The nature of pandemics

Sonia Awale

Over 172 million infections and nearly 4 million lives later, the exact origin of the Covid-19 pandemic is still a matter of debate. Early studies pointed to bats as the source of the novel coronavirus and that the virus could have jumped to an intermediary host like the pangolin, which is a delicacy in certain parts of China, and then on to humans. The rise of zoonotic diseases is now traced to the destruction of nature, and the devastating Ugandan wildlife trade. This could be how the cross-species transmission of SARS-CoV-2 took place in late 2019, but there is little political will to stop the destruction of nature.

“Whatever the root cause, this is not the first pandemic and it will not be the last of the planet’s current suite of biodiversity loss continues, a trend exacerbated by the climate crisis. The coronavirus pandemic is a much-needed wake-up call but people have short-term memory, they will soon forget the connection to habitat destruction,” says environmentalist Kumar Paudel of Grassroot Nepal. “Politicians can’t keep destroying the ecology for the sake of economic growth.” Indeed.

Finance Minister Bishnu Paudel’s new budget announced this week will allow further plunder of the fragile Chure Hills for quarrying to reduce the $10 billion trade deficit with India. This will add to the clear-felling of the last tract of native forests in the eastern Terai for the construction of the mammoth Nepal International Airport for which Paudel also allocated money for infrastructure, international investor selection, land acquisitions and site clearing. On the occasion of World Environment Day on 5 June (Theme: ‘Reimagine. Recreate. Restore.’), eight of Nepal’s development partners issued a statement cautioning the government about Nagir.

“It is important to ensure that decisions...” for large projects such as Nepal International Airport, are based on sound economic, financial, climate, environmental and social impact analyses in line with Nepal’s established economic, environmental and social regulations, as well as climate and other commitments,” the statement reads. (See page 4.) “Covering everything with concrete is not development, and our development model is suicidal, the coronavirus pandemic is just the latest example of this,” says biologist Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha. “We need to link ecology with the economy to drive change in nature-friendly policies, and conservation education must be at the forefront.”
A yam between two Indians

Peer since Nepal emerged as a nation-state in 1948 and half a century ago, one of the guiding principles has been to socially distance itself from empires to the north and south. As these powers rose and fell, Nepal's rulers adored it. They fought, lost and learnt to live with the British in India. When India became independent in 1947, the anglophile Rana dynasty fled en masse.

Kathmandu maintained a difficult neutrality during the Sin-Indo-China war of 1962 because it did not want to support the frontlines, fighting and dying on behalf of one neighbour against another.

Throughout the Cold War, Nepal's royal rulers walked the tightrope and even managed to take advantage of global and regional rivalries. And when China fell out with the Soviet Union, Nepal's foreign policy split into little pieces. Nepal's kings had to keep walking the yam-between-stones doctrine.

In today's multipolar world, as tactical forces renege, geopolitics, Nepal is wedged on more. Nepal's rulers have always been tried to dump in foreign powers into its internal palace intrigues.

Prime Minister K P Oli used a border dispute with India to stake out a national fervor. Not to needle India so much, but to blunt a mutiny within his own party. That power struggle has continued somehow through many twists and turns right up to hearings in the Supreme Court this week over PM Oli's second resolution of the House and call for early elections.

This time, an increasingly cornered Oli has been trying to mend fences with New Delhi, India's spy chief, army chief, foreign secretary and senior BJP adviser all jetted to Kathmandu in close succession. The NCP disintegrated, and the OML split. Oli has been wielding the softest of, declaring that Lord Ram was born in Chitwan, desponding. Nepal is a 10,000 million dollar giant, and holding forth in Hindu to Pranab Modi tv channels to trace India.

Besides balancing India and China, Nepal's Nepali's current prime minister has to tread carefully in India's toxic politics.

The Times of India

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Kids Brendra's Reign

Brendra (Reda) was being roasted in the open behind the blur of a strong wind behind the brick walls. She was being roasted not just for her 20 years of leading the kids of Nepal, but for her dynamic leadership. Brendra's leadership, her activities, her ideas and her energy were all being questioned. When Brendra was leading a constitutional campaign for the kids of Nepal, her ideas and her leadership were being questioned.

Brendra's leadership was being questioned because she was not a political leader. She was not a political leader. She was a leader of the kids of Nepal. She was a leader of the kids of Nepal. She was not a political leader. She was a leader of the kids of Nepal. She was a leader of the kids of Nepal.

But time will tell. And in the future, we will all remember that Brendra was the leader of the kids of Nepal.

The Times of India

Online packages

Why are Sheharas always happy?

The answer is very simple. Sheharas are very happy because they have a lot of friends and relatives. They have a lot of activities and outings. They have a lot of freedom and opportunities.

Most popular on Twitter

Why not try this

A Nepal's Maoist revolution from the inside by Dada Singh Thapa

I was there. I was a member of the Maoist army. I saw how the Maoists operated. I saw the suffering of the people. I saw the joy of the people.

Most commented

Aid pours into Nepal, but what is it being used for?

