The coronavirus is here to stay. Vaccines will not be available for Nepalis till late next year. There are no proven therapies yet. The only way to stay safe is through prevention, since hospitals will be full.

That is the prognosis from health experts for the coming winter and into next year. Even before SARS-CoV-2, Nepal used to see a winter spike in deaths of the elderly from pneumonia. But with the added threat of the new virus, this winter is going to be even more dangerous than previous ones.

“This thing will keep going for another year at least, the only way to deal with it is prevention – that means masks, separation and handwashing,” says Buddha Basnyat at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences.

People above 65 and those with pre-existing conditions need to be especially careful – their family members have to take strict precautions not to bring the virus into the household.

Doctors advise taking flu shots where available so that the high risk groups do not end up having to light on two fronts in the coming months.

“In Nepal, data shows that winter is a killer of older people, so in the coming months they need to minimise interaction with immediate family members who move about in public,” says Samer Mani Dixit of the Centre for Molecular Dynamics. He advises that seniors isolate in their rooms, and meet relatives in open spaces wearing masks.

What makes high risk groups even more vulnerable is that in winter windows are closed, and they tend to mingle with the extended family with whom they share the home. They should also get as much exercise as possible, and expose themselves to direct sunlight to boost immunity.

“High risk individuals like the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions have to treat all members of the household and visitors as if they are Covid positive. That means wearing masks, keeping separation and meeting them only in open areas,” says Dixit.

The government, which seems to have more or less given up trying to control the virus by leaving it to the public to take precautions, needs to prepare for the winter surge.

There has to be adequate oxygen supply to hospitals, more ICU capacity, separate corona wards in hospitals, and the new Nepal Army hospital could be turned into a Covid-dedicated facility.

The silver lining is that mask-wearing and handwashing have reduced other chronic infections in Nepal. Hospitals report a marked decrease in water-borne diseases like typhoid and dysentery, and airborne infections like COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease). Mask-wearing slowed the spread of seasonal flu in this year’s southern hemisphere winter.

Some in Nepal are promoting ‘herd immunity’ as an antidote to the expected winter surge. Scientists caution against this notion because there is still so much uncertainty about the virus.

Says Buddha Basnyat: “Herd immunity is herd mentality, it is dangerous.”
Covid-19 and the new Great Game

One of Barack Obama’s White House offers once got into trouble for saying that a hurricane disaster presented a good opportunity for the administration to show it could get things done. It was politically incorrect, but true.

Indeed, here in Nepal, frequent natural disasters have been good threats for governments of the day to prove themselves. We thought that would happen after the 2015 earthquake, but our rulers expanded their self-interest to the chance to invest in rebuilding with massive aid packages. The Blockade was a time to rise and create those jobs. We thought that would happen after the 2015 earthquake, but our rulers squandered the chance to invest in rebuilding with massive aid packages.

Instead, it has fallen back on business as usual, and well-governed countries in the world are a substitute to the war, nor have they shown any sign that Nepal was being urged by China to stake its claim on its territory. This remark was criticised even in India for his insensitivity towards Nepal and its national sensibilities in the Indian Army, some of them deployed in Ladakh. And the chance to reposition Nepal and to demonstrate it was serious about confidence building that Nepal needs to do in Kathmandu.

The GoI jet dash to Kathmandu and the Narnaivan visit took on added meaning with the 2+2 meeting of top American and Indian foreign and defence officials in New Delhi on Tuesday, and the signing of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) – which despite its awkward acronym is essentially a bilateral strategic pact.

This is proof that the world is once more bipolar, and China is looking at its southern neighbours. Meanwhile, in Kathmandu US-China rivalry was taken to a new level with Dasain diplomacy. American ambassador Terry Black made mutton curry while Chinese ambassador Huang Jing cut out with the US national anthem and the Chinese national flag.

Whatever may be Prachanda’s reason to come at this moment in time, on ‘his own’ initiative, and after two years of talks, a beaming Tuladhar dropped by the Ministers’ residential quarters at the Ministry of Defence, the proposed peace talks with the Maoists, as we now know, and the timing of the visit to Kathmandu.

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The Maoists have shown their adaptability. That is why these things are easy for Prime Minister Oli to lose focus on. But to negotiate. The Maoists have shown their adaptation.

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The Himalaya mourn a saintly leader

The Tengboche Rinpoche was a constant source of saintly support, presiding through periods of prosperity and disaster.

