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35.3°C 6.5°C
Dhangadi Jomsom



POST PHOTO: SANJOG MANANDHAR

A cancer patient needing chemotherapy waits at Bir Hospital in Kathmandu on Sunday to get a PCR test done. The hospital requires a Covid-19 negative report before treating or admitting a patient.

Hospitals requiring recommendation for oxygen raises concerns about red tape

Authorities say there is uneven distribution of oxygen and they needed to step in to address shortage in a coordinated way. Police have also stepped in.



POST PHOTO: BEEJU MAHARJAN

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU, MAY 9

There is a widespread scramble for bottled oxygen across the country.

With surging cases of Covid-19, hospitals are facing oxygen shortage, prompting many to declare that they

will take no more Covid-19 patients without increased oxygen supply.

Authorities have stepped in but that has not been widely welcomed.

Blaming the current crisis on mismanagement in oxygen distribution, the Ministry of Health and Population on Saturday issued a circular in the

name of 10 oxygen manufacturers, most of them based in Kathmandu Valley, instructing them not to supply oxygen to hospitals whether they are public, private or community-run without its recommendation letter.

Private hospitals have condemned the government's decision, saying that the decision would be harsh on private and community hospitals and that it adds bureaucratic hassles just to get the life-saving gas.

"At a time when the country needs a unified response from the government, private sector and all other sectors in the current Covid-19 crisis, the government's unilateral decision is aimed at harassing hospitals run by communities and the private sector," the Association of Private Health Institution of Nepal, a grouping of private hospitals, said in a statement.

Kathmandu-based oxygen plants produce around 8,000 cylinders a day but manufacturers say the current demand far exceeds their capacity.

But oxygen manufacturers are following the directive.

"From Sunday, we have stopped supplying oxygen to anyone without a recommendation from the ministry," said Gaurav Sharda, president of Oxygen Industries Association.

>> Continued on page 2

Air pollution not only impacts health, but can also trigger floods and landslides, study finds

Pollutants facilitate the formation of larger clouds that remain for a longer period during which more water is accumulated. When it rains, its intensity is therefore higher.

CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL
KATHMANDU, MAY 9

In the last week of March—when wild-fires raged across the country, the country was shrouded in haze and harmful smoke.

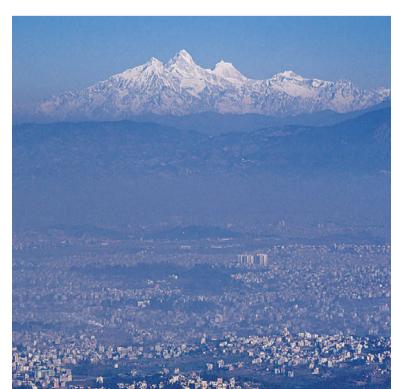
Nationwide forest fires had taken the air quality to hazardous levels leaving the general public gasping for clean air.

The situation called for a public health emergency.

However, the adverse impact of air pollution and deteriorated air quality is not limited to human health.

The effects of air pollution transcend public health and can lead to massive loss of lives and property by unleashing catastrophic events like floods and landslides, according to the findings of a recent study published in Climate Dynamics, a scientific journal.

Researchers had studied the climatic impact of aerosols—a collection of solid particles or liquid droplets dispersed in the air—on clouds, precipi-



POST FILE PHOTO

Study shows the freezing point was higher by 136.82 metres on days with extreme levels of pollution in the atmosphere.

tation, and the freezing temperatures over Himalayan foothills and the mountainous region of Nepal.

"Our findings suggest that atmospheric pollution affects the clouds, rainfall, and the free air freezing tem-

perature," Pramod Adhikari, co-author of the study, told the Post from the University of Nevada in Reno, United States over the phone. "Aerosols, the tiny particles suspended in the atmosphere, modulate cloud properties and hence the intensity and amount of the rainfall. Such a phenomenon can result in excessive rainfall and can cause natural disasters."

For one of its kind study in the region, researchers—Adhikari and John Mejia, associated with the Division of Atmospheric Sciences, Desert Research Institute—analysed the long-term satellite data of 16 years from 2002 to 2017, focusing on Nepal and northwestern India, to understand the atmospheric impact of aerosols.

Researchers had then separated polluted days and clean days—280 days as polluted and 275 as clean days through a fixed parameter—to study the level of effects of aerosols on polluted and clean days.

>> Continued on page 2

Oli dangles a carrot as Nepal-Khanal faction wavers

Nepal-Khanal group remains indecisive as prime minister faces a trust vote today. Janata Samajbadi is a divided house. Congress waits and watches. So do the Maoists.

TIKA R PRADHAN
KATHMANDU, MAY 9

8,277 new coronavirus infections.

88 deaths.

88,160 active cases.

400,000 infections which the country is going to log soon since the pandemic began.

These were the numbers related to the Covid-19 pandemic on Sunday.

Nepal's political parties, however, had some other numbers to focus on.

CPN-UML chair and Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli was busy figuring out how to achieve the magic number in the House of Representatives on Monday. His bete noir Madhav Kumar Nepal was totally engrossed in figuring out what number of lawmakers he could make resign. The Nepali Congress was calculating if it could get the required numbers to lead the government after unseating Oli. The

Janata Samajbadi Party deliberated on how to keep its numbers in the House intact and how to utilise them. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), which appears to have totally lost the game, appeared to be sitting helpless with non-significant numbers in its kitty.

That the government has given up its fight against the pandemic has already become an understatement, especially after Oli told CNN on Saturday that

the coronavirus "situation is under control" in Nepal.

And other parties that could have held the government to account for its spectacular bungling in handling the pandemic have proven themselves to be useless, analysts have said time and again.

As the ongoing pandemic has failed to become Nepali politicians' priority, on Sunday, they were busy holding meetings on crunching their own numbers.

Had leaders of the Madhav Nepal-Jhala Nath Khanal faction made a "decisive move", as they had promised, there would have been some clarity on how Monday's vote of confidence would move forward.

The Nepal-Khanal faction, however, could not take any decision. Later in the day, Oli sent his two close aides, Bishnu Poudel and Subas Nembang, to convince the Nepal group to put their resignation plan on hold.

"We have decided to wait until 9 am tomorrow [Monday] for Oli to express his commitment to bringing the party to the stage where it was before May 2018," Yogesh Bhattarai, a UML secretary, told reporters following hours-long meeting after the message from Oli. "Oli must commit to running the party on the basis of consensus. We will try our best till the last moment to ensure that the party remains united."

>> Continued on page 3

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NATIONAL

Delayed PCR test reports risk coronavirus transmission in Sarlahi district

Those who were in contact with the suspects can transmit virus to others while waiting for reports, health workers say.

OM PRAKASH THAKUR

SARLAHI, MAY 9

A 55-year-old man from Malangwa Municipality Ward No. 8, the district headquarters of Sarlahi, took medicines for seasonal flu after suffering from high fever and common cold. But even after several days of taking medicines, he was not feeling well. So he went to the District Hospital in Sarlahi to get his swab tested for Covid-19.

It took three days for his results to arrive. He tested positive for Covid-19.

"I stayed with my family at the same house. Now my family might also have contracted the virus. No contact tracing has been conducted here," he said. "Some of my family members have also complained of throat irritation. I would have isolated myself had I gotten the results earlier."

On Thursday, Godaita Municipality in Sarlahi collected 32 swab samples but the reports of only 12 samples have arrived so far. Ten of them tested

positive for Covid-19.

"We are facing difficulties to manage Covid-19 suspects due to delay in receiving test reports. This has increased the risk of Covid-19 transmission," said Devendra Yadav, mayor of the municipality. "Those who were in contact with the suspects can easily transmit the virus to others while waiting for the test results to be released. This is why it is necessary to perform PCR tests and release reports soon."

Sarlahi has 260 active cases at present with four fatalities, according to the data of the District Health Office.

The District Hospital in Sarlahi has a PCR laboratory in operation. "The lab can test 94 swab samples at once. The testing becomes expensive if we test just a few samples at a time. This is why we conduct testing only after having collected 94 samples, which takes a few days," said Shree Prasad Sah, senior public health inspector at the hospital.

According to him, 390 swab samples

have been collected in the district for PCR testing within the last three days. "PCR testing has also been affected due to frequent power cuts. This is why we are unable to release test reports on time," said Sah.

Until now, the District Hospital has collected 390 swab samples after it started PCR testing from its own lab from April 29. Out of 244 swab samples tested, 85 tested positive for Covid-19, the hospital data showed.

Meanwhile, Kailali is also facing a delay in obtaining PCR test reports, as the collected swab samples from the district are being sent to Dhangadhi for testing, health workers say.

"We have to keep patients under observation until the PCR test reports arrive from Dhangadhi. Usually, patients showing symptoms of fever, headache and common cold are suspected of having Covid-19. If test reports are released soon, treatment can be done accordingly," said Dr Ramesh Upadhyay of Tikapur Hospital.

(Ganesh Chaudhary in Tikapur contributed reporting.)

The majority of Covid-19 suspected individuals have been provided with supplemental oxygen at the hospital. "The flow of patients is increasing now and it's already beyond the hospital's capacity. If this situation continues, the hospital cannot handle any more patients," said Upadhyay.

According to doctors, it takes at least five days to receive PCR test reports after swab collection. "We collect swabs twice a week and send them to Dhangadhi for lab tests. The hospital receives PCR reports after several days," Upadhyay said.

In the last few weeks, the hospital has collected 407 swab samples. Among them, the hospital received only 285 test results, 88 of them positive, as per the data of the hospital. So far, nine people have died of Covid-19 in Tikapur alone, according to the data of the District Health Office in Kailali.

(Ganesh Chaudhary in Tikapur contributed reporting.)

Air pollution not only ...