Aid is pouring into Nepal. But what is it being used for? We need to know how the aid is being used.

Most visited online page

Quote TWEETS

Nepal's political leaders are not as approachable as one would like.

The international community's help is not enough to meet the needs of the people. We need to work together to meet the needs of the people.

Nepal's political leaders are not as approachable as one would like.

The international community's help is not enough to meet the needs of the people. We need to work together to meet the needs of the people.

Nepal's political leaders are not as approachable as one would like.

The international community's help is not enough to meet the needs of the people. We need to work together to meet the needs of the people.
HIGHEST HONORS COME WITH HIGHEST STANDARDS

We have been awarded the Diamond Status by APEX Health Safety independent audit powered by SimpliFying for our efforts in ensuring the highest standards of hygiene and safety for our passengers.
Ujwal Thapa’s light shines on

Bibeksheel Saja Party co-founder wanted to breed leaders, not be a leader himself

Limited flights

The Cabinet has decided to allow one flight per week to Turkey, Qatar and China from June 15. Lufthansa will fly five times a week from Istanbul. Qatar Airways will fly twice a week from Doha. Scheduled for Chinese cities have not been announced. Some 245,000 people have signed a request for flights to China. Laxmi Airlines is the only company that has declared it will fly to China. Laxmi Airlines plans to fly at least twice a week to Thailand.

IFC in Dolma Impact Fund II

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group is investing $10 million in the Dolma Impact Fund II for small and medium-sized enterprises, in health care, renewable energy, technology, and other critical areas in Nepal. The fund will be used to strengthen the country’s economy. The government will provide a guarantee of 20% of the IFC’s investment and create up to 600 jobs. The fund has already invested in 17 projects.

Healthpost handover

A health post in Sindhupalchowk was handed over to the Nutrition Consultative Committee on Wednesday. The handover ceremony was held at the health post in the district. The health post was handed over to the government of Nepal by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the government.

Vaccine airlift

Nepal Army and the government of Nepal are airlifting 300,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines from China. The vaccines will arrive in Kathmandu on June 15. The government has signed a contract with China for the delivery of the vaccines.

IME Covid aid

The IME Foundation, a leading financial services provider, has provided medical equipment (80 oxygen concentrators worth about Rs100 million) to the Health Ministry on Tuesday. The foundation has also donated Rs100 million to the government of Nepal to support the fight against COVID-19.

Budget gives Covid rebates

Budget gives Covid rebates to businesses turnover of up to Rs100 million or incomes of Rs100 million or more to benefit from tax rebates. The rebates are available for the fiscal year 2020-21 and will be effective from July 1. The rebates will be beneficial for small and medium-sized enterprises.
If Birendra was alive, Nepal could still be a monarchy

20 years after the royal massacre, people who knew King Birendra pay tribute

**Alisha Sijapati**

Twenty years ago at 8.45 pm on 1 June, 2001, King Birendra, Queen Ashwarya and eight other members of the royal family were killed during a regular monthly family dinner at the Narayanthan Palace. People in Thamel heard the sound of automatic gunfire, and feared that the Maoists were attacking the palace. It turned out that Princes Dipendra had killed his father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunties, and other relatives before killing himself.

The massacre shook Nepal to the core, and shook the world — a regicide, patricide, matricide, fratricide, sororicide, multiple homicides and a suicide all within minutes.

Nepal was in the midst of the Maoist insurrection which had the aim of abolishing the monarchy, and the monarchy itself had imploded. By November, the rebels attacked the Royal Nepal Army bases, intensifying the conflict.

Dipendra was in a coma for four days, and proclaimed king. After he died, his uncle Gyanendra became king. Nepal had three kings in four days.

This week, 20 years later, many who knew King Birendra still mourn him, and say that perhaps Nepal would still be a constitutional monarchy today if he had not died.

For some, he was “Maharaj Sahib”, to others he was beloved “Rajah Datt”. Birendra was the perfect gentleman king, and for many Nepalis an icon of Viashna. From palace colleagues to civil servants, relatives to politicians most have nothing but nice things to say about the man.

Since he was a child, Birendra was always known for his calm demeanour, mild mannerisms, and a soft-spoken kind hearted personality. A man of frugal tastes, he was educated in India, Zon, Harvard and in Japan. Birendra was never comfortable being an absolute monarch. So, when the first People’s Movement of 1990 took place, he relinquished powers to be a constitutional king despite misgivings from hardliners in the palace.

His leadership skills differed from all the preceding kings, and his brother who succeeded him to the throne. He wanted nothing but peace and development for the country. But critics say he was not assertive enough to follow through and get things done.

Bhekh Bahadur Thapa was Nepal’s ambassador to India when the massacre took place. He got the news from breaking news on television at the Shrekancha Road embassy residence in New Delhi. In interviews with the media the next day, he broke into tears.

Even after two decades, Thapa’s voice falters when he remembers the king who appointed him to be Nepal’s youngest ever Finance Minister. He recalls the king’s state visit to India on Republic Day in 2001 where he showed himself as a leader without stern or arrogance.

