a joint secretary at the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, had presented a report to the Election Commission saying that there won't be any problem in using EVMs.

"Many countries, including India, have been effectively using electronic voting machines. Nepal can easily use them," Dutta told the Post in May. "We had recommended that the Election Commission use the electronic voting system after studying the voting system of different countries."

According to Dutta, Nepal can use electronic voting by forming a team to aggregate voting devices as per the need of the polling constituencies.

A Carter Centre report of the 2008 Constituent Assembly polls had observed that the pilot test of electronic voting machines in Kathmandu went well, a promising sign for future elections. A year later electronic voting machines were used in all six constituencies during the by-elections held on April 10, 2009 in Morang constituencies 5 and 7, Dhanusha, Kaski, Rolpa and in Kanchanpur.

It has been 14 years since, and the country is still relying on ballot papers and hand counting of votes. Meanwhile, the election body said it has submitted the estimated expense of Rs10 billion to the government for holding the federal and provincial elections in a single phase on the same day.

There had been expenditure of Rs7.8 billion in these elections in 2017, according to the commission. But rise in salaries, allowances, daily allowances, increased cost of election materials, increased number of voters and voting centres, need for using information technology, and inflation among other things demand more expenditure, the commission said.

"The proposed expenditure plan also includes the cost of new vehicles required for the commission as there are not many useful vehicles with it," said Shaligram Sharma Poudel, spokesperson at the commission. "We need 100-150 vehicles."

Finance minister resigns after public outcry ...

the budget.

>> Continued from page

"Such parliamentary committees were formed in the past also to investigate different allegations against former finance ministers. But they never resigned," he said. "I can face 1,000 other investigations because I haven't done anything wrong."

The probe committee formed earlier in the day consists of four lawmakers from the UML, two each from the Nepali Congress and the Maoist Centre, and one each from the CPN (Unified Socialist), Janata Samajbadi Party and Loktantrik Samajbadi Party.

Khagaraj Adhikari (UML), Dev Gurung (Maoist Centre), Pushpa Bhusal (Congress), Pradeep Gyawali (UML), Bhanubhakta Dhakal (UML), Boomers BK (UML), Laxman Lal Karna (Loktantrik Samajbadi Party), Shakti Basnet (Maoist Centre), Sarala Kumari Yadav (Unified Socialist), Sitaram Yadav (Congress) and Surendra Yadav (Janata Samajbadi Party) are the members of the committee.

The UML had maintained that Sharma had no moral right to address the House in the capacity of a minister.

"We are against the decision of the Speaker to allow Sharma to address the House as a minister. He can only address as a lawmaker," said UML lawmaker Yogesh Bhattarai while addressing the House earlier in the day. "Allegations against him have already been proved. The probe committee will only recommend actions against him."

This is the third parliamentary probe committee since 2011 formed to investigate allegations related to budget wrongdoings by unauthorised persons and leaking the budget before it was presented in the House.

In July 2011, then finance minister Bharat

Mohan Adhikari was accused of allowing unauthorised persons to tweak tax rates while leaking

A parliamentary probe committee led by Laxman Ghimire, then Nepali Congress chief whip, was formed to investigate the allegations.

"Then prime minister Jhala Nath Khanal and Maoist chair Dahal were aware of whatever had happened in the ministry," Ghimire, who is currently in Australia, told the Post over the phone.

"Most of our recommendations were not

implemented though I cannot exactly recall what they were." Ramesh Lekhak, a Congress leader who was a member of the panel, said they had recommended a warning to the then finance minister and then secretary. He, however, could not recall what exactly hap-

He, however, could not recall what exactly happened. Rameshore Khanal, who was finance secretary then, had resigned expressing reservations about the way Adhikari had prepared the budget.

Another parliamentary committee was formed in May 2016 when the national budget was leaked to national newspapers before it was presented in Parliament. An eight-member committee led by Lekhak was formed to probe the matter. Bishnu Poudel was finance minister.

"We had made several recommendations to

"We had made several recommendations to maintain the secrecy of the budget," Lekhak told the Post. "The present situation wouldn't have arisen had our earlier reports and recommendations been followed strictly. However, I still believe a parliamentary probe is necessary to dig out the truth."

Lekhak said that a parliamentary panel should have been constituted soon after the

The probe committee formed on Wednesday has 10 days from the day it commences its work to submit its report.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, Finance Secretary Madhu Marasini went on an extended leave.

Marasini, Revenue Secretary Krishna Hari Pushkar and two joint secretaries Bhupal Baral and Chakra Bahadur Budha were said to be at the Finance Ministry on the night of May 28, the day before the budget presentation, when Sharma invited the two outsiders

Marasini has not said anything despite the Post's repeated attempts to learn from him about the alleged incident on the night of May 28.

Two officials at the Finance Ministry told the Post on Wednesday morning that Marasini decided to go on leave saying he won't return as long as Sharma remains finance minister. Marasini could not be reached for comments after Sharma's resignation.

Sharma, a former Maoist commander, has been a controversial figure. On November 19, 2010, he was at the forefront to block the budget when Surendra Pandey of the UML was set to present it in Parliament. A scuffle ensued as Sharma accosted Pandey when he was proceeding towards the rostrum. The budget briefcase got torn apart.

A member of the probe committee said they would start work as per the mandate.

"Our terms of reference are clear," Dhakal, a member of the probe committee representing the UML, told the Post. "We will dig out the facts while also recommending action if [Sharma is] found guilty."

••••

submission of EOI.

NATIONAL

Drainage work along Jamal-Kantipath road creates hassle for locals

Department of Roads has dug up about 300 metres of the section and left the work incomplete in the rainy season.

ANUP OJHA

KATHMANDU, JULY (

Indra Giri, 52, runs Cool Chef Restaurant located in front of the Election Commission office in Kantipath. He does good business for the rest of the year but come monsoon and his daily business dips significantly.

When it rains his street-facing eatery does not attract customers because of the sorry state of the adjoining road which turns into a pool.

"During the monsoon, the street becomes waterlogged because of the poor drainage system in the area," said Giri. "Workers from the Department of Roads came here a month ago to fix the drainage, but they dug up various sections of the road and left.

Every monsoon, for over a decade, the Jamal-Kantipath section in ward 27 becomes submerged in rainwater inconveniencing the local residents, businesses and commuters.

Urban planners criticise authorities for a lack of caution and foresightedness to public projects.

"Because of the poor road condition, my business is not doing well," said Giri, who has been running his business for the past 13 years.

"My daily income has decreased from Rs20,000 to Rs 8,000 because fewer people come to my restaurant

However, it is not just the rains that bring significant losses to Giri's business. When days are sunny, the road is covered in billowing dust kicked up by passing vehicles.

"This area is becoming increasingly unsuitable for businesses and even for residential purposes. The Department Roads and the Kathmandu Metropolitan City start digging roads just ahead of the monsoon. This year, the City decided to take care of the drainage problem in this section but the tendency of leaving the work incomplete has created more problems for us," said Giri.

The Department of Roads has been laying sewer mains in the area for over a month

"We started the work a month ago, but due to continuous rain we could not complete this task," said Narayan Nihure, the chief of the Road Division, Kathmandu.

He said the division has allocated tem along the Jamal-Kantipath road

stretch. JSS Engineering and Construction company has the contract for the project.

But when asked why the drainage work could not be started well before the monsoon season so as to avoid waterlogging, Nihure said the sewer in the area is over five decades old and it had to be checked for faults during the rainy season.

Urban planners have criticising the authorities for a lack of foresightedness and their negligent approach to public work

Prakash Maharjan, a local who runs a grocery store in the area, says the Department of Roads should have started working on the drainage before the monsoon arrived to assuage the problems faced by the locals.

"After a decade of neglect, the local government finally took initiative to fix the drainage, but it should have started work a few months ago," said Maharjan. "This is just an excuse to use up the budget before the end of this fiscal year.'

Lack of coordination between various government bodies and departments is the reason behind the mess in the Jamal-Kantipath area, argues Yagesh Kumar Khadgi, ward-27 chairman. "The Department of Roads did not communicate with us. In the process of laying pipes for the drainage, they ended up damaging drinking water pipelines," he said.

"I had told the department that digging the road section during the rainy season was not a good idea," said Khadgi. "But they did not listen to my suggestions."

The Department of Roads has dug up around 300 metres of the road section on the left side from the Rastriya Naach Ghar to the Election Commission office.

Hume pipes have been laid in some areas and left without covering up and asphalting the surface. Officials said the area will be blacktopped only after mid-September.

Unveiling the annual policies and programmes for the fiscal year 2022-23, the Kathmandu Metropolitan City had given priority to road maintenance under the City's jurisdiction and fixing the drainage problem. The Kathmandu Metropolitan City has hired an additional 150 cleaners and deployed them to various road sections.

"We are happy that because of the City's initiation the Department of Roads is trying to solve the drainage problem in the area but their work is half-hearted," said Maharjan. "It has

only created more problems for us." He said the City's sweepers and cleaners come to clean the area, but the mud in the dug up section is mak-



Visitors take a ride on a pedal boat at Pimbahal Pokhari in Patan, Lalitpur.

Rising new cases could be an indication of a new coronavirus surge

Health ministry confirms BA.5 subvariant of Omicron, which is able to evade vaccine protection and built-up immunity.

ARJUN POUDEL

KATHMANDU, JULY 6

Amid confirmation of BA.5, a subvariant of Omicron which is considered highly contagious, the number of new coronavirus cases has been rising in the country, stoking concerns about a

According to the Ministry of Health and Population, 113 people tested positive for Covid-19 on Wednesday—90 in 1,549 polymerase chain reaction tests and 23 in 1,165 antigen tests.

