Nepal confirmed 453 cases in the third month of lockdown.
The Kathmandu Airlift

Nepal's main export item has historically been human labour. Subsistence farmers have been moved out of India in search of jobs. The first overseas Nepal migrant workers were recruited by the British in India for their sugar plantations. And, of course, Nepal still enrols in the British and Indian military. But the recent spate of failures of governance in post-1990 Nepal that actively promoted overseas migration as an industry. Throughout the Maoist-NDP, the struggle in the early 1990s, during the decade-long conflict and the unstable politics since 2006, the state encouraged migration in part to create the conditions that would end up in the situation where, in the final analysis, the government has had to regroup those who were involved in the industry and who have been left stranded with no job, no food, no shelter, no water, no medical care.

The government is said to be working on a return strategy for migrant workers, which is commendable. But it begins the question: what was it doing for the past two months?

The situation has already created an urgent need for the return of the stranded workers and for the establishment of mechanisms to ensure that they are protected and supported in their return. The government should take immediate steps to address the humanitarian crisis and ensure the safe and dignified return of all workers. This includes providing medical care, food, and shelter to those who are stranded and working with partners to facilitate their return to Nepal. The government should also ensure that workers are not subjected to forced or exploitative labor practices upon their return.

Veggie

Correct in theory: in practice it does not make sense (Nepal’s youth, who only care about things that are immediate to them, are not familiar with the tradition of vegetarianism). Some people are against the idea but many people support it. Many people say it is not possible because they believe in the tradition of vegetarianism. Some people also say it is not possible because it is not practical.

Always planning

This government has been planning since it assumed office last year to open the airport and bring back the stranded workers. But it seems to have forgotten that planning is just one part of the process. The government should focus on implementing its plans and ensuring that the workers are able to return safely and securely. The government should also ensure that the workers are provided with the necessary support and assistance to reintegrate into their communities. The government should also work with partners to address the underlying causes of migration and ensure that workers are not subject to forced or exploitative labor practices.

WHAT'S TRENDING

When the air is clean

Air pollution in Kathmandu has reached hazardous levels, causing health problems for residents. The government has recently taken steps to improve air quality, such as implementing stricter pollution control measures and promoting public transportation. However, the situation is still concerning, especially for vulnerable populations such as children and elderly people. The government must continue to work towards reducing pollution and improving air quality for all residents. Public awareness campaigns and education initiatives can also help.

Nepal lockdown proves air quality can be improved by lockdown

The recent lockdown in Nepal was successful in improving air quality, with significant reductions in particulate matter and nitrogen oxides. This highlights the potential of lockdowns to reduce pollution, especially in urban areas with high traffic volumes. However, the long-term effectiveness of lockdowns will depend on sustained efforts to promote cleaner transportation and industrial practices, as well as policies to reduce demand for fuel.

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Coronavirus Nepal Lockdown Month 2

After 50 days what is utterly extraordinary has come to seem normal, the unimaginable is commonplace.

The ancient brick walls of the Patan Darbar absorb the dull afternoon light that glitters off a black dog sitting behind a door and a woman in a pale suit game immobile from a high window, but otherwise the square is empty.

Temple gates are closed, worship is suspended, offerings banned, bells muted and lamps left unlit, monitored by the occasional passing police patrol. Two long wooden benches flank the magnificent nickel-plated gold doorway, usually packed with bemused locals and tired tourists soaking up the sun and watching the world go by.

But now the palace door is slammed tight shut, glistening daily in the overcast afternoon, and the streets, glistening, generations of grateful bottoms, are bare and bendy.

Across the silent Valley, streets deserted, shops shuttered, offices closed, hotels burned and government gates padlocked, the reclining Vishnu at Budhanilkantha lies abandoned and alone. His black stone limbs are strewn with dead flower petals and rotting leaves blown through the concrete fence. Barred behind chinked chains wrapped around his metal gates, the normally bustling temple precinct, never without worshipers, pilgrims and prayers, is still and lifeless.

