F

Five months after the first COVID-19 case was detected in Kathmandu, and after many experts were puzzled about why the virus was not spreading, parts of Nepal and Kathmandu city are now in the vortex of the pandemic.

Hospitals in Tashi cities are fast filling up with symptomatic cases, and doctors say patients requiring ICU treatment and ventilator support are on the rise.

On Thursday, Kathmandu Valley recorded its highest daily rise of 87 positive cases. All beds are occupied in hospitals with designated wards for coronavirus patients. Overwhelmed, doctors are sending symptomatic patients to home isolation. Some were diverted to Kathmandu Medical College’s facility in Dhumal and Ayurveda Hospital in Kumari.

"Self-isolation at home has worked elsewhere but in Nepal where people don’t strictly follow safety measures, patients are constituted, and there is a lack of proper rescue mechanism, it might not be the best strategy," cautions Rabindra Murti, founder head of the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division. "It would be better to move asymptomatic cases to available government training centres, non-profit institutions, and if needed even hotels and hostels."

As of Thursday, Nepal has a total of 21,750 cases with 6,296 active. So far, 65 people have lost their lives, five of them on 8 August alone. Cases in Kathmandu Valley have reached 876, mostly in the capital city. Eight people have been infected with coronavirus at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Law and so has minister Gyanaendra Kunwar Yadav in Province 2.

Says public health expert Samrat Dixit: "Local governments and security personnel should be facilitating self-isolation at home. Admitting asymptomatic cases in hospitals deprives resources, as it exposes mildly infected patients to severe cases."

There are now 66 ICU cases across Nepal with 28 just in Bagmati Province where three patients are on ventilator support. Given the steep rise in symptomatic and severe COVID-19 cases, all 1,272 ICU beds nationwide and stock of 900 ventilators could be used up.

The rate of infection in Kathmandu is increasing leading to a difficult situation which could lead to a shortage of hospital beds, equipment and health workers," warned Jaydevwar Gurum of the Health Ministry during the daily press briefing on Thursday, appealing to the public to remain at home and follow safety measures.

Says Sudhakar Buskut, a physician at Patan Academy of Health Sciences: "We are seeing a worrying surge in typical COVID-19 symptoms with advanced pneumonia, unlike before when most cases were asymptomatic and had co-morbidity."

He says the rise of symptomatic cases is due to re-infection due to seasonal flu, typhoid and dengue, common during the monsoon. Others have pointed to high co-morbidity contributing to possible community transmission.

But despite the surge in symptomatic cases, health professionals have advised against re-imposing a blanket curfew, fearing a 'smart lockdown' where localities with cluster outbreaks are sealed off and tested - while strictly enforcing masks in public places and preventing crowds.

So far, lockdowns have been re-imposed in four Tashi districts, and semi-lockdowns in parts of nine others where there has been a surge in cases.

"We are already experiencing semi-lockdown of sorts because of floods and landslides. A lockdown now will cause more harm than good. The only way to fight this pandemic is behavioral reform, surveillance and isolation," says Muratani.

Indeed, most experts agree that a focus on the coronavirus should not shift attention away from more devastating conditions that can affect people’s well-being because of economic collapse.

Soma Awaile
High-risk remittance

The Nepali government knows how much this country’s economy is dependent on remittances from Nepalis working abroad. It pays the salaries of politicians and bureaucrats from the money they send home. They should also know how vulnerable the economy is to fluctuations in the Persian Gulf or Southeast Asia, or global emergencies like this pandemic. The Iraq War, the 2003 SARS outbreak, and the 2011 tsunami in the Straits of Hormuz between Iran and the United States have highlighted this fact.

In 2004, twelve Nepali workers employed by contractors at a US military base in Iraq were shot and killed on their way to the airport. Fourteen Nepali workers guarding the Canadian Embassy in Kuwait were killed in 2009 in a US military operation in Kandahar.

Hundreds of Nepalis have been evacuated from Libya when civil war broke out there in 2011.

And when the massive blast that destroyed Beirut on Tuesday wiped out the homes of 250,000 of the estimated 300,000 to 500,000 Nepali domestic workers and protectors who were caught up in the horror. Because Nepalis see now scattered all over the globe, many have not been able to return to their jobs in this country.

The vulnerability of Nepal’s economy to overseas remittances is magnified by the fact that many of these workers are still overseas workers, with a 20% equivalence of their GDP coming from remittances.

More than 65% of Nepal’s population is working abroad. Of these 3.5-3 million, two for every three live in India, 26% work in just four Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and Kuwait).

This, of an estimated 200,000 have returned from India. And of the $400 billion who have registered with Nepal’s missions abroad to come home, only 30,000 have been repatriated since June.

For the past few years, the number of Nepalis migrating overseas for work has been steadily declining, although remittances held steady. The pandemic near-terminally reduced that income.

The monthly remittances through official channels in April this year were half the amount for April 2019, although it has picked up since. The World Bank estimates that remittances globally this year will fall 20% below last year’s level, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) puts the losses at 28% for Nepal as its overseas workers are laid off or cut reduced salaries.

