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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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20.0°C -4.5°C
Dhagadi Jomsom



POST PHOTO: KABIN ADHIKARI

Children play football on Bishnumati Corridor at Shobhabhagawati. As open spaces in the Capital shrink, there is a dearth of safe playgrounds.

From US with caution: A letter to Nepal warns of ramifications

In its response to a letter by Deuba and Dahal, MCC Compact Operations has indicated cuts in aid, assistance, private investment and foreign direct investment, officials say.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, FEB 5

After repeated communications amid Nepal's delays in ratifying the Millennium Challenge Corporation-Nepal Compact, the Department of Compact Operations appears to have now taken a tougher stance.

It has set a February 28 deadline, as per the request made from the Nepal side, for the ratification and has said a failure to do so could lead to the end of MCC's partnership with Nepal.

"Without action by February 28, the MCC Board of Directors will discuss next steps at its March 22 meeting including whether to continue with the compact," said Fatema Z Sumar, vice president at MCC Compact Operations, in an interview. "Without ratification, it is within the MCC Board's authority to discontinue Nepal's eligibility to receive the 500 million dollar grant from the United States. Such a decision will effectively end MCC's partnership with Nepal."

Sumar also said MCC received a letter from Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) chair

Pushpa Kamal Dahal on September 29 seeking four or five months to build consensus.

"February 28 is the conclusion of that five-month period and we are looking for the compact to be ratified by that date," said Sumar. MCC provided a response letter to Deuba on Friday, according to Sumar.

Multiple officials say MCC is unlikely to entertain any further request for deadline extension.

Nepali officials said MCC has sent the response letter to Prime Minister Deuba, Maoist Centre chair Dahal, Finance Minister Janardan Sharma and Finance Secretary Madhu Marasini, among others.

Bhanu Deuba, Prime Minister Deuba's chief personal assistant, and Finance Secretary Marasini con-

firmed receiving the response from the MCC headquarters. Ramesh Malla, personal assistant to Dahal, however, said he was not aware of the letter.

Marasini declined to share the content of the response letter.

Officials, however, said the letter from the MCC headquarters has clear indications that any further delays could lead to the end of the US grant for Nepal.

Nepal and the United States signed the MCC-Nepal Compact in September 2017.

The Nepal Compact was MCC's first compact in South Asia, under which Nepal is eligible to receive \$500 million in grant from the United States to strengthen Nepal's energy sector, improve regional energy connectivity and roads.

Deuba was prime minister back in 2017 also when Nepal signed the MCC-Nepal Compact. He was leading a government backed by Dahal. Incumbent Communication Minister Gyanendra Bahadur Karki signed the compact agreement as the finance minister then.

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Top MCC official hints Nepal may lose eligibility to receive \$500 million if ratification fails

Fatema Z Sumar says MCC believes Deuba and Dahal will stick to their commitments to ratify the Nepal Compact from Parliament by February 28.

JAGDISHOR PANDAY
KATHMANDU, FEB 5

As Nepal's ruling coalition partners continue to waver on the parliamentary ratification of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)-Nepal Compact, a top MCC official has hinted at the possibility of discontinuation of the grant if there's no progress by the end of this month.

Fatema Z Sumar, vice president under the Department of Compact Operations at MCC, told the Post on Friday evening that she believes Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal will act as per their commitments to ensuring the ratification by February 28.

"MCC received a letter from both Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Maoist Centre Chairman Prachanda requesting four to five months to gain parliamentary consensus and work together to ratify the MCC-Nepal Compact," said Sumar in a virtual interview from Washington.

"MCC is now asking that the prime minister and the chairman continue to honour their commitment to work together to ratify the compact by the timeline indicated in their letter—which is no later than February 28."

According to her, without action by February 28, the MCC Board of Directors will discuss next steps at its March 22 meeting including whether to continue with the compact.

"Without ratification, it is within



PHOTO: MCC.GOV

Fatema Z Sumar

the MCC Board's authority to discontinue Nepal's eligibility to receive the 500 million dollar grant from the United States," she said. "Such a decision will effectively end MCC's partnership with Nepal."

That a joint letter was sent to MCC was made public by Deuba upon his return from the Climate Summit in Glasgow on November 4. Deuba said that he and Dahal had sent a letter to MCC assuring its ratification.

Dahal, however, had denied. On January 16 also, Mahmood Bah, acting chief executive officer at the MCC, in an interview with the Post, said that Deuba and Dahal had sent the letter to MCC.

American officials for quite a while

have communicated to Nepali politicians about the early passage of MCC from Nepal's Parliament. While Prime Minister Deuba appears committed to the American grant's ratification, Dahal as well as Madhav Nepal, two key partners in the coalition government, are against it.

The Maoist Centre believes that some of the provisions of the agreement need amendments as they undermine Nepal's constitution and sovereignty. Dahal's political paper, endorsed by the party's general convention in December last year, says the MCC Compact will not be passed without amending some clauses.

The current coalition is now even facing the threat of disintegration over the American grant.

Sumar has made it clear that amendments are not possible at this time. "Because it signed the compact and agreed to those provisions, no amendments are possible at this time," she said. She added that MCC on Friday provided a response letter to Deuba and Dahal.

"MCC thanked them for their commitments and acknowledged their plan to increase public awareness of the compact and the positive impact it will have for more than 23 million Nepalis, which is roughly 80 percent of the entire country," she said without offering any details on the letter.

When Nepal signed the agreement to receive the \$500 million grant from the United States in 2017, Deuba was the prime minister, backed by Dahal.

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Highest glacier on Mt Everest is melting at a rapid pace, a new study shows

The rate at which the glacier is thinning is blamed on climate change and it's a cause for concern for countries relying on Himalayas for water, irrigation and hydropower.

PRITHIVIMAN SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU, FEB 5

Human-induced climate change is causing the highest glacier on Mt Everest to melt at a rapid pace which may lead the South Col Glacier to be completely wiped out by the middle of the current century, a new study has found.

The study, published in Nature Portfolio Journal Climate and Atmospheric Science, revealed that the South Col Glacier, which sits around 7,906m (25,938 ft) above sea level, has lost as much as 55m of thickness in the last 25 years.

It is thinning over 80 times faster than the 2,000 years it took to form the ice, according to the study conducted by researchers led by the US-based University of Maine. A team of scientists and climbers, including six from the University of Maine, visited the glacier in 2019 and extracted samples from a 10-metre-long (around 32 feet)



POST FILE PHOTO

The snowpack is said to have been eroded, exposing black ice and fuelling melting process.

ice core. They also installed the world's two highest automatic weather stations to collect data and answer a question whether the earth's most out-of-reach glaciers were impacted by human-linked climate change.

"The answer is a resounding yes, and very significantly since the late 1990s," Paul Mayewski, the expedition leader and the director of the Climate Change Institute at the University of Maine, told CNN.

Researchers noted that the glacier's thick snowpack has been eroded, exposing the underlying black ice to the sun and accelerating the melting process. This transformation from snowpack to ice means the glacier can no longer reflect radiation from the

sun, making its melt more rapidly.

According to the study, the transition from a permanent snow/firn surface to majority ice-cover could have been triggered by climate change since 1950, with sublimation enhanced by rising air temperatures playing the critical role. "But the ice loss has been most intense since the late 1990s," the report states.

"At an estimated thinning rate approaching 2,000 mm (2m) annually, even glaciers such as South Col Glacier that are above 8,000m may disappear by mid-century."

The finding of the new study is consistent with the conclusion of a team of French researchers who found that the world's glaciers are melting at an accelerating rate.

>> 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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NATIONAL

-BY THE NUMBERS-

16,975

FOREIGN tourist arrivals in January 2022.
SOURCE: NEPAL TOURISM BOARD

53%

FULLY vaccinated population.
SOURCE: CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS

815,796

THE highest ever single-day vaccinations against Covid-19 on February 2, 2022, since the drive began on January 27, 2021.
SOURCE: HEALTH MINISTRY

1,103

THE units of electric cars that entered Nepal during the first six months [mid-July 2021 to mid-January 2022] of the current fiscal year.
SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF CUSTOMS

\$93.79

A barrel of Brent crude oil hit on Friday setting its highest price since October 2014.
SOURCE: REUTERS

Rs30.56 billion

FDI pledges during the first half of the fiscal year 2021-22.
SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY

35,993

NUMBER of migrant workers leaving the country between mid-Dec 2021 and mid-Jan 2022, excluding re-entry.
SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN EMPLOYMENT

BRIEFINGS

High level committee formed to identify farmers' problems

JANAKPUR: The Madhes provincial government has formed a high level committee to identify and resolve the problems faced by farmers in the province. The five-member committee was constituted on Saturday under the leadership of Bijaya Yadav, the provincial Minister of Land Management, Agriculture and Cooperatives. The committee will submit its report to the Council of Ministers within 15 days.

86 kg marijuana seized

MAHOTTARI: Police seized 86 kg marijuana from a vehicle in Bardibas of Mahottari district on Saturday. The marijuana was hidden in the vehicle that was enroute to Bardibas from Sindhuli. Security personnel detained Ramesh Rana, 31, of Sindhupalchok in possession of the drug. Detailed investigation into the case is underway, said police.

Bailey bridge comes into operation in Chanaute

SINDHUPALCHOK: A bailey bridge came into operation at Chanaute in Helambu, Sindhupalchok six months after it was swept away by the devastating floods in the Melamchi river. Minister for Home Affairs Balkrishna Khand inaugurated the bridge amid a function on Saturday.

13 people die, 30 injured in separate road accidents

Eight people died when a jeep carrying a wedding procession swerved off the road at Gaumukhi Rural Municipality-6 in Pyuthan on Saturday.

SHAMSHER BIKRAM GC
PYUTHAN, FEB 5

At least 13 people died and more than 30 others sustained injuries in separate road accidents across the country in the past 24 hours.

Eight people died and six others were injured, some critically, when a jeep carrying a wedding procession crashed at Gaumukhi Rural Municipality of Pyuthan district on Saturday morning. The vehicle swerved off the road and plunged around 150 metres below at around 1am, said police.

The fatal accident took place while the wedding attendants were returning home to Liwang from Lung village carrying the bride. Both the bride and the groom sustained injuries in the incident.

Police identified the deceased as Basanta Bahadur Khadka, his wife Basanti and daughter Elish, Khim Bahadur Khatri, Keshari Khadka, Nandi Khadka, Bipana GC and jeep driver Bal Bahadur Budha.

According to the District Police Office in Pyuthan, six of the victims

died on the spot while two died on their way to the district hospital. The injured were referred to Butwal after receiving primary treatment at the district hospital.

"It seems that the accident took place as the driver tried to avoid a boulder on the road. The edge of the road soaked by rain caved in and the vehicle fell off," said Deputy Superintendent of Police Satya Narayan Thapa. Thapa said the number of casualties was high as the victims were not rescued immediately.

"I was stuck on the cliff for a long time. I did not have my phone with me so I shouted for help. The villagers came to know of the incident after quite a while. So many people died due to a lack of timely rescue," said Dan Bahadur Khadka, the groom who survived the crash.

It was raining when the incident took place.

"The rescue was difficult as the accident took place at night and it was raining," said Thapa. Security personnel and the local people rescued the victims and rushed them to the district hospital.



The accident in Pyuthan happened as the road had got slippery due to rains, officials say.

Seven of the deceased are from Liwang village in Gaumukhi Rural Municipality. The villagers, who were eagerly waiting to welcome the bride, are in deep mourning now.

"The entire settlement is in mourn-

ing. The tragic accident took place due to slippery roads caused by rains," said Bishnu Kumar Giri, the chairman of Gaumukhi Rural Municipality. According to him, the rural municipality has decided to provide Rs 50,000

to the bereaved families of each deceased. In Sunsari, three people died and 27 others sustained injuries when a bus and a truck collided at Khuniya bridge in Jhokraha Narsingh Rural Municipality-3 on Friday night. Both the vehicles caught fire after the collision.