Daily test positivity rate of polymerase chain reaction tests is close to

This is for the first time the number of daily infections has crossed 100 in the last four months. The last time the country recorded more than 100 cases was on March 4.

Experts say the increase in new cases after a gradual decline indicates the start of a new surge in the country. And this time it has been attributed to the BA.5 subvariant.

"When the number of new cases declines significantly and then rises again, it is another surge," said Dr Samir Kumar Adhikari, joint spokes-

The number of new cases had

declined to two on May 14. Total active cases had declined to 93 on June 14.

On Wednesday, the number of

active cases stood at 471 throughout The Health Ministry also confirmed two more cases of BA.5 subvariant in infected patients. Last week doctors at

Dhulikhel Hospital had confirmed one case of BA.5 in a patient. Officials at the Health Ministry said that the new subvariant was detected in swab samples collected from the health desks set up at international land crossings on Nepal-India

The BA.5 subvariant has been spiking globally including in India. On Wednesday, India reported 16,159 fresh Covid-19 infection and 28 deaths.

The new Omicron subvariant known as BA.5 comprises a majority of Covid-19 cases in the United States of America, which accounted for around 54 percent, according to data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Australia is heading for its third Omicron wave in coming weeks, as BA.4 and BA.5 become the dominant Covid strains.

was caused by what scientists dubbed

SARS-CoV-2, first detected in Wuhan of China. Later, the virus' variants were seen in the UK, the Middle East, and India.

Then came the Delta variant that fuelled the second wave, killing 8,000 people across Nepal and infecting hundreds of thousands. The third wave of the pandemic was driven by the Omicron variant in January this year. BA.1 and BA.2 subvariants of the Omicron were responsible for infections as of now.

Omicron is highly contagious but severity of infection was low largely because many in Nepal had been vaccinated.

The BA.5 subvariant has been spiking globally, as it can spread faster than other circulating variants and evade vaccine immunity. But this latest variant is causing fewer deaths and hospitalisation than the previous ones.

Experts say a surge in new infections in several countries driven by BA.5 means the new sub variant of the virus has the ability to evade the protection from vaccines and previous

"Omicron variant of the virus tracts and neck," said Dr Janak Koirala, an infectious disease expert. "Even if the chance of severity and death is low from the infection in youths, those with compromised immunity, must take extra precau-

Doctors say that more people might have been infected with the new virus variant, as the majority of people have not undergone testing and the government does not have an active contact tracing mechanism. "The number of new cases depends

on how many tests we carried out, said Koirala. "If we stopped carrying out testing, we may not know about the infection status, the more we carry out testing the more cases we find.'

Doctors also suspect that the majority of people undergoing testing are those seeking foreign jobs or

"Now the chances of getting reinfected from a new subvariant of Covid-19 has incresaed," said Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, chief of Clinical Research Unit at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital. 'Time has come for all to take extra precaution to avoid infection. Authorities concerned should enforce safety meas-

Court paves way for construction of pylons for Hetauda-Dhalkebar-Inaruwa power line

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA KATHMANDU, JULY 6

The Supreme Court on Tuesday paved the way for the construction of pylons at Padariya in Lahan Municipality of Siraha district as part of the 400 kV Hetauda-Dhalkebar-Inaruwa transmission line by scrapping a petition filed three years ago. On January 30, 2019, Sarita Giri, a former

minister, had filed a petition at the apex court demanding a change in the route of the transmission line in the Padariya area; the court had issued an interim order accordingly. With the court not conducting a single

hearing for more than three years after issuing an interim order, the construction of the vital high capacity project was affected, according to Nepal Electricity Authority.

A joint bench of Justices Ishwor Prasad Khatiwada and Susmalata Mathema on Tuesday scrapped the petition, the Supreme Court said in a notice on its website.

Shyam Kumar Yadav, chief of the Nepal-India Electricity Transmission and Trade Project, confirmed the court ruling saying that it has paved the way for the projects to carry out the construction works in the area. Under the Project, the 400kV Hetauda-Dhalkebar-Inaruwa and the 200 kV Bharatpur-Bardaghat transmission lines are being constructed.

"The petition was filed in January 2019, and construction works were obstructed there before that," he said. "With the court ruling, we hope to erect a transmission tower in the Padariya area.'

According to him, the foundation of eight transmission towers could not be constructed due to the court case in Padariya while installation of other four towers was also affected after foundations were constructed in the Dhalkebar-Inaruwa section of the transmission line project.

Besides Padariya, the NEA has been facing obstruction to construct pylons in Hatiya of Makawanpur and Jiyajor of Lalbandi Municipality in Sarlahi under the Hetauda-Dhalkebar-Inaruwa transmission line.



The transmission line is being constructed under the Nepal-India Electricity Transmission and Trade Project.

"As a result, we have so far completed constructing 704 pylons out of 792," Yadav said.

In just over a week, it is the second scrapping of the petition filed against construction of the transmission line. On June 27, a joint bench of Prakash Kumar Dhungana and Ishwar Prasad Khatiwada vacated an earlier interim order paving the way for installing the two remaining pylons in Dumkibas, Nawalparasi under the 200kV Bharatpur-Bardaghat transmission line.

It took more than a year for the Supreme Court to vacate its own interim order on halting the construction work.

In April last year, the Supreme Court had issued an interim order not to build two pylons of the 74km transmission project as demanded by the locals of the Dumkibas, Nawalparasi.

Officials and experts say that prolonged court process has been one of the major obstacles to completing the important development projects in the country for long.

The construction of the 400kV Hetauda-Dhalkebar-Inaruwa and 220 kV Bharatpur-Bardaghat transmission lines had started in 2011 and both were supposed to be completed by 2016. But a number of factors including local obstructions and disputes with the contractor delayed these projects, according to NEA officials.

As a result, the key financier of these two projects—the World Bank—discontinued its funding in November last year, according to

Before withdrawing its funding, the World Bank had extended the project deadline several times. Obstructions from locals and legal cases against the projects, however, led to continued delays, said officials.

"If all the obstructions are removed immediately, we can complete the Hetauda-Dhalkebar-Inaruwa Transmission Line by 2023," Yadav told the Post last week

Sharma could return ...

>> Continued from page 1

Until the ruling parties do not name a new finance minister, Prime Minister Deuba is preparing to assign Minister for Communication and Information Technology Gyanendra Bahadur Karki to look after the finance ministry or Deuba may keep the portfolio with him, according to the

On Wednesday evening, President Bidya Devi Bhandari assigned the responsibility of finance minister to Deuba as per the Article 77 (2) of the constitution after Sharma resigned.

A section in the Deuba camp is considering keeping the Finance Ministry with the Congress and giving the Home Ministry to the Maoist

Since the Maoist Centre does not have an expert hand to lead the Finance Ministry, some have suggested appointing a Congress leader as finance minister, another Congress leader said.

"The prime minister will hold a meeting with Maoist chair Dahal soon and discuss various alternatives," the leader said. "The scenario will be clear within a day or two.'

Some Maoist leaders say Sharma will come back after a few days as finance minister as the parliamentary probe committee is unlikely to find anything against him.

The 11-member committee formed on Wednesday has been given 10 days from the day it commences its work to submit a report.

One name that has been doing rounds for new finance minister is Maoist leader Barsha Man Pun. He has served as finance minister in the past too, from August 2011 to March 2013, in Baburam Bhattarai's cabinet.

Pun, however, said no one is going to be appointed finance minister from his party imme-

"High chances are Sharma will return after the probe is completed," Pun told the Post. "Earlier when former finance minister Ram Sharan Mahat faced a similar parliamentary probe, he returned after getting the clean chit. So Sharma will also come back. It is just a matter of days." He ruled out himself as a candidate for finance

"But I am not going to become minister for some four-five months. After the elections, I will be a minister for a longer stint," Pun told

minister and if that person will be from the

The question of who will become the finance

Maoist Centre will also depend on the party's internal political dynamics.

Dahal is under pressure to appoint 15 office bearers and the Central Committee meeting on Thursday is expected to take a decision. The key position is party general secretary,

which both Sharma and Pun are eying. The reluctance of Deuba and Dahal to initiate action against Sharma also indicated that there

were too many skeletons in the closet and they wanted to stop them from tumbling out. Some say the entire idea of forming the probe committee is not aimed at pinning Sharma down

but at exonerating him so as to ensure his comeback which is in the larger interest of both Deuba and Dahal as elections are approaching. The Nepali Congress minister also hinted that Sharma could return as finance minister.

One Maoist leader said that the party will start deliberations on the new finance minister once it appoints its office bearers

According to the leader, Narayan Kaji Shrestha

and Shakti Basnet are two other names which could be considered. The UML, the main opposition party, had demanded a parliamentary probe against Sharma

ever since it was reported that he had allowed two outsiders to tweak tax rates. Nepali Congress leaders joined the fray only after the Finance Ministry failed to produce the

CCTV footage of the night of May 28 Congress Vice President Dhanraj Gurung and General Secretary Gagan Thapa as well as central members including Ram Hari Khatiwada made public statements that either Sharma should resign or the prime minister should fire him and launch a probe into the charges of tax

rate manipulation. Pressure piled up as some civil society members also demanded Sharma's resignation and a fair investigation into the allegations against

Prakash Sharan Mahat, spokesperson for the Nepali Congress, said that Sharma has just resigned and a parliamentary committee has been formed to probe the charges, so the scenario is still not clear as to who will succeed him at the Finance Ministry.

