



Country awaits concrete action plan on economic recovery

MB Subba

When the prime minister announced the new phase of Covid-19 management on BBS from Gelephu on March 2, it was expected that the government's focus would immediately shift towards economic recovery.

A month since, however, the government is still working on an action plan to revive the economy. The GDP growth has slumped to negative 10.08 percent.

Finance Minister Namgay Tshering said that the government was working on fiscal and monetary measures and improving economic policies.

The government, he said, was charting out an "action matrix" that will determine what would be done as part of the short-term, medium-term and long-term recovery plans.

"The normalisation of the Covid protocol which is happening now itself is the biggest part of the recovery plan," he said, adding that fiscal incentives that are also being rolled out would also contribute to economic recovery.

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► The widening and blacktopping of the Korila-Ngatshang road on Mongar-Trashigang highway that started in March 2019 have been completed. The road is expected to be handed over to authorities soon. ► Pg 13

Focus Point

~~Rest~~ Wait assured!



Quarantine for local travelers ends on April 4

Nima Wangdi

Those travelling from high-risk to low risk don't have to quarantine or get tested from April 4 according to a press release from the Prime Minister's Office issued yesterday night.

Individuals who have entered home quarantine on or before April 3 will be allowed to travel on the enforcement date according to the press release. "This major shift in policy comes after almost two years."

The high-risk areas include Thimphu, Wangduephodrang, Dukti chiwog under Yallang gewog, and

Jangphutse-Manam villages under Toedtsho gewog in Trashiyangtse, Merak and Sakteng gewogs in Trashigang and all bordering areas in southern Bhutan.

Quarantine period for international travelers has also been reduced to five days from 14 days facility quarantine.

The press release stated that the individuals who are already in quarantine and complete five days on April 5 will be allowed to exit based on the revised quarantine protocol.

The PMO announced numerous major relaxation measures including

doing away with the red flats. Those who test positive are advised to self-isolate at home and should go to the nearest flu clinic or health facilities or call 1010 in case of severe symptoms.

"All meetings, seminars and training should be conducted virtually," the press release stated. The testing requirement for essential drivers is discontinued and the entertainment centers will remain closed until further notice.

Escort services for people travelling through India will continue until the international quarantine remains.

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SC closes mutiny case and convicts Khandu Wangmo

Thinley Namgay

The Supreme Court (SC) on March 31 upheld the High Court's (HC) judgment and sentenced Khandu Wangmo to nine years in prison for her involvement in mutiny. She was convicted of all the eight charges against her.

The concurrent sentence of nine years in prison was for abetting mutiny, criminal misappropriation of property, larceny by deception, illegal possession of a firearm, and impersonation of uniformed personnel.

She was also convicted of unauthorised utilisation of resources, illegal procurement

Khandu Wangmo has to serve a total sentencing of 30 years, which includes the 21 years prison term for the sedition case.

of official documents, and harassment. The offences are graded misdemeanour and were given six months prison term for each offence.

Prosecutor from the Office of the Attorney General said Khandu Wangmo has to serve a total sentencing of 30 years, which includes the 21 years prison term for the sedition case.

SC stated that the courts had thoroughly investigated all the eight charges for mutiny and found her guilty.

Khandu Wangmo appealed to the SC on January 3 this year for the mutiny case, stating that she wasn't guilty. However, the SC dismissed her claims and upheld the HC's bench III judgment.

After completing the sentence for mutiny, she had to serve the sedition sentence.

Quarantine for local travelers ends on April 4

From Pg 1

"But for convenience of our public, frequency of escort services will be increased," the PMO release stated.

Random testing will be conducted in the communities along the border for the surveillance of new variants. The press release stated that both antigen and RT-PCR tests will be offered in health facilities and designated flu-clinics for individuals who are symptomatic.

The second dose of vaccination for children between 5 and 11 years will begin on April 4.

Another dies from Covid-19

An 81-year old woman died

of Covid-19 today at Gomtu, Samtse. The health ministry stated that the deceased was bedridden due to a previous stroke. "She had cough, fever and shortness of breath when she was brought to the hospital."

The patient was supposed to be referred to Phuentsholing Covid-19 hospital after consulting the regional and National Covid-19 management team. However, the ministry stated, that the patient party declined referral and chose to continue with supportive Covid-19 management at Gomtu.

"Despite the best supportive management and care, the patient succumbed to Covid-19," the health ministry stated.

Country awaits concrete action plan on economic recovery

From Pg 1

Citing an example, he said that export of boulders would be expedited immediately in the short-term.

Similarly, borrowings would be invested in economically viable long-term projects and programmes that would last beyond the present government's term, he added.

The areas of the long-term investments include renewable energy, human capital development formation and ICT infrastructure, according to the finance minister.

Lyonpo Namgay Tshering said that improving the access to credit would be one of the main priorities. The finance minister has written to financial institutions, asking the latter to reduce interest rates amid a sluggish credit growth.

The economic affairs ministry, he said, was working on the policy front to accelerate the growth of industries. "We are coming up with some radical action plan," he said.

Lyonpo said the reduction in the quarantine period for international tourists would also

help the tourism sector to pick up gradually.

The government, he said, was also closely following the economic trends of India as the two economies are closely linked. The data of inflation trends and fuel prices in India were being studied for the government to act accordingly, he said.

The government has stated that its strategy going forward would be to try and prevent infections as much as possible without lockdowns, which will be imposed only if the cases surge beyond the hospitalisation and bed occupancy threshold, or if a new deadly variant emerges.

However, critics say that relaxing the Covid-19 protocol and doing away with lockdowns would not be enough to revive the economy and that the government should implement a "tangible" recovery plan as soon as possible.

The People's Democratic Party's (PDP) general secretary, Kuenga Tashi, said that there was nothing concrete the party knew for now about the tangi-



► Lyonpo Namgay Tshering

ble economic recovery plan of the government.

"But more than such plans, we would like to iterate that the government must implement all planned activities of the 12 Plan before completing their tenure. Our economy has suffered enough and we have no option than to revive it to pre-Covid level as a baseline to move forward," he said.

The government, he said, must pursue to recover the economy by "picking the low hanging fruits" and prioritising those activities that foster a robust economic regrowth.

Opposition MP Ugyen Dorji said that now that we the country is transitioning to a new normal, the government must put in concrete and sincere measures to rebound our economy.

"Apart from hydropower and tourism, ours is a trading economy, so, the government must facilitate the revamping of all hitherto stalled trading activities, mostly with India and Bangladesh," he said.

The Opposition Party, through a recent press release, suggested the government to work on "some concrete and serious" fiscal and financial measures on economic recovery and submit to Parliament.

It added that the government should also work closely with the central bank on monetary and credit measures.

The Opposition also suggests the government to complete Punatsangchhu-II and Nickachhu hydropower projects by mid 2023, and expedite other hydropower projects.

The Opposition states that the projects can be completed if Punatsangchhu-II is provided with additional 1,600 workers and Nikachhu with 90.

Others said that the government should implement programmes that will employ a large number of people.

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Fuel price increase leaves no sector unaffected

Thukten Zangpo

The all-time record high cost of fuel, especially diesel, is already creating a ripple effect at all levels and in all sectors. From cost of essentials, housing, construction to service and industry every other sector will bear the brunt of the increase.

Diesel touched Nu 100.67 and petrol at Nu 93.78 in Thimphu today. Diesel saw an increase of Nu 17.26 (20.69 percent) and petrol Nu 9.24 (10.9 percent) since March 17 this year.

Compared with 2019, pre-pandemic level, fuel price has increased by about 57.6 percent. For reference, a litre of diesel in March 2019 was Nu 61.93, and a litre and petrol Nu 61.41.

The impact is already being felt. A Thimphu civil servant said that Nu 2,500 was enough to fuel his Alto car for a month a few months ago. It cost him Nu 3,300 after the revision. This is about 12.6 percent of an officer-level civil servant earning a monthly salary of Nu 26,274. The monthly fuel budget of Nu 2,100 in March 2019 has increased by about Nu 1,200 for the same quantity.

