Among the list of the achievements of his two years in office, Prime Minister KP Oli told Parliament in February that he had helped restore Nepal’s international stature. Under fire at home for poor governance, he said the world was finally taking Nepal more seriously and offered as proof visits by leaders of China and India. He added Nepal was seeking a "diplomatic settlement" with New Delhi after India for the first time also put the east bank of Lipu Lekh on its official map. But it did not look like New Delhi headed those overtures. Even as both countries were in COVID-19 lockdown, on 8 May Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh video-conferenced the inauguration of a road through Nepal at a tri-junction of its border with India and China. Nepal and India hurled press statements at each other, Nepal’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned India’s ‘unilateral act’. India fired back reiterating that the 70km road to the Chinese border was through its territory. The escalating of the dispute while all three countries face serious economic impact from the global pandemic was a reminder of Nepal’s precarious balancing act between its giant neighbours.

"Nepal condemned India’s unilateral action, but what we have to remember is that India would not have dared build the road through the disputed region without Chinese acquiescence," said a Nepali geopolitical analyst. "This was a bilateral action by China and India."

Anti-Indian street protests in Kathmandu over the road were expected, but Nepal’s political figures also urged the government to take up China’s tacit support of the Indian move. When Chinese Ambassador Hou Yanqi tweeted photos on Wednesday of a consignment of medical aid to Nepal, most followers’ comments urged her to speak out against India’s action. Social media suffused with the realisation that India could not have built the road without a green light from China. Indeed, India and China have discussed Lipu Lekh in bilateral talks since 1999. A joint communiqué between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in 2015 in Beijing listed Lipu Lekh as one of the areas through which the two countries agreed to conduct trade. All this goes to show that Beijing and New Delhi are on the same page on Nepal’s claim to Kalapani. The Sagarmatha Treaty of 1955 between the East India Company and the defeated Gurkhas clearly stated that the main channel of the Mahakali River would form a makeshift Nepal’s western border with British India. Nepal may have a legal claim over the territory, but its own official maps do not include the Kali River as the border. 

Kunda Dixit
Lines on a map

Legally, treaty-wise, and under international law, the entire Lamjungdara basin at the source of the Mahakali River is Nepali territory. But in practice, both are patently aware, international law does not apply in geography. Might is right. Laws are laid down by the victor.

So, it does not seem to matter that more than 200 years ago, the Sagaraj Treaty of 1816 between the East India Company and the defeated Gurkha agreed to the mean channel of the Mahakali River as Nepal's western border.

After the Mutiny of 1857, the Survey of India maps cunningly moved the border to Lipu Khola, a tributary of the Mahakali that flows down from Lipu Lakh pass. That was the original dispute in Kathmandu, then as now, had no idea what was going on in Lusha-Eung edge of Nepal.

After Independence, India inherited the British survey. So, when the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi saw this, they decided this would be the new road to the Chinese border. But Lipu Lakh was not in Kathmandu's list. And they have been there ever since.

Nepal's official maps also show Lipu Khola as the boundary between Nepal and India, and not the Mahakali River. Ultra-nationalists cry themselves hoarse about 'big bullies' India, but why would a neighbour respect your boundary if you yourself never cared where it is?

It was common knowledge in Kathmandu that the Indian military had a base there. Elected rulers in Nepal after 1990 used this to take aim at Indians for nationalistic for political benefit, but did nothing about it.

Then on 2 November last year, an official Indian map showed not just the original 3364 km of Liplii Uryanuwa within India's external boundary, but for the first time also depicted a whole 694 km swath of the east bank of Lipu Khola also as Indian territory. That is the move that must really hit the fan.

Last week, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, in the presence of top Indian Army generals, inaugurated by video conference a 71km stretch of road in the pass. A photo-op while both countries were in lockdown was intriguing in itself, but the timing could not have been better for Nepal's embattled Prime Minister K.P.Oli. It is like an external threat to unite Nepal's ethnolitical factions, and some even think of opp. attackers in the NCP suddenly went quiet this week on strident demands for his resignation.

Why should a neighbour respect your boundary if you yourself never cared where it is?

India has never historically been bothered about winning the hearts and minds of Nepal. It believes in carrying the brick by brick and Kalapani has opened up a new exponent in Nepal's cyberspace of the 21st century. This public posture on New Dehli government's 'to do something', so it fixed on a new route or two, and flew up an APP until to set up an outpost 12km from India's new road.

Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali on Monday handed Indian Ambassador Vinay Mohan Khotsa a note protesting India's 'unilateral action' in building a road on Nepal territory. But India's position is blatanent - Bilbao is on the same page as New Delhi on the dispute.

Lipu Khola has long been a flashpoint in India-China meetings: during Indian External Affairs Minister Jawaharlal Singh's visit to Beijing in 1999, China promised New Delhi to DAL in 2008, and by President Xi Jinping in India in 2014. A joint communiqué between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in 2015 in Beijing stressed that Lipu Khola one of the Himalayan passes through which the two countries agreed to conduct trade.

For the first time, in 2021, India and Nepal were discussing the road at the Chinese border. But Nepal and New Delhi are still far apart in their approach to the border dispute.