THE MOUNTAIN CRESTED STARCHED EARLY ON THE MORNING OF THE 19TH, AS THE BRAZILIAN SUNBRIGHTLY TRIUMPHED OVER THE GROUND. Without his encompassing compassionate demeanour there would be no Grimpecher. Without his encompassing compassionate demeanour there would be no Grimpecher. Without his encompassing compassionate demeanour there would be no Grimpecher.
O n Sunday night, television viewers across Nepal were greeted with this message on their screens for 120 of the most popular international sports, entertainment and news channels.

"The children do not have school, and we are all confined to our homes because the virus is everywhere, and watching television was a way to pass the time, now the kids cannot even get to follow their favourite sports channels," said Putali Tamang of Dhobighat.

The ban has hit hardest Nepali fans of sports events and entertainment programs under India’s Zee banner, Sony, HBO and Cinemax are still available because they do not carry commercials. Al Jazeera is also available depending on the distributor.

What this means is that while the monthly fees for satellite dish or cable may not go up right away, as the agreements with various international channels are renewed, operators will be forced to pass on the added cost of commercial-free programming to Nepali customers. Of the 90 pay tv channels, 60 are said to be completing their technical preparation for clean feeds.

The government’s argument is that international channels that charge Nepali customers through their local distributors should not also be making money from commercials. It says this follows the international practice that if customers pay for a feed, it should not carry commercials.

However, the government seems to be unaware that many Nepalis are now paying for live streaming content directly to Nepalis through their internet service providers. The Android IPTV box is also available depending on the distributor.

"They are working on the technical details of providing the clean feed, some are in the testing stage, and a few of the channels should be back on air in a few days," said Ihsra Sharma of the Nepal Cable Television Operators Federation.

The ban was enforced during Dasain, and also to stay home because of the rapid spread of the coronavirus in Nepal. While most people have been forced to stay home because of the rapid spread of the coronavirus in Nepal, there was also an argument that customers to bypass distribution via cable and satellite.

The Android IPTV box is becoming popular, and allows ISP customers to bypass distribution via cable and satellite. The Android IPTV box is becoming popular, and allows ISP customers to bypass distribution via cable and satellite.

The public is outraged, blames government for playing dirty with clean feed rule

Raju Banskota

The Ministry of Communication and Information said it had given satellite and cable operators one year’s notice to implement its ‘Clean Feed’ policy, and it had to stop the distribution of foreign tv channels that contained commercials.

The theory is that customers should not be charged for television programs that contain advertising, but between the lines the directive had a nationalistic rationale against Indian commercials. In June, Nepal got distributors to delete most Indian news channels from their feed for airing content that was derogatory for Prime Minister K P Oli.

Program codes that contain advertising, should not be charged for television programs, the government decided not to grant that. While advertising agencies have generally welcomed the decision, the government’s move has been greeted by outrage from the public in social media, mainly because it was enforced during Dasain, and also while most people have been forced to stay home because of the rapid spread of the coronavirus in Nepal.

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Nepal’s baffling ban on India flights

Irrational and bizarre restrictions on foreigners and Delhi flights hurt travellers

Bhattarai, who was not wearing a mask during the meeting, tested positive for Covid-19 the very next day. Kwatra was quoted as saying that he raised the issue of resumption of Nepal-India flights, while the Nepalese side said the discussions were only about

again after a confusing series of conflicting decisions last week (see page 7). For all those reasons, even visitors who were determined to book in this autumn have cancelled reservations, agencies say.

Hong Kong bars Nepal Airlines again

Nepal’s national airline has been suspended from operating Kathmandu-Hong Kong flights for the second time this month, after more passengers tested positive on arrival on 21 October.

Nepal Airlines passengers who had boarded KA490 in Kathmandu with RT PCR negative reports were found to be positive when tested again on arrival. The new ban will stop Nepal Airlines flights to Hong Kong till November. A Nepalese-passenger tested positive at Hong Kong airport from Kathmandu on 15 October and the 21 October flight was the first after the earlier ban.

Air India flights from New Delhi, and India Air Vistara flights from Chennai have always similarly tested positive after passengers tested positive. Passengers from 11 high risk countries have to spend two weeks in hotel quarantine in Hong Kong after arrival, and Nepal and India are on the list.

Covid-19 fund for businesses

Use to Watch, with support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and in partnership with NAB Bank and Laxmi Bank, has launched the Covid-19 MSEF fund to provide bridging finance for small and medium businesses to stay afloat during the crisis.