The $7 billion a year that Nepali workers abroad send home helps pay for Nepal’s imports, of which the highest proportion (46%) is petroleum. At the current level of $7 billion, savings have shown that migrant earnings help pay for food and education for children in Nepal.

Nepal’s absolute poverty declined by half by 2017 in the last 20 years. Most of this is credited to increased household incomes from migrant workers. A fall in remittances could set Nepal back a decade in terms of gains in male and child survival, nutrition, and education. The long-term impact of the remittances could be re-engaged in agriculture to grow food on land that has been cleared of forest.

In the face of this, the government is being focused on the country’s national food production. It has launched a campaign to boost local production and self-sufficiency.

The government also plans to encourage remittances from the country’s overseas workers and boost local production. The government has launched a campaign to boost local production and self-sufficiency.

Vijay Pant

Online packages

Walkabout with Anil Gaijatra

Nepali Times summons a new feature to the online world. "Walkabout with Anil Gaijatra" will go out to give an overview of the topic for the readers. The show will take you to the various interesting places and the experiences of the feature in the COVID-19 world. The story will be told by the next great Nepali Times.

Tiger Trek

Shane on the poachers but a greater shame on the judicial system that does not do its job properly and goes on with such nonsense. "Law makes Nepal have fewer tiger poachers." Tapan Neupane, (1212)

Sun Chemberai

Kanchenjunga glaciers

Very captivating and witty insights on the Himalayas. "Kanchenjunga glacier" is one of the most spectacular glaciers in the world. The show will take you to the different parts of the glacier and show how it has changed over time.

Goonwar Rimal

In search of Yeti

I am running through years of memorable but also some unappreciated and unexpected experiences. "In search of Yeti" is a fascinating and thrilling story of a man who has searched for the legendary creature for years.

Bevvy Nives

COVID-19 and children

This is a comprehensive and enlightening discussion about children and the COVID-19 pandemic. "COVID-19 and children" will take you through the different stages of the pandemic and how it has affected children in Nepal.

Maja Biderman

Solar vs Hydro

Don’t think solar is a better option. "Solar vs Hydro" is an informative and engaging discussion about the pros and cons of solar and hydroelectric power. The show will take you through the different aspects of both and help you make an informed decision.

Gyuma Dondup

B downloads to be as serious as it can get. "B downloads to be as serious as it can get" is a comprehensive and informative discussion about the downloading culture and its impact on society. The show will take you through the different aspects of downloading and help you make an informed decision.

Kalya Para

School closure

I wouldn’t say it's lost. "School closure" is a comprehensive and informative discussion about the decision to close schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The show will take you through the different aspects of the closure and help you make an informed decision.

Sujat Dhul

Food imports

Government should subsidize agro entrepreneurships. "Food imports" is a comprehensive and informative discussion about the government’s efforts to subsidize agro entrepreneurships. The show will take you through the different aspects of the subsidy and help you make an informed decision.

Tez Thapa

The way I see it is the only solution for Nepal to focus on agro products rather than continuing to be guillotine about cheap and fast foods. "The way I see it is the only solution for Nepal to focus on agro products rather than continuing to be guillotine about cheap and fast foods." Nigawar Tenzin

Nathan Nogen

It might help to invest in the support network for local farm good: storage, transportation, irrigation and more greenhouse at higher altitudes. "It might help to invest in the support network for local farm good: storage, transportation, irrigation and more greenhouse at higher altitudes." Nigawar Tenzin

Most popular on Twitter

Most commented

Lax laws make Nepal haven for tiger poachers

By Sujat Dhul

Despite being the first country to declare its tiger population extinct, Nepal remains one of the most important centers for tiger-related activities in the world. As Nepal has declared itself tiger-free, it is highly unlikely that it has not been a victim of poaching activities.

Nepali Times

Lax laws make Nepal haven for tiger poachers

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Many of the articles printed in the Kinjal continue to remain relevant even 20 years later. In the following paragraphs, we will highlight some of the key issues of the day.

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Preserving King Birendra's family home

20 years after palace massacre, visitors to Shree Sadan can soon see rooms exactly as they were then

Alisha Sijapati

When Narayanhiti Palace was opened to the public in 2006 soon after Nepal was declared a republic, Nepalis flocked in to see what daily life of the royals looked like. They were not impressed.

Many thought they would also see Tribhuvan Sadan, the building where the 2001 family massacre took place in which ten members of the royal family were killed, and which was later demolished.

The pink pagoda-shaped building with a tower designed by American architect Benjamin Polk was a ceremonial structure for official functions, and there was not much to see there about the private life of royals.

Now, the Narayanhiti Palace Museum is set to open Shree Sadan, King Birendra's private family residence, which has been kept intact since the massacre at 8:45 pm on Friday, 13 June 2001.

Nepalis got an exclusive sneak preview of Shree Sadan this week, and it is like a time capsule – Prince Niraj's room still has his clothes hung on the walls, the arrow holes have been left to show the bullet holes, and the windows have been left open to show the bullet wounds.