"The Finance Ministry was allotted to the Maoist Centre, so naturally they are likely to lay claim to it," Mahat told the Post. "It's a matter for Prime Minister Deuba and Maoist chair Dahal to

OPINION

EDITORIAL

Women in budget

Despite significant strides, some gaps in mobility and entrepreneurship remain.

Over the years, Nepal has made great strides in closing gender-based gaps. According to a report released by the World Bank in March 2022, Nepal made the fastest progress among South Asian countries. In fact, among the eight indicators measured. Nepal scored a maximum of 100 in three areas—workplace (that analyses laws affecting women's decisions to work), pay (laws and regulations affecting women's pay) and marriage (legal constraints related to marriage). Despite these significant strides, there are glaring gaps in other areas, such as parenthood, mobility and entrepreneurship, which require immediate redressal.

Adopting gender-responsive budgeting and thus incorporating gender into the framework of the national budgeting system has undoubtedly made the government more accountable in its commitment to women's empowerment. Still, there seems to be a callous slant taken in the implementation of the existing policies. It follows a standard tick-box approach to addressing any particular issue of women and gender inequality. For example, concerning gender-based violence, the focus has remained on making safe houses. Still, no further steps such as social integration and initiatives to ensure healthcare and psychological well-being of the victims are being integrated into the programmes taken to mitigate the glaring disparities.

In the last 15 years, there has been a marked increase in direct gender-responsive budgeting, from a meagre 11.03 percent in 2007-08 to 40.25 percent in 2022-23. Gender-responsive budgeting has led to increased participation of women in the labour force as teachers, within the security apparatus and as entrepreneurs in running micro and small-scale businesses. It has also helped bridge the gap, increasing women's land ownership. Despite these achievements, these approaches have been classed as superficial and are divergent from the core problems at hand.

Measures should not be designed as reactive. The issue of rescuing expectant mothers by helicopter, though useful, would instead be better served by addressing maternity health by establishing health care centres so that the needs are taken care of without much fuss of a rather supercilious grand idea of transporting the ill through means which are often riddled with complications. There may be rules preventing workplace harassment of women. Still, without a proper reporting channel, such laws merely exist to the satisfaction of the authorities who quickly point out their existence but do little to examine their effectiveness in tackling the issues on the ground.

As it stands, the implementation of policies has been at a snail's pace across the sectors, not just those concerning proposals related to gender-responsive budgeting. The existence of policies on paper rarely matches their implementation in reality. Despite what has been achieved, the government's actions need to show that empowering women is more than detailing procedures on paper. Instead of focusing on reactive responses, there is a need to implement policies that will prevent crises in the first place.

Towards an even brighter future

China-Nepal relations have achieved significant progress since the establishment of diplomatic ties.

HOU YANOI



In late June, Chinese President Xi Jinping chaired the 14th BRICS Summit (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and a high-level dialogue on global development and delivered important speeches via video, and delivered the keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the BRICS Business Forum. Many important propositions and initiatives on the issue of peace and development have been proposed.

First, to defend fairness and justice and safeguard world peace and stability. We in the international community should reject zero-sum games, practice genuine multilateralism, and build a new type of international relations based on mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation. Second, to focus on the development theme and set the orientation for global development cooperation.

A push to jointly create a development pattern featuring benefits shared by all, balance, coordination, inclusiveness, win-win cooperation and shared prosperity, and put forward a four-point development proposal. Third, promote win-win cooperation and provide solutions for improving the global govern-

Equal opportunities

We must adhere to extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, increase the representation and say of emerging markets and developing countries, and ensure that all countries enjoy equal rights, follow the rules as equals, and share equal opportunities. And finally, to continue reform and opening up and inject Chinese impetus into the recovery of the world economy. China will strive to deliver the economic and social development goals for the whole year and will pursue opening up against higher standards and develop systems for a higher-standard open economy.

The world has entered a new period of instability and change, the recovery of the global economy remains sluggish, and security challenges are becoming more prominent. Against this background, the series of initiatives and propositions put forward by President Xi, with his historical responsibility as the leader of a major country and aspiration for the world, has grasped the general trend of the world and is of great historical significance in leading the development direction of the BRICS cooperation mechanism. The BRICS cooperation mechanism has always taken the development eme as its starting point Xi's speeches elaborate on China's strategic thinking on the BRICS cooperation mechanism and lay out the direction of BRICS future cooperation on multilateralism, international justice, and anti-pandemic collaboration, among others.

There is also the need to hold high the banner of global development. Development issues have been placed on top of the international agenda to promote in-depth and pragmatic implementation of the Global Development Initiative and set the direction for implementing the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and promoting the building of a global community of development.

China's various initiatives unequivocally stand for multilateralism while opposing hegemony and supporting opening-up and cooperation against secession. They reflect the interests and demands of emerging markets and developing countries and represent the broadest opinion of the international community. To provide solutions of China, President Xi's speeches, combined with the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiatives, contribute Chinese wisdom in improving global governance, promoting economic recovery, cooperating to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, enhancing people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and thus answering the fundamental question of

"where is the world going" China and Nepal have been friendly neighbours for generations. Both are developing countries facing the historic task of promoting economic and social development and improving people's living standards. The Nepali side actively supports and responds to the Global Development and Security Initiative. China and Nepal share the same or similar views and propositions in adhering to the priority of development, the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, and the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security.

With the care and promotion of the relations have achieved significant progress since the establishment of diplomatic ties. High-level interactions are frequent, and political mutual trust has been increasingly consolidated. The two countries understand and support each other on issues concerning their respective core interests.

We have joined hands to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, and China has become Nepal's biggest supplier of anti-pandemic materials and vaccines. The total trade volume between China and Nepal increased 67 percent and reached \$1.977 billion in 2021, of which Nepal's export to China rose 63 percent. Large-scale projects including the China-Nepal Cross-Border Railway, Pokhara Regional International Airport and Kathmandu Ring Road are under steady progress. These have further enriched the connotation of the Strategic Partnership of Cooperation, Featuring Ever-lasting Friendship for Development and Prosperity between our two countries and bringing tangible benefits to our two peoples.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, exchanges and interactions between the two countries have been adversely affected in recent years. Nevertheless, the two sides have made ongoing efforts to enhance cooperation in various fields and boost economic recovery. State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi successfully visited Nepal in March. The two sides reached many consensuses on moving ahead on bilateral relations. They also signed nine cooperation documents, including development assistant infrastructure connectivity, energy, medical and health cooperation and other fields. Recently, the relevant authorities of the two countries have actively implemented the consensuses and agreements mentioned above. The two sides have successfully opened and resumed direct flights between Kathmandu and Kunming and between Kathmandu and Chengdu.

China has further optimised the visa policy for foreigners to China, and personnel exchanges between us have increasingly smooth. Chinese side has promptly reviewed and approved the application of the first batch of Nepali students to

to universities in China. Some students have already arrived in China to continue their studies. The two sides held the 14th meeting of the China-Nepal Diplomatic Consultation Mechanism and a video conference on Border Law Enforcement Cooperation China has also increased the volume of one-way freight transport at the China-Nepal border ports, and is work ing on a two-way transport plan. The exchanges and cooperation between us in various fields have shown sound momentum of recovery and

New historical starting point

In the second half of this year, China will hold the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, and Nepal will hold provincial and federal elections. In the first half of next year, China will hold the 14th National People's Congress, and Nepal will form a new government. China-Nepal relations have reached a new historical starting point. As President Xi put it we must "respond to people's concerns, pursue the larger interests of all countries" and "firm up confidence, and act

Guided by the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative, we shall further strengthen policy coordination, connectivity of infrastructure, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and closer people-to-people ties and promote practical cooperation in various fields such as infrastructure connectivity, development and poverty alleviation, resource es and energy, and environmental protection, and work together to build a China-Nepal community with a shared future. I am confident that under the guidance of the two countries' leaders we will undoubtedly overcome the difficulties posed by the pandemic, and jointly promote bilateral relations and practical cooperation in various fields for greater gains and an even

Hou currently serves as Chinese ambassador to Nepal.

Funding the fight against NCDs

Reducing the burden of non-communicable disease sustainably is a goal the world cannot miss.

STEPHEN OGWENO



Noncommunicable diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, lung disease, diabetes, obesity, and mental disorders, are often chronic and develop over a long period. Collectively, NCDs account for about 70 percent of all deaths globally (and 60 percent of deaths in Sub-Saharan Africa, where they account for over 55 percent of hospital admissions in countries such as Kenya). Developing countries thus face a double burden of illness, with communicable diseases like malaria, HIV, and tuberculosis still presenting a huge challenge alongside the rising incidence of NCDs.

One might expect that the large and increasing burden of NCDs would lead to more funding and resources being channelled toward addressing them. But the fight is chronically underfunded and remains a low priority compared to efforts to tackle infectious diseases.

There is no global fund for any NCD: In 2019, over 40 percent of NCD development assistance came from private institutions. But efforts to combat communicable diseases, the burden of which has declined significantly over the years, have several

dedicated international funding institutions, including the Global Fund, Gavi, the United Nations Population Fund, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. And although NCDs are the leading cause of death worldwide, they account for less than 10 percent

of the global health budget. One reason for this disparity is the relative lack of evidence-based research into NCDs. Funding agencies with a duty to invest in data-driven strategies have therefore tended to focus elsewhere. Moreover, NCDs are still hugely misunderstood. Many people think that these diseases are caused only by the individual, and ignore all their other social, economic, and structural determinants. Weak grassroots action and poor

public framing of the NCD problem nas not helped, either.