The fund will leverage One to Watch’s expertise in managing business development, its robust network of investors and entrepreneurs to identify and support high-impact SMEs,” said Suman Joshi of One to Watch.

The fund will provide collateral-free loans to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSEs), and will pay interest on such loans for up to 18 months. It is expected to support up to 100 MSEs and help them retain up to 1,000 jobs.

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises are the backbone of Nepal’s economy. They employ a large share of the workforce and are drivers of innovation and new job creation. Their rebound, therefore, will set the foundation for overall economic recovery,” said Elisabeth von Capeller, Swiss Ambassador to Nepal.

Industrial scale biomass pellets

Bakas, renewable Energy is planning to produce 30 million metric tons of biomass pellets every year and help reduce Nepal’s per capita coal impact and also improve public health by reducing air pollution. Biomass pellets are a clean and cheap alternative energy source and the material for production is sourced from the forest floor. This week, Bakas signed a loan agreement with NAB Bank for a debt financing of Rs160 million. Business Oxygen (Pvt) Ltd. (BO2) is making an equity investment of Rs5.8 million for developing the biomass pellets project at tinshopa of Sarlahi district.

“This is an exciting project that assists adaptive resilience and will help the economy with clean energy in numerous ways including being a substitute for coal,” said Siddhant Raj Pandey, CEO of BO2.

Ncell festive offer

Ncell customers can enjoy endless conversations, with their family and friends within and outside the Ncell network at more affordable rates this festive season. Endless Karunargh’s “allowance packs” for Ncell calls and a reduced rate of just Rs0.33 per minute. Customers can subscribe to 7 days, 15 days, or 30 days validity packs by dialing *17190# and following the instructions.

Global IME Bank offers 16% dividend

Global IME Bank will distribute 16% of its shareholders in 2019/20.

The Bank earned a net profit of Rs3.8 billion in 2019/20. The bank’s paid up capital will reach Rs2.6 billion after the distribution of bonus shares.

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Photos from the heart
Hosted by Gyanworiya. Taking photos from the heart is a short course designed for photo enthusiasts of all kinds as well as the general public, communication professionals, and others. This virtual course runs every Saturday with a documentary photographer. Nabin Baral focuses on the importance of design in any reading materials to convey messages.
Application deadline: Rolling basis

Boudha market
Buy fresh and organic fruits and vegetables, fresh baked goods, and other delicious goodies. Support local products, artisans, and follow physical distancing guidelines.
Saturdays, 8 am-12 pm, Upbaba Cafe, Boudha.

Creative Sundays
Create Sunday for kids is a weekly guided workshop for kids aged 4-12 to express themselves through art, storywriting, drama, and games. Call us at Facebook for details.
1st November onwards, 9860807865

Ojasvi Next
For the first time since its launch in 2014, Ojasvi Next, which merged the popular cosplay event in Nepal, is going online. The event will be divided into five segments: Cosplay showcase, charades, and Q&A among others. To participate in the event, visit their social media pages.
27 November

Khana set, or take a break from rice and try the Thakali food delivered from Cafe de Tukche. Order the Thakali baked goods, and other delicious goodies. Support local products and farmers, and follow physical distancing guidelines.

Get your Guide's Virtual world tour
Discovering incredible experiences from across the globe doesn’t have to be. Get your Guide’s The world at home inclusive brings some of their top tours, activities, and attractions to you online. Find everything on their YouTube channel.

Haadi Birjani
Cosing is a way of life. Birjani Haadi is the place to go to in order to
stop slow-volted organs
unraveled with a secret spice
baked in clay pots that enhance the dining experience.

The Cover Story
The Cover Story is a fortnightly series where writers, poets, and people talk about the cover designs of their books. Stay tuned to discover a new insta-post and YouTube channel for updates.

Europeanana
Discover cultural heritage from 3,000 museums, galleries, libraries, and archives across Europe. Head online to read about historical places, watch exhibitions, photographe, ancient manuscripts and more.

History from Home
Check out the Reminiscences: Histories from Home exhibition from Black Bus Nepal. Look at the full schedule of contents and conversations on Facebook.

Poetry Foundation
Discover all things poetry. Browse through collections of classic and contemporary poets, readings, poetry news, and the entire 100-year archive of Poetry Magazine.

The Workshop Eatery
Head to the Workshop Eatery from 8-10 pm on its closing day to enjoy a unique dining experience.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU

The Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu hovered between 50-100 in the 24 hours from 1pm on Wednesday to 1pm on Thursday (see above). This live hour-by-hour measurement of AQI at the US Embassy monitoring station in Phora Darbar can be seen at www.nepalitimes.com. The morning and evening peaks are clearly visible, but the absence of haze from India and a fresh northwesterly breeze has cleared up Kathmandu Valley’s air somewhat.

