

Commercially Important People

There are tens of thousands of Nepalis in India, the Gulf region and elsewhere who have been laid off, whose resident permits have expired, or are stranded, who want to come home. Many are on unpaid leave, or they are working in essential services with higher chances of exposure, and at greater risk of being infected.

Others just want to be home with family, and do not want to continue living in crowded worker dormitories that are breeding grounds for infections. As the lockdowns and global economic downturn continue, the pressure will grow from destination countries on Nepal and other South Asian nations, to repatriate their nationals.

they also risk turning what is still a health crisis into a humanitarian disaster.

Countries that have benefited from the cheap labour are casting them away as disposables at a time when they know the situation in South Asia. It exposes a blatant lack of humanity and extreme selfishness to send workers home knowing very well the limited medical capacity of the sending countries.

The role of Nepal's embassies in the Gulf, Malaysia and Maldives is critical during this emergency. There are many countries with substantial Nepali migration populations without missions, but even where there are resident embassies, Nepali workers have accused them of being apathetic during this crisis.

Regardless of whether Nepali workers are being forced to go back, or they are returning of their own free will, the preparedness to transport and quarantine the influx is inadequate. Even if all hotel rooms in Kathmandu are requisitioned for quarantine, it would not be enough to isolate workers. Not having a plan in place to accommodate those coming back is a colossal oversight.

To be sure, the logistics are going to be a sheer nightmare: the workers all need to be COVID-19 free, the most vulnerable migrants should not be asked to pay for flights back, who is going to pay for the

The Nepal government needs a strategy ready for transport and quarantine facilities if its workers overseas are suddenly sent home en masse.

On Sunday, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) warned it would punish countries that refused to take back workers wishing to go home by suspending bilateral labour agreements. Saudi Arabia is sending back Ethiopians by the plane loads. Kuwait is planning to deport thousands of undocumented workers from Bangladesh. The United Nations warned that the planned deportation of 200,000 Ethiopians from Saudi Arabia risks spreading the epidemic in that African country, while human rights groups have condemned the move.

These could all be signs of things to come. Like other South Asian countries, Nepal is woefully unprepared to take back so many workers immediately because of limited quarantine facilities. The logistics are near-impossible. Even if only 10% of the 1.5 million Nepali workers in the Gulf region wanted to come home, it would take six months to fly them all back, even if there were two daily widebody flights.

The number of infected people in the Gulf, Malaysia and India are increasing, and many of them are foreign workers. With their health infrastructure starting to be overwhelmed, there will be increasing pressure on destination country governments to send workers back to South Asia.

This is not just Nepal's problem, our neighbours are all scrambling to increase quarantine facilities to accommodate returnees. Aside from the moral and ethical question that the deportations could raise,

rest, which countries to take workers back from first? It would also be unjust to fly back Nepalis from the Gulf, but stop Nepali workers from India at the border.

Even after the thousands upon thousands of Nepali workers land in Kathmandu how are we going to get them back to their homes, mainly in Provinces 1 and 2? There needs to be adequate quarantine preparation especially in high migrant districts. Given previous cases of imports of COVID-19, there is already a stigma associated with returnees, and social ostracisation will be a huge problem.

Not having a strategy to deal with this ticking time bomb will mean that it can go off at any moment. There are enough indications that sooner or later, there will be an influx of returning workers. Every minute wasted is opportunity lost.

The government has often described Nepali migrant workers abroad as 'true heroes' for sending money home that props up the economy. It is time we treated them like the heroes they are. They are Nepal's real Commercially Important People, not the tax-dodging tycoons.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Embracing a new year in 2066, Kathmandu Valley was set for one of the most popular festivals, Rato Machhindranath. In issue #498, 10 years ago, Nepali Times published a short story on the history of Rato Machhindranath and its importance. The panache and the excitement of this spring festival a decade later is now cancelled in Kathmandu and Patan due to the coronavirus lockdown. Excerpts:

Over a thousand years ago, the sage Gorakhnath took umbrage at the good people of the Kathmandu Valley when his request for alms was ignored. He gathered all the serpents of the Valley, keepers of rain, and sat on them. The ensuing drought caused much suffering, and King Narendra Dev was compelled to call upon Gorakhnath's guru, Machhindranath. When Machhindranath appeared, Gorakhnath rose to greet him, releasing the serpents, and ending the drought. Ever since the god has been honoured in Patan every year.

As this year's Rato Machhindranath chariot is built plank by plank on the road to Jawalakhel, well might we wonder what is holding the heavens up. Who is stifling the peace process, and what will it take for the stakeholders to come to their senses and get to their feet?



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WILDFLOWERS 101

A video introduction to the new phone app that lets you identify Himalayan wildflowers easily. Prepare for your next trek in Nepal so you can know and admire not just the mountains, but also Nepal's beautiful flowers. Story: page 8-9.

BACK TO FARMING

This is an excellent article ('Back to the future of farming', Editorial, #1005). It's a shame it takes a pandemic to highlight the importance and value of farming. If villages have self-isolated for 14 days without any cases, then surely it's safe to farm by maintaining hand washing and social distance.