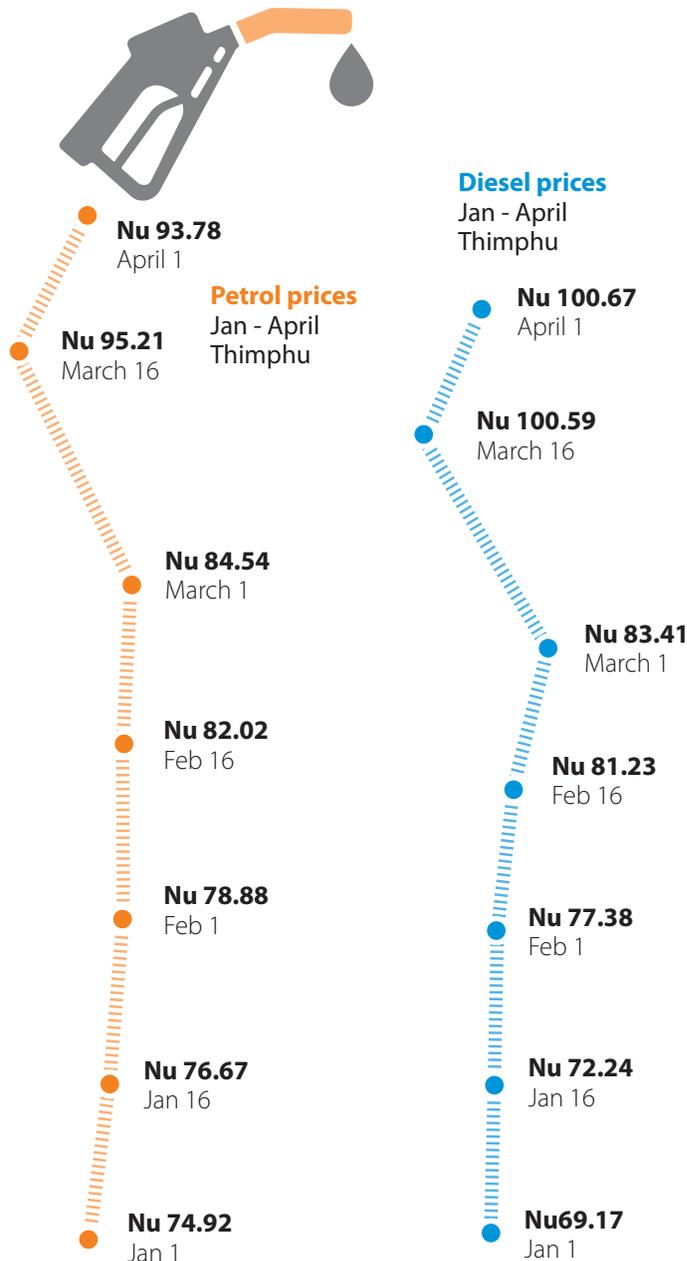
Spending a larger portion of income on fuel translates to less consumer spending. Professor of economics with the Royal Thimphu College, Sanjeev Mehta in a recent interview said higher fuel prices affect those who do not own cars.

"At the micro-level, reallocation of household budgets to manage the impact of rising fuel and overall prices, contribute to a welfare loss. Household savings also fall during this time. The poor and lower-and middle class are the worst hit," Sanjeev Mehta said.

He added that the higher cost of living tends to cut into the real income while unemployment and poverty rate rises.

According to the National Accounts Statistics, 2021, private household final consumption expenditure for food and non-alcoholic beverages fell by about 12.32 percent in 2020 among others compared to the previous year.

In an earlier interview, the economic affairs minister, Loknath Sharma said that a fuel price hike would increase



the price of goods since it constitutes 25 percent of the consumer price index.

A Royal Monetary Authority's study on the impact of fuel prices on inflation in 2021 found that an increase in fuel prices by 10 percent would increase monthly inflation by 3.6 percent within a month and further push inflation by 1.3 percent after three months.

"If fuel prices increase by 10 percent, other factors remain constant, the total increase in inflation will be 4.9 percent after three months from now," it added.

With the increase in fuel price by 15.8 percent since March this year, it could increase monthly inflation by about 5.7 percent within a month and further push inflation by 7.7 percent after three months.

A wholesaler said the recent fuel hike drove freight charges by Nu 2,000 to Nu 3,000 negating the benefit of removing the driving switching mode, which was attributed for driving transportation cost.

However, he said that the costs of the goods are expected to increase soon with most of the goods arriving with new prices and maximum retail prices. This is because of increase in price of goods at source driven by cost of fuel besides other factors.

With the service sector consuming the maximum fuel at 33 percent, the sector will bear the heaviest brunt. The agriculture sector consumes almost 22 percent, the industrial sector at about 20 percent, and the household sector accounting for almost 19 percent in 2020.

Construction Industry

Cost of construction materials has gone up by 30 percent from the pre-pandemic level. The recent fuel hike will make it worse, according to Construction Association of Bhutan's executive director, Tshering Younten.

A contractor said that the cost of construction raw materials could have gone up by 50 percent with the recent fuel hike pushing production and transportation costs.

For instance, he said that a metal rod that cost Nu 52 per kilogram earlier is Nu 80 now transported from Phuentsholing to Thimphu.

Similarly, a bag of cement cost Nu 355 from Nu 325 and a truckload (10-wheeler truck) of sand that cost Nu 12,000 now costs Nu 18,000. A bag of cement from retailers in Thimphu cost Nu 520 a bag weighing 50 kgs.

"Buildings under construction will reassess the cost and this will have an impact on housing as the cost will be passed down to tenants since landlords would have to pay increased equated monthly installments," he added.

Dungsum Cement Corporation Limited's (DCCL) interim chief executive officer, Tshering Tenzin said cement price was revised by Nu 5 a bag because of the fuel revision.

The ex-factory price for Ordinary Portland Cement is Nu 305 a bag and Nu 295 for Portland Pozzolona Cement.

However, Tshering Tenzin said price of cement would increase depending on locations.

Industry

In an earlier interview, the economic affairs minister Loknath Sharma said the rise in fuel prices will affect the competitiveness of manufacturing industries as it impacts the supply chain and logistics cost of raw materials during imports and export of finished goods or materials.

Fuel price would increase price of raw materials because of the huge volume import on-road transportation, an official from the Association of Bhutanese Industries said. "This will drive cost of export making it not competitive in the international market."

DCCL's interim chief ex-

ecutive officer, Tshering Tenzin said export of cement to India would become less competitive if the fuel price increases mainly on the increased freight charges for coal which is the main raw material. About 15 to 20 truckloads are ferried from State Mining Corporation Limited (SMCL) for the plant's daily operation.

Eighty percent of demand for coal (high ash) is met from SMCL and 20 percent of coal (low ash) is imported from India. Tshering Tenzin said low ash coal is necessary for the plant.

Lyonpo also said that if global prices persistently remain high, India may increase the use of coal for power generation and this will further accentuate the coal import difficulties for our industries. India uses 29.55 percent of fuel to generate electricity to meet domestic demand.

Tshering Tenzin said that if India resorts to coal for power generation, this will further accentuate the coal import difficulties for DCCL. Bhutan imports 50,000 metric tonnes of coal in a year.

According to the National Statistics Bureau, the recent producer price index (PPI) saw an increase of 12.53 percent in the third quarter (July to September), 2021 from the previous year. PPI is a measure of the average price change of goods and services over time from the producer's perspective.

Passenger fare

Fares for public transport will see an increase too as cost of fuel determines fare charged.

Road Safety and Transport Authority's chief transport officer, Sithar Dorji said that the authority recently revised the taxi and bus fares effective from March 1 this year.

Passenger fares are revised twice a year, on February 1 and August 1. "The recent hike in fuel price would be taken care of when the fare revision takes place from August this year," said the chief.

The revised fare for a 30-seater coaster bus for a one-way trip from Thimphu to Bumthang is Nu 554. It was Nu 296 in August 2020 and Nu 344 in August last year. Similarly, a taxi fare from Thimphu to Bumthang costs Nu 1,469 now.

Doma paney: An unhealthy habit and trend

Offering a *doma khamto* is an expression of goodwill sometimes seen as soliciting favours or a socially acceptable bribe. Some in the *doma* import business have literally taken it too far.

The tradition or the strange habit of chewing the nut and leaf smeared with lime, unfortunately, has become the means to evade tax and bribery. Both *doma* and *paney* are imported in huge quantities even if they are grown in the country. The increasing import has resulted in revenue leakages as it gave businessmen the leeway to evade tax.

A look at the statistics indicates how importers had been benefiting from the zero tax levied on import of *paney*, the so-called *modus operandi* to evade tax in collusion with custom officials. Import of *paney* has increased significantly in just one year. In 2020, according to the Bhutan Trade Statistics (BTS), Bhutan imported about Nu 101 million worth of betel leaves. This shot up to more than Nu 129M in 2021. Import, going by the BTS, increased by more than Nu 28M. That is a lot of leaves to chew in a pandemic year punctuated with lockdowns.

If importers are declaring the nut as leaves, they save the 20 percent sales tax imposed on the nut. Import of *doma* in the same period increased by about Nu 6.68M. Those chewing *doma* would know how many leaves are needed to go with the *doma*. Undervaluing the taxed item and overvaluing the non-taxable item not only resulted in revenue leakage but enabled importers from not having to resort to fraudulent payment practices as they paid through the formal payment channel, Real Time Gross Settlement.

Playing with import items to evade tax or for other illegal practices is not new in the import business. Not long ago, we imported thousands of tonnes of rice in a few weeks or corrugated zinc sheets when the country was going through a Rupee crisis. These were the same tricks – if for a different reason.

