



(Un)United States of America

Kunda Dixit

America's turmoil over the past four years and this messy election are a lesson in how to dismantle a functioning democracy in a few easy steps. This is an important warning for Nepal and countries in the region which are grappling with making their own electoral systems free and fair, and deliver accountability.

Foreign policy experts say that the chaos that has followed this election is more reminiscent of the banana republics to which America used to lecture about freedom, democracy and human rights.

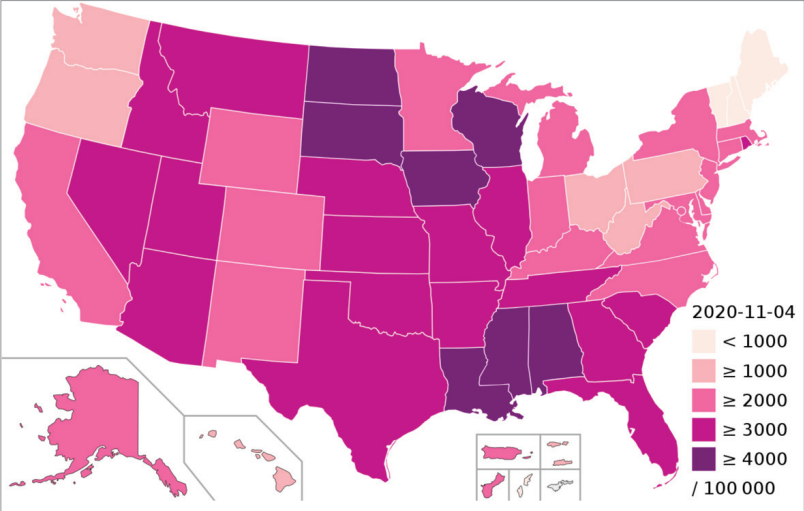
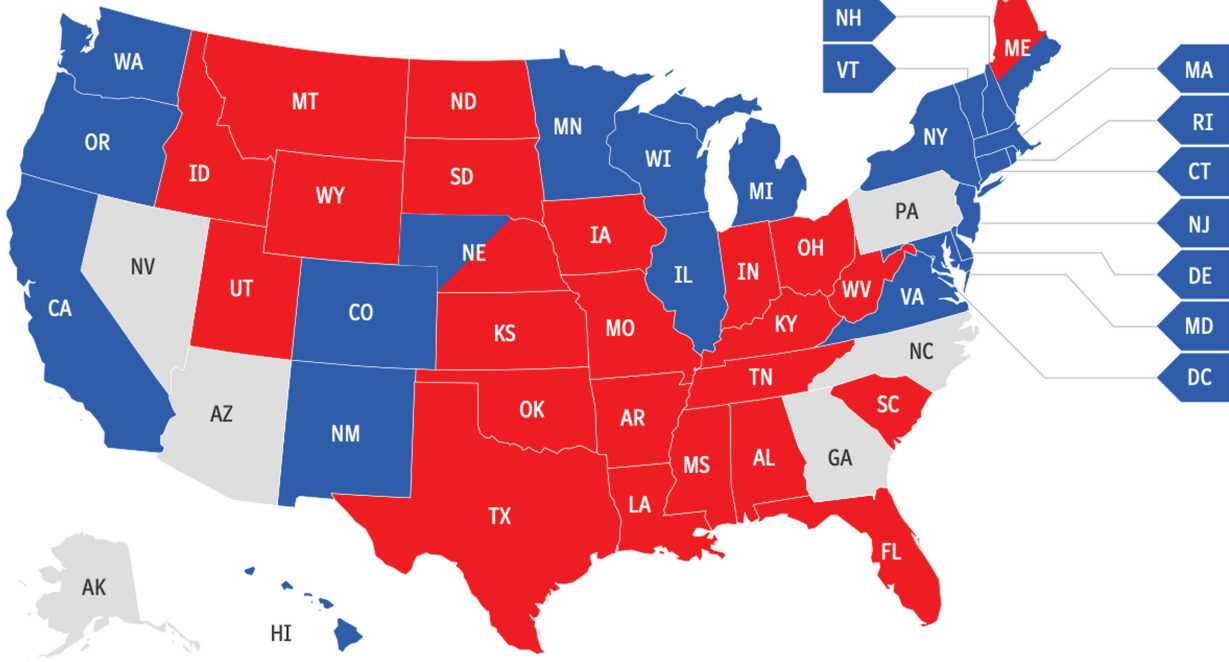
America has projected hard power through its global military might, but also its value system through technology and US cultural products. But four years of Trump has cost America this moral high ground globally.

"The US is divided like never before. This will have far-reaching consequences for the rest of the world and for South Asia that looks up to the United States as a beacon of democracy with proper separation of powers and moral authority to guide other countries on matters of electoral politics," says Nishchal Pandey, Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies in Kathmandu. "Despite his poor handling of the pandemic and several erroneous decisions, President Trump has shown that his policies were admired by a substantial chunk of the population."

Indeed, the US election results so far prove how little facts matter even in a democracy in which the media has been relentlessly investigating Donald Trump's wrongdoings. Even if Joe Biden wins, the results have shown that Trumpist disenchantment with the establishment is strong and he has managed to successfully convince his base that the 'liberal press' is out to get him with 'fake news'.

Pandey adds that US voters have repeatedly shown that very few understand how electoral colleges work, and why the popular vote does not determine the winner.

Result Joe Biden Donald Trump Undeclared



Many precincts that have the highest proportion of Covid-19 cases also voted for Trump.

He told *Nepali Times*: "It is high time that the US introspects on the shortcomings of how its elections are conducted because its democracy instead of becoming an element of its soft power is becoming a travesty of sorts to telecast live all over the world."

For many Nepalis there is a strong sense of irony about an America that has been supporting human rights, inclusion and democracy in the country's post-conflict transition. Many remember former US president Jimmy Carter's multiple visits to observe elections here. It seems the services of his Carter Centre are now required more in his own home state of Georgia where the

race is neck-to-neck, and there is deep disagreement about counting methods.

A possible Biden victory may also be good news to those applying for H-1B visas who were barred from entry into America by Trump in June, which would affect up to 50,000 Indian professionals, and some Nepalis. A US court subsequently overturned the decision last month. Trump also banned the US Diversity Visa (DV) lottery, and interviews for 2021 winners were suspended, citing Covid-19. Applications, however, have reopened for 2022. Many undocumented Nepalis in the US were also affected by Trump trying to end the Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

On Wednesday, even as Americans were voting, the United States formally left the Paris Climate Agreement signed in 2015 – three years after Donald Trump announced he would be quitting. In the past four years, Trump has delayed action on the climate emergency, and overturned other environmental legislation, appointed an oil lobbyist to head the Environment Protection Agency (EPA).

Four more years of Trump would unleash so much damage to the Planet, environmentalists say, that it would take decades

to undo. Nepal's Himalayan mountains, which are already melting rapidly, will bear the direct impact of accelerated climate heating — endangering the water supply to millions of people living downstream in India and Bangladesh as well.

Geopolitically, the only difference for Nepal between Trump or Biden would be that at least Biden knows where Nepal is, and will not pronounce it "Nipple". Neither president is going to stomach China extending its military, economic and political clout in Asia – even though Biden's approach may be less aggressive.

Last week in New Delhi, American and Indian foreign and defence officials signed a Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) pact seen by many as a military alliance aimed at containing China. A Biden presidency would likely give continuity to this strategic alliance that has caught Asian countries like Nepal in a bind. Biden will also likely stay the course on the Indo-Pacific strategy and QUAD naval exercises in the Indian Ocean this week.

"It appears that Biden will largely follow the Trump approach to China and therefore to the Indo-Pacific in as much as this is a structural feature of current international politics and therefore has garnered bipartisan support in the United States," says Bhaskar Koirala of the Nepal Institute of International and Strategic Studies. "Under a Biden administration, the US can be expected to play an increasing role as an off-shore balancer in Asia."

For Nepal, a Biden administration may place a greater emphasis on development and programs such as the MCC (Millennium Challenge Corporation) infrastructure project as a counter to China's BRI (Belt Road Initiative).

Koirala adds: "Biden may have a more general foreign policy objective to ensure that Nepal is stable politically and that it retains its independent identity." 🇳🇵

Lies and damned lies
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



Nepali Times edition #832 of 11-17 November 2016 that analysed Donald Trump's surprise win.

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

Lies and damned lies

Going by official statistics, Nepal's economy is doing splendidly. The economy grew at 2.27%, not bad considering that it has been battered by the past eight months by Covid-19.

Every expert had predicted that Nepal's remittances would go down with the pandemic, with the Asian Development Bank even putting a precise figure: a decrease of 28.7%. But it actually went up by 8.1% in July-September compared to the same months last year.

Inflation is holding steady at 4.5%. The balance of payments is Rs68 billion in the positive. Nepal's hard currency reserves have hit a record-breaking \$12.2 billion.

The Ministry of Health's statistics show

they do not reflect the overall outlook for the economy.

Many middle class families have lost all their savings to pay hospitals for treating relatives with Covid-19. There are no official statistics on them.

Official figures show that imports are down and the balance of payments is looking healthy, but domestic production is nearly zero. Pre-Dasain remittances may have gone up, but nearly 200,000 Nepali migrant workers are backlogged and have not been able to leave. Tens of thousands of workers and their families have gone back to India because of lack of jobs here, and paradoxically many Indian workers have streamed back to ply their trades in Nepal's cities.

It is the Central Bureau of Statistics that is supposed to keep track of economic activity, but its figures show that the country is not in an economic recession even though there are no accurate numbers for economic growth for the last two quarters to base that assumption on.

The Nepal Labour Survey of 2018 shows there are 7 million people employed in Nepal, and of these two-thirds are in the informal sector. We have no idea what has become of them. We can only guess that most have no income, but there are no figures. You can only solve a problem if you know there is a problem.

