It’s an Emergency

Oxygen

To save lives, Nepal’s most urgent need now is oxygen. Not just cylinders, but oxygen generators, concentrators and liquid oxygen. Most infected people are not dying of Covid-19 anymore, they are dying because of low oxygen saturation in the blood, and lack of hospital beds — patients who need not have died of coronavirus.

Now the situation is in the cities, Nepal’s pandemic has now infiltrated the remoter villages where there is no hospital care and no oxygen. The virus is preying on people already suffering malnutrition, previous ailments, and decades of government neglect. In Rolpa, Humla and other remote districts, between 60-80% of PCR tests are coming back positive, and it takes a week to get results.

Kathmandu’s doctor-to-patient ratio is 1:80; but in rural Nepal it is one doctor for every 10,000 people.

Class to 60% of all swabs collected in Bagmati Province, with 45% of them in Kathmandu Valley, says epidemiologist Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa. She adds: “There just aren’t enough tests and contact tracing is minimal, official total cases and fatalities are greatly underestimated.”

Hospitals in Kathmandu Valley with roof helicopters have multiple daily rescue flights, but even these facilities are at breaking point with patients being turned away. Understaffed and under-equipped hospitals in the districts do not stand a chance. Even where hospitals exist, many avoid them for fear of being infected and take wrong medicine from pharmacies.

As in India, Nepal is beginning to see a slight bending of the curve for new infections, but health experts expect the fatalities rate to remain high for some more time.

After the relentless patient pressure of the past month, there is a decline in those requiring admission,” says virologist at TChu hospital Sher Bahadur Pun.

“The virus has now infected a majority of people in the cities, and this combined with the lockdown means we may be getting to the halfway mark of the second wave.”

Vaccines

A prolonged lockdown is not the answer. The only long-term strategy is to vaccinate at least 70% of Nepal’s eligible population.

Doctors report a marked difference between the recovery of people who are vaccinated against those who are not. Saya, virologist Pun at TChu Hospital: “Except for a few rare cases, all patients in critical condition and those dying are the ones who for one reason or the other had not been vaccinated.”

But Nepal has run out of its vaccine stock, leaving 1.4 million people still waiting for their second dose of AstraZeneca Covishield in a week after India banned its export, and the COVID Vaccine Facility could not supply its remaining 1.8 million vaccines because of the global supply bottleneck. Vaccination will grind to a halt this week after the current campaign to inoculate 500,000 people in the 18-59 age group with their second dose of the Chinese VeroCell ends. Although Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali says the government is in “final negotiations” for 2 million doses of Sinopharm VeroCell vaccines by June, there is no movement at the Ministry of Health.

“We can implement lockdowns only for so long, the only exit strategy is vaccines. Science delivered, now our politicians must do the same,” says Buddha Basnet, a physician at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences. “The Nepal government must procure vaccines using every diplomatic channel possible, and rich countries must realise that they are not safe until countries like Nepal are also vaccinated.”

Activists have been trying to convince the US government and Europeans that Nepal has a lot of experience in successful vaccination campaigns against polio, smallpox, measles. It has over 50,000 female community health volunteers (FCHV) reaching children with vaccines every year.

Nepal’s health system has amassed vast experience in maintaining the vaccines cold chain even in the remote mountains. Says epidemiologist Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa: “It’s not too late, we can still use existing resources like FCHVs to deliver mobile vaccination, conduct contact tracing, dispel any remaining vaccine hesitancy, and use public health professionals in prevention.”
A humanitarian emergency

There is just one deed Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli wants to be remembered for in the annals of history: the transformation of Nepal from a landlocked, agrarian economy to a modern, technology-driven nation. Oli believes he has achieved this transformation, and he is determined to ensure that the benefits of this transformation are felt by all Nepalis. He has been working hard over the past few years to ensure that his vision becomes a reality. Oli’s leadership has been characterized by strong, decisive action and a commitment to the principles of democracy and human rights. He has been a strong advocate for gender equality and has taken steps to address the issue of corruption in government. Oli is a visionary leader who is dedicated to the development of Nepal and its people.”

HOW TIMES HAVE NOT CHANGED

In 1990, the government, led by the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), was facing a crisis. The country was divided into two rival factions, the NCP and the splinter group, the Nepal People’s Freedom Party (NPFP). The NCP was led by Jhala Nath Khanal and the NPFP was led by Baburam Bhattarai. The crisis was caused by the split in the NCP, which had been formed in 1988 by the merger of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) and the Nepal People’s Congress. The split was caused by a dispute over the leadership of the party and the direction of its policies. The crisis was resolved by the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2006, which ended the civil war in Nepal and paved the way for a democratic constitution.

Nepal’s leaders need to demonstrate the same acumen they showed for fighting each other to fight the virus.

The virus. The Health Ministry will now lead a “Unified Command” to coordinate response. What happened to the CCP?

The first order of business is to manage the supply chains for medical oxygen. Kathmandu Valley alone produces 12,000 cylinders a day, but its capacity is used 22,000 cylinders are being flown in from China, Oman and elsewhere. But the bottleneck now is gas production. Remdesivir and plasma therapy are over-employed, experimental drugs are unproven. Physicians advocate Paracetamol for fever, early oxygen when shortages drop to 19% and the cheap and easily available steroid Dexamethasone, which is shown to decrease mortality in patients requiring oxygen.

Public service announcements on proper masking, distancing and being careful must go beyond mobile phone, and online social media. A lockdown is not the cure; we must buy ourselves time to conduct mass testing and vaccination. Nepal scored well with vaccines in March, but it ground to a halt after the Indian brand Covaxin export.