According to the Province 1 Police Office in Biratnagar, bus driver Saroj Rai of Jhapa, truck driver Sheikh Firoz of Bara and bus passenger Nihai Pradhan of West Bengal in India died in the incident. The injured are receiving treatment at various health facilities in Sunsari and Morang.

Similarly, two persons died when a Bolero jeep swerved off the road and fell around 500 metres below at Biruwa Rural Municipality-3 in Syangja. Police identified the deceased as driver Bel Bahadur Thapa and his assistant Bhes Bahadur Thapa of Biruwa-3. The bodies of the victims, who were out of contact since Friday night, were found by the local people on Saturday morning.

(With input from local correspondents.)

From US with caution: A letter to Nepal warns ...

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Earlier, erstwhile prime minister KP Sharma Oli was planning to move the MCC compact forward in Parliament for its ratification. At that time, Dahal, who was co-chair of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) along with Oli, played a role in blocking its presentation in the House for voting.

Now, Dahal as Deuba's partner is putting pressure against tabling the MCC compact in Parliament for its ratification. The American grant has become such a politically divisive issue that the current coalition of five parties led by Deuba faces a breakdown threat.

Sources told the Post that if the present coalition fails to take a concrete decision on MCC by mid of this week, more US officials are likely to ring up Nepali authorities in the coming days.

Already some MCC board members have telephoned Deuba, Dahal and other leaders directly from Washington and communicated about the possible ramifications if MCC is not ratified by the given deadline, according to sources.

"And, if progress is not made, the State Department will get into action," a diplomatic source told the Post. "Senior State Department officials will communicate with top political leaders of Nepal."

A senior US State Department official in November also raised concerns about the delays in MCC ratification.

Donald Lu, assistant secretary of State for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, during his visit to Nepal, gave a clear message to Nepal on the MCC pact—take it or leave it.

"If Nepal does not take the grant, we will spend the money in some other country. And, it's okay with us if Nepal does not endorse it," said Lu during an interaction with the media after his meetings with Nepali politicians, including Prime Minister Deuba. "[Whatever is the decision] it is the sovereign decision of Nepal. We have urged you to find out what you want to do with the MCC."

A senior government official said Nepal will definitely suffer if the United States withdraws MCC from Nepal.

"And that will have multiple ramifications," said the official. "If MCC discontinues Nepal's eligibility to receive the grant, Nepal in the future may struggle in securing foreign aid, assistance, loan and foreign direct investment."

According to the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media, Nepal's diplomatic credentials will also be at stake if the MCC is turned down.

"We will be deprived of several bilateral and multilateral opportunities,"

said the official. While Prime Minister Deuba has hinted at ratifying MCC from Parliament, his coalition partners—Maoist Centre and CPN (Unified Socialist)—are demanding amendments to some provisions, saying the agreement cannot be endorsed "in its existing form".

The senior official said the MCC office, in its response letter, has hinted at some serious consequences like cuts in aid and private financing as well as foreign direct investments not only from the United States but also other countries.

Multiple officials familiar with the response said there are clear indications that the grant to Nepal will come to an end MCC is not ratified by the deadline. MCC headquarters is unlikely to entertain any further request for deadline extension, according to them. A joint secretary at the Finance Ministry said it's not just that Nepal will lose the United States' goodwill in the event of failing to ratify the MCC compact.

"Nepal may get cornered also by other countries that are allies to America," said the joint-secretary who also spoke on the condition of anonymity citing the sensitivity of the matter.

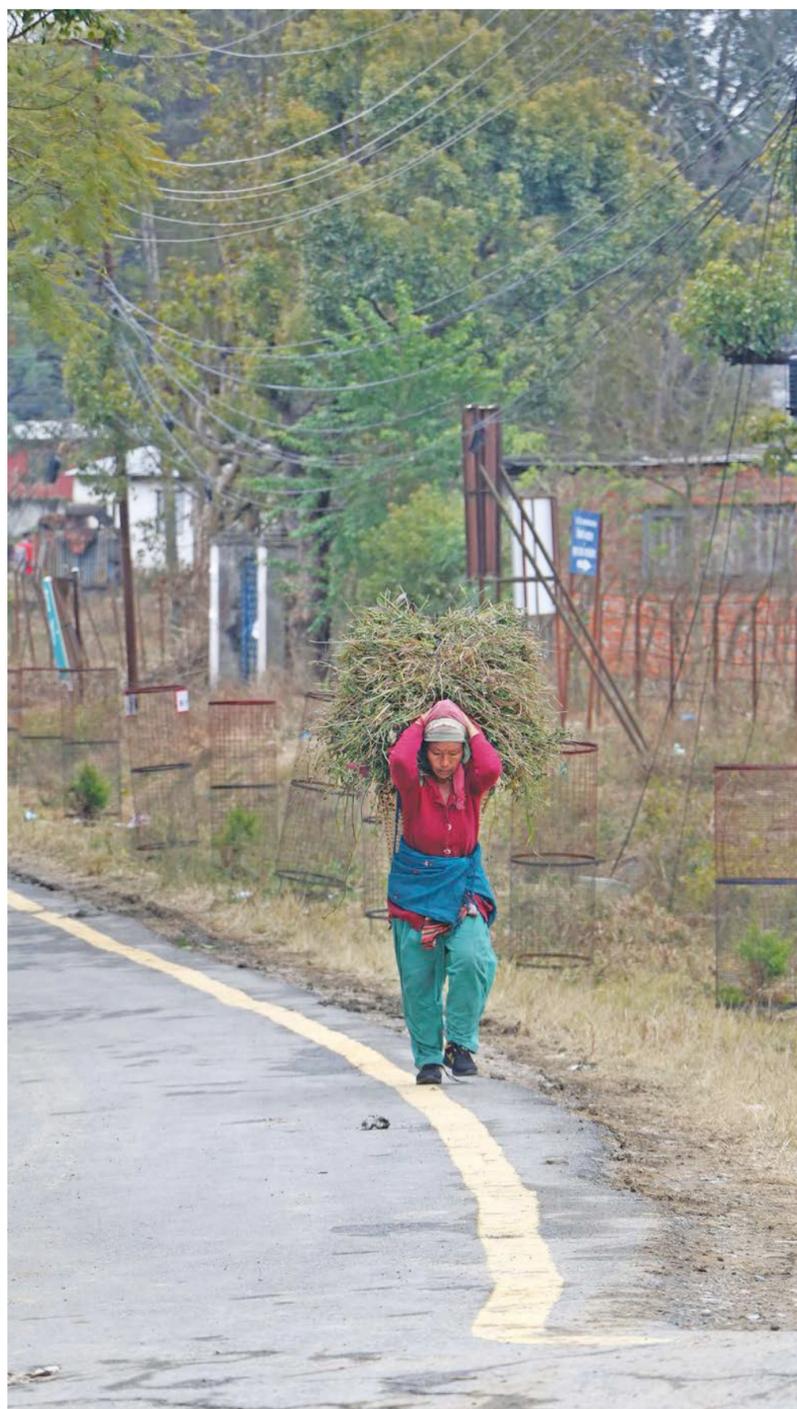
The latest developments have put Deuba under pressure. In a bid to get the MCC compact through Parliament, his government had formed a three-member task force. But the task force has become irrelevant now, after its members failed to arrive at any conclusion amid huge differences over some of the American grant's provisions.

Deuba is learnt to have been in communication with UML chair Oli through various channels, seeking support in MCC endorsement from the House. But the UML is unlikely to extend support unless the present coalition breaks down, as Oli has his own axe to grind against Dahal and CPN (Unified Socialist) chair Madhav Nepal.

Amid confusion over the American grant, the Post last week reached out to the US embassy in Kathmandu to solicit its views.

"The US trusts the Nepali government and its leaders to fulfil their signed obligations and do what is in the best interests of Nepal's citizens and promote their prosperity," US Embassy spokesperson Anna Richey-Allen said in an email response. "This is a sovereign decision for Nepal to make, as a democratic nation, and Nepal's decision alone."

"Should outside influence and corruption interfere in this sovereign decision, we believe it would be deeply concerning development and loss for the people of Nepal," she added.



A woman carrying grass walks on a road through Tribhuvan University in Kirtipur, Kathmandu.

POST PHOTO: BEEJU MAHARJAN

Highest glacier on Mt Everest is melting at a rapid pace, a new study shows

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

According to a BBC report, researchers found glaciers to have lost almost 270 billion tonnes of ice a year over the opening two decades of the 21st Century. The meltwater produced now accounts for about a fifth of global sea-level rise, the scientists told Nature journal.

The worldwide retreat of mountain glaciers in recent decades is well documented and this study has further reinforced the impact of climate change on the Himalayan mountains, according to the experts.

"The findings of the new study show there has been a massive impact of climate change in our Himalayas," said Manjit Dhakal, a climate change expert. "We can generalise that the glaciers in other Himalayan mountains are also depleting fast."

A study published in Nature in August 2020 showed that glacial lakes are rapidly growing in response to climate change and glacier retreat. The global glacier lake volume increased by around 48 percent to

156.5km, between 1990 and 2018, according to the study.

As the glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalaya Region are melting fast, the trend will continue in the days to come, according to a study released in February 2019. The Hindu Kush Himalaya region runs from Afghanistan to Myanmar and is the planet's "third pole."

"Even if carbon emissions are dramatically and rapidly cut and succeed in limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, 36 percent of the glaciers along the Hindu Kush and Himalaya range will have gone by 2100," says a study report of International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development titled "The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment". "If emissions are not cut, the loss soars to two-thirds," the report found.

If the global temperature rise is 2 degrees Celsius, half of the glaciers are projected to melt away by 2100, according to the report.

Climbers have already seen the visible impact of retreating snowpacks in

The finding of the study is a cause for concern for Nepal.

Nepal's Himalayan mountains.

"Nowadays we observe more rocks in the Himalayan mountains and rock falls instead of snow falling down," said Kami Rita Sherpa, a mountain guide who broke his own record by climbing the world's tallest mountain for the 25th time in May last year.

He said that growing portions of rocks in the mountain could affect the future expeditions to the mountain because the climbers could face more exposed bedrock and ice cover, making it difficult to climb the Himalayan mountains.

"The clothes and other instruments to climb the rocks and snowy mountains are different and more rocks in the mountain means our clothes and

equipment meant for snowy mountains may not work during the expedition," Sherpa told the Post.

The veteran climber said that particularly the new climbers would find it difficult to climb the mountains due to the growing presence of rocks replacing the snow. The concern of the veteran climbers has also been shared by the new study as it warned of the danger to climbers of Mt Everest due to warm and thicker air.

"As loss of high elevation snow and ice cover continues to thin exposing bedrock; warm thicker air increases oxygen availability; ice block movement in the Khumbu icefall and avalanches becomes even more dynamic; and glacier melt destabilises the Khumbu base camp that is home to 1,000 climbers and logistics teams during the climbing season," the new report says.

Besides the potential impact of melting glaciers on the climbers, it could have had a massive socio-economic impact on this region, according to researchers and climate change

experts. Mayewski also told the BBC that he observed that the rapid melting could have a wide variety of "significant regional to global scale implications".

Around one billion people depend on the Himalayan mountain range for drinking water, and if other glaciers in the region—and worldwide—follow Everest's example, their capacity to provide water for drinking and irrigation could fall significantly, according to a BBC report.

Dhakal said that the finding of the latest study is a cause for concern for Nepal whose economy and the livelihoods of many people could be badly affected by the loss of snow in the mountain.

"Hydropower is one of the pillars of Nepal's economy," said Dhakal. "If the water level in rivers decreases due to decreasing snow in the mountain, hydropower projects cannot produce electricity as estimated, affecting the power supply," he said.

Most of Nepal's hydropower projects are run of the river type and

their production capacity slumps along with depleting water levels in the winter.