The anti-graft commission intervened this time when they, together with the police, intercepted vehicles carrying under or overvalued *doma* and *paney*. This, many say, is just the tip of the tall *doma shing*. What is more worrying is officials getting lured by bribes.

As an import-dependent country, everything from salt to vehicles to electronics and heavy machinery is imported. For economic, environmental and political reasons, many goods, including essentials are not taxed or taxed less to let the benefit trickle down to common people. Taking advantage of taxation policies by tax officials and importers cannot be tolerated.

So it is with many other goods. Many Bhutanese complain about the quality of goods supplied by traders and suppliers because the goods are manipulated to increase profits. Many in the import business make profits from evading tax whether through undervaluing or non-declaration, using their network. Those following rules sincerely have no room or a chance to grow in the import business or any business dependent on import.

A corporate employee who joined the private sector summed up what has to be done to survive. Without learning the “tricks of the trade,” he said, no one can survive. The tricks, unfortunately, are all at the cost of the government or the people.

ACC had done a good job this time. But those trying to outwit authorities have many tricks up their sleeves. They may be thinking of another item to outsmart authorities already.

MY COUNTRY, MY TOWN



Sun soaked: Solar energy can be put to any number of uses; here are just two of them Photo: Kuenga Tshering

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Absence of Civil Service Tribunal could cause irreparable injustice

With radical steps to reform civil service, many senior executives had to resign and many more are being assessed to build strong leadership. Such bold steps must be lauded. But there can also be unintended consequences due to such drastic measures. Therefore, the aggrieved civil servants must also have the right to appeal. However, even after decades of enactment of the Civil Service Act, the Civil Service Tribunal is yet to be established.

Section 94 of the Civil Service Act (CSA) 2010 states that “An Administrative Tribunal may be established to adjudicate the civil service appeal cases.” This is an extremely important system to protect the civil servants from any form of arbitrariness or unfair proceedings against them by the Commission. Rule no. 19 of Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulations (BCSR) 2018 states that “Every civil servant subject to disciplinary action shall have the right to written reasons for any disciplinary action that is taken against him/her; prior and adequate notice of the nature and reasons for the intended disciplinary action; Opportunity to be heard and placed on record; and right to an appeal or review of a disciplinary decision.” Managing out is disciplinary action leading to loss of jobs or demotion – a major penalty under the civil service laws.

Therefore, there must be an appeal system to ensure that such actions are taken after following all the due process of law.

This concept is based on the two important rights under natural justice. First, the right that no one should be made a judge in his own cause and rule against biased (*Nemo iudex in causa sua*). Since the RCSC takes the decisions against its own employees, there can be intentional and unintentional administrative actions which can be wrong. Second, the right to hear the other party or no one should be condemned (*Audi alteram partem*) must be ensured. For example, in the recent managed out scheme, those senior executives should be given the right to defend their case as to why they should not be managed out or why their evaluations could be wrong or what led to their poor performance.

Section 61 of CSA requires that “the Commission shall institute and oversee the implementation of a transparent, objective and fair performance evaluation system, amongst others, to reward and promote deserving civil servants.” This gives the civil servants the right to know who and how the assessments were carried out, including the criteria. Further, if the Commission used the exact same criteria for every executive

assessment, it may not have worked because of the nature of their work and authority. For example, directors or equivalent positions in completely autonomous agencies may have far more authority and responsibilities compared to a small department within a ministry. It could also be that some executives have the right qualification and technical expertise matching their department while some may have completely different expertise which makes their job more difficult in their current positions. Currently, there are no checks and balances on the decisions of the RCSC.

The Civil Service Tribunal will rule out any such discrepancies, help reduce unintentionally or misjudged or wrongly assessed executives or civil servants and hold the officials assessing the civil servants accountable. Any intentional or unintentional mistakes on part of assessing team should not lead to managing out such senior executives after serving years of service as it will cause irreparable injustice.

Sonam Tshering
Lawyer, Thimphu

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are author's own.

Woman scams people online during the lockdown

Dechen Dolkar

Thimphu police registered a case where a woman allegedly scammed people online during the lockdown.

Four Thimphu residents have filed complaints against a 26-year-old woman using the Facebook username 'Tashi N Zangmo', who claimed she had an apartment for rent during the lockdown and made people deposit security amount from them.

According to the complainants, the woman responded to their inquiry on the Facebook page if there were any available apartment for rent that she had a flat for rent in Changzamtok.

A 25-year-old man said he posted on Facebook if there was a flat for rent in January.

"I immediately received a message from the woman claiming that she has a two-bedroom, hall and kitchen (BHK) for rent at Nu 6,500 per month at Changzamtok," he said. "She then asked me to

deposit one month's house rent as a security deposit to confirm the booking since there are many tenants looking for flat."

He claimed the woman said she is at Wangdue for annual ritual. "We had a conversation over the phone and I felt it was genuine and true and deposited Nu 6,500."

She reportedly said she is in the red zone area in Wangdue and cannot come out.

The victim said that he believed her.

"After the lockdown was lifted, I called her but she gave many reasons and kept postponing. I got a little suspicious and checked her Facebook profile. I saw a common friend and asked the friend. I learnt that she was a scammer," he said.

The man then messaged her to return the money and even warned her that it will be reported to the police. "She claimed mbob is not working and she is in hospital."

He complained to the police on February 25.

Similarly, another victim, a 23-year-old woman also posted on a Facebook page looking for a flat for rent for her family as their house owner asked them to vacate the flat in Changedaphu by March 15.

"We could not find a house and since it was lockdown, I posted on Facebook," the woman said. "I received a message from the woman, claiming she stays in a 2BHK flat in Changzamtok and that she wanted to vacate it."

According to the victim, she could not go out to check the flat since it was lockdown. "When I asked for her number, she gave the house owner's number," she said.

The house owner told the victim he has no issue if the woman wants to vacate it.

"The woman said she is a patient and she wanted to shift with her parents as she is expecting and asked to deposit Nu 14,000 as security deposit," the victim said. "Since we are in urgent need of a flat we deposited the security amount on March 1."

The woman promised she would vacate the apartment by March 10.

The victim said they registered for an electronic pass to shift the house, but the woman kept giving excuses. "She took advantage of the lockdown."

She said they live on the income their father earns as a taxi driver. "She took our little money."

Another 25-year-old victim also said she posted on Facebook, looking for a flat for rent for her sister who will be shifting to Thimphu from Phuntsholing on March 8.

The next day she received a message from the same lady claiming that she has a 2BHK flat for rent at Nu 7,000 a month at Changzamtok.

The lady has also sent her video of the house and was asked to deposit Nu 14,000 as a security deposit.

The lady claimed that the building is near Chundu sawmill with a two-storied building.

"I was convinced by her video. I asked her contact

number and account number and deposited the security amount," a 25-year-old victim said.

The woman told her she would vacate the flat by March 25.

"I called her on March 24 if she vacated the house, but there was no response," the victim said. "On March 25 morning, she dropped a message that she would vacate by April 1 since private vehicles are not allowed to move out of mega zones."

The victim posted on Facebook about her experience on March 26 and received messages from other victims.

The victims claimed the woman refused to respond to their calls.

Meanwhile, another victim also complained to police that the same woman took a kira and credit from the shop and never returned the money.

Thimphu police said the suspect is at large and that they would charge the case to court once they nab her.

Admission mounts in Thimphu schools

Phurpa Lhamo

As school reopening nears, schools in Thimphu are overburdened with new admission demands.

In addition to hundreds of online applications made to Thimphu Thromde, some parents are approaching the school administrations in person to seek admission for their children.

A principal of a school in Thimphu said that the rush was immense. He added that including applications forwarded by the thromde, there are around 100 applications from outside Thimphu. "When the zone-wise movement was allowed, parents came with hard copies of documents for applications."

The school has decided to sort out the external applications on April 11.

The principal said that

all students would be accommodated based on valid documents and genuine reasons. Only after sorting genuine cases, the school will provide admission to students seeking admission from schools in Thimphu. "The increase in admission is because many have migrated to Thimphu and have sought employment in the capital. Mainly because of that, we have heavy pressure."

In a lower secondary school in Thimphu, the admission pressure is particularly high for class VII.

The principal of the school said that with around five sections, each class had over 40 students. This is an increase from around 35 students in each class last year.

However, the number is expected to further increase, as admissions haven't been completed yet.

The increase in admission would have an impact on the teaching-learning process.

"So I feel that the sections will also increase to six this year," the principal said.

The rush for admissions and a high number of students in grade VII is attributed to the new normal curriculum (now called the national school curriculum),

the new assessment criteria, and online teaching methods adopted in the previous year.

Last year, the education ministry introduced the new assessment criteria, which required students between IV and XII grades to score 40 percent each in continuous assessments (CA) and on written examinations.

A principal said that with increase in failure rate more students were retained. He added that the failure could also be an impact of online classes held in 2020 and the national school curriculum.

In all schools, school administration is expecting a major impact on the teacher-student ratio due to the increased admissions.