The palace was open to the public on Wednesday, and it will be open on Fridays for the next few weeks.

King Birendra's family home was the last stop on the tour, and it was a somber reminder of the brutal massacre that took place there 20 years ago.

The building was fully restored and preserved, and visitors were able to see the rooms exactly as they were left.

Guests were greeted by a sign that read, "Narayanhiti Palace Museum - Shree Sadan - King Birendra's private family residence." They were then taken on a guided tour of the building, which included a visit to Prince Niraj's room.

The room was furnished with the same furniture and belongings that were there when the massacre occurred. Visitors could see the bullet holes in the walls and the blood stains on the floor.

The tour continued to the king's study room, where there were pictures of him and his family, along with a model of the palace.

The final stop was the king's bedroom, which was decorated with photographs and memorabilia.

Guests were given the opportunity to ask questions of the guide, who was able to provide detailed information about the history of the palace and the massacre.

The tour ended with a visit to the musium, where visitors could see artifacts and exhibits related to the history of Nepal and the royal family.

After the tour, visitors were able to take pictures in the hall, and the museum was open for visitors to explore.

The opening of Shree Sadan has been delayed by the pandemic and bureaucratic hurdles. But Director of the Narayanhiti Palace Museum Shrestha Nishal says they are being sorted out: "There are a lot of details and miscommunication, but we don't want to drag it any further. There is much more of an emotional connection with the royal family in this building, and it is a seeing memory of the tragedy."
Why Nepal is stuck

New book by ex-World Bank adviser blames state capture by politico-business syndicates

Kunda Dixit

A s a former broadcast journalist and ex-employee of the World Bank’s Nepal office, Rajiv Upadhyay (painted, right) is the right person at the right time to come out with an account of the political economy of Nepal’s development since 1990.

The title of Upadhyay’s book released on 5 August, Gahlot and Cartelle: An Up Close Look at Nepal’s Turbulent Transitions and Disrupted Development, pretty much sums up its content. During his tenure at the Bank between 1995-2018, Upadhyay served as the eyes and ears for successive bosses in their dealings with Nepal’s politicians and bureaucrats.

The result is an insider look at how the powerful multidimensional lender interacted with Nepal’s officialdom. Over the years, the Bank has on the one hand been criticized for meddling too much in state functions, and on the other for not meddling enough when Nepal was in deep crisis. So, it must be doing some things right.

The book begins in the heady days of the mid-1990s when democracy and the market economy brought hope that Nepal could finally take a great leap forward. However, some of its founders took ‘great leap forward’ to mean something else and waged a vicious war. Upadhyay’s first task at the Bank was to work on a report titled Political Economy of Reform in Nepal which concluded that politicians with short-term time horizons, a rent-seeking culture, and vested interest groups were preventing reforms. Sound familiar?

Gahlot and Cartelle takes us through the early reform years of the 1990s, the insurgency, Gyanendra’s reign, the peace process, and finally the new federal system – with Nepal’s politico-business nexus at the thread running through it all.

The book is a roll call of World Bank experts who visited Nepal: Astrid Ghanzi, Mac Maharaj, Emmanuel Tumusiime. There were Bank’s successive South Asia chiefs like Misko Nolhelm and Prathil Pathi, as well as past Country Directors that Upadhyay advised: Hans Rottenbuber, Ken Olstish, and Joannes Zutw.

They all came and went at various historical milestones in Nepal’s past 20 years, and Upadhya has revealing anecdotes about their meetings with Nepali officials. Rottenbuber arrived in Nepal in 2000 just as it was about to hit the fan (in his own words) over the Bank’s insistence on reforms in Nepal Bank Limited and Nepal Electric Board which were being bled dry by willful defectors.

Nadler, he says, were civil servants with cabal protection, as the Nepal Times reported at the time. They were so powerful that they could collude to get the GID Asa to frame reformers on trumped up charges, and baned on Supreme Court justices to convict them. Upadhyay becomes close to Madhav Ghimire at the Foreign Aid Division of the Finance Ministry who fought hard for reforms, and later in his career conducted the tricky 2013 elections. He was killed in a car crash in 2016.

Madhav Ghimire was in a panel discussion with David Dollar of the report, Answering Aid, which the Bank had asked me to moderate in 2000. Upadhya’s account of that conference reminded me of something I had long forgotten: how difficult it was to get government officials in the audience to ask a question. Ghimire was irritated because he had coached them to be pro-active. Nepal’s misfortune is that we do not make bureaucrats of the calibre, and integrity of Madhav Ghimire anymore. Upadhyay recalls that Ghimire went to Manakam Temple in 1996 to ask for his wish to be fulfilled. But he did not have a personal request for the priest, he asked for divine help to complete the Melamchi Water Supply Project. Twenty years later, plagued by corruption and mismanagement, the project is still not in hand.

Upadhyay played a behind the scenes role in setting up the Society of Economic Journalists of Nepal (SEJON) with a bunch of bright young boys, some of whom like Animesh Bhakta, Pratik Pradhan, Kiran Nepal have gone on to become editors of influential media.