India has reportedly assured us that Nepal is “priority” when shipments resume. The least Delhi can do is allow the Serum Institute of India to send its one million doses of the vaccine to Nepal already paid for, so that those waiting for their second doses, and others left out in the 59-45 age cohort can get their shots.

Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali says talks are in the final stages with China for the supply of 2 million doses of Sinopharm VeroCell by June. Supply constraints and pricing appear to have delayed negotiations on the delivery of 8 million doses of Sinopharm V in July.

US President Biden has promised to supply 80 million vaccines to 20 countries around the world in the coming week. Yet, it is not clear if the US is sending the vaccines.

What Nepal needs in this emergency is United Nations’ (UN) involvement. UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have a role to play in delivering vaccines to Nepal. Nepal needs to be part of the global effort to ensure that the vaccines reach the people who need them the most.

In the meantime, Nepal’s leaders need to demonstrate the same acumen they showed for fighting each other to fight the virus. Nepal’s health crisis is here to stay.

What are the implications of this for the future of Nepal? The country is facing a significant challenge in terms of its ability to provide healthcare to its citizens. The government needs to focus on improving the healthcare infrastructure and ensuring that the necessary resources are available to tackle future pandemics. This includes investing in research and development to develop new treatments and vaccines.

The country also needs to focus on improving its social and economic conditions to reduce the risk of future pandemics. This includes implementing policies to reduce poverty, improve access to education and health care, and promote economic growth.

The health crisis is also an opportunity for Nepal to re-evaluate its foreign policy and focus on developing relationships with other countries that are willing to support Nepal in times of need. This includes countries that are willing to provide aid and assistance, as well as countries that are willing to provide political support.

In conclusion, the health crisis is a significant challenge for Nepal and the country needs to take urgent action to address it. The government needs to focus on improving the healthcare infrastructure, reducing poverty, and improving social and economic conditions to reduce the risk of future pandemics. This includes implementing policies to support economic growth, improving access to education and health care, and promoting relationships with other countries that are willing to support Nepal in times of need.

The health crisis is a reminder of the importance of taking urgent action to address the challenges facing Nepal. The government needs to focus on improving the healthcare infrastructure, reducing poverty, and improving social and economic conditions to reduce the risk of future pandemics. This includes implementing policies to support economic growth, improving access to education and health care, and promoting relationships with other countries that are willing to support Nepal in times of need.

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HIGHEST HONORS COME WITH HIGHEST STANDARDS

We have been awarded the Diamond Status by APEX Health Safety independent audit powered by SimpliFlying for our efforts in ensuring the highest standards of hygiene and safety for our passengers.

TURKISH AIRLINES
“Nepal is a priority for vaccine supply”

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce has approved the LA of the Electricity Transmission Project (E3) of the NEA, which will be implemented by the Electricity Transmission Corporation of Nepal Limited (ETCL). The E3 project includes the construction of 340 km of transmission lines and 340 km of distribution lines. The transmission lines will pass through 19 municipalities and 118 districts.

Tourism recovery

The preliminary findings of Kathmandu’s tourism recovery in the post-COVID-19 phase show that the industry has made significant progress. According to the findings, the number of tourists visiting the city has increased by 45% compared to the same period last year. The tourist industry is expected to grow further in the coming months.

MCC clears EIA

The MCC has cleared the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Kathmandu Valley Bypass Project. The project aims to improve the connectivity and reduce traffic congestion in the Kathmandu Valley. It is expected to be completed within five years.

Inflation down

Nepal’s inflation rate this year is down to 3.1% from 6.74% last year. The Reserve Bank of Nepal has made some adjustments to its policies, and the inflation rate is expected to decline further.

FinMin Covid relief

The Finance Ministry has announced an additional Rs. 32 billion for the relief package to address the impact of the pandemic. The funds will be used to support the health sector, improve the economy, and provide relief to vulnerable groups.

Poetry winners

The winners of the 10th National Poetry Competition were announced by the Nepal Academy. The winners were awarded certificates and prizes to recognize their literary achievements.

Clean mountains

Nepal’s Army Mountain Climbing Campaign 2021 collected waste from over 500 peaks. The campaign has successfully reduced the amount of waste left on the mountains. The Army has set a new record in this campaign.

prabha BANK

The prabha BANK has launched a new digital banking platform. The platform offers various services such as account opening, money transfer, and mobile banking. The platform is accessible through desktop and mobile applications.

Nepal Army

The Nepal Army has conducted a large-scale training exercise to improve its preparedness for future operations. The exercise involved various units, including the Army's special forces, and was aimed at enhancing the Army's capability to respond to any potential threats.

Trade surplus

Nepal’s trade surplus has increased significantly in the past year. The surplus is expected to continue in the coming months due to the increase in exports and decrease in imports.

The country is in a difficult situation at the moment, and the reason is that we have a 1,900km open border with India. This has really stretched us to the limits.

What is the reason for the delay in bringing vaccines? Nepal has not got a clear answer.

I was in India in January, and we put forward our case for the Astrazeneca Covishield vaccine. Nepal became the second country in South Asia to start vaccinations.

We got 1 million doses as a grant from India, after that we bought 1 million, of which 1.1 million doses were delivered. Then China gifted us 600,000 VeeCell vaccines, under the COVAX initiative we got 368,000 doses. India separately provided 100,000 doses for the Nepal Army. So we have received more than 3.2 million doses so far, and about 2.2 million so far have been fully or partially vaccinated which is about 8.6% of the total population. This means we rank 65th in the world in vaccinations, which is not bad.