Nepal has a long history of border disputes, and has faced several international challenges in the past. In recent years, the country has been working towards resolving these disputes through diplomatic efforts. However, the India-Nepal border dispute has been a contentious issue, with both countries having different views on the border's location and extent. The dispute has been ongoing for several years, and both countries have been unable to reach a resolution through diplomatic means.

In this context, it is important to note that Nepal has been actively seeking international support to address its concerns regarding the border dispute. The country has engaged in several high-level meetings with neighboring countries and international organizations to discuss the issue and seek support for its position. The United Nations has also been involved in the negotiations, providing a platform for discussion and seeking solutions to the dispute.

Nepal's position on the border dispute is clear: it believes in maintaining its territorial integrity and sovereignty, and is committed to resolving the issue through peaceful and diplomatic means. The country has been proactive in seeking international support and has engaged in discussions with neighboring countries and international organizations to address the issue. The border dispute remains a significant challenge for Nepal, and the country continues to work towards finding a resolution that is acceptable to both parties.
Nepal lockdown proves air quality can be improved

Switch to electric transport will protect health, and salvage Nepal’s economy

CLEARING THE AIR: (left to right) Mil Merchant (above) from Chobar in Kathmandu for the first time in a long time, looking west at sunset, Himalbuddha and Mansuli with smoke rising from open garbage burning at the outskirts of Kathmandu.

Sonia Awale

On 10 May, for the first time almost anyone can remember, Mt Everest was visible from Kathmandu. From Chobar, Abbasao Gautam photographed the highest mountain in the world 20km away to the east, spotted by the setting sun.

Last week from Sitali district in the plains bordering India, journalist Chandra Kishore could see right across Nepal to Mt Langtang on the Chinese border.

With vehicles off the roads, factories closed, the air over Nepal was breathtakingly clean. Hospitals in Kathmandu Valley are usually crowded this time of the year with patients suffering respiratory illnesses aggravated by pollution and dust, but in the past two months hospitals have registered a sharp drop in people seeking treatment for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), asthma, chronic bronchitis and allergies.

“Many of our COPD patients who need regular follow-up haven’t shown up because their symptoms have eased. Some have called to say they don’t require oxygen therapy anymore,” affirms Ruda Pungeni, a pulmonary care specialist at LAMS Hospital.

The lockdown has led to a drastic drop in petroleum sales. Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) records show that in the first week of the lockdown, sales of petrol nationwide dropped to 6%, although it has now climbed to 45% of pre-lockdown levels. The Sujha Petrol pump in Pulchok sold 241,000 litres of diesel in April, down from 609,000 in December.

“The reduction in diesel consumption certainly played a part in cleaning up the air,” explains Sushil Shrestha of NOC. “But from December, we were already selling cleaner Euro 6 diesel emitting less SOX, NOX and soot. That is why stopping and fixing dirty tail pipes is the best short-term solution to air pollution.”

However, despite the sharp reduction in fossil fuel consumption, Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu did not improve as much as expected in April-May. The reason was wildfires in Dhading, Nuwakot and Chitwan in early April. But even after the rains, open garbage burning in the Valley and crop residue pollution kept AQI at dangerous levels.

But vehicular emissions is by far the biggest source of ambient air pollution in Kathmandu Valley, and according to one study accounted for as much as 79% of all particulate matter at street level. A 2017 survey by the Department of Environment states that PM10 from diesel vehicles alone contributed 34% of the air pollution.

The lockdown also improved the nation’s economic health by curtailing Nepal’s petroleum import bill. In 2018/19, Nepal’s import of petroleum products was at Rs62 billion – 2.2 times higher than the country’s total income from exports. Despite the recent collapse of global oil prices, this saving will be wiped out by the growth in the import bill in future if nothing is done.

Switching to electric public transport and battery vehicles to reduce the petroleum import bill by just 10% would save Rs21 billion a year – besides promoting domestic clean energy from hydropower, and improving air quality.

“What we are experiencing during the lockdown is just a short reprieve, it only want to prove that we can clean up Kathmandu if we want,” says climate change expert Manoj Dhakal. “But for long-term results we need to push cleaner energy options in road transport and the COVID-19 has provided us the perfect opportunity to electricity transport and revive our economy.”

However, with the economy in deep crisis the government will be under pressures to look for short-term measures to revive the economy, the temptation will be strong to go back to business as usual.

This was shown by the traffic jams this week after lockdown rules were relaxed. And when it is lifted, environmentalists are concerned that fear of the virus will keep people away from public transport, which already suffers from a lack of priority that it deserves.

“But the crisis is also an opportunity to reform our public transport system: digitise and electrify it and restriction routes,” urges Bhushan Taladzhe, director of Suja Talyat. “The government can play more active role by coming up with functioning operational guidelines and provide financial help to promote electric transport. It will be really unfortunate not to have used this chance.”

With the collapse in tourism, remittances and tax revenues there is pressure on the Finance Ministry to balance the annual budget. Tourism experts suggest the ministry is thinking of removing the tax rebate on electric vehicles, which would be a two steps back for the economy, health and environment.