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Aerosols include dust, pollutants emitted from sources like vehicles and factories, wildfire, and construction sites, among others.

According to Adhikari, aerosols present in the atmosphere can block sunlight or radiation from reaching the surface and, as a result, increase atmospheric temperature.

An increase in temperature means the 0°C isotherm altitude, the freezing level that represents the altitude in which the temperature is at 0°C or known as the freezing point of water in a free atmosphere, is pushed further up in the atmosphere.

"What aerosols do is push freezing point up from the earth's surface," said Adhikari. "Our study has found that the freezing point had gone up in Nepal and the northwestern part of India on polluted days because the radiation from the sun was absorbed and the temperature had increased."

The study recorded that the freezing point was higher by 136.82 metres on days with extreme levels of pollution in the atmosphere. And the impact of this could be evident on the ground.

"With the elevated level of freezing point, there could be rainfall in areas where there should have been snowfall," said Adhikari. "More rainfall means melting of the existing snow pack and glaciers."

With the rising temperatures and climate change, mountains have already witnessed excessive melting of snow, and most of the Himalayan glaciers are rapidly melting and shrinking. Such melting of glaciers leads to a shortage of freshwater stored in mountains.

Also, the rapid shrinking and retreating of glaciers influences the formation and expansion of glacial lakes, multiplying the risk of glacial lake outburst floods—a threat to communities living downstream and infrastructures.

Researchers Adhikari and Mejia also found that the presence of aerosols had a bearing on the intensity and amount of rainfall.

According to Adhikari, heavily polluted days with higher aerosols facilitate the formation of taller and broader clouds over the foothills and mountainous regions of the Nepal Himalayas and northwestern India.

Such a phenomenon increased the intensity and the amount of rainfall, which could lead to catastrophic floods and landslides.

"Besides pushing the temperature up, the aerosol level can affect cloud condensation nuclei which are tiny particles of a cloud droplet. Aerosols can impact the process of cloud formation," said Adhikari. "These cloud particles remain smaller and will take time in converting into raindrops. Such clouds will hang on in the atmosphere for a long time and can accumulate more water and ultimately lead to excessive rainfall when it rains, as our study found."

This higher intensity rainfall results in the triggering of floods and landslides in the region, according to the study's findings.

The study concluded that freezing line altitude moving higher by 136.82 meters during the heavily polluted days than relatively cleaner environments can also be critical in changing the snowline and melting of glaciers which in turn would impact the hydroclimate of the Himalayas.

"Freezing level going up means snowline, the line that demarcates snow-covered and snow-free areas, will move up to. An area that witnessed snowing earlier would not receive snowfall, but the only area above," said Adhikari. "When we receive less snowfall, glaciers will melt quicker and water will not be held in the mountain regions where it had been deposited in the snowpack. The water crisis will loom large as mountains store fresh drinking water in the form of the snowpack."

Researchers like Adhikari feel the effects of air pollution should be discussed beyond its immediate impact on human health as it affects the climate and everyday weather potentially leading to loss of lives and property.

"Aerosols emanating from vehicles and factories, dust, construction sites, or even wildfires impact human health. Besides, they can linger in the atmosphere for days and even several weeks and travel far, impacting cloud formation and precipitation elsewhere," said Adhikari.

"These pollutants have a direct impact on health but can also alter rainfall patterns, increase snowpack melting as cascading effects. For these reasons too, emission of pollutants should be controlled at their sources. Measures must be adopted for minimising pollution sources, if not fully control them. Otherwise, the results will be catastrophic."

Hospitals requiring recommendation for oxygen raises ...

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Private hospitals have also criticised the manufacturers' decision. They say that oxygen manufacturers have failed to fulfil their contractual obligation of supplying oxygen to private hospitals after the government's 'unwanted' intervention.

"The government hospitals are without beds. The private hospitals, where beds are available, have not been able to provide services due to the lack of oxygen due to the government's decision," the association said.

Kumar Thapa, senior vice-president of the association of private hospitals, said they were forced to make rounds of the government authorities when oxygen should be made available urgently.

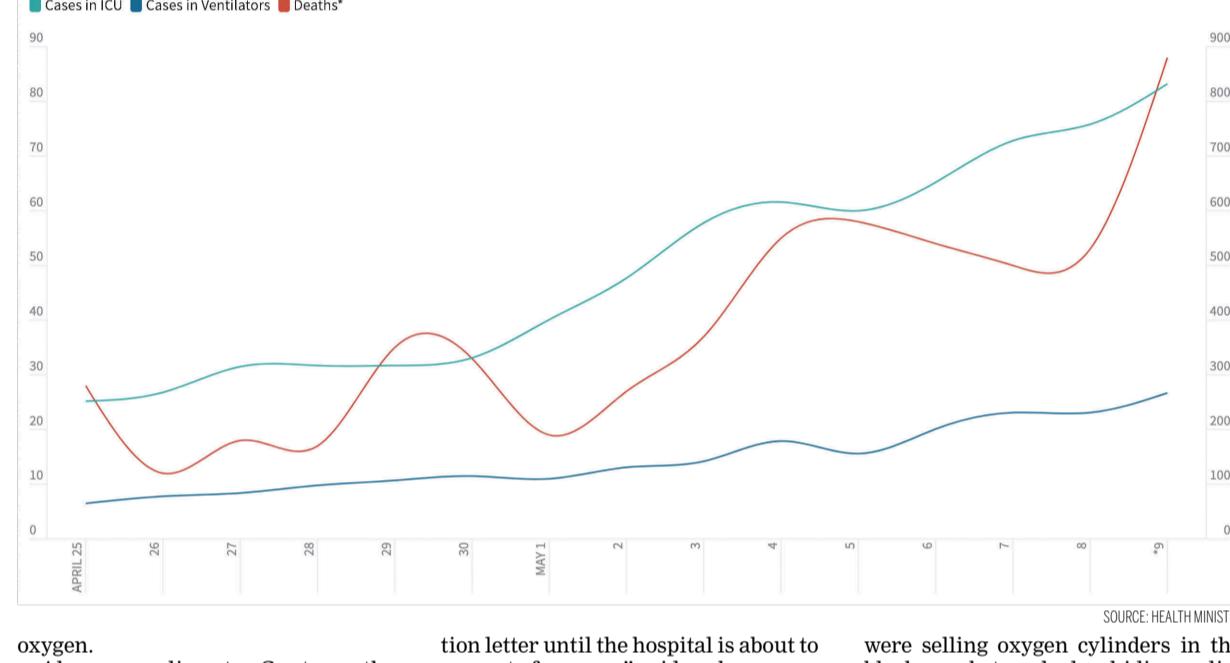
"We have been queuing at oxygen plants till now. With the government's decision, we have been forced to queue up at the ministry for the recommendation letter," said Thapa, who is also a promoter at Alka Hospital.

But the government has argued that the Health Ministry's recommendation was made mandatory to address the shortage of oxygen in a coordinated way.

"Who knows how many patients are there in every hospital, how many are in ICUs, on ventilators and wards?" asked Jageshwar Gautam, indicating that only the government has such data. "Therefore, oxygen should also be distributed as per the number and condition of the patients in each hospital. For this, the government got involved to ensure that oxygen is distributed properly."

Despite Gautam's claims, the government every day publishes data on the number of Covid-19 patients in hospitals. However, the data is not complete. For example, there were 50 Covid-19 patients at Kist Hospital on Saturday, according to the hospital but the situation report for Saturday does not show Kist hospital as having any Covid-19 patients.

The hospital ran out of oxygen Saturday afternoon and was able to get it from a government hospital to save the lives of its patients on



tion letter until the hospital is about to run out of oxygen," said spokesperson Gautam.

But oxygen continues to be a scarce commodity as well as the cylinders that hold it.

Nepal Police has started collecting oxygen cylinders from businesses and factories and distributing them to hospitals.

According to the data provided by Nepal Police, till Saturday evening they have collected 2,781 oxygen cylinders from across the country.

"Nine hundred oxygen cylinders were given to hospitals that were in need of emergency supply while 1,881 cylinders were distributed to oxygen manufacturers," according to senior superintendent Basanta Bahadur Kunwar, also the spokesperson for Nepal Police.

According to SSP Kunwar, oxygen cylinders which were being used by businesses for non-medical purposes were taken by the police after requesting the owners.

"Many people were also found to have kept oxygen in stock, while some

were selling oxygen cylinders in the black market and also hiding cylinders in shops and warehouses for future use. Those were confiscated by the police," Kunwar told the Post.

But despite the efforts, the supply may not meet the demand.

There are over 80,000 infected people in home isolation, according to the Health Ministry.

"Even if 20 percent of them need treatment, we are not in position to provide treatment," an official at the Department of Health Services, told the Post, asking not to be named.

On Sunday 88 Covid-19 related deaths were recorded throughout the country. The Health Ministry said that 52 of them died in the last 24 hours.

"The other 36 people had died in different periods and different places," Gautam, the spokesperson. "Some had died on the way to hospital, some at home and some tested positive after their death only."

The country recorded 8,777 new cases in the polymerase chain reaction tests.

Active cases stand at 88,160.

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues unabated, doctors warn of fatalities increasing if patients with breathing difficulties are not provided oxygen support.

"If we have 2,000 beds and sufficient oxygen supply, that will make a lot of difference," Dr Kiran Pandey, physician at the Hams Hospital, told the Post. "The major problems are in the management and coordination among the agencies concerned."

(Arjun Poudel and Shuvam Dhungana contributed reporting.)



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प्रथम पटक प्रकाशित मिति : २०७८/०९/२७

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कार्यालयको नाम : प्रदेश अस्पताल, सुखेंत

कार्यालय कोड : ३५००२६८०३६

राजशव नं. १४२२९

खाता नं. १०००१००२०१०१०००६

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Two boys play a game on a smartphone outside a shuttered shop at Maru, Kathmandu on Sunday, the twelfth day of the lockdown enforced to contain Covid-19.