We paid for 2 million doses of Covishield at $4 a dose, a price the government set, of which 1 million doses were sent immediately. But then the pandemic suddenly spread in India and India and government there banned exports. There was no other reason for the non-delivery of the remaining 1 million doses, it was not because of any middlemen or commission.

But the Health Minister himself assures middlemen before the delay.

He was not talking about the 2 million. After that we tried to buy another 5 million doses from India and that deal is also pending. After that we asked for more because there was demand for vaccines within India itself, but it is clear that the government of India told us to talk to their authorised agent in Nepal. However, we have said we won’t advance payment of which half the doses have not even been received yet.

Special interview in Sagol Samaj tv magazine program with Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali. Kanak Mani Dixit asks him about the government’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic so far, and its strategy to deal with the crisis now that there is a brief respite from the political stalemate.

Kanak Mani Dixit: Both the government and citizens are blamed for the second wave. But was it not the government’s job to warn people of the risks? Pradeep Gyawali: It is true that there were lapses, we knew the wave was coming but the state was bogged down with petty power struggles and that prevented us from concentrating on battling the pandemic. But it is not that the government has stood idle, since last year we had added testing centres, HDUs, ICUs, ventilators. But this second wave was so aggressive, all this was not enough.

For example, last year only the really serious patients needed oxygen, this time there are also patients needing critical care, which means more oxygen flow. Our preparations were not enough to deal with the severity of the second wave.

If the situation is so serious, why does the government not declare a health emergency? The existing Infectious Disease Act gives the government the power to impose those forcing rules to stop the spread of communicable diseases. Many have advised us that we should declare a health emergency which would allow the state to deplete private hospitals to treat patients, and get all agencies of the state to coordinate solely on health. But so far, the existing laws are adequate to deal with the situation.

Are there plans to make the COCC more effective? We set up the COCC because the war against Covid needs various ministries of government to work together. The Health Ministry is the frontline agency, but it has to coordinate with the Home, Foreign, Finance, Tourism, Supplies and other ministries. If the COCC had not been there, there would be chaos. The COCC is empowered with the authority to take its own decisions. Obviously, it’s work needs to be more effective and visible.

Maybe we need more than ‘coordination’? Maybe we need more effective and accountable leadership. The Health Ministry gives a good daily briefing, but Covid response is not just a health issue, there are decisions regarding supplies, transport, enforcement that need to be conveyed to the public.

We will activate the COCC to be more proactive in communicating its decisions and situation reports.

The prime minister told CNN that Nepal had the pandemic under control, a few days later in an appeal to The Guardian, he asked the international community for urgent help. Why this mixed message? It also depends on how the question is framed. CNN asked if it was true that the Covid-19 pandemic was out of control in Nepal. Even in the current situation, we cannot say it is out of control, and it is not. It is true that we are overstretched, and there are shortages of hospital beds and oxygen, but that does not mean that it is out of control, and we have surrendered. We have been telling the international community that the country is in a difficult situation at the moment, and the reason is that we have a 1,900km open border with India. This has really stretched us to the limits.

What is the reason for the delay in bringing vaccines? Nepal has not got a clear answer.

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Watch our Saglo Samaj tv magazine program with a special interview of Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali where journalist Kanak Mani Dixit asks him about the government’s response to the pandemic so far, and its strategy to deal with the crisis now that there is a brief respite from the political stalemate.

The oxygen shortage is a disaster. What is being done to ensure adequate supply? We definitely did not do enough to install adequate oxygen generators in the past year. This time, after the oxygen crisis hit, we stopped the non-medical industrial use of oxygen which used to make up about 40% of our production. This meant we could deploy 30,000 cylinders from industries to hospitals. We have also directed all oxygen plants to operate at 100% capacity, and to increase production in others. We still need cylinders, but much more urgent is increasing the capacity to generate oxygen, and we are trying to increase the import of liquid oxygen, and bring in medium-sized air-based oxygen plants.

Are you giving too much attention to Kathmandu Valley and have forgotten about the rest of the country?

I don’t think so. Ever since last year, we had to conduct an emergency repatriation of Nepali workers from the Gulf and Malaysia, and non-resident Nepalis played a very important role. This year too, Nepal abroad have been helping, and I would also request them to continue lobbying with the governments of the countries they work in to assist Nepal at this time of crisis.

Within the country, it pains me to say this, but it seems that some sections of civil society feel that their sole role is to oppose everything the government does. As if they are not citizens unless they oppose the government. This is not right. Civil society includes media, NGOs, and others and which play an important role in disseminating correct information, to raise public morale at a time of crisis. This is not to say that the media should suppress news about fatalities or the lack of oxygen, but when you say there were 9,000 new cases today why leave out the fact that 5,000 recovered? The government should not be alone in this fight, every citizen needs to be a part.

We have encouraged non-governmental organisations to help fight the pandemic, but without overlapping with the government, and to coordinate so that it conforms to our priority areas. We are also wondering why some of them are not putting in more effort. On the part of the government we will do our best to facilitate. Just let us all do our part and put in the effort. Let us remember that only if we ourselves are safe can we make society secure.
Buddha birthday in his birthplace

Even as the pandemic ravages Nepal, archaeologists unearth new secrets of Prince Siddhartha’s kingdom

For the second year in a row, Lumbini will see none of the thousands of pilgrims from around the world that used to congregate here to mark the birthday of the Sukarni Buddha, which this year falls on 26 May.

The Sacred Garden, holy pond, Mayadevi Temple and the pathways along the central canal are all deserted, except for a few monks in maroon robes chanting mantras through blue surgical masks.