Sara Parker

I've been talking about this for years, and shouting about it for weeks. Glad to see the importance of agricultural self-sufficiency highlighted. In the not so distant future Nepal should at least triple home grown produce -- or face a famine of epic proportions as neighbouring countries cease food exports to feed their own people.

Alex Ferguson

Sometimes, the best decisions are the ones that are forced on us. This contagion has forced us to re-examine our priorities and realign our values. I hope that we will again see those emerald fields welcome the weary traveller on his way back home.

Tashi Sherpa

More than the pandemic, solution for a food crisis and a possible starvation is the need of the hour.

Shyamal Krishna Shrestha

TSO ROLPA

This article highlighted the important issue of the remote mountains, which is almost untouched by the media ('Human face of a Himalayan climate crisis', Rastraraj Bhandari, #1005).

Chand Mohan

For millennia, locals have been conserving nature by keeping lakes, mountains pristine ('In other news', Kunda Dixit, #1005). Pollution starts in the mind of leaders and bureaucrats. Unless that gets better, everybody loses.

Gyurme Dondup

KARMA LAMA TAMANG

We must uproot the reasons for corruption, not only the people who are corrupt ('An alternative to alternative politics in Nepal', Karma Lama Tamang, nepalitimes.com).

Raj Shrestha

Without the will, nothing will change. There will be better days as the youth become educated and understand more about life, the economy, health and education.

Alan Roadnight

When the so-called new parties are backed up by unseen forces and receive their patronage, they become more dangerous.

Sudip Umesh Bajagain

PRODEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

I belong to that generation which believed change was inevitable and for good ('One moment 30 years ago today', Mukesh Pokhrel, nepalitimes.com). 30 years later I am amongst the group that feel doomed and rightfully so. The only change I see is massive corruption, much larger gap between rich and poor, more division in religious beliefs...the list can go on.

Biniya Dhital Goperma

I feel sorry for the people screaming at rallies for 30 years, just to have incompetent greedy immoral people running amok!

Varun Sjb Rana

It only paved the way for corrupted and greedy people.

Aparna Thapa Khadka

WHAT'S TRENDING



Making Nepal's history colourful

by Kanak Mami Dixit

Graphic designer Bhusan Shilpakar's way to pass the time during the lockdown took on new purpose when he used photo-restoring software DeOldify to colourise old Nepali photos. Check out Nepal's iconic black-and-white prints in colour at nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Human face of a Himalayan climate crisis

by Rastraraj Bhandari



Tso Rolpa glacial lake has grown 7 times in size since 1957, if it bursts it could affect up to 650,000 people downstream. But many locals think climate change is a hoax. Read

this field report online and visit our YouTube channel for a trip to the lake to see the effect of the climate crisis on the Himalayas.

Most popular on Twitter

Back to the future of farming

Editorial

In the post-pandemic era, the economy must be recalibrated to give agriculture the priority it deserved, but never got.

Most commented

UAE warning to send back workers, including Nepalis

by Upasana Khadka

There are an estimated 275,000 Nepali workers in UAE, and even if ten per cent of them wanted to return, Nepal would have neither the flight or quarantine capacity to handle them. Visit www.nepalitimes.com for this story accessed by over 200,000 readers online.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
As a nation, we must now look beyond the horizon of the national quarantine period to matters related to food security and employment. #COVID 19 #Nepallockdown #CoronavirusOutbreak

madhukar upadhyaya @madhukaru
It's the most neglected sector by the establishment, the community, the families and most importantly by the elites in the country for the last over half a century. Those who have continued it is not because they love it but because they have no option.

Bijaya Babu Shiwakoti @bshiwakoti
Good editorial by the @NepaliTimes. Besides the solutions suggested, using agro-forestry, others types of multi-cropping, better linkages with the market and our unique selling point of the agriculture produce need to be discovered. Marijuana farming can be in the mix?

Suresh Dhakal @suracedhakal
Recent circulation by the minister @gsbhusal is appreciable. I find @NepaliTimes editorial 'too' optimistic, which I liked btw. But, I see a serious governance problem, and most importantly land issue is often overlooked while talking about agri-reform.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
UAE threat to send back workers, including #Nepalis Sending tens of thousands of #SouthAsian #MigrantWorkers home would turn a health emergency into a humanitarian crisis. A report by @upasanakhadka1

malcolm mcewen -resigned to climate catastrophe @greenman023
The whole infrastructure of Middle Eastern countries was built and is maintained by foreigners. Nepal should welcome (and quarantine) it's own nationals and start rural re-population and training in Agro industry whilst the M.E. collapses without foreign workers.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Post coronavirus pandemic the government must expedite the foreign investment process to show that Nepal is back in business, writes Siddhant Raj Pandey of @bo2nepal. #economy #FinancialCrisis #CoronavirusLockdown #Nepal

SStha @Asteetwa
I believe it's essential to create a business environment for both Foreign investors and local businesses/entrepreneurs alike. FDI focused more on technology and knowledge transfer should be encouraged. Times like this shows how important local business are.

