

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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Sarus cranes seen at Tulsidihawa in Mayadevi Rural Municipality of Kapilvastu on Sunday. Ornithologists sighted more than 200 of the birds there, possibly in their search for a safe breeding spot

Leftists in Congress-led coalition discuss socialist centre idea

Dahal, Bhattarai and Unified Socialist leaders explore possibility of a left front as observers wonder if the bid is aimed at creating a sub-alliance minus UML for the upcoming polls.



The alliance forged by leftist forces for the last elections did not last long.

ANIL GIRI KATHMANDU, JULY 19

Three days after returning from his India visit, CPN (Maoist Centre) ıshpa Kamal Dahal is with his former colleague and deputy Baburam Bhattarai as well as those communist leaders who split from the CPN-UML in what seems to be a bid to give shape to the proposed "socialist centre" Dahal on Tuesday held talks with Baburam Bhattarai, his comrade-inarms from the "people's war" days. The duo fell out with each other after the constitution was promulgated in 2015.

Bhattarai was recently expelled as a central executive committee member of the Janata Samajbadi Party. Later on Tuesday, Dahal held talks

POST FILE PHOTO

Tuesday's meeting, however, did not take any concrete decision on forming the socialist centre or any other alliance that will be socialist in nature but agreed to 'go together,'

said leaders. "We agreed that the present alliance with the Nepali Congress should continue," Dahal said after the meeting.

Communist Party, formed in May 2018

after the merger between the Maoist

Centre and the UML. The party was

invalidated in March last year.

"We are also discussing how to strengthen the present coalition as well as party unification between Maoist Centre, Unified Socialist and Gautam-led NCP Unity National Campaign. But the current talks are not against the present alliance."

Talks were also held to bring Bhattarai into the new left alliance, Dahal added.

Party leaders said they expect further talks would give direction to the concept of forming a socialist centre.

After severing ties with the Maoist Centre, Bhattarai had formed Naya Shakti new iorce saying that the country needed a new political front different from traditional communist forces and the Congress to bring about socio-political transformation in the country in the changed context. In 2019, he joined hands with Upendra Yadav with an aim to create an alternative force. But now he has parted ways with Yadav.

As coronavirus infections rise suddenly, authorities step up booster vaccination

Experts stress need to follow the basics as multiple new Omicron sub-variants detected.

ARJUN POUDEL KATHMANDU, JULY 19

With an exponential rise in new cases of Covid-19, the Ministry of Health and Population has decided to launch vaccination drives, especially booster campaigns, aggressively.

The ministry said all health facilities under Kathmandu's local units started a vaccination programme on Tuesday, and local units and provinces concerned have been requested to launch similar drives at the earliest.

"People are not seeking vaccina-

tion, especially the third dose," said

Sagar Dahal, chief of the National Immunisation Programme. "Everyone should urge others to take booster shots if they have not already.'

The Health Office, Kathmandu said that all of the district's local units started a booster campaign Tuesday. The Kathmandu Metropolitan City has set up vaccination booths at vegetable markets in Kalimati and Jadibuti, Pashupatinath Temple premises, Swayambhunath Temple premises, Ason Chowk, Department of Passport

Tripureshwar, and in City Hall

Gyan Bahadur Oli, an official at the Kathmandu Metropolitan City, said the vaccination drive will continue for the next four days. "People above 18 years old can receive the first, second and third doses of the vaccine from the immunisation centres convenient for them," he said.

Despite having sufficient doses in stock, Nepal's booster uptake has been very low. The Health Ministry said that it has over seven million doses of vaccine in stock.

>> Continued on page 2

मधुमेह (Diabetes), उच्च रक्तचाप (High Blood pressure), ग्याष्ट्रिक (Gastritis) को बिरामीको लागि उचित आहार



(Unified Socialist) chai Madhav Kumar Nepal, its senior leader Jhala Nath Khanal and another senior communist leader Bamdev Gautam, who has recently launched a campaign to unite the leftist forces. Senior Maoist leader Narayan Kaji Shrestha was also present at the meeting.

Dahal, Nepal, Khanal, Gautam and Shrestha were members of the ninestrong secretariat of the Nepal

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1

Freedom for Haliyas a long shot even after 14 years of supposed emancipation

A good number of former bonded farm labourers in Sudurpaschim and Karnali find themselves in the dredges of poverty and privation.

BASANTA PRATAP SINGH IN BAJHANG & **ARJUN SHAH IN DHANGADHI** ILII Y 10

Jhima Luhar, 68, is a Haliya (bonded farm labourer) still paying off the loan that trickled down generations through her husband's family.

"We would have been able to live a happy life had the government freed us from the debt taken by our forefathers, provided land plots and helped us build a house," said Jhima, a resident of Sireta in Thalara Rural Municipality-9 of Bajhang district. "But nothing has happened so far. I don't think it will ever happen.'

The grandfather of Jhima's husband had borrowed some money from a local money lender years ago. Her husband, Bahadure Luhar, who was a witness to the transaction, died 28



The government has no proper records of the freed bonded labourers in Thalara, Bajhang

years ago. Today, Jhima's family owes Rs200,000 to the money lender. "My son Bikash has been ploughing our landlord's fields to pay interest on the loan," said Jhima. Sireta, a Dalit settlement 20 km south of Bajhang district headquarters Chainpur, has 88 families who still toil for their landlords to repay the loans that were borrowed generations ago. The government does not recognise Jhima and others from

her village as freed Haliyas since the destitute families did not figure in the government statistics of those held in bonded labour.

The paperwork identifies as many as 79 families from Thalara-9 as freed Haliyas. Their identification was verified by government authorities. But there is neither the physical presence of these families in the village nor any evidence that supports their existence in the village anytime in the past.

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NATIONAL

Sheep are dying in traps set for wildlife in Kanchenjunga Conservation Area

Poachers and smugglers instal traps in various places of the conservation area every year to catch musk deer and Himalayan black bear for their body parts.

ANANDA GAUTAM

TAPLEJUNG, JULY 19

Gopal Bista, a sheep farmer of Phaktalung Rural Municipality, lost four sheep to traps set by smugglers in the past two months. He lost 26 other sheep in a similar way over the past few years.

'The smugglers install wire traps by using pointed wooden spears and iron wire to cover fallen tree stumps. The sheep get trapped in these wire mesh while grazing in the area," said Bista. "Most of the animals die instantly because the sharp spears puncture their vital organs. Some survive with their legs entangled in the wire traps."

"Other animals let out cries once they get trapped so they can be rescued immediately. But the sheep do not cry like other animals," he added

According to Bista, several traps were found in Andhapokhari,

Selele, Kurlung Bhereni, Charrate, Tawalase and surrounding areas which are above 4,300 metres altitude.

Poachers and smugglers of animal body parts install traps in various places of the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area every year to catch musk deer and Himalayan black bear. The smugglers mainly target musk deer to extract its musk gland and Himalayan black bear for their gallbladder along with their hides and other body parts.

A Nepal Army team from Phungling, the district headquarters of Taplejung, destroyed 21 traps in Deuma, Chene, Mauwatar and Tigu among other places in Olangchungola of Phaktalung Rural Municipality-7 four years ago. These traps were set up between the altitude of 3,500 to 4,200 above sea level.

Before the Covid-19 outbreak, the Army team used to regularly patrol the area to search for possible traps and dismantle them. The local people claimed that the smugglers intensified their activities in the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area as the security personnel and the authorities concerned stopped patrolling the area regularly.

According to a report of the Himali Conservation Forum, a notfor-profit organisation working for red panda conservation, conservationists destroyed 17 traps installed in the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area in the last fiscal year 2021-22.

"It has become routine for us to recover such traps and destroy them every year. Any animal, whether domesticated or wild, can fall into these traps and die," said Ramesh Rai, the programme officer of the organisation. He urged the concerned authorities to take stringent action against the smugglers who set such traps

The local people and conserva-

tionists have time and again raised questions against the security agencies and the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area for not launching an effective programme to control poaching and smuggling of wildlife in the area.

The Kanchenjunga Conservation Area, however, claims that it has been making efforts to control such incidents

"Poaching and smuggling of wild animals is a major problem in the area. Search is on in the Ghunsa area to find the suspects who installed the traps," said Ramesh Yadav, the ward of Kanchenjunga Conservation Area.

Tseten Lama Sherpa, the ward chairman of Phaktalung Rural Municipality-7, said that the conservation authorities, security agencies and the local people should work hand in hand to control poaching incidents and conserve wildlife in the conservation area

Leftists in Congress-led coalition discuss socialist ...

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Bhattarai has been pitching the idea of socialist centre for quite a while and has held a series of meetings with Dahal in recent months, in the presence of Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun, a former Maoist commander.

Bhattarai told the Post that he has already proposed forming a socialist centre as an alternative to the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML—a "third pole," in his words, whose core political and ideological vision would be to transform the country by creating the national capital on the back of socialism.

"The fundamental idea of communist ideology did not work and will not work here. It only promoted centrality in politics and could not bring about social and economic transformation," he said. "We are facing new challenges by the day. For socioeconomic changes amid geopolitical challenges, we need a strong alternative force to guide the country. This is something I have been saying for the last nine years.

The bid to create a new political front like the socialist centre comes a day after the Congress, the leader of the current coalition, decided to fight the upcoming provincial and federal elections under an alliance with existing partners-Maoist Centre, Unifier Socialist, Janata Samajbadi and Rastriya Janamorcha.

Dahal has hailed the Congress decision

"The Nepali Congress has taken the right decision and this is good. We will go together, this alliance will not change," said Dahal, adding that there are also efforts going on to bring more parties under the alliance.

But some find it strange that Dahal, while promising to stick together with the Congress-led alliance, is also gathering communist leaders to explore the idea of a left alliance or socialist centre. An office bearer of Nepali Congress said that the bid to bring together communist forces seems

to be aimed at piling pressure on the Congress on seat-sharing arrangement.

"If we look at the recent developments and statements of Dahal and Nepal, they are not against the Nepali Congress and the ruling alliance. But reading between the lines, if they come together as a sub-alliance it will put pressure on our party," said the office bearer. "Chances of a larger unity among communists including the UML are slim as of now. What's going on is just a typical communist tactic."

During the recently concluded Central Committee of the party, Dahal had stressed the need to form an alliance of leftist and like-minded forces minus the Congress and the UML. At the Central Committee meeting of his party, Unified Socialist chair Nepal also made a pitch for an alliance of leftist forces.

There, however, is a lack of clarity on how these leftist leaders can come together to form a socialist centre. Some wonder if they are in a bid to create a sub-alliance while remaining in the current coalition led by the Congress for the upcoming polls.

"Still they are not convinced to abandon the communist tag," said Bhattarai. "If the formation of socialist centre is not possible immediately, my proposal is to form some kind of socialist alliance at least for now.'

Some political analysts and observers said that there is a need to revisit the leftist political ideology in Nepal in terms of principle, programmes and ideas but it looks like no one actually knows how to do it and who will take the lead.

'The concept of forming socialist centre is not bad, but if we impose the same old idea, that won't bring any change," said Narayan Dahal, a leftist political analyst, "We expected a miracle when the NCP was formed but nothing happened. So I am not that hopeful of constituting a new left political force until and unless it gives some new

ideas, programmes and principles.'

A Maoist leader said that since the government is preparing to announce the date for the federal and provincial elections, there is an urgency to reach a conclusion about a new political front.

"Those communist parties and leaders who want to shed the communist tag can make a new front but a blueprint is yet to be discussed," the leader told the Post requesting to remain anonymous

According to a Unified Socialist leader, if it is not possible to unite different political forces, discussions are being held to form a front of leftist parties

"If that is also not possible, there's also a proposal to form a unification coordination committee of like-minded communist forces," the leader

Bhattarai, also a former prime minister, currently is in a situation where he faces a political crisis. Despite his quitting the Janata Samajbadi, he has decided to remain in the current coalition.

There's a significant chunk of leaders who are close to him that want him to join the Maoist party while others have opposed the idea saying they should not return to become the same old communists again.

Dhakal, the leftist analyst, says people are tired of listening to politicians' same old rhetoric.

"First of all, the leaders should be able to convince the public how they can ensure that there would be dividends of democracy and how the hard-earned political achievements can truly benefit the members of the public," Dhakal told the Post. "We need an alternative political force that keeps people, not leaders, at the centre. If we really have a credible left, it will put pressure on the Congress to mend its ways. The socialist centre idea sounds fanciful, but if you ask me, I am not hopeful the idea will materialise anytime soon."