Kapilavastu, the district named after the kingdom that Siddhartha Gautam abandoned at age 29 more than two and a half millennia ago, is finally revealing secrets that had been buried deep in time.

It turns out that there is a lot more to Lumbini than Lumbini. While the Ashoka Pillar and the Mayadevi Temple mark the nativity site, there are the ruins of ancient Kapilavastu — the home of Siddhartha Gautam’s father King Buddhadhatu in Tissaranak.

Archaeologists here are not only researching the ruins of the ancient town, but also refuting theories that propose that the site was later relocated to Lumbini. "We have not even reached the outskirts of Kapilavastu," says Bawa Mohan, a Buddhist scholar with Nepal’s Department of Archaeology.

"We have been doing excavation here, except for these two Mauryan structures."

In ancient times, Lumbini was the birthplace of Buddha. "The Mahabodhi Temple was built by King Ashoka of the Maurya dynasty in 250 AD. In the 20th century, the temple was restored and was again dedicated to Buddha," says Malhotra.

An archaeological society is now being carried out by the Department of Archaeology and Durham University researchers using various equipment to dig, extract and date the site.

Greater Lumbini

Even before it was the seat of King Siddhartha’s father, Siddhartha Gautam, Tissaranak already had human habitation dating back nearly 3,000 years. Remnants of the early settlements can now be seen by half of the priests and the town that surrounded it.

In 1967, the Indian archaeologist V. Valley was the first to identify the site. He compared the names with those in Buddhist texts and found a match.

"It is very hard to find a match," says Malhotra. "We have seen many sites that have been abandoned and then redeveloped, but this is the only one that has been consistently used over the centuries."

The site was later abandoned and then redeveloped. The priests and the town that surrounded it are now being restored. The temple was once again dedicated to Buddha, the sage, and the Buddha’s relics are now preserved in a shrine.

The site is now a tourist attraction, with shops and restaurants serving local cuisine.

"We are still working on the site," says Malhotra. "But we have already made some important discoveries."

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Kausikamuni Buddha in Nighawks even before Ashoka came, and he concluded it in 249BC. The other of Kausikamuni Buddha in Gokulma is badly damaged, but early Chinese travellers noted that it too had an inscription.

"Beside the Shakayamuni Buddha, this region was also the birthplace of two other Buddhas, and compared to the Buddha sites in India like Bodhgaya and Kushinagar, I think Lumbini is more organized and better preserved," Maharanjan says. Much of that credit goes to former United Nations Secretary General U Thant of Burma who came here in 1967, and was so moved by his visit, he went on to convince King Mahendra to promote the birthplace of the Buddha as a world heritage site.

The famous post-war Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, designer of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, was hired to come up with a masterplan for Lumbini. Despite all the setbacks over the decades, Tange's vast Lumbini rectangle is now visible on Google Earth, and has preserved the nature and tranquility of this sacred site.

"If it wasn't for U Thant and Kenzo Tange's masterplan there would be no trees and the sacred garden would have shrivelled," says Maharanjan. "Thankfully, unlike many other holy places, Lumbini's spiritual essence is intact."

Even though he was not a Buddhist, Tange's master plan for Lumbini has deeply philosophical character. The nearly 8 sq km area is dominated by a north-south canal with amphitheatres, forests and wetlands on either side. At the southern end are concentric circles of the sarnath stupa: the sacred garden around the Maya Devi Temple. The plan includes an eastern monastic set aside for Theravada Buddhists, and the west side is for Mahayana Buddhism. The master plan is still being broadly followed, but there are many showy additions coming up in the monastic zones that do not conform to the Buddha's teachings of simplicity and reverence for nature.

Among the monasteries representing Buddhists from Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, China, Japan and Myanmar, there is also the elegant Vajrayana Vihara. There are Buddhist monasteries with huge donations from thousands of people from Kathmandu Valley. The challenge is to keep to the masterplan and prevent Lumbini from being overbuilt as it currently is. Vajrayana Vihara is one of the most serene of the five monastic zones, and one of the most popular with tourists.

"Venerable Metyaya, the monk who is vice-chairman of the Lumbini Development Trust, was born to a Hindu family in Kapilavastu and his vision is to turn Lumbini into an international center for peace where world leaders and spiritual thinkers can come to seek solace in this world of war and violence, and to confront the planet's environmental crisis."

"Gautam Buddha was a mediator who sought to bring peace between warring kingdoms in his day," says Metyaya. "We have to preserve this spiritual space not just as a pilgrimage site, but also as a centre for conflict resolution and nature protection."

"Venerable Metyaya says he gets proposals every day for new construction within the Lumbini zone, including for new monasteries and even one to build an enormous 100m high Buddha statue. "We will not entertain these, and on this the Nepalese state is also clear," he says. The Trust is now finalising a new billion plan starting with sacred garden to enhance the open space. Before Covid there were 250,000 foreign pilgrims and tourists a year here, and 1.6 million Nepalis.

The International Committee for Lumbini is the only one dealing with world heritage sites that come directly under the UN Secretary General in New York. Buddhist countries are members, and Nepal is trying to revive it after 25 years by changing its focus away from funding to develop an International Centre for Peace.

There are also plans to link the Greater Lumbini region with the Buddhist Circuit in India and Nepal for a time when pilgrims and tourists can only be on the Buddha's 2,600th birthday next year.

Where Siddhartha Gautam walked

Robin Coningham in Kapilavastu

We use a microscope for the geophysical surveys at Taalavastu which allows us to literally order the ground. But both walk under the surface are nuclear magnets, so we can recover only the magnetic ones.