के गर्ने attitude kills people

Nepal is unprepared not just for a COVID-19 outbreak, but also for pre-existing diseases and disasters



BIKRAM RAI

Laxmi Basnet

Epidemics are nothing new in Nepal. In fact, the country's history is littered with references to frequent outbreaks of cholera, influenza, measles and other disease that killed thousands at a time in Nepal.

Yet, despite knowledge about prevention or the availability of vaccines, Nepalis still continue to die in large numbers. An outbreak of diarrhoea killed 200 people, mostly children, in Jajarkot in 2009. Last year's unprecedented eruption of dengue in Kathmandu infected 15,000 and killed at least a dozen people.

So, for Nepal the only difference between the coronavirus pandemic and previous disease outbreaks is that it is global in scope, and it has wrecked the economy. The government has been more proactive this time, compared to previous epidemics in taking strict measures to prevent the spread, like the lockdown which has now lasted three weeks.

Even so, experts say Nepal's response was unnecessarily delayed. Nepal was one of the first countries outside China to report a case of COVID-19 when a Nepali student who had returned from Wuhan tested positive for

the virus on 24 January. He later recovered, and 15 new cases have been detected since, but it was only in the second week of April that the government finally began mass testing in western Nepal and Tarai districts, where there have been returning migrant workers from India.

Dengue, the mosquito-borne haemorrhagic fever is already being reported in all seven provinces. Cases have been arriving in hospitals which are already on high alert of COVID-19. A double epidemic would mean medical facilities will be overwhelmed.

"We are not new to epidemics. Thousands of children continue to die of easily preventable diarrhoea every year and there will be another dengue outbreak this summer, but where is the preparedness?" asks Gangalal Tuladhar, a disaster expert and politburo member of the ruling Nepal Communist Party. "It is a primary duty of a responsible government to prepare for any disaster or an epidemic before it strikes."

It is ironic that a senior member of a ruling political party that commands a near two-thirds majority in Parliament is the one complaining about the government being lax. To be sure, the government has been strict in enforcing the lockdown, and in his

latest address, Prime Minister Oli extended the lockdown until 27 April and all international flights have been banned till 30 April.

Also, local government have been credited with taking effective prevention measures, including house-to-house surveillance and monitoring of high-risk individuals. Swab collection and mass testing of high risk groups has started in earnest.

Still, Nepal's lack of preparedness to fight public health emergencies has been similar to the apathy shown about enforcing building codes and having a rescue and relief strategy in place for future mega-earthquakes.

COVID-19

It took the devastating 2015 earthquake to finally push the policymakers to develop the Disaster Risk and Management Act in 2017 – more than five years after it was languishing in the legislature. Unlike the Natural Calamity Act 1982 that is centred on the relief, the new Act listed 22 kinds of disasters in Nepal focusing on preparedness. Epidemics however have been categorised under 'non-disaster' in the new Act.

Epidemics has been lumped together with famine, fire, pest or micro-bacterial attack, industrial accident, toxic gas hazard, chemical radiation leakage, gas explosion, toxic food intake, environmental pollution, deforestation, physical infrastructure damage and accidents during disaster relief.

"Placing snakebites and outbreaks together itself shows that we haven't really understood what an epidemic means. There is a huge difference in how we have to deal with them," says Baburam Marasini, former head of the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division.

The emergence of COVID-19 on top of the reoccurrence of pre-existing diseases mean countries need health institutions with medical staff equipped to deal with epidemics, research wing to undertake new studies on emerging diseases, and a strong system that can take immediate steps to control spread of a contagion.

"We need to make laws taking infectious diseases into account, strengthen local infrastructure as well as increase capacity of the health sector," Marasini says. "We have to turn COVID-19 into an opportunity to build a new health structure and strengthen existing laws."

Chronic lack of coordination and turf battles between the Department of Health Services, National Public Health Laboratory, Epidemiology and Disease Control Division, Epidemiology and Epidemic Management Section, Teku Hospital and Animal Disease Investigation and Control Division have added to the problem.

Says public health expert Madhav Chaulagain: "We are unprepared not just for new emerging epidemics but for the pre-existing diseases and seasonal disasters too."

Close to three years after Nepal adopted a decentralised federal structure, provincial governments have to fly COVID-19 samples to Kathmandu in lack of regional laboratories and hospitals specialising in infectious diseases.

The root of the problem is a culture not primed for prevention, but for cure. Also a 'ke garne' fatalistic attitude that tends to leave solving a known problem until after the disaster hits.

"We think about building modern hospitals to cure people. What developing countries like us should really be focusing on is prevention and preparedness," says Gangalal Tuladhar. "We are lucky we still have time to prepare for COVID-19. It is time to work on prevention." 🇳🇵

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Unlocking the economy post-lockdown

Checklist of measures to help Nepal's economy regain good health once the pandemic eases

Sanjib Subba

The COVID-19 pandemic has caught the world off guard, with enormous repercussions for Nepal's economy because of its reliance on overseas migration and tourism.