"The agriculture sector will also suffer due to the lack of adequate water for irrigation," said Dhakal.

Despite the visible impact of climate change and potential catastrophic impact on the world in the future, world leaders are yet to agree on a binding commitment to reduce emission of carbon dioxide—a greenhouse gas which accelerates climate change.

During the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Glasgow, Scotland in November last year, world leaders agreed to meet next year again to pledge further cuts to emissions of carbon dioxide. They also agreed to phase down coal use, cut subsidies in fossil fuels and increase monetary support to poor countries to cope with the effects of climate change.

"We have to reduce the use of fossil fuel, coal and increase use of renewable energy," said Dhakal, "to reduce the emission and address the climate change crisis."

INTERVIEW

'We are looking for the compact to be ratified by February 28'

Fatema Z Sumar, MCC vice president of Compact Operations, says it's within MCC Board authority to discontinue Nepal's eligibility to receive the \$500 million grant and such a decision will end MCC's partnership with Nepal.

>> Continued from page 1

Gyanendra Bahadur Karki, the communication minister in the incumbent government, was finance minister then, and he signed the agreement on behalf of the Nepal government.

Nepal has committed an additional \$130 million to the MCC's \$500 million. As per the agreement, the funds will be spent on building electricity transmission lines and improving roads.

The MCC-Nepal Compact was tabled in Parliament on July 15, 2019 by Yubaraj Khatriwada, then finance minister in the KP Sharma Oli government. The US grant ran into controversy from January 2020, when some leaders of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), which was formed after the merger between Oli's CPN-UML and Dahal's Maoist Centre, objected to the idea of its parliamentary endorsement. Dahal was one of the key leaders to question MCC's parliamentary ratification. But the NCP was invalidated in March last year, resulting in the revival of the UML and the Maoist Centre.

By weaponising MCC against Oli in the then NCP, Dahal made a rod for his own back, as a large section in his party now opposes the American grant while he supports a government which is keen on ratifying it.

US officials have made it clear all along that accepting MCC is Nepal's choice.

In September, Sumar held a series of meetings in Kathmandu with top Nepali leaders, including Deuba. Her visit came a day after MCC offered pointwise clarifications to 11 major questions and supplementary concerns raised by the Finance Ministry.

"Accepting a 500 million dollar grant from MCC and the American people is Nepal's choice—and only Nepal's choice," said Sumar. "MCC remains committed to Nepal's economic development."

On whether Nepali politician's failure to ratify MCC will impact Nepal-US relations, Sumar ruled out such a possibility.

"The US commitment to the people of Nepal will endure whether or not the government of Nepal chooses to accept the MCC grant from the American people," she said.



PHOTO: MCC.GOV

You have stated that the deadline is February 28. Can there be an extension or is it the final deadline?

In their September 29th letter, Prime Minister Deuba and [Maoist Centre] Chairman Prachanda requested up to four or five months to fulfil their commitment to MCC and ratify the compact. So February 28 is the conclusion of that five-month period and we are looking for the compact to be ratified by that date.

There has been a big debate going on regarding MCC in Nepal. Some of the parties and their leaders are demanding amendments to some of its provisions before its parliamentary ratification. What is your take on this?

Just to remember, Nepal's Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs determined that parliamentary ratification is required for the compact having the status of an international agreement. When the government of Nepal signed the compact, more than

four years ago on September 14, 2017, it agreed to all the provisions in the compact. Because it signed the compact and agreed to those provisions, no amendments are possible at this time.

I want to ask you again... is February 28 the final deadline?

Without action by February 28, the MCC Board of Directors will discuss next steps at its March 22 meeting including whether to continue with the compact.

Without ratification, it is within the MCC Board's authority to discontinue Nepal's eligibility to receive the 500 million dollar grant from the United States. Such a decision will effectively end MCC's partnership with Nepal.

Will Nepal's failure in ratifying the compact affect Nepal-US relations?

We are very proud of the standing relationship between the United States and the people of Nepal. This is a historic friendship that has gone for nearly

more than 75 years and MCC is very proud to be part of this historic friendship. The US commitment to the people of Nepal will endure whether or not the government of Nepal chooses to accept the MCC grant from the American people.

A few months back you visited Nepal and met with leaders from across the political spectrum. What were your commitments then? Do you think they will stand by their commitments?

Both the prime minister and chairperson [Dahal] have repeatedly assured MCC of their commitment to ratifying the compact and moving it forward, including in their September 29th letter, in writing, to the board of the MCC.

We are taking them on their collective word of their support and looking forward to their leadership in leading the coalition to move this forward to table the compact and ratify by February 28 as they committed to us repeatedly that they will do.

Vaccination drive halted in some districts since November

A lack of sufficient doses and accessibility to health care centres, as well as adverse weather conditions, are some factors that have hampered the ongoing immunisation campaign against Covid, officials say.

ARJUN POUDEL
KATHMANDU, FEB 5

The number of people seeking vaccination has risen in Durgathali Rural Municipality of Bajhang district due to the requirement of mandatory vaccination proof to use public amenities.

However, the rural municipality has not administered Covid-19 vaccines since November due to a lack of doses.

"We do not have any vaccine to administer to the people who have not taken any doses yet and neither do we have the vaccine to administer the second doses," Hansa Raj Dulyal, a health worker serving at the rural municipality, told the Post over the phone from Bajhang.

"Around a half of the local unit's population is yet to receive the vaccine but we do not have any doses remaining."

When the vaccines were piled up in the central and provincial stores, the Ministry of Health and Population urged all the concerned agencies to ramp up the vaccination drive. The Minister for Health and Population himself held meetings with stakeholders, including chief district officers, serving throughout the country and sought their help to step up the drive.

But the local units of Bajhang have halted the vaccination drive citing vaccine shortage.

Health workers serving in the district say they are collecting the data of the people who have not received the vaccine yet. The data will be furnished to the provincial office to demand for the needed doses.

"We have used up all our stock to vaccinate school children and provide booster shots. Now we don't have any doses left to administer the first and second doses," said Dulyal.

A lack of sufficient doses, adverse weather conditions and inaccessibility of health care centres are some of the factors that have hampered the ongoing Covid-19 vaccination drive in the district, officials say.

On Friday, the District Hospital of Humla could not continue its Covid-19 vaccination programme due to heavy snowfall with temperatures in the district plunging to minus seven degrees Celsius.

Health authorities were struggling to maintain the cold chain for the vaccine due to power disruption.

"We have been using a diesel generator for electricity to maintain the temperature in the cold room," Dr Tashi Lama, chief of the District Hospital Humla, said over the phone from Humla. "Operating the generator is not so easy as it takes over two hours to start the machine due to the chilling cold."

The District Hospital of Humla is the only vaccination centre in the district that has been running the Covid-19 vaccination programme. Due to its inability to maintain the vaccine supply, the hospital had halted its vaccination programme a few months ago.

"Despite all the adversities and difficulties, people in Humla are seeking vaccines against Covid-19," said Lama. "Every day, over 300 people visit the hospital to get vaccinated but it has not been easy to continue the programme due to the adverse weather conditions."

Besides Humla, the ongoing vacci-

nation drive against Covid-19 has also been affected in many other mountain districts due to the cold and inaccessibility of immunisation centres.

Despite numerous obstacles, Nepal's vaccination programme has been gaining momentum. As of Saturday, 15,482,087 people, or 53 percent of the total population, have been fully immunised.

Public health experts say that Nepal's vaccination programme could have achieved better results had the authorities concerned addressed some obstacles seen in the local levels.

"To make the vaccine programme successful and increase the vaccine coverage, micro-level planning is needed," said Dr Jhalak Sharma, former chief of the National Immunisation Programme.

"The concerned authorities have micro planning but if problems arise, they should be addressed immediately."

It has been over a year since the authorities launched the Covid-19 vaccination drive but they have yet to make provisions to inoculate the disabled and bed-ridden people who are unable to reach the immunisation centres. The authorities have also failed to increase the number of vaccination centres in rural areas to expand vaccine coverage.

Authorities find it hard to maintain the vaccine cold chain due to power supply disruptions.

"There is only one Covid-19 vaccination centre in our rural municipality," said Dulyal from Bajhang. "People have to walk for up to three hours to reach the vaccination centre. This has made it difficult for many people to receive vaccines."

Meanwhile, officials at the Ministry of Health and Population say that they are unaware of a halt in the vaccination drive due to a lack of doses.

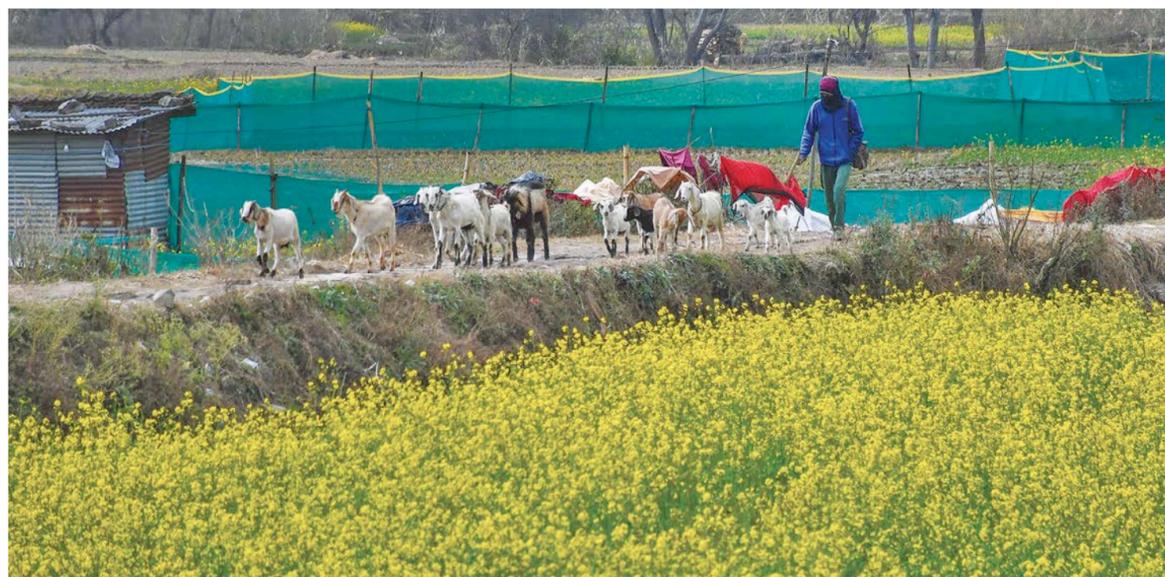
"We have been asking all concerned agencies to take the vaccine stock and increase the vaccination pace," said Dr Samir Kumar Adhikari, joint spokesperson for the Health Ministry. "I am not aware of any centre halting vaccination drives for lack of vaccines."

Adhikari, however, concedes that vaccination programmes might have been discontinued in some places due to various factors like problems in maintaining vaccine cold chain and supply and adverse weather conditions.

"If any centre has run out of vaccines, they should coordinate with the respective provincial offices," said Adhikari.

Nepal so far has received 45,737,840 doses of vaccines, including AstraZeneca, Vero Cell, Moderna, Janssen and Pfizer-BioNTech.

On Saturday, 1,714 people tested positive—1,103 in 5,225 polymerase chain reaction tests and 611 in 3,288 antigen tests. In the last 24 hours, nine people died of Covid-19. Active cases stand at 52,780.



POST PHOTO: ANISH REGMI

A farmer drives home a herd of goats at Khokana in Lalitpur on Saturday.

School students' achievement has plunged under virtual learning

Experts point to two reasons. First, most students don't have access to virtual learning platforms. Second, teaching learning has not been effective.

BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, FEB 5

Bhuwan Ghimire, 45, has two of his children enrolled in a public school in Kathmandu. His daughter studies in grade six at Nandi Secondary School, Naxal, while the son is a 10th grader in the same school.