Gahlot and Cartelle has some fascinating chapters on how even an honest prime minister like K P Sharma could be removed from power by the cartels to appoint Tilak Rimal as Rastriya Bank governor. Some at the World Bank office in Kathmandu described this as a way to get rid of an economist in charge of the first department. Finance Minister Mahesh Acharya resigned over the appointment, and Rimal had so much clout he got his dismissal overturned by the Supreme Court.

The next Country Director Upadhyay worked under was the soft-spoken, not-often-speaking Ken Olshish. He wrote surprisingly critical op-eds, including for Nepal Times, but in one of these to Acharya that defended the government raising fuel prices that triggered student protests. Olshish summoned the student leaders to his office, and convinced them about why they needed to do it.

Among the student leaders was Gagan Thapa, now an opposition MP. Upadhyay is also critical of the Bank’s heavy-handed approach. His chief economic advisor, Prabhat Kafle, had once boasted in DC that he was ‘bigger than Ghandi’ and carbs of Acharya that he had hoodwinked him by inflating guerrilla numbers four fold.

Experts the Bank had invited severely analysed Nepal’s malaise. Aatish Ghanzi, the author of Fixing Failed States, who is now at the University of Chicago, got his finger on the root cause: over-politicisation, last minute problem fixing and the short-term, short performance.

Mac Maharaj, a confidantes of Nelson Mandela, advised Nepal not to follow South Africa’s example in the peace talks. Public finance expert Emmanuel Tumusiime said ‘lack of money is not a problem in Nepal, it’s how we spend it’. Even as far back at 1964, an early World Bank consultant had concluded about Nepal: ‘The central government in Nepal is not conditioned to get things done... money is certainly not the problem’.

Upadhyay, de profundis. ‘For all the outward signs of progress, our structural problems remain fundamentally unaddressed since the early 1980s... the World Bank economists could write about poverty in a more critical manner.’ Indeed, Nepal’s progress is stymied because of the capture of the politicians. We know what the problems are, we know the solutions. Nepal just does not have the political will and capability to implement them.
Nepalis caught up in Beirut blast recount horror

For the mostly female domestic workers in Lebanon, the disaster comes on top of economic woes

Some of the estimated 2,200 Nepalis in Lebanon, most of them female domestic workers in Beirut, have been injured in the massive blast on Tuesday that killed more than 150 people and injured over 5,000.

However, Nepalis on social media groups in Lebanon report that most are safe, and even the ones that do not need hospital admission:

“From the window, I saw the first explosion but I did not make much of it. But the second one was huge and it felt like the building would collapse. It felt like a huge earthquake,” recalls Sanju Waija, who was in a church. “Something bit me hard and I could not tell what was happening. I went down seven floors and a Lebanese friend drove me to hospital.”

Since the injury was not severe and the hospital was dealing with many serious patients, Waija was sent to a pharmacy which bandaged the injury on her arm.

Waija was taken to hospital by Nepali domestic worker Premila, who also remembers the first explosion as not being so loud. “But the second one was so big it shook my house,” Premila said on the phone.

Rita, another domestic worker, who lives near the explosion area said: “The explosion was the loudest I have ever heard. I still cannot bear properly. My hands are still shaking. The glass in our windows are all broken. My employers were also afraid, and thought there would be another explosion.”

Lebanon was already in the midst of a pre-coronavirus economic crisis which was exacerbated by the lockdown, and has impacted migrant workers more than the pandemic itself.

There have been street protests, and migrant workers were already struggling because of the collapse of the Lebanese pound which has lost over 80% of its value against the dollar.

Ashok Thapa, Chairman of the Non-resident Nepali Association of Lebanon told Nepali Times: “The pandemic is a secondary concern for workers here given the relatively low number of cases, although things have deteriorated in the past week.”

Lebanon re-imposed the lockdown last week after cases started rising. Not all Nepali workers are similarly impacted. Those who work in US dollars are relatively better off, although there are some who are working for reduced salaries. But Nepali workers earning in local currency have been hit hard by the devaluation.

Those who work part-time in multiple households and live in rental accommodations have been worst affected by the economic crisis. Thapa adds: “At least those who live with the employers or work in companies do not have to worry about rent or food expenses.”

Rama, a live in domestic worker is aware that she is lucky to have a job. “Every day I have to go home to see her like family. When I heard my employer was unable to afford basic foodstuffs, I asked them whether I should start making plans to go back to Nepal. But my employer assured me that they can afford to keep me,” she said.

Rama describes that supermarket prices are different these days, with limits on the quantity of items that can be purchased owing to shortages, such as only one packet of rice or two apples per visit.

Premila is undocumented and lives with fellow Nepalis in a rented apartment. When the blast came, she ran out, part-time workers during the pandemic, employers are reluctant to hire us for fear of the virus,” she says. “The price of rice has doubled, and we are here in a small rented room, some of us not able to work and we are reduced our meals. I don’t have much of an appetite these days anyway.”