As coronavirus infections rise suddenly, authorities step ...

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Dr Prabhat Adhikari, an infectious disease and critical care expert, said authorities concerned should focus on administering the vaccine to a maximum number of people at the earliest. "The vaccines may not prevent infection but can save us from getting severe and reduce chances of death," he said.

After the third wave driven by Omicron, a highly contagious variant of the SARS-CoV-2, gripped the country, the Ministry of Health and Population started administering booster shots on January 17.

Several studies, including one carried out in Nepal, show that the immunity level achieved from vaccination or natural infection wanes after six months of the vaccination or natural infection.

So far, 6,950,373 people or around 23.8 percent of the total population have received booster shots. The Health Ministry has opened the booster shots to all people who were administered with the second dose of vaccine at least three months ago.

Doctors say the number of new cases will go up significantly in the coming days as the virus has been spreading in the communities due to apathy of authorities concerned to take preventive measures.

The government has neither activated surveillance measures such as free testing and contact tracing nor has it enforced safety measures such as wearing face masks, hand washing and maintaining physical distance.

Meanwhile, multiple new sub-variants of Omicron have been detected in Nepal. According to a doctor at Dhulikhel Hospital, which carried out whole-genome sequencing on various swab samples, BA.5, BA.5.2, BA.2.75. BA.2.73, BA.2.12.1, BA.2.38 and BF.1 sub variants have been detected in swab samples

The hospital's laboratory had carried out whole-genome sequencing on 22 swab samples of infected persons and obtained the results on Tuesday.

Whole-genome sequencing is a comprehensive method of analysing the entire DNA sequence of an organism's genes. Researchers believe that whole-genome sequencing of the coronavirus could be instrumental in tracking the severity and properties of the virus.

Among the subvariant of the Omicron variant, Nepal recorded infection of BA.5 ten days ago, and BA. 2.12.1 during the third wave earlier this year.

The BA.5 subvariant currently dominates the global caseload.

Lately, BA.2.75, possibly a super contagious Omicron mutant that can evade immunity, has been spreading rapidly in India and in other countries, according to the Indian Express

"Detection of several sub-variants of the Omicron variant at once is a matter of serious concern," said Dr Rajiv Shrestha, head of genetic laboratory at Dhulikhel Hospital.

The BF.1 subvariant was first detected in June-end and has been spreading in the UK, Scotland, Denmark and Canada, among other countries

Many things regarding BF.1 and BA.5.2 are not known but doctors say it could be more infectious than other variants and can evade immunity developed from all existing vaccines.

"Authorities concerned should enforce

safety measures immediately and focus on vaccination," Adhikari, the infectious disease expert, said. "Attention should be given to manage the surge by taking details of the number of hospital beds available and providing training to health workers among others.

The first wave of the pandemic in Nepal was driven by the virus variant first detect ed in Wuhan of China. The second wave was triggered by the Delta variant first reported in India. Over 8,000 people had died in the second wave. The Omicron var iant, which infected almost all people of the country, was responsible for the third wave. It, however, did not inflict much damage compared to the Delta variant as many people were already vaccinated.

Nepal on Tuesday recorded 357 cases of the coronavirus-268 in 1,857 polymerase chain reaction tests and 89 in antigen tests.

Nepal has so far received 58,891,970 doses of Covid vaccines of various brands-AstraZeneca, Vero Cell, Moderna, Janssen, Sinovac-CoronaVac and Pfizer-BioNtechincluding paediatric doses

So far, 20,477,162 people have been fully vaccinated in the country.

Of the total infected people on Tuesday, 22 are under 20 years old. The Health Ministry said that 19 infected people have been receiving intensive care in various hospitals.

Experts say complacency, and lack of testing, contact tracing and enforcement of safety measures, could prove costly if a more lethal virus variant like the Delta spreads in the country.

As children under five years old are not vaccinated yet, they are vulnerable to infection.

Many people, including children, have been suffering from flu-like symptoms of late

Doctors say that since this is neither a flu season, nor is the dust causing flu, anyone who is suffering from flu-like symptoms is most likely suffering from coronavirus.

They say that one should self-isolate immediately if they have flu-like symptoms such as runny nose, sore throat, body ache, and fever, among others, and inform people they have come in close contact with.

Dr Rajiv Shrestha, an infectious disease expert at Dhulikhel Hospital, warned that schools can again turn into hotspots.

"Authorities concerned should monitor if schools are following safety measures, he said. "School administrations must prevent students from coming to schools if they have Covid-like symptoms.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation on Tuesday said, the new wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has hit Europe, and health authorities must act now to mitigate its fallout.

"Waiting for the autumn to act will be too late," reports quoting Dr Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, said.

"It's now abundantly clear we're in a similar situation to last summer–only this time the ongoing Covid-19 wave is being propelled by sub-lineages of the Omicron variant, notably BA.2 and BA.5, with each dominant sub-lineage of Omicron showing clear transmission advantages over the previously circulating viruses."





आवश्यकता

यस पब्लिकेशन्सुको बजार प्रवर्द्धनका लागि निम्नानुसार कर्मचारी आवश्यक परेकाले सेल्समा रुचि भएका इच्छक उम्मेदवारहरूले निम्न स्थानमा आवेदन दिनहन अनुरोध गरिन्छ ।

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Freedom for Haliyas a long shot even after 14

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Githe Oda, Ram Bahadur Parki, Gajam Sarki, and Bhale Kami among others are mentioned in the roster of freed Haliyas which was verified by the government authorities. "But there has never been anyone here with those names," said Jhima.

"I rushed to Chainpur upon hearing that relief meant for Haliyas had arrived in the district. But the government officials turned me back saying that I wasn't on the list of freed Haliyas. The relief was given to people who have been our oppressors for so many years because apparently their names have been put on this list of freed Haliyas," said Jhima.

The government declared the emancipation of Haliyas (bonded farm labourers) on September 6, 2008. The declaration has legally banned enslaving Haliyas under any pretexts. The government soon announced various programmes to pay off the loans the freed Haliyas had taken from the landlords leading to the former's bondage, and to rehabilitate them. The next year, the government authorities started collecting statistics and information on the freed Haliyas.

Fourteen years since their supposed emancipation, a good number of freed Haliyas in Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces find themselves in the dredges of poverty and privation.

The freed Haliyas say the government has yet to make good on the promises made to them more than a decade ago.

A meeting was held two years after the government emancipation programme under the chairmanship of Chiranjibi Thapa, then assistant chief district officer and coordinator of freed Haliyas district data collection committee in Bajhang, that certified a total of 2,848 freed Haliyas in the district and recommended their rehabilitation. The verified list incorporated 79 families of freed Haliyas who did not exist but left out 118 genuine Haliya families of Ward No 9 of Thalara Rural Municipality.

While collecting the preliminary data of the freed Haliyas, the enumerators were provided with an allowance of Rs20 per family for bringing details of freed Haliya families. It is suspected that the enumerators doctored the forms without reaching out to the families just to earn some extra money. "It seems that the enumerator/s did not go to Sireta but randomly filled up the forms," said Krishna Bahadur Bohara, chief of the district land revenue office in Bajhang.

The genuine freed Haliyas lament that the government does not know who the real Haliyas are. Setya Luhar, aged 58, of Sireta has been working as a Haliya since he was 12. But his name is not documented as Haliya or



There are around 15 settlements in Bajhang where the villagers have been ploughing for the landlords to repay the loans their father and grandfather took years ago.

freed Haliya.

Setya has 10 members in his family and a loan of around Rs500,000. So he ploughs the landlord's fields while his wife collects fodder, harvests food grains like paddy, wheat, maize and does other agricultural works. They receive around one kilogram of rice per day.

"We have to be satisfied with whatever the landlord gives us. We cannot claim to deserve more wages. The landlord adds the interest to the principal amount if we fail to work for even a single day," said Setya.

"This is my life. I am deprived of the benefits that the government provides to the freed Haliyas. I visited the ward office, rural municipality office and the district headquarters several times. But I could not find my name on the list. We don't know who came to the village to collect names and when. Those who are on the name list are not in the village."

Sireta's story is playing out across several settlements in Bajhang where people are still working as Haliyas but do not feature on the list of freed Haliyas prepared by the government. They eke out a living as fieldhands for their landlords. "Even the land where this hut was built is not ours. We have nothing to our name. We have to live with the food grains provided by the landlords. Our children go hungry if the landlords do not give us food," said Amita Damai of Lwada in Chhabis Pathibhera Rural Municipality.

There are around 15 such settlements in Bajhang where the villagers have been ploughing for the landlords to repay the loans their father and grandfather took years ago.

The mismanagement in the identification of Haliyas and their data verification is not only limited to Bajhang. Hundreds of people in the nine districts of Sudurpaschim Province and three districts of Karnali Province are still working as Haliyas for their livelihood even after the abolishment of the Haliya system 14 years ago.

Identification of the freed Haliyas and their rehabilitation are under the federal Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation. Even the ministry does not have the actual data on the freed Haliyas and their rehabilitation. "We have not recorded the number of freed Haliya families that are included in the rehabilitation package," said Rehaman Singh Rana, the section officer at the ministry.

The ministry formed a committee under the chairmanship of Shyam Shrestha last year to study the condition of freed Haliyas, Kamaiyas, Kamlahari and Haruwa-Charuwa. According to the report, a total of 12,231 verified freed Haliya families of Sudurpaschim 1,055 were excluded from the rehabilitation package provided by the government.

The government has classified the freed Haliyas into four different categories-those with neither land nor house are included in Group A, while group B includes those who have houses but do not own land. Similarly, those who own land but do not have a house have been categorised in group C and group D includes those whose houses need repairs.

The government provided Rs200,000 to buy a land plot and Rs350,000 in the hilly region and Rs225,000 in Tarai to build a house to each freed Haliya family categorised in group A. Each household under group B was provided Rs200,000, while Rs 350,000 in the hilly region and Rs 225,000 in Tarai were provided to each household grouped in C. Likewise, each family under group D was provided Rs125,000 to repair their homes

Manbir Lohar of Budhiganga Municipality-1 in Bajura is recognised by the government at least on paper as a freed Haliya but he returned to the old practice as the Haliya rehabilitation programme did not support his livelihood.

"I have an identity card as a freed Haliya but I couldn't make a living to support my family so I went back to being a Haliya," said Manbir. "The government gave us the minimum and left us to fend for ourselves but we don't know what else to do except go back to being a Haliya.'

NATIONAL

Probe committee to question ex-finance minister Sharma

BINOD GHIMIRE Kathmandu, July 1

The parliamentary probe committee formed to investigate an alleged tax rate manipulation in the national budget has invited then Finance Minister Janardan Sharma for questioning after failing to recover the CCTV footage from the night of May 28 when the alleged incident took place.

Tuesday's meeting of the committee decided to discuss with Sharma the allegations that he invited unauthorised individuals to tweak the tax rates on the eve of budget announcement. It also decided to call the editors of Annapurna Post and Kantipur dailies that had carried news stories about the purported incident.

"We plan to discuss the issue with Sharma on Wednesday or on Thursday morning," Man Bahadur Bishwakarma, a member of the committee from the Nepali Congress, said. The committee will hold discussions with former finance secretaries

on Wednesday morning and with the editors from the two vernacular dailies in the afternoon.

The Annapurna Post in its June 13 edition published a story claiming that Sharma instructed four senior Finance Ministry officials to follow the suggestions of two individuals—a retired senior non-gazetted officer and a chartered accountant—on the night of May 28 to make some last-moment changes in taxation to benefit some business groups and harm others. Kantipur, the Post's sister paper, had carried follow-up stories on the alleged incident.

The panel is holding discussions with former finance secretaries on Wednesday.

"We are inviting the editors and Sharma to find out the truth," Bishwakarma said. "So far, we have not found any concrete evidence to establish the allegations."

On Sunday, the committee questioned Finance Secretary Madhu Kumar Marasini and Revenue Secretary Krishna Hari Pushkar along with Budget Division chief Chakra Bahadur Budha, Administrative Division chief Kedar Nath Sharma and the head of the information technology department at the Finance Ministry.