Prior to the pandemic, Ghimire was satisfied with the studies of his children. However, as the school shifted to online classes after physical classes were suspended to stem the spread of Covid, he feels their studies haven't been effective.

"I don't think my children are learning as envisioned in the curriculum," he told the Post. "I am particularly unhappy with the performance of my daughter. Ineffective virtual learning is negatively impacting the performance of children in the lower grades who need more attention from teachers."

He says the overall level of understanding of her children has dropped

compared to two years ago. Schools across the country shifted to virtual learning platforms from March 2020 after the government enforced the first Covid lockdown. In the last two years, most of the teaching-learning has been conducted virtually.

The schools that started in-person classes in October-November last year have again shifted to virtual classes after cases of a new highly contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus spiked. Most of the schools across the country will not return to in-person classes until at least mid-February.

Various studies have suggested that most of the students in Nepal lack access to virtual learning and this form of learning is not effective even in places with good connectivity. A survey conducted by UNICEF in September among 6,643 children and guardians across the seven provinces showed that in the lack of virtual learning platforms, textbooks have been the only sources of information for 63 percent of children after the

country went into a Covid lockdown in March 2020.

The number was higher among public school students with 70.5 percent of them relying solely on textbooks compared to 61 percent of private school students facing the problem. The report showed only 27 percent students had access to online classes—18 percent at community schools and 43.5 percent at private schools.

Education experts say the learning achievement of students has plunged for two reasons: first, most students do not have access to virtual learning platforms and second, teaching-learning has not been effective.

Tanka Nath Sharma, a professor at Kathmandu University, says it is worrying that students' learning achievement, which is already low, has further declined after their studies shifted online.

Several studies carried out by the Education Review Office, under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, before the pandemic show

that on average school students learn just half of what has been envisioned by the curriculum.

Dilli Ram Luitel, spokesperson for the Centre for Education and Human Resource Development, agrees that there has been a decline in the learning achievement because virtual classes haven't been as effective as in-person ones.

However, there hasn't been a study to say to what extent it has been ineffective, Luitel says. "There is a need for a proper study to find out the degradation in learning during the pandemic," he told the Post.

"However, there is no immediate plan for such a study."

An assessment by the World Bank says by the end of 2021 school days lost were above 200 and this is more than a school year. This prolonged interruption in learning could have grave and lasting effects, particularly in the middle income and poor countries, the assessment says. In some of such countries, the students had learned 27

percent less than what they would have learned in normal times.

"When the fallout of the coronavirus is finally tallied, it will become clear that its biggest damage is the lost learning of school-goers," the study states.

Principals and school operators agree that the loss of learning among students is immense. Gita Kafle, principal at Nandi School, says the learning achievement of students has gone down because virtual learning has not been effective.

"Unreliable internet and electricity supply, poor interaction and lack of support at the family level are the major factors for the decline in students' achievement," Kafle told the Post. "Let's hope the pandemic doesn't last [too] long."

School operators say it is necessary to carry out nationwide assessment of learning achievement of students. "It is necessary to conduct a competency test of our students," Ritu Raj Sapkota, chairperson of the National Private

and Boarding Schools Association, Nepal, told the Post.

Unlike the exams conducted at the school or at the national level that generally test the knowledge of the examinees, the learning achievement assessment also tests the aptitude of the students. The World Bank assessment shows more efforts are needed to finance the return to classroom-based teaching, and help public schools adopt teaching techniques that blend online and in-person learning and teach students at the level they need today after the months and years they have been denied an education.

The best option, according to educationists, is to measure the learning achievement of students and conduct remedial classes.

"Students will continue to perform poorly if the gap in their learning achievement is not bridged sooner," Luitel, the professor, told the Post. "Teachers must conduct remedial classes for students once they return to school for in-person learning."

Devolution of sycophancy

With federalism giving rise to new power centres, 'chakari' culture has taken newer forms.

AVASNA PANDEY

POLITICS & PROSE



In BP Koirala's short story "Doshi Chasma", Keshav Raj, a commoner, visits an army general's house to pay his obeisance every day. But one day, his faulty glasses fail him, and he cannot recognise the general as he passes by. Having failed to offer his *swasti* at an opportune moment, Keshav Raj worries he might have angered the *jarsaab*, while it later turns out that the general had not even noticed him.

Keshav Raj is a quintessential Nepali sycophant. Sycophancy has long sustained the hierarchical and feudal nature of Nepali society. Anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista in *Fatalism and Development* writes that *chakari*, or sycophancy, was an integral part of the social organisation in Nepal. And it has to a large extent become coextensive with the informal structuring of Nepali organisations—it is a way for information to be passed throughout the organisation outside formal channels. So embedded is the act in the system that anyone who refuses is considered to be attempting to disrupt the social organisation.

The fault in our status

The promise of social media was that it would give everyone a voice. So it did, to a significant extent. But it also turned us into exhibitionists, as we constantly market ourselves by showcasing our associations particularly with influential people. Hence, we post every picture with authorities to wish them on their birthdays and anniversaries, and we congratulate them for inaugurating projects and writing poems. Our captions adulate them even more, as we sing paeans to the glory of the leaders—*adaraniya buwa, dai, didi* and so



POST FILE PHOTO

forth—not to mention the garlands we offer them, often used to pay homage to leaders, which have become synonymous with cheap publicity. On social media, the voice of reason is lost somewhere, and the platform has mostly turned into a circus-like snafu, or rather the new proscenium, where wanting to be part of the show, we often bow and scrape.

The exhibition of *chakari* on social media is just a new iteration of what has long remained a part of Nepali culture, politics and society. Tracing the genealogy of the *chakari* culture might lead us to the establishment of Nepal Mandala itself, but a cursory look at the past few decades is enough to understand that it is a culture we have inherited well from our former rulers. Rana rule sustained itself through the servitude of sycophants. It was on the basis of sycophancy that the Ranas delegated power and position to bureaucrats. The more dedicated the sycophant, the higher the reward. It was on the basis of servitude and patroni-

sation that the *baksis* culture flowered. Once the Rana regime was gone, the monarchy once again became the centre of power, in effect, of the culture of sycophancy. Those who fell out of favour of the monarchs lost political legitimacy, to the extent of being considered a threat to the institution of monarchy itself.

With the re-establishment of multi-party democracy, the power of the durbars waned significantly as political parties were now in a position to wield power over state mechanisms. And after 2015, when federalism ensured the devolution of power centres to multiple locations across the country, the culture of sycophancy devolved as well. Today, with the devolution of power to provincial and local levels, there are multiple locations where the transaction of sycophancy and patronage can be exercised. In other words, sycophancy is adaptive in all forms of power relationships, from authoritarian to democratic. It is hydra-headed; it does not die away easily

and keeps appearing in various avatars.

Bista in his book points out that sycophancy is an act to be performed publicly; but public spheres have gone through a sea change since the anthropologist put forth his views. Thanks to technology, public spheres are no longer limited to physical spaces like palaces and *khopis*, but have come to constitute digital spaces as well. Today, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter offer arguably more effective platforms for sycophants to pay their allegiance to the patrons and exhibit such an allegiance for the consumption of the public. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to claim that these new spaces provide fertile ground for neo-*chakari* to take place. How we practise sycophancy might have changed over the years, but it has not been eliminated from society. As prisoners to structures and attitudes that demand submission, many of us continue to become real-life Keshav Raj, and would serve as poignant subjects for a re-assessment of Bista's theory in the digital age.

The legitimising effect

State formation and formation of identity complement each other. Our identities—as citizens, lawmakers, professors or sycophants—are formed through a historical process through which a particular self comes into being. A culture that prioritises personal relations over merit and critical thinking inhibits us from exercising our agency as citizens. Instead, it forces us to worship those who expect servitude in exchange for even the simplest tasks of public service delivery. As institutions and bureaucracy become increasingly dysfunctional, the "people" have nothing more than selfies and pictures taken with their elected representatives to get promotions, admissions, contracts, political appointments and so on. This reliance is pitiful, but aptly portrays our state-society relation.

The relationship between the sycophant and the patron is a mutually beneficial one. By hobnobbing around the power centre, the sycophant projects an image of himself or herself as someone who has access to power. And in doing so, the sycophant ends up legitimising the power of the patron. The patron, meanwhile, continues the relationship with the sycophant because there is legitimacy to be derived from that relationship. In that sense, it is not a relationship entirely based on dominance and subjugation, but on a transaction of legitimacy in a society that values power and patronage.

The culture of sycophancy needs to be stemmed if we are to change society for the better, but given our current state of affairs, it seems like a distant dream. We have changed the system of governance at the macro level, and this might give the impression that our society and culture is changing too. But inside this story of change lies the notion of continuity, a feudal mindset that seems to be working to either accumulate power or exercise it in various ways through different channels. What we need is a complete overhaul of how we understand politics, public service delivery and social relationships. What we will have is only a marketplace of self-interests and transactional exchanges. A country without a soul.

Pandey teaches at Tribhuvan University's Department of International Relations and Diplomacy.

The hidden cost of sidelining the humanities

A major academic discipline is dying a slow death due to a system that quantifies success.

AARATI BARAL



Call for columns

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We will respond only to pitches that have original ideas. Plagiarism will lead to blacklisting. We suggest that you google your pitch before writing to us. If you're submitting an article that the *Post* or other publications have already covered, tell us why your piece offers something new.

Let us know what your expertise is on the topic you're interested in exploring. The *Post* receives dozens of pitches every day from aspiring writers, students, analysts, activists, entrepreneurs and diplomats. We are not able to respond to every single email, but if we like your idea, we will get back to you within a week.

"What does my heart say?" I found myself contemplating this question several summers ago, quite unusual for a teenager raised in a society that teaches you early on to think what "people" will say. "How do I want my life to blossom?" I asked.

I had just finished my school and was considering academic disciplines for further studies. And it wasn't long before I found my answers—in the pleasure and comfort that the humanities and social sciences (HSS) offered. After all, I had grown up reading stories, playing with words and keeping abreast of the goings on in society and politics.

In a world dominated by an unending quest for technological advancement and capital accumulation, a young student's decision to study HSS comes as a surprise, if not shock, to many. I joined the stream anyway, and, as expected, encountered people waxing eloquent about science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. A degree in STEM, they told me, would be a golden ticket into a world of employment. They regarded my choice as "naive", "outdated", and "unimportant" and bombarded me with questions. What was the point of spending time on subjects that have no market value anymore, they wondered. How would I make a living with that degree, they worried. But I continued to be unperturbed by their concerns, for I was unequivocal about why I wanted to study the humanities.

Reading between the lines

The foremost art that humanities teach us is to consider what makes us human beings and create a world out of our imagination. They help us think critically, appreciate the arts, cope with life's pressing problems, understand the course of history, and enrich our understanding of the world through a study of language, literature, history, philosophy, ethics, and fine arts among others. Social sciences teach us to consider what we are as social beings and help us understand how we interact with the world around us through a study of sociology, anthropology, psychology, social work, political science, and economics among others. Together, HSS are married in such a way that they simply work on the expansion of human consciousness and foster a deep understanding of society.

The question of employability should not worry parents, friends and relatives of HSS students, for there is a plethora of career choices such as teaching, writing, editing, researching, volunteering, and advocating



SHUTTERSTOCK

among others. But more than mere jobs, HSS scholars develop the life-affirming skills of empathy, humility, morality and ethics that cannot be quantified. Despite this, why do parents want their children to avoid HSS? Why don't HSS subjects get the recognition they deserve?