Premila is one of the 30 Nepalis in Lebanon who have registered to return home, and it will be a struggle to pay the $700 air fare. This is a smaller number than other countries because of the lack of jobs and the spreading coronavirus back in Nepal, as well as the high air fares amid the Lebanese currency crisis. Others are stuck with employers who are not in a position to clear their debts.

Many Nepali women have come to Lebanon despite a ban on domestic workers going to West Asia, some had been able to get home for several years to see their children and families because of the fear that they will not be allowed back out. However, last year the government allowed current workers — many working in Lebanon — to return to their jobs after home visits.

Nabibank

Nabibank has been awarded Nepal’s Best Bank for the EuroMoney magazine’s Awards for Best in the World for the second time in a row. The bank was awarded on the basis of services and credit growth among others. EuroMoney’s Awards for Excellence was introduced in 1990, during which time EuroMoney has distributed awards to international, regional and national level banks for their contribution to banking services.

Everest Bank

Everest Bank has handed over an Auto Parameterizer and Recompressor to Lumbini Institute of Ophthalmology’s Shirin Ram.

Hydropower agreement

WAPCOS has signed an agreement with NREGA to provide financial assistance to the tune of 5,000 JCCs.

Bok and NIC

Bok and NIC/IFC have formed a $10 million climate bond to finance renewable energy projects.

Covid-19

President of the Nepal Swasthik insurance company Arun Shrestha handed over the financial assistance to the NCU Krishnapur District Medical Officer.

NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.

nepaltimes.com
WOW Virtual Nepal
On the occasion of the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, WOW (Worldwide Online Virtual Events) and curator Malika Sajda will invite to Cinemaya’s Griffith and Lupita Nyong’o, Nepali women who have championed the destiny of indigenous women and have strived to advocate for indigenous knowledge and culture. Visit for more information. 9 August, 9pm-9am

Sunday Sessions
This International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, writer, researcher and Indigenous activist Tahlia Tres Darga will join Pradipika to speak about his deep involvement with the Nepali Indigenous movement and how he took up writing to tell stories of Bolivia. Stay tuned for the Facebook live. 9 August, 11am

Quilting workshop
Looking for a creative outlet? Participate in a quilting workshop with Happy Hands Nepal and learn how to quilt! 9 August, 11am-1pm (Happy Hands Nepal, 01488877)

Art 25
Satty Media Art collective’s special painting competition Art 25 is virtual this year. The painting skills right from the comfort of your home from home, Kathmandu, can participate. Sign up for the virtual live painting competition at bits/rtr/Artpine by 15 August.

Liberation
Not a writer? Down load and listen to audiobooks of thousands of poems and poetry in the public domain, read by volunteers from all over the world.

Kurj grasag
Kurjgrassag – In Nepal creates animated educational content on scientific, technological, cultural, philosophical and psychological subjects. If teachers, parents, or curious viewers are looking for concise educational material, head on to the Kurjgrassag YouTube channel.

Imago Dei Cafe
The menu, nourish by Imago Dei, features a limited option for each weekend. Get thoughtfully created with a healthy balance of nutrition and great taste. Healthy food was never so good.
Kag Packets, Naxal (311164)

Hotel Kaski Darbar
Dine at award-winning Japanese eatery at Hotel Kaski Darbar. Do not miss the grilled park in Ama park.
Kastropahal (615543)

Phalano Coffee Ghar
This casual wine serves great coffee, filling sandwiches and special lunch goods at record time and attentive service.
Pokhara (5155665)

Chez Caroline
Chez caroline from the street shop and bistro, is the place to visit for authentic French and continental cuisines in Nepal. The restaurant offers catering and takeaway services too. Try the Feuilletades, croissants and custard pastry. Tasted with lovely cream and hot chocolate sauce.
Amita Martin (6153207/ 9847893363)

Le Mirich
At Le Mirich, bold and exciting flavors of Indian cuisine are quality preserved in the refined and sophisticated tiled setting. Gluten free and vegetarian options are available here.
Lalit Nath, Pokhara (51532497)

Air Quality Index
Kathmandu, 31 July - 6 August

Google Heritage tour
Qatar Airways’ virtual adventure and explore world heritage sites through Google in UNESCO World Heritage Virtual Tour 360° explore the world heritage site, Khao Phra Bat in Thailand, the Jassawas Cave in India, the Archaeological Area of Pompeii, Stonehenge, and more.

The Doors
A platform for successful Nepali entrepreneurs to share their ideas and insights on the world of business. Find the Doors on Listen Notes and YouTube.

Heme Katha
The web series shows unusual stories of adventurous people in the form of short documentaries. Head on to their YouTube channel to start.

Our Pick

Our Pick

The pattern of pairing showers with sunny spells continues. Today remains mostly sunny with a chance of a shower in the afternoon. The temperature is expected to range between 21° and 29° with the maximum temperature at Kathmandu pegged to 31°. Caution come will probably increase on Sunday as more monsoon trough comes from the west. Rain will likely begin to moderate.