Another principal said that in all levels of grades, admission had increased. He said that with the already

increasing teacher attrition rate in Bhutan, the increase in admission would have an impact on the teaching-learning process.

He added that for lower classes students, the number is increasing to around 35 students per teacher from the ideal number of 24 students per teacher. For higher students, the number could increase to around 40 students a teacher.

"When the number of students is more, quality will decrease," the principal said.

According to a principal in Thimphu, the thromde had directed the schools to study new admissions to further study the requirement of teachers and additional resources.

He added that, if need be, the thromde is planning to provide tents for classrooms and additional teachers.

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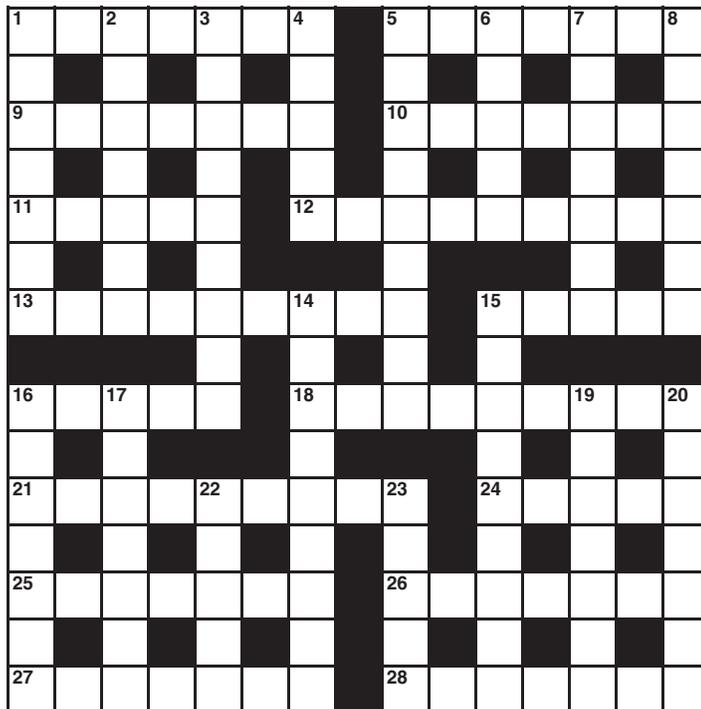
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Kwik Xword



March 31, answers

Across: 1 Decamp, 4 Eggplant, 9 Of note, 10 Fly a kite, 12 Go too far, 13 Aspect, 15 Tuba, 16 Magic Flute, 19 Bleak House, 20 Spur, 23 Second, 25 Honduras, 27 Decrepit, 28 Befall, 29 Sweeping, 30 Vendor.

Down: 1 Drought, 2 Constable, 3 Method, 5 Gale, 6 Play safe, 7 Abide, 8 Theatre, 11 Paradox, 14 Big shot, 17 Upper hand, 18 Skin-deep, 19 Besides, 21 Rustler, 22 Adhere, 24 Cache, 26 Sign.

Quick CLUES

Across

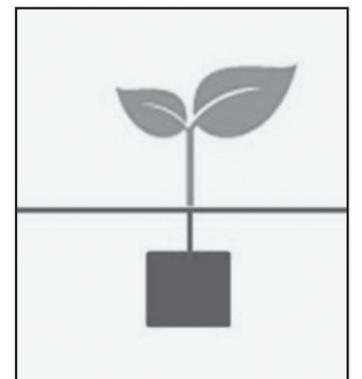
- 1 Withdraw from contest (7)
- 5 Insanity (7)
- 9 Outburst of petulance (7)
- 10 Power of endurance (7)
- 11 Out of order (5)
- 12 Nonplus (9)
- 13 Rapt (9)
- 15 Short period (5)
- 16 Ponder resentfully (5)
- 18 In a weak state (2,1,3,3)
- 21 Manage to communicate (3,6)
- 24 Opera by Gounod (5)
- 25 To cut off from society (7)
- 26 Tycoon (7)
- 27 Baltic republic (7)
- 28 Repeated decorative design (7)

Down

- 1 Gratify fully (7)
- 2 In succession (7)
- 3 Point of entry (9)
- 4 Warm and damp (5)
- 5 Newspapers, broadcasting (4,5)
- 6 Belonging to a small variety (5)
- 7 Gourmet (7)
- 8 Malicious gossip (7)
- 14 Melodramatic broadcast serial (4,5)
- 15 Offer determined resistance (4,5)
- 16 To charm (7)
- 17 Remote settlement (7)
- 19 Try to equal (7)
- 20 Shared by (7)
- 22 Sequence (5)
- 23 Express in words (3,2)

Solution on Tuesday

Rebus



toor areqps



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★☆

How to play

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3 X 3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9.



Answer

Health Capsule



DO MOISTURIZERS PREVENT WRINKLES?

apparently not. I use them every day, and look at me!



NO. MOISTURIZERS DO HELP TREAT THE LESS OBVIOUS FINE LINES, BUT NOT THE DEEPER FURROWS.

Health Capsules is not intended to be of a diagnostic nature.

BHUTAN 25 YEARS AGO

Students help landscape conference hall



April 5, 1997: TAbout 180 high school students and officials of the Health and Education Ministry got together last Saturday to start giving the Banquet Hall compound a facilt. This was a part of preparations for the 50th World Health Organisation's Regional Committee Meeting to be held in Thimphu in early September.

WIZARD



The life and legacy of Tsangpa Gyare

Part 2: Birth, family background, education and practices

Tsangpa Gyare was a charismatic Buddhist figure whose subsequent lineage holders and spiritual tradition fundamentally shaped the societal and political fabric of proto-Bhutan through a network of monastic estates administered from Ralung. In the seventeenth century, this network eventually enabled a Drukpa lineage hierarch, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, to establish the sovereign Bhutanese nation state. Despite the great formative influence of Tsangpa Gyare on Bhutan's history, precious little is actually known of his life. What little that is known about him can be shrouded in myths. Thus, this article will reconstruct his life based on a comprehensive analysis of all available textual and material evidence about him, and seek to establish his true historical significance to the Buddhist world in general and to Bhutan in particular.

Birth and family

Most of Tsangpa Gyare's biographies, and the annals referring to him, give the same information about his date and place of birth, and his family. Tsangpa Gyare is said to have been born on the morning of the 15th of the first month of summer in the year of the snake (1161).

He is said to have been born in a village of the Gya clan in Saral in Khule at the bottom of the Hawo Kangzang mountain in the upper Nyang region of the eastern Tsang region in central Tibet.

He was born as the youngest among the seven sons of his father Gyazurpo Tsape and mother Marza Darki. His childhood name was Yungdrungpel, and he was called Pelnag by his family members and fellow villagers. According to Tsangpa Gyare's biography composed by Gyaltangpa, his mother's name is Mar Darmakyi (a Tibetan who enjoys Buddhism). She was highly intelligent, had a soothing voice with an overwhelming beauty and was a veritable Vajra Dakini.

During her pregnancy, she experienced many miracles; she felt comfortable when she became pregnant, had loving kindness (jampa) and compassion (nyinje), and became devoted to Buddhism. She also



► Ruin of Marza Tarki's house

dreamt of the sun appearing from her navel. When Tsangpa Gyare was born, she watched flowers showering down from the sky, twin suns, rainbow, and enjoyed plenty of light rays in her bedroom.

The 'Lhodruk Choejung' gives the names of his six brothers as Lhanyen, Lhabum, Kelden, Jotsul, Gompe and Mangtsen.

His grandfather was Gyadarseng, who is said to have had a noble mind and a strong faith in Buddhism. His maternal grandmother was Darmagyen, who is said to have had supernatural knowledge and the marks of a Dakini.

Bon influence

Tsangpa Gyare's family seems to have had a strong relationship with the Bon religion. Both Buddhist and Bonpo monks are said to have performed rituals and educated Tsangpa Gyare after his birth.

Among his brothers, Kelden seems to have been his tutor. Kelden took Tsangpa Gyare to see a Bon master who educated him during his childhood.

Tsangpa Gyare kept up a relationship with the Bon master and studied with him even after becoming a Buddhist monk. While the master seems to have belonged to the Bon religion, he must have taught Buddhism to Tsangpa Gyare as there is no evidence that he studied the Bon doctrines. There is actually no trace of either doctrinal or customary influence of Bon in his collected works. So, Tsangpa Gyare probably learnt only Buddhism from the Bonpo master, a highly probable scenario given

the fluid mixing of Bon and Buddhism in actual practice.

The biographies and annals state that Tsangpa Gyare was a noble, handsome and wise child. Even in his play-act, he is said to have pleased people by building temples, teaching Dharma, and practicing his Bodhisattva vows. Such noble dispositions and behaviours proved that Tsangpa Gyare was wise and had the requisite personality to become a monk.

Most of these sources state that Tsangpa Gyare was loved by his parents, family members and relatives even though one source mentions that his father did not especially cherish him because he had many sons.