A defiant snare of vermilion stains a tree near the entrance. Naryan’s celestial powers protect the Valley swamped by this unnatural quiet, and bolster the nation’s battle against the invisible coronavirus to be vanquished with a strategy of isolation, closures and lockdowns, debated by a drumbeat of hand washing, face masks and social distancing.

The silence of the airport departure terminal is all pervasive, the car park empty, the doors locked, and inside the dusty check-in desks and rows of unmanned immigration booths stand sentinel to former days. The new evacuation flights and the occasional cargo planes bring the place alive with masked staff and gloved security personnel. An aircraft overhead causes us to stop and raise our eyes in witness to an unusual event. Every motor engine sounds unnaturally loud in the Valley trough with which we have become habitudinal.

After 47 days of Nepal lockdown, what is utterly extraordinary has come to seem normal, the unimaginable has become commonplace. I wake at dawn thinking, “is this for real?” Unprecedented, unique, incredible are all overcome words, but how else to relate, to express, to process our current situation. We are becoming inured to scenes and situations throughout the world that a scant few weeks ago would have been unthinkable.

Thousands of aircraft are patiently parked along the periphery of unused runways as flights worldwide are grounded by the pandemic, machinist-machined and travellers confined to home. The vast skies above South Asia are devoid of air traffic, all borders sealed, domestic flights forbidden, and not even citizens permitted to return home. The airline industry is suffering its worst ever crisis, and when plans do take off on the other side of this disaster, aviation will never look the same again.

Global tourism is realising how its tentacles extend far beyond the obvious frontlines of hospitality – airlines, tourism, hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, tours and attractions – into less obvious areas of the arts, theatre, design, banking, education, conservation, and of course agriculture and food production.

Businesses that have taken a lifetime to build are crumbling day by day. Texts and beggars are obscene, working beings, dockers, elephants and camels are having a holiday, wild nature is flourishing in the metropolis, but the roaming street dogs and stupa monkeys are hungry. The world is at a standstill, the suffering dark.

Sporting events are cancelled, competition abandoned, arenas empty, stadiums broken, games aborted, scoreboards blank, ladders and league tables on hold. The massive preparations for race meets, world cups and Olympics evaporate in the face of the most destructive viral onslaught of our lifetimes.

Footballers have hung up their boots, racchushees remain in their stables, and the green lawns of Wimbledon see no tennis served with Pimm’s and strawberries. In bizarre efforts to keep audiences engaged, matches are played in vacant venues, and Formula One and sailing regattas have resorted to virtual events online. There is no fear of missing out, as the sporting world is on ‘pause’.

Desperate people queue around the block, snaking for hours through socially distant circles, for free meals or access to food banks – and not just daily wage earners deprived of employment in emerging nations, but white-collar workers in the world’s major capitals of London, Paris and New York.

Nepal is largely dependent on trade and support from its wealthy neighbors. But, it is only by ducks on the ponds, solitary bees and insects in the flowers, blushing unseen in the deserted gardens, holes are being lost, companies collapsing, rents unpaid, loans and mortgages renewed.

In Nepal we are familiar with political shutdowns closing the roads and shuttering the shops, strikes that never lasted more than a day or two. The strict curfew that accompanied the king aspiring to lift the ban on political parties in April 1990 was only sustained for three days.

We are exhausted to stay safe and shelter in place, as the walls close in and perimeters shrink, moulded by the relentless confines of our homes. Rooms contract and expand, depending on our state of mind and time of day. Vivaldi’s winter dream infuses beyond sleep to punctuate the waking hours. Is that a dream, or the echo of times when I have been sitting glued to my laptop day after day, week after week.

Tanana paces the driveway, wearing out his prayer beads, the tires of his unused car softening on the flagstones. The curious have arrived and the wheeling trash has ceased. The roses have budded, bloomed and died, the extravagant white petals of the magnolia have exploded before wilting waxy brown, and the cherry tree has carpeted the ground with crimson blossom and is now clad in hopeful fresh green.

Within the relentless rhythm of the lockdown the formidable days unfold, measured in perpetual birthing and sheets of vitamin pills, all plans in suspension, all projects on hold. In theory, now is the chance to read, watch movies, watch in Netflix, listen to music, sort photos, fix the house, and call friends but in reality I struggle with the focus and motivation to do any of it.