Nepal's three week lockdown has been extended till at least 27 April. Flights are not going to restart till mid-May at the earliest. The country's remittance-fueled, consumption-led economy, low manufacturing capacity, unemployment, huge trade deficit, high reliance on import-based consumption have been pre-existing challenges even before the lockdown. The pandemic has made everything more difficult.

Tourism is the hardest hit, especially the hotel industry which is most vulnerable due to the fixed cost associated with not only salary and wages but also regular maintenance as well as loan servicing obligations. Tourism is cash flow sensitive, and its oxygen supply has come to complete halt. It will take at least till 2021 for travel and tourism to revive, or rebound. Priority rescue measures are urgently required.

Transport is another sector that needs urgent attention. Once the lockdown situation improves, transportation will kickstart itself. But till then, the industry needs support to manage maintenance and financial obligations.

Aviation witnessed a quick rebound after the double whammy of the earthquake and Blockade, particularly for domestic movement. The situation is different this time. The high cost of grounded aircraft due to leasing, fixed and variable costs will pose a major challenge. Big ticket loan exposure and interest expense may just kill some operators.

Most airlines have equipment on 'Dry Lease' that carry certain fixed costs ranging from \$100-150,000 per month for smaller aircraft. Dollar fares for expats and tourists have been a major revenue earner for operators, and with tourism down this will dry up.

Finance industry including the banking sector are operating at bare minimum, and only offering basic services such as cash operation including remittance services and basic trade finance. New book creation has virtually stopped as no loan processing is being carried out.

Liquidity has been a problem that predates the pandemic. Nepali banks have been long plagued by liquidity crunch, particularly after the real estate crash of 2009. After the earthquake, the industry faced a major credit crunch. The capital hike, reconstruction demand, a stable government all led to a surge in loan demand. But an unstable

liquidity supply was a chronic threat.

If prolonged, this could lead to assets price burst and real-estate could take the plunge. Banks would have to revalue risk assets, as most are backed by real estate collaterals. In short, non-performing assets need to be closely monitored.

Remittance-dependence has fuelled consumption growth, and this could be affected by coronavirus outbreaks in destination countries for Nepali

migrants like Japan, Malaysia, Korea and the Gulf. In addition, there is now uncertainty about labour demand because of the global downturn. Annual remittances could take a nosedive.

Construction could pick up as soon as the lockdown is lifted. But big ticket projects, particularly ones with foreign contractors, in hydro, airports, highways could slow down and costs could overshoot. Banks with guarantee exposure in the construction sector could also be hit. The non-funded instrument could see 'Willful Claim' capitalising on grey area of force majeure, currently under discussion

COVID-19

at the Nepal Rastra Bank and the banking sector.

Trade may rebound quickly because of Nepal's import-based consumption patterns. However, the dent in purchasing power capacity due to loss of business and employment could be a matter of concern.

The Health Sector ironically may see a slowdown during the pandemic. The banks carry significant exposure in medical care in heads like working capital, term loan and fixed assets.

Balance of Payments could be a major concern as remittances drop. Tourism is another forex earner that is hit hard. Exports were always negligible, but even that will be slowed further with the lockdown.

Revenue collection could dry up due to shortfall in revenue targets. This could limit spending and development in infrastructure projects, creating problems in multiple areas from employment, base level economic activities, consumption amongst others.

Small and Medium Enterprises are key economic enablers and yet largely out of formal sector reach. This impact assessment could be bit tricky and may require deep dive in to both formal and informal source of borrowings.

Perhaps linkage to cooperatives could be one way to establish the relationship so as to gauge the depth of the impact. The critical focus here should be on employment generation, domestic production and revenue collection.

GDP has 15 main sectors contributing to it. It may be wise to run a predictive analysis of each critical sector that may impact on employment, value chain, economy amongst others.

These are trying times for the economy, and we must be strategic about pressing the right buttons to speed up the rebound. 🇳🇵

Sanjib Subba was until recently the CEO of Nepal Banking Institute.



Also keeping financially healthy in a lockdown

Post pandemic the government must expedite the foreign investment process to show that Nepal is back in business

As we face an unprecedented and precarious pandemic that has caused uncertainty to the entire global economy, Nepal's own response to it will determine at what velocity our economy will hit the ground. We need to brace ourselves for a very hard landing.



COMMENT

Siddhant Raj Pandey

All businesses have been severely disrupted by the COVID-19 lockdown. As private equity investors, our first task has been to assess the nature of the problem that they face and provide solutions.

The effect of this contagion has not just been sector-specific, but has affected the entire value chain. In Nepal this problem is compounded as we are heavily import dependent, which has created severe disruption in intermediate (raw) materials

and components for production.

All sectors of the economy are facing limitations. The tourism and hospitality industry has suffered immensely due to cancellations of visitor arrivals, local restaurants have had to close down due to lack of business. Agriculture will be next to be affected due to the lack of fertilisers and other inputs. As the lockdown is extended, the state of the economy will progressively deteriorate.

The foremost factor for a private equity investor like us in a crisis like this is to ensure the management of impact on the work force. Human resource must be well taken care of and all our partner companies have preventive measure against this virus.