So, despite COVID-19 proving the benefits of reducing fossil fuel consumption, experts find it unlikely the government is going to change policy. The benefits of switching to cleaner energy are long-term, and the current economic crisis needs immediate solutions.

Before the lockdown, despite lack of infrastructure such as public charging stations, electric vehicles were making up to 10% of all of new sales. The government should now be pushing ahead with electrifying public transport, to narrow the trade deficit, lower air pollution, reduce Nepal’s carbon footprint and protect public health.

As part of the Paris Agreement, Nepal will have to submit the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) later this year. Incentives on electric vehicles will need to be increased in line with our national commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as well as to reduce air pollution and protect public health.

Says Manoj Dhakal: “The electric vehicle movement will go ahead whether the government wants it or not, but longer we delay incentives for renewables energy the more money we will waste and also damage public health.”

Kathmandu Air Quality Index
April 2019 and April 2020 PM2.5 daily average

SOURCE: US Embassy Kathmandu

PHOTO: ABHISHEK GUITHEL
Lockdown gives distance learning a boost in Nepal

Home learning familiarises teachers and students with technology, and could help lift quality of instruction

Shristi Karki

In ordinary times, children would wake up at the crack of dawn, put on their uniforms, pack their backpacks, and leave for school. This time of year, SSI students in Nepal would be making full use of their post-exam holidays, books and exams the last thing on their minds. University students would be in the thick of the semester, some on the verge of graduating and going out into the world as young professionals.

But these are not ordinary times. With COVID-19 lockdowns, distance learning has gotten a boost. Even unprepared schools and teachers are unleashing creativity, and the existence of a digital divide despite the spread of digital communication.

At Madhyapurthimi, a public school in Sainjhe, principal Bibek Subedi tells Shristi Karki that students sitting for SBE exams to find educational materials on YouTube since the lockdown began. However, as the shutdown stretched on, Latchamchhe along with his teachers realized their conduct Grade 10 classes on Zoom.

But for two weeks Latchamchhe realised that it was a futile exercise.

"Not every student was able to access Zoom, because some of them don't have smartphones and only some had mobile data," she says. "Some of the students don't even go to school properly during the lockdown, let alone have Internet access.

Her students thought it would be better to form a group on Facebook Messenger and conduct classes that way. Now, students take pictures of their handwritten notes and upload them on their Messenger group so that all students will get an equal chance to learn from them. Students who can access the Internet call their friends who cannot, and pass along information.

"Simply advertising online classes is not enough when there is a lack of access," says Latchamchhe. Government schools in Nepal are notoriously underfunded, understaffed and lack infrastructure, which is why parents can afford to send their children to more expensive schools. There is a fear that the COVID-19 lockdowns will add to not just the digital divide, but also the gender gap between have and have-nots, and the disparity in the quality of education provided by public schools and private schools.

But Latchamchhe thinks even better equipped private schools have a difficult time adjusting.

"Some private schools might be able to successfully conduct classes online, but there is no way most can communicate with 100% of their students," she says. "It is a public school or private school. This pandemic has shown us that we are all on the same boat.

The reputed Shuvasthara School in Lamjung has been able to reach all of its 450 students and conduct classes online. With the help of the JDI project, teachers have been conducting webinar-style classes via Zoom, and students hand in their assignments on Google Classroom.

Principal Khayam Timina says that the first week was a trial period, but classes have been going on smoothly on the second week of their online academic year. And while online classes are not the same as real classrooms, Timina adds, the students have taken to it.

For Shuvasthara, there has been a positive consequence of conducting classes online. "This process has empowered our teachers, who have been learning a lot about IT and gaining mastery in the technical aspects of teaching," says Timina, who says the school's digital divide has challenges but also offers opportunity for education.

This pandemic has made us think about developing digital learning, which we perhaps would not have done otherwise," he says. "ICT in education is crucial, and hopefully, much needed attention will be directed towards building a digital platform that will help students well into the future. However, the pandemic has also brought us into stark focus that although 96% of households in Nepal have mobile phones only a quarter of those polled in a recent nationwide survey said they used the Internet on a daily basis, and most used it to access Facebook and YouTube. But telecom companies are attempting to provide a solution to this problem.

NTO has introduced its Raskha package, providing 2 data options to students at reduced cost. Schools can request the company to provide students access by giving NTO a list of their mobile phone numbers. NTO has a "robust system," said NTO spokesperson Seema Sethi, adding that if schools take the initiative of communicating with their students about the service, most can easily go online with high-speed 4G Internet in all 77 districts.

Still, many students are concerned about missing out on their classroom time due to the lockdown, expressing their frustration to parents and even friends over the Internet. Even having constant access to the Internet doesn't mean that learning is easy.

A final year undergraduate student Narmada Karki says that although she has been doing the research over the Internet, the lockdown has made it impossible to conduct fieldwork that she needs. Moreover, she has Zoom consultations with her thesis supervisor at 10 pm. "It is a new experience to work online," she says, "but we have had to adapt to it in order to make it work.