Chief justice in dock for attending council meet

Experts say Rana, who has refused to hear a petition against ordinance on Constitutional Council Act, committed judicial misconduct.

BINOD GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, MAY 9

Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana's participation in the meeting of the Constitutional Council has raised some serious questions, with many calling it a judicial misconduct and a fraud on the legal system.

A meeting of the Council, called by its chair Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, recommended 18 names for various posts in different constitutional bodies on Sunday.

The meeting, skipped by the leader of the opposition and House Speaker, was attended by Chief Justice Rana as well as National Assembly chair Ganesh Timilsina.

Experts say Rana should have avoided the Council meeting because a petition against the recommendations made on December 15 is pending at the Constitutional Bench, which he heads. The petition was filed on December 16.

"This is the height of judicial misconduct and it is an out and out fraud on the legal system," said senior advocate Dinesh Tripathi, who specialises on constitutional law.

The government on Tuesday re-issued an ordinance on the Constitutional Council Act (Functions, Duties and Procedures) 2010, seeking to amend the provisions related to calling of the Council meeting. The same ordinance was issued earlier on December 15, and accordingly, as many as 38 names were recommended for various posts, including the chief commissioner of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority.

But that was challenged in the Supreme Court. The petition was moved to the Constitutional Bench for a hearing.

However, though the issue was scheduled for hearing over a dozen times, Rana did not take initiative to conduct a hearing.

Of the 38 people recommended, 32 were appointed on February 3. They did not go through the parliamentary hearing process, as Oli on December 20 had dissolved the House of Representatives.

Oli had amended the Constitutional Council Act so as to make it easier for holding the meetings of the Council. As per the amendment, a Council meeting

can be held if the majority of members are present. Before the amendment, at least five members and the chairperson's presence was a must to hold a meeting. The constitution has envisioned six-members in the prime minister-led Council.

Currently, there are only five members, as there is no deputy Speaker in the House.

As per the constitutional provisions, chief justice, House Speaker, leader of the opposition, National Assembly chair and deputy Speaker are the members of the Council. Oli as prime minister chairs the Council.

Experts say since the earlier recommendations were challenged in the court, Rana as the head of the judiciary

Forum, told the Post. "His participation in Sunday's meeting clearly demonstrates that he is deliberately pushing back the petition against the ordinance and appointments."

Under Oli, many have been saying the principle of separation of powers has come under attack, as the lines between the executive, the judiciary and the legislature have been blurred.

Some allegations also have surfaced if Prime Minister Oli and Chief Justice Rana are working in collusion.

After overturning the House dissolution decision on February 23, which was seen as a major setback for Oli, the Supreme Court within two weeks, on March 7, in a dramatic verdict had made Oli emerge as a powerful prime

He, however, didn't provide the list of the appointees.

According to sources, former secretary Madhav Regmi has been recommended as the chair of the Public Service Commission. Similarly, Dilip Regmi, former chief of the National Investigation Department, has been recommended as a member of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority. Another person recommended as a member of the anti-corruption agency is Hari Poudel, according to sources.

Likewise, former secretary Bir Bahadur Rai has been recommended as a commissioner of the Election Commission.

Nepal's constitution envisioned a Constitutional Council with a view to appointing individuals to the constitutional bodies on the basis of merit and qualification so that such entities can keep a close eye on the government and hold it to account.

But for years, the constitutional councils have become a place where leaders place people of their choice, with some vested interests.

In a recent case, the appointments to the National Human Rights Commission have come into question, with the United Nations and international human rights organisations too expressing their reservations. They have said the way the Oli government has appointed individuals in the national rights watchdog jeopardises the constitutional body's independence.

Chief Justice Rana is complicit in all these appointments, experts say.

According to Tripathi, Rana's complicity has become apparent in Oli's unconstitutional and illegal moves.

Sundays' Council meeting to recommend names for the constitutional bodies was held a day ahead of Oli's trust vote in Parliament.

"It has become evident now that the longer Rana remains the chief justice, the more deterioration of the judicial independence the country will see," said Tripathi. "It's an irony that the person who is supposed to protect the constitution and who is the ultimate arbiter of the constitution has emerged as a threat to the very constitution."



The Council's meeting recommended 18 names for various posts in different constitutional bodies on Sunday.

should have avoided the Council meeting unless he redressed the earlier issue. According to them, Rana's reluctance to conduct any hearing and participate in a Council meeting to recommend more names for the constitutional commissions based on the same ordinance amounts to a major conflict of interest and an attack on the judicial system.

"The way Rana is behaving shows that as though he heads the legal department of the Oli government and not the judiciary. He has failed to maintain the integrity and independence of the judiciary," Raju Prasad Chapagain, chair of the Constitutional Lawyers'

minister, as it invalidated the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) and revived the CPN-UML and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre).

The March 7 verdict, in effect, had caused a split in the alliance formed by Madhav Kumar Nepal and Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Nepal is currently struggling within the UML against Oli, and Dahal is leading the Maoist Centre, which after the court verdict was reduced to the third force in the House.

Sunday's Council meeting recommended 18 names for various constitutional bodies, said Udaya Timilsina, a personal aide to National Assembly chair Timilsina.

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OPINION

EDITORIAL

Out of control

It is the coronavirus pandemic, and not the media narrative, that should be under control.

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli thinks everything is under control, just the way Emperor Nero thought everything was under control even as Rome burned, the way Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar thought everything was under control even as Company forces reclaimed Delhi. The situation is under control, except that dozens of people are dying due to the virus every day and thousands of people are being infected. The situation is under control, except that for a patient to get an ICU bed, another patient must either recover or die altogether. It is the coronavirus situation, and not the media narrative, that is expected to be under control, Mr Prime Minister.

If the situation was under control, the PCR test results of dozens of parliamentarians and staff at Parliament Secretariat would not come back positive. If everything was under control, Oli's own henchmen inside Baluwatar would not test positive for a second time. If everything was under control, ambulances would not be speeding on empty roads blaring their melancholic sirens, social media walls would not be full of condolence posts and desperate calls for help in securing hospital beds and oxygen supplies, international media would expend their precious space raising alarms that Nepal was headed the India way in pandemic management.

Hospitals are reported to have stopped admitting patients as they are running short of beds and oxygen cylinders. Friends and relatives of the patients are running from pillar to post trying to manage ICU and ventilator beds for their loved ones. Philanthropically-oriented individuals are donating blood, money and food to strangers so that humanity continues to thrive despite the crisis. And yet, the prime minister, sitting in his cosy bubble inside Baluwatar, tells the international media that everything is under control.

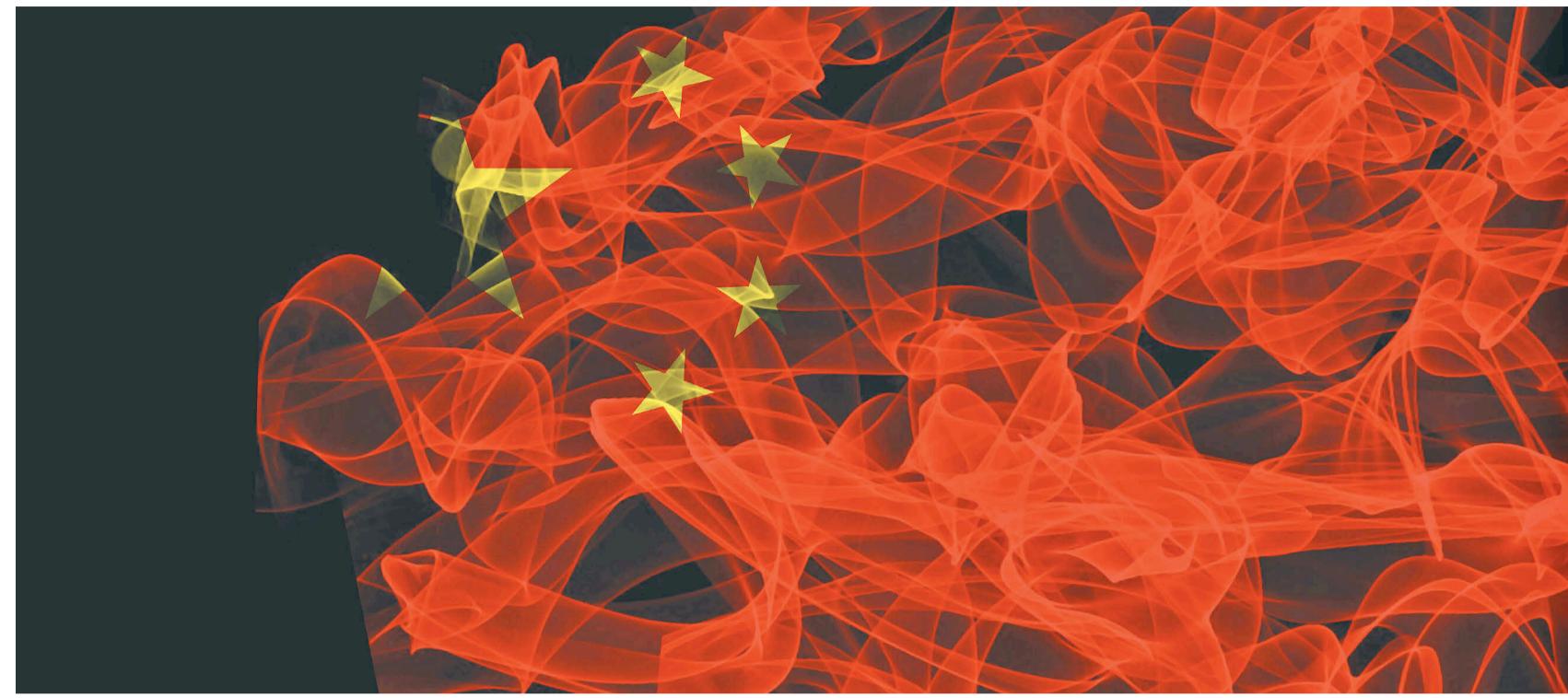
What's more, if the denial of the coronavirus crisis and control of the media narrative were not enough, the prime minister had the audacity to blame the people for spreading the virus. First, he blamed the opposition for not letting him do his work. Then he blamed the Pushpa Kamal Dahal faction of his erstwhile Nepal Communist Party (NCP) for jeopardising their political future. Then he charged his own comrades supporting the Madhav Kumar Nepal faction with pushing the party towards a split by conducting parallel activities under the CPN-UML. And now, it is the people who are to blame for making a mess of the pandemic.