Pre-pandemic figures show 17% of the population living below the poverty line.

Informally, economists estimate that one-third of Nepalis have now been pushed below the poverty line. But that is just a guesstimate. There are no surveys to show how many people from which sectors lost their income. Just like with Covid-19 tests and treatment, the government is telling citizens most at risk to fend for themselves.

A 2016 Population and Health Survey showed that half of Nepal's population suffered from food insecurity, with 10% of families facing chronic food shortage. Eight months into the pandemic, aside from sample surveys by WFP and UNICEF, we do not know for sure the scale of the nutrition crisis.

Without these statistics, the already inadequate relief targetted for the most vulnerable will be side tracked by the politically connected. Which is what is happening. In the past eight years, the government has not even been able to identify the poorest families.

Prime Minister K P Oli, preoccupied with a perpetual power struggle with his party nemesis Pushpa Kamal Dahal, relies on incomplete statistics to declare that Nepal is not in an economic crisis. You cannot wake up someone who is pretending to sleep.

Nepal's macroeconomic picture looks rosy, but the ground reality is different

that 1,052 people have died so far from the coronavirus. But the Nepal Army says it has cremated and buried more than 1,400, the mortality totals at hospitals do not add up, and no one has bothered to count those who have died during isolation at home.

The total number of positive Covid-19 cases in the country is now over 185,000, but the number is probably many times higher. That figure is just among those who tested. The Ministry of Health has an exact number for those who have recovered: 148,408. But who is counting those who have stopped quarantining?

Since conclusions can be subjective, we rely on statistics to plan. But what if the figures are distorted or wrong? After all, statistics can be bent any which way to suit any argument.

Economic indicators are designed for 'normal' times, not when the world goes upside down. Extraordinary circumstances need more than figures for GDP per capita and annual economic growth. National averages distort the reality: you could have one foot in the oven and another in an ice bucket and say that on average you are comfortable.

Nepal's macroeconomic picture may look rosy, but the ground reality is different. By themselves the numbers may be right, but

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Twenty years ago this week in *Nepali Times* issue #16 of 10-16 November 2000, the page 1 story was the same old report – fighting within the Nepali Congress. The ruling party was going through the same paralysing power struggle that is threatening to split the NCP today. The showdown 20 years ago was between Party President between Girija Prasad Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba, today it is between K P Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

In his page 1 story titled 'Showdown' Binod Bhattarai analysed the competition between Koirala and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai's protege Deuba ahead of Congress's party convention. The story looked at the ambitions of the two leaders to be party president, and how their egos got in the way. Nepalis who believed that the older generation in the party would pave ways for the new were disappointed. Deuba was the young Turk then, but Koirala even at 78 had the pedigree and political muscle to lead the Nepali Congress.

Excerpts from the story:

Koirala and Deuba are now officially at war, this fight will be more cut-throat than a national election. Now, the focus will be on serious electioneering, which is also time for horse-trading. To increasingly-disgusted Nepalis, it does not matter if it is Koirala or Deuba who is leading



this feckless party. And we all had high hopes about the younger generation of leaders being cleaner and more business-like. Sensing the disarray, the leftist opposition has smelt blood, and is cashing in on the fuel price hike to launch a season of strikes that threatens to cripple tourism. In this melee, no one seems to have time to address this country's urgent problems -- not even to try and revive the stalled talks with the Maoists.

We'll find out who's boss in two months when the Nepali Congress holds its general convention in Pokhara. But even then there may be no clues as to why the Nepalis have to suffer this endless Congress cockfight, and why the party cannot function as a cohesive political organisation. OK, all political parties fight. But what is serious here is that every time they clash, the dust chokes the entire government machinery. Now that Koirala is in the fray he will have to also get down to serious campaigning. Signs of campaigning were already evident as in the bizarre sight last

week when both the opposition left parties (against fuel prices) and the Deuba faction (haggling over the nitty-gritty of party membership) were out picketing.

From the archives of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

ONLINE PACKAGES



JUNGLE OUT THERE

Take a trip to Bardia National Park which has become a hub for research to ensure that deer have enough grass so tigers have enough prey. Travel across the border to India to see how the two countries cooperate in conservation. Big cats special on [page 9](#).

SNOW LEOPARDS

Glad that Tshering Lhamu Lama is getting recognition ('Trekking to save Nepal's snow leopards', Sonam Choekyi Lama, #1033). She is a fearless advocate for snow leopards. If you can, please support these conservation actions.

Brian Peniston

• Tshiring is incredibly dedicated to snow leopard conservation and local community development.

Rodney Jackson

• Excellent article and meaningful work, Tshiring. Left me wanting to hear more about your adventures and all the stories.

Phurwa Dhondup

• In the past, wildlife conservation in Nepal have been led mostly by foreigners. It thus gives me a great sense of pride seeing women from Nepal brave the harsh topography and weather conditions to film these incredibly camera shy animals, knowing that they want to protect snow leopards and actually have concrete plans to do so.

Sushant Chalise

• If young people stay in village and carry on with research and livelihood improvement of local communities, we can certainly win the locals to work together for the conservation of mountain ecosystem.

Jhamak Karki

• I loved that two local children are helping to make their neighbours' lives better as well as trying to assure the snow leopard a place in its home too. I envy you having something wonderful to which you can dedicate your lives.

Kathleen Moore

• An inspiring story about snow leopards and mountains by local mountain girls.

Lopsang Lama

• So glad I could witness a bit of that passion and dedication. All my good wishes and support to this wonderful cause!

Rocio Garcia

MAJESTIC MOUNTAINS

Wow ('Crystal clear air makes the peaks of the eastern Himalaya visible from the Nepal Tarai', Parmeshwar Jha, nepalitimes.com!) You are making my frustrated wanderlust so much worse.

Claire Cozens

• Amazing! We may not be able to view this again.

Bryan Hitan

TENGOBOCHE RINPOCHE

Thank you for bringing Rinpoche's importance into light ('The Himalaya mourn a saintly leader', Lisa Choegyal, #1033).

Ngawang Tenzin

• Beautifully written tribute to this special saintly man.

Jenny

BIOMASS FUEL PELLETS

Projects like this are very much needed and very significant in the context of Nepal ('Not letting waste go waste', #1033). All the best for this ground breaking initiative.

Madhav Simkhada

CLEAN FEED

Clean feed policy is a welcome choice for me but for others who heavily rely on the TV for their entertainment, it's quite opposite ('Nepalis denied tv channels over Dasain', Raju Baskota, #1033).

Rujzo Krmchry

• Foreign channel gateway administrator must refund the cost to the subscriber during this period. Clean feed policy is in favour of Nepal.

Subedi Pushparaj

COVID-19

As a guy privileged to live in the UK with its NHS health service and retained wealth my heart goes out to the people of your beautiful land and the warmth and compassion they show compared to the pampered westerners. I am sure your resolve and fortitude will win through these difficult times.

Richard

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



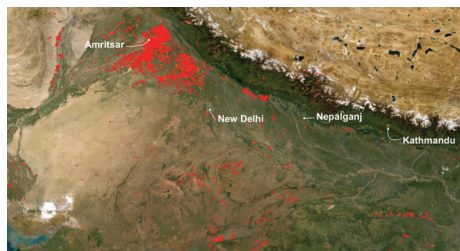
Everest Trail reopens, but cautiously

by *Surendra Phuyal*

The Khumbu Valley below Mt Everest detected ten cases of Covid-19, and residents want to keep it from spreading. But they see no reason why tourists should be kept away, as long as they take health precautions. Multimedia package on nepalitimes.com



Most reached and shared on Facebook



Double whammy: air pollution and Covid-19

by *Sonia Awale*

1,052 people have died in Nepal from Covid-19 in the past eight months. In 2019, air pollution killed 42,100 people in the country. Pollution has worsened with stubble burning in India, and the two calamities are set to converge this winter. Read the story for details.



Most popular on Twitter



Trekking to save Nepal's snow leopards

by *Sonam Choekyi Lama*

An exclusive on a researcher's personal journey of documenting snow leopard in the Nepal's Himalayas as she planned for conservation trek next year. Join online discussion about the elusive cat.



Most commented

Nepalis denied tv channels over Dasain

by *Raju Baskota*

On the eve of Dasain, the government decided to enforce the rule requiring television distributors to provide advertisement-free foreign channels. Suddenly, 120 of the most popular channels got blacked out of the cable menu. Full report on our website.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#Everest Trail reopens, but cautiously
Nepali hikers have returned to Khumbu, but Sherpas do not want coronavirus to spread in their valley. Multimedia package by @surendraphuyal from Solukhumbu. #COVID19 #Himalayas #trekking #tourism



Matiram Pun @PunMatiram
We should totally protect those communities including other areas getting infected with SARS-CoV-2. Trekkers can wait till next year!



WildYak @WildYak11
Tengboche Rinpoche always warned the Sherpas not to become too dependent on tourists.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#Nepalis denied tv channels over Dasain
The public is outraged, blames the government for playing dirty with clean feed rule. To know more on the clean feed policy, read @rajunews story here:



समान @samman_re
I'm totally fine with clean feed system. There are many channels which have obliged to the rule and enforced clean feed. If there are some channels that don't want to do it, it's their problem. Nepali citizens should understand this and pressure the channels.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The Covid-19 Crisis Management Center (CCMC), along with NepalTelecom and @Noell, tracked mobile #geolocation and developed a heat map of #Nepal's Covid-19 hotspots. Find out if your district falls under high risk area in this report by @SoniaAwale



Fight4Justice @सुरेस तामाङ
Look at the COVID hotspots, we are in one of them, stay safe!