On Saturday, the committee questioned Kamal Prasad Bhattarai, director general of the Department of Customs; Ritesh Kumar Shakya, director general of the Inland Revenue Department; and Bhupal Baral, chief of the revenue management division of the Finance Ministry. No official questioned by the committee has confirmed the output of uncuthenicad



Youngsters enjoy ice-cream on the premises of Patan Durbar Square in Mangalbazar, Lalitpur on Tuesday afternoon.

POST PHOTO: ELITE JOSHI

Provincial ministers pile pressure for police adjustment

They have met with leaders of the ruling coalition as well as prime minister after issuing a seven-point declaration in Janakpur earlier this month.

TIKA R PRADHAN KATHMANDU, JULY 19

In a bid to press the federal government for a quick adjustment of the police force, besides managing issues related to civil servants, internal affairs ministers of all the provinces met all major party leaders of the ruling coalition partners earlier this week.

"All the leaders responded positively but I have the feelings that they could further delay and linger the adjustment," said Bharat Prasad Sah, internal affairs minister of Madhes Province. "We will wait for a week and then start a struggle against the federal government. Madhes will take the lead."

The ministers met Madhav Kumar Nepal, chairperson of the CPN (Unified Socialist); Upendra Yaday, pressure from anti-federalist forces within their own parties.

The meetings in Kathmandu followed their gathering in Janakpur on July 7 where they had issued a seven-point declaration.

They have also issued a mid-August ultimatum to the federal government to adjust the police force while demanding that district attorneys must be brought under the chief attorneys of the provincial governments. They have also called for bringing district administration offices and chief district officers under provincial governments.

"Poudel told us that he would also urge the ruling party leaders to fulfil our demands," said Dowate Bishwakarma, internal affairs minister of Gandaki Province. "He said that without strengthening the provinces, iederalism cannot be made strong The ministers have also warned the federal government that they would start recruiting police personnel on their own if the federal government didn't heed their demands. At the Janakpur meeting, the ministers had also come to a conclusion that keeping the security of the three districts of Kathmandu Valley under the federal government was against the constitution.

vincial police but with the delay in the adjustment process, it cannot implement the budget.

The leaders from the ruling coalition heading the provincial governments have been accusing their central leaders of acting against the spirit of federalism, just like the previous KP Sharma Oli government.

Leaders of the parties that are leading provincial governments are now complaining that the existing government of the five-party alliance-Nepali Congress, CPN (Maoist Centre), CPN (Unified Socialist), Janata Samajbadi Party, and Rastriya Janamorcha have also been following in Oli's footsteps.

Provinces say the

government will begin the process of adjustment before the upcoming polls."

Federal and provincial elections are due later this year.

Amid concerns of provincial governments, experts on federalism say that the federal government is unwilling to hand over the constitutional powers to provinces.

"During the tenure of the KP Sharma Oli government, leaders had started a debate on limiting the role of the provincial police to the security of provincial officials while the federal government should look after the overall security of the provinces," Jammarkattel said. "But the issue fizzled out after the Oli government fell. The mindset of our leaders has not changed yet."

The Madhes Province was the first among the seven provinces to bring provincial laws related to provincial police despite controversy and criticism from the leaders who were leading the previous federal government led by Oli. this move of allocating the budget for the provincial police to exert pressure on the federal government," said Sah, the minister for internal affairs and law of the Madhes government. "We accused KP Sharma Oli of being anti-federalist, but now the existing coalition government is also not ready to follow the constitution."

Schedule 6 of the constitution gives provincial governments clear authority to have their own police forces. But again, the federal government has shown no urgency to implement the federal police laws.

Article 133 of the constitution says that any law enacted by provincial governments will be void if it is inconsistent with any federal law.

Article 268(2) of the constitution states that each province will have its own police force. Clause 3 of the article savs that matters relating to the operation, supervision and coordination of functions to be discharged by the Nepal Police and the provincial police shall be as provided for in the Federal law. The Gandaki Provincial assembly had endorsed its provincial police bill in October 2020, paving the way for the provincial government to form its provincial police force. Chief Attorney of the Madhes government Dipendra Jha said there has been no progress on police adjustment after the change in federal government. Provincial governments say the adjustment of the Nepal Police could only begin after the formation of a new government after the federal and provincial polls. "Since the government is preparing to announce the poll date soon and the festival season is also round the corner, I don't think the adjustment process will begin anytime soon,' Jammarkattel told the Post. "The process may begin only after the formation of a new federal government and seven provincial governments."

confirmed the entry of unauthorised persons in the ministry on May 28.

Similarly, the committee has also decided to hand over the hard drive that is supposed to contain the CCTV footage in question to the Central Police Forensic Science Laboratory to investigate whether the footage was deleted. Technicians from the Nepali Police will check whether or not the CCTV recordings were deleted and if they can be recovered.

Surendra Aryal, secretary for the parliamentary Finance Committee who is also the secretary of the probe panel, said the panel decided to hand over the hard drive to the police following suggestions from experts from the Institute of Engineering under Tribhuvan University and the Cyber Cell of the Nepal Police. The probe committee on Tuesday had consulted the technical team after failing to find the CCTV footage of May 28.

Aryal said that the investigation committee couldn't recover the CCTV recordings of the night in question despite repeated attempts. "Let's see what the forensic investigation of the Nepal Police yields," he said. (Unified Socialist); Upendra Yadav, chair of the Janata Samajbadi Party; and Pushpa Kamal Dahal, chair of the CPN (Maoist Centre), before calling on Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who is also the President of Nepali Congress.

They also held talks with senior Congress leader Ram Chandra Poudel, who heads a political mechanism of the five-party coalition.

The ministers were scheduled to meet Home Minister Balkrishna Khand on Tuesday before returning to their respective provinces, but due to his illness they spoke to secretaries of the ministry.

"The secretaries of the Home Ministry have told us that they have made all necessary technical preparations for police adjustment and the work would start once there was a political decision," said Sah. "But I don't think these people would move ahead with the adjustment process anytime soon although they all told us they would."

Asked what made him think so after meeting the leaders of the ruling coalition, Sah said the leaders are under By amending the existing laws, the federal government has kept the security of the three districts of the Kathmandu Valley with itself which according to many leaders of the ruling coalition contradicts the constitution and therefore that needs amendment in the constitution as well.

With the federal government unnecessarily delaying the adjustment of police force, the provincial governments have not been able to take any decisions regarding the mobilisation of security personnel to maintain law and order in their respective provinces.

The Madhes government has already allocated a budget for its pro-

adjustment of Nepal Police could only begin after federal and provincial polls.

Even a year after the formation of the current central government, there are no signs of moving the police adjustment process ahead.

Provincial internal affairs ministers are now planning to organise a pressure campaign. The ministers said they plan to submit memorandums to provincial chiefs if their demands for speedy adjustment of police force are not heeded.

"When we met the home minister after the new government was formed, Bal Krishna Khand had told us that the adjustment process would begin after the local polls. But nothing has happened as of now," said Shalikram Jammarkattel, a minister for economic affairs and planning, who was internal affairs minister of the province earlier. "I don't think the federal Most other provinces then followed suit. Madhes Province has been taking the lead in creating pressure on the federal government to provide their due rights guaranteed by the constitution.

This year also, according to Bharat Prasad Sah, the minister for internal affairs and law in the Madhes government, his government has included setting up provincial police in its annual policy and programme and also earmarked necessary budget, but they will not be able to set up the force in lack of police adjustment by the federal government.

Currently the Madhes provincial government is led by a coalition of the Janata Samajbadi Party, the Nepali Congress, the CPN (Maoist Centre) and the CPN (Unified Socialist).

"The budget has been allocated but it cannot be spent without the adjustment of the Nepal Police. So we made





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OPINION

EDITORIAL

It's that virus again Back to the basics: Mask up, sanitise, maintain distance and get vaccinated.

The coronavirus pandemic has been playing hide-and-seek with the global population for more than two and a half years, and it does not seem to tire. The moment we think we have won over the virus, it appears in a new avatar, as if it was a djinn. After a months-long lull, the virus is back again, this time in the form of an Omicron offshoot named BA.5. Considered a highly transmissible variant owing to three key mutations in its spike protein, the new variant is now a familiar name in testing labs across the world. In the United States, two-thirds of the coronavirus patients were found to have been infected by the new variant, with experts already calling it a new wave altogether; and World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus saying the pandemic is "nowhere near over".

In Nepal, cases have been on the rise continually this past week, with the increase in infection hitting 357 on Tuesday and the total number of active infections reaching 1,982. But this could be a gross underestimation, for a large number of the infected could be in home isolation without getting tested, or are out in the public as their symptoms are mild enough for them to remain unaware of their infection. In cases where the infection is mild and does not require hospitalisation, patients are often found to be avoiding tests altogether. Now that the contact tracing and testing system has become a thing of the past. there is no negating the possibility of the virus spreading in a subterranean form.

And as always, our casual attitude towards the virus has not helped at all. We have come to be heavily reliant on science's capability to fight against the virus—from medication to vaccination. However, we have failed to follow the behavioural etiquette that complements science-namely, following safety protocols so as to prevent ourselves and others from being infected. Science alone cannot bear the burden of fighting the virus; as human beings who are potent carriers of the virus, we have to work in tandem to stop the transmission of the virus. We are too quick to leave the past behind, so much so that what we consider the past is still lingering around our backs.

As of today, 70.1 percent of the total population has been fully vaccinated, and 70.4 percent has received partial vaccination. Only 23.8 percent has received booster shots, which is still pretty low considering the threat of the new variant. It has become all too clear that a booster dose has a higher chance of preventing serious infections and hospitalisations. And vet, neither the government agencies nor the citizens themselves seem keen on administering or taking the booster doses. What's more, the government has halted jabbing the 5-11 years age group in several districts due to a syringe shortage. It is high time the government expedited administering the vaccines, including the booster doses, to the entire eligible population. We have had enough of the virus; we must work actively to subdue the potency of the virus through science as well as behavioural change. Lest we forget, it's back to the basics once again: Mask up, sanitise, maintain distance and get vaccinated.

The pedagogy of spiritual secularity

Secularism is necessary to secure the fundamental freedoms of the downtrodden.

CK LAL



It is business as usual in what was once celebrated as the city of temples, valley of gods. Buddhist shrines and Hindu temples still dot the cityscape, but their presiding deities seem to have gone up to the mountains to escape from the corrupting influence of realpolitik in Kathmandu.

Restored for the second time through a judicial verdict, the Pratindhi Sabha has done little else over the past year other than electing a deputy speaker. Parliament is yet to resolve the impeachment motion against suspended Chief Justice Cholendra Shamsher Rana. Startling revelations of the rot in the judiciary have failed to break the slumber of the legislature.

The less said about the shenanigans of the federal government the better. Serious charges of budget leaks against the then finance minister Janardan Sharma have not been taken to its logical conclusion. He had allegedly tweaked tax rates under the influence of lobbyists.

When the line that separates one branch of the state from another begins to blur, political parties are expected to debate its implications, take a clear position and inform the public of their decisions through the media. Almost all political parties of Nepal have been reduced to being mere platforms for contesting elections.

The Young Turks of the dominant party in the ruling coalition as well as the main opposition have collectively failed to reform-let alone dislodge-the capricious, dated and dictatorial politicos from their leadership positions.

The surviving signatories of the 16-point conspiracy seem to have forgotten that other than the republican system, almost every provision in the contested statute needs to be justified through public campaigns to increase their acceptability. Chief Minister of Madhesh Province Lal Babu Raut has been pointing out since September 2018 that the federal government has been treating provinces like "an unwanted baby". He repeated the same charge at the Kantipur Conclave in Janakpur. Not even the chief ministers of the other six provinces have taken the trouble to corroborate his expositions.

In the midst of all this confusion, the second most important leader in the ruling coalition was in New Delhi disparty-to-party relations cussing between Maoist radicals and Hindutva



fanatics! Snafu is an acronym in Americanism that describes a state of utter confusion behind apparent normalcy-"situation normal, all fouled up". The expression captures the directionless pandemonium of governance-six cabinet reshuffles in a yearlike no word in any of the local languages.

Inherited convictions

It is never easy to modernise governance anywhere in the world. The United States is still struggling with political concepts such as equality between the races, the liberty not to bear a child or the idea of the state having complete monopoly over instruments of violence. A century after the veneration of the "two gentlemen" of the May Fourth Movement—Mr Science and Mr Democracy-the Chinese have not yet been able to get rid of entrenched elitism, and even Mao failed to destroy the "Four Olds' despite the tyrannies of the Cultural Revolution.