Perhaps most significantly, NCDs were not part of the Millennium Development Goals and thus missed out on the momentum toward greater health funding in the period from 2000 to 2015. Even now, reducing premature deaths from NCDs is just one of 169 targets under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3.4), making this objective difficult to fund.

With the NCD burden likely to increase further, several urgent steps are needed to bring about a shift in global funding priorities.

The first step is to emphasise the close connections between NCDs and communicable diseases, so that some funds already being channelled to fight communicable diseases can be directed toward addressing these links. For example, many HIV patients have successfully managed their viral loads, and up to 40 percent now die of NCDs like ischemic heart disease and diabetes. Likewise, epidemiological evidence shows that NCDs contribute significantly to tuberculosis deaths. Focusing on only communicable diseases or NCDs without considering the other will result in lower longterm impact.

Second, we must strengthen universal health coverage in order to focus first on the poorest, who are most affected by NCDs. Poor people with NCDs often cannot access medication or afford out-of-pocket costs and palliative care. Only when the poor benefit from universal health coverage can we begin to address the burden of NCDs effectively. Such schemes should also have a comprehensive NCD package that focuses on health promotion and creation as well as cov-

ering treatment. Third, countries should use relevant research and data to develop a financial case for investment at the national level. Funding priorities will vary by country and region. Some will take a disease-specific approach, while others will adopt a more preventive and promotional strategy.

But regardless of the focus, making a solid investment case requires a strong grassroots advocacy movement that holds the government accountable for its commitments. For example, most governments signed the Abuja Declaration according to which public-health expenditure should account for at least 15 percent of the total national budget. Yet, in many countries, especially in Africa, it makes up less than 5 percent.

Fourth, aligning an NCD strategy with a broader national development strategy can enable countries to reap greater benefits from both. By linking infrastructure and built-environment projects to efforts to combat NCDs, we can create public spaces that encourage walking and other physical activities and reduce air pollution. Similarly, by working together with the food industry, we can improve package labelling, eliminate trans fats, and increase taxation of sugars, salts, and unhealthy foods to encourage people to adjust their diets.

Clearly, tackling NCDs calls for a partnership approach. Contrary to the widespread popular belief that NCDs are caused by individual behaviour, research continues to demonstrate that the environment and government policies have a huge effect on these diseases as well.

All these suggestions underscore the importance of building robust health-care systems that can deliver the ultimate goal of a strong, healthy society in which NCDs are prevented, managed, and controlled. Once we look at the bigger picture, it becomes clear that reducing the global NCD burden in a sustainable manner is a goal that the world cannot afford

Ogweno is Founder and CEO of Stowelink Inc., and recently launched a mobile app, NCDs 365, to provide information about non-communicable

- Project Syndicate

FOREX

Pound Sterling Japanese Yen (10)

Chinese Yuan Qatari Riyal

Australian Dolla

Malaysian Ringit

Saudi Arab Rival

BULLION

GASOLINE WATCH

100% PERFORMANCE, EVERYTIME

Rs 181.00/-

(erosene (Per Litre)

HIGHEST LOSERS

PRICE PER TOLA

Rs 96,000

Rs 1,175

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

MONEY

Bheri Babai hybrid project surges past half-way mark

Under the inter-basin water transfer scheme, surplus water from the Bheri river will be redirected to the Babai river through a tunnel.

129.99

151.90

18 97

86.54

33.88

Around 56 percent of the physical works at the Bheri Babai Diversion Multipurpose Project have been completed at Chiple in Bheriganga

Municipality, Surkhet. According to Lekhnath Subedi, information officer and chief divisional engineer, the national pride project located in mid-western Nepal has made 41.10 percent financial progress in its first and second phases.

"Despite interruptions caused by Covid-19, bad weather and fast water current in the monsoon, the work goes on," Subedi said.

The completion deadline of the scheme, which will divert water from the Bheri to the Babai rivers to irrigate fields and generate electricity, was pushed back by three years after a flood swept away a newly built dam at Chiple on the Bheri river in September

Currently, civil works under the project's second phase are being implemented. "The construction of the headworks, power house and dam is going on," said Subedi.

The contract for the second package of the project was awarded to Raman Guangdong JV with a completion deadline of August 14, 2023. The Rs6.16 billion contract was signed on July

"The tender process for the third phase of the project which includes construction and installation of hydro mechanical and electromechanical components is being carried out,' said Subedi.

"While the tender process for the hydro mechanical component has been completed, the procurement process for the electromechanical component has reached its final stage.

The construction and installation of a gate and penstock pipe under the hydro mechanical component, and the turbine and generator switchyard under the electromechanical component is being carried out, according to Subedi.

A Rs2.13 billion contract was signed with China's Zhejiang Orient Engineering Company to build the hydro mechanical component on November 23 last year. "According to the contract, the work needs to be completed in three years,'



Besides irrigating 51,000 hectares of land in Banke and Bardia districts throughout the year, the irrigation-cum-hydropower project is expected to generate 48 megawatts of electricity.

The construction of the project, which is expected to ease the food crisis in the mid-western region by increasing agricultural yield, was inaugurated in April 2015 by the then prime minister Sushil Koirala.

Officially launched in June 2015, the diversion tunnel was completed on April 16, 2019, six months ahead of schedule.

Under the project's inter-basin water transfer scheme, surplus water from the Bheri river will be redirected to the Babai river through a tunnel to irrigate farmlands and generate

Initially, the pride project was slated to be completed in the upcoming fiscal year beginning mid-July. However, it is estimated that it will take another three years for the scheme to be ready.

Besides providing irrigation facilities to 51,000 hectares of land in Banke and Bardia districts throughout the year, the irrigation-cum-hydropower project is expected to generate 48 megawatts of electricity.

The Bheri Babai Diversion Project is expected to make an indirect financial contribution of Rs3.1 billion to the state through agricultural producOfficially launched in June 2015, the diversion tunnel was completed on April 16, 2019.

tivity, and a direct revenue contribution of Rs2.1 billion through energy

The construction of the 132 kV Kohalpur-Surkhet transmission line has moved forward after the federal government on June 20 decided to allow the power line to pass through national forest areas. Currently, work related to land acquisition and construction of substations is going on.

According to project officials, land acquisition work has been completed at Bheriganga Municipality and Birendranagar Municipality Surkhet and Kohalpur in Banke.

"Land acquisition in some areas of Banke will take time because of related disputes," said Ravi Kumar

Chaudhary, head of the transmission line project.

There are some disputes in Banke's Baijanath Rural Municipality wards 1 and 4. Even then, we have published the tender call notice for the construction of substations Kohalpur and Surkhet.'

The transmission line is expected to improve the power supply in Karnali. A total of 13,056 trees will be felled to construct the power line.

"More than 13,000 trees need to be cut down for the construction of the transmission line--6,820 in Surkhet, 3,320 in Bardia and 2,916 in Banke, said Chaudhary The trees which fall inside the pro-

ject area in Birendranagar,

Bheriganga and Lekbesi municipalities, Bardia National Park, Kohalpur Municipality and Baijnath Rural Municipality will be chopped down. "The Nepal Electricity Authority

and the Department of Forest will reach an agreement regarding the felling of trees," Chaudhary said.

"The trees inside the national park will be felled by the national park authority, those in the national forest area will be felled by the respective district forest offices, and those in the community forest will be cut down by the respective community forest, he said.

"The entire process will take at least three to four months.'

Of the 160 poles that need to be erected for the construction of the transmission line, 130 would be on public land and national park area, and the other 30 would be on private lands, according to the construction

While the towers will be constructed on 99 hectares of land, the substations will be constructed at different places. According to the Environmental Impact Assessment report, the transmission line project will occupy 70 hectares of forest area. The foundation work for the 40 towers in undisputed areas have already been completed, according to Chaudhary.

Currently, a 33 kV transmission line is in operation in Karnali province including Surkhet. The Nepal Electricity Authority had planned to upgrade the transmission line in Surkhet to 132 kV more than three decades ago. It is expected to be completed in two years

BRIEFING

60 women to trek in Dolpa to raise climate awareness

KATHMANDU: A group of 60 Nepali women from different walks of life will trek to Phoksundo Lake in Dolpa in October to draw the attention of the authorities concerned towards the impact of climate change on the lives of women. Prajeeta Karki, chairperson of Sathsathai Foundation, said that the objective of the trek is also to promote tourism long trek will begin on October 8. "Besides the women leaders from Karnali Province, the group will consist of women from across the country," said Karki. Earlier this year, around 40 women leaders, including Supreme Court justice Sapana Pradhan Malla, had trekked to the Everest Base Camp with the slogan "Women United For Climate Justice" and celebrated the International Women's Day at Kalapatthar to raise the issue of climate change. The team had also issued a 10-point declaration to draw the attention of the world to the impact of climate change. (PR)

Ncell's 'greening of Ring Road' inaugurated

KATHMANDU: The Ring Road's Green Belt built and maintained by Ncell Axiata Limited as a part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative was inaugurated on Tuesday. The company has been taking up the responsibility for building and maintaining the greening of the Koteshwar-Kalanki stretch in collaboration with the Department of Forest and Soil Conservation. Mayor of Lalitpur Metropolitan City Chiri Babu Maharjan, Director General of the Department of Foreign and Soil Conservation Rajendra KC and CEO of Ncell Andy Chong inaugurated the green belt amid a special function on Tuesday. Under this project, Ncell has already completed landscaping and building the green belt area and has been maintaining greenery in the 10.2 km stretch. The project has transformed the stretch into an exemplary green area, fostering the clean and green Ring Road. Under this project. Ncell has contributed to tree plantation besides landscaping, ensuring the maintenance of the green belt. the company said in a statement. Ncell will take care of the green belt until 2024 with an aim to greatly benefit the people, community, and the environment. Addressing the inauguration, CEO Chong said, "We are delighted to contribute towards a healthy environment for people and community in line with the government's objectives linked with Sustainable Development Goals and our Axiata Group's aspiration of Net-zero carbon." (PR)

Sri Lankans return to cooking with firewood as economy burns

Before the crisis, almost all households in Colombo could afford to use gas.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE NEHINNA (SRI LANKA), JULY 6

As once relatively wealthy Sri Lanka shortages of everything from medicines to gas, people are returning to cooking with firewood.

