You have to give it to K P Oli, he seems to have wriggled out of the biggest crisis in his current tenure as prime minister. No, not the pandemic, but a near mutiny in his party.

Just as rivals within his Nepal Communist Party (NCP) were set to mount yet another offensive to oust him from office, he has defused the threat for now by agreeing to form a peacekeeping 6-member task force.

Halfway through his tenure, however, Oli and his party are not out of the woods yet. On Wednesday, for example, the Election Commission gave the re-registered UML its own election symbol. This was Oli’s gambit to threaten to split the party if his rivals continue to challenge him – and it looks like he wants to keep that option open in case they backtrack.

After marathon meetings last week, Oli and party co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal reiterated their commitment to let a special party convention decide on the NCP leadership, and set up the taskforce to mediate till then.

Since then, members of the anti-Oli faction including Madhav Nepal have been ominously quiet.

It took Prime Minister Oli more than two months to neutralise his rivals, but he is now confronted with the Covid-19 health and economic emergency. Cases are surging, and large parts of the country have gone back into lockdown.

Oli has been so engrossed in trying to save himself that he has not had time to save the country. There is widespread public outrage that his government mis-handled the coronavirus crisis and profited from the procurement process.

What a fall from grace it has been for a party that swept the 2017 elections on the promise of ‘stability and prosperity’. Nepalis have seen neither in the past two-and-half years. Far from making the country stable, Oli is himself on shaky ground.

With another two-and-half years to go for elections, NCP leaders seem to have decided that they have to improve performance. Even party insiders admit that if elections were held today, the NCP would not get a majority.

Even before the Covid-19 crisis, public disillusionment with his government had been mounting. Oli first tried to silence critics with restrictions on the media. When that did not work, he reverted to ultra-nationalism to distract attention from his failures, and to defuse the threat from within his party.

Even though the Covid-19 pandemic is a crisis, it gave the government a chance to finally prove itself. It did show some decisiveness in March with the lockdown, but failed to follow up by managing test kits, equipment, setting up adequate health facilities, and assisting those most affected by the lockdown. Worse, ministers were hand-in-glove with cronies and middlemen to siphon off the budget.

As the pandemic spread like wildfire across India, the government made another blunder last month by announcing that the lockdown had been lifted – knowingly fully well that there would be unregulated movement across the open border. It should have lifted restrictions in phases, but the deed was done. The current spike in cases, and the need for another lockdown is a result of that oversight.

Now that the prime minister has agreed on a kind of ceasefire with his party rivals, his government has another opportunity to turn its full attention and show that it has the capacity to deal with the socio-economic fallout of the pandemic.

To present a cleaner can-do face to the public, Oli is said to be working on a reshuffle. This is his last chance to nominate ministers based on integrity and capability rather than balancing internal party arithmetics.

The fate of the NCP in the 2022 election depends on it.

Analysis by Rameswor Bohara
Inhabitants is a constant refrain in all his poetry by Nepal’s nature, and believed in its healing power. He wrote about death with acceptance, almost embracing it, using the power of shorter words to strip away the associated with a final departure. His poem Gaunt in written in the traditional chhaudumi melody, is a melancholic masterpiece about losing his first wife. One of his most famous poems is about dreaming that he was dead, and which was later turned into a popular song by Narayan Gaur. As death approached in recent years, he wrote openly about his own impending demise and about how he would pass to the other side night jasmine, silently falling from the tree in the minute detail the sound of night rain on blades of grass during the monsoon. His observational skills were phenomenal, using simple similes and rustic colloquialism to describe in the minutest detail the sound of night rain on blades of corn during the monsoon. His masterpiece glinting like a diamond in the moonlight, clouds massing up against the dazzling Himalayan sky. He had a special place in his heart for this land, he had a special place in his heart for his birthplace in Lamjung. It became a matter of great regret for him that he could not go back more often in later years.

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Who is in charge in Nepal?
The Covid-19 control committee is acting like a government within a government

Alisha Sijapati

The confusion and chaos that followed the sudden cancellation of repatriation flights on 16 August was just the latest proof that the Covid-19 Crisis Management Committee (CCMC) and the government are working at cross-purposes, thus deepening the misery of Nepalis already burdened with the pandemic and its economic fallout.

The CCMC had already cleared the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) to issue a schedule of repatriation flights till 31 August. Embassies abroad had drawn up the passenger manifest based on their priority lists. But it abruptly cancelled the permission, saying quarantine hotels were not ready.