The most startling illustration of the power of tradition is India's rapid descent into the darkness of the regressive politics of Hindutva. In a country where Turks, Afghans, Persians and Mughals ruled for over a millennium, and which is home to the third largest population of Muslims in the world, the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party has no Muslim member in Parliament.

What is even worse, nobody seems to be ashamed of the fact that the most diverse and multi-national country in the world is headed towards an oxymoron—a Hindu theocracy. Hinduism has no holy book with a monopoly over the revealed truth, no hallowed messenger of God and no priesthood with the divine right of interoperating the scriptures.

The concept of blasphemy is alien, and nothing like an apostate exists in the family of faiths known as Hinduism. One can be an agnostic, an atheist, a sceptic or even a heretic, and still be free from any fatwa or strictures. Caste groups exercise the traditional authority of social boycott through archaic practices such as "hukka-pani band"; but no guru of Shakta, Shaiva, Vaishnav or Vedant has the power to throw someone out of the sect. Renouncement is the privilege of the believer.

In the materialistic tradition of Lokayat, perception is the only source of true knowledge. It rejects afterlife, liberation, scriptures and immortality. Despite opposing everything that the Sanatanis venerated, sages of Sanatana Dharma accepted Rishi Charvaka as their equal. The ideology of Hindutva is a political project drawing its inspiration from European fascism. It has nothing to do with the flexibility of faiths within the Hindu family.

In times of uncertainties, the lure of fascism is strong. The open border, cultural similarities and social bonds between India and Nepal offer innumerable advantages. The downside of the close relationship is that the power elite of Nepal adopt methodologies of the Indian establishment pretty fast to entrench their control.

The clamour in the mainstream politics that Nepal be declared a "Hindu" state is getting its fuel from three principal sources-the nostalgia of the permanent establishment in Kathmandu, the tactic of opportunistic politicos and the insidious propaganda of the Indian media and society. The risk of Hindutva politics being enormous, it is necessary for Nepal to remain steadfast in its resolution to be a modern republic that is federal, democratic, inclusive and secular.

Futuristic aspirations

In a skilful manoeuvre of concerted disinformation, the idea is being propagated that the hegemony of Hindus in Nepal is under threat from Arabic Islamists, European Christians and

godless communists of China. Such propaganda against secularism sounds too much like geopolitical gas lighting to check the influence of Washington and Beijing in Kathmandu.

Secularism is necessary to secure the fundamental freedoms of the downtrodden in a caste-bound society where hierarchy in the social order is bequeathed rather than acquired. Secularity offers ideological, intrinsic and instrumental advantages to a nascent republic trying to modernise its society, culture, economy and politics.

Ideological goals are easiest to list Unlike the French concept of laïcité that seeks to eradicate all religious symbols from public life and produce an uniform citizenry, secularity implies complete freedom of religion, no preference for the faith of the dominant majority and the primacy of humane concerns. Secularism is thus the central and inalienable feature of a democratic state.

The intrinsic advantages of secularism in a multi-national state are no less compelling. Most Dalit and Janajati traditions permit eating beef which is anathema to some Hindus. Vaishnavs are vegetarians while Shakta worship is often incomplete without ritual sacrifice. Vaishnavs visiting Kathmandu for the first time are startled when they see eggs being broken upon the trunk of Ganesh, a ritual that perhaps dates back to animistic practices

In an economy drawing its suste nance from remittances, the risks of religious dogmatism do not need enumeration. Islamic states employ millions of Nepali workers. Donor countries and lending agencies are staffed by people of multiple faiths. It makes little sense to antagonise them just to please Hindutva zealots.

The Nepali polity has chosen the noble aim of becoming secular. The idea needs to be constantly propagated to widen and deepen its acceptability in society.

Pandemic effects on periods

Whatever the case. changes to menstrual cycles after vaccination are short-lived.

GABRIELLA KOUNTOURIDES



Covid-19 has affected countless aspects of our lives. For many people who menstruate, one of the pandemic's effects has been on periods. People have reported changes to their menstrual cycles after having Covid-19, from the timing of their period, to its duration, to bleeding (a heavier or lighter flow).

Meanwhile, many people have reported changes to their menstrual cycles after Covid-19 vaccination. The largest study yet on this topic has just been published, finding that 42 percent of people who regularly menstruate reported a heavier period after Covid-19 vaccination.

The researchers, based in the US, launched an online survey in April 2021, which was advertised through multiple channels, including TV news, Twitter, blogs and radio. The survey asked for demographic information and included questions about people's periods, from symptoms to timing and bleeding duration.

It also asked about Covid-19 vaccination status. For this analysis, all participants had been fully vaccinated, meaning they had received two doses at least 14 days before completing the survey (boosters were not yet available at the time). Most participants had received either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.

The results are based on responses from 39,000 people who regularly men-



struate or who have done so in the past. The latter group could include people who have been through menopause, people receiving gender-affirming treatment, or people using hormonal contraceptives that suppress menstruation. The study excluded anyone who had had Covid-19.

In the group who regularly menstruate, 42 percent reported a heavier period after their vaccine, 44 percent reported no change, and 14 percent reported a lighter period.

In the second group, two-thirds of post-menopausal participants and people on long-acting reversible contraceptives (such as IUDs and implants) reported breakthrough bleeding after Covid-19 vaccination. Over one-third of those on gender-affirming treatment (which eliminates menstruation) experienced breakthrough bleeding.

What has other research found?

Other studies have also found changes in periods following vaccination. For example, a study of almost 4,000 participants in the US found that after a second vaccine people started their period on average just over half a day later than expected.

A Norwegian study of more than 5,500 people found that over 7 percent of participants experienced heavier and longer periods after receiving their first Covid-19 vaccine dose.

Similarly, a study of 2,269 women in the Middle East and North Africa found that women reported menstrual

irregularities such as longer periods and longer cycles (more time between periods) after vaccination.

Why might these changes happen?

Reports of cycle changes after vaccination is not a new phenomenon. A 1913 study showed heavier bleeding after typhoid vaccination. Similarly, a 1982 study on hepatitis B and a more recent one on HPV found changes to menstrual cycles following vaccination.

We don't yet fully understand the biological mechanism behind cycle changes linked to Covid-19 vaccines. But changes to menstrual cycles usually stem from one of two routes: hormones or inflammation. A vaccine works by provoking the immune system to react to exposure to a disease,

which can influence inflammation.

As the study didn't find any differences between users of hormonal contraceptives (such as the pill) and non-users, the authors suggest the mechanism is likely to relate to inflammation rather than hormones.

The authors also suggest that menstrual changes could be due to the effect of the immune system on the uterus. In particular, the inflammation sparked by the vaccine could affect the uterine lining, leading to breakthrough bleeding. But this requires more research.

Whatever the case, changes to menstrual cycles after vaccination are short-lived. For most, cycles should return to normal within a few months

Some things to keep in mind

While the effect of vaccines on periods is not an area that has traditionally attracted a lot of research, the issue has been brought into the spotlight by the scale and speed of the Covid-19 vaccination campaign. Because more people are having similar symptoms at the same time, this leads to more attention and more research.

It's important to note that this study cannot conclude that the vaccine causes menstrual changes. While it shows associations, to establish a causal link, we would need a clinical trial (so, to follow people who did and didn't receive a Covid-19 vaccine over a longer period of time). Indeed, the authors stress the importance of including questions about menstrual cycles in future vaccine research.

Further, the way participants were recruited in this study means the results should be interpreted with caution. People who saw changes in their period after vaccination might have been more inclined to respond to the survey, which could have skewed the results. Most of the participants were also white, so the results may not apply to racially diverse groups.

This research should provide an impetus for further study and raise awareness of menstrual changes as a possible side-effect of Covid-19 vaccination. The public should be made aware of possible side-effects, not because they're dangerous, but because people need to know what to expect.

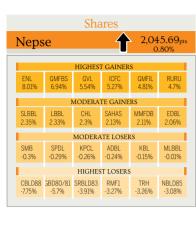
Just as you might have a painkiller on hand to take if you develop a headache after vaccination, some people may want to be prepared with extra menstrual products. Knowing what to expect could be especially useful for people who are no longer menstruating but may experience breakthrough bleeding following vaccination.

Kountourides is a PhD candidate researching female reproductive health.

MONEY

FOREX

US Dollar	128.21
Euro	131.47
Pound Sterling	154.11
Japanese Yen (10)	9.32
Chinese Yuan	19.02
Qatari Riyal	35.04
Australian Dollar	88.42
Malaysian Ringit	28.81
Saudi Arab Riyal	34.14
	Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank



BULLION	PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold	Rs 93,800
Silver	Rs 1,160
	SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

GASOLINE WATCH



Api Power and India's GreenZo Energy tie up to develop 50MW hydrogen plants in Nepal

Foreign direct investors rush back following Covid slump

Investment commitments in the last fiscal year soared 68 percent to Rs54.15 billion, the Department of Industry said.

KRISHANA PRASAIN KATHMANDU JULY 19

Investment pledges shot up sharply in the last fiscal year ended July 16 as investors rushed back following the

Covid slump. Foreign direct investment commitments, with China in the lead, soared 68 percent year-on-year to Rs54.15 billion, the Department of Industry said. The investment pledges in 295 projects will create 16,905 jobs. But offi-

cials say that investment pledges and actual money spent rarely match. In the previous fiscal year 2020-21,

Nepal received investment pledges worth Rs32.20 billion for 183 projects and services.

Suresh Shrestha, director of the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Section at the Department of Industry, says foreign direct investment commitments show an increasing trend.

"Investment pledges are coming mostly for small and medium-sized industries." He added that investments had slowed after the minimum was ramped up to Rs50 million.

In May 2019, the government revised the minimum threshold for foreign direct investment from Rs5 million to Rs50 million.

Prompted by shrinking foreign currency reserves, the budget statement for this fiscal year brought down the minimum to Rs20 million

"We have done very little in terms of promoting Nepal as a potential investment destination. We need to publicise our products that have a comparative advantage for investment," Shrestha said.

Shrestha said that credit rating is necessary for a country like Nepal to attract foreign capital. "Credit rating will build trust as political instability spreads concern among potential investors," Shrestha said.

The government has proactively made policy reforms to attract foreign investors, and the budget for the current fiscal year has brought different provisions under foreign direct investment

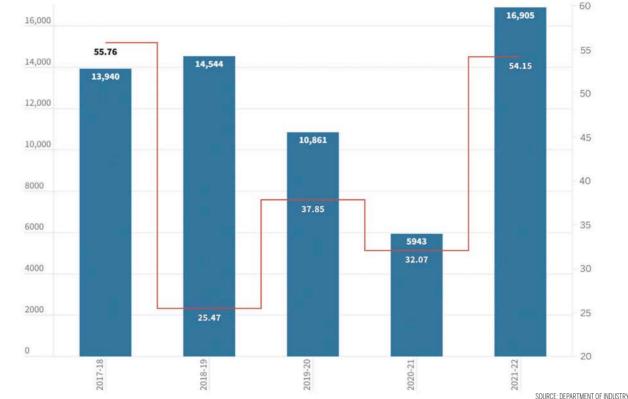
"There is still a problem with the difference in foreign direct investment commitments and actual investments," Shrestha said.

China tops the list of foreign investors in Nepal with investment pledges worth Rs42.72 billion in the last fiscal year, nearly double the previous fiscal year's figure.

In the fiscal year 2020-21, investment pledges from the northern neighbour stood at Rs22.50 billion. Investment pledges from India

jumped to Rs2.48 billion in the last fiscal year from Rs906 million in the

FDI commitment (in Rs billion) Employment generation



previous fiscal year. The financing commitments are for 12 projects.

According to the department's statistics, 125 investment commitments worth Rs19.40 billion have come for tourism projects, almost all of them from China.

The manufacturing sector received 51 foreign investment pledges valued at Rs7.91 billion, and the service sector received 98 pledges amounting to Rs23.74 billion.

The budget has made a few revisions in a bid to attract foreign investment. Arrangements will be made to approve foreign investments of up to Rs100 million through an automated system.

If large investors request foreign investment approvals electronically, an arrangement will be made to provide preliminary approvals within seven days so that pre-preparation work can be done, according to the budget statement.