FridaysForFuture
Fridays for Future is a global movement led by the environmental activist Greta Thunberg. This movement is about striking for the climate and making our world a better place.

Foodmandu for more.

Kritis Joshi
Kritis Joshi is a Jr.ção photographer and artist. She has been covering stories on environmental sustainability for more than a decade. She is also the co-founder of Black Bus Nepal, a photography studio and non-profit organization.

Erma Restaurant
Erma daftara offers an upscale fine dining experience with not-to-miss coastal continental dishes. To the cream of hermit soup, vegetable satvik, and the Erma house salad.
Hotel Shermabala, Ch执勤ghat (01) 4630255

Cafe de Tukche
Make lunchman lunch special, and get lechent. Tukche food, delivered from Cafe de Tukche. Order the Tukche kharat alk, a stalk a break from rice and my Tukche电流ri, delicious.
Lunchman, 9862893750

Grill Durbar
Grill Durbar, there isn’t anything that can’t be grilled. The signature grilled chicken, the spicy Durbar fries. Check out the Durbar menu.
9813786808, 9864167727, 9860382797

ONLINE ARCHIVES

ONLINE ARCHIVES

EVENTS

Binge Mode
Episodes of this pop-culture podcast produced by The Virgin’s Naina Dhillon. Discover the top films, tv shows, and other piece of media. Find Binge Mode on Stitcher and Apple podcasts.

DINING

EcoLogiC with Miss Moti
Kritis Joshi

Kritis Joshi is a Jr.ção photographer and artist. She has been covering stories on environmental sustainability for more than a decade. She is also the co-founder of Black Bus Nepal, a photography studio and non-profit organization.

Our Pick
A novel published in 1992 by author Vikram Seth. It is a multi-generational tale of two families, one Indian and one Chinese. It is set over 150 years spanning from the 1860s to the 1970s and is a historical drama novel.

The Cover Story
The Cover Story is a fortnightly series where writers, poets, and people talk about the cover designs of their books. Stay tuned to discover a new insta-post and YouTube channel for updates.

YouTube channel.

Virtual world tour
Travel may be limited these days, but discovering incredible experiences from across the globe doesn’t have to be. Get your Guide’s The world at home inclusive brings some of their top tours, activities, and attractions to you online. Find everything on their YouTube channel.

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Everest Trail reopens, but cautiously

Surendra Phuyal
in Solukhumbu

Flying from Kathmandu to Lukla today is almost like taking an international flight. Passengers need a negative RT PCR report not older than 72 hours, have to wear masks, visors and latex gloves on the 35-minute Twin Otter flight.

The Khumbu Valley below Mt Everest reported its first Covid-19 case on 23 October when an elderly local man suffering from asthma tested positive. The next day a team of medics helicoptored to Namche and contact traced 123 people, of whom nine were found to be positive – all of them young people, of whom nine were found to be positive – all of them young.

The municipality, however, reversed its decision and rescinded the flight ban and on foreign and Nepali trekkers from hiking on the Everest Trail. The local municipality has for so far contained the coronavirus crisis, and residents here want to keep it that way.

It has now enforced strict rules on outsiders. Since flights restarted on 17 September, Nepalis who had been cooped up for months by the lockdown had started making up for the absence of foreign trekkers. Non-Nepali tourists started flying in after a week’s hotel quarantine in Kathmandu after 17 October, although many trek reservations have been cancelled.

Ang Jangmu Sherpa owns Rivendale Lodge in Deboche which has a stunning view of Everest, Lhotse and Ama Dablam. She is happy several groups of Nepalis arrived after the lockdown came last month to acclimatise and train in the area.

“IT'S NOT JUST OUR KHUMBU region where businesses are suffering. The entire world is affected by Covid,” she said. “We have invested a lot of money to build this place, and suddenly we are in the midst of this crisis.”

Aside from the economic difficulties, Ang Jangmu is also worried about visitors bringing the coronavirus to the Khumbu. But she adds: “As long as people take precautions, get PCR tests, Nepalis are welcome and that would be good enough for now.”

Records show nearly 60,000 visitors entered the Sagarmatha National Park last year, contributing more than Rs180 million in fees and permits. That does not include another levy charged by the municipality, and also what tourists spend on food, lodgings and paying porters.