The switch began at the beginning

of the year when more than 1,000 kitchens exploded across the country, killing at least seven people and injuring hundreds more. The reason was suppliers looking to

cut costs and increasing the proportion of propane, which raised the pressure to dangerous levels. But now, along with much else in

the country of 22 million people, gas is either unavailable or too expensive Some tried to shift to kerosene oil

cookers, but the government did not have dollars to import it along with petrol and diesel, which are also in

And those who bought electric cook-

ers were in for a rude shock when the government imposed lengthy power blackouts as it ran out of dollars to import fuel for generators.

miraculously unharmed when her gas range exploded soon after cooking Sunday lunch in August.

"Fortunately, no one was there at the time. There were pieces of glass all over the floor. The glass-top stove had exploded. I will never use gas for cooking. It is not safe. We are now on firewood," she said, despite moves to address the propane problem.

Roadside eatery owner MG Karunawathi, 67, also switched to wood and said it was a choice between closing her business or putting up with smoke and soot.

"We suffer [smoke inhalation] when cooking with firewood, but we have no choice," Karunawathi told AFP. "It is also difficult to find firewood and it is also becoming very expensive."

Sri Lanka used to be a middle-income country, with GDP per head com-

parable to the Philippines and living standards the envy of neighbouring India. But with economic mismanagement and the crucial tourism industry run out of dollars needed to pay for

And the pain will likely continue for some time, with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in parliament on Tuesday saying: "We will have to face difficulties in 2023 as well. "This is the truth. This is the reality."

Unofficial inflation is now second only to Zimbabwe, and the United Nations estimates about 80 percent of people skip meals because they cannot afford food.

Before the crisis, almost all households in Colombo could afford to use gas, but now woodcutter Selliah Raja, 60, is doing a roaring trade.

"Earlier we had just one customer-a restaurant that had a wood-fired oven—but we now have so many, we can't meet the demand," Raja told AFP.

Spain's labour market buoyed by key reform

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Six months after Spain pushed through a key reform aimed at reducing labour market insecurity, the number of temporary contracts has fallen sharply, giving the government some economic context.

Long one of the European nations with the highest number of temporary contracts, Spain saw its unemployment figures fall for the sixth consecutive month in June, with the Labour Minister Yolanda Diaz hailing "historic" data on Monday as evidence of "a paradigm shift"

By the end of June, the number of jobseekers in Spain stood at 2.88 million down from 2.92 million a month earlier and the lowest monthly figure since the start of the financial crisis in 2008.

The drop was due to a significant increase in jobs, with 783,595 permanent contacts signed in June, the high-

est monthly figure ever recorded. "This is a record number of permanent contracts, representing more than 44 percent" of the total number

The euro fell 0.7 percent against the

Euro zone consumers cut spending

dollar to 1.0186, the first time below

on food, drinks and tobacco for

the second straight month in May

amid a spike in prices, according to

estimates from the European Union

statistics office Eurostat released

banks' tightening cycles across the

Atlantic remained in investors' focus.

deterioration in growth prospects is

enough to curtail tightening cycles-

especially that of the Fed," ING ana-

They reckon the forex market will

consolidate the current levels on

The divergence between central

"The big question is whether this

1.02 since December 2002.

on Wednesday.

lysts said.

the year, when there is a surge of temporary positions in tourism and agriculture, permanent contracts usually only account for 10 percent of

"We have 740,000 more people... with permanent contracts than before the Sanchez said this week. Writing on Twitter, Diaz said the

increase "clearly shows the effect of the labour reform. But she cautioned: "There is still a lot to do, but we are showing that there

is an alternative model to job insecurity: decent work with rights. The reform, which took effect

on January 1 following a hard-fought deal negotiated between the government, employers' groups and unions, limits the back-to-back use of temporary contracts and makes permanent contracts the rule rather than the exception.

This reform "was requested by Brussels", explained Carlos Victoria, a researcher at the Esade business school, after many Spanish companies got into a habit of "filling existing positions with temporary contracts".

Euro falls to lowest since 2002 on concerns over energy prices



The euro tumbled to a new two-decade low on Wednesday as fears over rising energy prices and potential shortages cast a long shadow over the bloc's economy, while demand for safe-haven assets drove the dollar to fresh 20-year highs.

All oil and gas fields that were affected by a strike in Norway's petroleum sector are expected to be back in full operation within a couple of days, Equinor said on Wednesday. Meanwhile, Goldman Sachs raised

its natural gas price forecasts, saying that a complete restoration of Russian gas flows through Nordstream1 was no longer the most likely scenario. Analysts expect a quick resurgence

in oil prices as supply tightness persists and as front-month spreads have held up despite Tuesday's price fall. "It is not only the threat of non-de-

a burden. Energy costs in Europe

are many times higher than in the

livery (of gas) that is weighing on the euro," Moritz Paysen, forex and rates adviser at Berenberg, said. "The already high energy costs are

US," he added.

Wednesday ahead of Federal Open Market Committee minutes from its June meeting, due at 1800 GMT. "The general view that the Fed

might ultimately have more opportunity than many other central banks to continue policy normalization," Unicredit analysts said.

The dollar index—which tracks the greenback against six counterparts-rose 0.4 percent to 107.02 its highest since 2002.

The euro dropped to its lowest level against the Swiss franc since the Swiss National Bank abandoned its

currency cap in 2015. The single currency was down 0.4 percent to a fresh 7-year low at 0.9897.

"In the current circumstances, the traditional safe haven currencies of the US dollar, Swiss franc and yen appear set to continue to outperform in the near-term," MUFG ana-

Yen gained a little support from some safety bids after Japanese households' inflation expectations strengthened in the three months to June, with the ratio of homes expecting price rises over the coming year hitting the highest level in

The dollar dropped 0.3 percent to 135.36 yen. It hit at the end of June its highest since 1998 at 137.

Bank of Japan has said it would not withdraw monetary stimulus because inflation is due to soaring fuel and raw material costs blamed on the Ukraine crisis and will likely prove temporary. Bitcoin fell 1.7 percent and was last trading at \$20,088. Ether rose 0.5 percent

A Euro banknote is displayed on US Dollar banknotes in this illustration.

BRIEFING

Cost of living a priority, French PM says urging for vote reforms

PARIS: French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said on Wednesday her minority government's top priori ty would be to confront a cost of living crisis, as she urged the opposition to work with her to avoid policy gridlock. President Emmanuel Macron's centrist alliance lost its absolute majority in legislative elections in June despite his having won a second term in April. Without pacts with other parties. Borne now faces the prospect of bill-by-bill negotiations in parliament. "Disorder and instability are not options," Borne said in a keynote policy speech to lawmakers at times drowned by boos from the opposition. "The French are asking us to talk to each other more, to talk to each other better, and to build together," said Borne, a 61-year old career civil servant and politician.

EU parliament for labelling gas, nuclear investments as green

BRUSSELS: The European Parliament on Wednesday backed EU rules label ling investments in gas and nuclear power plants as climate-friendly throwing out an attempt to block the law that has exposed deep rifts between countries over how to fight climate change. The vote paves the way for the European Union proposal to pass into law, unless 20 of the bloc's 27 member states decide to oppose the move, which is seen as very unlikely. The new rules will add gas and nuclear power plants to the EU "taxonomy" rulebook from 2023. enabling investors to label and market investments in them as green.

South African president decries deaths of 21 teens in tavern

EAST LONDON: The deaths of 21 teenagers in a nightclub tragedy is a crime and South African officials must increase steps to prevent alcohol from being illegally sold to youths, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Wednesday. "We do not know yet exactly what killed our children. But we do know that the law was broken that night, and proba bly many nights before then, Ramaphosa said to more than a thousand mourners at the funeral in East London for the young people who

Coup leader sacks civilians as protesters rally again

died at a tavern nearly two weeks ago.

KHARTOUM: Sudan's coup leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan on Wednesday dismissed the last civilian members of his ruling body as part of a power shift he has proposed, but protesters who have rejected his pledge again took to the streets. "The blood of the martyrs did not flow in vain." hundreds of women protesters chanted in Khartoum about pro-democracy activists who have been killed in street violence, also demand ing a return of "the soldiers to the barracks". Burhan—who grabbed drew international condemnation—in a surprise move Monday vowed to "make room" for civilian groups to form a new transitional government. He also said that the ruling Sovereign Council he chairs would be disbanded and, in an apparent move to carry out the process, issued a decree relieving five little-known civilian members of their posts. (Agencies)

UK's Johnson battles to stay in job after top ministers quit

Many Conservatives are concerned Johnson no longer has the moral authority to govern.