In the past, there was a belief that ‘archaeological digging is destructive’ as we had to physically remove the earth and put in, and do we were virtually destroying the site. The microscope is a better tool to quickly locate historic remains without having to remove anything.

Kapilavastu-Taalavastu is the most well preserved archaeological site in South Asia, and is 2,000 years old. The eastern part has been eroded and much of the agriculture due to the area being naturally eroded, and is relatively flat today.

There are still polanas, jungles, cats, and wildlife here, making this a mini nature reserve. We need to preserve Taalavastu’s archaeological, cultural and historical value. If not, it is likely that Kapilavastu is just not an ancient city, it’s a sacred site as well.

The Eastern Gate of the site where Siddhartha Gautam left his family at age 29 is seen enshrined and visited by many tourists. It is said he is of the garden near the city, which was three towns and three small settlements within the site.

We saw that the city was abandoned, the buildings are now very close to the surface. So the ancient pathways that went through the city. The increasing number of pilgrims has begun to wear away the archaeology of the site, so we built a wooden platform over the ancient path. We planted paddy rice and let it grow on the site, this will protect it.

The northern and the western parts now rest at 10-15m wide, with a long line of buildings on one side—shops, temples, and household buildings.

Walls and galleries protect ancient Kapilavastu to be seen a grand city with high walls, and many temples and megaliths. The historical reality, however, is that the floors and walls of these buildings are mud, the foundations are laterite, and the walls are thin, much like today's Thamel area.

However, we found that the pastas location situated at the highest point within the site, was fortified by high walls made from tanned earth, inside which forests formed into a grove where we found evidence of huge set of trees in an open space to a grand pool.

When the Cineglams filmed this site during the 19th century, they described it as a largely abandoned city where the walls were still strong. These structures are quadrangular, with open courtyards, and are normally interpreted as monastic. However, some courtyard buildings on the site were built over on the hankorival.
America Nepal Medical Foundation is setting up isolation centres in Kathmandu, with plans to raise funds for the project.

Feeding Hungry Nepal is arranging for food supplies to those who need it, as well as oxygen cylinders. Donations details are on Facebook.

Oxygen For Nepal is collecting funds to buy at least 1,000 oxygen cylinders in the next two months. Visit https://nepinfm.com to contribute to the initiative.

Pipal Tree is running a matched giving appeal through funding platform The Big Give to raise Covid funds for rural Nepal. Support the cause.

GiveAsia is partnering with nonprofits to support frontline health workers and institutions responding to the coronavirus pandemic. Log in to donate.

For assistance to Baglung Hospital in Far Western Nepal, contact Nepal health Nepal (info@nhek.co.np or +977 985 159020)

100% of your gift is going to oxygen cylinders and getting them to Covid patients. For information on how to donate and how to contact on Facebook.

Virtual Heritage tour will take participants on a journey to Bardakot and Chitwan. Make reservations on a Google form at Story Girl’s Facebook page. 28 May, 10 am.

MoNA exhibition looks at MoNA’s exhibition Key Smith on Kathmandu, which showcases an upcoming exhibition from 1978 to 2020 by notable Nepali artists. It runs until 19 June.

Kathmandu Air Quality Index

- 290
- 280
- 270
- 260
- 250
- 240
- 230
- 220
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- 200
- 190
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5AM May 19 – 2AM May 20 measured at 571 Phoro Darbar.

A combination of on-site and online; removing due to the effect of topographic and landscape barrier; a vehicle of the wedding was taken to the air-quality index station by police van. The on-site and online workshop was conducted in Kathmandu as well as open-mic reading. Kathmandu University is conducting a poster competition at the best workshop approaches. A two-year master’s in science toward all polluants and the environment.

Isolation Reading

The Anarchy

William Dalrymple’s The Anarchy explores how the East India Company became a ruthless colonising power that built British power across South Asia.

Under a White Sky

In Under a White Sky, Elizabeth Kolbert, Pulitzer prize-winning author of The Sixth Extinction, documents the effects of scientists, experts and their interventions to save the environment.

Kathmandu

Thomas Selby’s history of contemporary history of Kathmandu; includes conversations with Nepalis on the field, army and police, personnel, expatriates, as well as ordinary people living in the city, that is evocative and shiftingwarily in perspective, tone, time, and place.

People Like Her

Writing duo Lety and happy talk are the tale of an immigrant woman who growing popularity threatens to unravel her carefully crafted life and her identity. Hypothetical responsive novel that explores technology, social media, celebrity, and influence culture.

Learning Resources

Global Digital Library

Looking to enhance children’s vocabulary while schools remain shut? The Global Digital Library has educational material and storybooks for parents and educators classified according to reading levels, including books in Mārathi, Nepali, and New languages.

Courses

Intended to learn about subjects that are not available in Nepali colleges and universities! Courseware partners with universities, organisations, and more around the world and provides universal access via a searchable database to the online courses covering a wide variety of topics.

TED Ed

Find hundreds of animated lessons on topics ranging from visual arts to mathematics. Go to the website for details, or go directly to TED-Ed’s YouTube channel and start watching.

EPI Course

A course started by authors, educators, John and Frank Green, all educators forever, EPI Course is one stop destination for educational materials. Watch topics of awesome courses in one channel, from organic chemistry to literature to mythology.

Home Dining

Mero Nepali Kitchen

Get through to your YouTube from mero Nepali Kitchen and learn how to make Nepali and international dishes during the time indoors.

Disney Eats

Perhaps more suited to viewing than dining, Disney Eats is the place to explore the world at Disney food. Suntan on YouTube, or visit the website.

SideChef

Browse through 16,000 step-by-step recipes personalized according to diet, color, and skill level. Go to https://www副作用.com, or download the app.