“He had made peace with the idea of taking a back seat”, Thapa recalls. “King Birendra hated war and violence, and he was keen on finding a peaceful solution to the Maoist conflict. He was actually working on a peace plan when the massacre happened.”

King Mahendra had brought him back from college in the United States to become the governor of Nepal’s eastern Bank, and instructed him to have weekly sessions with Crown Prince Birendra to instruct him about the country’s economy and development.

As crown prince, and after rebel spokesmen in Kathmandu were assassinated, Birendra’s relationship with Thapa was reported to be strong.

Vivek Bikram Shah worked with Birendra as his military secretary for more than 20 years, and has similar memories of the king: a calm, collected leader not easily flustered in a crisis.

“He did not speak much, but when he did it was with deep and considered opinion, and he showed great compassion to people around him”, Shah recalls. “He loved and admired the Nepali people and worried constantly about the country’s resources limitation to move forward.”

Shah says King Birendra regarded the Nepal people as his family. So much so that he perhaps did not devote as much time to his own family. He says, “If King Birendra was alive today, Nepal would still be a monarchy and he would have devoted all his time and energy to confront a challenge like the Covid-19 pandemic.”

Ketaki Chester, First cousin

“I have never met a more genuine person than King Birendra. He was a wonderful, good human being. He was kind to everybody, couldn’t hurt his voice even in anger. Once he became the reigning monarch, he was very popular, and I assure the country would have been in tumult if he had been taken away.” Birendra was not only a step ahead of his time in the monarchy, but I assure the country would have been in tumult if he had been taken away.” Birendra was not only a step ahead of his time in the monarchy, but I assure the country would have been in tumult if he had been taken away.”

Rajni Singh, First cousin

“King Birendra and I have roughly 10 to 15 years of age difference. He was a very calm and good hearted person. I remember how seventhly he signed an envelope for me and drew my picture. No one was as kind and goodhearted as him. When a child, he didn’t talk much, but was a good listener who would be on alert and watchful in listening. He was also a very thoughtful person and quite different from the rest of the family.”

Bhekh Bahadur Thapa

Former minister and diplomat

“King Birendra was a naturalist and a decent gentleman. His approach to people and country was at a very high order. When he asked me to call him Gyanendra, I initially refused the offer but suggested that he wanted someone with a special talent in economics and finance to help him. King Birendra was devoted to the natural sciences, and was very mild-mannered, and he must have been under pressure from his family and society. Some in his family and close confidants may not have taken him as seriously as they should have. He believed in seeing things from a smaller rather than relying on others, instead of depending on experts, he started listening deeply to the people.”

Vivek Shah, King Birendra’s military secretary

“Worked with him for over 27 years and he was so down to earth, simple and soft hearted.”

After the 1990’s movement, King Birendra was very well aware that things were not going too well, but he wanted to do the best he could to bring peace. He was always looking to the future, he wanted to bring change to the country and for that he knew the country needed to be at peace.”

As a person King Birendra was a devoted family man, but he regarded all of Nepal as his family. And perhaps he did give as much time to his own family as he would have wanted to.”
Nepal leads in snow leopard study

Research into the habits and habitat of the elusive cat is key to protecting them

● Sonia Awale

What has helped save the endangered snow leopard thus far is that it lives in the world’s most inhospitable mountain terrain. But this is changing as new roads improve access, making the elusive cat more vulnerable to those who mean it harm.

Research into the behaviour and ecosystem of snow leopards is therefore an important part of protecting them, and a new international survey has shown that Nepal leads other snow leopard range states in studying and conserving the threatened species.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) study, Over 100 Years of Snow Leopard Research, shows that 74% of the snow leopard habitat in northern Nepal has been the subject of research into the species.

Most of the snow leopard’s vast 1.7 million sq km range in remote mountains spanning 12 countries in central Asia has never been researched to study its ecosystem.

Nepal’s neighbours India and China have only 60% and 70% of their snow leopard habitat explored.

“The snow leopard lives in rugged terrain, so research poses significant logistical challenges. Most of the habitat is still unexplored and we don’t have a full picture of the status of this magnificent big cat,” says Rishi Kumar Sharma, WWF Global Snow Leopard Lead, who is the lead author of the report.

Of the 23% of the area studied, only 5% of the snow leopard range has been more closely examined through camera traps and genetic tools to estimate their number in the wild, the WWF survey shows.

This, coupled with the absence of long-term monitoring programs, makes it difficult to evaluate the impact of measures taken to protect the species, as well as track emerging new threats to the snow leopard. Sharma’s report examines the current state of knowledge by including peer-reviewed published papers on the species and its habitat.

The countries with the most snow leopard research are Nepal, India, China, Mongolia and Pakistan, in that order. The studies mostly focus on ecological research, human-wildlife conflict and socio-ecological dimensions of the snow leopard range.

However, since so little of the snow leopard’s ecosystem has been researched, the survey concludes that there are critical knowledge gaps that could be hampering more effective conservation measures.