I have learned to value every cup of coffee, waste no food, and price the fresh vegetables bought from the end of the lane. How sweet is that first mango of the season, and with what difficulties must it have travelled to arrive whole and perfect green and gold on our kitchen table?

None of us has seen anything on this scale before and emerging on the other side of it will have its own unknown shocks and challenges. But when we do, and when we are asked in some future virus-free era: “What was it like during the time of COVID-19, the great pandemic of 2020?”, these are the moments and memories I do not want to forget.
Nepal’s Accidental Leaders

Now that the Army is in the business of importing medicine, why not deploy the Ministry of Health to defend Lipu Lekh?

Over the years the reaction from those leaders has always been a sheepish smile. Let us give them the benefit of the doubt: they simply do not remember. In fact oral tradition says that when people get to the corridors of power, they forget how they got there in the first place.

The debacle in the health sector is trying to come to grips with a global pandemic is that it needs to ask the country’s military to step in to procure medical supplies. Kathmandu’s top service to India’s land grab in Kalapani is another symptom of the deeper moral malaise that plagues Nepal’s accidental political leadership.

One accidental leader was recently asked, “Now that the Army is importing medicines, should we not send the Ministry of Health to defend Lipu Lekh?”

Many Nepalis believe these accidental political leaders when they were blaming the mysterious Foreign Hand for anything that was wrong with Nepal. But today we have turned into a country that waits for India’s Republic Day to buy a tiny patch in the Valley, have started roof gardens to grow vegetable and rented remaining floors. The market is full of vegetables grown on roof terraces. In fact, 58 days into the lockdown, there is no visible shortage of vegetables or black marketing in Kathmandu.

The building in which the Nepal’s Parliament sits for the budget session is a birthday gift from the Chinese government to King Birendra – and it was supposed to be a convention centre. Our parliamentary democracy couldn’t even build its own Parliament.

Nepal is finally beginning to ask what happens to all the taxes we pay. There never seems to be a shortage of money when politicians and bureaucrats need the latest SUVs but we cannot afford a Zoom account!

The people of Kathmandu, many of whom have sold their homes in the districts to buy a tiny patch in the Valley, have started roof gardens to grow vegetable and rented remaining floors. The market is full of vegetables grown on roof terraces. In fact, 58 days into the lockdown, there is no visible shortage of vegetables or black marketing in Kathmandu.

With the global economic downturn there is a real possibility of Nepal going home from all over the world. Many countries want to protect jobs for their own citizens, and hence Nepal may experience a gain sooner than many would have predicted. We may have doctors, nurses, builders and services providers who are now second to none due to the experience they have received in the world’s most advanced economies.

The post COVID-19 economy in Nepal could be really well if they are given the incentives to start businesses and create jobs. They always told us they would return one day and rebuild and develop Nepal. We all know that good human resources are the most critical variable to develop a country and not just its natural resources endowment – just like Japan or Korea.

The COVID-19 crisis could be turned into a chance for a Great Leap Forward. Nepal’s return to Nepal should not be seen as a problem but an opportunity for growth.

Our accidental leaders will get due credit because if it was not for their mismanagement, Nepal would never have left Nepal in the first place. The glass is indeed half full.

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharta.

Anil Chitrakar's occasional "leaders" ask us what they should be doing, our response is usually: "When you were in jail, what did you resolve to do when you were released and came to power?"

½ FULL

Anil Chitrakar

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Nepal’s airlines can take off again

Aviation will revive post-lockdown if the government reduces the high price of aviation fuel

The tourism industry has collapsed globally. Several airlines are on the verge of shutting down, leading to layoffs of millions of workers being out of work. Nepal’s airlines will be no exception.

COMMENT

Birendra B Basnet

Over 273,000 Nepalis are employed directly within this sector, but if all people in the value chain that support this industry are included, this number will be in the millions. A big source of foreign currency earning will also disappear.