Perhaps the people did not gargle with guava leaf water enough. Perhaps they did not drink turmeric water enough. Perhaps they did not sneeze enough. Perhaps they did not follow any of the remedies he had prescribed to fight the virus.

If Prime Minister Oli's method of assessing the coronavirus situation is not entirely different from the globally accepted methods, then he should have seen clearly that the situation has been out of control for weeks now. It could actually have been under control had the government tried to control its desperation for staying in power and focused on the virus. It could have been under control had the prime minister not focused only on putting a leash on his party comrades. It could have been under control had he been considerate enough to check if hospitals were prepared to deal with the second wave and if the vaccine procurement plan was on track.

It is the prime minister's ineptitude, and that of his friends and foes, that has resulted in hospitals overflowing with patients, and cremation grounds overflowing with dead bodies.

China's pandemic diplomacy



The diplomatic offensive shows China's desire to be well connected in South Asia.

BINOJ BASNYAT



China has conducted four rounds of multilateral virtual conferences with South Asian countries in the last 10 months amid speculation and unspecified information about the Covid-19 pandemic. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were among the members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) who took part. State Councillor and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi opened the series of conferences with various assistance and strategic programmes under its pandemic diplomacy initiative in July 2020; the last one was held in April 2021. The diplomatic offensive shows China's desire to be well connected in South Asia.

The July meeting focused on engaging the South Asian region with the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network. The third conference discussed assistance for treatment along with Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects for linking up with the Indian Ocean. Wang said, "We will actively promote the building of the CPEC and the Trans-Himalayan Connectivity Network, support the extension of the

corridor to Afghanistan, and further unleash the dividends of regional connectivity." Wang added, "We should give play to our geographical advantages, strengthen exchanges and connectivity between the four countries and Central Asian countries, and safeguard regional peace and stability."

Military alliances

The four rounds of discussions led by China dealt with various themes including consolidating consensus on unity; joint prevention and control of the Covid-19 pandemic; avoiding politicisation and stigmatisation of the coronavirus with firm support to the World Health Organisation to maintain multilateralism; jointly building global health community; impact of the pandemic with the resumption of economic and trade cooperation; continuation of BRI infrastructure projects to maintain stability of industrial and supply chains; and creating new economic growth points in the digital field. A proposal to establish a China-South Asia Emergency Supply Mechanism and China-South Asia Poverty Alleviation and Development Partnership Centre has received consent, and initial consensus was established on dealing with non-traditional security challenges, enhanced information sharing and advancing sustainable development.

China's Defence Minister Wei Fenghe called on Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to oppose powers from outside the region setting up military alliances in South Asia. General Wei comments occurred for a push back from the QUAD grouping which is viewed by China as a pseudo-military alliance or as the beginning of another military alliance like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation or the Indo-Pacific Region.

Wang Yi visited Russia, Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia in September; Cambodia, Malaysia, Laos and Thailand in October; Japan and South Korea in November; and Nepal and Pakistan in December. The visits are said to boost relations, deepen cooperation and elevate military mutual trust as part of China's neighbourhood diplomacy. The diplomatic engagement is also to safeguard China's core interests particularly from the southwest and containment from the United States-led alliance and the multifaceted international environment. There is a rise in military assistance to South Asian countries.

Connectivity, shared consensus on common challenges, regional structures, economic advancement, strategic connectivity and relocating with 'good neighbourliness' will drive China and the nations in South Asia, with the hypothesis 'will pandemic diplomacy lead to pandemic politics'?

The Himalayan region of the Indo-Pacific Region with the emerging QUAD coalition and the evolution of China's pandemic diplomacy is a disconnectedness of India's influence in South Asia. Even if Nepal reframes its foreign policy from the customary basis of non-alignment and strategic autonomy that has defined independent Nepal's foreign policy, it has a big undertaking in convincing India, China and the US or the 'strategic triangle' on the merits, as foreign policy behaviour is questioned time and again in international relations. Beijing's outreach to the South Asian region comes with closer cooperation in the fight against Covid-19. When India is battling a resurgence in coronavirus cases, China is shoring up ties with South Asia through strategic cooperation.

Nepal's foreign minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali supported the need for an enhanced level of regional and international cooperation for Covid-19

response and economic recovery. China is providing an additional grant of medical equipment and materials worth 5 million RMB (Rs57,000,000). At the same time, mainly the US, European nations, India and the World Bank have been providing grants and assistance to counter Covid-19 challenges.

Nepal's non-aligned policy

Nepal's political parties, particularly the communist parties, are trying to win votes by effectively mobilising Nepali nationalism but without hurting Indian sentiments. The shifting and complications of great power relations has stressed Nepal's non-alignment, which may be questioned in the years ahead. Nepal adopted the non-aligned policy when India was part of it, and China was strategically important for both the Soviets and the US during the Cold War. China and US rivalry has put India in diplomatic ambiguity as India needs the US as it needs China and Russia. A China and Russia convergence can turn the regional security-political environment in a different tone.

With China now at the centre, Nepal and other South Asian countries will have to choose which side they would like to represent once again with communism versus democracy with the question of non-alignment or multi-alignment. Nepal needs India as it needs China and the US, hence the need to successfully demonstrate the possibilities for engaging both her immediate neighbours and the only global power is the argument. Decisions in Beijing, New Delhi and Washington will have an influence on Kathmandu's politics like the 12-point agreement, which was adopted in New Delhi and whose impact is still ongoing.

Basnyat is a strategic analyst and a former major general in the Nepal Army.

Money alone won't ensure global vaccine equity

Only a transparent, inclusive and well-designed strategy can do that.

ROSALIND MCKENNA



In March, South Sudan received its first batch of Covid-19 vaccines. While that is good news, it came almost four months after the first doses were administered in the United Kingdom, highlighting the wide disparities in global vaccine distribution. If these gaps are not narrowed soon—with international bodies leading a transparent and equitable global vaccine rollout—the entire pandemic response will be compromised.

Sudan received its doses thanks to the Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) facility, which has been at the forefront of efforts to ensure equitable access to Covid-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines worldwide. Institutions like the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and UNICEF have supported these efforts.

But rich countries are hampering progress by continuing to hoard supplies. In the United States, more than 2.1 million doses are being administered per day; South Sudan has administered around 1,000 vaccines in total. Overall, residents of high- and middle-income countries have received 83% of the 1.2 billion vaccine doses delivered so far.

In fact, the combination of export bans, hoarding and supply shortages has meant that COVAX has so far managed to deliver only one in five of the Oxford-AstraZeneca doses that were supposed to arrive in countries by the end of this month. At this rate, advanced economies will be able to vaccinate their entire populations

before many low-income countries even begin their vaccine rollout.

To accelerate progress, international development banks have committed considerable funding to help poor countries purchase and distribute vaccines, tests, and treatments. The World Bank alone has promised to contribute \$12 billion. But the details of its pledge are getting lost, raising the risk that this much-needed money will be wasted for lack of scrutiny.

For starters, the World Bank has yet to clarify how it will use its market power to ensure that doses remain affordable. But as vaccine producers such as Johnson & Johnson back away from their pledges to make vaccines available on a not-for-profit basis,

such intervention is becoming urgent. The three US pharmaceutical firms with approved vaccines—Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson—have already shared with investors plans to raise vaccine prices in the near future. In making \$12 billion available for vaccine procurement and deployment, it remains unclear what steps the World Bank is taking to make vaccine manufacturers share the technology and know-how to ramp up global production.

Furthermore, the World Bank is still struggling to explain how it plans to ensure that its expenditure is transparent, or ensure that countries abide by plans to get vaccines to priority populations. As the World Bank

knows, poor programme design and flawed vaccine rollouts can lead to exorbitant costs and unfair outcomes. The first World Bank-financed Covid-19 vaccine-procurement operation, launched in Lebanon in January, was nearly suspended within a month of its launch because politicians were cutting in front of higher-priority individuals, such as health workers.

Transparency is vital to limiting such behaviors, but the World Bank may be setting itself up for more of the same: It recently approved a project in Ethiopia, where similar queue-jumping is a known risk. It has also approved a project in Tunisia, where vaccine hesitancy and skepticism, and disinformation efforts, are

substantial—factors that can further undermine a programme's efficiency, if not addressed effectively.

These projects are being designed at rapid speed. Too often, however, World Bank teams—whether at the Bank's headquarters in Washington, DC, or in the countries seeking funds—are developing these vaccine programmes without input from all essential stakeholders. If groups at risk of being excluded from the vaccine rollouts are not involved in project design and monitoring, it will become all the more likely that they will be left behind.

Such groups include refugees, prisoners, and people living in slums and other overcrowded conditions. In

Greece, for example, more than 70,000 asylum seekers are being excluded from the national vaccination programme.

Persecuted minorities, such as Myanmar's Rohingya population and India's Dalits (the lowest-ranked group in the country's caste system), are also at high risk of being overlooked. And coordination in conflict zones, such as in Syria, may pose a challenge, with governments potentially even ignoring people in these territories.