Biased system

At present, with the growing domination of science and technology all around the world, governments are setting out to achieve technological advancement and innovation as markers of development. They are funding the educational institutions that follow the national priorities that focus mainly on science and technology. As a result, governments across the world are watering down HSS while focusing increasingly on STEM. For instance, in 2015, the Japanese government asked universities to cut HSS and focus on "more practical, vocational education" to "meet societal needs." In 2020, the Australian government increased the tuition fees of HSS to "incentivise students to make more job-relevant choices." The government's focus on STEM in the UK resulted in a 15 percent decline in arts subjects. Furthermore, between 2015 and 2018, many universities across the world saw a decline in the share of humanities degrees. In this global trend of sidelining HSS, Nepal remains no exception, and that is bad news for our collective future.

The Nepal government views academic excellence in science and technical subjects as a solid foundation to achieve social transformation and economic development. It has incorporated secondary level technical education, diploma programmes, and vocational skills development and training in all seven provinces. The Higher Education Reforms Project (HERP) prioritises science and technology, medicine, agriculture, and forestry for research funding, stating them as "technical areas" and "research activities in those areas as priority areas". In

addition, the University Grants Commission (UGC), which aspires to enhance technical higher education and advance economy-based knowledge and technology, funds and revises the programmes based on student demand and the employment possibilities of the subjects.

Given the government's emphasis on STEM subjects, several universities and colleges in Nepal are running HSS subjects only as subordinate to the degrees in STEM and management with poor resources, promotion and attention. It is due to this apathy that HSS was introduced as a four-year bachelor's programme in 2019, much later than any other faculty in the Tribhuvan University (TU). And with 12.6 percent enrolment in the same year, which was less than management, education, science, technology, medicine and engineering fields, TU witnessed the steepest decline in Geography and History with zero students in 2016 and 2018, respectively. At a programme conducted by the UGC in December last year, Minister for Education, Science and Technology Devendra Poudel advised universities "to develop new programmes of national priority and introduce subjects of market demand rather than traditional ones." It is these unscientific biases of those in decision-making positions that have corrupted the minds of an entire generation of parents, who believe that their children are good for nothing if they study HSS subjects.

As a result of the government's bias, STEM subjects now appear saleable, having "market value" and "job prospects" while HSS subjects appear to be of little market value. In this scenario, the value of education is accepted only in terms of "market", ignoring the social and moral ones that the HSS subjects offer. What students and parents infer from such a biased attitude of the government is that only those with degrees in STEM subjects can land decent jobs and contribute to the prosperity of the nation. Ultimately, this has led to a collec-

tive consciousness that HSS subjects are for students who are "not smart enough" to study STEM subjects. And that is as wrong as it gets.

Reviving HSS

HSS subjects are dying a slow, painful death not because they are unimportant but because they are sidelined by a system keen on quantifying success. Science and technology have indeed made our lives easier with innovations that fulfil the daily necessities of the modern world. Still, it is irrational to discount the significance of HSS for scientific and technological necessities. The relevance of HSS is crucial in countries like ours to ensure equality, inclusion and a better understanding of diverse communities. We need not look too far to understand why we need HSS as much as we need STEM. As the coronavirus pandemic ravages the world, scientific innovations have saved lives through the development of vaccines. But in a world that is highly diverse and unequal, it is ethics, morals, and values that ensure that vaccines reach even the poorest people of the world. A world devoid of the life-affirming values of humanity ends up creating a monumental divide between vaccine hoarders and losers. We certainly do not want such a divide.

Whenever people reflect on the past and envision the future of humanity, they overlook how literature, an essential component of HSS, has helped people decipher the complexities of the real world, make sense of life, and deal with uncertainties and ambiguities through myths, stories, and folklores which are as important as scientific innovations. Both STEM and HSS have saved humanity and society over time, and an artificial divide between the two is totally unwarranted. Authorities cannot continue to weigh them only in terms of their "saleability".

Baral is an op-ed intern at The Kathmandu Post.

Nepal's trade with China going through rough patch

Lack of visas for Nepali traders, restrictions on container trucks and late delivery of consignments are among the problems hindering trade, insiders say.

KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, FEB 5

From January 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic was beginning to spread, there was a near halt in the arrival of cargo containers from China to Nepal. Trade still has not resumed fully, with the northern neighbour placing strict restrictions at the border. Even then, imports from China swelled in the last fiscal year ended mid-July 2021.

According to the Department of Customs, imports from China in fiscal 2020-21 rose 28.58 percent year-on-year to Rs233.92 billion. Before Covid in fiscal 2018-19, imports amounted to Rs205.51 billion. In 2017-18, imports were valued at Rs159.98 billion, up from Rs129.87 billion in fiscal 2016-17.

Nepal suffers a huge deficit in its trade with China. If Nepal imported Rs233.92 billion worth of goods from the northern neighbour in 2020-21, its exports across the Himalaya were valued at a mere Rs1 billion.

This translates into a trade deficit of Rs232.90 billion, which accounted for 14 percent of Nepal's total trade deficit in fiscal 2020-21.

Business with China started booming after 2015 when the Nepal government removed export duty.

In fiscal 2015-16 when Nepal was hit by a devastating earthquake, imports from China stood at Rs116.11 billion, up from Rs99.28 billion in 2014-15.

In the last seven years, imports from China have increased three-fold.

Sunil Kumar Dhanuka, president of the Nepal Foreign Trade Association, says that freight costs have increased exorbitantly after the pandemic. It currently costs \$6,000-\$6,500 to ship a 20-foot container from China to Nepal, and \$10,500-\$11,500 to ship a 40-foot container. Before the pandemic, the charges were \$1,800-\$2,000 for a 20-foot container and \$2,800 for a 40-foot container.

A hike in freight costs means an increase in the price of goods by more than 20-25 percent for traders which obviously is passed on to the consumer. Shipping costs are a key component of food and non-food prices in countries like Nepal.

China is Nepal's second largest



Concerns have also grown if there is an undeclared blockade on the Nepal-China border, as Nepali traders have been unable to import goods, resulting in losses to the tune of millions of rupees.

trading partner after India. Nepal's major imports from China in the last fiscal year consisted of electric goods (worth Rs16.70 billion), machinery and parts (Rs21.17 billion), readymade garments (Rs17.96 billion) and telecommunication equipment and parts (Rs31.55 billion), according to Nepal Rastra Bank.

In the last fiscal year, the country exported handicrafts, mostly metal and wool, amounting to Rs141.9 million, other handicraft goods worth Rs165.9 million and woollen carpets valued at Rs222.8 million to China.

The pandemic has pushed up freight costs globally. As a result, goods have become more expensive causing a significant rise in inflation for countries like Nepal. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has predicted that higher shipping costs will make goods costlier over the next year.

According to an UNCTAD report published on November 18, the global surge in container shipping rates could raise consumer prices by 2.2 percent in the least developed countries over the next year, based on an 8.7 percent increase in import prices. Container freight rates skyrocketed

amid a surge in demand for freight transport, shortage of shipping containers, and limited capacity and congestion at ports, the report said, adding that the impact was generally greater in smaller economies.

Ashok Kumar Shrestha, president of the Nepal Trans Himalayan Border Commerce Association, said that transport charges from Kerung to the Nepal border, a 30-kilometre distance, have increased six-fold to around Rs600,000 per container from Rs100,000 before the pandemic. More than 100 cargo containers used to come through Tatopani daily before the earthquake.

Nowadays, according to Shrestha, around eight containers leave Kerung daily for Nepal.

Most of the goods imported from China are meant for festival sales during Dashain and Tihar. But for two years, the ordered consignments have been arriving so late that they missed the festival shopping season.

Shrestha said that China is not issuing visas to Nepali traders, as a result they are being cheated on quality as they have to place orders virtually.

A lack of infrastructure on the Nepali side is also one of the reasons for the fewer number of containers

coming this way. "The customs yard is very small," said Shrestha. "From Liping to Barhabise, the road is not so good, and this problem occurs every year during the rainy season."

Many importers are rerouting their inbound cargo through southern border points to avoid losses and uncertainties. It normally takes two months for goods ordered from China to arrive in Nepal by sea freight, and two weeks by container truck overland across the northern border.

The traders have informed the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassy of China and the private sector apex body, the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), about their problems.

The government has been negotiating with Chinese authorities to allow more containers to pass into Nepal, but the trade problem remains the same. Customs data shows exports to China declined to Rs1 billion in the last fiscal year from Rs1.19 billion in 2019-20. That is almost half of the figure for the fiscal year 2018-19 when shipments totalled Rs2.10 billion.

Concerns have also grown if there is an undeclared blockade on the Nepal-China border, as Nepali traders have been unable to import goods, resulting in losses to the tune of millions of rupees. "China failed to exhibit good neighbourly behaviour in terms of trade," said Posh Raj Pandey, a trade economist. Government officials say that trade between Nepal and China is continuing following certain health protocols. "In this context, China failed to keep good relations with Nepal."

According to Pandey, although Nepali traders suffered losses due to the restrictions, China could face long-term harm in terms of trade relations. Nepal looked towards its northern border to diversify trade after India's border blockade in 2015.

A slew of agreements were signed, including one on trade and transit, which allowed Nepal to access seven Chinese sea and land ports for Nepal's third country trade. The third-country trade via China also raised hopes that Nepal would finally come out of its complete dependence on India.

But with China not allowing cargo trucks to enter Nepal smoothly, concerns have risen if Nepal indeed can conduct third-country trade via its northern neighbour.

"Traders who ordered goods in advance from China have lost billions," said Pandey.

There are two key trade routes—

Rasuwadaghi-Kerung and Tatopani-Zhangmu (also known as Khasa)—between Nepal and China.

Kerung is situated at a distance of 190 km from Kathmandu while the distance between Tatopani and Kathmandu is 115 km.

The Tatopani-Khasa border point reopened on May 29, 2019, after remaining closed for four years following the 2015 earthquakes. The border point was a major overland route for trade with the northern neighbour.

The Rasuwadaghi-Kerung customs point, which was elevated to an international checkpoint between Nepal and China allowing people from third countries to cross the border, reopened in July 2020. Nepal's foreign trade has been growing for the last five years, except for a decline in the fiscal year 2019-20. Nepal's total trade decreased by 14.59 percent to Rs1,294.50 billion in 2019-20 from Rs1,515.64 billion in the fiscal year 2018-19 due to Covid-19 related trade restriction and a global supply chain breakdown.

However, in 2020-21, Nepal's foreign trade hit a new record increasing by 29.9 percent to Rs1,680.96 billion. The total trade deficit increased 27.3 percent to Rs1,398.71 billion in 2020-21.

India accounted for 64.1 percent of Nepal's total foreign trade in fiscal 2020-21 ended mid-July 2021. China is Nepal's second largest trading partner accounting for 14 percent of Nepal's total trade. However, China is not the second largest trading partner for Nepal's exports.

"China's indifference towards Nepal gives a message that we cannot trust China. Nepal needs to diversify its market," said Pandey.

(This report is produced under a fellowship programme of Center for Media Research-Nepal)

FOREX	
US Dollar	119.82
Euro	137.42
Pound Sterling	162.39
Japanese Yen (10)	10.43
Chinese Yuan	18.84
Qatari Riyal	32.91
Australian Dollar	85.16
Malaysian Ringgit	28.67
Saudi Arab Riyal	31.94

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION		PRICE PER TOLA
Fine Gold		Rs 92,500
Silver		Rs 1,250

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

GASOLINE WATCH

100% PERFORMANCE. EVERYTIME.