“Snow leopards are not just the emblems of Asia’s high mountains but are also critical to sustaining the landscapes they live in, which support water sources for over 3 billion people,” says Margaret Kannard of Land Wildlife Fund at WWF International.

She adds: “This report will be a guide for the conservation community to diversify and prioritise areas of research to preserve suitable and suitable habitat for snow leopards and to ensure water security for the vast human populations downstream.”

Indeed, protecting the snow leopard habitat also means protecting the environment of the Himalaya, Tibetan Plateau, Karakoram and Pamir that are together called the Water Tower of Asia because it already 3.2 billion

Importance of Ecosystems for L

Development partners’ statement of support to Nepal on the occasion of World Environment Day, 5 June

On World Environment Day, we reiterate our commitment to helping Nepal respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and a sustainable and inclusive recovery.

This commitment is demonstrated in our joint support for Nepal’s Green, Resilient and Inclusive Development (GRID) ambitions for which development partners have committed up to US$7.4 billion. With committed leadership from the Government, we look forward to embarking on a green, resilient and inclusive growth path together as the Covid-19 crisis subsides.
Watch video of young students from Yangshila in Ilam who go from community to community to spread awareness about the importance of protecting endangered pangolins, and the benefits the shy mammals provide farmers.

**PROTECTING PANGOLINS**

Youngsters in Ilam prove local young can have a powerful role in nature conservation

Four years ago, teenager Anish Magar saw a pangolin being killed close to his home in Yangshila, in the forested Churi Hills of eastern Nepal. He began to contact local NGO, the Nepal Foundation for Learning (NFLC), demanding that they take action.

But NFLC Chair Kamal Bhawakecha advised the teen not to go to the police. Instead, he urged the youngster to try to save the rare and elusive animals, the most trafficked mammal in the world.

"We must be extremely cautious about why it is important to protect pangolins, and then we will not punish them again," Bhawakecha told them.

Anish Magar then became the local leader of the save-the-pangolin effort, and the teen went from village to village to speak directly to locals about the animal’s dangers. He helped organize campaigns and workshops developed by One Generation and Leader Initiative.

Pangolins are shy, nocturnal, usually timid mammals that look like reptiles. They prey on ants and termites, eating the insects’ eggs and larvae as well as other ant and termite larvae. Due to its popular pet and traditional medicine status, it has been a target for poachers. As a result, the species is under threat.

Nepal has the fourth largest population of snow leopards after China, Mongolia and India, in a much smaller area. Despite their endangered status, between 221-450 snow leopards are killed annually across Asia for them driven by trade for poisoning on livestock like sheep, yaks, and goats. Increased habitat loss, degradation and poaching have also contributed to their declining numbers. Young people with new roads making remote mountainous areas more accessible, the snow leopards face new threats. However, only 14-16% of the snow leopard range is protected, with 40% of those being smaller than a soccer field in size.

The new threat to the snow leopard ecosystem comes from the climate crisis, and their numbers are predicted to decline by 30-50% by 2070 as the mountain ice caps melt.

The good news is that recent years have seen more interest in saving the elusive cats, national-level population assessments have been carried out in several range-countries. New studies on the impact of the climate emergency have been conducted with research in Nepal’s Koshi Phukhola National Park, Manang and Mustang.

Scientist Madhu Chetri has extensively studied out cats in Upper Mustang and Manang to analyze their prey composition, and find clues about human impact on their habitat.

Similarly, researcher Tshering Lhamo is planning Snow Leopard Conservation Trips to Delphi’s Phukhola Lake to attract premium tourists from all over the world, bringing jobs and income to locals. She believes this will allow them to enjoy the value of protecting the habitat of Nepal’s largest endangered bordering the Tibetan Plateau.

The WNP recommends evaluating the effectiveness of conservation actions, monitoring snow leopards and prey species, integrating habitat restoration programs into conservation, studying disease, spatial ecology, and impacts of climate change and infrastructure development as priority areas for future research.

Says Sharma: "We need to build a more accurate picture of the status of snow leopard populations and their prey species at these sites, then we can better assess future changes and evaluate the impact of conservation actions. But more than anything else, we need a much better understanding of what the people sharing the space with snow leopards think."
VIRTUAL EVENTS

WWF webinar
On World Environment Day, join us at a Zoom webinar hosted by CRDO, OHI and WWF Nepal. Where experts from the ground discuss the impact of human-induced waste in Nepal, and solutions geared towards ecosystem restoration. Learn on WWF Nepal’s Facebook page.
5 June, 3.30pm

ROAD TO COP26
Call for Nepali women researchers to participate in a five-week media workshop led by climate and science journalist Joannatemperley. Participants will develop their own story relating to climate and gender focused on their local communities, following which they will receive a reporting grant to publish the piece. More on https://www.ukinmil.com/np/ workshop-and-grant-opportunity-women-researchers-climate-change
Application deadline: 7 June

JCCRM webinar
As part of JCCRM’s “Sustaining Digital Heritage” initiative, the upcoming webinar ‘Understanding Disaster: Risk for Digital Heritage’ will be based on sessions from the forthcoming JCCRM digital heritage workshop. Attendees will learn about the importance of digital asset management in the face of climate-related disasters.
22 June, 05.00pm