In-country vaccination programmes must include clear protections for the most vulnerable groups, with the World Bank using its leverage to prevent discrimination in the implementation of its projects. Any vaccine funding must be made contingent on its fair and safe distribution. Moreover, there must be supervision and monitoring of these projects, as the Bank's own board recently urged.

For this to work, the World Bank must engage directly with marginalized groups. Their perspectives are essential to determining how best to spend the pledged funds and to ensure accountability by challenging misuse of resources and misallocation of vaccine doses.

The global vaccine rollout is a critical test for an institution whose stated mission is to 'end extreme poverty and advance shared prosperity.' Fortunately, there is reason to hope that the World Bank will pass. Its president, David Malpass, has called the Covid-19 crisis a 'pandemic of inequality,' one of its hallmarks being unequal access to vaccines.

But simply throwing money at the problem will not be enough to solve it. Only a transparent, inclusive, and well-designed strategy that explicitly protects the interests of the most vulnerable and gives them a way to sound the alarm when things go wrong can do that. That would be money well spent.

Rosalind McKenna is a team manager in the financing division of the Open Society Foundation's Public Health Program.

— Project Syndicate



SHUTTERSTOCK

FOREX

US Dollar	117.92
Euro	143.44
Pound Sterling	164.78
Japanese Yen	10.86
Chinese Yuan	18.33
Qatari Riyal	32.38
Australian Dollar	92.50
Malaysian Ringgit	28.68
Saudi Arab Riyal	31.44

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

Industry department recommends review of minimum threshold on foreign investment

In May 2019, the government had revised the minimum threshold for FDI to Rs50 million from Rs5 million. However, at that time, the private sector had opposed the move saying that the potential investors might consider the policy restrictive.

KRISHANA PRASAIN

KATHMANDU, MAY 9

Two years after the government had implemented the minimum threshold requirement for foreign direct investment, a government committee has recommended that the minimum threshold be revised sector-wise to improve the country's foreign investment attractiveness.

The study report on foreign direct investment-2021 published by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies said that the investment threshold of Rs50 million in all sectors is not practical.

In May 2019, the government had revised the minimum threshold for foreign direct investment from Rs5 million to Rs50 million. However, at that time, the private sector had opposed the move saying that potential investors might consider the threshold policy restrictive.

After nearly two years, the report prepared by Jibjal Bhusal, director general at the Department of Industry, said that the investment ceiling can be insufficient for investors investing in industry but it's high for those willing to invest in service sectors like software companies.

Nepali private sector has been saying that small businesses, such as restaurants, coffee shops and hotels need a lower threshold. "We have realised that it would be more practical if the foreign investment limitation is fixed based on sector-wise investment," said Bhusal.

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries, the country's apex private sector body, have also been arguing that the investment limitation of Rs50 million is not practical for startup companies.

"Foreign investment commitment is expected to be hit severely by the second-wave of the pandemic. It is hard to meet the target this fiscal year as investment has stopped following the closure of offices," Bhusal said.

According to Nepal Rastra Bank, the country's central bank, foreign direct investment flows fell abruptly in 2020 globally as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The decline is projected to be more severe than those seen after the Global Financial Crisis in 2009.

While developed economies were ini-



POST FILE PHOTO

The five-star standard 45 Keys Boutique Resort in Kaskikot, Pokhara built with foreign direct investment from Singapore has postponed its opening date due to the coronavirus.

The service sector attracts most of the foreign investment while infrastructure sees the least.

tially the most affected, the decline has now spread to developing countries, with inward investment in most countries falling in 2020. The decline in foreign direct investment poses significant challenges for many developing countries like Nepal, as it has become one of the major sources of external financing in recent years.

The recent trend of foreign investment realisation shows that there is a huge gap between approved foreign direct investment and actual foreign direct investment inflows in Nepal.

With political stability and positive

changes in the economy, foreign investment commitment has been increasing after the fiscal year 2017-18, the report said.

The report also highlighted some problems in the implementation of the Foreign Investment and Transfer of Technology Act, 2019 (FITA).

For instance, technology transfer, in general, is the transfer of knowledge, skill, technology from one side to another, but as per the existing Act, the consulting service purchase from foreign countries also comes under technology transfer.

There is no clear provision for investors who want to cancel the investment, the report said.

There is no situation for investors to reinvest their earned profit in the company although there is provision for reinvestment, the report said.

Foreign investors can invest 100 percent as per the provision in the Act but other rules of governing bodies do not allow 100 percent foreign investment in many sectors like casino, aviation, telecommunication among others, according to the report.

The most crucial service providers like the Department of Industry, Office of the Company Registrar, Investment Board and the central bank are not digitized and it has been causing hassles for investors as they need to do traditional paperwork which is time consuming, according to the report.

According to the Department of Industry report, sector-wise, the service sector has been able to attract most of the foreign investment while the infrastructure sector saw the least.

Industry-wise, foreign investment in the energy industry has attracted most of the investment because of the huge investment in nature.

Similarly, the report said that the number of foreign investment inflows is high in Bagmati province and very low in the Sudurpaschim province.

In the past decade, the highest foreign investment commitment of Rs253.52 billion was approved in the fiscal year 2015-16, right after the earthquake of 2015 that killed nearly 9,000 people and damaged infrastructure worth billions of dollars.

With political stability and positive

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With political stability and positive

Greece reopens beaches after lockdown

REUTERS
ATHENS, MAY 9

With widely spaced sun loungers and regular disinfections, Greece reopened its organised beaches on Saturday as the popular Mediterranean holiday destination eases Covid-19 curbs in preparation for the return of foreign visitors next week.

Tourism accounts for about a fifth of Greece's economy and jobs, and—after the worst year on record for the industry last year—the country can ill afford another lost summer.

"We're pinning our hopes on tourism," said Nikos Venieris, who manages a sandy beach in the seafront suburb of Alimos, just outside the capital, Athens, where social distancing measures will remain in place.

Under current measures, beach managers like Venieris will have to place umbrellas at least four metres, carry out regular disinfections and test beach bar employees and other staff for Covid-19.

Greece fared well in keeping the first wave of the pandemic under control last year but a resurgence in cases pushed health services to the limit and prompted authorities to impose a second lockdown in November. As infections have fallen and vaccinations gathered pace, authorities have steadily eased restrictions, opening bars and restaurants earlier this week.

आकार्क घडेरी विक्रीमा

चढ़ाविरी केवलकार नजिकै, रामकोट डाढ़ापोरा र ललितपुर नेपालदेश सबै सुविधायुक्त आकार्क घडेरी किताहरु चलनयती भन्दा सस्तो मूल्यमा तुर्जन विक्रीमा

ग्रेगी इन्वेस्टमेन्ट एण्ड डेवलपमेन्ट प्रा. लि.

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PROTECT YOURSELF FROM THE COVID-19 SECOND WAVE

The coronavirus that causes Covid-19 is predominantly transmitted through the air when a healthy person is exposed to the respiratory droplets from an infected person. The highly infectious virus can also enter the body through contaminated surfaces like tabletops, doorknobs and stair banisters, although the scientific community now sees surface transmission as low risk. Still, it is advisable to wash hands frequently after touching suspected contaminated surfaces and avoid shaking hands.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

STAY CONNECTED

While taking precautionary measures by avoiding meeting others, it is important to be in touch with friends and family virtually.



AVOID RUMOURS AND MISINFORMATION

Learn to filter information and avoid being misled by rumours. Not everything you read on social media is true. Limit the time you spend on social media.



STAY ACTIVE

Engage your mind and body in light exercises or meditation. If required, reach out to professionals for help.



GENERAL SYMPTOMS



HIGH FEVER



COUGH



TROUBLE BREATHING



SORE THROAT



RUNNY NOSE AND BODY ACHE

PREVENTIVE MEASURES



WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY WITH SOAP

Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly at least for 20 seconds after touching a suspected contaminated surface.



WEAR A MASK WHEN YOU GO OUTSIDE

Cover your mouth with a mask when leaving home. Avoid reusing the mask. Change masks frequently. Dispose of used masks properly in a dustbin.



MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCE

Ensure you do not get too close to other people and there is a minimum distance of two metres between you and another person.



DON'T HESITATE TO SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE

Seek medical attention if you have any of the symptoms akin to Covid-19.



AVOID TOUCHING YOUR FACE

The virus can enter your body when you touch your eyes, ears and nose quite often. So avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.



AVOID SHARING /USING PERSONAL ITEMS

Don't share your personal items like pens, mouse and digital devices and avoid using those used by others.

WORLD

Myanmar junta brands ousted lawmakers 'terrorists'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BANGKOK, MAY 9

Myanmar's junta has labelled a shadow government of lawmakers and politicians ousted in a February coup and a people's defence force that is being set up to confront security forces as terrorist groups.

The government of national unity was established by elected legislators who were barred from taking their seats when the military seized power and detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and others.

The junta has previously accused them of treason, and the announcement on state TV Saturday said they were being branded terrorists because of their participation in a civil disobedience movement—a popular revolt against the military takeover that has seen people taking to the streets daily despite the lethal use of force by authorities.

The junta has previously accused ousted lawmakers of treason.

More than 700 protesters and bystanders have been killed by security forces since the February 1 coup, according to several detailed estimates. The junta has said the death toll is about one-third of that, and that the use of lethal force was justified to end what it called rioting.

Last week, the shadow government announced the formation of "People's Defence Force," which would serve as a precursor to a "Federal Union Army" of democratic forces.

The National Unity Government has the backing of several major ethnic minority groups who for decades have been seeking greater autonomy and who maintain their own guerrilla forces. The two most important are the Kachin in the north and the Karen in the east, both actively engaged in combat with the government's military forces. Since the coup and crackdown on opponents, students and factory workers have fled to territory controlled by the ethnic guerrilla forces to take military training.