Secondly, we assess the financial health of the companies. Our advisory role is to give oversight on what they should do to alleviate the problem. It is no surprise that all are in a stage of cash shortage for working capital and debt repayment compounded by receivables that seem improbable of getting paid on time.

We impress upon them to consolidate their accounts, manage expenses prudently and cut costs. Management of operational risk is

very important at this juncture — this is not the time for bottom line expectations but to ensure top line sustainability.

Depending on the gravity of the state of their balance sheets, we support them to acquire bridge gap funding or, in the long run, increase our equity portion. The companies that are in a better situation have been active in providing philanthropic activities to the community.

Whether it is providing free lunches to the police and health workers or building and providing swab collecting booths for safety of medical workers at hospitals or setting up a call center that provides access to doctor services have all been pro bono activities in this hour of need. We encourage such endeavors and also provide linkages between the companies in our portfolio.

Never has private equity impact funds been more relevant than now. Patient risk capital with a hand holding mechanism that provides diffusion of knowledge along with the much needed capital is what private equity has been doing in Nepal for the past five years.

For a foreign direct investor (FDI), we are restricted due to the time taken by the government agencies for approval, which can take as long as three to six months. There are capital increment requests for investments that have been waiting for over 18 months for FDI approval.

Businesses will not have that long a gestation period if they are strapped for cash. Therefore, the government needs to put in place a mechanism to expedite onward investments or top ups for these companies to move forward. Furthermore, this will also help the weak situation of the balance of payment of the country.

Millions of dollars are awaiting approval at this moment. Post lockdown, this will be an opportunity for the government to show its sincerity towards foreign investors by expediting the process and demonstrating that FDI is an important component to Nepal's development showcasing that we are open for business in action rather than words. 🇳🇵

Siddhant Pandey is Chairman and CEO of Business Oxygen Pvt Ltd (BO2).

Nepal must hope for the best, prepare for the worst

So far relatively unscathed from the coronavirus pandemic, but the country cannot afford to be complacent

BIKRAM RAI

Buddha Basnyat
and Sudeep Adhikari

In sharp contrast to Europe and the United States, the Western Pacific, South and Southeast Asia have reported relatively fewer cases of COVID-19 despite having their first cases in January itself.

As of 16 April Nepal has recorded 16 confirmed cases out of which at least 12 were imported infections. Despite being in the neighbourhood of the epicentre, the South Asian region have shown a relatively lower prevalence of the disease. Most of these countries have resource constraints, illiteracy, poverty, inefficient health system, and poor hygiene — all conducive to the spread of epidemics.

Cities like New Delhi, Karachi, Kathmandu and Dhaka are so densely populated that a virus capable of human-to-human transmission like COVID-19 would be expected to be rampant — just as tuberculosis is.

Tuberculosis is primarily a respiratory illness spread by droplet infection in the same manner as the novel coronavirus. India has now detected more than 12,000 COVID-19 cases, nearly half of which in the last 6 days. There have been 414 deaths, 22 of them on Wednesday, 15 April, but this is still much lower per capita than in the

United States (7 cases vs >1,000 cases per million population in India and the US respectively).

Is this lower prevalence a true picture, or is it giving us a false sense of security because we have not performed enough tests? Nepal had tested only 15,800 people till 16 April.

There is a possibility that the disease is circulating in the community, and more will be detected once testing is scaled up. However if this was true, there should have been reports of increased hospitalisation and mortality associated with some unknown and unusual pneumonia. Most of the hospitals in Nepal have set up fever clinics, but none so far have reported an increase in the number of suspected patients.

Mathematical models are used to predict outcomes in infectious diseases. Crucially, most models predict that the exponential 'wave' has yet to hit our region. The lockdown may have in fact pushed the wave further back, and bought us time. It is also possible that some element in the agent-host-environment interaction, could have hindered the virus from spreading. But this could be just a feel-good hypothesis.

Amazingly, Nepalis who are not known for following directions have taken to heart the importance of a lockdown, and the constant wearing of a mask. Nepal enforced

a lockdown immediately after detection of the second case, while many countries in the West did it only after the disease exploded.

This prompt action by the government is praiseworthy. On Tuesday, the government announced the extension of the lockdown till 27 April. We have to use the time to prepare health facilities and scaling up testing and contact tracing. Otherwise, the lockdown will have been for naught.

Experimenting with partial lock downs in some areas may be a consideration. But how to deal with the tremendous impact of the lockdown on the livelihoods of vulnerable people and the economy is another question altogether. And if Nepal's migrant workers are forced to return home from the Gulf and other countries the problem will only be compounded.

Medical data from Wuhan revealed that COVID-19 patients who needed a ventilator had a very high mortality rate, from 60-97%, and that patients in intensive care required about 10 days on the ventilator. With such long durations and high mortality rates, deciding whether or not to put a patient on a ventilator will be a critical decision.