You Must Be Joking

Yummi

Yummi is the place for notes on offers, which users can judge before trying by checking out how it rates on a user-run rating system. Users are also able to leave the rating and time it takes to prep and cook the dish.

YOU HAVE HIGH STANDARDS.
SO DO WE!

Kholo

We are sorry to notify that the upcoming exhibitions of Kholo 2.0 will be postponed temporarily due to the health and safety concerns regarding the Coronavirus.

We apologize for any inconvenience but everyone’s safety is more important.
This spring, a new variant of coronavirus was identified in India that quickly made its way to Nepal through the open border. We saw a surge in the number of people testing positive, and the death toll increased dramatically.

Data suggests that this strain of virus may not be as dangerous as it seems, but it seems to be much more contagious, and it is impossible not to worry when hundreds of people lose their lives every day. Especially when those who pass tend to be relatives and friends, and members of their families.

It has been said that the main reason for this catastrophic spread in India and Nepal was the lockdowns that abandoned without the population being fully vaccinated. It is understandable that in our countries, the idea of a lockdown may not work as well because a majority of the population still lives off daily wages. When the lockdown started last year, many claimed that hunger would take their lives before the virus. This time, it is both hunger and the virus killing people. The government is partly to blame: it was unprepared for a second wave it knew was coming. The people also became complacent after the infection rate dropped dramatically last year.

Once the lockdown was lifted, many people started to move about and get on with their lives. Plus, there is a large section of the population that does not believe in the importance of masking and physical distancing.

People started gathering without caring about whether they could catch the virus and infect others. Most people still seem to believe that the virus spreads because of others, and not because of them. ‘ Optimism bias’ is a term in psychology that explains how people believe they are likely to experience good outcomes, and less likely to experience bad outcomes. People did not acknowledge or admit that the virus could have spread because of them, but blamed ‘ others.’ Whatever the reason might be for this deadly second wave, we are in the thick of it now, and the state manager to take control of the situation and look after citizens, it is up to each one of us to take care of ourselves.

When we hear bad news, it can be hard to escape from thinking about it. However, it is completely normal to feel overwhelmed and helpless. Watching the news and the endless series of bad news can make you feel down, and it is human to feel anxiety, depression, sadness, confusion, and anger.

There are useful tricks and techniques you can incorporate in your daily habits to help you through this challenging time. It may take some effort and patience, but making these changes will improve your mental wellbeing.

1. Take a break from news and social media
   It is easy to say avoid news and social media when we are home all the time, but taking a break from TV news, online portals, and social media can help you combat the effects of the bad news. Reading too many negative things can start to affect you mentally. Set a rule for yourself that you only read the news once a day. Scheduling hours in the day when you do not check social media, and this is especially true before going to bed.

2. Re-evaluate your news sources
   We want to stay on top of what is happening in our country, but many news sources are click-bait guys scratching for views, so you may not know what you are reading is the whole truth or a series of selected facts that distort what is happening. Make sure your source of news is reputable and objective, and stick to one source if possible.

3. Accept your level of control
   When you hear bad news, your first instinct is to worry how it will affect you and your loved ones. It is natural to feel helpless when you think you cannot change the situation. Try to understand that the influence we let the hour-by-hour news have on us can affect how we handle the stress. Do what you can on a small scale to begin with. When you cannot change a situation, you can control how much you let it affect you.

4. Seek positive news
   It is all too easy to follow news that makes you feel down, and it is human to feel anxiety, depression, sadness, confusion, and anger.

5. Choose healthy distractions
   We all need a relief from all the negativity. Some may choose alcohol, food, or drugs to cope but they will end up causing more harm than good. The key is to try to take the attention away from the bad news. Get into a hobby that you loved as a child, learn a new language, read more books or meditate. Meditation can be hard for beginners, but you can always try guided meditation to help direct you.

6. Try breathing exercises
   The reason breathing exercises have gained so much popularity these days is because they work. Try timed breathing exercises because they will help your mind feel calmer and over the course of a few days, it will be easier to manage your mind. Try this inhale for 4 seconds, hold it for 7 seconds and exhale for 8 seconds, and do this 10 times.

7. Take care of your physical health
   We are locked up by the lockdown, but even walking up and down the stairs or around the house can help. Adding some physical activity will improve your mental wellbeing as well. You can follow instructors on YouTube for free and try yoga or aerobics. Find ways to move your body.

8. Stay well
   If there is a time when the importance of health has taken priority, it is now. It can be easy to snack mindlessly or over-indulge but take this time to train yourself to eat more mindfully. Eat nutritious food. Add fruits and vegetables to your daily diet. Make sure to drink plenty of water all day.

9. Stay connected with family and friends
   Modern technology has its disadvantages but when we are confined at home, take advantage of FaceTime or video chatting to connect with loved ones. Regular contact with people you love will lift your mood and appreciate their presence in your life. Talk to people and make the time to listen as well.

10. Stay hopeful
   Yes, things are bad, and it can be extremely hard to think positive during these times but stay hopeful that things will get better because they will. It is a matter of time, and unfortunately it is taking longer than expected but have faith that these bad times will soon pass. Make a list of things you are grateful for. We are all in this together, and we will get through this together.