BRIEFING

Afghan school blast toll rises to 58, families bury victims

KABUL: The death toll from an explosion outside a school in Afghanistan's capital Kabul has risen to 58, Afghan officials said on Sunday, with doctors struggling to provide medical care to at least 150 injured. The bombing on Saturday evening shook the city's Shi'ite Muslim neighbourhood of Dasht-e-Barchi. The community, a religious minority in Afghanistan, has been targeted in the past by Islamic State militants, a Sunni militant group. A car bomb was detonated in front of the Sayed Al-Shuhada school on Saturday, and when the students rushed out in panic, two more bombs exploded. Officials said more than 150 people had been wounded, adding that most of the victims were female students. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Saturday blamed the attack on Taliban insurgents but a spokesman for the Taliban denied involvement.

US Navy seizes weapons likely bound for Yemen

DUBAI: The US Navy announced on Sunday it seized an arms shipment of thousands of assault weapons, machine guns and sniper rifles hidden aboard a ship in the Arabian Sea, apparently bound for Yemen to support the country's Houthi rebels. An American defence official told The Associated Press that the Navy's initial investigation found the vessel came from Iran, again tying the Islamic Republic to arming the Houthis despite a United Nations arms embargo. Iran's mission to the UN did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Chinese rocket debris lands in Indian Ocean, draws criticism

BEIJING: Remnants of China's biggest rocket landed in the Indian Ocean on Sunday, with most of its components destroyed upon re-entry into the atmosphere, ending days of speculation over where the debris would hit but drawing US criticism over lack of transparency. The coordinates given by Chinese state media, citing the China Manned Space Engineering Office, put the point of impact in the ocean, west of the Maldives archipelago. Debris from the Long March 5B has had some people looking warily skyward since it blasted off from China's Hainan island on April 29, but the China Manned Space Engineering Office said most of the debris was burnt up in the atmosphere. (AGENCIES)

As coronavirus cases grow, India's vaccination campaign falters

So far, around 10 percent of India's population have received one shot while just under 2.5 percent have got both.



AP/RSS

Relatives stand near the funeral pyre of their loved one who died due to Covid-19 at a cremation ground in Prayagraj, India.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BENGALURU, MAY 9

Since India opened vaccinations to all adults this month, hoping to tame a disastrous coronavirus surge sweeping across the country, the pace of administering the shots has dropped with states saying they only have limited stock to give out.

Cases meanwhile are still rising at record pace in the world's second-most populous nation. Alongside a slowdown in vaccinations, states have gone to court over oxygen shortages as hospitals struggle to treat a running line of Covid-19 patients.

On Sunday, India reported 403,738 confirmed cases, including 4,092 deaths. Overall, India has over 22 million confirmed infections and 240,000 deaths. Experts say both figures are undercounts.

India's Supreme Court said Saturday it would set up a national task force consisting of top experts and doctors to conduct an "oxygen audit" to determine whether supplies from the federal government were

reaching states. Complaints of oxygen shortages have dominated the top court recently, which stepped in earlier this week to make sure the federal government provided more medical oxygen to hospitals in the capital, New Delhi.

The country's massive vaccination drive kicked off sluggishly in January when cases were low and exports of vaccines were high, with 64 million doses going overseas. But as infections started to rise in March and April, India's exports drastically slowed down so doses went to its own population. So far, around 10 percent of India's population have received one shot while just under 2.5 percent have got both.

At its peak in early April, India was administering a record high of 3.5 million shots a day on average. But this number has consistently shrunk since, reaching an average of 1.3 million shots a day over the past week. Between April 6 and May 6, daily doses have dropped by 38 percent, even as cases have tripled and deaths have jumped sixfold, according to

Brahmar Mukherjee, a biostatistician at the University of Michigan who has been tracking India's epidemic.

One reason for the drop in shots is that there are just not enough available, experts say. Currently, India's two vaccine makers produce an estimated 70 million doses each month of the two approved shots—AstraZeneca, made by the Serum Institute of India, and another by Bharat Biotech.

Vaccine supply has remained nearly the same since the drive began in January, but the target population eligible has increased by threefold, said Chandrakant Lahariya, a health policy expert. "In the beginning, India had far more assured supply available than the demand, but now the situation has reversed," he added.

In Kerala state, the drive to inoculate all adults is crawling along because "our single biggest problem is the very slow arrival of supplies," said the state's Covid-19 officer, Amar Fethi.

In New Delhi, many are waiting for hours outside vaccination centres—but only after they've been able to

book a slot. For Gurumukh Singh, a marketing professional in the city, this has been impossible. "It gets really frustrating, having so many hospitals and vaccine centres around but not being able to get access because they are all pre-booked," he said.

Experts also point to a new policy change by the government, which has upended how doses are being distributed.

Previously, all of the stock was bought by the federal government and then administered to the population through both public and private health facilities.

But from May 1, all available stock has been divided in two, with 50 percent purchased by the government going to public health centres to inoculate those above 45. The remaining half is being purchased by states and the private sector directly from manufacturers at set prices to give adults below 45. This has led to lags as states and private hospitals, still adjusting to new rules, struggle to procure supplies on their own.

"You have now taken it out of a fairly efficient system where every dose was still centrally-controlled," said Jacob John, a professor of community medicine at Christian Medical College, Vellore. "But with market forces at play and unprepared states burdened with such a daunting task, the efficiency of the system has fallen."

Things could change in the coming months, as the government last month gave an advance to the Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech, which could help boost manufacturing. And last week, India received its first batch of Sputnik V vaccines. Russia has signed a deal with an Indian pharmaceutical company to distribute 125 million doses.

But with vaccines currently in short supply, there are worries that those most in need are missing out. The goal should be to prioritise preventing deaths, which means fully vaccinating the elderly and vulnerable first, said Dr. Gagandeep Kang, a microbiologist at Christian Medical College, Vellore.

"You need to give it (earlier) to people who are more likely to die first," Kang said.

China to create 'line of separation' at Everest summit on Covid-19 fears

REUTERS
BEIJING, MAY 9

China will set up "a line of separation" at the summit of Mount Everest to prevent the mingling of climbers from Covid-19-hit Nepal and those ascending from the Tibetan side as a precautionary measure, Chinese state media reported on Sunday.

Everest base camp on the Nepalese side has been hit by coronavirus cases since late April. The Nepalese government, starved of tourism revenue, has yet to cancel the spring climbing season, usually from April to early June before the monsoon rains.

It was not immediately clear how the line would be enforced on the summit, a tiny, perilous and inhospitable area the size of a dining table.

A small team of Tibetan climbing guides will ascend Everest and set up the "line of separation" at the summit to stop any contact between mountaineers from both sides of the peak, Xinhua news agency reported, citing the head of Tibet's sports bureau.

A group of 21 Chinese nationals are en route to the summit on the Tibetan side, Xinhua reported.

The Tibetan guides will set up the separation line ahead of their arrival, the state-run news agency said, without describing what the line would look like.

It was also unclear whether the Tibetan guides would be the ones enforcing the "separation", or whether they would remain in the so-called death zone, where many lives have been lost due to a dearth of oxygen, to hold the line.

The top of the 8,848-metre peak is a small mound of snow with barely enough space for half a dozen climbers and guides at any one time.

China has not allowed any foreign climbers to ascend from the Tibetan side since the outbreak of the new coronavirus last year due to infection concerns.

Tourists in the Everest scenic area in Tibet are also banned from visiting the base camp on the Tibetan side.

Mainland China on Sunday reported 12 new Covid-19 cases on May 8—all of which involved travellers arriving from overseas—up from seven a day earlier. Nepal reported 9,023 new cases on Friday, the country's biggest one-day increase.

Putin reviews Russian military might as tensions with West soar

REUTERS
MOSCOW, MAY 9

President Vladimir Putin reviewed Russia's traditional World War Two victory parade on Sunday, a patriotic display of raw military power that this year coincides with soaring tensions with the West.

The parade on Moscow's Red Square commemorating the 76th anniversary of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in World War Two featured over 12,000 troops and more than 190 pieces of military hardware, including intercontinental ballistic missile launchers, and a fly-past by nearly 80 military aircraft under cloudy skies.

Putin, who has been in power as either president or prime minister since 1999, stood beside Soviet war veterans on a review platform set up on Red Square.

"Unfortunately there are once again attempts to deploy many things from the ideology of the Nazis, those who were obsessed with a delusional theory on their exclusiveness. And not only (by) all sorts of radicals and international terrorist groups," Putin said in what appeared to be a common denunciation of the West but what the Kremlin said was aimed at the rise of neo-Nazism in Europe.

Putin, who has been in power as either president or prime minister since 1999, stood beside Soviet war veterans on a review platform set up on Red Square.

"Russia will again and again uphold international law, but at the same time we will firmly protect national interests (and) ensure the security of our people."

This year's parade precedes parliamentary elections in September and comes at a time when Moscow's relations with the West are acutely strained over issues ranging from the conflict in Ukraine to the fate of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

The United States and Russia have expelled each other's diplomats in recent months in a series of retaliatory moves and Moscow and EU member states have been involved in a similar tit-for-tat diplomatic dispute.

Sunday's parade follows a massive show of Russian military force near the borders of Ukraine and in Crimea, which Russia annexed from Kyiv in 2014, and an uptick in fighting in eastern Ukraine between Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian government forces.

Moscow said the build-up, which alarmed the West, was a training exercise in response to activity by the NATO military alliance and Ukraine.

It has since ordered a withdrawal of some troops. Smaller military parades took place on Sunday in cities across Russia and in annexed Crimea, and at Russia's Hmeymim air base in Syria.

'Freedom' fiestas: Spaniards celebrate end of Covid-19 curfew



People celebrate on a street in the neighbourhood of Born, as the state of emergency gets lifted in Barcelona, Spain.