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
From shoes to suits, tote bags to cushion covers, Nepal's traditional dhaka fabric makes an entry into contemporary fashion. #FromTheArchives



Wendy Werner IFC @wendywerner4
Great article: history, culture, & design!!

Times

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Publisher and Editor: **Kunda Dixit**
Digital Products Strategist: **Sahina Shrestha**, Associate Editor: **Sonia Awale**, Layout: **Sanubabu Tamang**
Published by **Himalmedia Pvt Ltd** | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com
Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518



Nepal's sky can be this clean every day

The pandemic has shown air pollution can be reduced, we just have to do it without the socio-economic cost

‘Our ATR-72 broke through the thick smog at about 3,000m after takeoff from Kathmandu. An ocean of grey-brown pollution blanketed the Tarai, and stretched right across to the southern horizon. Out of the right-hand window, the Annapurnas rose above the carpet of smog, with Mt Machapuchre appearing like a black pyramid devoid of snow.’ That paragraph is from my column in this paper from January 2019.



Even until February 2020, we believed it would take a miracle to get rid of the appalling pollution that blanketed the Indo-Gangetic plains. But it happened. NASA released satellite data from March 2017, 2019 and compared them to those in March 2020. The NO2 concentration over Lahore, New Delhi, Karachi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Dhaka had reduced by between 28-56% on average.

After Nepal went into lockdown in March, Kathmandu's air cleared dramatically. This newspaper printed pictures of Mt Everest visible from Kathmandu Valley, residents in Jalandhar in the Punjab plains saw the Dhauladhar range of Himachal Pradesh, and Kangchenjunga was visible from Siliguri.

This week, a sudden change in wind direction swept away thick smoke from crop residue burning and other industrial and vehicular pollution that had enveloped the Ganga plains most of October. It was like a Dasain from 50 years ago,



ABHUSHAN GAUTAM / NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE
Gauri Shankar and Mt Everest visible from Kathmandu in May during the first lockdown.



On Saturday, one could see right across the breadth of Nepal from Rajbiraj to Mt Makalu on the horizon. PARMESHWAR JHA

with crystal clear skies and one end of Nepal visible from the other. The Nepali social web was full of photos of Mt Makalu visible from Rajbiraj, of Mt Manaslu from Nawalparasi, and Mt Everest from Kirtipur.

However, the lower concentration of particulate matter and pollutant gases in the air were not outcomes of effective implementation of environment-friendly public policy or innovation. Nor were they a result of voluntary changes in societal behaviour. They came

about because of social containment measures to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Strict lockdowns forced vehicles off the roads for months, industries and the service sector shut down, reducing sources of most pollution. But this came at enormous cost as economies were brought to their knees. Millions of jobs and livelihoods across South Asia were lost. Migrant labourers, domestic helpers, cleaners, drivers, guards, in construction and factories, crop harvesting, brick kilns – all

trudged back to their villages in the biggest movement of people in the Subcontinent since Partition in 1947.

Over the past decades, our countries have invested billions on social safety nets, in food security, safe drinking water supply, primary health care. Yet, at a time of greatest need, those most affected by the emergency had no access to food, water, medical care.

The plight of migrants during the pandemic reflect a deeply divided socio-political landscape and failure of governance.

It is a warning that we must transit to more frugal ways of living, minimising our environmental footprints, and engendering both structural and behavioral changes for a greener, healthier, and more inclusive future.

Before the lockdown, pollution levels exceeded permissible levels, and mitigation received only lip service. There was a stark dichotomy between public concern about the health impact of pollution and state intervention to address it. The main reasons were procedural lapses, inadequate regulation and poor policy implementation. In short, the failure of politics to improve governance. The crisis has shown that there must be more accountability.

Increased investments in clean energy sources guided by creation of new jobs, mitigation of air pollution and balancing the natural ecosystem should be cornerstones of the new order. Action to stem air pollution will not just remove a persistent urban hazard, but also reduce the spread of Covid-19 into the future. Studies have shown that dirty air worsens pre-existing medical conditions, and can also elevate coronavirus risk.

The good news is that the sources of air pollution are broadly known: vehicular and aircraft emissions, dust from roads, excavation, debris of demolished buildings, construction sites, brick kilns, setting fire to crop residue burning, open burning of plastic and solid waste, inefficient hospital incinerators, industries, crushers and mixers, asphalt plants and metal and automobile repair units, poor fuel quality and shoddy pollution test of vehicles.

Each can and must be tackled systematically at source. Honest efforts are needed to overcome procedural lapses, make regulation effective, and enforce compliance to policies. In 2018, long before the pandemic hit, the mayors of Katmandu Valley got together to express a collective commitment to curtail air pollution.

The pandemic lockdowns have shown us it can be done, we just have to find a way to do it without the socio-economic cost.

The benefits will be enormous – for public health of hundreds of millions of people, reduction of the region's huge carbon footprint, and even in slowing down the melting of Himalayan glaciers because of the deposition of soot particles.

Many years from now, when Covid-19 becomes just another flu and these mitigation efforts start yielding results, looking out of an aircraft window on a winter morning flight westbound from Kathmandu, we may finally be able to see the Ganga plains and the foothills of the Annapurnas from the air, just like we did during the lockdowns.🇳🇵

Ajaya Dixit is research adviser at the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (ISET-Nepal) and contributes this column Climate for Change for Nepali Times.

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Nepal building a highway to Everest

New road linking Lukla to rest of the country will transform region, not all of it for the better

Surendra Phuyal
in Solukhumbu

Excavators are clawing through sheer cliff faces, rocks tumble down to the Dudh Kosi below, and once in a while the sound of dynamite echoes in the gorge.

A new road linking the town of Chaurikharka just below Lukla to the rest of the country is due to open by December 2022, and work is going on despite the pandemic.

Although the road will not enter the Sagarmatha National Park which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it will make trekking and climbing in the Everest region more accessible. But it will turn Lukla airfield largely redundant, while locals fear an erosion of the region's Sherpa culture, architecture and lifestyle.

On the Chinese side of Mt Everest, there is a highway from Lhasa right up to North Base Camp below the Rongbuk Glacier at 5,200m. Since 2016, it has become vital to transport goods and people for expeditions to the world's highest mountain from the north.

Kathmandu is already linked through a 277km highway to Phaplu of Solukhumbu district, which is a two-day trek below Lukla. Work started on the 77km road linking Phaplu to Chaurikharka six years ago, but progress has been slow due to difficult terrain, delays due to the 2015 earthquake and Blockade, and lack of money.

This means that for at least the next two years, trekkers, climbers and local people will either have to trek from the nearest roadhead near Phaplu or Jiri-Shivalaya-Bamti Bhandar in Ramechhap district, or as many do, take a 30-minute flight to Lukla from Kathmandu.

Like all infrastructure projects in Nepal, completion of this road is delayed. Khumbu municipality has run out of money for the remaining 24km dirt track to Chaurikharka from Thamdada.

The completion of the road was the pet project of the former Chair of Khumbu Rural Municipality, late Nim Dorje Sherpa who died in June. He believed that connecting Phaplu to Lukla would further lift living standards, bring down prices, and reduce the drudgery of his Sherpa people.

"It's still our top priority project," says Lhakpa Tsheri Sherpa of Khumbu Municipality, adding that construction has been delayed somewhat by the Covid-19 crisis which has also devastated the region's trekking and climbing income this year.

Khumbu used to earn Rs200 million a year just from trekking and climbing fees, not counting what visitors paid for lodging, food and portering. This year, the income is down to Rs60 million.

"It is because of this loss of income that the construction of this last 24km stretch slowed down," explained Binod Bhattarai, Chief Administrative Officer of Khumbu Municipality. "Now there is hardly any money to complete the project. We are struggling."



Excavators at work on Thamdada, 24km south of Lukla, despite the fact that the Khumbu Municipality has run out of money to complete the Phaplu-Chaurikharka road. ALL PHOTOS: SURENDRA PHUYAL



Sunkoshi Bridge at Harkapur on the highway from Kathmandu to Phaplu.



The Municipality has decided to open Khumbu for trekking and climbing even though nine Covid-19 cases were detected in Namche Bazar last month, and it could have spread. Local people have stopped trekkers from going above Pangboche on the Everest Trail.

South of Lukla on Thamdada, bulldozers are at work on the track, while flights to and from Lukla buzz overhead all morning. The road alignment then drops precipitously to the river and Surke helipad below Lukla, before a final ascent to Chaurikharka.

Bhattarai is not giving up, he says: "The Province 1 government has assured financial support for this project, and other officials and MPs, too, have said that the work need not stop. So, we are hoping that we can make up for lost time."

Not everyone in Khumbu is happy with the road. They think it will spoil the region's pristine beauty and fragile culture, as has happened when roads have reached other parts of remote Nepal in recent years.

Sonam Gyalzen Sherpa from Namche, who is chair of the Sagarmatha National Park Buffer Zone Management Committee, says the economy has to be balanced with ecology.

"The Road will enter the boundary of the national park from Surke and it will surely have some adverse impact on local culture and nature," he said. "But since the Khumbu is remote and needs a road we are trying to ensure that the EIA is carefully done and its recommendations are strictly adhered to. It will be a big challenge for sure. We are currently discussing how we can mitigate damage."

However, there are also strong voices in support of the road. A cylinder of cooking gas that costs



Mules descend from Lukla to Phaplu at Paiya village along the partially completed track.



Yaks and zopkyos carry goods up the Everest Trail near Namche Bazar. Locals hope the road to Lukla will make essential items cheaper.



Zopkyo trains carrying gas cylinders from Phaplu to Lukla. Higher up on the Everest trail, the cylinders cost ten times more than in Kathmandu.

Rs1,500 in Kathmandu is Rs15,000 in Gokyo or Lobuje in Upper Khumbu. The cylinders have to be taken on a 12 hour truck ride to Phaplu, then transferred to mule trains that take several days to get up to Namche. Sugar, salt and other food items cost several times more than in Kathmandu.

