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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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35.6°C 13.5°C
Nepalgunj Jomsom



POST PHOTO: MANOJ PAUDEL

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.



POST FILE PHOTO

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) chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal is in talks 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-in-arms from the "people's war" days. The duo fell out with each other after the constitution was promulgat-

ed in 2015.

Bhattarai was recently expelled as a central executive committee member of the Janata Samajbadi Party.

Later on Tuesday, Dahal held talks with CPN (Unified Socialist) chair 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 nine-strong secretariat of the Nepal

Communist Party, formed in May 2018 after the merger between the Maoist Centre and the UML. The party was invalidated in March last year.

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.

"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, or a 'new force', in 2016 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.

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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 on 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 at

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), ग्यास्ट्रिक (Gastritis) को बिरामीको लागि उचित आहार



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8. Captain Oats मा फाइबर को मात्रा बढी भएको हुनाले पेट तथा ग्यास्ट्रिकको बिरामीको लागि अत्यन्त लाभदायक ।
५. Captain Oats मा भएको SELENIUM को मात्राले शरीरमा भएको Vitamin 'E' सँग मिलेर सम्पूर्ण रोगहरूसँग लड्न सक्ने क्षमता बृद्धि गर्दछ ।
६. Captain Oats मा भएको Vitamin 'B' ले मानिसको दिमागी तनाव कम गराउँछ ।
७. Captain Oats गर्भवती वा सुत्केरी महिलाको लागि अत्यन्त लाभदायक हुन्छ ।
८. Captain Oats मा विभिन्न Vitamin तथा Minerals हरूको समिश्रण हुने हुँदा बच्चा, युवा, बृद्ध सबैको शरीरको स्वास्थ्य सन्तुलनको लागि राम्रो मानिन्छ ।

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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 dregdes of poverty and privation.

BASANTA PRATAP SINGH IN BAJHANG & ARJUN SHAH IN DHANGADHI
JULY 19

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



POST PHOTO: BASANTA PRATAP SINGH

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.

>> Continued on page 2



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HIGHEST GAINERS	
ENL 8.01%	GMFB 6.94%
GVL 5.54%	ICFC 5.27%
GMFL 4.81%	RURL 4.7%
MODERATE GAINERS	
SLBL 2.35%	LBBL 2.33%
CHL 2.3%	SAHAS 2.13%
MMFD 2.11%	EDBL 2.06%
MODERATE LOSERS	
SMB -0.3%	SPDL -0.29%
KPCL -0.26%	ADBL -0.24%
KBL -0.15%	MLBL -0.01%
HIGHEST LOSERS	
CBLD88 -7.75%	BD80/81 -5.7%
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Source: Nepal Oil Corporation

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

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 Delhi-based 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 locations including Bardeghat, 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.

The plant, according to 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.

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 officials 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.

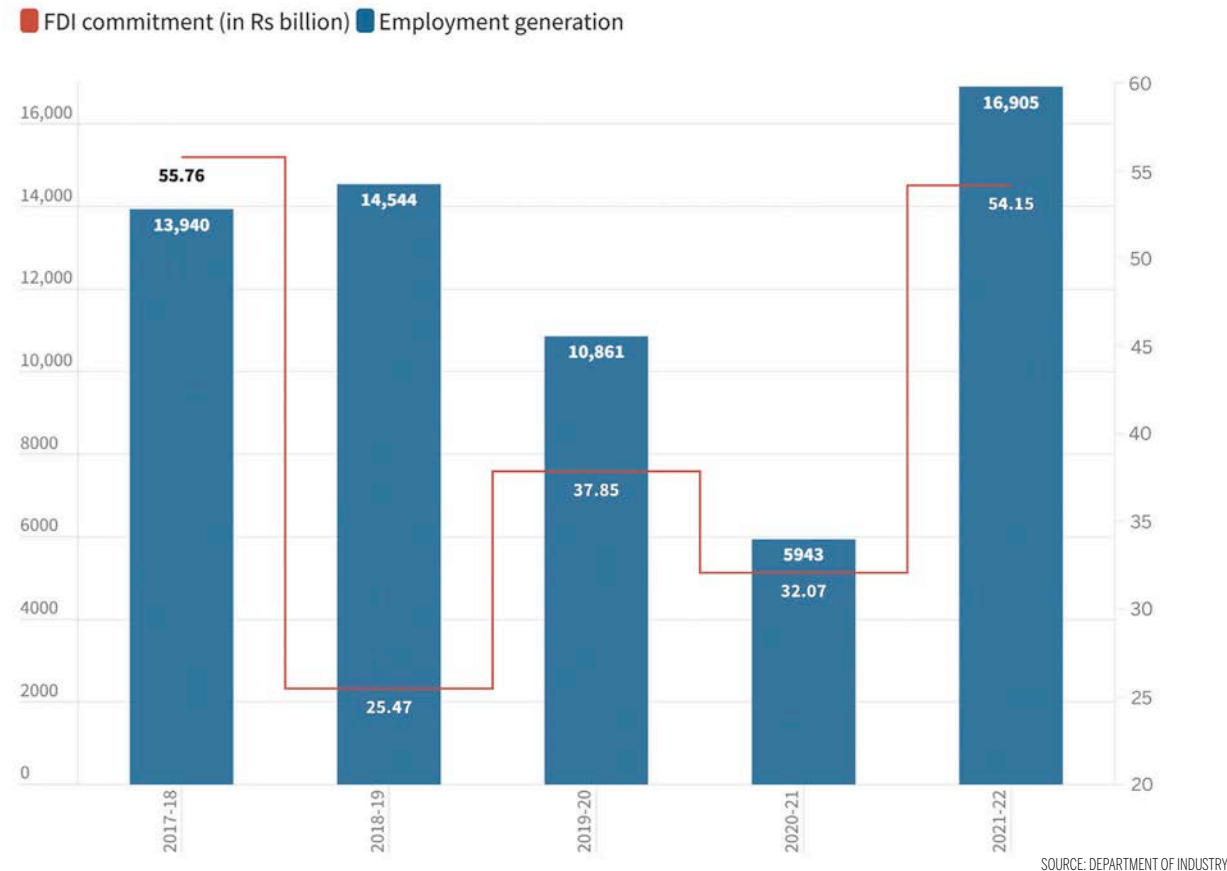
The government has proactively made policy reforms to attract foreign investors, and the budget for the current fiscal year has brought different provisions under foreign direct investment.