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson leaves 10 Downing Street in London, on Wednesday.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

A defiant British Prime Minister Boris Johnson battled to remain in office Wednesday, shrugging off calls for his resignation after two top ministers and a slew of junior officials said they could no longer serve under his scandal-tarred leadership.

Members of the opposition Labour Party showered Johnson with shouts of "Go! Go!" during the weekly ritual of Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons as critics argued the leader's days were numbered following his poor handling of sexual misconduct allegations against a senior official.

But more damningly, members of Johnson's own Conservative Partywearied by the many scandals he hasfaced-also challenged their leader, with one asking whether there was anything that might prompt him to resign. "Frankly ... the job of the prime minister in difficult circumstances, when he's been handed a colossal mandate, is to keep going," Johnson replied, with the bluster he has used to fend off critics throughout nearly three years in office. "And that's what I'm going to do.'

His fellow Conservatives listened quietly, but offered little support.

Johnson is known for his ability to wiggle out of tight spots, managing to remain in power despite suggestions that he was too close to party donors, protected supporters from bullying and corruption allegations, and misled Parliament about parties in govlockdown rules

He hung on even when 41 percent of Conservative lawmakers voted to oust him in a no-confidence vote last month and formerly loyal lieutenants urged him to resign.

But recent revelations that Johnson knew about sexual misconduct allegations against a lawmaker before he promoted the man to a senior position in his government have pushed him to

Many of his fellow Conservatives are concerned that Johnson no longer has the moral authority to govern at a time when difficult decisions are needed to address soaring food and energy prices, rising Covid-19 infections and the war in Ukraine. Others worry that a leader renowned for his ability to win elections may now be a liability at the ballot box.

Former Health Secretary Sajid Javid, who helped trigger the current crisis when he resigned on Tuesday night, captured the mood of many lawmakers when he said Johnson's actions threatened to undermine the integrity of the Conservative Party and the British government. "At some point we have to conclude that enough is enough," he told fellow lawmakers. "I believe that point is now."

Johnson's grilling in Parliament was the first of two Wednesday. He was also questioned by a committee of senior lawmakers.

How Johnson handles the questioning may determine whether the simmering rebellion in the Conservative Party gathers enough strength to oust him. Also looming was a meeting of the leadership of a powerful Conservative Party committee—and action there could signal whether lawmakers have the appetite to pursue another vote of no-confidence.

Months of discontent Johnson's judgement and ethics erupted when Javid and Treasury chief Rishi Sunak resigned within minutes of each other on Tuesday evening. were responsible for tackling two of the biggest issues facing Britain — the cost-of-living crisis and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

In a scathing letter, Sunak said "the public rightly expect government to be conducted properly, competently and seriously. ... I believe these standards are worth fighting for and that is why I am resigning.'

Javid said the party needed "humility, grip and a new direction" but "it is clear this situation will not change under your leadership.

Mindful of the need to shore up confidence, Johnson quickly replaced the ministers, promoting Nadhim Zahawi from the education department to treasury chief and installing his chief of staff, Steve Barclay, as health secretary.

But a string of resignations by more junior members-from both the moderate and right-wing of the Conservative party—that followed late Tuesday and early Wednesday underscored the danger to Johnson.

Former International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell said late Tuesday that the prime minister's time was finally up. "It's a bit like the death of Rasputin: He's been poisoned, stabbed, he's been shot, his body's been dumped in a freezing river, and still he lives," Mitchell told the BBC. "But this is an abnormal prime minister, a brilliantly charismatic, very funny, very amusing, big, big character. But I'm afraid he has neither the character nor the temperament to be our prime

The final straw for Sunak and Javid was the prime minister's shifting explanations about his handling of allegations against Chris Pincher.

Last week, Pincher resigned as Conservative deputy chief whip after complaints he groped two men at a private club. That triggered a series of reports about past allegations levelled against Pincher and questions about Pincher for a senior job enforcing party discipline.

Johnson's office initially said he wasn't aware of the previous accusations when he promoted Pincher in February. By Monday, a spokesman said Johnson did know of the allegations—but they were "either resolved or did not progress to a formal

Germany plans new path to residency for migrants

Proposals apply to migrants denied asylum but cannot be deported and those living in Germany for at least 5 years.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

The German cabinet on Wednesday signed off plans to make it easier for migrants with "tolerated" status to stay in the country permanently and integrate into the job market.

The proposals, outlined in a draft document seen by AFP, apply to migrants who have been denied asylum but cannot be deported and who have been living in Germany for at

Around 130,000 such migrants will be granted a "right of opportunity to stay" lasting for one year, according to the document.

After that, if they can prove they have a reliable source of income and a sufficient command of the German language, they will be granted official permanent residency.

'These people, who have made a life for themselves in Germany over a long period of residence, are to be offered a perspective under residence law and given a chance to obtain the necessary requirements for legal residence," according to the document.

"Criminals remain fundamentally excluded from the right of opportuni-

Ulrich Schneider, an employment adviser to migrants for the Caritas NGO in the Black Forest town of Freiburg im Breisgau, welcomed the proposals.

"We have waited a long time for such a bill... in particular because it offers a perspective to people who until now lived under the threat of possible expulsion," he told AFP.

"Tolerated" asylum seekers often find themselves in legal limbo because they are unable to prove their nationality, or because deportations to their country of origin have been suspended for political reasons.

Those currently living in Germany include many Afghans who arrived during the 2015-16 refugee influx.

They have been left "on a sort of waiting list" where their permission to remain in the country must be reviewed every three months, according to Schneider.

The draft bill includes plans to make it easier for migrants to be joined by family members, especially if they are skilled workers, and to improve access to vocational and language courses.

It also proposes measures to make it easier to deport asylum seekers with criminal convictions.

The changes must still be voted through in the Bundestag and Bundesrat lower and upper houses of parliament before becoming law. German Economy Minister Robert

Habeck called the move "pragmatic and smart" at a time when the country was suffering from labour shortages in many sectors, including hospitality

Failing to make use of these people's skills would be "a sin against the economic potential of our country", he said.

However, critics said the plans do not go far enough and accused Germany's coalition government of watering down a promise to completely overhaul the country's migration

"The aim is good and fair: to give a chance to people who so far have no secure status," said Joshua Hofert, a board member at the Terre des Hommes NGO, but "the paradigm shift announced by the coalition is not

Saudi expecting 1 million in largest hajj since virus

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MECCA, JULY 6

One million Muslim pilgrims were converging on Saudi Arabia's holy city of Mecca on Wednesday for the largest hajj since the coronavirus pandemic severely curtailed access to one of Islam's five pillars.

Saudi Arabia's decision to allow some 850,000 Muslims from abroad to make the annual pilgrimage, which begins on Thursday, marks a major step toward normalcy after two years of a drastically scaled-down hajj restricted to Saudi residents.

pilgrims participating is still far less than the 2.5 million Muslims who travelled in 2019 for the pilgrimage, typically one of the world's largest gatherings. Those performing the ritual this year must be under 65, vaccinated against the coronavirus and have tested negative for Covid-19 within 72 hours of travel. The pilgrims are chosen from millions of applicants through an online lottery system. Saudi officials inspected the holy

site on Wednesday and stressed their "readiness" to receive pilgrims with the goal of "maintaining public After the coronavirus struck in

2020, Saudi authorities allowed just 1,000 pilgrims already residing in the kingdom to attend, prompting historians to compare the disruption to the site's storming by religious extremists and dramatic closure in 1979.

Last year, the hajj was similarly restricted to 60,000 fully vaccinated Muslims living in Saudi Arabia.

unprecedented shock waves throughout the Muslim world, devastating many believers who had spent years saving up for the religious rite. This year, however, Saudi authorities are keen to relax virus curbs. Religious pilgrimages brought in \$12 billion before the pandemic-accounting for the largest percentage of Saudi Arabia's gross domestic product after oil.

माटरसाइकल हराया

देखि 5:00 am बजेको बीचमा का.म.न.प वडा नं. ३१ शान्तिनगर, ओमशानि चोकबाट प्र.३-०२-०११ प ०६६८ नं. क ३५०CC को Battle Green रंगक Royal Enfield 350 Classic Bulle मोटरसाईकल हराएको हुँदा पाउनु हुन महानुभावले नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालय व फोन नं. ९८०१९०८५४५ मा खबर गरिदिन हन अनरोध गर्दछ। सँवारी धनीः Muluk Singh Limbu

च्यासिस नं.: MESU3S5C1KK-522343 इन्जिन नं.: U3S5C1KK-128176

राहदानी हरायो

मिति २०७९/०२/१० गते कलंकीदेखि बसपार्कसम्म जाँदै गर्दा मेरो निम्न व्यहोरा भएको राहदानी हराएको हँदा पाउनु हुने महानुभावले नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालय वा तलको ठेगानामा बुक्ताइदिन् हुन अनुरोध गर्दछु।

Name: Sunita Thapa Passport No.: 07380323 Address: Sunsari Contact: 9813288088

राहदानी हरायो

मिति २०७९/०३/१५ गते बालुवाटारदेखि चऋपथसम्म जाँदै गर्दा मेरो निम्न व्यहोरा भएको राहदानी हराएको हँदा पाउन हने महानुभावले नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालय वा तलको ठेगानामा बुभगइदिन् हुन अनुरोध गर्दछ ।

Name: Niruta Kandel Passport No.: 11971221 Address: Rupandehi Contact: 9851247310

India's 'bulldozer justice' flattens Muslim dissent

Critics say campaign latest manifestation of BJP's discriminatory policies towards India's 200m Muslim minority community.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE ALLAHABAD, JULY 6

After two nights in police custody, Indian teenager Somaiya Fatima was released in time to watch live footage of an excavator claw smashing into the walls of her childhood home. The residence is among scores of

dwellings and businesses flattened by wrecking crews this year, in a campaign authorities have promoted by turns as a battle against illegal construction and a firm response to criminal activity. But rights groups have condemned

"bulldozer justice" as an unlawful exercise in collective punishment by India's Hindu nationalist government, and many of the campaign's victims have one thing in common.