PM2.5

ONLINE ARCHIVES

DINING

Our Pick

Le Mirich
At Le Mirich, bold and exciting flavors of Indian cuisine are quality preserved in the refined and sophisticated tiled setting. Gluten free and vegetarian options are available here.
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Amita Martin (6153207/ 9847893363)
Adventures of a lone archivist

Nepali overseas worker takes it upon himself to collect as much as he can of Nepal’s historical memorabilia

Alisha Sijapati

Archiving should be a state function, but Nepal does not have a National Archive. But a Nepali working in the Gulf has himself achieved a goal that can be achieved by just one individual with a passion for history.

No one can find the original of the 1816 Sugauli Treaty anywhere. Important historical documents, like that with Tibet, China and British India are also missing. Many of them probably went up when Singh Bahadur caught fire in 1977.

Which is why Santosh Khadere has taken it upon himself to archive as much as possible of all official records, early photographs, letters and speeches from Nepal history as he can. What started out as a hobby, has now become an important contribution to archiving in Nepal for this 28-year-old Dang native and college dropout.

He has been in Abu Dhabi for the past six years, working eight nights a week. He posted so much factually incorrect news about Nepal that he started collecting digital records of the country’s past wherever he could find them on the Internet. Working 6-7 hours during the day, Khadere has built up a collection that he shares widely through his Twitter account and with regular well-researched articles in Aamroos Post.

“Being away from Nepal has made me value my homeland even more, and to stay in touch while being relevant to my roots and upbringing,” Khadere says. “In addition, it gives me the opportunity to correct historical inaccuracies, lending of facts, or deliberate lies.”

Khadere says it is thanks to the corpus of knowledge on the searchable Internet that he can do this work. Without the net it would be immensely complicated since the documents, records, news clips and film footage are scattered around the world. “It is all there on the net, you just have to know how to search for it,” he says. “But I am limited to material that is in the public domain, I don’t have the money to pay for other content.”

Khadere’s archive so far has 600 videos, 700 books and newspaper clips, numerous government letters, even invitation cards from Mohan Shumshere for a diplomatic reception at the Nepali Embassy in Barakamia Road in New Delhi in 1960. Khadere has dug up news clips from 190 years ago to piece together Rana Shumshere Rana’s affair with a Hollywood dancer, and his eventual death in the Bahamas.

“It is disappointing that our country does not have any papers related to the Kalapani border issues and whatever news has been printed in just mutilating stamping on statuses or other representations, grotesques transform their frustrations onto a rehumanized embodiment of their foes. But by doing this, they are not exemplifying a moral resolution to our own dire social and ethical behaviour by others.

Young and old alike must learn that there is not just day and night, and twilight and dawn as well. Ivan G Somalas is Director of Smithsonian/United Nations and was a former consultant with Nepal’s Ministry of Health, Industry, and tourism.

Ivan G Somalas
We have been home now for more than four months, and as a photographer, nature and wildlife photographer, the shelter in place restrictions have been encouraging. The great outdoors was always my comfort zone, and now being confined within the home has forced me to reflect on the work I was doing and explore ways to enhance it.

The world is suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic, and Nepal is also affected by the great disruption. The spread of the virus was suspectedly being controlled by the lockdown, but now it seems otherwise. The total number of cases and fatalities in Nepal continues to rise.

With all assignments and projects probably canceled for the rest of the year, I felt back on macro photography, which was what got me started into capturing images of nature and wildlife in the first place back in 2004. It was time to challenge myself again.

And where better than the small patch of grass outside my house in Kathmandu, it is alive with insects, arthropods, reptiles of various shapes and sizes walking, hopping, buzzing, fluttering, and flying around under the monsoon sky. The patch is breathing with life, especially during the rainy months, when people spend at least 30% of their time alone at the sight of insects and spiders, and we are culturally hardwired to regard them as being harmful. Some of you might get goosebumps and chill down the spine even thinking about them. I share this feeling when it comes to spiders, I admit, but these critters in the garden form an amazing urban ecosystem. The very fact that they are still around means we are not completely obliterated them with chemicals of mass destruction like insecticides.

Chromatic mammals like tigers, pandas and rhinos get all the attention in nature programs. The smaller members of the animal kingdom tend to disappear underfoot. But when we talk about conservation, forests, and wildlife, we have to include everything in it. Because they are all inherently interconnected. Even the tiniest insects are part of a larger web, each of them contributing in their small way to biodiversity and the health of nature. The spider is as important as the bat, if not more. And we are not even half aware of microscopic organisms that cannot even be seen with the human eye.

And as the COVID-pandemic has shown, we ignore nature at our own peril. The spread of nonzoonotic infectious is happening because of modern industrial society, ignoring and destroying the natural world. The biosphere is being sterilized with the urban sprawl, monoculture crops, or plantations. Factory farms are mass producing meat, and there are 25 billion chicken worldwide at any given time. Chicken bones will be the lasting legacy of the anthropocene era.