Other seriously ill patients with other diseases like heart attacks with a potentially better outcome may be denied a ventilator due to the overwhelming number of severely ill COVID-19 patients. Renal failure also seems to be a prominent feature of severe

COVID-19 patients, which is going to tax our limited dialysis capabilities.

These conversations should be carried out now by Nepal's policy makers during this relatively calm period. Because once the storm hits, it will be all hands on deck to deal with the day-to-day emergency.

Peter Horby from ISARIC (International Severe Acute Respiratory and Emerging Infection Consortium) and his team have enrolled almost 3,000 COVID-19 patients in the UK for a randomised controlled trial to study the efficacy of both commonly prescribed drugs like azithromycin, steroids, and medications used in hyper-inflammatory conditions.

The UK is in a unique position to deliver large clinical trials because of its unified National Health Service (NHS). Horby's study is the kind that could quickly make available reliable and concrete treatment strategies even as we wait for an effective vaccine.

Not for nothing is this coronavirus designated as 'novel'. Even as our lives are dramatically transformed, the world will have to find new drugs, new vaccines, and new methods to cope with this and other future viruses. 🇳🇵

Buddha Basnyat, MD and Sudeep Adhikari, MBBS are both from Patan Academy of Health Sciences and Patan Hospital.



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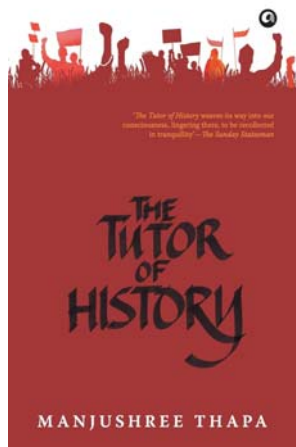
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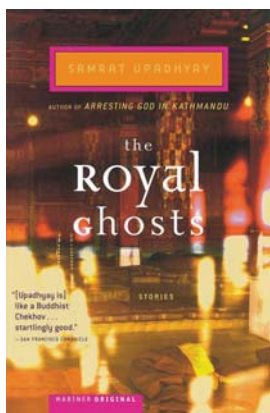
SELF-ISOLATION

Suggested Books:



The Tutor of History

Manjushree Thapa's social saga is a compelling tale of idealism, love and alienation set in rural Nepal during the parliamentary elections in 1992.



The Royal Ghosts

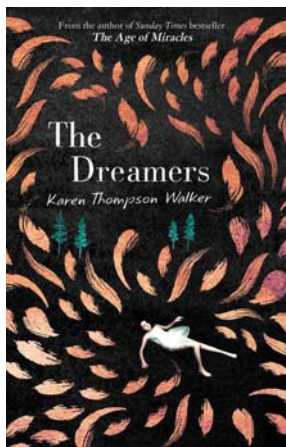
A collection of short stories from Samrat Upadhyay, centred on the tensions that buffet middle class Nepali society and interwoven with historical events of Nepal's recent past.

Three Men in a Boat

A comic gem of the 19th century, Jerome K Jerome's 1889 novel is an account of three men and a dog's two-week boating holiday along the Thames river.

Storms of My Grandchildren

Climate scientist James Hansen's first book about the threats to people and the habitability for life on earth because of global warming.



The Dreamers

An isolated college town in Southern California is gripped by a sweeping virus that triggers perpetual sleep in Karen Thompson Walker's 2019 sci-fi novel.

QUARANTINE

Suggested Movies on the Dish:

Appaloosa

Two friends hired to police a small town that is suffering under the rule of a rancher find their job complicated by the arrival of a young widow.

18 April, 10:05am Cinemax



Doctor Strange

While on a journey of physical and spiritual healing, a brilliant neurosurgeon is drawn into the world of the mystic arts.

19 April, 5:50pm, Cinemax



Prometheus

Following clues to the origin of mankind, a team finds a structure on a distant moon, but they soon realise they are not alone.

17 April, 5:40pm, Cinemax

Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy

Ron Burgundy is the top-rated newsman in the male-dominated broadcasting 1970s San Diego, but things are about to change for Ron and his cronies when an ambitious woman is hired as a new anchor.

20 April, 4:15pm, Cinemax



The Book Thief

Liesel, a young girl in Germany during World War II, finds solace by stealing books and sharing them with others. Based on Markus Zusak's 2005 novel.

21 April, 2:15pm, HBO

Black Mass

The true story of Whitey Bulger, the most infamous violent criminal in the history of South Boston, who became an FBI informant to take down a Mafia family invading his turf.

22 April, 7:45pm, Cinemax



Kung Fu Panda 2

Warrior panda Po and his friends fight to stop a peacock villain from conquering China with a deadly new weapon. Watch with your kids.

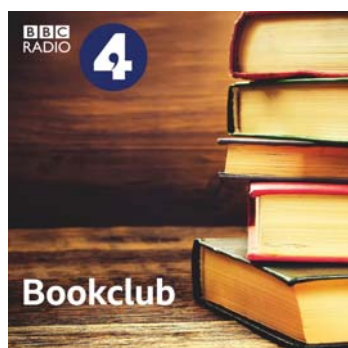
23 April, 1:30pm, HBO

CONTAINMENT

Podcasts we like:

The Doers

A platform for successful Nepali entrepreneurs to share their ideas and opinions on the world of business. Find The Doers on Listen Notes and YouTube.