ISOLATION READING

The Sixth Extinction
Elizabeth Kolbert’s prize-winning book about the future of the world’s biodiversity and our place among the animals of the natural world. Join us to discuss the book and the climate crisis.
12 June, 9.00pm

THE CARBON DIARIES 2015

The Carbon Diaries: 2015
Sarayah Lloyd’s dystopian novel follows 16-year-old Laura, her friends, and her family as they cope with the effects of global warming in the UK after the country has imposed carbon rationing in the wake of weather-related disasters.
23 June, 06.00pm

The Anthropocene Reviewed
The Anthropocene is a new scientific era in which humans have become a geological force. This book is an attempt to define it and explain what it means.
24 June, 06.00pm

TLLclimate
An award-winning MIT podcast that breaks down the science, technologies, and policies behind climate change and its impact on the planet. Each episode will include discussions from scientists. Go to https://climate.mit.edu/365/podcast to learn more.
25 June, 06.00pm

mothers of invention
Former President of Ireland Mary Robinson, and comedian Emma Harckham discuss this podcast about the role of women in driving solutions to climate crisis across the planet. Find on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.
26 June, 06.00pm

Attitudes!
A climate comedy podcast hosted by Eric Gibson and Bryan Rollins. Based on discussions of women’s rights, LGBTQ+ rights, pop culture, and various social issues.
27 June, 06.00pm

FOREST 404

Forest 404 is a nine-part environmental thriller podcast of 200 years into the future where forests do not exist anymore. Each episode is followed by an expert discussion.
28 June, 06.00pm

PODCASTS

Costing the Earth
BDX Radio FM Costing the earth presents fresh ideas from the Scottish mind working towards a cleaner, greener planet. Find on the BDX Radio FM website or on Apple Podcasts.

ONLINE ARCHIVES

Nature Picture Library
The Nature Picture library provides access to more than 500,000 images and videos covering every aspect of the natural world on animal, plants, landscapes, environmental issues, marine life, pets and nature peoples. Browse through the galleries.

Climate Museum UK
Climate Museum UK’s mobile and digital museum collecting art, objects, ideas, games and tools to engage the public and respond to the Climate and Ecological Emergency. Find more on https://climate museum.org.uk digital museum.

Vox Climate Lab
Vox’s 5-part YouTube video series Vox Climate Lab, produced by the University of California in partnership with VICE, will launch September 4. Sagan explains ways to change how people think and act about climate change.

Stonewall Museum
Stonewall National Museum and Archives has played a significant part in the collection, preservation, and accessibility of LGBTQ+ culture and history of the U.S. Check out virtual exhibitions at https://stonewallmuseum.org/virtual-exhibitions/

Google underwater tour
Take Google’s 360° view of the ocean and explore the mysteries of the sea with Sir David Attenborough. Watch videos and underwater maps, and learn about the unique creatures that inhabit the world’s oceans.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

10 June in Kathmandu.

INTERNET TIMES

OUR PICK

The award-winning eight-episode British documentary series Our Planet narrated by Sir David Attenborough was made available for free in 2020 in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, and reminds us about climate change, the human impact on biodiversity, and the conservation of living species. Each episode explores the planet’s natural diversity, species that still exist, and those that are now feared, and includes stunning shots of sea and land life. Catch it on Netflix’s YouTube Channel.

CAREER IN MEDIA

You might be the Nepali Times’ next intern, looking to make a career in media. You have a talent for writing and editing. Style and clarity in writing are your forte. You are also a proficient in Nepali. A good visual and design sense. Eager to learn and explore new ideas. You have video skills, or can learn fast. You believe journalism is not just a job.

YOU HAVE HIGH STANDARDS. SO DO WE!
"Be safe"

Safety is more than a synonym or a metaphor, it is a prayer.
I hope you will not have to go through what I just did.

When I say, “Be safe,” I am asking you to be kind to yourself. I am asking that you remember to wear your mask at all times, to keep your distance, and to wash your hands regularly. These are simple things that we can do to protect ourselves and those around us.

When you “salt” every time you step out on one of your short walks, it means I am whispering a reminder that you know to keep a safe distance from neighbours and acquaintances you might meet during your walks. It is as fervently hoped that when you run into someone, you will bring your parents to together to greet them from a great distance, and keep your side of the road and then walk away.

When I say “safety,” the word is more than a synonym or a metaphor. It is a prayer. It is me hoping you will not have to repeat the experience I have had, wherein one is acquainted with the world for weeks on end, often at the end of the tether.

It is a lonely place to be battling for breath and to have to be literally done doing it, clinging to whatever remains of sanity when you are constantly in such a place—although, isn’t it true that each of us fight battles alone?

This loneliness is not the one of choice that introverts like me often make. It is layered in different aspects and moments. It is mostly about starting from one wall to another, learning every single item in your room by heart. It is about thinking of friends and family and how long since you last had a hand or pressed someone to your bosom.

It is about wondering if there might indeed be time for you to finish that story you were writing.