Kathmandu CEO Peytra Gautam believes this is the first time education is a way to engage students at a time like this when not much else can be done. It cannot be the only way to go about education.

"It is a Learning Management System or Zoom, most of the time education will be all about how engaged their students are with them," says Gautam, adding that there should be better understanding about how kids learn rather than just the tools and technologies and better.

Will it attempted shift towards digital improve the quality of education post-pandemic?

"There has been a shift but let's look at this as a way to engage students until the schools open back up," Gautam says. "It is not something that nothing is going to change. Neither is the change going to look at this as a way to completely transform education into the digital.

"Technology is a tool that should support good teachers," he explains, "although technology enhances capability, we need to have meaningful information and can bring reforms it is a work in progress. That is where the technology comes in.

A blended model is going to be the best approach."

Online classes may widen digital divide ...

... but it will also allow Nepal to leapfrog in education

Madhuri Sudhan Dahal

Shrieks come from Nepal are looking for viable options to re-orient the new academic year amid many uncertainties about the future. They have started online classes in the distant classrooms, and although online education will strengthen the existing digital divide in the nation, there are many options.

The internet penetration rate in Nepal is 27.4%, out of which 58.4% have access to wireless services and 7% to Wi-Fi. The number of households who have access to smartphones, however, must has been on the Internet only to access social media — especially Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, online classes will not have a significant impact on students who are unable to access smart phones. Students who have access to smartphones will depend not only on the availability of telephone infrastructure, but also on a technical knowledge on the part of students and teachers about how to work online.

This is the right time for the government to invest in education. The Education Ministry has allocated NPR 15 million to augment online classes which will help in the movement, but will not be enough to gain momentum on country scale. In the same vein, the government also needs to build a framework to expand internet access.

Additionally, Nepal Youths and Ncell need to be persuaded to provide internet access to students at minimal cost and lift their corporate social responsibility. Several private IEN are likely to do business, which means the Internet an expensive luxury. Not every student can afford online classes, even if some service providers offer free access at the time. Many students will still not be able to afford it.

Online classes require at least 3G broadband access, which much of rural Nepal does not have. Wireless broadband is extremely expensive. Currently, "My Nepal" app costs Rs 1,000, which means that only one of five visual classes at the lowest video quality would require SIEMS Internet costing Rs 200,000 every year.

The best way to conduct the online classes is if academic institutions include classes by making use of free available educational platforms like Gaurang Learn, without charging fees to students. Only one-fourth of Nepal’s public schools have computers, and even fewer have internet connectivity.

We have to warn of the digital divide due to the lockdown, leading the knowledge divide among students across the country does not have to.

Reading material can also be disseminated through radio and television. A country that has a revolution in community radio is well placed to enjoy its reach

To make sure that students are not dependent on memory materials. Saathi is a digital hearing, and it is a great start. But our goal should be to reach every corner of the country and make trap digital access.

For educators, conducting classes online will mean ridding newer ways of teaching and engaging students. This includes creating interactive video conferences, webinars, and making videos for YouTube. Teachers will also have to adapt to the online format with the recording videos, assignments, feedback, and student-centered learning. Digital classes will be more engaging. It is something that is new and will take us a few years to be fully in place.

The more immediate challenge for educators. In this day and age, some students may actually be more technologically advanced than their teachers. This is a learning curve, actual learning from their students even as the students gain knowledge from them, leading learning a two-way process. The teachers will have to be extra diligent in making sure students missing online platforms. Pajjab, for instance, could flush their own computers and be寝 for the students missing in class.

Although distance learning might be difficult for educators and students, many teachers around the core had already been doing this successfully before the pandemic. E-learning has been tested previously without having to physically meet in class and are executed through songs, presentations, open-ended questions — all without neglecting students academic experience as the quality of education provided by the institution.

Madhuri Sudhan Dahal is a researcher and senior editor of Nepal Reagan.
Meanwhile, a measles outbreak in Nepal

Delays in vaccination during lockdown infects more with measles than does coronavirus nationwide

Shiva Upreti in Gorkha

When Gita Chepang, a four-year-old son Satin developed a raging fever, stared vomiting, had diarrhea, body pain, and rashes she feared it might be the "corona" everyone was talking about. Then a neighbour, 29-year-old Ram Maya Chepang, also complained of similar symptoms. They failed to respond to an expensive allergy medicine given by a local pharmacy. So, Gita called Balak Maya, a doctor at a nearby health post.

"She checked my son, and said he had measles," she recalls, "she noticed me giving the boy the allergy medicine, and told me to isolate him."

Ram Maya Chepang is a single mother, and her school-aged daughter and son go to the market to sell vegetables and there is no one to take care of her all day. Three other children from one household in the village of Jiling also got measles, and had raging fever for two weeks before they got better.

In late April, local health officials started getting reports that the Chepang neighbours were not the only ones infected. More than 160 people in two villages along the Dhading and Gorkha districts in central Nepal were affected.