"The growth in investment commitments is good; but it is still not sufficient, especially in the manufacturing said Dinesh Shrestha, sector," vice-president of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

"Foreign direct investment is still lacking in the manufacturing sector which could help Nepal become less import-dependent. It has become important to bring foreign direct investment in the manufacturing sector," Shrestha said.

"Most foreign direct investors say they are having a hard time getting the facilities offered by the government. Besides, in Nepal, repatriating profits is also difficult," Shrestha said.

"This kind of message will keep away investors. So, it is important for the government to hold discussions with foreign investors once a year and listen to their grievances.

According to the Auditor General's report published last week, Nepal is not receiving foreign direct investment as expected due to policy instability, problems in tax administration, land conflicts, industrial security and raw material issues.

The government opened the One Stop Service Centre in May 2019 to make it easy for investors to receive services relating to waiver, facility and subsidies and essential infrastructure.

"But the centre has not been able to function effectively due to lack of digitisation and full automatisation," the report said.

Nepal lacks strong and effective implementation of intellectual property laws due to which foreign investors hesitate to make investments here, local investors say

Of the 724 complaints filed under the Patent, Design and Trade Mark Act, only 57 cases were resolved while the rest remained pending in the last fiscal year, the report showed.

The current fiscal year's budget has also announced that intellectual property and copyright of the creators will be protected. The process of taking action against intellectual property theft and copyright infringement will be made effective, the budget statement said.

According to the fourth edition of the Industry Status Report published by the Confederation of Nepalese Industries on Monday, no international investor will invest in Nepal if there is currency risk and the reward is less. Hedging is even more critical when it comes to bringing investments into Nepal.

The Hedging Rule didn't attract even a single project because of five major issues: The structure and institutional framework were not clear, the hedging fund was not guaranteed, there was no clarity on which currencies could be hedged, and the tenure of the hedged investments was not stipulated, the report said.

Ukraine grain storage crisis hits home as farmers harvest new crops

REUTERS

KHRESHCHATE (UKRAINE), JULY 19

Ukrainian farmer Mykola Tereshchenko hopes to start harvest ing his wheat fields this week, but the smallholder in northern Ukraine has nowhere to store the grain.

His silos are still crammed full with 1,100 tonnes of grain from last year's harvest that he can't export due to the closure of Ukraine's sea ports following Russia's invasion in February.

While some crops have left by rail or road via neighbours such as Romania and Poland, millions of tonnes have piled up on farms and a lack of shipments from one of the world's biggest grain exporters is pushing up global food prices

The US Department of Agriculture estimated this month that Ukraine ended the 2021/22 season in June with 6.8 million tonnes of corn, an eightfold rise from the a year earlier, while wheat stocks almost quadrupled to 5.8 million. UN agencies have warned that lack of Ukrainian grain, which typically goes to the Middle East and Africa, is threatening starvation and mass migration on an "unprecedented scale'

Farmers such as Tereshchenko, in regions where sending grain via rail or road to eastern Europe is problematic, will have to sell their harvest at a huge loss if they can't store it, leaving less cash to buy seeds, fertilisers and chemicals for next season and exacerbating expected falls in Ukraine's output.

Tereshchenko farms as part of a collective of 30 people near Khreshchate, a village of 700 people some 120 kms (75 miles) from the Russian border that was shelled and bombed during the first month of the war.

The villagers mostly hid in cellars during strikes that destroyed the roofs the farm, Tereshchenko said. Thirty cows and pigs were killed.

Once Russia withdrew to focus on capturing a swathe of Ukraine's east after failing to take the capital Kyiv, sappers combed fields that had been littered with the detritus of war, defusing mines and ordnance. Farmers then went through the fields using tractors to drag rockets out of the soil.

Almost no money has come into the collective, which has only managed to sell some sunflower seeds at very bad prices. "We have our own storage. But it's full with grain that we haven't been able to sell," Tereshchenko told Reuters.

The future of his farming business, and many others in the war-torn country, could now hinge on talks which are expected to continue this week on opening up a sea corridor to allow exports via Ukraine's Black Sea ports

to resume. nopes the sea re but fears what will happen if it doesn't. "For me, personally, this would be the death of all my dreams and plans in life. I'm 60, what else is there?" he said. "For the collective, this is a catastrophe. They'll be without work, without bread. I'm a pensioner, I can hang in there. But for the people, it will be a catastrophe, just a catastrophe." Prices for grain have plunged in Ukraine in recent weeks as farmers try to clear space in their silos for the new harvest. According to the APK-Inform consultancy, the bid price for third-class milling wheat in Ukraine slumped to 3,100-3,400 hryvnias (about \$110) per tonne on July 8 from 7,650 hryvnias (about \$259) in mid-April. "The price of all grain has gone down, and the cost of logistics has gone up so much that it just destroys everything-the farmer has no more income," a foreign grain trader who works in Ukraine said.

Indian rupee breaches 80 per dollar, hits new record low

The projects are scheduled to be installed within a span of 3 years and can generate 4,000 tonnes of hydrogen annually.

POST REPORT

KATHMANDU, JULY 19

Api Power Company and New Delhibased GreenZo Energy have signed a memorandum of understanding to develop green hydrogen plants of capacity totalling 50MW in different parts of Nepal.

According to Indian media reports, Api Power will be investing Rs16 billion in the projects. The company has proposed to build hydrogen projects at its existing sites of hydro and solar projects at including Bardeghat, locations Chanauta, Kawasoti, Dhalkebar, Parwanipur, Simara and Chandranigahpur.

These projects are scheduled to be installed within a span of three years or by 2025 and can generate 4,000 tonnes of hydrogen annually, according to the reports.

"The work on establishing the hydrogen plant will begin in 2023," Guru Neupane, founder of Api Power, told the Post.

He said that they aim to produce hydrogen which could be used in various industries including cement and ice cream making.

"We also plan to set up a fertiliser plant in Nepal for which hydrogen is needed substantially while nitrogen is taken from the air, he added.

plant, according to The Neupane, is the first of its kind in Nepal which will fracture water into hydrogen and oxygen and hydrogen will be collected. "We will use surplus electricity from power plants," he added.

"We are excited and looking forward to working on a common dream to decarbonise the planet," said Shreya Agarwal, who leads the Strategy and Operations part of GreenZo Energy.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MUMBAI, JULY 19

The Indian rupee fell to more than 80 per US dollar for the first time on record Tuesday, as the greenback extended its rally and foreign capital outflows intensified.

The rupee hit 80.0600 against the US dollar in early trade, Bloomberg data showed, before paring losses on suspected central bank intervention to close at 79.9487.

High inflation and rising interest rates in the United States coupled with fears of an impending recession in the world's biggest economy have fuelled a broad dollar rally in recent weeks as investors become increasingly risk-averse.

Tighter US monetary policy has exacerbated outflows from emerging markets such as India, where foreign investors have withdrawn a net \$31 billion in debt and equity this year.



Data released last week showed that US consumer price inflation hit a fresh four-decade high in June, exceeding market forecasts and stoking expectations of another large Federal Reserve rate hike next week

In a written statement to the Indian parliament on Monday, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman attributed the rupee's sharp fall to external

"Global factors such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, soaring crude oil prices and tightening of global financial conditions are the major reasons for the weakening of the Indian Rupee against the US dollar," she said.

At the same time, the Indian currency has strengthened against the British pound, the Japanese yen and the euro in 2022 so far, Sitharaman added. But higher crude prices have resulted in a deteriorating trade balance in a country that imports 80 percent of its oil.

China's Tianjin halts some businesses in fresh Covid curbs

REUTERS

SHANGHAI/BEIJING, JULY 19

A handful of Covid-19 infections have forced the northern Chinese port city of Tianjin to shut many entertainment venues and some kindergartens and tutoring agencies, the latest big city to fight nascent clusters.

Tianjin, with a population of over 12 million and home to factories linked to Boeing and Volkswagen, reported 11 domestically transmitted infections for Monday after around a week of zero cases, official data showed on Tuesday.

Tianjin Port Co Ltd, which manages the port's cargo loading and unloading businesses, is operating normally, a representative said on Tuesday.

Caseloads for Tianjin and the rest of China have been low in the global context for over two years, but China has maintained a "dynamic zero Covid" policy of containing outbreaks as soon as they emerge, even though its strict measures in response to the highly transmissible Omicron variant have disrupted local businesses and

clouded the outlook for the world's second-largest economy.

Tianjin officials said late on Monday that various indoor entertainment venues, such as chess and card parlours and bars, in two districts with a total of over 2 million residents were ordered to close, without specifying a date for their reopening.

One of the districts said it also ordered a three-day closure at kindergartens and tutoring agencies.

Nomura analysts said in a note on Monday that an estimated 264.1 million people in 41 cities in China are affected by full or partial lockdowns or other control measures, up from 247.5 million in 31 cities last week.

Including Tianjin's cases, mainland China reported 699 new domestically transmitted infections for July 18, of which 199 were symptomatic and 500 were asymptomatic, the National Health Commission said on Tuesday.

The majority of Monday's new cases were found in the northwestern province of Gansu and the southern region of Guangxi.

In Gansu's provincial capital of

Lanzhou, a district with over 100,000 residents entered a lockdown from Monday, during which each household can leave their residential compound only once each day to get groceries. A lockdown for four other major districts with around 3 million people started last week and has been extended to July 24. In Guangxi, the coastal city of Beihai, currently clocking over 700 local cases, has become the latest tourism city hit by travel restrictions.

Beihai has told hotels and travel agencies to fully refund trips and stays booked by those who were eventually unable to come, reversing a pre-outbreak boom in demand.

It is also rushing to take care of over 2,000 tourists stuck in the city, some of whom had come in close contact with infections or visited areas affected by the virus and couldn't leave without going through quarantine. Tourists who are able to leave have to show negative test results within the previous 48 hours.

The financial hub Shanghai, which reported 23 new local cases for Monday, began mass testing on Tuesday in many of its 16 districts, after a similar testing drive last week.

There were no new deaths, leaving the nation's fatalities at 5,226.

As of Monday, mainland China had confirmed 227,830 cases with symptoms, including both local cases and infected international travellers.



A medical worker in a protective suit collects a swab from a resident for nucleic acid testing at a makeshift testing site for Covid-19.

WORLD

BRIEFING

Sunak tops Tory MPs' latest vote as race narrows to three

LONDON: Britain's former finance minister Rishi Sunak again topped the latest vote by Conservative MPs to choose a new prime minister, as another candidate was eliminated to leave three contenders in the race. Sunak garnered 118 votes, followed by former defence minister Penny Mordaunt on 92 and Foreign Secretary Liz Truss on 86, with longshot candidate Kemi Badenoch trailing on 59 and therefore eliminat ed from the contest. The vote means that Britain will get either its first British Asian prime minister or the third female leader in the country's history. Sunak, whose resignation helped to topple outgoing leader Boris Johnson, fell two votes short of the number needed to guarantee a place among the final two, who will battle it out over the summer before party members choose the winner. He is all but guaranteed to make the final cut in Wednesday's last round of voting by MPs.

EU moves to unblock Russian bank funds to boost food trade

BRUSSELS: The EU is preparing to carve out exceptions in its tough sanctions against Moscow that would unblock assets at Russian banks linked to trade in food and fertiliser, a document showed on Tuesday. Member countries "want to make it abundantly clear that there is nothing in the sanctions that is slowing the transport of grain out of Russia or Ukraine," an EU diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity. The EU's proposal is part of the bloc's lat est sanction update that is being negotiated by member states. It will require unanimous approval to enter into force. The derogation would be available to banks already blacklisted by EU sanctions when, according to the draft plan, "such funds or economic resources are necessary for the purchase, import or transport of agricultural and food products, including wheat and fertilisers". It comes as Brussels battles Moscow's allegations that Western sanctionsand not its invasion of Ukraine-are causing a global food crisis.

Microsoft launches 'sovereign' cloud for governments

STOCKHOLM: Microsoft on Tuesday launched a public cloud for government customers, offering greater control over their data, and has signed up Italian defence group Leonardo and Belgian telecoms firm Proximus as partners. The Covid-19 pandemic has sparked a digital transformation in many public sector organisations, and Microsoft expects to use its

"Cloud for Sovereignty" to better compete with rivals such as Amazon Web Services and Alphabet's Google. The size of the global government cloud market is expected to reach \$71.2 billion by 2027 from \$27.6 billion in 2021, according to market research firm Imarc Group. "We do expect cus tomers around the world ... but the

Britain breaks its record for highest temperature

The typically temperate nation is the latest to be walloped by unusually hot, dry weather that has gripped Europe since last week, triggering wildfires.