It is also about learning by heart the views your room has to offer. In Kathmandu, it is the squadron, now doused in colours that range from pistachio to fuchsi. They show back at you as you watch from the solitude of your room, observing neighbours, making a mental note of their daily activities, even through the last thing you want to do is to pray.

Some nights, the solitude will come back by bite or times you feel your lungs as if knocked out of breath. And then you gavel, your head slumped in your palm, coughing into bedduddies, sometimes cursing, sometimes reminding yourself that you cannot be the viewer and that you’re going to do over everything again, even if it’s from your body.

But the virus is a vicious one and it slams you down, compelling you to live prone sucking in only as much oxygen as your lungs have the capacity for just then.

You listen to the sounds of the night— they become an unending and seared one in your yard and the voices of your roommates and your mother. It is about remembering you have to go through the phase before you go to bed, then the phase before you open the door to pick up and shut the door again, just like some crimes.

I wish to shield you from experiences like these.

I wish that after picking your plates, you never have to stare at the food for an hour, wondering if your sore throat will burst as you swallow, wondering why everything tastes like nothing. And then nibble slowly, not knowing whether to have or have not the act of eating food that is now scant taste, scant fragrance, but you must eat even though you have no appetite.

I wish some of these to be over your experience.

When I say “be safe”, I wish you are not is the world of cloistered and isolated lives, nocloistered and isolated lives, no

The healing power of nature

Reconnecting with nature makes us rise above our troubles, appreciate life and help others

It is crucial to stay connected with loved ones, and to keep our minds and bodies healthy. What else can we do to keep our spirits from being dragged down?

The world has experienced a global pandemic, and lockdowns have been implemented to control the spread of the virus. But as restrictions are lifted, it is important to recognize the impact of the pandemic on mental health.

Many of us are not aware of the positive impact nature has on us. Living in close quarters can take the frustration out on the closest people.

Nature can be found in small spaces, such as your backyard or a nearby park. Spending time outdoors can improve your mood and reduce stress.

In addition to physical benefits, spending time in nature can improve mental health. It can reduce anxiety and depression, which are common issues affecting many people.

Nature can be especially beneficial for individuals with co-occurring disorders. It provides a way to connect with others and develop a sense of community.

Many people find solace in nature, whether it be through hiking, gardening, or simply taking a walk in the park. These activities can help improve mood, reduce stress, and promote overall well-being.

By spending time in nature, you can experience a sense of peace and tranquility. It is an opportunity to disconnect from the fast-paced pace of modern life and reconnect with oneself.

In conclusion, it is important to make time for nature in your daily routine. It can be as simple as taking a short walk or spending an hour in your garden. The benefits are numerous, and it is a practice that can be enjoyed by everyone.

Be sure to connect with nature and appreciate its beauty. It will do wonders for your mental and physical health.

In summary, the healing power of nature should not be underestimated. It plays a vital role in improving our well-being and should be an integral part of our daily lives.

I hope you will find this information helpful and consider incorporating nature into your routine. Remember, every little bit counts!

Thank you for reading. I wish you all the best on your journey to a healthier, happier life.
The deadly Covid-19 surge that has engulfed neighbouring India appears to be spiralling out of control in Nepal. Daily deaths have been exploding. The experience from India shows that fragile health systems can get overwhelmed quickly leading to needless suffering: citizens’ pleas for oxygen, lack of ICU beds and medicines.

Tackling this threat requires Nepal to adopt a three-pronged approach immediately:

1. Promote consistent mask-wearing to contain the spread of disease, especially in rural areas where the healthcare infrastructure is even more deficient.
2. Prepare a healthcare response in the event of localised surges.
3. Prepare for quick last-mile vaccination delivery, in anticipation of vaccine arrival.

There are rigorous evidence-based strategies to implement such a response, as Nepal’s other South Asian neighbours are doing.

Nepali can protect themselves against the worst of Covid-19. Here’s how.

- Mushiq Mobarak
- Neela Saldanha

The graph shows the discrepancy between official figures and total peak COVID death figures belting in Nepal mortality. There is usually a 3-week lag between infection and death.

Kaushal Bhutan

In its daily briefing on 1 June, the Ministry of Health announced that 0,085 people had tested positive for Covid-19, and 6,006 people had died in the previous 24 hours. This was the lowest fatality tally in three weeks, and the positivity rate had also fallen to 10%.

Experts were vague on these figures, and took it as a sign that the second wave had peaked. Indeed, the rolling weekly average of daily confirmed cases is much lower and the daily death total had dropped from 200 just two weeks ago.

However, a new study shows that pandemic statistics the world over are fraught with inaccuracies. Nepal figures are also a gross underestimate, and while daily infections were probably closer to 120,000, more than 30 times higher than official figures. On 1 June, the fatality total was ten times higher than the official tally.

The study by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) of the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle goes beyond official confirmed cases to calculate “excess mortality” and undetected Covid-19 infections.