The villages of Benighat in Dhading and Gorkha in Gorkha which first saw the outbreak a month ago are on either side of the Trishuli River. Villagers from here go down to the highway to sell their produce, which is why there is a danger of it spreading further. The Chepangs living in these remote areas were already in missing pockets where vaccination campaigns did not reach even in the best of times. But this year, the government’s immunization drive for measles and other diseases has been delayed because of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Sita Shikya, who heads the local health department says there are many other remote villages along the border between the two districts who have not been immunised and are at risk of getting measles.

"The local vaccination centre is in Syadul, which is a three-hour walk away from the two villages, and most mothers do not want to make the journey with their children," she says. Two children have already died in Dhading during the current outbreak.

The two who died were two-year-old Anubhak Chepang and an eight-month-old baby who had not been vaccinated for measles, according to Benighat mayor Shankar Dwivedi. In fact, he says, none of the 160 infected in the two districts had ever been inoculated.

Slyam Bahadur Chepang from the area believes that the disease was spread during the weekly market when people mingled. "You go to sell your vegetables, and then return with the disease," he said.

Simultaneously with the COVID-19 scare, measles outbreaks have also been reported from several districts including Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and the eastern Terai. Health officials blame the restrictions on mobility, lack of public transport and suspension of vaccination drives for the sudden outbreak.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that spreads through droplets after sneezing and coughing just like the COVID-19. Although about 100,000 measles cases used to be reported in Nepal annually till 20 years ago, it had dropped to 160 in normal times in the past few years.

Lack of awareness about the disease appears to be a part of the problem. Shalu Lad Chepang, who lives in one of the villages where the outbreak happened says most people in the village know nothing about the disease. "We do not know how it spreads, and we don’t even know if there is a cure," he says, adding that most in the village will go to local shamans.

Hoping to educate the locals, Balak Maya Chepang, a member of the Pragati Community Health Unit, instructed the villagers not to teach one another and warned mothers to protect their children from going out. Yet, many locals are not following instructions.

"Along with my four-year-old, I also have a two-year-old son and his measles often play together. It is impossible to tell them to stay away from each other," says Gita Chepang.

Ramu Maya Chepang also did not physically distance herself from her children, yet got infected even though her children are fine.

Ward Chair Tulsi Regmi says an immunisation drive is being launched in the two villages and surrounding settlements, and 11,154 children were vaccinated last week. He admitted that awareness drives had not been carried out because of the remoteness of the villages and the lockdown.

However, Sumana Gurung of the Syalud public health unit says mothers were suspicious of a recent vaccination drive. "They picked up their children and ran away when we approached. They were worried that their children would cry, or even die. Most mothers were scared of their husbands sending them for immunising their children," Gurung added.

Pre-existing diseases may kill more children

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) warned this week that about 6,000 young children could die every day from preventable causes during the next six months. Attention is focused on the coronavirus pandemic. Health records show that children are mostly safe from the virus when adults nearby people die, 60 years. But UNICEF says the additional death could largely occur in low- and middle-income countries with health systems that are already weak, and may be overwhelmed by the pandemic response.

"Under a worst-case scenario, the global number of children dying before their fifth birthdays could increase by the first half of 2021. "UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said in a statement. "We must not let mothers and children become collateral damage in the fight against the virus. And we must not let decades of progress in reducing preventable child and maternal deaths be lost."

Health experts have warned that far more children could die because of the disruptions in health services, delays in vaccination campaigns and travel restrictions caused by lockdowns that have been imposed to fight the virus.

**VIRTUAL EVENTS**

**Art Exhibition**
**14 May**

**SOLUS classes**
Email for SOUL’s Performing Arts online balloon, acting and jazz caper while at home. Call up or go to Facebook page. 38847839

**CODING WEBINAR**
IT Nepal is bringing you a webinar series on different topics to start a coding journey for beginners to utilise your free time during lockdown. This session is curated for fresh students who have just joined the college and pursuing their careers in the IT field. 16 May. 3pm-4pm. 9857671790, 9831559985

**Vocal Technique Masterclass**
Explore the basics of vocal technique with instructor Marya Rajja. Practice tips guide for a journey as singer no matter the style of music you are interested in. For details, go to Kathmandu Jee Conservatory's Facebook page. 15 May. 9831559545

**Short Story Contest**
Send in your short stories to the Editor for a chance to get your story published and win $1000. Any genre is a fair game as long as the story is a work of fiction under 3,000 words. Deadline: June

**Shilpee Theatre**
Plays from Shilpee Theatre are on YouTube channel. Watch COMi, and their adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s classic Gilders

**Boju Bajaj**
Journey to Hetauda and Bhaktapur as they talk from across two centuries about politics, media and feminism in South Asia.

**PROJECT GUTENBERG**
Catch up on classics on public domain. Search for poetry classics at Project Gutenberg. Download ebook formats suited to individual devices.

**ONLINE ISOLATION**

**VICE**
Watch documentaries about anything and everything from all over the world on the VIC YouTube channel. Start from documentaries about Nepal’s honey harvests, The Nepalese honey that makes Young Hasta.

**Virtual Tour**
Nepal Heritage Documentation Project visits Patan’s monasteries right from home, and learns about the historic heritage site in the process. Visit website for details.