The Nepal government’s prompt action to lockdown the country two months ago has saved many from sickness and death. But a lockdown is not a cure, it has just bought us time to put other measures in place to control the spread of the virus.

The World Health Organization has warned that the virus will be around for years, and pandemics may only be over when, and if, a vaccine is available. For Nepal that may take additional years. An indefinite lockdown is not the solution, and the restrictions will create massive unemployment, and lead to a spread of poverty and hunger, which could culminate in civil unrest.

Almost 60% of businesses in Nepal are closed, and the current lack of loan servicing will cause a banking crisis. Since 50% of these borrowings are through personal deposits that require monthly servicing. Furthermore, there are more than a million Nepalis waiting to return home from overseas. A drop in remittances will impact the country’s balance of payments deficit.

Public health experts must come up with a timeline on easing the lockdown so that the economy can begin to get back on track. We delayed testing in the first month of the lockdown because of the lack of kits. In the past two weeks, we have seen a surge of cases as testing increased among migrant workers and those they came in contact with.

Once more Nepalis return from abroad, there may be many new cases.

We must develop contact prevention protocols for all walks of life. Wearing masks, hand-washing and sanitizing, and physical distancing must be an established part of daily activity. Everyone must be vigilant, and self-quarantine or get tested immediately if symptoms develop, being alert about the health of family, friends, and colleagues at the workplace.

We also need to analyse the available data after testing reaches a critical point and infer permissible risks in order to open up the economy. This analysis could be achieved by knowing the rate of tests conducted, the distribution of asymptomatic and critical cases, and, most importantly, the death rate due to COVID-19.

Kathmandu valley accounts for 50% of the recreation movement to Chitwan and Pokhara, and we must prepare for the movement of Nepal; statistics to these two destinations once the lockdown is eased.

There will have to be well thought out COVID-19 Prevention Protocols for the tourism and aviation industry which can be closely monitored and traced. These have to be enough test kits and isolation facilities as well as management guidelines in place to prevent the spread of the virus.

Once we create the confidence that Kathmandu, Pokhara and Chitwan are safe destinations with the movement of internal tourists, we can re-market them for international visitors, particularly from India and China. Our advantage is direct connections to the two giant markets at our doorstep.

Buddha Air has completed a comprehensive COVID-19 Prevention Protocol and all staff are being trained to follow it diligently. Through our 100% subsidiary Buddha Holidays, we are working with hotels in Pokhara and Chitwan to slowly and implement their Prevention Protocols as well. We will monitor these carefully to assure safety, and have started marketing these holiday packages in Kathmandu at very reasonable rates. They will be ready for sale and use as soon as the government lifts the lockdown.

We need to move fast for early bird advantage. Southeast Asian countries have already started opening bookings from August. If we move to cater to domestic tourists, we can start marketing in China and India for the autumn season.

There may be a silver lining in the current crisis because restrictions in global travel could mean outbound tourists in our region will want to travel nearer to home countries. If we act early, we might be able to attract more tourists from just India and China than what

Visit Nepal 2020 envisioned. Similar to other domestic airlines, Buddha Air was in full swing till the morning of 23 March, and all flights were grounded the next day. Since then we are at zero revenues for two months and counting. Airlines operate on continuous cash flow which is the reason most of us are facing extreme hardships.

Buddha Air is a live entity for us, which we will nurture and protect so that all those who work for it are taken care of. The paramount philosophy is the sense of ownership of each and every employee towards the company. Therefore, we will not lay off a single employee but try to confront the crisis collectively.

Buddha Air is not looking for any grant or subsidy from this government. We can keep going till September. However, we do expect the government to reduce the price of Air Transport Fuel (ATF) to be closer to the global price. In India the ATF price is NPR 36 per litre in Kolkata, but it is NPR 75 in Nepal. China provides a 50% subsidy on ATF price for domestic aviation, and the sector has rebounded to +2% year-on-year from 2019.

We are confident that things will start recovering to a new normal by October 2020 and we can weather this storm that has hit the global aviation sector. Our strategy is to provide cheaper fare for Nepali passengers so that the middle class can afford to fly. This will also be much safer than their traveling many hours by surface transport, and it will sustain domestic aviation without the government having to spend money on its rescue.