"We are Muslims and that's why we are being targeted," Fatima told AFP.

The 19-year-old was arrested along with her family after her father was accused of masterminding a large public protest in the northern city of Allahabad last month.

It was one of several rallies across India last month condemning a ruling party spokeswoman whose provocative about the Mohammed during a televised debate sparked anger across the Muslim world.

The day Fatima was released, she was sitting in a relative's living room when she came across footage of her home's destruction on her phone.

She said the demolition was a lesson for Muslims tempted to "speak up" against the government. "They've instilled fear in an entire community,' she said. "Everyone now looks at their



In this photo taken on June 12, a bulldozer demolishes house of a local leader allegedly involved in protests against a BJP leader's incendiary remarks about Prophet Mohammed, in Allahabad.

home and thinks that if it happened to us, it can happen to them also.

Fatima's home state of Uttar Pradesh is governed by Yogi Adityanath, a saffron-robed Hindu monk seen as a potential successor to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In office he has championed the bulldozer as a symbol of his commitment to law and order and as a potential tool to use against "trouble-makers'

Adityanath's acolytes celebrated his successful campaign for re-election as chief minister earlier this year by riding on top of excavators, while bulldozer tattoos became a minor craze among supporters of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

Since then "bulldozer politics" have spread elsewhere in the country and demolition campaigns have begun quickly following on the heels of outbreaks of religious unrest.

After a violent confrontation in April between Hindus trailing a religious procession and Muslims holding Ramadan prayers, authorities in Delhi knocked down nearly two dozen Muslim shopfronts and the facade of a mosque, defying a court order to stop.

Officials say the spate of demolitions are lawful as they only target buildings

constructed without legal approval.

But victims of the campaign deny that their dwellings are illegal, and say they are not given the legally required notice period to dispute demolition orders. Fatima's house was demolished "in the presence of hundreds of police and hundreds of cameras, with no empathy," KK Rai, a lawyer for Fatima's father, told AFP.

"There is no comparison for this ruthlessness.

Critics of the government say the campaign is the latest manifestation of the BJP's discriminatory policies towards India's 200 million-strong Muslim minority community.

'They have an ideological commitment that in India they have to make Muslims a second-class citizen, socially humiliate them and destroy their property," Rai said.

Amnesty International said last month that the demolitions were part of a selective and "vicious" crackdown on Indian Muslims who dared to speak up against the discrimination they faced.

Many Muslims living in Uttar Pradesh now fear their own homes are being earmarked for destruction after their family members participated in last month's protests.

"Now we have sleepless nights and restless days," said Mohd Javed, a resident of Saharanpur, who received an order to vacate his house soon after his brother was arrested for joining a demonstration in that city.

One week after Fatima's arrest, a bulldozer remained parked outside the police station near where her home

440 inmates on run after suspected Boko Haram prison raid

REUTERS ABUJA, JULY 6

Around 440 inmates are on the run after a suspected raid by Islamist Boko Haram militants on a prison in Nigeria's capital Abuja on Tuesday night, an interior ministry official said. The raid, and a separate ambush on an advance convoy of Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari-who was not present-heading to his hometown in the northern state of Katsina, highlights Nigeria's growing security challenges, especially in northern regions where armed insurgents and gangs are rife.

Shuaib Belgore, permanent secretary at the interior ministry, told journalists outside the Abuja prisonwhich has 900 inmates—that a security officer was killed during the raid and three others were injured.

He said the suspected Boko Haram attackers came for members who were held in the prison.

"They came specifically for their co-conspirators, but in order to get them ..., some of them are in the general [prison] population so they broke out and other people in that population escaped as well but many of them have returned," Belgore said.

on service said in a statement, with 443 still at large and the rest recaptured. It said four inmates were dead and 16 others injured.

A total of 879 inmates fled, the pris-

"They have reported themselves to the police," Belgore said.



A general view of the Maple Leaf Cricket Ground in King City, Canada is pictured in this photograph following the rain on Tuesday. Due to persistent rain, Nepal's first one-day practice match against Canada was abandoned. Nepal are currently in Canada tour as part of their preparation for the Scotland Triangular Series of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2, set to begin from July 11.

BRIEFING

Lamichhane to play for **Dambulla Giants**

KATHMANDU: Dambulla Giants drafted Sandeep Lamichhane for the third edition of the Lankan Premier League on Tuesday. Dambulla picked the Nepal national cricket captain under the international Diamond 'A' category for a fee of 40,000 USD. The wrist spinner will join the likes of Australian all-rounders D'Arcy Short and Ben Cutting, New Zealand wicketkeeper batsman Tim Seifert and Pakistan batter Haider Ali in the Dambulla squad, who are led by Sri Lanka limited-over captain Dasun Shanaka. Dambulla will compete against defending champions Jaffna Kings, Colombo Stars, Galle Gladiators and Kandy Falcons in the T20 tournament, which is set to take place from July 31 to August 21 in the cities of Colombo and Hambantota. Lamichhane has also been picked by

Williams switches to Ghana

Premier League's 2022 season. (SB)

Jamaica Tallawahs for the Caribbean

MADRID: Athletic Bilbao forward Inaki Williams announced Tuesday that he will switch his allegiance from Spain to Ghana with the hope of representing the country at the 2022 World Cup. Born in Bilbao to Ghanaian parents, the 28-year-old Williams was capped once by Spain in a 2016 friendly. "I feel the moment has come for me to find my origins within myself and with Africa and Ghana," Williams said on social media. His availability for Ghana comes as a huge boost ahead of this year's World Cup, where the 2010 quarter-finalists will face Portugal, Uruguay and South Korea in Group H. (AFP)

Cricket is a respite for Sri Lankans in crisis

Australia's tour has become a 'mental healing' for people like Nilantha, who is struggling to provide for his family.

ASSOCIATED PRESS GALLE, JULY 6

The sport of cricket has become a welcome distraction for Sri Lankans looking for a break from the effects of the

economic crisis in the country. The cricket-crazed South Asian island nation is facing its worst economic crisis in recent memory, enduring acute shortages of food, fuel and medicine. The government has shut schools and universities and has limited fuel supplies.

"Yes there is a problem in the country, people have become poor and helpless with all kinds of problems. We sometimes spent five, six seven days in fuel lines," said Ujith Nilantha, who watched the first Test between Sri Lanka and Australia with his 10-yearold son last week in the southern city of Galle.

"There is no happiness for children, and we can't provide what the child needs. When we watch this (cricket) it brings a mental healing," added Nilantha, whose livelihood in the tourism sector has been disrupted after arrivals fell with the energy crisis.

Cricket, a legacy from British colonizers, has become part of the local culture in Sri Lanka as in many South Asian and Caribbean nations. It is has been looked upon as a unifying factor in a country torn apart by racial, religious and political discord.

Even a bloody quarter-century civil war did not hamper the progress or the following of the sport in Sri Lanka. The now-defeated Tamil Tiger rebel group which fought for an independent state silenced their arms for the 1996 World Cup final, when Sri Lanka beat Australia to win the title.

Theekshana Nethumaksila was at the scenic cricket ground in Galle. The 16-year-old Nethumaksila is scheduled to sit for public exams this year but is unable to prepare properly because the schools are closed

"We only have cricket in times of sadness," he said. "We come here to watch cricket to get it off our minds.'

Before going ahead with the tour, the Australian cricket team had to contemplate whether it was ethical to travel to Sri Lanka and play when local people were struggling without electricity even for basic needs. The tour involved a three-game Twenty20 international series, won by Australia, and a five-match one-day international series, won 3-2 by Sri Lanka.

The Australian team's decision to go ahead with the tour earned them admiration from fans who turned up at the fifth one-day match last month dressed in yellow—the color of Australia's ODI uniform—to thank them for entertaining them and sending a positive message about Sri Lanka to the world.

Australia won the first Test match by 10 wickets, leaving Sri Lanka with a chance to square the series when the tour concludes with the second Test starting Friday, also at Galle.

Halep storms into semi-finals

The former world number one sees off Amanda Anisimova 6-2, 6-4 to set up a last four meeting against Elena Rybakina, who battles back to beat Ajla Tomljanovic 4-6, 6-2, 6-3.

Former champion Simona Halep eased past Amanda Anisimova 6-2, 6-4 to reach her third Wimbledon semi-final on Wednesday without dropping a set in the tournament so far.

The Romanian 16th seed, who won the title in 2019, broke the American's serve four times in the match, wrapping up victory in just over an hour.

Halep said she was playing her best tennis since she won her second Grand Slam at the All England Club

"Definitely this is my best tennis," she said. "I am trying to build my confidence back, and it's good. It's great to be back in the semi-finals." said the former world number one.

The 30-year-old took charge early in the match on Centre Court, racing into a 5-1 lead and taking the set 6-2. It was a similar tale in the second set, with Halep again dominating and going 5-1 up with a double break. Anisimova dug deep, earning her own break of serve when Halep served for the match but the Romanian stayed calm to serve out for the win.

Halep will face Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina for a place in Saturday's women's final.

Rybakina came from behind to reach her first Grand Slam semi-final when she defeated Ajla Tomljanovic of Australia, 4-6, 6-2, 6-3.