"The road will surely make our life easier," says Ang Jangmu Sherpa who runs a lodge in Debuje on the Everest Trail. "It will encourage more Nepalis to come trekking, and make certain goods such as cooking gas more affordable."

Says Ang Rita Sherpa of Lukla's Numbur Hotel: "Even if there is a road, most foreign trekkers are not going to travel to Lukla on a rough 14 hour road, but it will raise living standards in Khumbu."

"With careful planning to reduce environmental impact and maintain the quality of the trekking experience, tourism in Upper Khumbu can benefit from the new vehicular road access to Chaurikharka," says Sonia Miyahara, Managing Director of Hotel Everest View.

Besides the lack of money, the road has several other terrain-related hurdles. A dozen bridges need to be built across the Dudh Kosi gorge with a big one in Orlang Ghat that will cost Rs80 million.

Locals lament that despite the central government bragging about Mt Everest and Khumbu as an adventure destination and collecting revenue from fees, it has not chipped in for the road project.

"The federal government has done very little to help despite us knocking on doors of various ministries," said the Municipality's Lhakpa Tsheri Sherpa.

Locals are hoping that even if the 10m wide highway is not fully completed, the track will allow trucks and jeeps to negotiate the final stretch by 2022.

In Kathmandu, Infrastructure Minister Basata Kumar Nembang told *Nepali Times* that the federal government was committed to the project: "The Phaplu-Lukla road is one of the plans we have given high priority even in this pandemic situation. That road project will go ahead as demanded by local representatives."

Whatever the arguments for and against the road, one thing it will do is remove the need for travellers to be stuck, sometimes for weeks in Lukla, due to bad weather. 🇳🇵



BIKRAM RAI

Speaking for elephants

Lisa Choegyal's column 'The Elephant Dilemma', 4 October 2020 (<https://www.nepalitimes.com/banner/the-elephant-dilemma/>) elicited many comments from readers, some of which are excerpted here:

- As a group of animal welfare organisations we have to disagree with Lisa Choegyal's stand on elephant safaris.

Just because elephants are part of Nepal's heritage does not mean traditions should not change. Many outdated practices have been abandoned, including widow sacrifice and child labour, because they were against the ethics of the time. In any case, even if elephant tourism stopped today, elephants would remain an integral part of Nepal's heritage.

Just because elephants in Nepal are not used in 'alien' environments such as beaches and temples, does not mean that Chitwan's tourist safaris are 'natural'. Most elephants live in 'unnatural' shelters, usually a simple structure of zinc sheet with 4 poles. They are tied 24/7 unless taken for a ride. With a lack of fresh greens, their diet is 'unnatural'. Even the carrying of four tourists and a mahout is 'unnatural': even though elephants look invincible, science says that their skeleton is not designed to carry great weight on top of their spines.

Just because of a concern for loss of tourism, elephant riding and bathing does not need to be continued. The quick growth of non-contact tourism projects across the world shows there is great potential. Nepal introduced many humane alternatives for safaris (by canoe, car or on foot) and a pioneer company has already unchained its elephants. There is a growing market for a more ethical kind of tourism that involves elephants, be it in sanctuaries, elephant walking or viewing, *kuchi* and paper making, etc.

We feel there is enough evidence to show that elephant safaris generally are a cruel business. We have shown that over 80% of elephants live under 'unsuitable conditions'. This is in line with World Animal Protection's more recent findings that claim that more than three-quarter of captive

elephants are kept in 'severely-cruel conditions'.

Other groups have used video evidence to show present training techniques certainly do not 'mostly employ kindness and positive reinforcement'. Instead sharp objects, fire, fireworks and noise continue to be used to break in young elephants. Even the presumption that Nepal's safari elephants are no longer taken from the wild cannot be confirmed. The origins of elephants brought in from India are largely unknown as there is no proper documentation and no government control.

Ms Choegyal argues that people like us 'are shamelessly manipulating this emotion to convince the world that it is cruel to keep elephants in captivity'. This kind of languages creates an unnecessary and unbeneficial divide. We certainly do not try to manipulate anyone. We use evidence to show the realities of elephant tourism and to propose change.

We also introduce feasible alternatives and are ready to support such initiatives. At present we need all parties to save Nepal's precious wildlife and the country's tourism industry. The sooner we join hands, the better.

Animal Nepal

Animal Rights Club

Association Moey - Helping Captive Elephants

Elephant Aid International

Help Animals India

Nepal Elephant Walk Sanctuary

People's Alliance for Nature Nepal

Stand Up 4 Elephants

- Domesticated elephants play a major role in providing employment and economic opportunities to the local people through tourism, and also provide invaluable help to conservationists in researching and protecting Nepal's wild places.
Hemanta Mishra
- Cruelty to animals is a worldwide phenomenon. Dogs caged in

China and Vietnam meat markets. Whale massacres in Japan. The Gadimai sacrifices in Nepal. There are so many other forms of abuse of animals that need to be stopped more urgently. I agree with Lisa Choegyal that elephant safaris in Nepal are much more benign, and many livelihoods depend on it.

Erin Petersen

- Having seen the way elephants are taught 'obedience' and 'tamed' in Sri Lanka and Thailand, it is unconscionable that human beings in countries that practice the Buddhist ethos of compassion should be treating sentient beings in this way. In fact, elephants in the wild have a sophisticated family structure, respond to stress just like human beings when chained and confined. Elephants belong in the wild, and 'elephant safaris' should take on a new meaning, venturing into the jungle to observe them in their natural habitat.
Nandita Ghosh
- Those critical of captive elephants in Chitwan's tourism industry should not keep dogs as pets. There should only be wild dogs, and they should be allowed to roam freely in the wilderness.
K B Limbu

- I find it astonishing that so-called elephant activists do not seem to consider the fact that their blanket call for a ban on all captive elephants would leave thousands of them with no way to be supported, nowhere to live (since there is not enough wild land to release them to), and thousands of associated families with no work. Their plight would be worse.

- It would be a great differentiating point for Nepal to have every elephant facility audited to a recognised set of international standards. It would be the only country to do this.

- I'm all for a spirited debate on captive, domesticated elephant tours that meet the highest animal welfare standards, benefit communities, contribute to the stewardship of protected areas and create high-quality nature-based visitor experiences.

- Without delving too deep into the nuances of the issues associated with owning elephants ... the most important aspect is how you look after captive elephants and not really what you do with them. With that in mind I feel husbandry standards across the board can be improved in Nepal. Having an independent body to advise and monitor owners is a very good idea.

- At the moment it does look like a losing battle to keep elephants working, at least in India. If there is a ban on elephant safaris, it will mean more neglect of the captive animals.

- Dr Ingrid Suter makes a compelling case for captive elephant conservation and tourism. Particularly interesting is her belief in a grassroots, bottoms up consultation which I think is an excellent approach for Nepal.

- It is time for Nepal to end all forms of cruelty to animals, including cruel mass sacrifices, poisoning street dogs, and mistreatment of elephants in the name of tourism. If nothing else, it is bad karma.

- I agree, the welfare of captive elephants used for tourism is a concern in many countries and probably the certification model could address the critical welfare issue in Nepal.

- Nepal has always been unique in the use of domestic elephants for shoots in the old days and safari in more contemporary times. The good thing is Nepal has never used domestic elephants for work such as logging, etc. (Names supplied)

prabhu BANK

Virtual Photo Kathmandu

Due to the Covid-19 crisis, Nepal's premier international photo festival will be held virtually over the whole of next year from 3 December. Past three Photo Kathmandu events have been month-long jamborees in



which Patan itself turned into a stage for an explosion of the visual arts.

The festival is a part of a larger continuum of image-making, research and civic engagements at photo.circle and Nepal Picture Library, and has devised two strategies for the upcoming festival: time and place.

"We come once in two years for a month, create a momentum and disappear, so we decided to stretch the festival over a longer period and create a conversation over the whole year," says Photo Kathmandu's co-founder Nayantra Gurung Kakshapati.

Instead of physical exhibitions, Photo Kathmandu will collaborate with newspapers and come with print exhibitions for artists and photographers.

The opening week of the festival will have a series of portfolio reviews and will include professionals from all over the world. People can sign up for a free 30-minute session. Along with that, there will be artist talks and panels.

Irena Taskovski online

Producer and distributor of films, including Kesang Tseten's 2012 documentary *Who Will be a Gurkha*, Bosnia-born Irena Taskovski will be guiding a series of



four masterclasses on film production at Nepal's Pame Film and Music Festival 5-8 November. The 2020 edition was forced to go virtual, and screened 30 short, feature and documentary films from nine countries, as well as conducting online training and masterclasses.

Taskovski's films have been screened at more than 1,000 festivals worldwide in the past two decades. She says: "You need to be

smart and think about how one can make the authentic local story have a universal message so that people in different countries can also benefit from it."

Remittances rise

Contrary to most predictions that remittances Nepal workers send home would fall with the Covid-19 crisis, the inflow has actually risen compared to last year.

Figures from the Central Bank for mid-July to mid-September show that Nepalis overseas sent back Rs165.73 billion, an 8.1% increase compared to the same two months of the previous fiscal year.

This defied the prediction of huge drops in remittances due to the pandemic by Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics (18%), Asian Development Bank (28.7%) and the World Bank (14%).

Many migrant workers in essential sectors have continued to work and earn right through the pandemic, while others have been drawing on their savings to remit to their families, especially during festivals back home. The World Bank now forecasts a more gradual but prolonged decline continuing into 2021, with remittances falling by 12% in Nepal in 2021.