They give scant descriptions of his father, while they refer to many positive virtues and conducts of his mother, such as auspicious experiences at the times of his birth and her death. It thus seems that his mother influenced Tsangpa Gyare and formed his character much more than his father in his childhood.

Many of the biographies and annals state that his mother passed away when Tsangpa Gyare was eight years old (in 1168), while the biography composed by Gyaltangpa, the Ladakhi version of his biography composed by Mangala Bhadra and the 'Lhorong Choejung' give the year 1167 (at the age of seven).

Renunciation

The name Tsangpa Gyare means "cotton-clad practitioner from the Gya family of the Tsang region" and describes the fact

that he was a retreat meditator wearing only a thin cotton cloth. From the title of Repa, one may surmise that he was a lay practitioner in retreat. However, he also had the aspect of a fully ordained monk.

Tsangpa Gyare seems to have renounced the secular world at around 12 years of age, although the year of his renunciation differs according to each biography and annal. The biographies composed by Dremowa Sangyebum and Marton give the year 1171 (age 11); that by Lorepa gives the year 1171 or 1172 (age 11 or 12); and those by Mangala Bhadra, Pema Karpo and an anonymous biographer give the year 1172 (age 12).

The master who cut Tsangpa Gyare's hair when he renounced the world is regarded as Tathangpa in many biographies. But the biographies composed by Gyaltangpa and Mangala Bhadra affirm that it was done by the Bon master. The 'Lhorong Choejung' states that Tsangpa Gyare renounced in front of the Bon master at age 12 (in 1172) and renounced in front of Tathangpa at age 13 (in 1173); that is, he became a Bonpo monk and then a Buddhist monk.

He has two Dharma names. The biographies composed by Dremowa Sangyebum, Marton, Lorepa and Pema Karpo give the name Sherab Dutsi Khorlo. On the other hand, the biography composed by Mangalabhadra, the 'Lhorong Choejung' and one other source give the name Sherab Pel. Sherab Dutsi Khorlo seems to be his full name, while Sherab Pel is

presumed to be an integrated version of his Dharma name Sherab Dutsi Khorlo and his lay name Yungdrungpel.

Education and practices

After his renunciation, Tsangpa Gyare studied both sutras and tantras with many scholars and masters. He studied Vajrayana Buddhism such as tantras, meditation practices and rituals while he studied Sutrayana Buddhism such as Pramāṇa, Madhyamaka and Paramita. His collected works also prove that he studied both Sutrayana and Vajrayana Buddhism.

Tsangpa Gyare's biographies state that he studied the Great Perfection (Dzogchen). But he did not write any treatise about the Great Perfection. He may not have written about the doctrine belonging to another sect, which he may have studied only secondarily.

Similarly, as already mentioned, though he received education from a Bonpo master, no work on the Bonpo doctrine can be found in his collected works.

There is one episode that proves his mastery of Sutrayana Buddhist philosophy, a debate with his master Ling Repa. Tsangpa Gyare was asked one day by his master Ling Repa to have a debate. He initially refused the proposal to avoid debating against his master, but Ling Repa ordered him to ask a question. Tsangpa Gyare then asked him a question about the definition of the "body of reality" (Dharmakaya), and Ling Repa answered that the definition is "that which has no arising, ceasing and dwelling". Tsangpa Gyare pointed out the contradiction: "In that case, the space would also become the body of reality." Ling Repa admitted his own contradiction, appreciated Tsangpa Gyare's eminent competency at debate and prohibited him from further debating with the other disciples to avoid potential jealousy and conflict.

Contributed by Seiji Kumagai

(Uehiro Associate Professor, Kyoto University) and Dendup Chopel (Associated Researcher, Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Vitalising civil service

Civil service has been under the scanner for some time. More so, after the call for its reforms from the highest level. Most of us are familiar with the poor performance of the civil service. But to be fair, the civil service has risen to the occasion, especially in times of national distress or at critical junctures. Civil service is a reflection of ourselves; civil servants are people just like you and me, and those who manage it are no different. So, its performance mirrors the Bhutanese society at large.

I am sure you must have approached many offices for getting your work done at different times. Your experience must have been mixed, some good, others depressing. How many times did you have to visit the same office or furnish them with various information to complete your work? If you were able to use your connections, your job would have been done faster. But the point is that one should be able to get his/her work done without having to pull strings or, in other words, as a matter of right. As citizens, we expect a prompt service without us having to present our credentials.

Let me recount an instance that I faced some years back. I needed an authorisation letter from an office. When I approached the staff concerned, he directed me to produce a supporting letter from another office which I promptly did. He then asked me for some other documents with which I complied again. He could have of course asked me for these documents when I first met him so that I could have saved time. Still then, he cited some other obscure requirement for me to fulfil and blamed me for my own mistake. I thought that was too much of a red tape for me to swallow. So, I raised my voice demanding that I be allowed to meet his Dasho. After some altercations, he realised that I was firm in my demand and I would not leave his office without

We should neither celebrate the occasion nor be distressed by it, as even those who 'passed' this time have to prove their grit. And those who are leaving should bear no grudge or ill-will against the establishment.

an answer. He then told me to come the next day to pick up the letter! It took me four days to complete this simple work. And the irony is that this may be considered fast by many!

This is just one example of harassment. I am sure that the readers will have many similar experiences to share.

What I am discussing may sound trivial, but it is not. We expect efficient service regardless of the offices we approach. It is our right and we are not asking for too much, just a friendly conversation and a definitive answer from the dealing official or staff. The civil servants have to fulfil their mandates and be more transparent by providing public information. Journalists have been reminding us the difficulties they face in obtaining information from the bureaucracy. Thanks to the use of information and communication technology; most organisations maintain their websites, but sadly, they are not updated in time.

Several other problems can be mentioned – the lack of transparency within an office itself. One hand does not know what the other is doing. And this is across most organisations. Co-ordination within an office is very poor, let alone between offices. The sub-

ordinate staffs are neither sufficiently trained nor briefed by their superiors. Or, the acquired training of staff does not translate into improved results. The delegation of responsibility is low. So, junior staff cannot take even the simplest of decisions. They have to consult their bosses, who are often out of stations or busy in meetings. Hence, it is not just the head of the office whose performance must improve, but of every civil servant in an organization! How will the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) ensure this?

It is of course undeniable that the foresight and competence of the office head should make a difference, provided he/she is willing to take calculated risks and make decisions instead of hiding under the shadow of institutional limitations. Yes, institutional rules exist, and are needed for good governance. But such rules have to be interpreted and applied in the broader interest of the society, and not become rigid obstacles. If rules become hurdles, they must be changed. We need civil servants to cater to the needs of an increasingly informed, and fast changing democratic society.

Severing the services of 44 civil servants on the ground of mediocrity is a highly significant move and big news for a close-knit society like ours. We should neither celebrate the occasion nor be distressed by it, as even those who 'passed' this time have to prove their grit. And those who are leaving should bear no grudge or ill-will against the establishment. After all, they receive two years of their salaries and benefits. They ought to be satisfied with their past contributions to the best of their abilities. They will now find more time and new opportunities to pursue their interests and try something new. They will realize that a new world exists for them beyond the civil service if they are prepared to explore. We owe our best

wishes to all of them.

The challenge for the RCSC is to prove that the civil service will be more professional and efficient in the coming years, able to shoulder new and emerging challenges. There is no better organization than the RCSC itself to lead by examples. Its view that the line organizations should share the burden of reforms is

well taken; yet, it cannot expect them to do full justice as they have their own responsibilities. RCSC has to own its prime responsibility to shape the civil service that is suited to Bhutan's needs in the 21st century.

Let us hope that a new chapter in civil service begins in Spring 2022!

**Contributed by
Achyut Bhandari**



TOMORROW

- to venture into long journey
- to start new business

A good day for rituals (laza):
those born in the dog year.

Generally a good day (sogza):
those born in the sheep year.

APRIL 4, MONDAY

Good Day

- to perform annual offerings
- to learn astrology
- to roof house
- to marry and celebrate
- to enter into new house
- to shift house

Bad Day

- to learn astrology
- to roof house
- to marry and celebrate
- to enter into new house
- to shift house

A good day for rituals (laza):
those born in the snake and horse years.

Generally a good day (sogza):
those born in the rat and pig years.

A bad day (shedza):
those born in the monkey and rooster years.

WEATHER 

Time of issue: 4:00 PM,
April 01, 2022

SUNRISE : 5:51am | SUNSET : 6:19pm

				
Gasa	Trongsa	Bumthang	Sarpang	Phuentsholing
16°C	20°C	19°C	23°C	27°C
7	11	9	21	15

	
Thimphu	Trashigang
19°C	19°C
11	12

Source: National Center for Hydrology and Meteorology.
For any weather information: Call hotline 335578

**FOR NEWS, VIEWS AND
FEEDBACK**
Call 324684 or email
newseditor@kuensel.bt

Sri Lanka to turn off street lights, faces longest-ever blackout as economic crisis deepens

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka is turning off its street lights to save electricity, a minister said on Thursday (March 31), as its worst economic crisis in decades brought record-long power blackouts and gloom to its main stock market, triggering a halt in trade as prices slid.