Tens of thousands of Nepali workers who had been waiting for over five months to fly home, and families trying for flights out of Kathmandu were affected.

A Nepal Airlines Airbus was en route to Dubai to pick up passengers, and had to return empty on Tuesday. A CAAN Airbus was en route to Bangkok, and had to return home. As Defence Minister, Pokhrel then ordered the Nepal Army to manage the transport of arriving returnees from Kathmandu airport to holding centres and to their districts.

He also got the Army involved in procurement of test kits and medical equipment from China, but forced it to go through the same tainted middlemen.

Last month Army Chief Purna Chandra Thapa testily accused Pokhrel of tarnishing the military’s interest by blaming it for delays. Pokhrel’s colleagues have been lining up to assail him, too.

The CCMC has also been accused of bungling on lockdowns, not giving clear guidelines, issuing contradictory protocols for arriving air passengers, and not controlling the movement of people from India. On the other hand, line ministries have got used to pass the buck to the CCMC on everything.

The only difference between the NRA and the CCMC is that while the NRA was an constitutionally mandated body, the CCMC is an ad hoc committee with unspecified powers. Also, line ministries did not cooperate with the NRA in implementing its plans because of turf battles, while the CCMC has emerged as an all-power parallel government.

The CCMC has been accused of being preoccupied with implementation agencies.

The crisis management committee ordered the wrong test kits to be used in private PCR tests, or making private hospitals to treat Covid-19 patients. The Ministry of Health, which should be making the critical decisions on control measures, has been sidelined.

“Who is accountable for these lapses?” asks Thapa, who says that giving so much power without responsibility to the CCMC leaves it open to abuse of authority, and prone to making disastrous mistakes.

Nepal’s social media is also squarely on the CCMC as it is itself made up of the prime minister, health minister, home minister, defence minister, supplies minister and the Nepal Army. The CCMC is a government within the government that makes ad hoc decisions without consultations with public health and other experts.

There are scandals – even since the committee ordered the wrong test kits at inflated prices from middlemen alleged to be political cronies.

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The CCMC has also been accused because it never had a concrete pro-active plan on solving problems like having better quarantine facilities, increasing the numbers of tests, and now making sure there are enough isolation and ICU wards for treatment of seriously ill patients.

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The Covid-19 control committee is acting like a government within a government because it never had a concrete pro-active plan on solving problems like having better quarantine facilities, increasing the numbers of tests, and now making sure there are enough isolation and ICU wards for treatment of seriously ill patients.

Pokhrel is trying its best to respond to the pandemic.

The National Risk Reduction Authority (NRA) which was entrusted with reconstruction and rehabilitation after the 2015 earthquake. The NRA had the same problem of coordination.

Because of frequent changes in government after the quake, the head of the NRA was changed three times in one year. There was political interference in its day-to-day operation, and it also functioned as a parallel government.

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Pokhrel is trying its best to respond to the pandemic.
Kulman Ghising, the man credited with ending daily 14 hours of power cuts is due to step down next month after four years as head of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). His term can be extended by another four years, but powerful businessmen whom Ghising targeted as well as their political patrons want him replaced.

Ghising is a no-nonsense electrical engineer who knew exactly why Nepali consumers were suffering crippling power cuts, and went about systematically reducing pilferage, and cutting off 24-hour dedicated feeds through which his predecessors had been providing businesses low tariff electricity in return for kickbacks.

He expedited hydropower projects that had been languishing, confronted locals who had obstructed the construction of transmission lines, imported power from India to meet winter shortfall and expected electric during the monsoon surplus.

Most Nepalis did not care how he did it, but regard him as a saviour who took them from darkness to light.

But as his four-year-term comes to an end, there are those who are envious of the enormous public respect he has earned, as well as others who benefited for years from NEA’s favours and want him out.

Through all the smear campaigns against him, Ghising has held fast to his conviction that Nepal’s path to prosperity lies in generating enough power so Nepal’s 30 million people can switch to electrical appliances, manufacture, transport, and tourism, and reduce the growing dependence on oil imports.

The statistics say it all. From 2012 to 2016, when Nepal faced the largest of load-shedding, the NEA cumulatively lost Rs25 billion. The greatest annual loss of nearly Rs6 billion was in fiscal year 2015-2016. (See graph)

Ghising was appointed to lead NEA by Energy Minister Janardan Sharma in August 2016 during the prime ministership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, amid much resistance from officials who had profited from black transactions and kickbacks.