Daraz 11.11 Sale

Daraz is all set to launch its annual 11.11 sale on 11 November with over 6 thousand sellers, 160+ global and domestic brands, and more than 500,000 products. The sale offers various schemes and discounts and is expected to draw half a million customers from Nepal. Customers can get discounts of 20%.

Laxmi Bank

Laxmi Bank has been recognised as the Leading Partner Bank in Nepal for 2020 by the Asian



Laxmi Bank

Development Bank's Trade & Supply Chain Finance Program (TSCFP) for successful recording of most transactions in the trade and supply chain finance sphere last year.

Radisson's Terrace reopens

The Terrace Garden on the 4th level of Radisson Hotel Kathmandu known for its spectacular views and lush garden has



reopened adhering to Covid-19 protocols. The outlet has been redesigned for physical distancing setup and ensures guest and employee safety. Call 014422197 for reservations.

prabhu BANK

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EVENTS



FREE FILM VIEWING
KIMFF-COVID RESPONSE INITIATIVE

KIMFF
Every year in December, Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) brings a plethora of extraordinary films from all across the world. While the festival has always demanded physical presence in the past, this year keeping in mind the Covid-19 crisis, the festival is set to go virtual with free film viewing from their website. The 2020 iteration will have 18 films to watch.
10-14 November
For more: www.kimff.org

Mt Everest Diaries

In 2008, Shailee Basnet scaled Mt Everest and then led the Seven Summits Women Team which became the world's first female group to climb the highest peak in each continent. Basnet who is a mountaineer and a comedian is set to bring many funny aspects of this lifetime adventure on stage through 'Mt Everest Diaries'.
28 November, 5: 45 am NST
Tickets available at: shaileebasnet.com

**Boudha market**

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



Otaku Next
For the first time since its launch in 2014, Otaku Next, which began the popular cosplay event in Nepal, is going online. The event will be divided into eight segments—Cosplay showcase, chronicles, and Q&A among others. To participate in the event, visit their various social media channels.
27 November

ONLINE ARCHIVES

**Europeana**

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

Histories from Home

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

Poetry Foundation

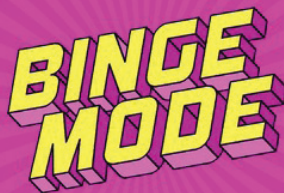
Discover all things poetry. Browse through collections of classic and contemporary poems, readings, poetry news and the entire 100-year archive of Poetry Magazine.

**Virtual world tour**

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

**Binge Mode**

Episodes of this pop-culture podcast produced by The Ringer give detailed recaps of your favourite television shows, films, or other piece of media. Find Binge Mode on Stitcher and Apple podcasts.



DINING

**Haadi Biryani**

Craving a quick and easy Biryani? Haadi is the place to go to or order from. Enjoy slow-cooked biryanis seasoned with a secret spice blend which come in clay pots that enhances the dining experience.
Dilli Bazaar (01)
4538444 / 9864334987

**Erma Restaurant**

Erma Restaurant offers an upscale fine dining experience with chef-curated continental dishes. Try the cream of beetroot soup, vegetable salsik, and the Erma house burger.
Hotel Shambala, Chakrapath (01) 4650351

**Cafe de Tukche**

Make your lunch special, and get authentic Thakali food delivered from Cafe de Tukche. Order the Thakali Khana set, or take a break from rice and try the Thakali Dhedo set instead. Check out the menu on Facebook.
Lazimpat, 9828937500

**Grill Durbar**

At Grill Durbar, there isn't anything that can't be grilled. Try the signature grilled chicken and the Durbar fries. Check out Foodmandu for more.
981378858, 9841677377, 9803082797



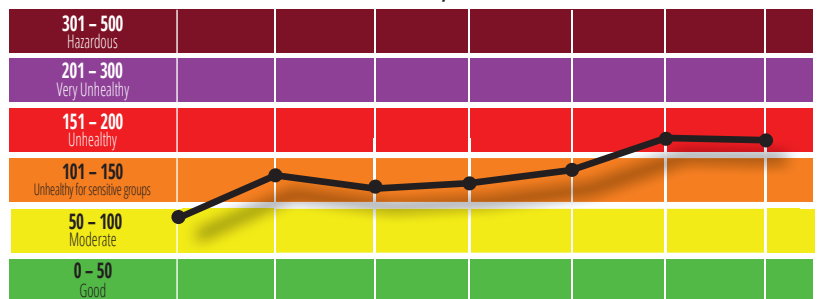
Going places together - qatarairways.com



After a week of crystal clear skies over Nepal due to a fresh, cool northwesterly breeze, a change in wind direction to the southwest has swept in the north Indian smoke from stubble fires. This will raise the temperature somewhat, although the haze will filter much of the sunlight. The air is once more polluted across Nepal up to an elevation of 3,500m, and it will add to Kathmandu Valley's own pollution.

**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

KATHMANDU, 30 October - 5 November



PM2.5

FRIDAY October 30 SATURDAY October 31 SUNDAY November 01 MONDAY November 02 TUESDAY November 03 WEDNESDAY November 04 THURSDAY November 05

The period of relatively clean air in Kathmandu Valley is over for now, as a change in wind direction from the southwest has again brought Indian smoke haze. This, combined with vehicular pollution, has meant that Kathmandu's daily average for Air Quality Index (AQI) is now often at hazardous levels above 150. As winter inversion traps pollutants, the AQI will get worse in the coming weeks, exacerbating traditional respiratory infections as well as the novel coronavirus.

<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



Rechargeable batteries have become less expensive, more reliable, and much longer lasting. When used properly, they can be used hundreds of times so, even though they initially cost more, they pay for themselves over time. The more frequently a battery needs recharging, the lower its overall environmental impact. So they are specially beneficial for high-consumption devices such as cameras, flashlights and electronic toys. Batteries have heavy metals, corrosive materials, and other nasty chemicals. This, combined with the often improper disposal of batteries, have a big impact on soil, air and water pollution in the environment. Disposable batteries may be more convenient, but reusing batteries mean fewer batteries need to be manufactured and transported. Having charged backup batteries can help ensure we are not left powerless. #FridayForFuture

OUR PICK

The South Korean web series—*Kingdom* is a political period horror show released in 2019 on Netflix. Created by writer Kim Eun-hee and directed by Kim Seong-hun and Park In-Je, *Kingdom* received generally positive reviews and was renewed for a second season, which premiered in March 2020. The Korean series is set during the Joseon period, three years after the Japanese invasions of Korea. The cast includes Ju Ji-hoon, Ryu Seung-ryong and Bae Doo-na.

बालबालिका माथि हुने हिंसा, दुर्व्यवहार, शोषण भएको, जोखिमपूर्ण अवस्थामा रहेको वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।



नेपाल सरकार

सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

Heat map of Nepal's Covid-19 hotspots

Cell phone data tracking reveals high risk areas because of the movement of people during Dasain

Sonia Awale

Any other year, up to 1.5 million people leave Kathmandu Valley for their home districts during the Dasain festival. This year, according to police estimates, it was only 200,000. Constant warnings by the Health Ministry and the experts to celebrate this year's Dasain-Tihar-Chhat in place seems to have worked.

However, those who went home left Kathmandu Valley where the pandemic has been raging for the past month, with more than 60% of new daily cases nationwide. The fear is that many took the virus with them and spread it across the country.

Now, a new study of the movement of people during Dasain by tracking mobile telephone geolocation gives precise information where most people from Kathmandu went for the festival, and where the risk of Covid-19 clusters are highest.

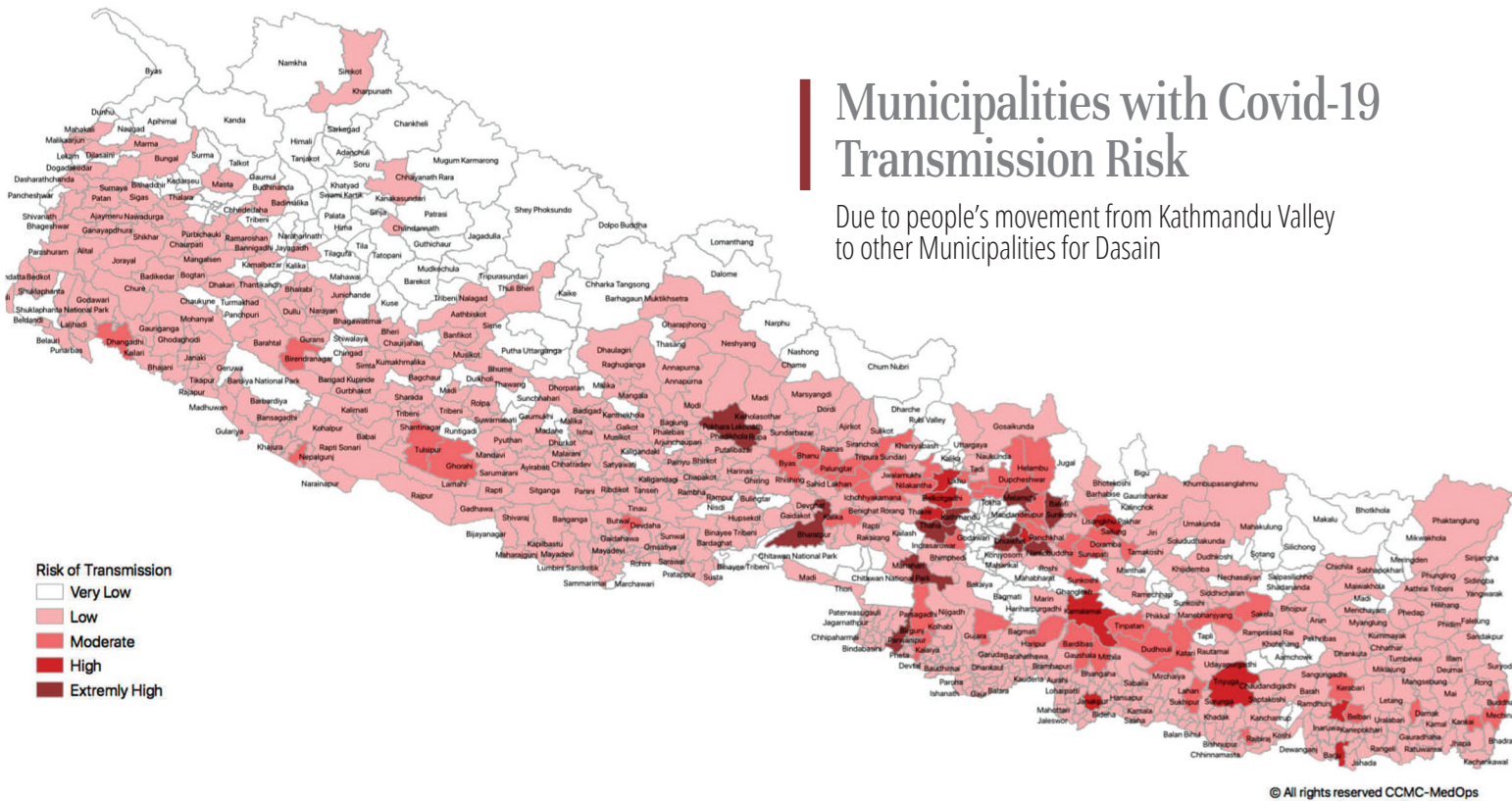
The Covid-19 Crisis Management Center (CCMC), in collaboration with telecommunication service providers Nepal Telecom and Ncell, have analysed the movement of at least 100,000 people who left for various districts two weeks before the start of Dasain by tracking their cellphone devices.