The island nation of 22 million people is struggling with rolling power cuts for up to 13 hours a day as the government is unable to make payments for fuel imports because of a lack of foreign exchange.

"We have already instructed officials to shut off street lights around the country to help conserve power," Power Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi told reporters.

A diesel shipment under a US\$500 million (S\$676 million) credit line from neighbouring India is expected to arrive on Saturday, Wanniarachchi said, but she warned that the situation was not likely to improve any time soon and could drag on until May.

"Once that arrives we will be able to reduce load shedding hours but until we receive rains, probably some time in May, power cuts will have to continue," Wanniarachchi told reporters, referring to the roll-

ing power cuts.

"There's nothing else we can do." Water levels at reservoirs feeding hydro-electric projects had fallen to record lows, while demand had also hit record levels during the hot, dry season, she said.

Protesters on Thursday gathered near the President's residence in Pengiriwatte road in Mirihana, Sri Lanka's News 1st website reported.

Many held up placards to protest against the rising cost of living, gas and fuel shortage, in addition to the electricity crisis, the report said.

Diesel - the main fuel for buses and commercial vehicles - was no longer on sale across the country on Thursday.

Petrol was on sale but in short supply, forcing motorists to abandon their cars in long queues.

"We are siphoning off fuel from buses that are in the garage for repairs and using that diesel to operate serviceable vehicles," Transport Minister Dilum Amunugama said.

Owners of private buses - which account for two-thirds of the country's fleet - said they were already out of oil and that even skeleton services may not be possible after Friday.



"We are still using old stocks of diesel, but if we don't get supplies by this evening, we will not be able to operate," chairman of the private bus operators association Gemunu Wijeratne told AFP.

The South Asian nation is in the grips of its worst economic downturn since independence, sparked by an acute lack of foreign currency to pay for even the most essential imports.

The state electricity monopoly said they would be forced to enforce a 13-hour power cut from Thursday - the longest ever - because they did not have diesel for generators.

"We are promised new sup-

plies in two days and if that happens, we can reduce the length of power cuts," Ceylon Electricity Board chairman M. M. C. Ferdinando told reporters.

He said hydro reservoirs, which provide more than a third of electricity demand, were also dangerously low.

The lengthy power cuts forced the Colombo Stock Exchange to limit its trading by half to two hours, while many offices asked non-essential staff to stay at home.

The electricity rationing also hit mobile phone base stations and affected the quality of calls, operators said, adding that their stand-by generators

were also without diesel.

The shortages have sparked outrage across Sri Lanka, with local television reporting protests across the country as hundreds of motorists block main roads in several towns.

Several state-run hospitals have stopped surgeries as they have run out of essential life-saving medicines, while most have stopped diagnostic tests which require imported chemicals that are in short supply.

Colombo imposed a broad import ban in March 2020 in a bid to save foreign currency needed to service its US\$51 billion (S\$69 billion) in foreign debt.

But this has led to widespread shortages of essential goods and sharp price rises.

The government has said it is seeking a bailout from the International Monetary Fund while asking for more loans from India and China.

Sri Lanka's predicament was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which torpedoed tourism and remittances.

Many economists also blame government mismanagement including tax cuts and years of budget deficits.

The Straits Times
ANN

Hybrid immunity gives best Covid-19 protection: Studies

PARIS: People with the "hybrid immunity" of having been both fully vaccinated and previously infected with Covid-19 have the strongest protection against the virus, two new studies said on Friday (April 1).

After two years of a pandemic that has seen nearly 500 million people infected and billions vaccinated, the studies highlighted the importance of getting jabbed for those who have natural immunity after recovering from the disease.

One of the two studies published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases medical journal analysed the health data of more than 200,000 people in 2020 and 2021 in hard-hit Brazil, which has the world's second-largest Covid-19 death toll.

It found that for people who have already had Covid-19, Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca's vaccines offered 90 per



cent effectiveness against hospitalisation and death, China's CoronaVac had 81 per cent, and Johnson and Johnson's had 58 per cent.

"All four of these vaccines have proven to provide significant extra protection for those with a previous Covid-19 infection," said study author Julio Croda of the Federal University

of Mato Grosso do Sul.

"Hybrid immunity due to exposure to natural infection and vaccination is likely to be the norm globally and might provide long-term protection even against emerging variants," Professor Pramod Kumar Garg of India's Translational Health Science and Technology Institute said in a

comment piece linked to the study.

Separately, a study using Sweden's nationwide register up to October 2021 found that people who recovered from Covid-19 retained a high level of protection against re-infection for up to 20 months.

And people with two-vaccine-dose hybrid immunity had a further 66 per cent lower risk of re-infection than those with just natural immunity.

Dr Paul Hunter, a professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia in England who was not involved in the study, told AFP that the 20 months of "very good protection" from natural immunity was "far better than we would expect for the original two-dose vaccine schedule".

But he cautioned that both studies were completed before the Omicron variant became dominant across the world, and

that it had "notably dropped the protective value of a prior infection".

A study in Qatar published on the medRxiv pre-publication website last week gave an insight into the protection offered by hybrid immunity against Omicron.

It found that three vaccine doses had 52 per cent effectiveness against symptomatic infection of the BA.2 Omicron subvariant - but that number jumped to 77 per cent when the patient had been previously infected.

The study, which has not been peer reviewed, found that "hybrid immunity resulting from prior infection and recent booster vaccination confers the strongest protection" against both the BA.1 and BA.2 subvariants.

The Straits Times
ANN

ADVERTISEMENT

Saturday, April 02, 2022 | KUENSEL

PAGE 11

VACANCY RE-ANNOUNCEMENT



NATIONAL PENSION AND PROVIDENT FUND, THIMPHU

The National Pension and Provident Fund, Thimphu is pleased to re-announce the following vacancy:

Sl.#	Position and Place of Positing	Qualification	Experience	Employment	Remuneration/ Grade
1	Director, Investment Department, Thimphu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum of a Bachelors' Degree (full time) from a recognized university in Commerce / Economics/ Finance. Preference shall be given to applicants with Master's Degree (full time) in Commerce/ Economics/ Finance during shortlisting only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum of 15 years of relevant work experience (maximum of 18 months of study period for Master's Degree and above shall be considered as active service); and Should have served in a senior management position of Chief / General Manager / P1 level or above for a minimum of 3 (three) years. 	On contract for an initial term of 3 (three) years; and the contract may be renewed for an additional term only depending on the performance, need and employees' feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic Pay of Nu. 75,000/ Contract Allowance - 40% of Basic Pay and Other entitlements as per NPPF SRR.

Interested Bhutanese fulfilling the above eligibility criteria(s) are requested to submit the application to the Chief HRAD **on or before 12 noon, April 25, 2022.**

For complete details, please visit www.nppf.org.bt and contact the HRAD at +975-2-324140 (Extn. 117) during office hours.

CALL FOR TENDERS FOR GOVERNMENT TREASURY BILLS



ROYAL MONETARY AUTHORITY OF BHUTAN

Treasury Bills of Nu. 7,000.00 million in the name of the Royal Government of Bhutan is offered for sale. The Bills shall be auctioned under Multi-Price Method and issued through the Royal Monetary Authority of Bhutan.

Submission of Tenders: Tenders must be submitted using web-based application link provided on RMA's website not later than **09:30 AM on April 5, 2022** and tenders shall be irrevocable after submission.

Treasury Bill No.	Auction/ Settlement Date	Days to Maturity	Maturity / Settlement Date	Amount
R 355	April 5, 2022	126	August 9, 2022	5,000.00 million
R 356	April 5, 2022	63	June 7, 2022	2,000.00 million

Eligibility : Any Bhutanese persons including firms, companies, Corporate bodies, financial institutions, trusts etc. can subscribe the Bills.

Bids must be stated in multiples of Nu. 10,000.00 and must be for a minimum of Nu. 100,000,000.00

The RMA will have the full discretion to accept or reject any or all the bids either wholly or partially, without assigning any reason.

Management

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

KUENSEL CORPORATION LIMITED

KCL/PROC-10/2022/

Sealed quotations are invited from the eligible suppliers with valid trade licence for the supply of "ORIGINAL TONERS, CARTRIDGES" for a period of one year.

Cost of tender form	Nu. 500/- (non refundable)
Last date of submission	15th April, 2022 before 12 Noon
Tender opening date	15th April, 2022 at 3 PM

The tender documents with detailed terms and conditions may be purchased from the **Procurement Division** on any working days from **28th March till 15th April, 2022.**

The Management

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Around 2,000 individuals have registered for IELTS at IMS

Dechen Dolkar

Around 2,000 individuals had registered for International English Language Testing System (IELTS) at the Institute for Management Studies (IMS) in Thimphu on Thursday.