ASSOCIATED PRESS LONDON, JULY 19

Britain shattered its record for high est temperature ever registered on Tuesday amid a heat wave that has seized swaths of Europe-and the national weather forecaster predicted it would get hotter still in a country ill prepared for such extremes

The typically temperate nation was just the latest to be walloped by unusually hot, dry weather that has gripped the continent since last week, triggering wildfires from Portugal to the Balkans and leading to hundreds of heat-related deaths. Images of flames racing toward a French beach and Britons sweltering-even at the seaside-have driven home concerns about climate change.

The UK Met Office registered a provisional reading of 40.2 degrees Celsius (104.4 degrees Fahrenheit) at Heathrow Airport-breaking the

record set just an hour earlier. Before Tuesday, the highest temperature recorded in Britain was 38.7 C (101.7 F), a record set in 2019.

The nation watched the mercury rise with a combination of horror and fascination. With several hours of intense sunlight ahead, the record could go even higher.

"Temperatures are likely to rise further through today," the forecaster said after the first record fell.

The sweltering weather has disrupted travel, health care and schools in a country not prepared for such extremes. A huge chunk of England, from London in the south to Manchester and Leeds in the north, remained under the country's first "red" warning for extreme heat on Tuesday, meaning there is danger of death even for healthy people.

London streets saw less traffic, as many heeded advice to stay out of the sun, and trains ran at low speed out of

and Italy, according to Copernicus.

Scientists now warn that, while the

situation is likely to ease across the

Iberian Peninsula, very high surface

ozone levels are now being seen in

areas of northern and western parts

of the continent as temperatures rise.

are forecast to peak in the next few

can lead to sore throats, coughing,

headaches and an increased risk of

that ozone pollution causes approxi-

mately one million additional deaths

Ozone is also a key concern for agri-

In January, researchers estimated

that persistently high levels of ozone

pollution in Asia are costing China,

Japan and South Korea an estimated

\$63 billion annually in lost rice, wheat

and maize crops. (AFP)

cultural regions and food security.

days, before easing.

asthma attacks

per year

The ozone levels in these regions

Parrington said high surface ozone

The Clean Air Alliance estimates



A view shows a wildfire burning from the Valmediano eolic park, on the second heatwave of the year, in Spain, on Tuesday

which has a glass-roofed atrium planned to shut its doors early. And the Supreme Court closed to visitors after a problem with the air conditioning forced it to move hearings online.

Many public buildings, including hospitals, don't even have air conditioning, a reflection of how unusual such extreme heat is in the country better known for rain and mild temperatures

The capital's Hyde Park, normally busy with walkers, was eerily quietexcept for the long lines to take a dip in the park's Serpentine lake.

"I'm going to my office because it is nice and cool," said geologist Tom Elliott, 31, after taking a swim. "I'm cycling around instead of taking the Tube.'

London's King's Cross Station, one of the country's busiest rail hubs, was empty on Tuesday, with no trains on the typically bustling east coast line connecting the capital to the north and Scotland. London's Luton Airport

Protesters' target is favourite for Sri Lanka presidency

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE COLOMBO, JULY 19

A veteran politician backed by the party of ousted Sri ankan president G favourite to replace him, analysts said after nominations closed Tuesday. Ranil Wickremesinghe is a six-time former prime minister who became acting president after Rajapaksa resigned, but is despised by the protesters who forced his predecessor from office. Wickremesinghe, 73, has the formal backing of the Rajapaksas' SLPP, the largest bloc in the 225-member parliament that will elect the president on Wednesday.

closed its runway for several hours on Monday because of heat damage.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said Britain's transport infrastructure, some of it dating from Victorian times, "just wasn't built to withstand this type of temperature-and it will be many years before we can replace infrastructure with the kind of infrastructure that could."

The dangers of extreme heat were on display in Britain and around Europe. At least six people were reported to have drowned across the U.K. in rivers, lakes and reservoirs while trying to cool off.

Meanwhile, nearly 750 heat-related deaths have been reported in Spain and neighbouring Portugal in the heat wave there.

The highest temperature previously recorded in Britain was 38.7 C (101.7 F), a record set in 2019. Tuesday's reading was provisional, which means they are produced as near to real time as possible with final readings issued after data quality-control, the Met Office said.

The head of the UN weather agency expressed hope that the heat would serve as a "wake-up call" for governments and voters to do more on climate change. World Meteorological Organisation Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said that heat waves were only expected to increase.

Climate experts warn that global warming has increased the frequency of extreme weather events, with studies showing that the likelihood of temperatures in the UK reaching 40 C (104 F) is now 10 times higher than in the pre-industrial era. In fact, that once unthinkable mark looked possibleeven likely—on Tuesday.

"This record temperature is a harbinger of things to come," said Bob Ward of the Grantham Research Institute at the London School of Economics. "The increase in the frequency and intensity of heat waves and other extreme weather events is the result of climate change, and these impacts will continue to grow" unless the world drastically reduces emissions.

Putin in Iran for Syria summit overshadowed by Ukraine war

pollution, 'extreme' fire risk Peninsula and parts of northern Italy. PARIS: Europe's searing heatwave is Daily maximum levels of surface generating very high levels of harmful ozone pollution, the region's ozone, which normally peaks during atmospheric monitoring service the middle of the day, reached unhealthy levels in Portugal, Spain

Europe heat sparks harmful ozone

warned on Tuesday, adding that large areas of western Europe also face "extreme" danger of wildfires.

The heatwave is also causing high levels of ground-level ozone, the Copernicus monitoring service said.

Unlike the protective layer in the upper atmosphere, this is a major greenhouse gas and component of urban smog that harms human health and inhibits photosynthesis in plants.

"The potential impacts of very high ozone pollution on human health can be considerable both in terms of respiratory and cardio-vascular illness,' said Mark Parrington, Senior Scientist from the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service.

Ozone is formed as emissions from fossil fuels and other man-made pollutants react in the presence of sunlight and Copernicus said cutting emissions of these pollutants is "crucial"

Scientists have already detected "extremely high surface ozone pollution" across western and southern Europe, particularly over the Iberian

Twitter, Musk square off over bid for fast-track trial

REUTERS DELAWARE JULY 19

Twitter Inc began making its case on Tuesday for a September trial over its lawsuit seeking to hold Elon Musk to his \$44 billion takeover, saying

tested positive on Monday for Covid-19. The San Francisco-based company is seeking to resolve months of uncertainty for its business as Musk tries to walk away from the deal over what he says are Twitter's "spam" accounts that he

says are fundamental to its value.

concern rails could buckle, or did not run at all. The British Museum-

rst few customers have been in Europe," corporate vice president Corey Sanders said in an interview, adding that the company is conducting private previews with customers. The European Union has been at the forefront of privacy and security legislation. (Agencies)

uncertainty MUSK'S DIA TO walk away was harming the company.

"The continued uncertainty inflicts harm to Twitter every hour of every day," said William Savitt, an attorney for Twitter, at the hearing being conducted remotely after the judge, Chancellor Kathaleen McCormick,

JOB VACANCY

SHL Management Services (KTM) Pvt. Ltd. is a company engaged in the leisure, entertainment and hospitality industry. It is involved in the management and operation of casinos. Currently, it manages and operates The Millionaires Club and Casino in the premises of Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat, Kathmandu and another casino in the premises of Tiger Palace Resort, Bhairahawa

SHL Management Services (KTM) Pvt. Ltd. invites application from highly motivated personnel for the following posts:

1. Casino General Manager - 1 Position

- Experience: 10 Years plus in an executive management role. Experience in an internationally recognized casino operation with demonstrable knowledge in the field of gaming operations, tables games and electronic gaming machines, casino marketing programs and gaming surveillance systems.
- Scope Of Work: Responsible for the overall management of the casino operation department including P&L and accountability with audit responsibilities.
- Knowledge Transfer: Take ownership of staff development training and management, creating a high performing, effective and customer focused team.
- Language: Excellent English written, and oral communication skill is essential and be able to effectively present information before committees, outside functions and employees.
- Workplace: Kathmandu or Bhairahawa.
- Salary Range: Negotiable

2. Electronic Machine (Expert) - 1 Position

- Experience: 10+ years in a related field. Most have at least 4 years' experience at senior level in Electronic Gaming Machine and slot repair and maintenance in the gaming industry
- Scope of Work: Troubleshoots repairs and maintains improperly functioning gaming equipment, slot machines and fiber optics. Performs moves, installs, overhauls and configures slot machines as directed by management, performs preventive maintenance to ensure maximum machine performance, moves and installs gaming devices as needs.
- Knowledge Transfer: Take ownership of staff development training and management, creating a high performing, effective and customer focused team.
- Language: Must be able to communicate in English and knowledge of any other languages would be an added benefit.
- Salary: Negotiable.
- Workplace: Bhairahawa

Preference will be given to Nepalese Citizens. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted for an interview/test.

Remuneration will be commensurate with qualification and experience. Interested and qualified candidates having specified qualifications and experiences are encouraged to send their applications, resumes, and supporting documents by 28th July 2022

HR Department SHL Management Services (KTM) Pvt. Ltd. Email: recruitment.hrnepal@silverheritage.com.au

rwitter McCormick Delaware's Court of Chancery to find Musk breached the merger agreement and to order him to complete the merger at the agreed price of \$54.20 per share. Twitter wants an expedited trial because it said Musk is smearing Twitter and undermining operations by

refusing to approve business initiatives, such as employee retention. The company said adopting Musk's "slow walk" proposal for a 2023 trial leaves little time for additional litigation over deal financing if Musk is ordered to close.

माटरसाईकल हरायो मिति २०७९/०३/३० गते नयाँ

बसपार्कबाट बा.प्रदेश ०२-०३५ प द०४४ नं. को २२०CC को कालो रातो रंगको पल्सर मोटरसाईकल हराएको हँदा पाउनु हुने महानुभावले नजिकको प्रहरी कार्यालय वा फोन नं. ९८४०२६९३४८ मा खबर गरिदिनु हुन अनुरोध गर्दछु सवारी धनीः विक्रम गुरुङ च्यासिस नं.: MD2A13X5MCJ99683 इन्जिन नं.: DKXCMJ33787

World Food Programme Programme Alimentaire Mondial Programa Mundial de Alimentos

برنامج الأغذية العالمي

WFP

His main opponent will be SLPP dissident and former education minister Dullas Alahapperuma, who is being supported by the opposition.

The winner of the three-way contest will take charge of a bankrupt nation that is in talks with the IMF for a bailout, with its 22 million people enduring severe shortages of food, fuel and medicine.

Sri Lanka ran out of foreign exchange to finance even the most vital imports in a crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic but exacerbated by mismanagement, critics say.

Months of protests culminated in Rajapaksa fleeing his palace before flying to the Maldives and then Singapore, from where he submitted his resignation.

As acting president, Wickremesinghe has extended a state of emergency that gives police and security forces sweeping powers, and last week he ordered troops to evict protesters from state buildings they had occupied.

An opposition MP said Wickremesinghe's hardline stance against demonstrators was going down well with MPs who had been at the receiving end of mob violence, and most SLPP legislators would side with him.

"Ranil is emerging as the law-and-order candidate," Tamil MP Dharmalingam Sithadthan told AFP.

SAVING

CHANGING

LIVES

LIVES

Vacancy Announcement WFP Nepal CO

"Qualified Female applicants and people with disabilities are encouraged to apply"

Position/Duty Station/ Number of Post	Contract Type	Grade	VA ID	VA Closing Date			
Human Resources Assistant (Talent Acquisition and Digital tools)/ KTM/ 1 post	Fixed Term (FT)	GS-5	169082	28 July 2022			

Visit http://www1.wfp.org/careers/job-openings to apply.

Create an account or update profile and CV in WFP e-Recruitment system before applying.

Please note that postings expire at 11:59 pm at the end of the selected expiry.

Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.

The organization reserves the right to cancel or postpone the whole recruitment process without providing any reasons whatsoever. No telephone enquires will be entertained.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE TEHRAN, JULY 19

Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Tehran for talks on Tuesday on the Syrian war at a three-way summit overshadowed by fallout from his country's war on Ukraine.