The data shows that the highest number of people left Kathmandu for Dhulikhel and Namobuddha of Kavre, Thaha and Manhari municipalities of Makwanpur, Melamchi and Sunkosi of Sindhupalchok, Parwanipur of Bara, Bharatpur of Chitwan and Lekhnath of Kaski districts.

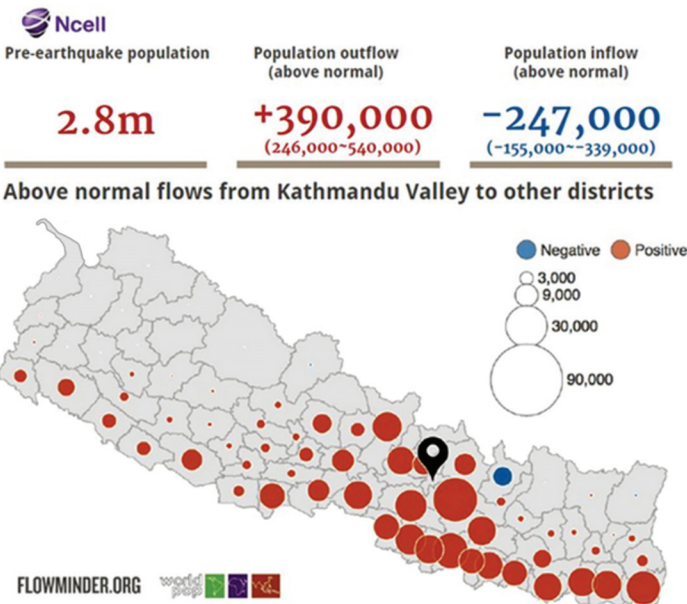
The CCMC now has red flagged these municipalities, and advised local authorities to be vigilant. The committee has also classified parts of the country as 'moderate, low and extremely low risk' in terms of Covid-19 crisis based on human mobility.

Likhu in Nuwakot, Belkotgadi, Thakre of Dhading, Panchkhal of Kavre, Lisankhu of Sindhupalchok, Kamalamai of Sindhuli, Janakpur of Dhanusha, Triyuga of Udayapur and Barju in Sunsari are also at high risk of outbreaks because of the volume of people travelling there from Kathmandu in the past weeks.

Ncell had previously helped



Outmigration from Kathmandu in week after the 2015 earthquake



track the movement of Nepalis post-earthquake in 2015, when it found that more than 400,000 people left Kathmandu in the week following the disaster, while thousands of quake-displaced people temporarily settled in the capital.

At that time it was found that the maximum number went to earthquake-affected districts to check-up on families, with the eastern Tarai districts being the destination for others. The numbers going to western Nepal in 2015 was negligible.

To understand the movement pattern of people for effective aid distribution, Ncell collaborated at that time with Swedish organisation Flowminder to make

use of the cellular network data for earthquake response.

In this crisis, areas identified as at 'very high risk' and 'high risk' of Covid-19 infection because of maximum human movement should be prioritised in terms of contact tracing and follow stringent safety measures if we are to bring the infection under control, say experts. But the CCMC and Health Ministry seem to be working at cross-purposes and undermining each other.

The two agencies responsible for Covid-19 response are at loggerheads, consumed by turf battles, questions of responsibility, and of late have been blaming each other for the dramatic spread of Covid-19 across Nepal, especially in



Kathmandu Valley.

In fact, in July-August when Birganj was reeling under a Covid-19 crisis, the CCMC had identified Kathmandu Valley at high risk of infection based on the number of people entering the capital from the Tarai. Just as projected, the capital is now the hotspot of Covid-19 infection in Nepal.

The total number of new Covid-19 cases which dropped during Dasain because testing centres were closed for the festival, is steadily picking up. Public health experts predicted that the cases will rise as the backlog is tested, as well as because of the rise in infections due to family movement.

To prove this point, on Thursday the total numbers testing positive

was back to the pre-Dasain level with 3,051 new cases, 1,398 of them in Kathmandu Valley. Some 3,430 patients were discharged in the last 24 hours. There were 18 more deaths. The recovery rate is 79.9%.

As of 5 November, Nepal has a total of 185,974 confirmed Covid-19 cases with 36,514 of them active infections. Kathmandu Valley accounts for most of them at 19,855. Total fatalities now stand at 1,052 with 393 of them in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur districts.

There are 428 people undergoing treatment in ICUs in various hospitals across the country with 74 of them on ventilator support. Bagmati province has the most seriously sick with 211 in ICU and 35 on ventilators. 🇳🇵

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Chitwan's Bote people in a changing world

Little known fishing community clings to life at the edge of the jungle on one side, and expanding human settlement on the other

Sravasti Ghosh Dastidar
in Chitwan

A tourist trip to Chitwan National Park usually includes interaction with the Tharu community. But most visitors do not get to see the region's lesser known indigenous people, the Bote.

The Tharu are known for their unique culture and artistic decorations manifested on walls, verandahs and household items. And while the Tharu are known as the people of the forest, the Bote are the river people.

They mostly live along the East Rapti and Narayani rivers bordering Chitwan National Park, although there are some Bote settlements in Gorkha, Tanahu and Lamjung. The Bote are one of the least known and dwindling indigenous groups in Nepal. According to the 2011 census, there are only 2,830 speaking the Bot language as a mother tongue.

Whereas transmigration of mountain settlers in the 1960s cleared the forests and displaced the Tharu, the expansion of Chitwan's highway towns and a tourism boom encroached on the habitation of the Bote along the riverbanks. When traditional fishing and foraging of the Bote was restricted after the Chitwan National Park was established, the community moved to agriculture.

Lately, they have also adapted to other trades like carpentry, motorcycle repairs and even auto rickshaw driving. However, in a Bote village near Sauraha three or four households still fish among the rhinos and crocodiles at the edge of the Chitwan National Park.

Dusk settles stealthily on the banks of the meandering East Rapti which marks the boundary between the Chitwan National Park and the tourist village of Sauraha, semi-deserted these days because of the pandemic.

Asian Pied-Hornbills, spotted doves and kingfishers flit from one branch to another of tall sal trees surrounding the tiny village. A group of men loiters around the thatched mud hut of Rishiram Bote.

Rishiram's wife and daughters go about the household chores of feeding their pet dogs, hen and goats, sweeping mud floors and washing utensils at the tube well. The boys play football. In between all the activities, everyone keeps looking towards the river expectantly.

The sun is now low in the hazy sky, and in the golden light two small dugouts carved out of *simul* logs pull up at the bank. Unlike the longer canoes that ferry tourists and forest department personnel, these boats accommodate only two people.

The women and children run towards the canoes with plastic basins and sharp machetes. Rishiram and three fishermen jump off the boats with small handheld fishing nets that are brimming with bighead carps, silver carps, *rohu*, *naini*, *mrigal*, silver fish, catfish and eels.

There are 120 species of fish



ALL PHOTOS: SRAVASTI GHOSH DASTIDAR

found in the cool, slow-moving waters of the Rapti. Some of them are big, and there have been catches of up to 10kg. The licensed Bote fishermen are not allowed by the national park to use longer nets which would entangle crocodiles, and also make fishing unsustainable. The Bote fish for their own community, and have to be satisfied with whatever they can haul in their smaller nets.

The women unload the fish, weigh and sell them to the men who have gathered to inspect the evening catch. They are regular customers, mostly hotel and restaurant owners from Sauraha who wait around for the boats to return. They can resell the fish at triple the cost price in town. Within minutes, the entire lot is gone. It has been a good day.

On other days when there are some unsold, the Bote dry the fish and consume it themselves. The catch varies from day to day, with fewer fish in winter. Rishiram leaves at 6AM when it is still dark, paddling into the thick fog of the Rapti and returning late. The national park rules do not allow them to fish at night, and the Bote existence is hand-to-mouth.

Living on the edge

The Bote literally live on the edge – the edge of jungle, and the edge of the rapidly urbanising inner plains of Chitwan Valley. Modernisation has pushed them to adapt to a monetised, mostly tourism dependent economy of the district. And the national park, with its endangered and protected animals, keeps them out. This is life along the periphery of human habitation, and at the fringes of a protected nature reserve.