Bookclub

A group of readers talk to acclaimed authors about their best-known novels in this podcast from BBC Radio 4. Find Bookclub on Stitcher.

The Globalist

Join Monocle 24's editors, presenters and guests as they offer insight into the day's breaking news from all over the world.



Ridiculous History

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

The Rewatchables

A film podcast from the Ringer Podcast Network featuring a roundtable of people discussing movies they can't seem to stop watching.

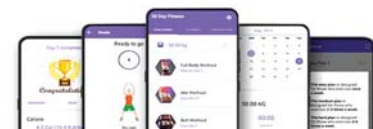
APPROPRIATE APPS

Nike training club

The Nike Training Club app was in development for over a year before being launched, and for good reason: the app scores high on all fronts – design, experience, features, and brand integration.

Yoga | Down dog

If you need an exercise plan that is more relaxed and reflective, with focus on mental health and meditative breathing while also building body strength and flexibility, the answer is yoga. Yoga | Down Dog is an excellent go-to app for yoga practice.



30 day fitness challenge

The 30 Day Fitness Challenge is a home workout app ideal for those looking to fit into that skirt that no longer fits or a shirt that could look better without those love handles peeking through.

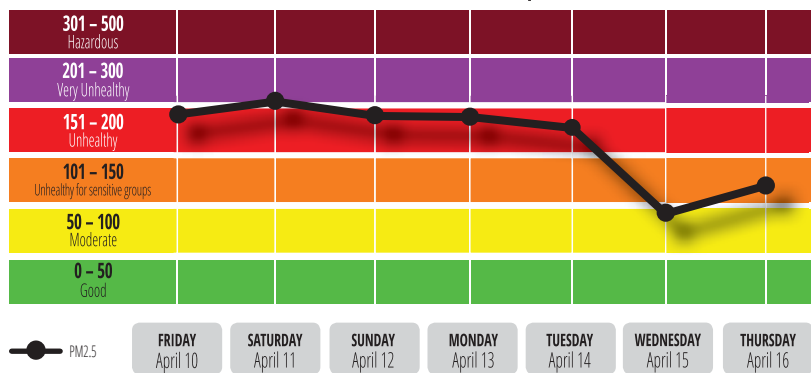


It does look like the pre-monsoon showers are starting earlier than usual with the infusion of moisture from a series of westerly fronts into Central Nepal. The systems will send warm plains air rising along the mountains, where the moisture will condense violently into thundershowers into Friday and Saturday with things gradually quieting down on Sunday.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 15°	26° 13°	27° 14°

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 10 - 16 April



After almost 12 days during which Kathmandu Valley's Air Quality Index (AQI) was in Yellow and Red Zone because of smoke haze from wildfires in the mountains, the showers on Wednesday improved the AQI daily average to the Moderate Zone. However, by Thursday it had risen again, since the fires seem to have spread once more in community forests in Dhading, Nuwakot and Chitwan.

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

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



Almost a third of the food produced globally for human consumption is wasted. This is harmful for the environment because not only does it emit a lot of greenhouse gases, but it is also a waste of fresh water, land and labour used to produce it. We can reduce waste by planning and buying only what we need, properly storing leftovers, using the freezer and making preserves. Recent lockdown measures have disrupted the food supply chain around the world while demand has surged as people stock up on food. So it is all the more important to make sure food is not wasted and lasts longer to aid social distancing, help household finances and ensure there is enough for everyone.

OUR PICK



Released in 2010, the British crime television series *Sherlock* is one gripping tale to be binge-watched during the lockdown. Based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective stories, the series is created by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss. Benedict Cumberbatch delivers unforgettable performance as the titular character. Martin Freeman as Holmes' loyal sidekick/friend John Watson adds to the goodness. Don't be fooled by a mere 13 episodes. All four seasons deal with some heavy materials with plot twists that will keep you guessing until the end.

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

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।



नेपाल सरकार

सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

Many foreigners stay put in Nepal

Nepal is home away from home for hundreds of tourists and expats during the pandemic

Sonia Awale
and Marty Logan

Three weeks into the lockdown, foreign embassies in Kathmandu are still trying to fly home the last of their remaining nationals from Nepal, but there are many expatriates who refuse to be repatriated.

Since March 24, there have been more than 25 chartered flights flying tourists and expats back to Europe, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Brazil. But many foreigners have chosen to stay back in Nepal and wait out the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I've made my life here for many years and the situation in Canada doesn't seem better," says Zachary Barton from Canada who has been propagating permaculture in Nepal since 2003.

On the phone from Fikkal Bazar in Ilam he told us: "In the past 20 years we've been through the Maoist war, a revolution, earthquake and blockade. Nepalis are extremely resilient. They're not making a run for things, not panic buying toilet paper. I feel better being here actually — people deal with things without freaking out."