Putin travelled abroad for only the second time since ordering the invasion of Ukraine in order to attend the gathering that also involves Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The summit comes days after US President Joe Biden visited the Middle East for the first time in his presidency, with stops in Iran's regional foes Israel and Saudi Arabia.

It is the first hosted by Iran's ultra-conservative president Ebrahim Raisi since he took office last year and is ostensibly aimed at ending more than 11 years of conflict in Syria.

All three are involved in the conflict, with Iran and Russia supporting Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and Turkey backing rebel forces.

Ahead of the trilateral meeting, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei met Erdogan, who has repeatedly threatened to launch a new military offensive against Kurdish militants in northern Syria.

Khamenei warned the Turkish leader that such a move would be "detrimental" for the region and called for the issue to be resolved through dialogue between Ankara, Damascus, Moscow and Tehran.

Erdogan, speaking later at a joint news conference with his Iranian counterpart, said Kurdish militias caused "great trouble" for both Iran and Turkey.

'We should fight against these terrorist organisations in solidarity and alliance," he added.

The presidents also oversaw the signing of a number of agreements in different fields, including in trade and economy. Erdogan has for months been offering to meet Putin in a bid to help resolve heightened global tensions.

"The timing of this summit is not a coincidence," Russian analyst Vladimir Sotnikov said. "Turkey wants to conduct a 'special operation' in Syria just as Russia is implementing a 'special operation' in Ukraine.'

Turkey has launched waves of attacks on Syria since 2016, targeting Kurdish militias as well as Islamic State group jihadists and Assad loyalists.

In their talks, Putin and Erdogan would discuss mechanisms to export grain from Ukraine, a Kremlin source said. Russia's war on Ukraine has massively hampered shipments from one of the world's biggest exporters of wheat and other grain, sparking fears of global food shortages. Turkey-a NATO member on speaking terms with both Russia and Ukraine-has spearheaded efforts to resume the grain deliveries.

Ultimately, Erdogan is hoping to get "the green light" from Putin and Raisi for Turkey's military operation in Syria, said Sinan Ulgen, a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warned on Monday that Russia's blockade of Ukrainian ports threatens supplies to countless thousands vulnerable to starvation.

Borrell dubbed the issue "one of life and death for many human beings".

SPORTS | MEDLEY

BRIEFING

MIS U-16 team to play football tournament in Denmark

KATHMANDU: An U-16 boys' team of Modern Indian School (MIS), Kathmandu, are set to compete in Dana Cup football tournament in Denmark set to be held in Hjorring from July 25 to 30. According to MIS, 93 football teams from different countries will compete in the boys' category. Altogether 18 players from the MIS will travel to Denmark accompanied by team manager Naresh Rawal and coach Prashant Maharjan. The tournament will be held in the league cum knockout format. The team is set to fly on July 24 and scheduled to return on August 1. (SB)

Stokes hopes early ODI retirement prolongs career CHESTER-LE-STREET (UNITED KINGDOM):

Ben Stokes said on Tuesday he was retiring from one-day internationals earlier than planned as the England Test captain hopes it will prolong his career into his mid-30s. Stokes was a central figure in England's 2019 World Cup final triumph, their greatest moment in 50-over cricket. But the all-rounder is making his 105th and final ODI appearance against South Africa on Tuesday—a match taking place at his Durham home ground. Before his farewell match, 32-year-old Stokes reiterated his warning about England's gruelling schedule. Tuesday's game comes midway through an England programme of 12 white-ball fixtures in 25 days this month, with the Test team playing seven matches this season. "The schedule for me feels unsustainable," Stokes told Sky Sports News shortly before Tuesday's toss. (AFP)

Shafique ton drives Pakistan's record chase

Chasing 342-run target, Pakistan are 222-3 at stumps on fourth day at Galle where the highest fourth-innings chase is 268.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE GALLE, JULY 19

Opener Abdullah Shafique hit a gritty century to keep Pakistan in the hunt to chase down a victory target of 342 in the opening Test against Sri Lanka on Tuesday.

Pakistan ended day four on 222-3, still needing 120 runs to take the lead in the two-match series at Galle, where the highest successful fourth-innings chase is 268 by Sri Lanka against New Zealand in 2019.

Shafique, batting on 112, and skipper Babar Azam, who made 55, put together 101 runs for the third wicket but spinner Prabath Jayasuriya broke through just a few overs before the close of play. Jayasuriya bowled talisman Azam with his left-arm spin around the batsman's legs with a delivery that spun sharply from outside leg to rattle the stumps of the right-hander, who looked visibly shocked.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Rizwan was batting on seven at stumps alongside Shafique, who had so far faced 289 balls and hit five boundaries and one six.

Pakistan began strongly with a 87-run partnership between Shafique and fellow opener Imam-ul-Haq, who made 35, but an alert stumping from wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella broke the stand. The left-handed Imam missed a delivery from off-spinner Ramesh Mendis and Dickwella clipped off the bails, with the decision going up to the third umpire. After different TV angles it was established that Imam's foot was just millimetres off the ground when the bails were dislodged

Azhar Ali was the next to go when



Pakistan's Abdullah Shafique (right) and captain Babar Azam shared a 101-run partnership for the third wicket in the first Test match against Sri Lanka at the Galle International Cricket Stadium on Tuesday.

he edged a ball from Jayasuriya to first slip. He made six off 32 deliveries.

Azam, who hit a defiant 119 in Pakistan's first-innings total of 218, then joined Shafique as the two rebuilt the innings on a turning pitch. Azam reached his fifty and two balls later Shafique got his second Test hundred with a single off Maheesh Theekshana,

raising his bat to a standing ovation from the dressing room.

Azam, who crossed 10,000 international runs on day two and averages over 45, went past 3,000 Test runs during another stubborn knock.

Jayasuriya, who claimed a five-wicket haul in the previous innings, kept up the pressure with his turners and sliders. Sri Lanka took the second new ball in the 81st over but the spinners kept up the attack in the final few

In the morning, Sri Lanka resumed the day on 329-9 in their second innings. Dinesh Chandimal was stranded on 94 when they were all out for 337.

tense overs of the day.



The United States beat Canada 1-0 in the CONCACAF W Championship final in Mexico on Monday and secured a place for 2024 Paris Olympics. Alex Morgan scored the decisive goal from penalty spot in the 78th minute.

Asian Games in September next year

Originally scheduled for September this year, the Games were postponed due to Covid.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

China will host the 2022 Asian Games in autumn 2023, organisers said on Tuesday, after postponing the event in

Hangzhou because of Covid-19. The Games were originally scheduled for September this year, but organisers postponed them in May as China tried to stamp out a large Covid resurgence in several parts of the country. The event will now be held in Hangzhou from September 23 to October 8 2023, the Olympic Council

of Asia (OCA) said. Hangzhou lies less than 200 kilometres from the country's biggest city Shanghai, which endured a monthslong lockdown earlier this year as part of the ruling Communist Party's zero-tolerance approach to the virus.

The OCA said on Tuesday that the new dates were chosen to avoid "conflict with other major international sporting events"

The Hangzhou organising committee vowed to "present a wonderful and marvellous sports and cultural event with Chinese characteristics", in a statement confirming the new dates. China is the last major economy committed to stamping out domestic spread of the virus through harsh lockdowns, mass testing and strict controls on international travel.

But that has hurt the country's international sporting ambitions, with the world's most populous nation cancelling or postponing almost all events since the start of the pandemic, with the exception of this year's Winter Olympics in Beijing. The World University Games, scheduled to begin in June in Chengdu and already delayed from last year, have also been postponed again, until 2023. The Asian Games typically attract over 10,000 athletes from across the region.

Organisers said in April that Hangzhou, a city of 12 million in eastern China, had finished constructing 56 competition venues for the Asian Games and Asian Para Games. Hangzhou will be the third city in China to host the continental competition after Beijing in 1990 and Guangzhou in 2010.

Some events are also expected to be held in other provincial cities including Ningbo, Wenzhou, Huzhou, Shaoxing and Jinhua.

Almost all international sport has ground to a halt in China since Covid emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019.

Belgium through to quarter-finals, Iceland crash out after France draw

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MANCHESTER, JULY 19

Belgium secured the last spot in the Euro 2022 quarter-finals as Tina De Caigny's goal beat Italy 1-0 in sweltering temperatures in Manchester on Monday.

The Hoffenheim striker's predatory finish early in the second half made sure of second place in Group 'B' behind France to set up a last eight meeting with Sweden on Friday

Despite scoring a late penalty, a 1-1 draw for Iceland against a muchchanged France was not enough for them to progress as they became the first side to bow out of a women's Euro from the group stage unbeaten.

In just their second ever major tournament, Belgium reached the knockout phase for the first time to round off a miserable few weeks for Italy.

"This is a historic night for Belgian women's football," said Belgium coach Ives Serneels. "This might be the best moment yet. It has been a long time in the making. I've been with the Belgian women's national team for 11 years now, so I'm ecstatic that we're going to the quarter-finals."

Hopes had been high for the Azzurre iven Juventus' promising run in the Champions League last season and the upcoming professionalisation of the women's Serie A.

However, they failed to recover from shipping five goals in the first half to France in their opening game.

That 5-1 defeat meant Italy needed to win to progress due to their inferior goal difference to both Belgium and Iceland.

Chances were few and far between in a first half affected by the conditions with temperatures reaching 36 degrees celsius as a heatwave hit Britain on Monday.

Belgium got the goal just four minutes into the second half when a freekick into the Italian box fell at the feet of De Caigny to sweep home her 38th international goal

In Rotherham, France did enough to see off Iceland's hopes of reaching the quarter-finals, whilst still keeping plenty in reserve for their last eight clash with holders the Netherlands on Saturday. A serious knee injury to Marie-Antoinette Katoto that has ended her tournament gave Melvine Malard the chance to start up front.

The Lyon striker took less than a minute to open the scoring when she slotted Clara Mateo's pass into the far corner. France had two further goals from Malard and substitute Grace Geyoro ruled out after VAR reviews.

And another controversial VAR call gifted Iceland a penalty with the lastkick of the game. Dagny Brynjarsdottir smashed the spot-kick into the top corner, but it was too late for Iceland.

HOROSCOPE

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) ***

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) ****

CANCER (June 22-July 22) ***



could get off to a rocky start. Luckily, the vibe will feel more stable, just in time for your afternoon break. However, it's unlikely that you'll find yourself in a social mood. It could also trigger insecure thought patterns

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) ***



You may feel a bit out of sorts. You'll begin to feel more like yourself after a while. The day might distract you with unwelcome emotions, especially if you're sleep deprived with low energy levels. Pull away with positive mantras.

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



Try not to prioritize the needs of others before your own today. Use this luminary placement as an opportunity to connect with your senses and find ways to exist in the present without overthinking your circumstances

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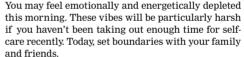
You may feel as though you're at the tail end of a marathon. Though you may find yourself scrambling to stay on task, you'll have an opportunity to slow down. Try not to push others into sharing their thoughts and feelings.

LEO (July 23-August 22) ***

Though you'll feel inspired to greet the day with gusto, watch out for disorganization and errors. Try not to rush your progress right now, keeping a close eye on your stress levels and mood. Slow down and smell the roses

VIRGO (August 23-September 22) ****

Today's skies brings an abundance of cosmic support your way. These vibes are poised to elevate your intuition, helping you commune with your higher power. Today, be mindful to appreciate the subtle moments of beauty



SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) ***

Take care to handle your responsibilities and to-do list early today. You won't be in the mood to focus on work, as the skies encourage you to embrace harmony and luxury. Try to cut out some time for quiet meditation later.

You may need to give others their space today.

Though your intentions may be honorable, your

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) ***

to focus on your own agenda



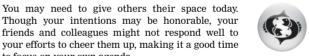
You may feel a bit emotionally on edge today. Do you best to process your feelings as they come, but avoid taking them out on others. This luminary placement will also ask your ego to come out and play, try not to brag too much.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) ***



Be careful with your words this morning as it may cause you to inadvertently reveal too much about yourself. This cosmic climate will ask you to find the present, connecting with your heart and the world that surrounds you.

PISCES (February 19-March 20) ***



SUDOKU

Try not to rush through your morning. Today's skies could leave you feeling tense or stressed out. However, a helping hand will provide you with an opportunity to blow off some steam by spending time with your best buds.

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE



The Chainsmokers arrive on day one of Maxim Big Game Weekend in February in Los Angeles.