AP/RSS

REUTERS
MADRID/BARCELONA, MAY 9

Exhilarated Spaniards danced in streets, chanted "freedom" and partied on beaches overnight as a Covid-19 curfew ended across most of the nation.

In scenes akin to New Year's Eve celebrations, hundreds of mainly young people gathered in Madrid's Puerta del Sol square to applaud the clock striking midnight while in Barcelona revellers headed to the beach with drinks in hand.

Police in Barcelona had the strange task of moving people on after the last curfew began at 10pm, only to let them back at midnight when it ended for good.

Some people wore masks but there was scant social distancing as friends kissed, hugged, danced and sang.

"Young people, like everyone else, have been very restricted," said shop worker Paula Garcia, 28, on the beach in Barcelona. "Now was time to give us a bit of freedom to enjoy a little of the summer."

But social media videos of large groups paying little heed to Covid-19 distancing drew criticism from some. "Freedom does not include breaking the rules," said Madrid's conservative mayor Jose Luis Martinez-Almeida, emphasising that gatherings to drink on the street, known as "botellones", were prohibited.

One of Europe's worst-hit nations, Spain has suffered 78,792 coronavirus deaths and 3.6 million cases. But infection rates have fallen and vaccinations are progressing fast, enabling most of the 17 regions to scrap the curfew until dawn.

Only four regions were keeping it: the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands, Navarra and Valencia.

"It was time they let us out," said store clerk Andreu Pujol, 25, also on the beach in Barcelona.

"Even so, I am still very unhappy with the handling (of the pandemic). You can see that in this country all they do is make things up as they go along."

As impromptu parties sprung up in town centres around the nation, police kept a wary eye, reminding some revellers that drinking on the street was prohibited.

Madrid's right-wing regional president Isabel Diaz Ayuso just won re-election after campaigning on looser measures, but the city has the second highest infection rate in Spain and was still ordering bars and restaurants shut from midnight.

Kathmandu Rayzrs end league rounds on top

Bal Gopal Maharjan-led side edge Chitwan FC 2-0 to move three points clear on top of the Nepal Super League standings.

SPORTS BUREAU

KATHMANDU, MAY 9

Kathmandu Rayzrs edged FC Chitwan 2-1 in the last league match to finish the group rounds as table toppers in the Nepal Super League football tournament at the Dasharath Stadium in Tripureshwor on Sunday.

The result did not have much significance for either team as former national coach Bal Gopal Maharjan-led Kathmandu were already assured of a playoff place and top two finishes irrespective of the outcome of the last group match. Coach Meghraj KC-led Chitwan were the first team to crash out from playoff contention and their bottom place finish was also confirmed before the kick-off.

However, it was a prestige game as the win secured Kathmandu first place finish in the league rounds with 13 points in the first ever franchise football league of the country. They replaced Dhangadhi FC, the only side that defeated Kathmandu, from the summit winning four, losing one and drawing one match each. Chitwan became the only team to bow out winless with two points, losing four and playing draw in two matches.

All three goals came in the first half as Cameroonian winger Messouke E Oloumou gave an early lead to Kathmandu taking his scoring tally to the highest five goals. Sanjok Rai doubled the advantage for Kathmandu before Rajiv Lopchan cut the deficit for Chitwan.

Referee judgment again drew controversy as Chitwan assistant coach Sailesh Karmacharya questioned their integrity.

"The referee did not give good [fair] decisions but I am not saying that they are not good," said Karmacharya. "Not only me, others have also made such remarks. Their level must be checked. They go blind despite seeing many things. I may be punished for



POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

A scene from the Nepal Super League football match between Kathmandu Rayzrs (red) and FC Chitwan at the Dasharath Stadium on Sunday.

raising my voice today but everything will come out in due course. There are a lot of hidden things," said Karmacharya.

Kathmandu and Dhangadhi will vie in the first playoff match on Tuesday with the winners among them securing a place for the final. The losing team will play in the second qualifier on Thursday, where they will play the winners among Lalitpur City FC and Butwal Lumbini FC.

Kathmandu coach Maharjan said he was happy to get into the playoff as table toppers. "We have our first match against Dhangadhi and we were defeated by them in the league stage. But we will try to come up with

NEPAL SUPER LEAGUE TABLE

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Kathmandu	6	4	1	1	9	8	13
Dhangadhi	6	3	1	2	8	5	10
Lalitpur	6	2	3	1	7	3	9
Butwal Lumbini	6	2	2	2	7	6	8
Pokhara	6	2	2	2	3	4	8
Biratnagar	6	2	1	3	11	12	7
Chitwan	6	0	2	4	5	12	2

a good performance in the playoff. We tested some new players today due to the injury of some regular starters and we were successful in the experiment," said Maharjan.

Oloumou, who had scored a hat-trick against Biratnagar City FC, put Kathmandu ahead in the 17th minute with his solo display as he rounded up two Chitwan defenders and beat goalie Roman Rasali in a one-versus-one situation to open the scoring. Midfielder Rai doubled the advantage in the 37th minute with a well placed shot from the area after he capitalised on a defensive error of Chitwan.

Rajiv Lopchan pulled one back in the 40th minute after he collected the ball parried by Kathmandu's second choice goalie Dinesh Shrestha in his effort to block Sunil Shrestha's strike on goal.

Man United delay Man City's coronation

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BIRMINGHAM, MAY 9

Manchester United put Manchester City's Premier League title celebrations on hold after coming from behind to win 3-1 away to Aston Villa on Sunday.

Defeat for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side would have handed the title to City and their local rivals would have enjoyed seeing Villa's Bertrand Traore opening the scoring midway through the first half.

But United hit back with two goals in four minutes after the break, Bruno Fernandes equalising from the penalty spot before Mason Greenwood put them ahead. United wrapped up the win thanks to substitute Edinson Cavani's goal three minutes from time.

Victory left second-placed United 10 points behind leaders City, with 12 still on offer to the Red Devils from their final four league games.

United, however, face Leicester and Liverpool in the coming week and defeat in either of those matches will see City, beaten 2-1 at home to Chelsea on Saturday, crowned champions before Pep Guardiola's men are away to Newcastle on Friday.

United kicked off having not lost a Premier League match at Villa Park since 1995, a year before current manager Solskjaer joined the club as a striker. Villa's hopes of ending that run against United were not helped by England international Jack Grealish's ongoing absence due to a shin injury, with Egypt forward Trezeguet a long-term absentee as well. Grealish looked on from the stands on Sunday as did England manager Gareth Southgate, himself a former Villa defender.

Villa went ahead against the run of play in the 24th minute. Fred's poor pass to Scott McTominay allowed John McGinn to gain possession, with

Douglas Luiz playing in Traore. The Burkina Faso international turned neatly and held off the challenge of Victor Lindelof before beating United goalkeeper Dean Henderson with a powerful shot into the far corner.

United nearly equalised five minutes before half-time but Greenwood's low shot was pushed away by Emi Martinez. But United were level in the 52nd minute when Fernandes scored from the spot after Paul Pogba was brought down in the box by Luiz.

And they led in the 56th minute after Aaron Wan-Bissaka found Greenwood inside the box, with the teenage England forward beating Martinez with a low shot. Worryingly for United, defender Harry Maguire limped off 12 minutes from time. But Cavani made the game safe with an 87th-minute glancing header from Marcus Rashford's cross.

And there was still time for Villa's Ollie Watkins to be sent off after he was shown a second yellow card for diving.

On Saturday, Sadio Mane's first-half header and a late effort by Thiago earned Liverpool an unconvincing 2-0 win at home to Southampton to keep Juergen Klopp's side in the hunt for a top-four finish in the Premier League.

Liverpool were far from their best, and keeper Alisson saved them on several occasions. But the win moved them into sixth spot with 57 points from 34 games, six points behind fourth-placed Leicester City with a game in hand.

Mane got on the end of Mohamed Salah's flighted pass into the area in the 31st minute, seconds after Southampton's Che Adams had been denied an opener for the visitors. The three points looked far from safe until Thiago buried a low shot into the corner in the 90th minute — his first goal since joining from Bayern Munich.

Bayern Munich's missing challengers in Bundesliga causing concern

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BERLIN, MAY 9

Munich police issued a missing person's notice for Bayern Munich's Bundesliga challengers on Saturday. Local law enforcement celebrated Bayern's record-extending ninth consecutive German title by joking on Twitter that they were looking for Bayern's missing rivals over the past nine years.

Bayern's latest title had an air of inevitability after Hansi Flick's team began the season with an 8-0 demolition of Schalke. They celebrated clinching the league on Saturday with a 6-0 rout of Borussia

Monchengladbach.

"It's a huge task every year, and a lot of heart and soul goes into it. But, of course, we have a great team every year," said Thomas Muller, who along with teammate David Alaba has won 10 league titles with Bayern.

Bayern's long-established domestic dominance was never in doubt all season, though their weakened squad compared to the season before, and the improvement of second-placed Leipzig in Julian Nagelsmann's second year as coach gave neutrals some hope of a title race.

It didn't last long.

Bayern defeated Leipzig 1-0 on April 3, stretching their lead to seven points

with seven rounds remaining. Other challengers simply failed to materialise.

Borussia Dortmund's title bid fizzled out early on under coach Lucien Favre, who was fired in December and replaced with Edin Terzic. Gladbach fell into disarray in February when the club announced that coach Marco Rose was leaving to take over Dortmund next season. Bayer Leverkusen were unbeaten and leading the Bundesliga until the 13th round when Bayern took over with a late 2-1 win in Leverkusen. Robert Lewandowski scored the winner in injury time.

It was to become a recurring theme;

Bayern digging in and doing enough when it mattered most.