It can be dangerous floating along these crocodile infested waters and the tall grass of the



Rishiram Bote



Rapti floodplain which is the favourite habitat of tigers and rhinos. Sometimes, fish-eating gharial crocodiles get entangled in the nets, and although setting them free can be dangerous, the Bote are forbidden from harming the rare reptiles.

Gharials, with their long snouts and razor sharp teeth have to be disentangled with great care, and there are always park rangers watching through binoculars from sentry towers along the river. The Park warden has trained them to follow instructions on fishing, the

do's and don'ts. For example, after disentangling them, the gharials have to be taken to the breeding centre at Kasara.

The larger mugger crocodiles are even more dangerous, and the Bote have lost friends and family to them. A few months ago, Rishiram's friend's body was found 50km downstream from where he was last seen. During the monsoon, the Rapti's waters rise and the crocodiles come right up to the huts. They are shoed away with sticks, sometimes unsuccessfully.

In the misty winter mornings, the tall, thick elephant grass has rhinoceroses, tigers and sometimes even wild elephants, lurking in them. The fishermen and rhinos frequently cross paths. On one such cold morning, Rishiram's uncle had gone into the forest with his nets, and he saw the rhino too late. It charged, and gored him.

Encountering tigers and wild elephants can be a risky affair. Especially if it happens to be Ronaldo, a rogue elephant which keeps himself entertained by entering villages and mauling inhabitants every year. Villagers usually ward off the wild elephants that come in search of food with electrified barbed wire fences.

However, the intelligence quotient of elephants is legendary. They know when there is a power cut and listen to the sounds of generators, and vibrations in the wires, to determine when the wires do not carry a current. The villagers then have to resort to lighting fires to keep the animals out, as well as keep themselves warm.

Sideline existence

The main livelihood of the Bote is fishing, paddling boats, gold-panning, collecting wood, and harvesting elephant grass and edible ferns from the forest. However, since the Chitwan National Park was established, fishing activities have been regulated with strict guidelines. Some now grow crops in their limited land by the river. They also sell chicken, eggs and elephant grass, and buy dal, rice and buffalo meat to supplement their own supply of fish, mutton, chicken and homegrown vegetables.

They now have solar-powered lights, but the homes are still plastered with mud and cow dung. The roofing is made from elephant grass, which is harvested once a year in spring when the Park is open for collection, and have to be rethatched annually. Rishiram and his brothers Parshuram, Dipak and Pardeep are the last few members of the

Bote community in Sauraha. There are a few more Botes living down the river in Pathiani. Chitwan is, however, dominated by the better-known Tharu who have cleverly showcased their culture to attract tourists.

Very few people have heard of the Bote, even in Nepal. Being more under-served than the Tharu, the Bote and Majhi communities of Chitwan are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. The Bote language, dress, dances and songs are indigenous, and endangered as the way of life of these people is transformed.

The Bote language is Indo-European but does not have a script, and is distinct from the Tharu and other indigenous languages here. The link language with other communities is therefore Nepali, and as children go to school, they are losing touch with their mother tongue.

Origin and relocation

There are two possible origins of the name 'Bote'. Besides fishing, the community was known for laying tree trunks or branches across rivers to build makeshift seasonal bridges to allow people to cross. 'Bot' means a tree, and it could be that Nepali speakers started calling them Bote.

The other possibility might be that since they did not own land or houses, and took shelter under trees on the waterfront, they came to be known as Bote, since their existence revolved around the river.

Many members of the community have moved on from Chitwan in search of greener pastures. The traditional livelihoods are being gradually replaced by agriculture and other trading activities that generate better income. The Chitwan National Park, which restricted their fishing tradition, has given some of them auto-rickshaws under an instalment scheme as an alternative to their traditional livelihood.

But Rishiram's family has stayed on, and is one of the few that still make a living from fishing. He could not continue his studies as he had to become the provider of the family from a young age. But he encourages his own children to get an education and pursue their dreams.

The four children and Parshuram's two sons want to continue their studies though they are yet unsure of their professional goals. Their school timings do not allow them to go fishing with their fathers, hence their interest in the traditional occupation of their community has waned. The girls go to school where they learn Nepali, English and Mathematics. They also help in the housework. They speak a smattering of Hindi, thanks to watching popular Hindi movies on television.

The transformation of Bote lives, their adversities and poverty, have not been able to erode their filial bonds. Community ties are still strong. Bote families find dignity in working together, and they approach life with plenty of smiles and pride in who they are.

As with other communities in Nepal, change is rapid and relentless. Literacy and income generation can help Rishiram Bote and others lift themselves from their subsistence lifestyles without erasing too much of their precious culture, heritage. Programs to uplift their socio-economic status involving tourism and conservation could combine their traditions with modernity, and help preserve what is best in the Bote way of life. 🇳🇵

Sravasti Ghosh Dastidar is a photographer, travel and lifestyle journalist. She has a content writing firm *Sravasti's* and an e-commerce website for eco-friendly greeting cards and pens.



Unsung heroes of Nepal's tiger recovery

Indigenous peoples are the real stewards of the country's conservation success story

Nepal serves as a global tiger conservation success story. Despite a decade-long civil war, floods and earthquakes, tumultuous politics, the tiger population across the Tarai have witnessed remarkable recovery.

The unsung heroes of this remarkable achievement are Nepal's indigenous people who live near national parks that are tiger sanctuaries. They are the primary stakeholders, and contributors to conservation who played a central role in Nepal achieving the TX2 goal two years ago of doubling its tiger population before the 2022 target.



COMMENT
Smriti Dahal

However, there is also a pressing need to protect the rights of the indigenous communities, and to ensure that Nepal's legislation aligns with various international treaties that the country is a signatory to — particularly concerning the rights of indigenous peoples to their land and resources.

This has become urgent as Nepal has seen an uptick in forest-related crimes and with economic losses throughout the country and in major tiger-bearing habitats during the Covid-19 crisis.

These communities, including the Tharu, Bote, and Musahar people, among others who have lived alongside wildlife long before national parks were established, applying their ancestral knowledge to coexist with the natural world. And yet over time, their way of life has been disrupted by curtailed access to natural resources, relocations, and a lack of legislative agency.

There is a false dichotomy that pits indigenous communities against park protection. Nepal formally adopted a protected park management system via the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act (NPWCA) in 1973 — a decision made to address the Tarai's rapid development, in-migration from the hills, and the loss of biodiversity in the preceding years. Rules and regulations were devised to



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augment conservation priorities, but in the name of protection traditional users' rights were thrown off balance, and indigenous people were deprived of their ancestral access to natural resources.

In 1993, Buffer Zones were established via the fourth amendment of the NPWC Act. The concept of Buffer Zones gave rise to benefit-sharing mechanisms for communities living around protected areas as a tradeoff for access restrictions. Under these provisions, 30-50% of park revenue would be channeled for community benefits and sustainable use rights for natural resources were also provided.

Buffer zone user committees also allowed impacted communities around parks to engage in formal dialogue with park authorities while also playing an active role in conservation of natural resources within parks.

While these provisions do not explicitly delineate the role of indigenous people, many community leaders living near tiger-bearing parks have worked within these groups to bring change. One of them is Bhadai Tharu, a well-known conservationist in Khata wildlife corridor in Bardia.

Despite losing an eye in a tiger attack, he continues to lead his community in natural resource protection, inspiring youth and fighting illegal wildlife crime in his area. Recognising the importance of traditional knowledge and leadership of indigenous people in conservation, WWF Nepal, in partnership with the government has also worked with them to develop homestays that celebrate their cultures. These add to their household income, and in turn brought change in attitudes towards tiger conservation.

Despite these steps, Nepal's legislative model in park protection continues to foster approaches that pit traditional rights of indigenous peoples against natural resource protection. Legislation needs to recognise indigenous people as primary stewards of conservation, while also providing them with traditional user access in response to their contributions.

Although the establishment of buffer zones, revenue sharing, and limited access to resources are steps forward in meeting the needs of local communities that live around the area, they still fall short of providing

indigenous people with decision making power.

The Buffer Zone Act only legally recognises fishing rights of traditional communities like the Bote. While informal agreements between park authorities and indigenous communities for use of resources within certain areas exist, not accepting this access as a legal right leaves room for conflict between the Tharu, Bote and Musahar communities and park authorities.

There are also cases of 'elite capture' within the Buffer Zone Committees which have marginalised indigenous communities who are the rightful owners and stewards of these protected areas.

Nepal is a signatory to various international treaties and conventions related to the rights of indigenous people, including ILO169, UNDRIP, and article 8j of the CBD — all of which highlight the need for conservation interventions to respect, preserve, and leverage traditional knowledge and practices while also ensuring equitable benefit mechanisms.

However, much work needs to be done to translate the spirit of these treaties on the ground. While there are examples of successful conservation models led by indigenous peoples — the handover of Kanchenjunga Conservation Area being one — a lot more could be done to respond to these examples of conservation co-ownership with legislative agency.

Nepal's path to TX2 must better recognise the role and contributions of indigenous peoples in doubling the country's tiger population. Recognition begins with addressing the requirements of indigenous peoples, and expanding a rights-based approach to conservation.

Indigenous people need to be allowed full co-management of the resources in a manner that does not undermine the objective with which the protected areas were established. Sustainable conservation is achieved only when there is a balance between protecting wildlife and safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples. 🇳🇵

Smriti Dahal, PhD, serves as the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Specialist at WWF Nepal.

Chitwan can accommodate more tigers

A new study says Chitwan and Parsa National Parks have enough prey for a larger tiger population

Tufan Neupane

When a wildlife census in Chitwan National Park in 2013 counted 120 tigers, conservationists were elated. It meant Nepal was well on its way to doubling its tiger population by 2022 as per an international target.