But Ghising’s appointment was a turning point for NEA and for the country. Within a year of taking over, NEA’s profits soared to Rs1 billion, and it was to cross Rs1 billion this fiscal year. Even more than lifting the Authority out of the red, it is the assurance of uninterrupted power that has spurred growth and employment in Nepal.

Kulman Ghising has often been called ‘Cool Man’ by his admirers for his can-do attitude and his obsession with problem-fixing – attributes rare among Nepal’s politicians and technocrats. He was educated almost entirely in Nepal, and got his engineering degree from Jamshedpur in India. He has served 22 years in NEA, rising up the ranks to promote rural electrification, manage large projects like Chilime, and deal with Nepal’s private power producers.

Starting out, Ghising did not have a magic wand. With experience of the inner workings of the NEA, and of handling projects in Nepal, he knew what the problems were. And he did what any manager would do: address the losses on the supply side to ensure that it kept up with demand and growth.

That is why his first order of business was to cut the dedicated lines providing uninterrupted electricity to industrial zones. He increased their tariffs and prioritised supply to household consumers.

Ghising knew that Nepal’s electricity grid had some of the highest rates of pilferage and system loss, even among developing countries. Leakage alone was 26%, and NEA started a campaign against consumers stealing electricity from transmission lines with ‘hooks’. By this year, pilferage has been slashed to 15%, saving NEA Rs7 billion. The next step was to reduce system loss which occurs when the distance between the point of generation to consumption is too long. NEA set about upgading transmission lines, substations and transformers.

Despite all these moves, there was still a shortfall in electricity and Ghising filled this gap with imports from India through the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur transmission line. But as NEA’s own hydropower plants and private producers started coming online, imports have declined steadily from 35% of total supply for the past five years to 22% this year.

This year’s power import from India also dropped because of the COVID-19 lockdown, which reduced domestic demand for electricity, and increased production from Nepal’s own run-of-the-river power plants due to a vigorous monsoon.

With the completion of the 455MW Upper Tama Kosi this year, import from India is expected to drop further, even though there will have to be some power import to meet winter demand spike. Nepal’s monsoon surplus is expected to grow further in the coming years which is why Ghising has been publicly appealing to Nepal to switch to induction stoves for cooking, and was opposed to the hefty new tax on electric vehicles announced by Finance Minister Yubraj Khatiwada in this year’s budget.

NEA’s revenue has also gone up because of a hike in tariff, despite which demand has also gone up.

Man credited with ending power cuts may not get an extension next month

NEA’s customers have increased by 1.3 million in the past four years, and there has been an annual increase of 20% in electricity demand in that period.

Aside from all these measures, Ghising’s main achievement in the past four years has been his ability to dismantle the business nexus that created an artificial shortage in electricity that allowed a black market to flourish. NEA’s previous heads, dispatchers, and their political patrons all benefited from this scam.

At one point in the winter of 2016 when Nepalese were waking up from the aftermath of the earthquake and the Indian Blockade, Nepalis were getting only six hours of electricity a day. Collusion between NEA officials and industrialists was allowing 315MW of cheap electricity to be sold to private businesses, at a time when Nepal was only producing 750MW.

Ghising is an outstanding manager with the simultaneous ability to be both hard cop and good cop. He used his connections with high ranking Nepali officials to deflect pressure from those who tried to discredit him. And he could go to the grassroots to convince locals to let transmission lines and substations in Lalitpur, Kabeli corridor, Kukharka, or Ramshapah that had been delayed for decades due to opposition.

Later, Ghising went to Rasuwa to personally threaten local contractors who were delaying the construction of a substation critical to evacuating electricity generated by power plants on the Trishuli River. A video of him berating the contractors went viral on social media, further raising his public esteem.

It is not that Ghising does not have critics. Some have said he got all the credit for ending power cuts, when it was the fortuitous completion of the crossborder transmission line that allowed him to end load-shedding with imported power. Some say the NEA’s profits are more than a reduction in leakage. Private power producers now blame him for claiming credit for raising revenue by overcharging them.

Ghising has been able to move forward on the need to unbundle the NEA’s generation, transmission and distribution so as to make the agency more efficient. But there has been no conclusion. A committee has been formed to look into this, but there has been no conclusion.