The Chainsmokers to perform at the edge of space

Drew Taggart and Alex Pall have signed up to get into a capsule and perform some 20 miles above the Earth.

MARK KENNEDY

ne of The Chainsmokers' latest hits is "High", and they're hoping to live up to their lyrics. The hit-making duo of Drew Taggart and Alex Pall have signed up to get into a pressurised capsule tethered to a stratospheric balloon in a few years and perform some 20 miles above the Earth.

The feat would make Taggart and Pall the first musical artists to perform at the edge of space, said Ryan Hartman, chief executive officer at

The Chainsmokers have had five Top 10 Billboard Hot 100 hits.

fledgling space tourism company World View, to The Associated Press.

World View says The Chainsmokers will be on one of the company's inaugural flights slated for 2024 and will record a performance from inside the capsule, giving viewers the ability to experience the music and the trip firsthand

"We have always dreamed of going to space and are stoked to collaborate with World View to have this adventure and experience," said The Chainsmokers in a statement. "We know the views of both Earth and space are going to be incredible and inspiring, and we hope to leverage this flight for creativity on future projects.'

The Chainsmokers have had five Top 10 Billboard Hot 100 hits, including "Closer", "Paris", "Don't Let Me Down", and "Something Just Like This" with Coldplay in 2017.

Hartman said that while most of the people who have made space flights are scientists and engineers, World View hopes sending up artists might "inspire them to do something different than they would have otherwise done."

"We think about inspiring new perspectives and how those new perspectives can lead to a radically improved future for our Earth," said Hartman. "To be able to reach the audience of The Chainsmokers through Alex and Drew's work contributes to our mission as well. It's something that I'm personally inspired by and excited about.

World View is part of a new wave of private space exploration firms offering seats to the public, a list that includes Blue Origin, Virgin Galactic and SpaceX. Each World View balloon capsule is planned to seat eight passengers and reach a peak altitude of 100,000 feet (30,480 metres). Each flight will last six to 12 hours.

Picking The Chainsmokers for the honour was, in part, a personal decision as well as an attempt to excite a younger audience. Hartman said he watched as his youngest son belted out lyrics from the duo's songs and was inspired by the band's popularity. He explained the flight to the pair over dinner.

"I have just seen firsthand and personally how their music reaches a lot of different groups, a lot of different age groups and just how passionate they are about their music and their art. It matches our passion for what we do," he said.

- Associated Press

Jordan Peele on the dreams and nightmares of 'Nope'

The movie brings a new set of horrors and unsettling metaphors.

here's little in contemporary movies quite like the arrival of a new Jordan Peele film. They tend to descend ominously and mysteriously, a little like an unknown object from above that casts an expanding, dark ening shadow the closer it comes "Nope," the writer-director's third film, is nearly here. After Peele's singular debut, "Get Out," about the possession of Black bodies and the fallacy of post-racial America, and his follow-up, "Us," a monstrous tale of doppelgangers and societal mirrors, the "Nope" closely-kept-under-wraps brings a new set of horrors and unsettling metaphors. For Peele, who writes through shooting and considers the conversation generated by a movie one of its main ingredients, "Nope" is far from a finished project. "Movie's done," Peele said in a recent interview. "I'm still writing it."

Actor Daniel Kaluuya (left) and writer/director Jordan Peele on the set of 'Nope'

rider. To you, what does it mean that the erasure of Black men was there at the foundation of cinema?

It's a sad part of this industry. It was something I was learning at a good point for myself in this story. I felt like five, 10 years ago, I would never have been able to sell this movie to anyone. So I'm juxtaposing this origin story of film at the same time I'm trying to make a story that's scary and joyous and adventurous and everything I love about film. It just felt very fitting for that starting point to be acknowledged and have ancestral implications for our main characters.

Do you think of your movie as like an antidote to that film?

Yes. I've been trying to put that together. It's a sequel, it's an antidote, it's a reboot, it's an answer to the way films began and have continued.

Why do you think in writing "Nope" your thoughts went back to the beginning of the film?

Part of the world of "Nope" is flirting with real Hollywood and the Hollywood that takes place in my liminal dreams and nightmares. In real life, of the prominent Hollywood horse trainers, there's not an African American one I'm representing. The Haywoods are a very made-up family and notion. It was fun to weave the Hollywood fiction with reality and try and make a seamless immersion into what's real and what's not.

Since seeing your film, clouds have taken on a sinister appearance to me. What led you to build your film around that image of an unmoving cloud?

The beauty of the sky is enthrallingthe first movies, in a way. Every now and then, you'll see a cloud that sits alone and is too low, and it gives me this vertigo and this sense of Presence with a capital P. I can't describe it, but I knew if I could bottle that and put it into a horror movie, it might change the way people look at the sky.

When the US government declassified video of Navy pilots encountering unexplained aircraft-something your movie references-how did you react? Were you affected by those images?

I was. It made it very real, very much in the moment. It's one of the reasons, I guess, I can proudly say this movie is based on a true story. But what was most nerve-wracking or scary to me about the whole thing is that you'd like to think that when actual video proof of UFOs comes out that something would change in our lifestyle, not it's really business as usual. It just proves that there is a desensitisation to the spectacle. We're addicted, and we're in over our heads with this addiction. We have proof of UFOs or UAPs (unidentified aerial phenomena), but the interest of the major public goes so far. It's very interesting.

How focused are you on crafting your own films from the bottom up?

Nothing is more rewarding than being able to lead the charge on something that comes from somewhere deep, and to get the support of a team on something like that. I feel like if I were working off of someone else's property, I would owe something to someone else. Besides that core piece of inspiration, it just doesn't seem as fun to me.

After "Get Out," you suggested you would embark on a series of genre films that grapple with big societal issues. Three films in, where are you in that project?

I feel like I'm off to the races. I just don't know if I could limit how many films I have that are me. I'm starting to lose sight of what I would be doing if I wasn't doing movies like this. So I would say the project has been extended

JAKE COYLE NFW YORK

It's Peele's most ambitious film yet, a

flying saucer horror that digs into the

nature of spectacle and the desire to

document it-a multithreaded theme

that encompasses Hollywood history

and "Nope," itself. Daniel Kaluuya and

Keke Palmer star as a brother and sister in a family horse wrangling busi-

ness for film productions. Their

California ranch is visited by a strange

and violent force in the clouds that

"Nope," which opens in theatres on

Friday, also extends Peele's own

self-conjured mythology. His movies

are very loosely tethered together

(some fictional establishments appear

in several of them), and now even

encompass a "Nope" theme park

attraction at Universal Studios

Hollywood. Peele's dark world is

For Peele, as he said speaking

recently by Zoom from Los Angeles,

"Nope" is about reaching for a kind of

Hollywood movie once unattainable.

He pointedly opens the film with

Eadweard Muybridge's 1887 photo-

graphic study showing a Black rider

on a horse. It was one of the first mov-

ing pictures. But while the name of

the horse and its owner was recorded,

the name of the Black jockey is

"I feel like this is the first moment

that anyone would ever allow me or

anyone to make this movie. And so I

had to take advantage. I had to go as

big as possible," said Peele. "I was

The Eadweard Muybridge loop looms

over "Nope"; your characters are said

to be descendants from its unnamed

Responses have been edited for

they strive to capture on film.

increasingly ours.

unknown.

like: 'Let's go.'

brevity and clarity.

Chinese women flock to skateboarding

Considered easier to learn and less prone to wipeouts than other forms of skateboarding, surfskating also got a boost from this year as Beijing hosted the 2022 Winter Olympics.



Chen Yanni, 29, a member of Beijing Girls Surfskating Community, rides on a skateboard during a free weekly training session, outside the National Aquatics Centre, or Water Cube, in Beijing, China, on Monday.

MARTIN QUIN POLLARD

eeling cooped up by the Chinese capital's partial Covid-19 lockdown earlier this year, which shut gyms, parks, and other venues, Beijing resident Mina Zhao came across surfskating on social media and decided to give it a try.

Zhao, 40, who loves to ski, was an instant devotee, getting her husband and son involved in surfskating and even introducing it to dozens of fellow mothers

"I think for my work, even for my life, skateboarding is having a positive effect," Zhao said, adding that it has

helped her lose weight and reduce anxiety over her child's education.

Surfskating, a novice-friendly version of skateboarding that uses a more flexible front-end wheel assembly, known as a truck, to enable deeply carved turns akin to surfing, has taken off in Chinese cities since the spring, especially among women.

Zhao said surfskating gives her a sense of accomplishment, and the positive energy she gets from it emboldened her to spend time away from home, wear more colourful clothing and even dye her hair to a lighter shade for the first time.

"Through this sport, what we want to explore more is ourselves. Being ourselves is more important than the world's stereotypical view of us," she said.

She said it also has a calming effect. "The more anxious you are, the worse it is for your child. Sometimes I just skate around the basement, I feel like a man who has a couple of cigarettes outside when something happens,' Zhao said.

Considered easier to learn and less prone to wipeouts than other forms of skateboarding, surfskating also got a boost from the buzz over snow sports in China this year as Beijing hosted the 2022 Winter Olympics.

A surfskater can carve snowboard-style turns without the need for snow or even a slope.

Clubs, networks and group classes have proliferated.

One free weekly session for women near Beijing's landmark National Aquatics Centre, or Water Cube, has grown from around a dozen regulars in late April to nearly a hundred, according to its organiser, a professional dancer named Duo Lan.

Chen Yanni, 29, also tried surfskating to escape lockdown after seeing the sport on her social media feeds. She was quickly hooked.

"You feel so free," said Chen, who works in IT.

"And then there's this sense that I am approaching 30, but I feel very young all of a sudden. I love this feeling. It's like being a teenager again," she said.

Chinese online searches for skateboarding, and surfskating in particular, have soared. Xiaohongshu, a shopping and lifestyle recommendations app, says searches for "lu chong", which translates to "land surfboard", rose by 50 times in June from a year earlier.

E-commerce giant JD.com reported an 80 percent growth in surfskateboard sales in June, compared with the same period last year.

At one of "Burning Ice" skateboard shop's five Beijing branches, revenues were up around 300 percent this year, according to a store manager who declined to be named.

Surfskateboards at the store, which range in price from around 400 yuan (\$60) to more than 4,000 yuan, make up around 50 percent of the increase, he said. Women account for around 70 percent of the store's sales.

Some said they took up the sport as a hobby when Covid made summer travel difficult.

"I have the feeling that I have returned to the beach," said Yoyo, 34, a finance professional, part-time diving coach and surfer, who had been glum over the lockdown.

"It's hot in the summer, but I have the wind in my hair, and I feel free."



(From left) Julia Butters, Billy Bob Thornton, Jessica Henwick and Ryan Gosling pose on the red carpet before the World Premiere of Netflix's 'The Gray Man' in Los Angeles, on July 13.

Has Netflix found its Bond?

'The Gray Man', which stars Ryan Gosling, is a big-budget, effects-filled thriller in the spirit of a James Bond.

LISA RICHWINE & ROLLO ROSS LOS ANGELES

n the new Netflix movie "The Gray Man," Ryan Gosling's character jokes that he goes by the name Six because 007 was taken. The film is a big-budget, effects-filled thriller in the spirit of a James Bond adventure. Netflix Inc and the movie's directors hope the film, which starts streaming on Friday, will launch the company's own long-running spy series.

Gosling stars as Sierra Six, a former inmate sprung from prison by the CIA in exchange for servitude in a secret programme.

"I've always wanted to make an action movie," Gosling told Reuters. "Action was my first love. It made me fall in love with movies in the first place. It took a minute to get there and find the right one." The movie is based on a novel by Mark Greaney and directed by Joe and Anthony Russo, the brothers who helmed Marvel's mega-blockbuster "Avengers: Endgame."

The Russos said Netflix allowed them to bring their full vision to the screen. It was filmed at seven locations around the world.

"We wanted to be very ambitious with this movie," Anthony Russo said. "It is hard to shoot action. It's expensive to shoot action, and Netflix was up for this level of ambition."

The movie packs in nine major action sequences.

"It was a real trial by fire for me having it be my first action film," Gosling said.

"The Gray Man" releases on Netflix on July 22.

The Russos hope the film will be popular enough to warrant future instalments.

"Whether it's exploring the events after the original 'Gray Man' movie, or before, or where we choose to go, there's a lot of options in this universe," Anthony Russo said.

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