**QUARANTINE DINING**

**Da-Pow**
Cooking momo during lockdown? Order through Da-Pow and eat out at home’s doorstep. Or get egg lemon and other dishes. Go to Facebook page for menu. Order from Bhojpalas or Food Sale. Delivery: 11.30am-4pm. 9844250256, 9860299255

**The Village Cafe**
The Village Cafe delivered at home. Order from rich momo and Momo. Call for the delivery, or order through Kathmandu Organics. Delivery: 9801500771, 9844250256, 9846025217

**ATTIC**
Missing Attic’s signature Royal Alumni while staying at home? Here’s a home delivered. Go to Attic’s Facebook page to see what else is on offer.
Delivery: 9844250256, 9860299255, 9801500771, 9817025954

**Full Moon Pizzaia**
Go to The Full Moon Pizzaia Cafe’s menu on Foodomundo to order all things pizza. Order large supreme pizza for whole family. Delivery: 12pm-6.30pm, Khaiti Market, 9869540223

**Tasneem’s King Kitchen**
Order Tasneem’s mouthwatering biryani, or penne through their menu for your fill of savoury, spicy and savoury dishes. Order from Foodomundo. Delivery: 12pm-9pm, 9891121212

**THE GOLDEN GIRLS**

**OUR PICK**

**GIVING PLACES TOGETHER - qatarairways.com**

**Air Quality Index**
KATHMANDU, 8 - 14 May

**EcoLigic with Miss Moti**
Kripa Joshi

**GREEN YOUR LAUNDRY**

**LOCKDOWN TOWN**

**Venus**
Venus is finally here, the magnificent planet in Mithun’s life will never hit 0-90 degrees for the first time in the year – after 16 years. Venusurna is not born in May. What this means is conventional spirituality along the mountains, visiting the temple in presentation may not be possible. There is some hope and love from the western desert, so they will be by.

**Weather**
Now that the pre-monsoon showers have opened off and the summer is here, the Kathmandu’s daily average for Air Quality Index (AQI) is wavering between Moderate and Unhealthy. As traffic picked up because of the lockdown being relaxed, we saw a spike in pollution on Monday and Tuesday. We also saw the arrival of fog from a cold front that battered Nepal’s north last week, causing the concentration of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns above 100 in the Orange zone. https://epa.gov.np/airquality-monitoring/

**Lockdowns has a big impact on the planet because it cuts off a lot of CO2 emissions that help to reduce pollution in the atmosphere. We should all wear masks, use hand sanitizers, keep social distancing, use public transportation, use less plastic, and try to eat more fruits and vegetables.**

**Lakshmi two has a big impact on the planet because it cuts off a lot of CO2 emissions that help to reduce pollution in the atmosphere. We should all wear masks, use hand sanitizers, keep social distancing, use public transportation, use less plastic, and try to eat more fruits and vegetables.**

**Times**

**THE QATAR AIRWAYS**
Overseas Nepalis on the COVID-19 frontlines

From New York to Malaysia Nepalis are providing life-saving services during the pandemic

Upasana Khadka

On Tuesday, as the world paid a grateful tribute to nurses, thousands of medical personnel from Nepal were on duty across the world caring for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although there have been no recorded fatalities in Nepal, across the world 78 Nepalis had died from the coronavirus as of 11 May. Most of them were in the UK (60) and the United States (18). There are reports some among the 5,472 testing positive are nurses and care-givers in those countries.

“It has been very difficult for me to perform cardio-pulmonary resuscitation on COVID patients, knowing their survival rate is low,” says Jenny Lamichhane, a New York-based Nepali doctor. “I stay with them in their rooms, praying for them. People should not die alone, but visitors are not allowed in hospitals or nursing homes and must die alone.”

Even prior to COVID, as a geriatrician, Lamichhane has seen relatively more deaths and helped families cope with their loss. She adds: “But COVID has shaken all our training, expertise and experience.”

There are said to be 1.5 million unemployed or underemployed in the US healthcare system as doctors, registered nurses and pharmacists. Another 263,000 unemployed nurses and allied health professionals are working in non-health, lower paying jobs in the US.

There is a shortfall of 43,000 medical staff in US hospitals which have also reported a lack of personal protection which have often been rationed or reused, putting the medical professionals and their patients at risk.

“We have had to reuse spilt N95 for weeks and see both COVID and non-COVID patients wearing the same gear. When new masks and gloves arrive, there is brief celebration, and they are distributed like presents. But things have gradually improved,” another New York-based Nepali physician who preferred not to be named said.

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that over 4,000 healthcare workers have contracted the virus in the United States, with 27 deaths, as of April 19th.

“It is both emotionally and physically taxing. I am not used to dealing with so many deaths,” says the Nepali doctor in New York. “I have not seen my husband for weeks due to fear of transmission, and going home alone after the emotional and physical turmoil has been difficult. But it is rewarding to see patients go home after fighting overwhelming odds.”

Fortunately, the situation in New York is improving with a significant reduction in the number of COVID-19 patients. Daily deaths have also gone down. However, there are warnings of a second wave.