Prime Minister K P Oli is said to be personally not in favour of Ghising’s extension. Initially, he had promised the job to Sushil Gyewali, currently the CEO of the National Reconstruction Authority who has promised the job to Sushil Gyewali, currently the CEO of the National Reconstruction Authority that coordinated earthquake relief. Oli could have postponed Ghising’s extension so as to make the agency more efficient, but he has not.

Most of the criticism is fuelled by powerful lobbies against Ghising for sending them overdue electricity bills worth billions. Some industrialists have claimed they never had a dedicated feed, and have been sold one. A committee has been formed to look into this, but there has been no conclusion.

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Huge uptick in TikTok during lockdown

"It's a perfect time to switch to TikTok because I have time in my hands."

Diya Rijal

India has banned it, the United States and Australia are about to do the same, but in Nepal TikTok use has soared in the five months since the COVID-19 lockdown was announced. The Chinese-owned app has taken Nepali mental health in young people using its 15 second design for an explosion of creativity, and online awareness campaigns to promote products ranging from fashion to food. Former royal couple Prana and Himani Shah’s daughters Purnika and Kritika who do mainly dance videos are a TikTok with a massive following. Two weeks after the lockdown

a Chinese app developer, lets users publish a 15-second or 60-second video, and had seen widespread use in India. Even before the lockdown hit, TikTok already had 600 million active users in India, 44% of the population, and making up over a quarter of downloads worldwide.

There has been criticism of the ban in India, where most users were using it to engage and network, and had empowered the youth among the older section of the population where anti-China sentiments ran high after the Ladakh clash. After the ban, TikTok has been partially replaced with the LA-based company, Thriller with has seen 30 million downloads in India since June.

"I am surprised how much of them have genuine medical issues," says physician Bharat Pokhrel. "In Nepal this is a huge shift because patients do not always open up to share their actual problems or habits," says Pokhrel.

Because of the restriction on transport, many Nepalis have been using TikTok as a form of telemedicine — especially for sensitive mental health issues. The lockdown has led to an increase in mental health problems and suicide cases throughout the country.

"Noticed mental health is a major issue, and many people seek to consult from me via email provided in my bio," Pokhrel adds.

However, TikTok is more popular among young people showing off their creativity through short video clips of dance routines, lip-syncing, branching out influencer, or point-of-view videos — all done with a wide range of sounds and music.

While the TikTok ban in India with the capture of the Galwan border clash in Ladakh in May, and in the US and Australia it is driven by privacy concerns, the underlying reason is the phenomenal rise in the US and Australia it is driven — all done with a wide range of sounds and music.

"This is a way more interaction, with the users, because we have half the number of followers in TikTok compared to Instagram," said Rana, whose TikTok videos include lots of skits, voiceovers and videos with family members. He says engagement on TikTok is higher than other social media he uses.

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"It felt that this was the perfect time for me to do fun stuff on TikTok for the lockdown. The fashion and lifestyle vlogger has over 20,000 followers, with each video having an average of 50-60,000 views.

"During this lockdown, I got a lot of negative comments in TikTok, which sometimes makes me want to stop using it," admitted Shiwakoti. "But it is such a great way to reach my audience, I rarely used to interact with people but TikTok changed that.

In Nepal TikTok is not immune to hate comments, predatory behaviour to younger users, bullying, harassment and addition that plagues other platforms. Despite this, TikTok looks like it's here to stay.

Says physician Bharat Pokhrel: "In a nutshell, it has been a learning experience, an entertainment medium, and a way to reach out to the people from different parts of the country with useful advice during the pandemic."
Seven Summits tour
Go on a tour of the seven highest mountains of each continent with mountaineer, social worker, and stand-up comic Shaleen Basnet, who led the first all-women team of seven summits. Register to participate: http://tiny.cc/s7smtmz 20 August

KIMFF submissions
Submission deadline for KIMFF 2020 is approaching. Fill the entry form and send your film directly or produced in the last two years. Go to the website for more details. Deadline: 1 September

Van Gogh Museum
See the works of Vincent Van Gogh up close in a virtual tour of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, home to the largest collection of his artwork. The collection includes over 200 paintings, 500 drawings, and over 750 personal letters.