Birendra B Basnet is Managing Director of Buddha Air.
Online Archives

Global Nepali Museum
Global Nepali museum is the first database of its kind in Nepal that features Nepal art and artifacts that are housed in museums around the world. Go to the museum website and learn about sculptures, paintings, as well as contemporary art, and other Nepali cultural objects.

Madan Puraskar Postakalaya
Browse through the collection of Nepali-archived content, including manuscripts, newspapers, sketches, and photographs, on the Makan Puraskar Postakalaya database.

Virtual Street Art
Google Arts Project, Street Art showcases the world’s greatest graffiti works and tells the stories behind them, including those of Nepali. Viewers can take virtual walking tours, view online exhibitions and learn about the artists themselves.

Real Stories
Go to the Ritu Tomar’s YouTube channel to watch sampling, award-winning documentaries from all over the world. Watch factual films about war, crime, mental health, technology and more.

Virtual Events
Body by and Data will host weekly seminars focusing on understanding online gender-based violence and combating it. Stay tuned for the weekly seminars and check Body by and Data’s Facebook page for details and updates.

Blockage meet-ups
Blockchain meet-ups are organized to create a platform for blockchain enthusiasts to help grow the much-needed blockchain community in Nepal. Check the SAja Facebook page to join the webinar. 22 May, 5pm-6pm.

Bake It Easy
Heidi’s Doll House is doing a ‘Bake It easy’ online baking series featuring their head baker, Meredith Tamavuen. The free tutorials, posted on the company’s Instagram page every week, feature delicious recipes. Previous episodes are archived on the Heidi’s Doll House IGTV.

Furios Fiction
The Australian Writing Centre reveals a new set of story prompts on the first Friday of every month. aspiring writers will have 55 hours to submit a 500-word or less story for the chance to win AUD 500 open to anyone 17 years and older anywhere in the world. Stay tuned for the next prompt on 5 June.

Yoga Classes
Niru Yoga (Nirmayay and Yoga Retreat Center) brings free online yoga classes every Saturday and Sunday. Check the center’s Facebook page for the link to the meeting. 23 May, 7pm.

Going places together - qatarairways.com
The story of the week was Cyclone Amphan which slammed into the north-east of Nepal with wind, rain and snow. It’s properties destroyed Kathmandu, and the system has been pushed onwards by prevailing winds. The mission from a well-largely empty country into the west.

Air Quality Index
Ahendanu, 15 - 21 May

Energy conservation is an important factor to reducing our carbon footprint. One of the simplest ways to save money is to turn off the lights and electrical appliances when they are not in use. Leaving electrical equipments on standby will unnecessarily use energy, so it is best to turn them off. This will have an even bigger impact in an office environment. Office equipment is the fastest growing energy user in the business world. Making timely decisions and taking steps to shut down equipment can save money by prolonging the lifespan of equipment and reducing the electricity bill.

Achaar Ghar
Order homemade meals along with various chaat or yummy prepared using recipes passed down from generations. Delivery: 10pm-6.30pm, (01) 5344182.

Freddie Cafe
Brewed for the cafe’s menu for all things pizza, try the garden pizza. Call for direct delivery or order through foodmandu and Bhot Apps. Delivery: 10am-10pm. 9992832283, 9904571990 (01) 4271279.

Unutora Restaurant
Experience authentic Japanese food with a Nepali taste. Browse the lockdown menu on foodmandu to order sushi, sashimi, seafood and more. Delivery: 7am-10pm.

ORZK
Head to the ORZK Facebook page to order delicious middle eastern/multi-cuisine vegan and vegetarian dishes. Get the ‘Make Your Own Pizza’ or the ORZK signature Sun Cake. Delivery: 7am-6pm.

Def Ar Zindagi
The 2016 Indian coming of age drama starring Aara Bhat, Deepa Dhangrav is back around a budding filmmaker Kish with unexplored emotional issues stemming from her troubled childhood and her journey to gaining new perspective in life. The award-winning movie directed by Gauri Shinde has Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan in a pivotal role as Kish’s psychiatrist.