There are only 800 slots for the test which will be conducted on April 21st, 23rd, and 30th.

In Bhutan, IMS and the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) conduct the IELTS exams, which was suspended in 2020 due to the pandemic.

The Academic and Training Director at IMS, Tshering Dorji, said that it was a great relief to the many Bhutanese people who were planning to go abroad for further studies. "Those of them who got scholarships also couldn't go due to the suspension of IELTS test in the country."

Before the pandemic, the institute used to conduct tests



► There are only 800 slots for the test (Photo: Facebook)

on a monthly basis. However, the director said that it would depend and there were so many factors to consider.

Currently, the institute charges Nu 17,500 for the test.

The director said that the modality of the test was dif-

ferent. The resources have to come from India and they have to stay in a quarantine facility the cost of which has to be borne by the institute. "This time the speaking test has to be conducted via zoom using technology and cost has

increased little."

The director said that the test would be provided on a first-come-first basis. There are around 160 candidates registered in March.

The RIM at Simtokha also plans to conduct IELTS

Those of them who got scholarships also couldn't go due to the suspension of IELTS test in the country."

towards the end of May in collaboration with the British Council in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, around 82 individuals are still waiting for test fee refund from RIM. They had registered in January 2020 and paid Nu 13,000 each for the test. The test was supposed to be held on March 21, 2020.

Omicron should not be taken lightly

Journalists who tested positive for Covid-19 share their experience

Tashi Dema and Tshering Palden

For the last two years, Rajesh Rai conducted most of his interviews through social media to limit physical contact with people.

Reporting from a high-risk area in Phuentsholing, he went out only when necessary and also followed strict Covid-19 protocols in place.

With a seven-year-old son at home, he said he had to be cautious. When Phuentsholing started opening up, he went out to town once to do a story on the mood of the town earlier this month.

A few days later, he started getting a mild headache.

"I didn't realise it could be omicron until my son started becoming silent at home. That's when I thought it was better to check and confirm," he said.

His son tested positive for omicron. "But I tested negative that time," the print journalist said.

Two days after he tested negative on the antigen, he started having severe body ache, especially leg pain, sore throat, runny nose, and fatigue. "I also felt confused. I heard it was brain fog, another Covid-19 symptom."

He took paracetamol and took a lot of rest. "Recovering took time. The pain subsided. However, I still have weakness and fatigue but not like when I was infected."

According to him, symptoms differ from person to person. "My wife, who had mild symptoms when we were sick, had more severe fever than me and my son after a few days."

He said people in the same family don't fall sick or show symptoms immediately or together. "One can still test negative even after contact with a positive person. I think that's how the cases are increasing as people move around thinking they are negative when they are actu-

I didn't realise it could be omicron until my son started becoming silent at home. That's when I thought it was better to check and confirm."

ally infected."

Similarly, a broadcast journalist, Sonam Penjor, said he avoided going out and ensured he followed all protocols and wore personal protection equipment whenever necessary for the last two years.

He said he always wore masks and maintained a one-metre gap when interviewing people. "I always carried hand

sanitisers."

Sonam said he went to the town only three times this year. "I think I got infected there."

He said he had his booster dose on February 28 and had a high fever, backache, lethargy, loss of appetite, and joints pain that night. "I felt weak."

They went for the Covid-19 test the next day and both of them tested positive. "I was surprised my wife has already reached recovery phase with the cycle of threshold value 32.7," he said. "My wife didn't show any symptoms. I realised the booster dose helped her develop immunity as she got the jab a month ago."

The pain lasted for four days and he could not sleep for two nights. "I got Covid-19 attack and booster dose pain together," Sonam said.

Another print reporter, Nima, said he was prepared he would be infected one day as community cases in Gelephu spiralled, but al-

ways followed the protocols in place.

He tested positive last week. "I experienced muscle aches and recurrent fever with headache. "The symptoms are like that of seasonal flu but the throat pain and fever are severe. Other symptoms were mild."

Nima said he consulted friends who also tested positive and was told they recovered without any complications. "But the disease is also mentally stressing. It's confusing to know if I am recovering or not. The symptoms keep changing. We cannot take it lightly."

He said it's difficult not to think about the virus. "I try to do my regular chores to keep myself confident and strong mentally."

Nima said he must have been exposed to the virus while covering stories about the positive cases in schools and also while going out to buy essentials.

Drukair hopes for an optimistic year ahead

Phub Dem

The global airline industry is looking for a significant rebound in Spring and Summer with Omicron cases ebbing, the national airline DrukAir is preparing cautiously for the reopening.

According to international media, the global airline industry is “optimistic” about the outlook for air travel in 2022 as Omicron-related restrictions are either eased or completely removed.

The global airline industry remains the hardest hit due to movement restrictions. The challenges have continued ranging from new variants of the virus to shifting government policies on travel restrictions. The impact on customer confidence and airlines’ ability to plan and operate predictable schedules has severely hit revenues and finances.

According to the Ministry of Information and Communication’s annual statistical report, the total number of international air passengers to and from Bhutan in 2021 saw a decrease of more than 72 percent compared to 2020.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) estimates say international air passengers in 2021 decreased by 60 percent globally compared to the pre-pandemic period (2019).

Bhutan saw a gradual increase in international air passengers from around 130,000 in 2010 to 370,000 in 2019. However, the number of passengers plunged to 50,382 in 2020, and the trend further decreased to 13,444 last year.

Drukair’s Chief executive officer Tandi Wangchuk said that it was difficult to predict when air travel would return to pre-pandemic levels amid the current pandemic.

Although countries are administering vaccines and easing the restrictions, he said that the road to recovery was unpredictable and might take some time to return to business.

“Many uncertainties are making it difficult to say anything definitive, although we are trying everything to remain prepared for new developments of any kind,” he said.

He added that even if countries allow international



File photo

travel, passengers still need to check the latest entry requirements for travel. Unless the restrictions are eased, it might be difficult to forecast an increase in passengers.

With the easing of travel restrictions in Bhutan and other destination countries, Tandi Wangchuk said that the company looks forward to a resurgence of passengers excited for leisure and business travels.

However, he said it was essential for the company

to remain alert as hygiene and safety standards will become more stringent, and digitalisation will transform the travel experience.

“For instance, mobile apps could store traveller’s vaccine certificates and test results. We can only hope that air travel will become greener and more efficient,” he said.

The operating revenue of Drukair was reduced by 42 percent from Nu 966 million in 2020 to Nu 556 million in 2021. And the loss after tax increased

by 36 percent from Nu 814 million in 2020 to about Nu 1.11 billion last year.

According to Drukair officials, the company projected revenue of Nu 1.349 billion and a loss of Nu 1.395 billion for this year.

Drukair adopted some austerity measures such as deferring leave encashment, strict monitoring of travel and daily allowance, and encouraging staff to take leave without pay and avail extraordinary leave.

Besides, the company also relieved expatriate captains starting January this year and negotiated other expatriate captains’ salaries. Drukair also discontinued the replacement of separated employees and has recalled station managers. “Employees decided to take certain percent cuts to discourage laying off staff in the lower-income groups,” Tandi Wangchuk said.

Moreover, according to the CEO, if the situation doesn’t improve or deteriorates, the company might resort to further pay cuts.

The paper could not get a response from Bhutan Airlines.

Commuters happy with the completion of highway blacktopping

Tshering Namgyal | Mongar

Commuters using the Mongar-Trashigang highway are happy with the completion of blacktopping works of Korila-Ngatshang road stretch.

Many said that besides shortening their travel time by more than 30 minutes, it was pleasant to drive.

“It usually takes more about an hour to cross this 11kms stretch, but it’s already reduced to about 20 minutes now,” a cab driver, Dawa Singye, said.

A driver and also the owner of a local transport bus plying between Mongar and Sershong, Dorji, said that after the blacktopping, he didn’t have to repair his bus.

“I had to repair it frequently before because the road condition caused breakdowns,” he said.

The highway widening and blacktopping started in March 2019.

However, the road widening work was suspended because of issues between the contractor and the Department of Roads (DoR) office in Lingmethang, Mongar in June 2019, which affected the work progress and upset the commuters.

After more than a year of halt, it was retendered and awarded to another contractor on June 8, 2020, with 15 months contract duration.

The total cost of the road improvement was Nu 129.11



► Korila-Ngatshang road

million.

Although the contractor failed to meet the deadline, DOR gave time extension of another six months until the end of March this year.

The project engineer of the contractor, Lobzang Chodup, said they faced difficulty recruiting technical persons

like a plant operator, paver operator and screed operator. “Materials had to be imported from India and pandemic hampered the work progress.”

He said even the heavy snowfall hampered the laying of bitumen.

With the blacktopping completed, construction of-

officials said they are left with only road marking work which is expected to finish in two or three days.