Vanadiscent’s ‘Isolation’
Apply to the ‘Isolation’ international call for artists and writers to share their literal, artistic, or in-between interpretation of ‘Isolation’. Enter your piece of artwork, photography, mixed media, installations, ceramics, jewelry, fabric, sculpture, poems, performance art, and stories of fiction and poetry. Application fees apply. Details at artadiscent.com. Application deadline: 31 August

Virtual tours
Explore groundbreaking award-winning factual films about some of the most burning issues across the globe including politics, the environment, and the current pandemic. Find joystick pictures on YouTube.

Ridiculous History
History is beautiful, brutal and, often, ridiculous. Episodes of Ridiculous History delve into some of the weirdest stories from across the span of human civilisation.

Virtual events
Virtual tours can make guide to making real lemonade.

Ridiculous History
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The Skin of Chitwan
Watch the recently launched Indigenous Past, Sustainable Future exhibition ‘The Skin of Chitwan’ by Nepal Picture Library online at skinchnawan nepalipicturelibrary.org

ONLINE ARCHIVES
Nepal Picture Library
Look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal’s history and learn about the stories behind the photographs.

MyLoft
Find thousands of books to read or listen to, from fiction to plays, non-fiction and self-development. Check out The British Council’s MyLoft App for our free access to educational and recreational resources. Register for the Digital Library at bit.ly/267v4U4.

Books for children
Looking for ways to keep children occupied? The International Children’s Digital Library has children’s books from all over the world, including Adventures of a Nepali Rugpadya Kanak Muni Dliat from Nepal.

HOME DINING
With restaurants closed, and televised also off the menu, here some dishes that can be easily made with ingredients available at home.

Gundruk ko achaar
There must be very few households that don’t have gundruk fermenting in the sun. Have some mustard oil, chilies, lemon and Kurauni to grow our own food and provide a little bit of spice and zing gundruk ko achaar. Break out the old family recipe or get instructions online.

Kurauni
Also called khowa, this creamy dessert requires nothing more than boiling milk, just be prepared to do a whole lot of stringing. 1 litre of milk makes about 200 grams of kurauni. Enjoy it as is, or look up how to use it to make other delicious Nepali dessert items.

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Momo
Home-made momo is another lockdown comfort food that can kill time and make it a family event. Find dozens of video tutorials on how to start.

Lemonade
There is no greater time than the stifling summer to enjoy a refreshing glass of simple lemonade -- and not the easy peasy lemon square kind. The Stay at Home Chef on YouTube has a simple-to-follow recipe and an online guide to make real lemonade.

FOOD: N. 9098 MA KHAR GAI

Nepali Picture Library
Look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal’s history and learn about the stories behind the photographs.

MyLoft
Find thousands of books to read or listen to, from fiction to plays, non-fiction and self-development. Check out The British Council’s MyLoft App for our free access to educational and recreational resources. Register for the Digital Library at bit.ly/267v4U4.

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From letters to landlines, phones to Facebook

How social media has transformed the way Nepali workers overseas stay in touch with home

Upasana Khadka

When Kamal Miya in the UAE and Bhumiya in Kuwait found themselves stranded abroad after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, they took to social media via Facebook Live videos to seek help. Both of them are back in their villages in Nepal now, and attribute the early repatriation to their online outreach that drew widespread attention.

The Nepal Embassy in Malaysia holds weekly Facebook sessions with updates and answers to questions which are viewed by thousands of stranded Nepali migrants in the country.

When a video of a Nepali security guard getting beaten up mercilessly by his supervisor in Malaysia went viral this month, it drew attention of the Malaysian authorities, even though similar cases are not uncommon. "There was no daily basis and go unnoticed," says Miya.

Soon after the explosion in Beirut, and the letters were more to keep updates about his studies. Yubraj gave birth, the harvest, and the neighbourhood, whose water buffer was mainly messages from his airport to fly back to Nepal.

Kum Bahadur in the UAE and his son, Kalim in Saudi Arabia were in touch with his family. "It barely feels like we are abroad these days because we are in close contact with frequent regular phone calls," says Yubraj, who is working in Qatar and the son of Kum Bahadur, a 60-year-old returnee who had himself worked in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s.

Yubraj recalls growing up and writing letters to his father in longhand and mailing it by post. It would take months to get a reply. "My father tried to write at least once a month. He used to be curious about tiny details about our farm and the livestock," Yubraj says. "He did not share much about his life in Saudi Arabia." Perhaps Yubraj's father had nothing to say about Saudi Arabia because he never got to see much of the country. He was brought straight to his farm, but could stay in touch with his family.