Our Pick
Vårtalabiktha maadhù h inhisa, dhurjavavatra, shaajna bhaakto, jhikmimurana abhavatana sasherek vo vartalabikthakakar udaluran bhaakto chë mëna bhaal h탈안론인 팩스 나날레

Nepal Saithar
Saratho tasa sahyna pradhivaadh maadhESA
Sahyna tasa pradhivaadh

Quarantine Dining
Mamagoto Nepal
Enjoy delicious pan-Asian food from Mamagoto, a restaurant that serves variety of Asian fusion dishes. Order Spring Rolls, Soups, Dumplings, Ramen and more from Foodmandu. Delivery: 12pm-6.30pm.

BECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI
KIRPA JOSHI

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UP WHERE THE AIR IS CLEAR

Photographs of Kathmandu Valley with air pollution removed by the coronavirus lockdown

Abhushan Gautam

The reduction of vehicular emission due to the COVID-19 lockdown has cleaned the air over Nepal and northern India. So much so that the Himalaya is visible from Chandigarh, Kangchenjungas visible from Siliguri. And for the first time in many years, Mt Everest can be seen again from Kathmandu Valley even though it is 200 km away.

Despite the sharp reduction in fossil fuel consumption due to restricted mobility, air quality of Kathmandu did not improve as much as expected in April. The reason was wildfires in Dhading, Nuwakot and Chitwan in early April and open garbage burning in the Valley, as well as crossborder haze.

The lockdown, however, did prove that we can improve Kathmandu’s air quality by reducing vehicular emissions, which contribute 78% of the particulate in the ambient air.

These breathtaking images were taken from Chobar in Kathmandu Valley on 10 May on a remarkably clear evening.
Bhaktapur’s COVID-19 heroes
A group of volunteers is doing work with coronavirus that no one else wants to do.

Monika Deupala

When a 29-year-old woman died at Dhulikhel Hospital on Saturday, her family was grief-stricken. The woman, identified as Arun Saiju, volunteered in the COVID-19 task force. She died in the hospital as she was being treated for COVID-19.

Arun Saiju was a volunteer at the COVID-19 task force. She died in the hospital as she was being treated for COVID-19. Her family and friends were grief-stricken.

The story of Nepal’s first COVID-19 fatality
The country’s high maternal mortality rate intersects with the coronavirus pandemic.

Laxmi Basnet

The pregnant 29-year-old woman from Barahi was living in Kathmandu. She was eight months pregnant when she was admitted to the hospital. She died on Saturday morning.

The ministry of Health had to intervene, and with the help of volunteers, she was taken to the electric crematorium at Pashupati. She was then cremated as per the wishes of her family.

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From Bhutanese refugee to coronavirus caregiver

After 16 years in a refugee camp in Nepal, Lakmi Biswa is saving lives of COVID-19 patients in the United States

Gopal Gartoula in Pennsylvania

Lakmi Biswa was four years old when her father carried her on his shoulder across the border to India, joining other Bhutanese forced out of their country. The refugees were packed into trucks and dumped in Nepal’s Bajia district.

Born in Phentongling, Lakmi grew up in a refugee camp in India. She was among 100,000 other Nepali-speaking driven out by the Bhutan regime starting 1990. Lakmi spent 16 years in a bamboo shed in Sector 5 of Sanischare refugee camp, and went to a school supported by the United National High Commission for Refugees

She had just started college in Biratnagar when her family was brought to the United States in 2008 under an international third-country resettlement program. The US took a bulk of the refugees, while fewer numbers were settled in Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the UK.

Lakmi continued her undergraduate studies, working part-time to pay for her education. She is now enrolled in a medical science course at the University of Kansas and works at the Adventist Shwezwan Mission where she has to care for COVID-19 patients.

The US state of Kansas has over 8,000 confirmed cases, and is seeing a daily addition of 400 new infections. The statewide death toll has crossed 186.