The spring season had just started in March when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the government cancelled all trekking and mountaineering, and tourists had to rush back to Kathmandu to catch flights out before Nepal went into lockdown on 24 March.

There had been zero tourists since then. In September, Nepali trekkers started trickling in and now there are some foreign trekkers. Many lodge-owners are happy that at least tourist trekkers are finally arriving in the Khumbu after a quiet spring and monsoon.

Says mountain guide Dawa Nuru Sherpa in the village of Pangboche: “Porters have no work, hotels are facing problems. We should welcome Nepalis, at least people like us can work and earn our living.”

Nepali tourists are taking advantage of attractive packages offered by airlines, helicopter companies and lodges in the Khumbu. There are two expeditions attempting to climb Mt Ama Dablam, one of them with a Qatari prince.

“We wanted to use the opportunity to get to see Nepal,” said Bashu Panjuki from Butwal, who works in Abu Dhabi, and has been stuck in Nepal because of the lockdowns. “We followed all the travel safety protocols to visit Gokyo. It was worth every paisa. It was amazing and unforgettable.”

For Ang Jangmu Sherpa, who runs Sherpa Guide Lodge in Phakding was happy to greet visitors after months. As 27 Nepalis arrived from Lukla, she had a busy morning last week preparing food and rooms for them. She said: “It is a crisis time but now I’m happy to welcome Nepali tourists. We are following health guidelines, although sometimes in the kitchen or restaurant it is difficult.”

In Khumjung, lodge owner Lhakpa Dorje Sherpa, who has climbed Mt Everest and Ama Dablam twice each, looks worried. Khumjung is slightly off the beaten track on the trail between Namche and Tengboche, and few villagers wear masks.

The PCR tests you do in Kathmandu may not be reliable because you move a lot after that test: you were in a plane, met people, and then that, and then you have caught the virus along the way. We have also heard there are fake PCR reports,” he says.

To address these concerns, the Khumbu Municipality guideline states only tests done at government hospitals, HAMS, B and B and Star Hospital will be accepted at Kathmandu airport before leaving for a Lukla flight.

“We don’t have the right health infrastructure at present for PCR tests,” says Lhakpa Tshering Sherpa of the municipality. “At least we have no choice but to rely on PCR reports from Kathmandu.”

The Park’s Chief Conservation Officer Bhumiraj Upadhyay has this piece of advice to prospective visitors: “Please make sure that you get a proper PCR test before coming here. If you do so, you will know that you are safe and you will help people of Khumbu remain safe from the virus.”

PHOTOS: SURENDRA PHUYAL

Bhumiraj Upadhyay
Let the mountains rest during Covid-19, but come back next year for the Snow Leopard Conservation Trek in Dolpo

Sonam Choekyi Lama in Dolpo

It is morning here at 4,000m, and an overnight blizzard has left everything white. All around us, the outlines of the mountains of Dolpo have been softened by new snow. Below, Phoksundo Lake is partly ice-covered. The snow has made it easier for us to look for snow leopard tracks. These cats are elusive enough, but their fluffy camouflage makes them hard to see even if they are nearby.

That the Snow Leopard is, that it is here, that its frosty eyes watch us from the mountain — that is enough. And in the not-seeing, I am content.’ These lines from Peter Matthiessen’s classic The Snow Leopard echo in my mind, and make me curious: what does this creature that is so hard to see look like?

It is the philosophical Zen-like idea of the ‘not-seeing’ that holds such symbolism in Matthiessen’s book. Its powerful description of the animal that is there but not there, that you look for but cannot see. It reminds us of our own ephemeral presence in the eternity of nature, of being here today, gone tomorrow.

Like the tracks on the snow that indicate that the being is nearby, its proof will be erased soon enough with the warmth of the sun. All that will remain is the memory of our presence, and the flash of fur on an icy crag.

The snow leopard is one of the world’s most elusive and rare cats. It is sparsely distributed across 12 countries in Central Asia and the Himalaya, admirably adapted to its high and rugged range at elevations of 3,000-4,500m.

The snow leopard has become not just a professional quest for my sister Tshiring Lhamu Lama, but also a personal journey. She is a Snow leopard researcher and conservationist, and founder of Snow Leopard Journeys. As luck would have it, she invited me to join her to spend three winter months earlier this year in our birthplace of Phoksundo to document her research, and to plan for a Snow Leopard Conservation Trek next year.