	Petrol (Per Litre) Rs 142.00/-
	Diesel (Per Litre) Rs 125.00/-
	Kerosene (Per Litre) Rs 125.00/-
	LPG (Per cylinder) Rs 1575/-

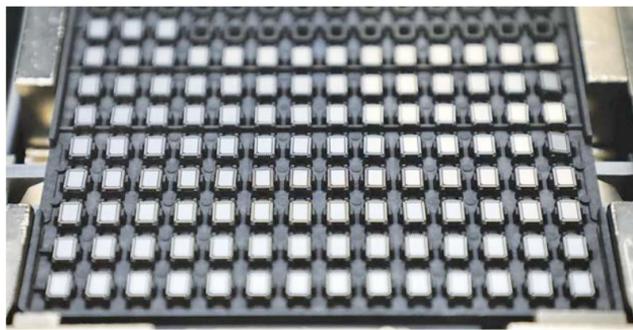
Source: Nepal Oil Corporation

BRIEFING

Apple plans to debut low cost 5G iPhone in March:
Bloomberg News
CALIFORNIA: Apple Inc is targeting a date on or near March 8 to unveil a low-cost 5G iPhone and an updated iPad, Bloomberg News reported on Friday, citing people with knowledge of the matter. According to the report, the new iPhone will be the first update to the iPhone SE model in two years and will feature 5G network capabilities, an improved camera and a faster processor. Apple in October announced two new MacBook Pro models that run on more powerful in-house chips. With the expected launch still more than a month away, Apple's plans may change in the face of production delays or other changes, the report added. (REUTERS)

Automakers, chipmakers differ on when chip shortage will abate

Supply limitations are far from over and will persist well into 2022, chipmakers say.



Chips are pictured at semiconductor packaging firm Unisem's plant in Ipoh, Malaysia.

REUTERS
SAN FRANCISCO, FEB 5

Automakers, including General Motors, Ford Motor and Hyundai Motor predict a near two-year chip constraint will ease in the second half of 2022, but automotive chipmakers, on the other hand, expect a recovery to take longer.

During their quarterly results reporting over the past two weeks, GM CEO Mary Barra projected the semiconductor shortage would diminish in the second half, Ford forecast a significant improvement in the second half after a first-quarter low in vehicle sales, and Hyundai predicted chip supply would return to normal levels in the third quarter of this year.

But leading automotive chipmakers like NXP and Infineon forecast a supply squeeze to persist despite production increases.

The differing outlooks on the most pressing issue facing the automobile industry prolongs uncertainty about its recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and risks hampering its efforts to transition to new, chip-intensive technologies such as electrification and safety and driving-assistant features.

The chip shortage will cost the global auto industry in 2021 \$210 billion in revenues and lost production of 7.7 million vehicles, consultant AlixPartners estimated in September.

Tesla, which managed chip supplies last year through strategies including writing new software to handle changes in chips, expects chip shortages to last through this year before easing next year.

Chief Executive Elon Musk told an earnings call last month the shortage was not a long-term issue, with factories increasing capacity and automakers guilty of panic buying of chips which slowed the supply chain.

He described that to investors in blunt terms.

"I think there's some degree of the toilet paper problem as well, where, you know, there was a toilet paper shortage during Covid, and like, obviously, it wasn't really certainly a tremendous enhanced need for ass wiping. It's just people panicked..."

Chip firm Qualcomm was optimistic. "I do think that a lot of our peers along with us are prioritising the auto business and shipping as much as you can," AkashPalkhiwala, Qualcomm chief financial officer, told Reuters.

Leading automotive chipmakers, however, were less sanguine.

Infineon said on Thursday the supply-demand balance would improve in some chips for the second half of this year, but the market for mature chips—crucial to automakers—would remain tight.

"Supply limitations are far from over and will persist well into 2022," Infineon CEO ReinhardPloss said during an investor call. Infineon is concerned that the spread of the Omicron Covid-19 variant would lead China, with its zero-Covid strategy, to shut down factories, limiting supply.

NXP also said the industry would not get out of the supply-demand imbalance this year. A chip factory takes a couple of years to build and another couple to get to maximum capacity, STMicroelectronics said. The company said in November that it would take until 2024 or 2025 to see a major increase in capacity.

Invitation for Bids

Prasauni Rural Municipality

Office of The Rural Municipal Executive

Prasauni, Bara

Madhesh Pradesh, Nepal

Date of publication: 2078/10/23 (2022-02-06)

- The Office of The Rural Municipal Executive, Prasauni has allocated funds towards the cost of **Construction of Rigid Pavements & Building Works for below mentioned contract**. Bidding is open to all eligible Nepalese bidders.
- Office of The Rural Municipal Executive, Prasauni, invites electronic bids from eligible bidders under National Competitive Bidding procedures.
- Eligible Bidders may obtain further information and inspect the Bidding Documents at the **Office of The Rural Municipal Executive, Bara, E-mail:prasaunigaupalika1@gmail.com**
- According to amended public procurement act (PPA-69 amendment) and public procurement regulation, only e-Bidding is applicable for this contract. No Hardcopy submission is applicable.
- Bidder who chooses to submit their bid can download the bidding documents for e-submission from PPMO's Web Site www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp. Bidders, submitting their bid electronically, should deposit the cost (as specified in this notice) of bidding document in the Project's Office revenue account as specified below and the scanned copy (pdf format) of the Bank deposit voucher of **non-refundable fee of Rs 3000.00/-** per bid shall be uploaded by the bidder at the time of electronic submission of the bids. Information to deposit the cost of bidding document in Bank:
Name of the Bank : **Himalayan Bank Ltd., Prasauni, Bara**
Name of Office : **Office Of The Rural Municipal Executive, Prasauni, Bara**
Account Name : **GA-1.1 Aantrik Rajaswa Khata Prasauni**
Office Account no. : **05307682940019**
- Pre-bid meeting shall be held at **Office Of The Rural Municipal Executive, Prasauni, Bara** at 2078/11/12 (2022-02-24), 14:00 Hrs.
- Electronic bids must be submitted to the Office Of The Rural Municipal Executive, Prasauni, Bara through PPMO website www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp on or before **12:00 Hrs on 2078/11/24 (2022-03-08)**. Bids received after this deadline will be rejected.
- The bids will be opened in the presence of Bidders' representatives who choose to attend at **14:00Hrs, 2078/11/24 (2022-03-08)** at the **Office Of The Rural Municipal Executive, Prasauni, Bara**. Bids must be valid for a period of 90 Days after bid opening and must be accompanied by a bid security & scanned copy of the bid security in .pdf format, amounting to a minimum of **rupees as mentioned below** which shall be valid for 30 days beyond the validity period of the bid (i.e. **120 Days**).
- If the last date of submission falls on a government holiday, then the next working day shall be considered as the last date. In such case the validity period of the bid security shall remain the same as specified for the original last date of bid submission.
- The employer reserves the right to accept or reject, wholly or partly any or all the bids without assigning any reason, whatsoever.

S.No	Contract ID No.	Project Name	Estimated Amount With Vat (Nrs.)	Bid security (Nrs.)
1	PRM/NCB/SQ/WORKS/2078/079-15	Construction of Rcc Concrete Road Baluwa Dekhi Sohari Pokhari Hudai Banjariya Sann Baato Dhalan Karya Work, Ward No.7	74,03,448.28	2,00,000.00
2	PRM/NCB/SQ/WORKS/2078/079-16	Construction of Old Age Home Building Brid Aashram Bhawan Nirman Karya Work, Ward No.2	40,91,379.31	1,20,000.00

WORLD

BRIEFINGS

Western Australian officials warn of catastrophic bushfire conditions

PERTH: Western Australian officials warned on Saturday of forecast "extreme to catastrophic fire conditions" as a large bushfire burned out of control in the west of the country, forcing families to flee their homes. More than 2,300 hectares (8.9 square miles) have burnt over the past couple of days just west of the tourist town of Denmark, some 420 kilometres (261 miles) south of Perth, on Western Australia's south coast, fuelled by gusty winds and high temperatures. "Severe heatwave conditions and extreme to catastrophic fire dangers are forecast ... on Sunday," the Bureau of Meteorology in Western Australia state said on Twitter.

Two skiers killed in second deadly avalanche in Austria

ZURICH: Two skiers were killed by an avalanche in western Austria, police said on Saturday, hours after another avalanche in the same province killed five people on an unusually dangerous day in the Alps after heavy snowfall followed by warmer weather. Emergency services found the bodies of the two Austrian skiers, a woman aged 61 and a 60-year-old man, at 00:40 am on Saturday after their relatives raised the alarm when they could no longer be contacted, police said. The pair had set out in the Tyrol region on Friday afternoon and the man told a contact by phone at 3:30 pm that they had reached the 1,868-metre (6,129-ft) Breitegg peak. That was their last contact.

Peru light plane crash at Nazca Lines kills five tourists, two crew members

LIMA: At least seven people have died after a light aircraft crashed during a flight above the Nazca Lines archaeological site in Peru, local police and the national government said on Friday. Local police said that the deceased included three Dutch tourists, two Chilean tourists, and two Peruvian members of crew. The Ministry of Transport and Communications said in a statement that the Cessna 207 aircraft crashed in the vicinity of the Maria Reiche airport in the city of Nazca. (AGENCIES)

Macron's government seeks to give Islam a French makeover

France has seen a rise in radical Islamic terrorist attacks by its own citizens in recent years.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NICE, FEB 5

The French government on Saturday forged ahead with efforts to reshape Islam in France and rid it of extremism, introducing a new body made up of clergy and laymen—and women—to help lead the largest Muslim community in western Europe.

With France bloodied by past Islamic extremist attacks, having hundreds of citizens who went to fight with jihadists in Syria in past years and thousands of French troops now fighting extremists in Africa, few disagree that radicalisation is a danger. But critics also see the efforts as a political ploy to lure right-wing voters to President Emmanuel Macron's centrist party ahead of April's presidential election.

The new body, called the Forum of Islam in France, is being introduced on Saturday by the French Interior Ministry. Supporters say it will keep the country—and its 5 million Muslims—safe and free of foreign influence, and ensure that Muslim practices in France adhere to the country's cherished value of secularism in public life.

Its critics, including many Muslims who consider the religion a part of their French identity, say the government's latest initiative is another step in an institutionalised discrimination process that holds the whole community responsible for violent attacks of a few and serves as another barrier in their public lives.

The new body will include imams, influential figures from civil society, prominent intellectuals and business leaders. All of its members are hand-picked by the government, and women will make up at least a quarter of its members, according to French media reports. It replaces the French Council of Muslim Faith, a group set up in 2003 by former President Nicolas Sarkozy, then interior minister. The Council served as an interlocutor between the government and religious leaders. It is being dissolved this month by Macron's government because, according to Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, it was no longer fulfilling its role in the Muslim community and French society as it



A file photo shows Muslims praying at the Paris Mosque.

was reeling from attacks in recent years that killed hundreds.

"We want to launch a revolution by putting an end to [foreign influence] on Islam," Darmanin said in a recent interview with Le Parisien daily. "Islam is not a religion of foreigners in France, but a French religion that should not depend on foreign money and any authorities abroad."

In his project, Macron envisions measures like training imams in France instead of bringing them in from Turkey, Morocco or Algeria—a plan many in the Muslim community approve of.

Muslims are divided over the project. Some believers visiting the Grand Mosque of Paris for Friday prayers cautiously welcomed the idea while others worry it's going too far in trying to control their faith, or say that the government has singled out Islamic institutions but would not

France is home to the largest Muslim community in western Europe.

dare suggesting such changes to Christian ones. Hamoud ben Bouzid, a 51-year-old Parisian, was optimistic about Macron's plan and his effort to include different voices from the Muslim community to show to the wider society its diversity. Members of the clergy "don't speak for every Muslim citizen" of France, he said.

"We live in a secular country so why not expand the forum and give voice to many more Muslims in France?" ben Bouzid said. Muslims in France have long complained of stigmatism in

daily life, from being singled out by police for ID checks to discrimination in job searches. Whenever extremist violence hits, by foreign-born attackers or by French-born youth, France's own Muslims come under suspicion and pressure to denounce violence.

Islam is the second religion in France, with no single leader and multiple strains represented, from moderate to Salafist with a rigorous interpretation of the religion to outright radical upstarts.

Last year the French parliament approved a law to strengthen oversight of mosques, schools and sports clubs. The government says it was needed to safeguard France from radical Islamists and to promote respect for secularism and women's rights. The law, which raised concern in parts of the Muslim world, has been used to shut down multiple mosques and community groups.