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Lockdown mornings in Kathmandu are only for me as I am awakened by the 4:00-00:00 4:00-00:00 of the Asian Kestrel that perches on the fence line of the nearby. This bird has been visiting the neighbourhood every March to April and makes its presence known far and wide.

You must have heard of the cuckoo that was pasted and on its annual 12,000km migration from southern Africa, across the Arabian Sea, the Subcontinent, and through most of Asia to the breeding ground in Mongolia—the longest bird migration ever recorded. I don’t know when our Kestrel migrates.

More morning songs of the Asian Kestrel win over the Oriental Magpie Robin’s long symphonies from a tree top which opens up the day with a beautiful brand new day. Because of the lack of traffic, the cacophony of vehicle horns, machinery, and other forms of city construction nearby is replaced by an melody silence broken only by bird songs. And if you hear them, you can also see them.

With the first rays of the sun hitting the dew middle flowers, Honey Bees are not busy busting about. A soft and moist breeze pushes through the Holy Basil, disturbing tiny speckless bees from landing on the small flowers—they navigate to land on the swaying stems while pollinizing to their tiny hair (scopae). Then they ride to the next flower to pollinate it, a process repeated over and over.

As I look outside their daily rituals, a parasitized Spider Hunting Wasp lands on the ground, and moves around from one shaded area to the other searching for prey and ultimately making its way to my high before flying away. A moment later it is dragging a paralyzed spider towards its burrow in a nearby grass patch. The wasp will lay its egg on the abdomen of the spider, and the larva will feed on the spider as it grows. While I explore this magnificent macro world, the life cycle of insects become more interesting, and I realize how human disturbance can hamper a species, and affect the food chain.
This is also the season for butterflies, and they are flitting about in force. I observe a caterpillar constructing a cocoon cage before going into the pupa stage in the metamorphosis. The constructed cages look very elaborate. I found it extremely interesting to see how the cocoon cage of the caterpillar was hard to see and was almost six steps. As I put some distance between myself and the subject, I noticed more life forms and in their smaller world.

The documentation through video also became a priority during this time. I started using a jumping spider, and this became a moment for the next two days as it got into the wrong interaction from a perspective. I started filming it from a distance, which came from a dead leaf where it was sheltering, scanning around for prey, and starting again and again. Documenting nature is difficult when you are filming on your subjects, and the timing is not always yours. This is how it should be and, both in the process, a process.

As I look around the garden for other bugs to take portraits of, I am surrounded by a number of species of spiders in such a small area. One of these is a black and white jumping spider, making it well. The engineering instinct with which it instinctively weaves the silk into the web with its hind legs was fascinating. The size of the web was not much to take up my attention, from time to time I look up at the nearby tree for their next move. They are in the White-eye making a hopping flight from another tree to the distance. The days close with a show of parakeets streaking across the sky on their way to their resting tree. They are always on the same flight path. It is on the bank of a rushing waterfall, announcing their presence with a low sound.

They seem to be proliferating. Ichangus and Nagarjunus have resident Sky-blue Parakeets, and on the eastern edge of Kathbandhu Valley there are Kose-Kinged Parakeets along with Alexandrain Parakeets. I was able to spot a Grey Trooper. White-fronted Parrot, Spotted Love, and red-winged Bulbul in the past months – birds that were relatively rare before.

Then there are the many species of butterflies, moths, damselflies, butterflies. There are insects that smartly walk on the dead leaves, and those that stay almost from surface tension. The dragonflies on their jagged flight path, the way they can glide on the flow of water while airborne, the propwash complexly sync with the flight patterns of the birds. And at night, the Black-winged Starling

Long distance travel is not on the agenda even though the lockdown has eased. They navigate their way through the maze of potted plants on the porch, and then stop away in search of a point to jump into.

The male Garden Lizards appear in the early morning sun to grace the sun, and show off their crimson head and black throat to attract females who seem to go for that kind of pigment. A Ground Skink picks its body and from a crack in the rock wall to bask in the warm sun, and I take a close look at the guy since he has seen them in such proximity in my location. The situation is also the same in the morning, and they are moving their ultra slow locomotion. If it has rained overnight they seem to want to climb the wall of the house for no explicable reason. Sometimes the sun comes up before they are where they want to go, and they dry up their eliminated bodies falling down to the grass below. These used to be lots of ground beetles that used to hunt and feast on slugs where we were kids, but it is not seen now, and it is a change.

As the day comes to a close, there are many variants of motifs that are moving in the fluorescent light in the park. The sheer number of motifs species is varying, a richness and richness of wing patterns that is much more than I ever expected. By this time, our resident barred Owlet is up and about. After being hungry all day, it is a hurry to feel and is giving a wild shriek from its perch on an electrical pole on the street. Despite becoming more and more a concrete jungle, Kathmandu still has hidden small worlds where wild life ebb on to patches of nature. It just needs a keen observer to find them, and get the reassurances that despite everything they are going about their business in a human-dominated world.

Photography

Ajay Narasingh Rana | A nature and wildlife photographer and naturelism for request and contact for booking.
Prime Minister K. P. Oli held a meeting with 20 public health experts on Tuesday to discuss steps to deal with COVID-19, especially in cities bordering India — a sign that his government is taking a react-surge in cases seriously.