There is an easier way to see a snow leopard: through camera traps that we installed. But there is nothing to beat the sight of a snow leopard in the flesh. It was after a month of stalking and tracking that I had my first encounter on 28 February.

The coronavirus pandemic had spread from China to Europe by then, but up here in remote Dolpo, we had no idea. I was alone, scanning the ridges and checking up on the motion-detection camera inside a small cave.

It was 6pm and already getting dark when, right at the entrance to the cave, was a large cat that looked like a furry cloud trailing a long curly tail. We were face-to-face. The leopard was as surprised to see me as I was. My happiness at seeing this apparition overcame my fear.

Was it real? Was it an illusion? Did I really see it?

In slow motion, I stretched my hand to grab my camera.
leopard noticed my movement, and leapt away noiselessly, disappearing up into the cliffs above. I did manage a grainy photo as it bolted off – visual proof to myself that I had actually seen what I had just seen.

We sighted snow leopards four more times this winter. I will never forget its haunting yowl echoing from the cliffs overlooking Phoksundo Lake. Even when we did not hear it, the leopard’s ghostly presence was all around us. It would pass through our village, marking and depositing scat, but it would disappear before we noticed it was there.

“IT looks like he is challenging us, teasing us, playing hide and seek,” Tshiring said.

My sister has been to every corner of Dolpo, where even our locals have not yet been, to research snow leopards. We were all inspired by George Schaller and Peter Matthiessen, who passed through our village of Phoksundo in 1973, long before either of us were born. Schaller’s study of the blue sheep and Matthiessen’s The Snow Leopard have been the inspiration for Tshiring’s conservation work. In 2016, she joined Schaller’s team which was retracing his 1973 trip, and had a chance to carry forward her study into snow leopards.

Throughout my research in Dolpo, our people would ask me why we need to save these predators that kill our yaks and sheep, and which do not give us any milk or food,” Tshiring tells me. She tried to explain to the herders the importance of maintaining the ecological balance of these mountains, and how the snow leopard is at the top of the food chain.

This has given her work even more of a sense of urgency, and she is convinced that snow leopard conservation can only happen if the local communities are involved in protecting the animal. They may be convinced about helping protecting the animals if they see benefits from its conservation through wildlife tourism. Trekking is becoming the mainstay of Dolpo’s economy now, even though this year there have been no tourists and no income because of the Covid-19 crisis.

But for next year and beyond, Tshiring is convinced that the Snow Leopard Conservation Trek to Phoksundo Lake can attract premium tourists from all over the world, bringing jobs and income to locals. This, in turn, will convince them of the value of changing the habitat of the snow leopard in Nepal’s largest district bordering the Tibetan Plateau.

Last winter, our main aim was to engage and involve local herders through employment opportunities which might change their perception about snow leopards into the protection of these magnificent cats. Snow Leopard Journeys will not just create jobs, but also plough 10% of its income for further snow leopard conservation work by sustaining herder livelihoods.

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Double whammy: air pollution and Covid-19

Winter air pollution will complicate the struggle to manage the pandemic in India and Nepal

Mario Molina, ozone, air pollution and climate

"Exposures to air pollution have been shown to affect the human body's immune defense making an individual more vulnerable to respiratory infections such as pneumonia," says Pallavi Pant, air quality scientist at the Nepal Effects Institute. "Air pollution exposures are linked with a range of diseases including chronic heart and lung diseases – all of which contribute to poorer outcomes in patients infected with the virus."

Researchers say it is likely that people living in areas with high air pollution will experience more adverse outcomes from Covid-19. The report also found that air pollution is a leading risk factor to health both in Nepal and India followed by smoking and high blood pressure.

Even though there is now greater awareness in Nepal and in South Asia about the impact of poor air quality, not even steps have been taken at the national state level. There is also no cross-border collaboration in controlling air quality especially as the season for crops residue burning is sending plumes of pollution across South Asia.

"Although there have been actions and air quality improvements in some countries, including Nepal, it has been little or no sustained progress over the last decade in the most polluted countries of South and South East Asia," says the report.

In the first-ever comprehensive analysis of air pollution's global impact on newborns, the report finds that outdoor household particulate matter pollution contributes to the deaths of nearly 500,000 infants in their first month of life. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the infant deaths are due to use of household burning of solid fuels, getting polluted with air from India and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Nepal, 22% of all neonatal mortality is linked to air pollution, which is more than attributed to indoor pollution. The air pollution levels are much higher than the figure in India where 46% of all neonatal deaths due to air pollution is attributed to household air pollution.