“As terrible as the COVID-19 pandemic appears, this analysis shows that the actual toll is significantly worse,” said IHME Director Chris Murray, revealing the results of the analysis this month. “Understanding the true number of Covid 19 deaths not only helps us appreciate the magnitude of this global crisis, but also provides valuable information to policymakers developing response and recovery plans.”

The official figures for Nepal are frightening enough. The country has the world’s second-highest weekly increase in deaths at 28.1% and the highest national test positivity rate of 60%. Yet, Nepal conducts only 713 tests per million people, contact tracing is virtually non-existent, less than 2% of the 30 million population is fully vaccinated, and mask-wearing is at below 50%.

The IHME’s graphs for Nepal show that during the early May peak when new confirmed cases were above 9,000 every day, the actual daily number was probably closer to 350,000. Nepal’s Ministry of Health’s total tally of fatalities is now 7,163, but the modelling shows that the actual total is 28,258.

Epidemiologists warn that if the official figures are so wrong, then the planning to meet the requirements for everything from test kits, hospital beds, ICU, oxygen supply and ventilators, and even funerary planning would need to be re-evaluated and up-scaled.

“We have known that underreporting is widespread. The figures are underestimated, but the impact cannot be underestimated,” says virologist Sher Bahadur Pun at TPok Hospital. “For example, although we are just beginning to see a plateauing of the second wave, the increase in new cases is constant and the strain on the health system remains the same.”

The IHME uses the “excess mortality” model to calculate a more accurate figure for the infection and death rate from Covid-19 by using data for previous years, and factoring in new variables to calculate how many more people are actually dying during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic years.

There are many factors affecting mortality during the pandemic: deaths directly due to Covid-19, increase in mortality because patients with pre-existing conditions are not getting the hospital care they need, or deaths due to mental disorders. However, there is also a reduction in the number of deaths caused by high air pollution, fatalities from other air-borne infections like tuberculosis, measles or influenza, and even a drop in highway-traffic accidents.

So, IHME models collected available data on excess mortality from Covid-19, added an estimated additional deaths that were not registered to come up with the total deaths from coronavirus.

In Nepal, even official data shows a steep spike during the whole of May as Nepal workers started arriving from India with the fast-spreading S:1.617.2 variant. But on 1 May when the confirmed daily Covid-19 deaths was showing only 32, the model shows that 117 people were already dying every day nationwide from the disease.

Within two weeks, even when the official total had soared to 200, the graphs show that the excess daily mortality was already 742. The reason for the discrepancy was that mostly hospital deaths were being counted, and the death registration system is inaccurate and late.

Epidemiologist Lhamo Yangdhen Sherpa says the graph just prove what everyone knows all along: testing is inadequate and even the distribution of testing facilities is haphazard.

She adds: “People in remote parts of Nepal like Sikkimchhu have to walk for days to get their swab sample, which is then sent to a lab in Biratnagar. By the time result is back, a week has passed by and many of them are already sick.”

Even though the national case numbers have gone down, experts say it is raging across rural Nepal— but there is no way to quantify it because of the lack of testing.

Experts like Mushiq Mobarak of Yale University say that the most effective strategy for countries with fragile health systems like Nepal to reduce fatalities is a three-pronged approach that aggressively promotes mask-wearing, responds to (localised surges, as well as last-mile vaccine delivery. (See above)

Mask-wearing alone has been proven in a trial in Bangladesh to show that a vigorous campaign, for no-cost mask distribution, aggressive awareness drive, and punishment for non-wearers tripled the number of people using masks properly.

Indeed, the IHME model also proves that direct impact of mask wearing in Nepal. The modelling shows that the total coronavirus death toll in Nepal by 1 September will be at 44,711 if mobility went up to pre-COvid levels. However, if 95% of Nepalis wore masks in public at all times, the number of deaths would be reduced to 42,500. This means 2,212 lives would be saved just by universal mask-wearing in the next three months.
Nepal from Covid-19

On mask-wearing, researchers at Yale University and Stanford University, together with the non-profit Innovations for Poverty Action and GreenVoice, ran a large-scale ($50,000 study) randomised controlled trial to identify a precise combination of strategies that are successful in changing mask-wearing norms. Randomised controlled trials are the same techniques used to boost vaccine efficacy. When the strategies were jointly implemented, they tripled mask-wearing in rural Bangladesh, and this effect was persistent over 16 weeks of observation, including after the intervention activities ended.

These four strategies form the NORM model:

- **No-Cost masks distributed at scale**
- **Offering information on mask-wearing reinforcement in public places by intercepting non-mask wearers**
- **Modelling and endorsement by trusted leaders**

The researchers tested a dozen other strategies like verbal commitments, text message reminders, social signaling, involving the village police in reinforcement, and even village-level monetary rewards, but none of these were successful; increasing mask-wearing rates are much more effective in reducing transmission risk and save lives.

Why do these strategies work? Door-to-door distribution with messaging makes it public knowledge that everyone in the community was given a mask, and neighbours are aware of the public health threat of not wearing one. Public, in-person reinforcement creates some social shame from being confronted by a stranger and creates incentives for people to carry the mask to avoid the awkward confrontation. The endorsement from community leaders makes the program personal and credible.