Anjana Rajbhandary

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21-27 May 2021
50027

LOCKED UP
How to cope with prolonged restrictions, and the string of bad news
Helping Nepalis breathe

- Tufan Neupane

On 12 May, 15 Covid-19 patients died in Rupandehi and Nepalganj after the hospitals there ran out of oxygen supply. Another 18 patients died the next day in Kathmandu’s Bir Hospital and Trauma Centre because they could not get their oxygen cylinders refilled in time. Private hospitals in Kathmandu Valley (including Medipac, Medcity, CTM, Helping Hands, Long Life, EVERGREEN, Medheypur, Thimi, and Star) stopped admitting coronavirus patients, saying they had enough medical oxygen only for existing patients.

Some patients had to quickly find ambulances and move to another hospital with an empty oxygen-equipped bed after the one they were in ran out of oxygen. Those who could not move died in their beds, gasping for air.

Muhammad Shahidul at the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) made a legal distinction between dying of the coronavirus, and deaths of a patient due to lack of medical oxygen in a hospital. One is a disease, the other is a violation of human rights, he says.

“It was a given that there would be a new outbreak of Covid-19. Yet, many people lost their lives prematurely due to ineffective hospital management. The government completely failed in its main responsibility of protecting its citizens,” he says.

All coronavirus deaths in hospitals are lumped together under Covid-19 fatalities, however there needs to be a distinction between whether a patient died despite being given all the care necessary, or because the oxygen supply ran out. There are two completely different conditions and should be treated as such, says a retired chief justice of the Supreme Court. Health is a basic human need and it is the state’s responsibility to ensure it. He says, the patients did not die of Covid, but because of negligence.

A bench of Supreme Court Justice Rakesh Sharma and Justice Lavanya Suthar on 11 May ordered the government to “Facilitate the supply of oxygen and medicines required for the treatment of those infected... and immediately dispense human resources taking into account the increasing number of patients.”

Some hospitals in Kathmandu are admitting Covid patients only after families sign an undertaking that the hospital will not be held responsible if the patient dies due to the lack of oxygen. Activists call this “criminalising humanity.”

On 14 May, Lilly Thapa of the NHRC called on Deputy Prime Minister Ishwor Pokharel who also heads the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre (CCMC) and drew his attention to the oxygen crisis.

The two Nepals in the

- Lesley D Junlakana

Scaling down through my lensfeed these days, I see posts detailing the latest news about climbers summing up Mt Everest, and need to the peas from Nepal for help for a band— an elderly father, a diabetics sister—struggling to breathe due to Covid-19 and in desperate need of a hospital bed, a ventilator.

The contrast is too great, too extreme. My mind struggles to cope, to accept these two polar opposites.

Can they end up? Can there be these two sides of a single country?

If there is any link between them, then it is this: both the climbers, who have paid an example in excess of $50,000 for the privilege of summiting the mountain on our planet where the oxygen saturation (S02) in the Body normally 96-98% can fall as low as 60%, and the patients suffering from a severe attack of Covid-19 in Dr. Shrestha were both dependent on oxygen supplies for the very same.

But the expedition team members have made a conscious decision to draw such harsh conditions whereas patients finding themselves in such a poor state through no fault of their own.

Nepal’s battle with the 2nd wave of Covid-19 caused the much-lauded Nepal Everest 2020 campaign to crumble along with the hopes and dreams of thousands of people working in the treking and expedition sectors.

A few tourists filled back to Nepal for the 2020 autumn season after the international airports stood for many months to allow for registration and charter flights. Reopened. The mountain season started to pin its hopes on spring 2021.

Many trekkers, in a critical financial stress, encouraged their Rockefeller-inspired enthusiasm to come and enjoy trails that were less crowds than usual; however, not all potential travelers were wary, all too aware of the risks involved. They were perhaps deterred by the lack of any government and the protocols, or simply bound by their own country’s travel restrictions and economic melaise.

The main exception to this overall hesitancy and reluctance to travel to Nepal was the expedition sector. The Nepal government annouced registration for the Spring climbing season, a major source of revenue, actively encouraging teams to enter.

And they came (primarily) for Everest itself, as for any of the country’s myriad major mountaineering challenges, like Annapurna and Dhaulagiri, both among our planet’s fourteen eight thousanders.

This policy continued stably with that of neighbouring China for the Spring expedition season only Chinese
NEPAL

Supply demand in cylinders per day

Demand:
Kathmandu Valley: 30,000
Total Nepal: 40,000

Total Nepal: 19,000

Supply:
Kathmandu Valley: 6,000 from oxygen pumps
Rest of Nepal:
10,000 cylinders from oxygen plants
1,000 cylinders in hospitals

Lack of oxygen has become a major concern.

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Oxygen Concentrators
- Portable acute hospital use
- Convert ambient oxygen from ambient air
- Oxygen available for more patients depending on supply
- Limited flow

Oxygen Generators
- Generate pure oxygen from ambient air to central hospital medical systems or to fill cylinders

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The Ltumbini Provincial Hospital in Butwal needs 700 cylinders a day for Covid-19 patients, and it was assured 300 per day by the local government. It is not even getting 200, and has been turning serious patients away.

“Oxygen is not a luxury, but an essential basic need. Hospitals need to ensure adequate supply, and the government must help,” says the former director of Epidemiology and Disease Control Division Baburam Malla.

It may be too early to hope, but there are indications that the number of daily new infections is flattening, and the numbers who have recovered is also rising.

On Wednesday, there were a total of 8,173 new cases, 2,035 of them in Kathmandu Valley. There were 246 fatalities in the last 24 hours. While the test positivity rate was up to 37.4%, the active cases were 7,948, respectively.

In addition, 3,000 of the 20,000 empty oxygen cylinders gifted by China have been flown in. Another 5,000 cylinders have been flown back on a cargo plane.

Air Ambulance Vinay Mohan Kafle assured that India would increase its contribution to oxygen delivery to Nepal.