But in 2018, the number of tigers surprisingly fell to 93, owing to male tigers getting into fights over territory. Ecologists feared that the park was getting too crowded, and it had reached a saturation for the number of tigers it could accommodate and there was fear of human-animal conflict.

An adult male tiger needs at least 100sq km to roam in, while a female needs about 20sq km. Each adult needs to make at least one kill of a deer-sized animal a week.

The debate compelled the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation to study the carrying capacity of Chitwan and the adjoining Parsa National Park, where there was actually an increase in tigers in the 2018 count.

Now, a new study titled 'Assessment of Ecological Carrying Capacity of Royal Bengal Tiger in Chitwan-Parsa Complex, Nepal' that studied prey density and tiger territory has found that Chitwan and



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Parsa combined can actually hold at least 175 tigers.

"Under natural conditions, Chitwan has a carrying capacity of 136 tigers and Parsa can hold 39," said Haribhadra Acharya, an ecologist from the Department involved in the study. "At present, there are 93 tigers in Chitwan, 90 in Bardia and 18 in Parsa."

The study examined how much prey meat a tiger needs in a day, which they estimated to be 6kg, and that totals an average of 2,000kg of meat a year. In protected areas, 15% of prey species are usually hunted for food by carnivores annually, of which tigers alone account for 10%, the study found.

food demand these numbers,

the researchers calculated that there needed to be prey species with 20,000kg of meat roaming in a 100sq km area of an adult tiger's territory. This is when they came to the conclusion that Chitwan and Parsa National Parks have enough meat on hooves for more tigers.

They calculated that an adult tiger makes up to 50 kills a year,

roughly one deer a week, and concluded that there were enough prey species to meet that food demand.

"The common conclusion of these two findings is that the parks can hold at least 175 tigers. If suitable habitats can be developed in the intermediate zone and other corridors, this number could increase further," says Acharya.

The area of Chitwan National Park (952.63 sq. km) and the adjacent Parsa (627.39 sq. km) is a vast stretch of sub-tropical forest stretching from the Inner Tarai Chitwan Valley to the Tarai. Even though Parsa is two-thirds the area of Chitwan, it cannot carry proportionately the same number of tigers because of a lower prey density of chital deer.

There are 52 chitals per sq km in Chitwan, but only 14 in Parsa because Chitwan has more lakes, ponds, rivers and grasslands than the drier Parsa.

At the Global Tiger Summit held in St Petersburg in 2010, tiger range countries pledged to double their tiger populations by 2022. Nepal achieved the target in 2018 with 235 adult tigers, the first country to do so.

This was a remarkable achievement considering that there were only 121 tigers in 2009. Nepal's target is to reach 250 in the next two years, and given the new findings for Chitwan and Parsa, the country is on track to do so. 🇳🇵



Spared at first, elderly hit hard by Covid-19

The coronavirus crisis has added to the hardships and isolation of Nepal's seniors

Sonia Awale

Up until two months ago, health experts were perplexed as to why mostly younger people were dying of Covid-19 in Nepal and other South Asian countries. In Europe and North America, it was mainly the elderly who were victims.

In fact, age-wise breakdown of coronavirus mortality by Health Ministry in August showed that most deaths recorded were of people in the 41-50 years category. This was explained by the fact that younger people were moving about more, and were bringing the virus back from India or from hotspots within Nepal.

But since then, the virus is spreading within the community and families, younger asymptomatic people who have not been tested are infecting elderly family members at home.

September-October saw a sharp rise in the fatality of people in their seventies and above from Covid-19, even though infection rate is much higher in the 21-50 age group. On 31 October when Nepal registered 23 deaths a day, 13 of the fatalities were above 70, and 20 of them were aged between 60-70.

Health experts say this is striking proof that younger people are now taking home SARS-CoV-2 and making their parents and grandparents seriously sick. This trend may have been exacerbated by families travelling to far corners of the country for get togethers over Dasain, and a new spike in infections is expected in the coming week.

Despite being the most susceptible to coronavirus, the elderly were already getting the least priority from the state, society and increasingly even within families. Physically fragile, suffering memory loss, or lonely seniors are politically ignored and socially ostracised.

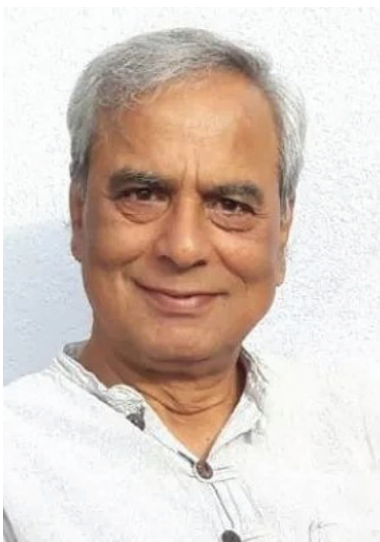
"We know senior citizens are at the most risk, focus should have been on saving them during this crisis, but they are literally on the bottom of the ladder in terms of society's priorities," says Krishna Murari Gautam, social scientist and founder of Ageing Nepal that helps old age homes manage the coronavirus.

"Most households are misinformed: people think old people cause and spread Covid-19 but it is the younger people who are exposing them to the virus, so they have to be mindful of their behaviour," Gautam adds.

To be sure, the elderly were already the most vulnerable, but now the pandemic has added to all the pre-existing problems they faced: collapse of joint families, children and grandchildren abroad for studies or work, economic hardships and expensive health care.



BIKRAM RAI

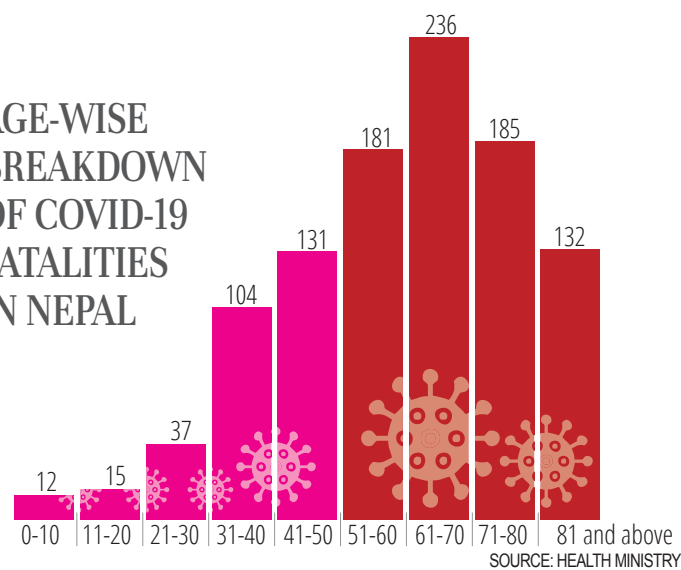


Krishna Murari Gautam



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AGE-WISE BREAKDOWN OF COVID-19 FATALITIES IN NEPAL



Older people are now more isolated than ever within their homes and communities: they cannot go out and mingle within a limited circle of friends and relatives, visit temples or take part in community *bhajans* and other religious activities.

To make matters worse, they have been terrorised by the daily television headlines that highlight the death toll. Many are now showing psychosomatic symptoms of coronavirus without actually being infected out of sheer anxiety.

In others, mental health illnesses has become an increasing problem. Those on medication for depression and dementia are suffering relapse due to additional stress, say health experts.

Gautam, who was recently awarded the UNESCO Literacy Prize for his activism on behalf of Nepal's elderly, says: "Most seniors are either illiterate or at least digitally illiterate. A much more effective option would have been to utilise our great network of female community health volunteers spread across the country or even

cooperatives to spread awareness about Covid-19 among the elderly."

Lockdowns in the initial phase of the crisis to contain coronavirus added to the problem. Old age homes soon ran out of daily essential supplies and donations they relied on. The elderly at these care institutes also need regular health check-ups as well as stock of medicines for various conditions.

Rosha Shrestha of Harmony Care Home in Bansbari worked early on to prepare for the oncoming crisis. In January, as the country was recording the first case of Covid-19, Shrestha started looking for an alternative should an outbreak occur and worked meticulously to develop her own protocols to keep the virus at bay.

Harmony is now segregated into red, yellow and green zones for all people and materials entering inside or going out of the home, everything has to be disinfected. Shrestha who is a nurse by profession also equally focused on uplifting the moral of her family of senior citizens as well as in enriching their diet, using

traditional home recipes.

As a result, none of the occupants have symptoms and have not had to visit a hospital in the last nine months, unlike in the past when they needed to be hospitalised every once in a while for their different ailments.

Shrestha has also trained other nursing homes and regularly consults older people over the phone, trying to dispel the notion that Covid-19 is catastrophic, that it is like any other epidemics of the past, not without casualties but also not something we can't overcome with safety measures.

"Despite these positive steps I know that I have to save my older people for at least another year or two so that they won't have to visit hospital for any reason, which is now unsafe and also unavailable," says Shrestha. "It was a grave mistake on the government's part to allow all hospitals to admit Covid-19 patients instead of segregating a dedicated facility. Where do I take my *ba* and *ma* if they fall sick now?"

With increasingly more youth migrating abroad for jobs and further studies, there is now a dire need of geriatric caregivers in Nepal. In fact, even as Nepalis take up elderly care jobs in Israel and Japan, they might be needed more at home in near future.

Since the 1950s, Nepal has added over 40 years of life expectancy, a dramatic public health achievement. But how well have we planned those added years or realised its potential?

Says Gautam: "It's ironic that on the face of Covid-19 crisis, we have more or less abandoned the elderly when this was what we strived to achieve for so long. The good news is it is still not too late to care for them and their needs, especially this winter when the risks go up." 🇳🇵