The Stanford engineers on the research team produced high-quality reusable, washable masks that can be procured very quickly and cheaply in South Asia. The research team also provides detailed implementation protocols for all projects, activities, to make each step easily and quickly implementable for governments.

The results of this study were so compelling that state governments and groups in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have expanded and adapted the NORM model, and it has drawn headlines such as 'India draws lessons from Bangladesh's mask study' in a leading newspaper in India. In India, SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) is distributing 3.2 million masks and has implemented the NORM model for 1 million people in Gujarat. The Mayor of Dhaka North quickly mobilised a coalition of partners within 48 hours to implement in crowded shopping malls and at transit hubs before the Eid travel rush. The commissioner of Lahore and the health minister of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province in Pakistan have mobilised staff and resources to implement after Ramadan.

BRAC, the world's largest non-governmental organisation, is poised to reach 77 million people in Bangladesh with the NORM model training interventions, along with associated healthcare responses and vaccine pre-order strategies.

This model of community-level mask distribution, promotion, and reinforcement can serve as the anchor to cost-effectively deliver the other necessary components of an effective Covid response strategy: empowering community health workers to provide more accurate treatment options to those who fall ill, and undertaking the activities required to overcome vaccine hesitancy and facilitate vaccine registration.

In both India and Bangladesh, SEWA and BRAC are taking advantage of the economies of scale in mask delivery to also set up Covid care centres to take pressure off hospitals. Distinguishing effective from ineffective treatment strategies requires medical expertise and clinical experience. We have partnered with the South Asia Alliance convened by a professor at Harvard Medical School to create training manuals on effective Covid treatment plans for community health workers. We have also collected large-sample data to systematically understand the nature of vaccine hesitancy in Nepal, and other low and middle-income countries, to inform the design of vaccine campaigns. Quick implementation of the NORM model in Nepal is feasible with decisive leadership and political will, as other South Asian neighbours are doing. Our international research team stands ready to provide any necessary technical support to adopt the model, share all implementation protocols, and monitor results to aid further tinkering and any necessary course-correction, as we have done for our other partners in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

The team is not looking for any monetary or research rewards. The evidence is convincing that this is a cost-effective way to stem Covid transmission and save lives, and we would therefore like to facilitate implementation by the Nepal government or other local non-government actors.

Mushfiq Mobarak is Professor of economics, Yale University, and Nita Sandhu is an MD/MBA graduating from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, and an MPA from the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta.
Nepal rocks

We are so lucky to have a govt. that gives it to us straight. The Prime Minister never minces words, and IMF-MoF does not beat around the bush to convey to us the bad news that the country is going belly-up, which is why we have to sell the Chairs to India to reduce the trade deficit. We are lucky he did not mislead us by sugar-coating the message that we can only balance the budget by hook or by crook, mainly by crook.

Let’s see, what else can we do to reduce the trade gap? Flattening the curve would enhance the Tani, and after we are done with that, we can sell the Mahabharat and turn the range into Nepal’s Central Plains for planting. And if we still have a balance of payments deficit, then we can start quarrying Ganesh Himal. That way we can open up a new trade route to Tibet, killing two birds with one stone.

But why sell Nepal piece-meal? There is an even better idea: let’s sub-contract the whole country to a company that can run it better.

For transparency, we would need to announce a global tender in the papers, and in the national interest, the Axe demands this week’s space for the following declassified ad:

COUNTRY TO LET

Looking for a easy, quiescent rural hideout in an exciting neighborhood, set amidst rolling hills, to give you the feeling of being in the country? Want to attract a multi-cultural, consumer society to settle in one that is trying to become even more multilingual and consumerist?

Then here is an offer you cannot resist to rent a remote land World country on the verge of graduating to Middle Income Nation. Spacious, fully-furnished, land-locked and tucked-away from Democratic Republic recently declined open-celebration free, with majestic same scenery that is South Asia’s skin’s native state and was never contended, has a double circle national language flag, and is the birthplace of card battles, is available for immediate long-term lease on a management contract.

It is a fallow grain with unexploited hydro-power potential, a seven story of vegetation in Mustang and a vast gash of deposits in Luing. Quiet laisser with nature fences, perfect for the expansion of a mega-airport. Hair for white elephants. Has an untapped gaseous satellite, a used muffine farm, a convene of villages, a peak grape, and free WiFi. Aerial water supply in the marmot, ever still fall out land and borders that can be buttered for success, efficient garbage disposal on every street corner, plenty of parking on horspots, pets allowed to roam freely in neighborhood without leash and mule.

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Period of lease and rent price negotiable in a business deal that will include a 20% inflation for the current land value.

Application with full particulars of prospective owner. Condition should be at least 40 years background in governing a Southeast Asian city-state, preferably one that has learned closing up or quota amount of deals with 30 days with a warm reception on each first touch.

CONE is an equal opportunity employer. Women are encouraged to apply, but do so at their own peril. All axes must apply.

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Indian Telcos to spend Rs 1.8 trillion over next 3 years

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