Lamichhane was at a nursing home in New York for a month as coronavirus cases peaked, and says that compared to hospitals, nursing homes are much less equipped with masks and gloves.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world in Malaysia, Nepalis are working overtime in factories making latex gloves to meet the surge in global demand. Malaysia produces 65% of the world production of rubber glove industry, and is expected to export 225 billion units this year.

In October 2019, glove exports by Malaysia-based WRP Asia-Pacific had been banned by the US Customs and Border Protection for using forced labour at its plants in Malaysia. But in March, as the global pandemic hit the ban was lifted.

Over three quarters of the close to 382,000 Nepali migrant workers in Malaysia are employed in manufacturing, including of medical supplies.

“First we stayed home for over a month because of the US ban, then we worked part-time, in two shifts,” says Krishna, who works at WRP Asia-Pacific in Kuala Lumpur. “My ageing parents are concerned about the disease, and we are pressuring me to come home. I tell them I am safe, my hours are good and the money is for our future so I try to remain optimistic.”

While workers like Krishna are indoors in factories making life-saving healthcare equipment, other Nepali migrants outside are subjected to large-scale unannounced raids and discrimination.

Nepalis are frontline workers in the stressed healthcare system in New York and in glove factories in Malaysia, proving the vital role migrants play regardless of their status or profession. The expectation that the vulnerability of migrants’ contributions during this crisis will lead to lasting shifts in migration governance is, however, questionable.

Public memory is short-lived but even in the midst of the pandemic, while foreign doctors like Lamichhane are saving lives inside New York hospitals, the Trump administration has temporarily banned immigrants from seeking permanent residency while working on plans to halt work-related visas as well.

Says Jenny Lamichhane in New York: “I used to cry every day in the beginning, due to stress of being exposed and bringing it home to my 21-month daughter. But when families started to text me for taking care of their loved ones, it made me realise that my impact goes beyond my patients. Giving them emotional and moral support gives me strength, and makes me feel a little better.”
Nepal’s school gets roof to play in

School prototype for seismic Nepal is this sustainable roofscape design

Sapana Shakya in Makwanpur

When schools reopened in June 2013 two months after the earthquake, students attended class in tents or temporary classrooms. They used unstretched bamboo, plywood panels, razor-sharp corrugated steel sheets that were dangerous and offered no protection against the elements.

One of the 8,000 school destroyed five years ago was the Janakumar Primary School and its two classrooms in Makwanpur district south of Kathmandu. After schools reopened, local Chepang children attended classes in a makeshift shed.

The Sustainable Mountain Architecture (SMA) team in Kathmandu surveyed the Makwanpur site to see if a larger school with four classrooms, a staff room and kitchen could be built. The major challenge was that with the steep slope on three sides and the mountain on the other, there was not enough space for the children to run and play. The team decided to use the roof.

The school design is inspired by the Open Air School concept in Europe in the 1920s, which were airy, bright and less cramped. The most famous example of this is the school designed by Dutch architect Johannes Prinsker in Amsterdam (1930) which is still running.

Schools and kindergartens all over the world are being designed with purposeful rooftops. Be it the Fuji Kindergarten (2007) by Tomoko Architects in Japan, where the gigantic oval shaped roof deck allows unfiltered learning and play for children or Skanderborggade (2008) in Denmark by architect Dorte Mandrup, where she had to be creative with the small plot given.

In the Makwanpur school, SMA designed the four classrooms in the shape of a trapezium arranged like a bow tie. This shape allowed the functional need for more entry/exit space towards the courtyard and partly in the tree for good acoustics inside the classroom.

The design is earthquake resistant, comfortable and takes the climate and seasons into account - different from all the hurriedly made schools in 2015 or the standard design which do not address context, orientation and weather.

The two interior curved corners use local river stones that contrast with the unique colour for each of the four classrooms. Bright hues of pink, green, blue and yellow promote playfulness and stimulates learning.

Playing steps of different heights can be used for seating during a group congregation or a theatre performance. Once at the level of the roof, children can actually run around via metal bridges that connect the rooftops of their classrooms.

To reduce heat gain during the warmest months, the two classroom blocks are placed on the northwest and the northeast of the site. The 350mm thick stone masonry walls work efficiently as natural thermal mass and keep the buildings warm in the winter and cooler in the summer. The large sail tree on the southwest of the site shields the sun in summer.

The rounded corners in the design allow free flow of the wind across the courtyard and help cross ventilation naturally. In the shaded open centre of the school, a newly planted jacaranda tunnel will cover the children sitting around the stepped down courtyard.

Movement of the children and the air were two important starting points for the design. Due to the airflow, the school is comfortable during the hot months, and the pleasurable roof circuit is used by the children every day.

Sapana Shakya is an architect with Sustainable Mountain Architecture that designs schools rigorously tested by three criteria; its form, function and the building envelope.
A NEW CLASS STRUCTURE

Kavre school is rebuilt using rammed earth walls to make classrooms stronger and more climate-friendly

Monika Deupala in Kavre

Nearly 8,600 schools were destroyed in the 2015 earthquake in central Nepal, and more than 34,000 classrooms collapsed. The death toll in the earthquake would have been much higher than 8,600 if the disaster had not struck on a Saturday when schools were empty.