Years later, in 2001, it was Yu- braj's turn to seek his fortune in Qa- tar. By this time, there was already a landline in his house, but calls were still expensive. So, he still wrote let- ters to his father, but this time their roles were reversed – his father was writing to him in Saudi Arabia. "I still remember the first letter I wrote to my family from Qatar," remembers Yubraj. "I told them about my struggles in the desert heat and the stark contrast with the cool air of Lamjung. I also described to them the mornings did not help cool off because the water was warm no matter which knob I turned on." Yubraj tried to sound positive in his letters, just like his father, so his family would not worry too much. But he also wrote to them that he could have achieved more in Nepal itself, had he been willing to work as hard as he did in Qatar. One day, Yubraj saw his manager get a new Nokia 6300, but it took him two years to be able to afford one so he could stay in touch with his family.

Kum Bahadur used to farm in a majra in Saudi Arabia, growing watermelon and camel fodder. He had never understood what a majra was until he visited Nepalis toiling in a farm in the desert. He says: "It brought tears to my eyes thinking how hard my father struggled. We have it much easier now."

Yubraj, who went to the local post office every two weeks to see if there was a letter from his father. He used to get anxious if there was no letter for over a month.

Three years after Kum Bahadur left for Saudi Arabia in the 1990s, the village got its first landline phone. One day the didi from the shop rushed to Yubraj’s house to say there was a call. My grand-aunt spoke to my father first and broke down when she heard his voice for the first time in years.

"It was an emotional moment," Yubraj says, adding that the calls were expensive. "Phone calls were short and rare, it was just to hear each other’s voices. The details were in our letters."

In his 24 years in Qatar, Karem Bathik矣 Miya has seen how advances in technology have changed the way migrant workers communicate with families back home.

"We used to send letters or cassettes with 60 minute voice recordings to our family members,” he recalls. “I even had pen-friends all over Nepal whom I wrote frequently. I spent a lot on postage because my letters were so heavy. As a loyal customer, the post office rewarded my family so they were able to send six months of letters for free.”

Phone calls were not that fre- quent, and the closest shop with a landline was 22km from his house in Tanahun. Miya’s family had to be notified by the shopkeeper via messages, including drivers of mini-buses or shoppers, about the day and time when they had to come to the shop for the next call.

"The calls were very expen- sive, and I had to make chit-chat with the shopkeeper to return the favor,” says Miya, adding that a call usually meant there was some kind of emergency. Finally, Miya was able to send home a mobile phone in 2007, after which they could call each other at will.

"Look how times have changed,” he says, “it’s more expensive to send letters now than to make video calls.""
It all began with a telegram two days past which I had been living in Kathmandu. One day, when I was sitting at my desk in my spacious office, just as I did every day, a telegram arrived. “About to die like a dog in Namche,” it read. “Send a plane. Waiting at Lukla. Sakamoto.”

The telegram was written in Japanese, but in the Latin alphabet. Nanyak Sakamoto was the illustrious mountain climber, and he had set out on foot from Kathmandu towards Everest Base Camp.

I immediately went to the Police Headquarters and had them send a reply: “Will send plane. Wait at Lukla.” I negotiated for the use of one of the two helicopters of Royal Nepal Airlines that had been donated by the Soviet Union and were dust-covered hulks.

Sakamoto and his companions boarded the helicopter, leaving us three behind. For the first time in a long time, I took deep breath after breath of cold mountain air. We walked to Tengboche where I vowed to build a hotel, chanting the prayer of ma ni padme hum which is Namgyu myoko zenge kyo in the Japanese version. We went to Khumjung and Khunde where I saw potential for tourism in Nepal. We began long ago about the possibility of building a lodge or hotel on the east side of Syangboche Hill so that people who wanted to see Everest could come and stay there. What could we save as an airfield in a nearby pasture. There were a lot of rocks, but it could take small planes.

The area was called Syangboche, and locals told us in the forest used to be so thick that you could lose sight of a yak. I began making plans to build a hotel and airfield in that area. The eastern side of Syangboche is called Om Lhasa, and if I were to build a hotel that would be a good location. I stood on the sun-drenched hill on that bright and shining morning, and my heart was filled with inexpressible joy. There was no more magnificent and massive scenery than this view. There was Ama Dablam (mother’s necklace), and beyond the ridge that linked Lhotse and Nuptse, was the part of Everest above the 8,000 South Col. To the right of Ama Dablam are Kangtega and Thamserku, and to the south are the Kongde peaks that line either side of the narrow Dudh Koshi river valley. Thamserku looms above, piercing the sky like the tip of a spear.