Britain's pandemic modellers say future large waves of Covid possible

REUTERS
LONDON, FEB 5

There is a realistic possibility of large waves of Covid-19 infection in the future in Britain and such waves might even be considered likely, epidemiologists who model the Covid-19 pandemic to inform government advice have said.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has ditched legal restrictions in England, saying that, while the pandemic was not over, Britain needs to learn to live with Covid.

The Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling, Operational subgroup (SPI-M-O) said the emergence of new viral variants was the biggest unknown factor in the medium-to-long term, along with waning population immunity and changes in mixing patterns.

"Large future waves of infection that need active management to prevent detrimental pressure on the health and care sector are, at least, a realistic possibility [high confidence] or likely [medium confidence]," SPI-M-O said in a consensus statement published on Friday.

Britain has reported 157,730 deaths from Covid-19, the seventh highest total globally, and Johnson has faced heavy criticism for his handling of the pandemic, which has seen three national lockdowns.

The Omicron variant fuelled a spike in infections to new highs at the end of last year, prompting Johnson to reintroduce some limited measures, but deaths did not rise at the same pace.

He has now reopened the economy fully, citing the country's programme of booster shots, the availability of antivirals, and the lower severity of the Omicron variant, as breaking the link between infections and deaths.

England returned to Plan A last week, and the chair of SPI-M-O told Reuters that while each year should see the Covid situation improve, there may be times where the government has to go backwards and introduce measures.

"The next few years will be highly uncertain, and future outbreaks and waves will likely be noisy as things settle down," the SPI-M-O statement said.



Technicians work to restore power to the Central Garden neighbourhood of Memphis, Tennessee, United States on Friday. More than 120,000 customers were without power on Friday afternoon in Shelby County, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility reports.

China suspected in hack of journalists at News Corp

The media firm's internet security adviser said hack was likely aimed at gathering intelligence for Beijing's benefit.

REUTERS
NEW YORK, FEB 5

Digital intruders broke into News Corp email accounts and compromised the data of an unspecified number of journalists, the company disclosed on Friday.

The media firm's internet security adviser said the hack was likely aimed at gathering intelligence for Beijing's benefit. News Corp, which publishes the Wall Street Journal, said the breach was discovered in late January and affected emails and documents of what it described as a limited number of employees, including journalists. It said that cybersecurity firm Mandiant had contained the breach.

David Wong, vice president of consulting at Mandiant, said the hackers were believed to have "a China nexus, and we believe they are likely involved in espionage activities to collect intelligence to benefit China's interests."

A spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in Washington said he was unaware of the details of the reports but that he hoped "there can be a professional, responsible and evidence-based approach to identifying cyber-related incidents, rather than making allegations based on speculations."

In a letter seen by Reuters, company

executives told their employees that "we believe the activity affected a limited number of business email accounts and documents from News Corp headquarters, News Technology Services, Dow Jones, News UK, and New York Post."

"Our preliminary analysis indicates that foreign government involvement may be associated with this activity, and that some data was taken," executives said.

The company added that its other business units, including HarperCollins Publishers, Move, News Corp Australia, Foxtel, REA, and Storyful, were not targeted in the attack. News Corp shares were down 1.3 percent in morning trading.

The Wall Street Journal, which reported the news first, competes with Reuters, the news division of Thomson Reuters Corp, in supplying news to media outlets.

Beijing's hackers have been targeting Western journalists for years, said Mike McLellan, the director of intelligence at cybersecurity firm Secureworks, which has tracked China-linked spying on media organisations on-and-off over the past decade. He said journalists might have access to valuable sources of intelligence about China's adversaries or its domestic opponents.



The News Corporation headquarters building is seen in New York.

Canadian cities brace for anti vaccine mandate protests

'Freedom truck convoy' has attracted support from Donald Trump and opposition federal Conservative party in Canada.

REUTERS
TORONTO, FEB 5

Canadian cities, including the financial hub Toronto, are bracing for disruptions this weekend as protests against vaccine mandates spread from the capital of Ottawa.

The so-called "Freedom Convoy" began as a movement against a vaccine requirement for cross-border truckers, but has turned into a rallying point against public health measures.

Protesters have shut down downtown Ottawa for the past eight days, with some participants waving Confederate or Nazi flags and some saying they wanted to dissolve

Canada's government.

Toronto Police said they would have a ramped up presence in the city over the weekend due to anticipated protests. On Friday they closed a major downtown avenue, which is home to several hospitals, fearing protestors would otherwise impede access. Entry was limited to hospital staff, patients, family and people picking them up. "If anyone is planning to come here for a protest that is not peaceful and not respectful I would urge you, on behalf of all Toronto residents and business, to please stay home," Toronto Mayor John Tory said on Friday.

Healthcare workers were planning a rally of their own in downtown

Toronto on Saturday.

Some protest vehicles arrived in Quebec City on Thursday evening for a planned Saturday protest, coinciding with the city's annual winter carnival. Trucks blocked traffic near Manitoba's provincial legislature in Winnipeg on Friday.

Some Ottawa residents, subjected to near-constant honking, smashed windows and harassment for wearing masks, criticised Ottawa Police earlier this week for not doing more to end the blockade.

Ottawa police warned on Friday of a crackdown on what they called an "increasingly dangerous" protest and dedicated 150 officers to "patrolling and addressing unlawful and threat-

ening conduct in the most impacted neighbourhoods."

Several Toronto healthcare workers said on Thursday they received advice from their hospitals to not wear hospital scrubs in public in light of the protest. Police said this was not their advice.

"The notion that we have to somehow skunk around or be afraid of who we are and what we're doing, I think, is offensive and regrettable and, I think, a sad commentary on our society," emergency room doctor Raghav Venugopal told Reuters.

Venugopal said he supported people's right to protest peacefully but hoped police cleared access for hospital staff and patients.

Johaug wins first gold medal of Beijing Games

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING, FEB 5

Norwegian cross-country skier Therese Johaug won the first gold medal of the Beijing Olympics on Saturday as sport moved centre stage after a troubled build-up dominated by coronavirus and rights concerns.

Johaug was a comfortable winner of the women's 7.5-plus-7.5-kilometre skiathlon, taking what is likely to be the first of many cross-country skiing medals for Norway at these Games. The 33-year-old was almost ruled out of the Olympics before she travelled to China when she was classified as a close Covid contact after two of her Norwegian teammates tested positive.

Dinigeer Yilamujiang, a 20-year-old Uyghur who was chosen by China as one of two athletes to light the cauldron in Friday's opening ceremony, finished 43rd in the skiathlon race. Yilamujiang's inclusion in a ceremony watched by a worldwide television audience placed her at the centre of long-time controversy over rights abuses in China's Xinjiang region.

Campaigners say China has incarcerated at least one million people from mostly Muslim minorities, notably Uyghurs, in "re-education camps" in Xinjiang.

The United States, Britain, Canada and Australia are among countries staging a diplomatic boycott of the Games over China's rights record, and particularly the fate of the Uyghurs.

Asked whether the inclusion of a Uyghur competitor in a ceremony featuring several generations of Chinese athletes met the International Olympic Committee's standard of political neutrality, IOC spokesman Mark Adams said she had "every right" to participate.

Shaun White, the American snowboarder who has defined his sport, announced he would retire after competing in Beijing at his fifth Olympics. White, three times a gold medalist in the halfpipe, said there were "little signs" that his 35-year-old body was telling him time was up.

The Games are taking place inside a vast "closed loop" bubble designed to thwart Covid-19. The nearly 3,000 athletes and tens of thousands of support staff, volunteers and media have been cut off from Beijing's general population. There have been more than 350 Covid cases in the bubble, among them an unknown number of athletes.

Germany's three-time Olympic nordic combined champion Eric Frenzel will miss his first event on Wednesday because he tested positive on arrival in Beijing, his team said.

China has pursued a no-nonsense zero-Covid policy and adopted the same approach to the Games, with everyone inside the bubble tested daily and required to wear a mask at all times.

Egypt stand in Senegal's path to first Cup of Nations title

The Lions of Teranga face the record seven-time champions Pharaohs in Sunday's final.



Senegal, who lost the title decider to Algeria two and a half years ago, are playing their third final in the Africa Cup of Nations.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
YAOUNDE, FEB 5

Senegal once again stand on the brink of a first Africa Cup of Nations title but they must get the better of record seven-time champions Egypt in Sunday's final in Yaounde which sees Liverpool stars Sadio Mane and Mohamed Salah face off for the trophy.

It has been a difficult tournament for Cameroon, scarred by the deadly Olembe Stadium crush of January 24 and troubled by organisational chaos and poor attendances, yet it has thrown up a heavyweight final showdown between two African giants.

Cameroon hoped to be there themselves, but the five-time AFCON winners who dreamed of lifting the trophy on home soil were beaten on penalties by the Egyptians in Thursday's semi-final.

As a country, Egypt have the experience of seven past Cup of Nations victories, although the most recent was in 2010 when they claimed their third in a row.

Salah made his international debut the following year and is now desperate to win silverware with the Pharaohs having already been in the team that lost the 2017 final to Cameroon and then went out prematurely as hosts in 2019.

Senegal, meanwhile, have the status of Africa's top-ranked national team but also the pressure of a nation to finally claim their first Cup of Nations crown after losing to Algeria in the deciding game two and a half years ago.

"We knew it was not going to be at all easy to get to two straight AFCON finals, but the most important for us now is to go all the way and win it," Mane said after scoring one goal and making another in the 3-1 semi-final defeat of Burkina Faso.

The Lions of Teranga are hoping it will be third time lucky in the final after they also lost the title decider in 2002, going down on penalties to Cameroon. Aliou Cisse was the captain of that team and then the coach in 2019. Nobody knows better than him what it would mean to Senegal to get the monkey off their back.

His side must take advantage of the extra day's rest afforded them given their semi-final was played 24 hours earlier than that of their opponents, and Senegal have also come through all three knockout ties in 90 minutes.

In stark contrast, Carlos Queiroz's Egypt required penalties to beat the Ivory Coast in the last 16 and extra time to overcome Morocco in the quarter-finals before another shoot-out against Cameroon—the equivalent of a whole extra match in often energy-sapping conditions.

That explains why Egypt assistant coach Diaa al-Sayed suggested moving the final back a day to allow his team more time to recover.

"Senegal have one extra day to train and therefore maybe we should play the final on Monday," he said after the semi-final.

This Cup of Nations has already seen the Confederation of African Football announce last-minute venue changes without offering an official explanation, while the third-place play-off was belatedly brought forward a day to Saturday.

Egypt, though, will not get their wish and must try to avoid the fate of Croatia, who similarly needed two penalty shoot-out wins and another in extra time to reach the 2018 World Cup final, where they were well beaten by France.

"We are the only team that has played three times 120 minutes but we are very well prepared physically and we have the commitment needed to keep going to the end," insisted Al-Sayed.

Egypt will be without veteran Portuguese coach Queiroz after he was shown a red card against Cameroon, while right-back Omar Kamal is suspended too.

They must also hope Salah can have more of an impact on the game than he did in the semi-final when he often appeared isolated on the right flank.

Without doubt Senegal have the greater depth, from Chelsea's Edouard Mendy in goal to skipper Kalidou Koulibaly in central defence, Paris Saint-Germain's Idrissa Gana Gueye in midfield and Mane on the wing.

Mane, like Salah, gets the attention but Senegal will hope their collective strength can make the difference.

Langer quits as Australia men's cricket coach

The 51-year-old stepped down from the top management job after failing to secure support of senior players.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY, FEB 5

Australian men's cricket coach Justin Langer announced his abrupt departure Saturday, just weeks after his side trounced archrivals England in a lop-sided Ashes series and months after they won the T20 World Cup.