The Death Zone

Covid-19 patients on oxygen waiting to be admitted into Tinku Hospital on the same day.

were unable to climb the north face of Everest which straddles the border of Nepal and China’s Tibet Autonomous Region.

And strangely Nepal’s digits won’t budge: more than 400 climbers are on the mountain this season. More than 150 had already made it to the summit by the jet stream pushed in this week, and there were two fatalities on 12 May. This is the 2nd year ever on the mountain, even despite 20% when, stiffly, there were queues of climbers staying dangerously close in The Death Zone as they waited their turn to get to the summit.

An ascent expedition on members started to arrive in Nepal towards the end of March, allowing them sufficient time for acclimatisation and acclimatisation before making their final summit bids.

Times


day of the Khumbi Mela festival in Kathmandu, attended by an estimated 1,900 pilgrims, and now dubbed a super-spreader event.” Nepal’s former King Gyanendra Shah and Queen Komal Shah were among those who avoided the peak after returning from the festival in Kathmandu.

As the alarming figures increase in numbers and country, including Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, the traditional employment base for Indian laborers, started to get tighter. From Delhi, many thousands of Indians sent to work in Kandham, taking advantage of a growing administrative opportunities and compelling their kinship ties of the Indian Embassy before catching onward flights.

In the same trend, trekking pilgrims faced to the remote Nepalese region of Muktinath, a sacred site in traditional pilgrimage circuits from India. The State Department of Tourism is working hard to work closely with the various external embassies to ensure the safety and security of the visitors and tourists as well.

At the situation in the Kathmandu Valley in particular became increasingly serious, alarming reports of Covid-19 cases started from the final terminal bids. The news of a rise in Covid-19 cases in Nepal, India, and then Tibet was not able to control its first wave of Covid-19 and Figure has remained in a lagging state throughout the year, even dropping to below 10,000 cases per day, the trend, however, is still concerning as the number of patients has increased steadily, particularly in the lower and lower regions.

Although reports continued to filter in of Covid-19 at BoS Camps, climbers are being evacuated. Some distressed personal bags were given away to the government as a way to aid a pandemic in both the main team and camps, and some communities. However, social media posts by the team leaders themselves completely ignored the issue.

In the early evening of 9 May, the Sherpa regrouping near the summit of Everest were in their usual state of euphoria. After that, the Sherpa, led by Kaji Sherpa, marking his record-breaking 28th summit attempt in the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Nepal now reached 405,000 and the daily tally approached 11,000. The positivity rate in the Valley was over 20% in a single day, and as high as 90% in the Khumbu, according to the government.

The key question now is how the sea of Covid-19 with so many deaths and disfigurement is shaping up. The government’s response has been slow and insincere, promising a few medical kits to the affected areas so far, and very little help for the survivors.

At the situation in the Kathmandu Valley in particular became increasingly serious, alarming reports of Covid-19 cases started from the final terminal bids.
Ass as Ambassador

While at home with nothing to do, many of you have been worrying obsessively about the state of the country. Don’t, we are in the very capable hands of the Great HeirApperson who reminds us constantly that a revolution is not a tea party, the nation is taking a great leap forward to let a hundred flowers bloom because a 1,000 mile journey begins with the first step, and that political power comes out of the barrel of a whisky.

Nowhere else in the world would you have such a cumulative wealth of experience among national leaders. The PM has just become PM for the 3rd time. And there are five ex-PM MFs all lining up to replace him, and one of them has been PM five times already. Imagine their total IQ if we added up all that weight of brainpower.

And by now, the party whips have forgot the living daylight out of all MP’s. In addition, every one of them has stashed everyone else in the back, and vice-versa. There is no one remaining in back-stab anything, so now they are stabling each other in the front. In the wild, there is a parliament of owls, but here in Nepal we are one step ahead — we have owls in parliament.

PM Oli’s refusal to reseat his allegiance to God almighty while taking his oath of office proves that his party, the Nepali Congress, is the epitome of the asses. He must have been smoking something else during the swearing in by Madan President.

The ministers sewer their wild oaths were good entertainment binned live on Nepal TV to distract us from the fact that the country is going to hell in a handbasket. Would have been even better if all that swearing included the name of a famous Nepali chain, that cannot be uttered here since there may be minors within earshot.

It is really encouraging, though, that the newly installed Oli administration hit the ground running and got down to brass tacks by calling an emergency Cabinet meeting to address the biggest and most urgent challenge the country has faced in its recent history — the appointment of a new ambassador.

Anyhow, my back-of-the-envelope calculation shows that by not having badass ambassadors for the past 14 months, Nepal’s national exchequer saved $25 million. This is no mean feat. Now, all that money can be spent on erecting the Republic Monument and Virendra in Thankot.

Besides monetary savings, not having Ambassador Extraordinaries and Plenipotentiaries for so long also meant that Nepal’s embassies did not make political grifts, and indulge in other extra-curricular activities. However, we do envy the PM having to ward hanger-ons and cronies, appease coalition factions, and balance demands of the political families.

There are more ambassadorial squabbles than there are nation states and territories in the world, so one way to fit everyone is to appoint ambassadors to all the world’s 195 countries. If that is not enough, the PMO can appoint one ambassador each to Trinidad and Tobago.

Luckily, with space exploration, Nepal need not be confined to Earth to open new embassies. We can designate Chargé d’affaires ad interim to the Moon, Mars, Venus and some of the larger rocks in the Asteroid Belt.

And if even those heavenly bodies are still not enough, we may have to venture further afield to open new embassies outside the solar system. That way we can blast them all into space, and have the country to ourselves.