“We have already submitted the letter of completion to the DOR and waiting for the committee to inspect it before handing over the work,” Lobzang Chodup said.

Gaydrungs' future depends on Cabinet decision

... the contract of the gewog clerks expired yesterday

MB Subba

The contract of about 194 gaydrungs (gewog clerks) across the country, whose contract terms ended yesterday, are waiting for the Cabinet's decision on whether or not to retain their post.

The Department of Local Governance (DLG) has submitted a proposal to the Cabinet on the need to retain the post in local government administration.

The gaydrungs had jointly appealed to the government through the DLG on March 7 for an extension of their term by another five years.

DLG Director Kado Zangpo said that the department had conveyed the gaydrungs' appeal to the Cabinet citing the benefits of having gaydrungs. The department, he said, was waiting for directives

from the government.

Gups Kuensel talked to said that the service of gaydrungs was still important although their responsibilities have slightly reduced with the introduction of community centres at gewogs.

Tsendagang Gup from Daganana, Bal Bdr Rana, said that gaydrungs help service seekers to fill up forms and draft letters for those who cannot write besides carrying out regular works like collections of taxes and insurance.

"It would cost more than Nu 200 if a person has to get a letter drafted or form filled up outside the gewog office," he said.

Sarpang's Chhudzom Gup Bisnu Prasad Rai said that services would be affected if the post of gaydrungs were done away with.

"The gaydrung stays at the

office to provide services to the public when the elected officials like the gup, and the gewog administrative officer (GAO) attend meetings at the dzongkhag," he said.

One of the gups said that services of gaydrungs were more important than that of GAOs.

According to him, as most gups and mangmis are educated, gewog administrations could do without GAOs, if they had gaydrungs.

The LG officials said that gaydrungs are not entitled to retirement benefits, as their appointments are not governed by the RCSC rules.

Lingbukha gaydrung from Punakha, Dorji Wangchuk, said that the appeal was based on the outcome of a recent meeting of gaydrungs. "We are anxiously waiting for a response from the government,"

he said.

Saling gewog gaydrung Jigme Thinley from Mongar said that gaydrungs wanted their contract extended by the government if the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) did not accept them.

He said that many gaydrungs had dependents to support and that they were looking forward to a positive response from the government.

The gaydrungs said that they had been in contact with government officials through social media groups and that they were hopeful of the contract being renewed.

The RCSC last month had rejected the government's proposal to recruit gaydrungs on a consolidated contract under the civil service to retain the post.

The RCSC reasoned that there were no gaydrungs men-

tioned in the position classification of civil servants.

The DLG, however, states that Article 22(19) of the Constitution states that local governments shall be supported by administrative machinery staffed by civil servants.

Successive governments have extended the gaydrungs contract in the past years. The Cabinet had last extended gaydrungs' contract in April 2019 as per the resolution of the National Assembly.

A study report conducted by DLG in 2019 states that an overwhelming majority of the population considered gaydrung as a critical component of public service delivery at the local government level.

The past conferences of dzongdags and gups have also acknowledged the critical role of gaydrung in LG administrations.

More urban residents embrace agriculture

Chhimi Dema

The urban agriculture initiative that struggled to retain growers in the past has received a major boost with a record number of residents joining this year.

This year, there are 351 beneficiaries altogether working on 97 acres of land in Thimphu, Punakha, Bumthang, and Sarpang. In Thimphu, there are 10 groups with 241 beneficiaries.

Records with the agriculture department (DoA) show that there were 266 and 277 beneficiaries in 2020 and 2021 respectively.

Project coordinator BB Rai said that many left for other opportunities to earn. "We allowed beneficiaries to go for other opportunities."

The initiative produced 95.8 metric tonnes (MT) of vegetables last year and engaged about 300 individuals each year.

The production in 2020 was 33.86 MT, and the year 2021 saw an increase of 62.04 percent. This year's produc-

tion target is 100MT.

The DoA provides technical support such as the construction of electric fencing, greenhouse, irrigation canals, and distribution of seeds.

The initiative allows the beneficiaries to produce sufficient vegetables for consumption, BB Rai said. "However, some groups had made income from selling the surplus produce."

The urban growers are focusing on producing tomato, eggplant, chilli, and a few other vegetables this year.

Sangay Dendup, a beneficiary, said that the initiative has allowed him to teach those interested in farming.

He said that when they began working, they didn't know farming basics such as the planting season for different vegetables. "We were taught basics of farming and construction of greenhouses as well."

"I was engaged productively, and despite not having a formal job, I could rely on the farm for a whole year and share the produce with others," Sangay Dendup added.



► The initiative produced 95.8 metric tonnes (MT) of vegetables last year and engaged about 300 individuals each year

Another beneficiary, Dechen Zangmo, 41, said that the initiative allowed her to be self-sufficient. "I don't have to buy vegetables from the market."

She said that the government's support helped her be

financially independent.

The initiative was started in 2020 under the Department of Agriculture (DoA), which was initiated with the support of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation

as part of Covid-19 contingency plan. It ends this year.

BB Rai said that those who are interested to grow could continue so long the landowners and Zhung Dratshang allow.



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Manchester City: Ukrainian refugee Andrii Kravchuk permitted to train with club

Manchester City have been given Premier League permission to let Ukrainian refugee Andrii Kravchuk train with the club.

The move follows intervention by City and Ukraine defender Oleksandr Zinchenko.

The pair played together at youth level at Shakhtar Donetsk.

Kravchuk was on a training camp in Turkey with his Russian club side Torpedo Moscow when the Russian invasion of Ukraine began.

The 23-year-old midfielder has now terminated his contract and fled to Manchester, where he will train with City's Under-23 squad for the remainder of the season.

"I felt really uncomfortable," Kravchuk said about playing for a Russian club.

"I was playing in a country that invaded my homeland.

Leaving the club was the only decision. People in Ukraine would not understand me if I continued to play there."

Kravchuk's family remain in Kyiv, where his brother Aleks is fighting in the country's armed forces.

"I tell him every day how proud I am of him, for not only protecting our family but the whole country and the Ukrainian people. He is staying and fighting," Kravchuk explained.

"I'm really worried. I am in groups on my phone and always receiving messages with bombing alerts. Every time those alerts come through I am so anxious. Your only thought is that my family can die.

Kravchuk said he is "so grateful" to Manchester City for allowing him to train at the club and to his compatriot Zinchenko for help in finding a solution.

"The past few weeks and



months have been so difficult, but to be back on the pitch means so much to me," he said.

Zinchenko said that he wished the "circumstances were very different" but it was "good to be back with Andrii".

"I know how much football

means to him and how it can help us during these difficult times," Zinchenko said.

Earlier this month, the Premier League blocked Burnley's bid for Victor Moses from Spartak Moscow despite Fifa amending their rules to allow overseas players in the Rus-

sian Premier League to sign for clubs in other countries outside the transfer window.

But as Kravchuk is only training, they have agreed to let him join City, so he can maintain his fitness and continue his development.

BBC Sports

Cricket World Cup: England-Australia final to be shown free to air on Sunday



England's Women's World Cup final against Australia on Sunday will be made available on free to air.

Sky Sports have made the showpiece event available to watch on Pick TV, Sky Showcase and the Sky Sports YouTube channel.

The final takes place at Hagley Oval in Christchurch from 02:00 BST.

Test Match Special will

provide ball-by-ball commentary on BBC Radio 5 live, as well as live text commentary and clips on the BBC Sport website and app.

Heather Knight's England side are defending champions in the event, while Australia are the number one ranked team in the 50-over format.

"We are pleased to be able to make another moment of national significance free for

the whole nation to watch," Sky Sports managing director Jonathan Licht said.

England lifted the trophy at Lord's in 2017 after a thrilling nine-run victory over India.

They made a poor start to their title defence in New Zealand, losing their first three matches, and came close to elimination before winning five successive matches.

England were also winless in the multi-format Women's Ashes series that preceded the World Cup.

Australia won their group

encounter with England and have been in dominant form, winning all eight of their matches so far.

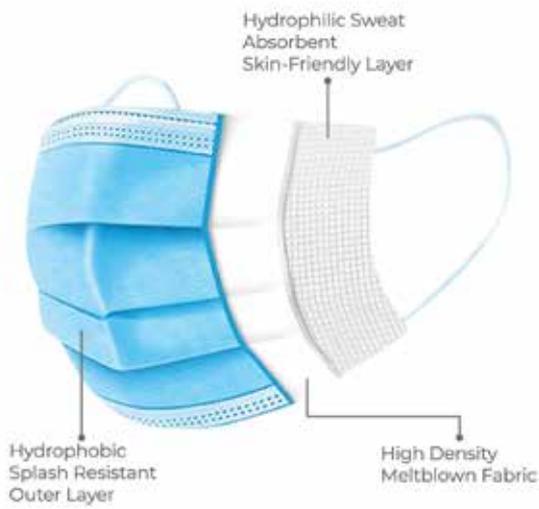
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