In March, Lakmi Biswa suddenly got a call from Bollywood actress Priyanka Chopra after being selected among five female frontline workers in the fight against the coronavirus. It was the real Priyanka Chopra, and she asked about how her nursing job taking care of coronavirus patients was going. “How are you coping?” asked the celebrity star, who was Miss World in 2000, has acted in Hollywood films like ‘My Father’s Birthday,’ and is a UNICEF Goodwill ambassador, and has her own child welfare foundation in India.

“I told Priyanka that I know how it feels for a very sick person not to have relatives nearby, and most of my patients also do not have their near and dear ones with them because of the pandemic,” she says. “I try to be there for my patients, but it makes me very emotional because of my own loss. Lakmi Biswa is a single mother, and is raising a three-year-old daughter. She says of her long journey as a refugee child from Bhutan to America. “I have seen a lot in my life, there has been a suffering and loss. But that gives me strength to face the latest crisis. It motivates me even more to serve others.”

Travellers stuck in Nepal help locals in need

Foreigners refuse repatriation flights and help Nepalis affected by the COVID-19 lockdown

Sonia Awale

Foreign embassies have delivered most of their nationals stuck in Nepal by the lockdown in the past two months. But with flights from Kathmandu cancelled for at least another month, remaining foreigners have decided to stay on and help Nepalis affected by the lockdown.

As the pandemic raged through Europe, the United States and new Brail, many travellers who found themselves trapped in Nepal turned to their embassies for help, as they have little retum and repatriated, and decided to stay on in Pokhara, Kathmandu, Kalimpong and Manang.

One of them is Austrian graphic designer Tom Claar who has been in Pokhara since late February and has decided to stay back even though his country is easing its restrictions on movement.

A team from Chy Va Austria and its Nepali branch have been carrying out the “Tuesdays of life” campaign to help poor families in Pokhara with essential supplies such as rice, turmeric, salt, oil, and soap to last them a month. The city has been hit because many have lost their income in the tourism industry.

A few 75 family members have benefited from the charity and 31 more are on the waiting list. The team wants to continue with the food distribution every week and donations have been coming in from all over the world, including Austria, Norway, France, Russia, Spain, Italy and Switzerland.

Claar says: “We support one family for a full month and we are grateful for all the help we have received. We could do this for as long as needed and stay in Nepal longer to help.” adds Claar who has been volunteering with the non-profit

HELPING HANDS: by (Arty) Jhalak (centre) with one of the trekking guide's family who received daily essentials to tide them over during the lockdown.

Clay’s, since 2014 and spends five months a year in Nepal. Briton Lesley D Jhalak is also letting it out in Nepal until she can return to Bangkok where she is a freelance writer and photographer.

She regularly volunteers in Nepal at Kag Chode Monastery in Kagbeni and Pokhara.

On the fifth day of the 2015 earthquake she provided essential commodities for 12 families of trekking guides and porters living in Kathmandu. But fundraising has not been easy.

“Unlike the earthquake when there was an outsourcing donations from around the world, this time it has been difficult to ask for help because everyone is affected by the COVID-18,” says Jhalak who is now working on establishing a sponsorship program in which donors can choose a specific family to support for a longer term.

She adds: “Once the lockdown is over, we are also looking to provide them with training such as cooking and English language classes so that they are not solely dependent on moonlighting expectations for their livelihood.” In Kathmandu’s Bhemoni, Spaniards Jesus Trujillo and Mercedes Banos with a local guide spent three weeks identifying families in need and providing them with daily essentials and cash to help them tide over the coronavirus lockdown.

“Trujillo and Banos had arrived in Kathmandu in early March from India for a visa-run and were not expecting to stay beyond 10 days. After realising the lockdown has hit the poorest in the country, they decided to start a project ‘helping families in Kathmandu’.

“This is my first time in Nepal and the experience has been quite intense but at the end of the day when you see people smile because of the support they have received in this difficult time, all of it is worth it,” says Trujillo who works with museums in the Netherlands.

“My first time in Nepal was during the earthquake. In fact I had arrived just a day before the disaster and I ended up helping with cleaning up rubble,” recalls Banos who is a personal yoga instructor back home. “And here I’m back in Nepal as we face another crisis. It’s like my destiny to be here.”