Nepal reported 368 new cases on Thursday, taking the total number so far to 21,750 and the number of fatalities up by five to 65. Kathmandu Valley detected 87 new cases and now has 87 confirmed cases with six deaths.

The government this week put six districts with over 200 cases (Kathmandu, Raastahat, Kailali, Mahottari, Parsa and Doti) in the Red Zones. In Kathmandu, 72 staff of Nepal Police Headquarters tested positive and the premises are sealed off. Eight staff of the Ministry of Law, and a minister of Province 2 have tested positive.

Speaking at the interaction, Prime Minister Oli said: “We must lower the infection rate to zero, and treat those who are sick. But as long as we keep the border open, there will be more cases. So we have to test them before allowing them to travel to home districts.”

Experts present noted that although the numbers are rising, the World Health Organisation (WHO) still puts Nepal in the ‘cluster spread’ stage, where the virus is not allowing community transmission. They advised the government against re-imposing a lockdown, saying it was not a long-term solution.

Most public health experts favour a ‘smart lockdown’ where localities with cluster outbreaks are sealed off, and tested — while strictly enforcing masks in public places and curfews. On Wednesday, the government re-imposed the odd-even rule for vehicles.

Since the lockdown was lifted on 21 July, the rate of infection has increased to 5.8%, indicating rapid spread in districts bordering India where all major cities like Birgunj, Birhatmaru, Dhangadi, Nepalgunj, Janakpur and Rajgurran are under curfew.

Officials in Kathmandu Valley are also said to be considering lockdowns, but experts say it is more advisable to seal off neighbourhoods rather than a strict blanket closure.

Medical experts fear that another lockdown is likely to kill more people than the disease itself seeks to control, as people with non-coronavirus ailments cannot get to hospital for treatment, and the economy suffers even more, lowering nutrition levels of people.

Government figures show that there were 30% more child deaths in April-May this year compared to last year. Maternal mortality has also gone up because many women mothers gave birth at home instead of going to hospital. There has been a spike in measles and other infections because of delays in vaccination campaigns.

“A lockdown is not the solution to the coronavirus crisis. We must first analyse why we did not do the previous four months to take measures to control the approach,” says Sher Bahadur Pun of the Ministry of Health, “another lockdown will not make a difference.”

Pun adds that uncontrolled movement of people across districts during the lockdown with thousands crossing the Indian border to reach their homes, led to the flare-up in the infection.

“It is only going to get worse from here, especially as winter approaches,” predicts Budha Banayt of Patan Academy of Health Sciences. “We have to accept this and prepare for it, but another lockdown is only the last resort.”

Banayt says the government has to get on a war-footing to increase testing in the Terai districts which have the lowest rate of testing. This will ensure that the number of severe cases rise, develop a treatment taskforce. Hospitals should be better equipped to handle the increase in symptomatic and severe coronavirus cases being seen now, with clear treatment guidelines identifying the most effective form of therapies for Nepalis, so there is no expensive over-prescription.

As the ICU get filled up, there is an urgent need for ventilators and oxygen concentrators, Banayt adds. There are now 30 ICU patients with COVID-19 across the country, with 24 in Bagmati Province, which includes Kathmandu Valley. Banayt is said to have reached saturation in ICU capacity, and hospitals in other Terai cities are also filling up.

Experts are also advocating for regular mass testing in cities with more movement of people. And if there is indeed another lockdown, they say testing in densely populated urban centres is a must.

A recent surveillance based on swab samples of 10,000 of the people who entered Kathmandu Valley last week found that 0.7% of them tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. Despite this seemingly low positivity rate, health officials say that the finding is significant because those individuals would have been carriers in their families and communities.

More worryingly, there is now a rise in cases with serious symptoms across Terai districts, unlike in the past when most were asymptomatic or had co-morbidities. Hospitals in the Terai are seeing a surge of typical COVID-19 symptoms with severe pneumonia.

“Most hospitals and doctors in Nepal are now starting to feel the worsening this virus can cause, as it did in Lombardy, New York and parts of India,” says Buddh Banayt.

“Which is why despite low fatality rate in this part of the world and the concept of herd immunity, there is no time to be complacent.”

A rate in influenza in the rainy season could also be a reason for misdiagnosis because flu and COVID-19 have similar symptoms. Experts suggest flu to be tested with COVID-19, especially as winter approaches.

But even with all the planning in the world, strategies, drugs and medical infrastructure, the most effective tool against the virus are the three simple safety measures: physical distance, masks and hand hygiene.

Says Sher Bahadur Pun: “Testing, tracing and treating are important. Government action is crucial. But how strictly Nepalis follow safety guidelines and adapt it into their everyday lives will make the most difference.”

Health experts say that while Nepal may not be able to build hospitals in a week like Wolff did, the government can start mass-testing in the high-risk zones, set up tents and ICU beds and stockpile life-saving drugs and medical equipment.