The 23-year-old Moscow-born player switched nationality in 2018. This year Russian and Belarusian players are banned from Wimbledon following the invasion of Ukraine.

Rybakina fired five aces in the first set but her 10 winners were cancelled out by her 10 unforced errors. The steadier Tomljanovic did not concede a break point while a single break in the third game was enough to hand her the opener.

Back came Rybakina with a triple break in the second set to level the tie. She swept through the decider and despite being broken when serving for the match in the seventh game, she made no mistake in the ninth with another ace sealing the win.

Halep and Rybakina have met three times so far, with the Romanian holding a 2-1 edge.

Their most recent clash came at the 2021 US Open, when Halep came out on top in three sets in the third round.

"It is a big challenge for me. We have already played a few times and it was a tough battle," said Rybakina.

Djokovic fights back

Defending champion Novak Djokovic battled back from two sets down to reach an 11th Wimbledon semi-final on Tuesday.

Djokovic triumphed 5-7, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 over Italian 10th seed Jannik Sinner, recovering from a two-set defi-



Romania's Simona Halep returns to Amanda Anisimova of the US during their women's singles quarter-final match of the Wimbledon tennis championships in London on Wednesday.

cit for the seventh time in his career. The Serb will face Britain's Cameron Norrie, who also needed five sets to get past David Goffin of Belgium, 3-6, 7-5, 2-6, 6-3, 7-5.

Djokovic, a 20-time major winner, said he had to give himself a talking to after going two sets down.

"The first two sets compared to the next three were like two different matches," he said. "But at the end of the second set I took a toilet break, gave myself a little pep talk, tried to gather my thoughts.

Djokovic is no stranger to Grand Slam adversity, having twice come back from two sets down as recently as last year's French Open. The second of those stunning recoveries was in the final against Stefanos

After Tuesday's bathroom break, he returned to court and grabbed a break

in the fourth game of the third set as he trimmed his quarter-final deficit. In control, the 35-year-old levelled the tie with a double break in the fourth set as Sinner took a worrying tumble on his ankle scrambling to the Centre Djokovic carved out two more

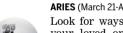
breaks in the decider, the second off the back of a stunning, cross-court backhand on the stretch to go to 5-2 before calmly serving it out.

Jabeur makes history

Ons Jabeur became the first Arab woman to book a place in the last-four of a Grand Slam.

World number two Jabeur of Tunisia defeated Marie Bouzkova 3-6, 6-1, 6-1. She will next face close friend and mother-of-two Tatjana Maria, who defeated fellow unseeded German Jule Niemeier, 4-6, 6-2, 7-5.

HOROSCOPE



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

your loved ones and social media platforms today. These vibes can also help you build steady foundations within your love life, making it a great time to discuss the future with them





You'll have an opportunity to impress your superiors and colleagues at work today. Fully embrace these vibes by keeping a tidy appearance, managing your time well, and creating an environment that supports teamwork



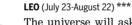


You'll have an opportunity to manifest your dreams today. However, these vibes won't bless you with a free ride, you'll need to step up and put some hard work behind your dreams. Decompress to release symptoms of stress



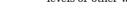
CANCER (June 22-July 22) ***

day can help you feel safe within your space, creating an environment where you can let your guard down. Unfortunately, it could trigger feelings of jealousy or possessiveness





The universe will ask you to speak boldly and from the heart today. These vibes are perfect for





creating boundaries that will support your mental wellbeing. But it could trigger elevated stress levels or other wellness issues





PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

ACORNSSTIPEND

R A I S E O M E N D A W N E L L A M O N G V E E A L E C N O G S O P A L S

ARROYOS DRILLS

I R A S C O I L S L A U N D R O M A T

You'll awaken with some added pep in your step today. This cosmic climate will help you tap into your gratitude, helping you see beauty in simplicity. Resistance to change could cause you to hold yourself back, so stay open to change



to bring more structure to your personal goals, as long as you're willing to believe in yourself.

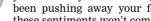
LIBRA (September 23-October 22) ****



SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) *** Don't be afraid to set boundaries in order to make space for yourself. Today's skies will ask

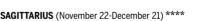
rush of inspiration, helping you express your-

self more honestly. You'll have an opportunity





you to honor your emotions, especially if you've been pushing away your feelings. Expressing these sentiments won't come easily.





Your attention will be in high demand. You may find that your friends are looking to you for advice or leadership as your influence gains some traction. Under today's skies, try not to

waste away your morning on the phone



CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) ***

professional and financial situation. It will give you an opportunity to make some serious moves, so don't be afraid to throw your weight around as it can help you get ahead in life.





The universe will conspire to help you manifest your dreams today. It could trigger insecurities, making it important that you access your confidence and belief in yourself. Fortunately, it will help you make professional headway

PISCES (February 19-March 20) ***



Take a moment for introspection and meditation. This cosmic climate will ask you to go within while tapping into your personal power. Unfortunately, issues within your social circle

could come into play with some intensive drama.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

 Raucous laughs 5 Unwind 10 Crazed captain 14 Colorado

neighbor 15 Ham it up 16 NYC art gallery 17 Old Italian

bread 18 Nile dam

20 Split to join

22 Thundering 24 TV Tarzan

25 Chablis, for one 26 Way too properly 30 Strains the brain 35 Untold centuries

36 Opposite of "paleo" 37 Ludicrous 38 Fancy trim

41 Willowy

43 Small pansy 44 "ER" setting 45 Lib. section 46 ATM key

Jordan 50 Rough it 53 Frequent 007

47 Jackson and

54 1950s card game 58 in and of —

62 San — Obispo 63 Rummage through

66 A Great Lake 67 Cats do it 68 Waits in traffic 69 1899 gold rush

70 Ship's trail

71 To date (2 wds.) 72 Cookbook amts

DOWN Gift-giving time Elec. or water

3 Syrup brand Gives form to Gearing up 911 responder Near the floor

Video-game pioneer 9 Kin of argon

10 Omnia vincit 11 Kachina maker

12 Revival shout 13 Loud noise 21 Chicago Loop

23 Hawk's lair 25 Grand Teton st. 26 Irritate

27 "The Kiss"

28 Gold brick

sculptor

29 Brown of big

underlings trains

31 Fay's role in "King Kong" 32 Core group 33 Pay homage

40 DEA agents 44 Little rascal

49 Somewhere

51 Open-air lobbies

48 Elev.

else

34 Castle

39 Percent ender 41 Biol. or astron. 42 Most fortunate

52 Motel staffers 54 Crab appendage 55 Mystique Pottery flaw

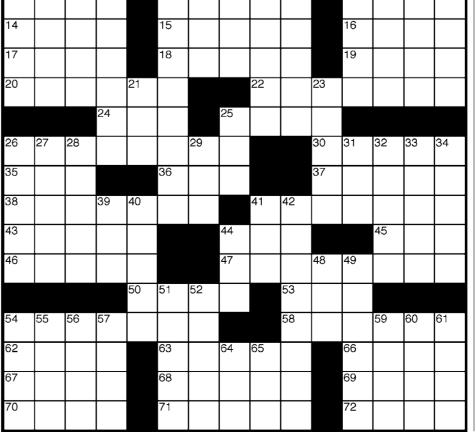
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RHINESTONE

BONNET

57 Memorable tennis champ 59 Winged god 60 Like a wet noodle

61 Service charges 64 House buzzer 65 Spike or Ana



SUDOKU

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7 5 2 1 3 4 6 9 8 YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION













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Dr. Ram Baran Yadav Former President

Sessions

Session I

What has hindered governance?

Federalism, service delivery and local prosperity



Dipendra Jha Chief Attorney, Madhesh Pradesh



Jagdish Prasad Agrawal Businessperson



Shardadevi Thapa Member of Provincial Assembly, Madhesh Pradesh



Dr. Achyut Wagle Economist/Professor, Kathmandu University School of Management



Janakraj Sapkota Province Bureau Chief, Kantipur Daily

Session II

Chure: The lifeline of Madhesh

Chure degradation, water crisis and the future of Madhesh



Dr. Bhogendra Jha Vice-Chairman, Policy and Planning Commission, Madhesh Pradesh



Kamala Oli Shivakoti Board Member, President Chure Terai Madhesh Conservation Development Board



Dr. Vijay Kumar Singh Danuwar Chure conservation expert



Chandra Kishor Writer and Analyst

Session III

Rejuvenating Janakpur

An opportunity to restore its glory



Manoj Kumar Sah



Ramashish Yadav Social Activist and Member of Mayor, Janakpurdham Social Activist and Member of Sub-Metropolitan City Provincial Assembly of Madhesh Pradesh



Lawyer, Janakpur



Writer and Analyst



Madhesh Pradesh Bureau Chief, Kantipur Daily

Session IV

Has society changed or remains the same?

Issues of social transformation in Madhesh



Bharat Prasad Sah Home and Communications Minister, Madhesh Pradesh



Sundar Bahadur Vishwakarma Member of Provincial Assembly



Dr. Sushma Dwivedi Social Activist and Professor



Tula Narayan Sah Writer and Analyst



Sanjeev Satgainya Editor, The Kathmandu Post

Session V

Federalism: **Exercise and** experience

Five years of Madhesh Province



Lalbabu Raut Chief Minister, Madhesh Pradesh



Prof. Krishna Khanal Dr. Vimala Rai Poudyal Political Analyst



Member of National Assembly



CK Lal



Sudheer Sharma Editor-in-Chief, Kantipur Daily

July 9, Saturday





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