Elsewhere, there are still many tourists and travellers making the best of their time in Nepal while they wait to get back home. Despite the first three COVID-19 fatalities they still consider Nepal safer than many other places in the world.

Vazquez is a data scientist from Mexico City and has been stranded in Pokhara since the second week from March. With no embassy here in Nepal he has to travel to India for a possible repatriation flight.

“Both Mexican embassy hasn’t been very responsive towards their travelling citizens in this time of need and going to India isn’t an option either, I will be in more danger of contracting the virus there,” he told Times on the phone.

Khasan Famur from Holland had come to Nepal for a few days, but had to stay back in January. He took a month-long yoga instructor course and trekked to Everest Base Camp before settling in Pokhara due to the lockdown.

He says: “I know the health system here is much more fragile compared to back home but I feel settled here and peaceful. The hospitality of people here has added to my decision to ride out the crisis in Nepal.”
Uncertainties for Nepali overseas students with COVID-19

Nepali students waiting to join colleges abroad for 2020 session are in limbo

Alisha Sijapati

Just when Nepali students thought 2020 was going to be their year, the coronavirus happened. Preparing to go overseas for higher studies, they have all been left in a lurch, uncertain about their future.

Like millions of other students around the world who had been enrolled for the new academic year in August, Nepali students fear they have to put their dreams on hold. The lockdown in Nepal, an indefinite ban on flights and uncertainty about whether universities will open physically or not, 2020 looks bleak.

Arun Shrestha has got a scholarship to study liberal arts as an undergraduate at Harvard University. Since receiving an acceptance offer, the teenager’s excitement has turned into doubt.

“I received my admission decision in late March, and I was working on my IELTS, applying for a visa and getting documents ready, but because of the pandemic, everything is shut down,” said Shrestha from his hometown, Nawapar, where he is stuck because of the lockdown.

Bhagwantra Subba who was on a six-year scholarship from school in Nepal, was looking forward to pursuing her Bachelor’s degree in Rochester, New York later this year. Her plans are also up in the air.

Numerous universities all over the world have already planned to postpone the academic session to January 2021, while others have gone online despite the time difference. Many US universities have given admitted students the option of a deferment.

Subba, who initially thought of deferring, is now considering to take online classes even if the time difference would be inconvenient. She says, “I will be quite challenging, especially considering that a lot of my classes will be discussion-based on Zoom.”

However, if the travel ban is lifted, both Subba and Shrestha say they plan to attend in-person class at their US universities.

There are pros and cons of online classes, and a lot depends on the subject the students are taking. Some demand more field and practical work, and these would be unsuitable for distance learning.

Even Nepali students already abroad, cannot physically attend classes because of movement restrictions, Shantosh Limchhane who is a three-year student pursuing Bachelor’s in Electrical Engineering at Victoria University in Melbourne is finding it difficult to study from home and work at the same time.

“My subject requires me to be in the lab most of the time, so it is difficult to restrict myself to online work,” he explains. “I could have been more innovative with my classroom in the lab, and could explore more. Also it is unfair that I still have to pay full tuition fees.”

In a bid to revive its in-person classes by September, Central European University in Vienna is trying its best to accommodate all incoming students focusing more on individual solutions. Austria has already eased its strict lockdown, and plans to welcome students with physical distancing and other precautions.

In a pre-orientation session in Zoom on Wednesday, Júlia Kaszálóvá, Director of the Cultural Heritage Studies Programme at Central European University confirmed to students that despite the ongoing global pandemic, the department will try to make classes more engaging online, and cut hourly lectures and initiate a creative way of learning to engage students from their home countries.

Also, the university is open to accepting deferment looking at the global pandemic.

“We don’t know what will happen in the next few months, but physically, digitally and intellectually, we’ll try our best to help our students,” said Kaszálóvá.

Harvard University has also decided to resume its classes from the autumn, but is still weighing on the option of whether to do it online or in-person classes.

“All pre-orientation programmes were held online,” Ratnesh told Nepal Times. “All these sessions were conducted at around midnight or early morning in Nepal. The time difference is not so feasible.”

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