Bayern have a 10-point lead over Leipzig with two rounds remaining. They have dropped points only nine times in 32 games so far. Their goal difference (+plus-52) is almost twice as good as any of their rivals. Leipzig are next with plus-29.

Flick complained last month that his squad wasn't as strong as it was last season when he led Bayern to a trophy treble of Champions League, Bundesliga and German Cup.

Ultimately, the outgoing coach was proven right as his team went on to be knocked out in the quarter-finals of the Champions League by last year's

beaten finalists Paris Saint-Germain. Bayern were already knocked out in the second round of the German Cup by second-division Holstein Kiel in January.

Despite Flick's misgivings, Bayern still had enough quality to trump their domestic rivals. Not even Lewandowski's knee injury toward the end of the season dented the team's campaign. Lewandowski recovered and raised his tally to 39 goals with a hat-trick in Bayern's rout of Gladbach — just one off Bayern great Gerd Muller's all-time record from the 1971-72 season.

The Poland star still has games against Freiburg and Augsburg to

match or break Muller's record.

Flick is leaving voluntarily after the season to be replaced by Nagelsmann, the coach of the team that pushed Bayern hardest this season.

Bayern have won 30 of the 58 Bundesliga titles since the league was formed in 1963.

Bundesliga chief executive Christian Seifert warned in 2017 that it would be a problem if Bayern Munich win the title 10 or 15 times in a row. But it seems there's no one to stop the Bavarian powerhouse. Police in Monchengladbach responded to their Munich colleagues' appeal by saying their search had failed to yield any results.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19) ***

Aim to bring open-ended projects to completion today, Aries. The moon's presence in practical Taurus helps you ground down and steadily tackle your errands, yet her deep waning phase can lend to low energy levels.

MONDAYS: Good day to work.

TUESDAYS: Good day to work.

WEDNESDAYS: Good day to work.

THURSDAYS: Good day to work.

FRIDAYS: Good day to work.

SATURDAYS: Good day to work.

SUNDAYS: Good day to work.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) ***

The moon's phase always has a direct effect on your energy levels, Cancer. Monday's skies find the moon deep in her waning phase, as she trudges through peace-seeking Taurus.

MONDAYS: Good day to work.

TUESDAYS: Good day to work.

WEDNESDAYS: Good day to work.

THURSDAYS: Good day to work.

FRIDAYS: Good day to work.

SATURDAYS: Good day to work.

SUNDAYS: Good day to work.

LEO (July 23-August 22) ***

Monday's skies wipe the slate clean, Leo. The hard-working Taurus moon tiredly plows forward through her waning phase, suggesting the need to bring open-ended projects towards completion.

MONDAYS: Good day to work.

TUESDAYS: Good day to work.

WEDNESDAYS: Good day to work.

THURSDAYS: Good day to work.

FRIDAYS: Good day to work.

SATURDAYS: Good day to work.

SUNDAYS: Good day to work.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22) ***

Keep your ear to the ground today, Virgo. Your ruling planet, messenger Mercury, merges with the North Node of fate. This once-a-year meeting brings important news, revelations, or conversations to the career front.

MONDAYS: Good day to work.

TUESDAYS: Good day to work.

WEDNESDAYS: Good day to work.

THURSDAYS: Good day to work.

FRIDAYS: Good day to work.

SATURDAYS: Good day to work.

SUNDAYS: Good day to work.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) ***

It's time to put the finishing touches on a few unfinished projects today, Sagittarius. The waning moon glides through steady Taurus, helping you ground down and tackle any errands still looming on your to-do list.

MONDAYS: Good day to work.

TUESDAYS: Good day to work.

WEDNESDAYS: Good day to work.

THURSDAYS: Good day to work.

FRIDAYS: Good day to work.

SATURDAYS: Good day to work.

SUNDAYS: Good day to work.

PISCES (February 19-March 20) ***

Give your mind a break today, Pisces. The moon is closing up shop in preparation for tomorrow's new moon, prompting low energy levels and the urge to bring completion to recent undertakings.

MONDAYS: Good day to work.

TUESDAYS: Good day to work.

WEDNESDAYS: Good day to work.

THURSDAYS: Good day to work.

FRIDAYS: Good day to work.

SATURDAYS: Good day to work.

On social media, memories pop up from a pandemic still going

Social media's throwbacks, reposts and commemorations crack open the digital time capsule of the pandemic before it's even over.

KANTELE FRANKO
COLUMBUS

When the pandemic passed the one-year mark, Lisa Phillips wasn't exactly eager to walk down memory lane. She had developed symptoms and quarantined with a suspected case of Covid-19 last spring, lost her mother to the disease in July and been hospitalised in November from what she describes as a nervous breakdown fueled by grief and isolation.

But Phillips also wasn't ready to delete the apps that provide those reminders that showed her each day what she'd shared on social media just a year earlier. That pain, she says, shouldn't be forgotten. So she still wanted to save the memories—but for later.

As we navigate these weeks that are unspooling a year after March, April and May 2020, memories from earlier in the Covid-19 crisis are popping up in people's social media feeds when throwbacks, reposts and commemorations crack open the digital time capsule of the pandemic before it's even over.

Out spill the first reminders of a billion virus-inflicted anniversaries, ranging from the relatively trivial to the tragic: the empty toilet paper shelves, the new masks, the start of remote work or school, the gratitude to exhausted health care staff, the In Memoriam.

For Phillips, 42, of Phoenix, the trauma still feels fresh. "If you're not ready to relive the anniversary and beginning of this ongoing pandemic, you're not alone," she tweeted.

Social media's insistence on serving our own experiences back up to us—even if desired—can complicate the coping. But experts say it also provides opportunities to realise connection—and to frame how we move forward.

"In certain ways—not all ways—we have more in common with more people on the planet than we probably have in any other year," says Jamil Zaki, a Stanford University psychologist



AP/RSS

When the anniversary of the pandemic arrived, Lisa Phillips from Phoenix was not eager for a trip down memory lane.

who researches empathy.

People's circumstances vary widely, and the pandemic has exposed lots of inequities, disproportionately impacting communities of colour. "But at some level,"

Zaki says, "many of us are dealing with a very similar type of anxiety, uncertainty, mourning and loss."

Zillah Wesley, an organiser with the anti-poverty Poor People's Campaign in Washington, DC, says she has known more than 40 people who have died during the pandemic, including several relatives and friends' relatives. Many of them died in the early months, she says, and nearly all of them were fellow members of the Black community.

Now posts about them are showing up again on her smartphone, she says, bringing a sinking feeling of loss.

"I sit with it and just let it flow through me so it won't pop up in other ways," she says. "It's like you can click off the thing and still go about your day, but the person is still gone."

The pandemic has been a collective trauma, and sharing personal emotional experience can help people feel supported and find meaning in that, says Sara Levens, a University of North Carolina at Charlotte psychology professor whose lab studies emotion.

Some people may find it helpful to look back on their own or others' experiences and reflect on

what they've learned, what's been lost and gained, or where they've seen resilience or joy in the midst of greater hardship. To navigate that content in a healthy way, experts recommend that people pay attention to what kind of social media posts and stories they're viewing—how the content makes them feel and whether they're actually getting something useful from it.

"Just like you would be mindful of doom-scrolling, I think we need to be mindful of pandemic-scrolling," says Elana Newman, a University of Tulsa psychologist and trauma researcher.

If the posts you're reading start to feel more overwhelming and less like you're plugging into a

shared experience, it's probably a good idea to disengage and distract yourself with an activity that helps replenish you, Levens says.

Disabling social media notifications and muting or unfollowing accounts that negatively impact your mental health can help. Some users are even more proactive, intentionally limiting how they use digital tools that resurface their own memories.

Brian Acunis, a soon-to-be graduate student who has lived part of the past year in New York, says he deleted the reminiscing app Timehop from his phone just a few months into the pandemic. He gave up a three-year streak with it because he didn't want to keep

seeing memories of all the activities and friends he was missing.

"It just was too sad of a reminder," says Acunis, 28.

That tension isn't lost on the folks behind the app. In March, on the anniversary of the pandemic declaration, Timehop tweeted a reminder that users can hide unwanted memories, noting they sometimes "need to be put away."

There's no surge in the use of that option so far. But if things change in the coming months, Timehop might consider altering how people hide memories or encouraging breaks if that would benefit users, CEO Matt Raoul says.

"We try to balance that mantra of 'we do not want to curate your memories and we want to show you everything' with giving people the tools to control it in a way that's best for them," Raoul says.

Phillips, a vice president at a cloud computing services company, now skips Timehop and social media altogether on days when her grief feels especially sharp or she doesn't have mental or emotional space for what they might serve up. She says she also seeks help from others through professional care, therapy and talking with family and friends.

She still considers it valuable to document moments and milestones on social media so she can look back at the difference over time. "There's a part of me," she says, "that doesn't want to lose the sort of archival element."

Zaki, too, thinks the pandemic is worth remembering—not only because of what it caused but because of what it revealed about the loneliness, depression and anxiety that people increasingly felt even before it descended.

"I really hope we don't forget this time and don't just snap back into whatever normal was before, because normal before was not that normal. We were fracturing as a culture. Trust was diminishing," Zaki says. "And I think that in a lot of ways the pandemic, like other disasters, exposes some deep truths about who we are, what we need and who we can be."

— Associated Press

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TODAY
Pulmonologist

The raging coronavirus pandemic and the prohibitory orders issued to contain its spread have left people confined to their homes. During these trying times, many of us with medical concerns and emergencies are unable to visit hospitals, many of which are overwhelmed with Covid-19 patients. And since not everyone has direct access to doctors, we have taken an initiative to provide professional medical counselling to those in need. We have assembled a roster of health specialists to answer your medical queries. Every day at 5pm on eKantipur Facebook page, we will have one doctor LIVE to address your medical concerns.

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