The 51-year-old resigned from the top management job in Australian sports after failing to secure the public support of key players, and as governing body Cricket Australia made clear his days were numbered.

Board members held lengthy "robust" discussions about Langer's future into Friday night, but failed to reach an agreement with the former Test batsman. The coach is said to have bristled at being offered a one-time extension until the end of the T20 World Cup in November—this despite a stellar record that culminated in a 4-0 Ashes victory and Australia being ranked the world's number one Test team.

Sports management company DSEG announced Langer's departure in a terse statement saying "our client Justin Langer has this morning tendered his resignation as coach of the Australian men's cricket team". "The resignation follows a meeting with Cricket Australia last evening. The resignation is effective immediately."

Cricket Australia said it had accepted Langer's resignation, while praising his "outstanding leadership". "Justin is not only a legend of the game but an outstanding individual," it said, adding Andrew McDonald has

been appointed as interim head coach. In the months leading to his departure disgruntled players complained anonymously to local media about his "headmaster-like" leadership style.

But his position seemed untenable when the new captain and world number one bowler Pat Cummins pointedly refused to publicly endorse Langer when asked recently. "It lies in Cricket Australia's hands," he said. "They're just going through an evaluation process at the moment which I think is fair and the right thing to do."

Cricket Australia CEO Nick Hockley did not give details of the dressing room divisions, but said it was time for the team to "transition" to a new coach for the sake of "unity and future success".

Langer took the job in 2018, with Australian cricket at its lowest ebb for decades in the wake of the sandpaper-gate cheating affair that shocked the country.

Langer not only ended the rot but oversaw a string of wins that took Australia back to the top of the Test rankings and culminated in recent victories in the T20 World Cup and the Ashes.

Hockley said Cricket Australia would be looking for someone "strategic" to manage batting, bowling and other coaches who were ready to step up into more autonomous roles.

Langer played 105 Tests from 1993 to 2007, averaging 45.27 and amassing 7,696 runs, including 23 centuries.

Several prominent players have suggested Langer may be a good fit for the now-coachless England side.

Middlesbrough stun Man United

REUTERS
MANCHESTER, FEB 5

Manchester United were dumped out of the FA Cup fourth round by Championship side Middlesbrough 8-7 on penalties after wasting a sackful of chances in a 1-1 draw at Old Trafford on Friday.

Ralf Rangnick's side dominated throughout but ultimately paid for their profligacy in a tense shoot-out when, after the first 15 penalties had all been converted, United youngster Anthony Elanga blazed over to send 9,000 Boro fans wild.

Jadon Sancho's 25th-minute goal, shortly after Cristiano Ronaldo had missed a penalty, was scant reward for United's superiority with Ronaldo and Marcus Rashford both culpable of failing to take golden chances.

Chris Wilder's Boro kept themselves in the tie, however, and equalised in the 64th minute when former United youth player Matt Crooks converted from close range.

Bruno Fernandes somehow struck the post with the goal gaping soon after that and United then battered away at Boro's defence in extra time all to no avail.

Boro then showed incredible poise with their penalties to send the 12-time FA Cup winners tumbling out.

It was a hammer blow for United who will wonder how they will not be in the hat for the fifth round after having 30 goal attempts to Boro's six.

"Incredibly disappointed, we should have won and killed off the game in the first half," Rangnick said. "Crossbar, post, missed penalty and numerous chances. It should have been 2-0 or 3-0."

HOROSCOPE

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

This morning indicates that you'll be in for a rough ride. These vibes could create power struggles, crossed boundaries, irritation, and miscommunications, so you'll need to try your hardest to stay calm.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) ***

If you've been neglecting your partner lately, it could come back to haunt you this morning. If you already feel the tension rising, try to get ahead of the situation by acknowledging the issue before an argument ensues.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) ***

If you're currently in a domestic partnership, try to create some space for yourself. You may notice that you're more irritable than usual, which means getting out of the house will serve you and your partner well.

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

Challenges to your authority could come into play, especially if you have children under your charge. Avoid pandering to petty disagreements in temper tantrums, no matter the age range or relationship.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) ***

You could feel more emotionally unstable, especially if you've been neglecting your meditative or spiritual practices recently. Do yourself a favor and take all the space you need, and remember to be gentle to yourself.

LEO (July 23-August 22) ***

You'll be more psychically sensitive than usual today. Do your best to stay grounded and focus on your breath, especially if the emotions and actions of others begin to overwhelm you. Try not to exert yourself catering to others.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) ***

Monitor your stress levels, so be sure to focus on your breath and take everything in stride. Even if your to-do list feels like it's a mile long, you won't accomplish much if you allow the pressure of it all to paralyse you.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) ***

You could end up stifling your brilliant ideas, especially if you're worried about what others might think. Try to have faith in the fact that you're one of the most creative and innovative members of the zodiac.

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

A series of harsh aspects in the sky might cause you to get emotionally invested in your phone or computer, which could disrupt your screen time behaviors. Try to unplug for a while and get outside for some fresh air.

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

A little bit of healthy competition never hurt anyone. It's okay to feel ambitious after measuring the success of your friends, but if these sentiments turn to jealousy, you could get yourself into trouble.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) ***

Your ego might be obsessed with that amazing jacket you saw while window shopping, but that doesn't mean you should pull out the plastic. Do your best to practice restraint right now with your shopping.

PISCES (February 19-March 20) ***

Try not to overspend by going out for an extravagant outing with your friends today. If you already have plans, try to keep an eye on your tab, and opt to pay for your own meal, versus splitting the check evenly as a group.

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- Chimed
 - Hoax
 - Sharp end
 - Fridge maker
 - Falana or Montez
 - Care for
 - Refute
 - Valhalla honcho
 - Sign on a door
 - Jr. naval officer
 - Used for wrapping
 - Parthenon goddess
 - Half a beef
 - Horrified
 - Harpooned
 - Actress — Thompson
 - Yard enclosure
 - Most remote
 - Tune from an opera
 - Ounce fractions
 - Ivy League member
 - Wonder
 - "Late Show" feature
 - NASA destination
 - Did pull-ups
 - Movies
 - Maui dance
 - Dawn goddess
 - Tractor-trailer
- DOWN**
- Not frequent
 - "Right on!"
 - Takes into custody
 - Safari animal
 - Inclined
 - Cipher
 - Husband of Fatima
 - Bosses
 - Island farewell
 - Vatican heads
 - Occurrence
 - Warrior princess
 - Clothing
 - "Orange" or "stock" ending
 - does it!"
 - Epics
 - Grad
 - Hoops
 - nickname
 - Pizarro's conquest
 - Adams or McClurg
 - Sports enthusiast
 - "Laughing" animal
 - Yield, as interest
 - Swing around
 - Keep an eye on
 - In a dreary manner
 - Diva — Ponselle
 - Stadium level
 - Irritating
 - Dairy product
 - Sing wordlessly
 - Groom a horse
 - Sherlock's lady friend
 - Centering points
 - Still snoozing
 - Fabric sample
 - Barely makes ends meet
 - Exude moisture
 - Swirling water
 - Yes, on the Riviera
 - "Where Eagles Dare" actress

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

B	A	C	O	N	N	A	P	E	P	L	A	N
O	H	A	R	E	U	N	I	X	R	I	S	E
S	O	R	E	S	M	I	N	I	E	M	I	R
H	Y	P	O	T	H	E	S	E	S	F	O	N
A	R	T	D	E	C	O	V	E	R	B	E	N
P	O	R	E	D	D	A	N	E	J	O	N	
A	V	E	C	M	E	A	N	T	P	E	R	T
R	E	V	S	I	A	M	F	A	C	T	S	
T	R	I	S	E	C	T	S	W	A	R	T	H
Y	E	A	R	A	D	U	L	T	E	R	A	T
A	C	M	E	E	R	I	K	F	O	G	E	Y
W	H	E	W	L	I	T	E	U	S	H	E	R
L	O	S	S	P	E	D	L	E	A	S	E	

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
13				14		15			16			
17						18			19			
20				21	22			23	24			
27	28	29						30				
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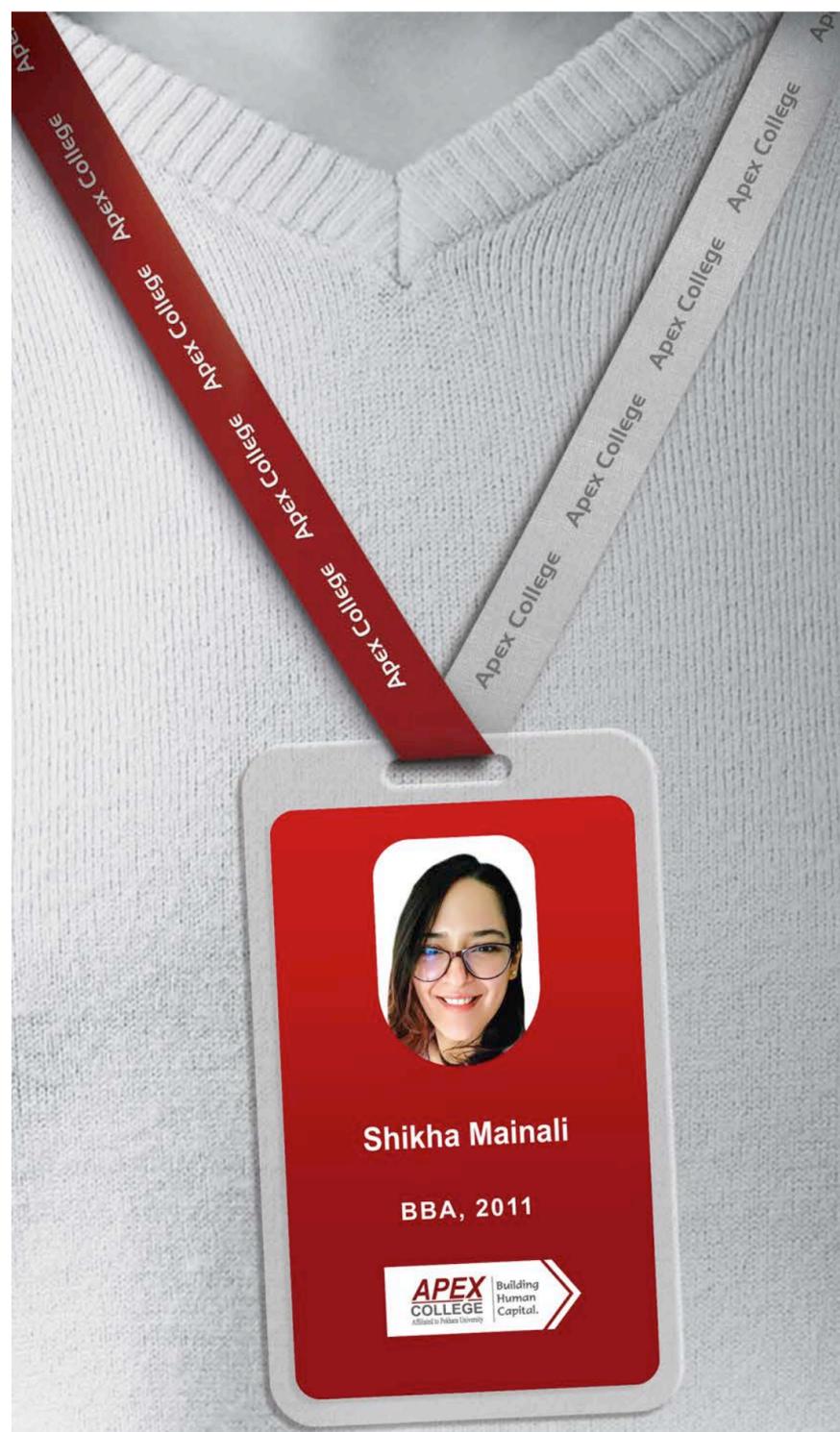
SUDOKU

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

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

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