What is that which makes the Himalaya so beautiful? If I look at them, I realize that it is nothing more than the black and white mountains against a blue sky. However, when I really look at the mountains, I am overwhelmed and impressed by their mystery. I wondered if it is because of their massive scale, or because of their steepness and perpetual coats of ice and snow. I thought that this was probably the only place where I could build a hotel.
about the true nature of ‘development’,
found the necessity to think deeper
to execute such acts, to brandish pretexts
and culture. And here I am, cutting
nature in Nepal?

a society incarcerated inside con-
rays of the sun in the blue sky and
much rather live under the brilliant
peaks was sublime.

Some of us had to hold plywood
warmed up in a bucket of hot water.
they were served swiftly on plates
ried into the dining room, where
it on time for the guests’ arrival.

guests had to struggle through the
ing packed with the villagers. Close
much it may cause altitude sickness.
ning an excuse that if we hurry too
was done. We took a long halt until a
messenger to ask them if cleaning up
the hotel was visible, I sent out a

At this altitude, we never
supposed to arrive at Lukla.

To have autonomy rather than to
range of development.

damental ideas were the same, but
our respective efforts were leading us
in different directions. So, in the end
I had to say this to him: “In order for
us in different directions. So, in the end
I had to say this to him: “In order for

our colleagues to live with the Sherpas, he must
ahead with it.

agreed with Sir Ed, but I was going
Mount Everest, was an issue that
the Himalaya, not to mention near
Certainly, a hotel in the middle of

Dynamite could not be pur-

However, at the present stage,

Nepal may need to modernise even
if it was going to cause a few problems,
in order to lift living standards of
its people, we cannot cut corners. The
villages of Namche Bazar [safety] to buy more time.
At this moment, we never stop to

bees and wasps. When we came to a place where the
hotel was visible, I sent out a
as a messenger to ask them if cleaning up
was done. We took a long halt until a
‘G’ name, the other was called ‘B’,

Swiss pilot had first come to Nepal in 1960,
flying a Pilatus Porter for the Swiss
the legendary pilot was the one who

With the intention to justify Hotel Everest View
and its airport. Maybe we need to
be economically stable before we can
achieve a richness of spirit.

This was started to put
into action what I had been only
even vaguely thinking about till then —
to establish in experimental farm in
Khumbu Valley to increase agricul-
tural yield without using
chemical fertilisers and pesticides. It could be the source of
fresh organic food for the hotel guests.

In the room, the dining table
was almost covered with the tables
of a hotel of the Kazumi
kindly performed the blessings.

The air service between Kath-
mandu and Syangboche, was not

Suicide attempt? Weston

Surely the commitment to
culture and their commitment to

Sir Edmund first came into contact with the Sherpas, he must
have been impressed by their culture and their commitment to
maintaining the purity of their culture

The Sherpas didn’t speak

Takashi Miyazawa.

Nevertheless, I always felt great

The hotel was finally off and run-
in. But even though every

living in Kathmandu, I often receive
an email with the subject line,

I was the one who

at the present stage,

I always knew the purpose of the hotel.

I assured him we would not.

Certainly, a hotel in the middle of

as machinery aid from the Japanese

The hotel was finally off and run-
in. But even though every

living in Kathmandu, I often receive
an email with the subject line,

I was the one who

at the present stage,
Learning from HIV to fight Covid-19 in Nepal

The country’s experience in HIV/AIDS prevention in the last 20 years holds lessons in tackling the spread of the novel coronavirus

Sonia Awale

When Lalbahadur Shah of Birganj died last week, none of his relatives showed up for his funeral even though he had tested negative for Covid-19. With no family, friends and neighbours attending, the Muslim community members took it upon themselves to perform his final rites as per the Hindu faith.

Shah had hypertension and diabetes, although he had tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 before he tested negative. He succumbed to other health complications.

Across Nepal, people infected with the virus, even those who have recovered, have been shunned by neighbours and society. Migrant returns and their families have been singled out and humiliated. Doctors and health workers have been harassed by landlady.