“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



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 sector,” said Dinesh Shrestha, 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 prop-

erty 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.

Indian rupee breaches 80 per dollar, hits new record low

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.



A vegetable vendor counts Indian Rupee currency notes in Mumbai on Tuesday.

AFP/ISS

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.



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.

REUTERS

Ukraine grain storage crisis hits home as farmers harvest new crops

REUTERS
KHRESHCHATE (UKRAINE), JULY 19

Ukrainian farmer Mykola Tereshchenko hopes to start harvesting 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 eight-fold 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 of 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.

He hopes the sea route will reopen 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.

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 Hjørring 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 balls, 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 tense overs of the day.

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.



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
KUWAIT CITY, JULY 19

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.

HOROSCOPE

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

The day 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.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) ***

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.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) ***

You may feel emotionally and energetically depleted this morning. These vibes will be particularly harsh if you haven't been taking out enough time for self-care recently. Today, set boundaries with your family and friends.

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.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) ***

You may need to give others their space today. Though your intentions may be honorable, your friends and colleagues might not respond well to your efforts to cheer them up, making it a good time to focus on your own agenda.

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

You may feel a bit emotionally on edge today. Do your 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) ***

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.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Move out

7 Balance sheet guru

10 Pro votes

14 True

15 Poetic adverb

16 Livy's bear

17 Nosy

18 Flour holder

19 Oodles

20 Spear or club

22 Grants

23 Food processor button

26 Big guns

28 Under the covers

29 Cask

30 Corporate exec

31 Cry audibly

32 Library abbr.

33 Divas and birds

37 — kwon do

38 Leatherworker's tool

39 Delt neighbor

40 Overhang

41 Braves' home

43 Fireplace residue

44 Historical period

45 Sci. class

46 False front

47 "Lion King" villain

48 Type of radio

52 Championship

53 Virginia caverns

54 Theater features

56 Mild rejoinder

57 "Gotcha!"

58 Mean to

62 Rozelle or Sampras

63 Earn

64 Excavate further

65 — bien, monsieur!

66 Lime cooler

67 Rock layers

DOWN

1 Corp. execs.

2 Son of Val and Aleta

3 Imitate a dove

4 Declared openly

5 Conical dwelling

6 "Paint the Sky With Stars" vocalist

7 Mechanically enhanced human

8 Show the way

9 — Arbor

10 Holiday tradition (2 wds.)

11 Wash out

12 Purplish flower

13 Fresh

15 Saffron dish

22 Make a fist

23 Starchy food

24 Depth charge target (hyph.)

25 Refuse to go along

27 Coldest

29 Show servility

32 Dressing table

33 Blanks

34 Oust

35 Not urban

36 Prolonged gaze

42 Chafes

46 Fly a plane

47 Close kin

48 Dozed

49 Even bigger

50 Declaim

51 Sighed with delight

52 Doctrine

55 Slangy hats

57 Turkish honorific

59 Earth-conscious org.

60 Volleyball need

61 Molecular biology topic

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

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SUDOKU

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3 9 4 2 1 5 6 7 8
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9 7 5 8 2 6 1 4 3
1 4 3 5 7 9 8 2 6
4 8 7 9 5 2 3 6 1
5 2 9 1 6 3 4 8 7
6 3 1 7 8 4 2 9 5

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★



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
NEW YORK

One 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."

— Associated Press

JAKE COYLE
NEW YORK

There'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, darkening 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 closely-kept-under-wraps "Nope" 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."

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 business for film productions. Their California ranch is visited by a strange and violent force in the clouds that they strive to capture on film.

"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 increasingly ours.

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 photographic study showing a Black rider on a horse. It was one of the first moving pictures. But while the name of the horse and its owner was recorded, the name of the Black jockey is unknown.

"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 like: 'Let's go.'"

Responses have been edited for brevity and clarity.

The Eadweard Muybridge loop looms over "Nope"; your characters are said to be descendants from its unnamed

Jordan Peele on the dreams and nightmares of 'Nope'

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



AP/RSS

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 enthralling—the 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 some-

thing 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.

— Associated Press

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
BEIJING

Feeling 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 snow-board-style turns without the need for snow or even a slope.



REUTERS

(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

In 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.

— Reuters