The earthquake provided Nepali architects a chance to look at lighter and stronger structures that also addressed seasonal variation in temperature, natural lighting and airtightness.

One of these is the Dwarka secondary school in Masan Deupur of Kavre which was destroyed in the earthquake of 2015. Architect Anu Rimal of Office of Structural Design based in New York says he took into account the terrain and location on a ridge with a stunning view of the Panchebhal Valley below and the Himalayan panorama beyond.

“We incorporated courtyards into the design on all four sides of the building allowing students to interact with outdoor space in between the classes,” says Rimal, who has also employed the same rammed earth technique in the school that be used in the award-winning Royalpura Hospital in Achham.

Rammed earth is more sustainable, uses mostly local clay, insulates the classrooms from excessive heat and cold, and is sturdy. The earthquake provided the opportunity to replace the dingy and crowded classrooms of standard government schools, most of which collapsed or were badly damaged in 2015.

Construction of the school was supported by Kids of Kathmandu, Sustainable Future, Moving Mountains, Foundation Zien, Karma Improvement Project and Netflix and inaugurated on 20 January.
Change, don’t just adapt to COVID-19

The worst thing Nepal can do in response to the global pandemic is merely try to get back to normal.

Bishal Thapa

Nepal is adept at adapting. Five years after the devastating earthquake, wooden planks still pop up damaged houses. We harp from one crisis to the next, making do with what we can. This time around, we must change, not just adapt.

One analyst estimated that a recovery package would cost the government Rs200 billion. The package recommended, unsurprisingly, measures we know we should have undertaken much earlier: invest in small and medium enterprises, improve social services, build infrastructure, improve governance, modernise agriculture, promote industries, generate employment.

All of these responses will be repeated in the Finance Minister’s budget speech due soon. It is as if this crisis simply wound back the clock to let us see what we should have done but had failed to do.

Take the financial sector. Amid concerns that borrowers will struggle to repay their loans, the Rastri Bank announced several relief measures, including reduction in interest rates, a moratorium for working capital repayment, increasing liquidity, extending refinancing and encouraging more lending.

These measures are a vivid illustration of how we adapt, but fail to address the underlying chronic challenges. For economic growth during normal times and, more so, to bounce back from a crisis, Nepal’s financial sector critically needs a modern, comprehensive, robust insolvency and bankruptcy protection framework. We should have had this a long time ago.

Insolvency and bankruptcy protection rules are the hallmarks of modern financial systems. It governs the relationships between borrowers and lenders. When structured properly, it encourages entrepreneurship and helps restructure enterprises which are fundamentally sound but have been somehow unable to pay their debts.

Healthy economies value honest failures that are not based on malfeasance or fraud. Success makes great stories. But it is the willingness to risk failure and the ability to bounce back from it that is the true engine of economic growth.

Nepal’s current framework for insolvency and bankruptcy is outdated and draconian. Under a bankruptcy, businesses are given little room to restructure. Debt recovery digs into the borrower’s personal credibility and unpledged property. The debtor’s ability to bounce back is destroyed.

As we emerge from this crisis, many enterprises with weak underlying fundamentals will fail. They should be allowed to fail. Rather than short-term relief which may artificially sustain them, an insolvency and bankruptcy protection framework would have allowed the enterprises to fail with dignity and provided the space to do something else.

This crisis is so serious that even enterprises with sound fundamentals will fail. Here again, an insolvency and bankruptcy protection framework, rather than short-term relief, would have done better by providing them a mechanism to restructure their business and ride out the crisis.

Short-term relief measures are critical to this response. But we now have two choices: adapt and accept relief measures and move on, or accept the relief measures but force government to modernise its existing insolvency and bankruptcy protection framework.

There is already adequate understanding of modern insolvency and bankruptcy mechanisms in Nepal. In importance and need, particularly in modernising our economy, is extremely acknowledged. Despite this, robust insolvency and bankruptcy protection to replace existing outdated financial regulations has never been brought forward. Nobody understands why, or where the missing link lies. But mysteriously, it never gets done.

All businesses should default on their loans until such time that government brings such a protection framework. It could be immediately approved as an executive order. Several Nepali financial experts working together could have it developed and ready for cabinet approval within a week. That would be about as much time as it took the Prime Minister to approve two extraordinary ordinances, get it enforced by the President and have it rescinded.

It is highly irresponsible to call on everyone to default on their loans. Most defaults could trigger a larger financial crisis. But listen, a virus jumped out of a bat and infected a human. This has unleashed a pandemic, which has in turn spawned an economic crisis that is being compared to the Great Depression.

Millions of Nepalis are unemployed. Thousands of our workers are stranded abroad for months and are by and large waiting for a safe passage home. Infections are still rising. And throughout this crisis, the highest authority of government, the Prime Minister and his ministers, are embroiled in a senseless power struggle.

What will you do this time? Will you rebuild and strengthen your house or prop it up with a wooden plank? Insolvency and bankruptcy reforms are only one example. Across sectors, we must not just try to adapt, but bring long-lasting change.

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