This is nothing new in Nepal. Tuberculosis and leprosy patients have been traditionally shunned. And the stigma associated with Covid-19 is very reminiscent of how people with HIV/AIDS used to be treated in Nepal in the past, and may have lessons for dealing with SARS-CoV-2, since the virus (like HIV) is here to stay.

*Physical distancing doesn’t mean discrimination and we should make people understand this,* says public health expert Aruna Uprety. “There is widespread panic about Covid-19 and this is turning people against those infected with it, exactly like it was with HIV/AIDS. This in turn is adding to the mental stress of the patients, undermining their recovery.”

Says Anjana Rajbhandary, a counsellor and columnist: “Social stigma is attached to lack of knowledge and when people know less, they feel the need to blame someone else because they are afraid of the unknown. Fear and anxiety about death and disease can lead to gossip, which results in stigmatising and discrimination.”

Constant focus in the media on new infections and fatalities over those who have recovered has reinforced the misconception that Covid-19 is highly lethal, adding to the fear about it.

On Tuesday, Nepal reported a total of 5,016 new cases, its highest daily rise with 205 in Kathmandu Valley alone, forcing the local governments in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur to reimpose lockdown for a week starting Wednesday midnight. So far, 17,580 people have recovered while 114 have passed away.

The number of new infections was down to 521 on Wednesday, 151 of them in Kathmandu.

The similarities between HIV/AIDS and Covid-19 go beyond stigma. Just like HIV/AIDS spread like wildfire in western Nepal among families with husbands working in India, most of the Covid-19 cases were imported among families with husbands working in India and spread among the poorest sections of Nepal’s most underserved region. And just like with HIV, Covid-19 is falling people with compromised immune systems.

Long-time HIV/AIDS activist Rajive Kafle also sees parallels between the current Covid-19 crisis and the HIV epidemic of the 1990s in turning public awareness into behavioural change for prevention. Both diseases are caused by viral infections and attack the immune-compromised – only the method of transmission is different. While HIV is spread human-to-human through aerosol particles or blood transfusions, SARS-CoV-2 spreads through unprotected sex, sharing needles or by eating nutritious indigenous food,” says Kafle.

Aruna Uprety recalls a recent field visit to Makawanpur district where she found Chhupang nomads living without toilets or clean drinking water, who were not wearing masks and maintaining distance.

“I am not sure if we will have to learn with Covid-19 just as we did with HIV. What would help is strengthening our immunosystem to fight against the infection, be it by applying traditional medicinal or by eating nutritious indigenous food,” says Uprety. “But to prevent infection for now our first line of defence are masks, distancing and hand-washing.”

Constant focus in the media on new infections and fatalities over those who have recovered has reinforced the misconception that Covid-19 is highly lethal, adding to the fear about it. Just like with HIV/AIDS, it is masks and distancing for Covid-19.

If we were able to change peoples’ behaviour in something as sensitive as sex, then we should be able to do it much more effectively for Covid-19,” says Rita Thapa of Nepal Public Health Foundation, who was formerly with the WHO. “We still have time to work together with local authorities, civil society and the government to run mass awareness campaign that reaches down to the grassroots.”

Since this August, the government has started providing free TLD (once-a-day generic fixed-dose combination of tenofovir disoproxil fumarate, lamivudine, and efavirenz), new antiretroviral drug considered the best regimen in the world for 37,000 people living with HIV in Nepal. Activists like Kafle credit this milestone to treatment literacy, community mobilisation and continued activism.

“A similar kind of dedication will guarantee accountability and transparency in terms of testing and treating coronavirus in Nepal when the vaccine and therapies aren’t available,” he adds.

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INFECTIOUS MESSAGES: An HIV/AIDS awareness booklet for Grade 7 by the government in Nepal depicting the modes of transmission (left) and a new poster showing preventive measures for Covid-19, also illustrating which behaviour is risky.

AIDS awareness educational posters by the government showing preventive measures (from left) and a new poster showing preventive measures for Covid-19, also illustrating which behaviour is risky.

learning the stigma for some 50,000 people living with HIV in Nepal.

Nearly 30 years later, Shrestha and Acharya are once more doing their jobs for public service announcements via social media and radio to spread awareness about Covid-19 preventive measures. The message is similar: while it was condoms and safe needles for HIV/AIDS, it is masks and distancing for Covid-19.

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