On 11 April, 141 Canadians were flown out from Kathmandu on Qatar Airways, but for some the \$3,000 price tag for a one-way economy ticket to Toronto was not worth it, considering uncertain times even back home. The New Zealand consulate also repatriated 27 nationals on 1 April, but twice as many Kiwis have decided to stay on in Kathmandu, Pokhara and other parts of Nepal.

"Canada took too long to repatriate its people and tickets were too expensive," says 38-year-old Daniel Valdizan, an English-language professor in China who came to Nepal after universities there shut down in early January.

He adds: "Most of us who chose to stay back agree that people here have been nothing but friendly and understanding to tourists, and I don't feel unsafe here."

Indeed, guest houses in Thamel, Pokhara, Bandipur and other tourist spots have offered subsidised room rates and even free food for stranded tourists. Many have posted videos on YouTube full of praise for Nepali hospitality. The Department of Immigration has also said foreigners on tourist visas will not be fined for overstaying when they leave.



TOM CISAR



CESAR MORALES

NOT LEAVING ON A JET PLANE: Austrian graphic designer Tom Cisar (*left*) has decided to ride out the COVID-19 storm in Pokhara. Cesar Morales (*right*) was training Nepal's tennis team for the Olympics when the lockdown was announced and says he would rather stay in Kathmandu than fly back to Chicago via Spain.

Some French and Spanish trekkers who were in the mountains when the lockdown was announced have decided to stay on in Pisang in Manang. A dozen or so European, American and other nationals are said to be chilling out by the lakeside in Pokhara and relaxing in the rustic charm of Bandipur.

A survey of various Kathmandu-based embassies this week showed that about one-third of staff are still in Nepal, but most with families have gone home. Foreigners working for bilateral agencies have kept only essential staff in Nepal.

"I was in India when all of this started happening and got back here by the skin of my teeth on the last day. I was so happy to be back," says Gloria Jones from Canada who is an adviser at a monastery here. "I have friends and family in Canada and no one's trying to convince me to go back. I think they're a little jealous of how happy I am here."

Douwe Kiran Soeting has been in Nepal for only three years but considers the Himalayan nation more of a home than his native Netherlands, and has

decided to stay back helping at the Khagendra New Life Home where he supports 75 people with disabilities.

"While here, at least I can keep people informed, help them stay positive and make sure they have

enough funding for food," says the 41-year-old.

Cesar Morales was invited to train Nepali tennis players preparing for the forthcoming regional championships and the Olympics. He was supposed to

travel to Spain and Italy before flying home to Chicago.

"Nepal is still one of the safest countries to be in right now and people here have been wonderful. Flying with so many people and with multiple layovers back home to my parents who are 65 is a risk I cannot take," Morales said from his flat in Satdobato.

Briton Lesley D Junlakan is waiting it out in Nepal until she can return to Bangkok. Freelance writer and photographer who

COVID-19

previously used to teach at Thammasat University in Thailand spends five months a year in Nepal volunteering at Kag Chode Monastery in Kagbeni and Pokhara.

"I'm trying to make my time here worthwhile, documenting the lockdown and how it has affected people here, which I hope will be useful for the future," says Junlakan who is now living in a guesthouse near Thamel. Graphic designer Tom Cisar from Austria has been volunteering in Tsum Valley since 2014. He is now in Pokhara with few other foreign nationals who have also chosen to stay back.

"There is xenophobia in many parts of the world during this crisis, but Nepal hasn't had such a problem yet. This disease is no one's fault, and all of us of different race and colours have to fight it together." 🇳🇵



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The first-ever phone app puts identification of mountain flowers literally in the palm of your hands



Wildflower app celebrates

Nepal is famous for its spectacular scenery of mountains and plains, rich cultural heritage. But no less wondrous is the beautiful flora that adorns it.

It is the flowering season, and some of us lucky to be up in the mountains during the lockdown will wonder what that gorgeous rhododendron is called. Or what the story is behind that delicate carnivorous plant with leaves like the hands of the Buddha? How about the medicinal uses of the

lovely blue gentian?

Now, the answers are all within reach – literally in the palm of your hand, and it does not add a single ounce to your backpack.

The Flora of Nepal Project and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation have partnered with vegetation ecologist Elizabeth Byers and High Country Apps to produce Wildflowers of Mount Everest, the first-ever wildflower identification app for Nepal.

Nepal's flora is unique in the

world, being specially adapted to survive at high elevations, through cold winters and wet summer monsoons. In spring, luxuriant displays of rhododendrons and primroses cover whole mountainsides with colour.

Summer brings the beautiful and sometimes bizarre blossoms, such as *Hippolytia gossypina* with its white-haired pillars topped by clusters of golden flowers. The autumn trekking season is painted with the blue of gentians and the bright red and yellow autumn

foliage of the shrubs and trees.

Wildflowers of Mount Everest, designed for iOS and Android devices, provides more than 2500 beautifully detailed images and over 1,000 local names for 557 wildflowers, shrubs, and trees that grow on the slopes and trails of Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone. Many of the plants may also be found at upper elevations throughout Nepal.

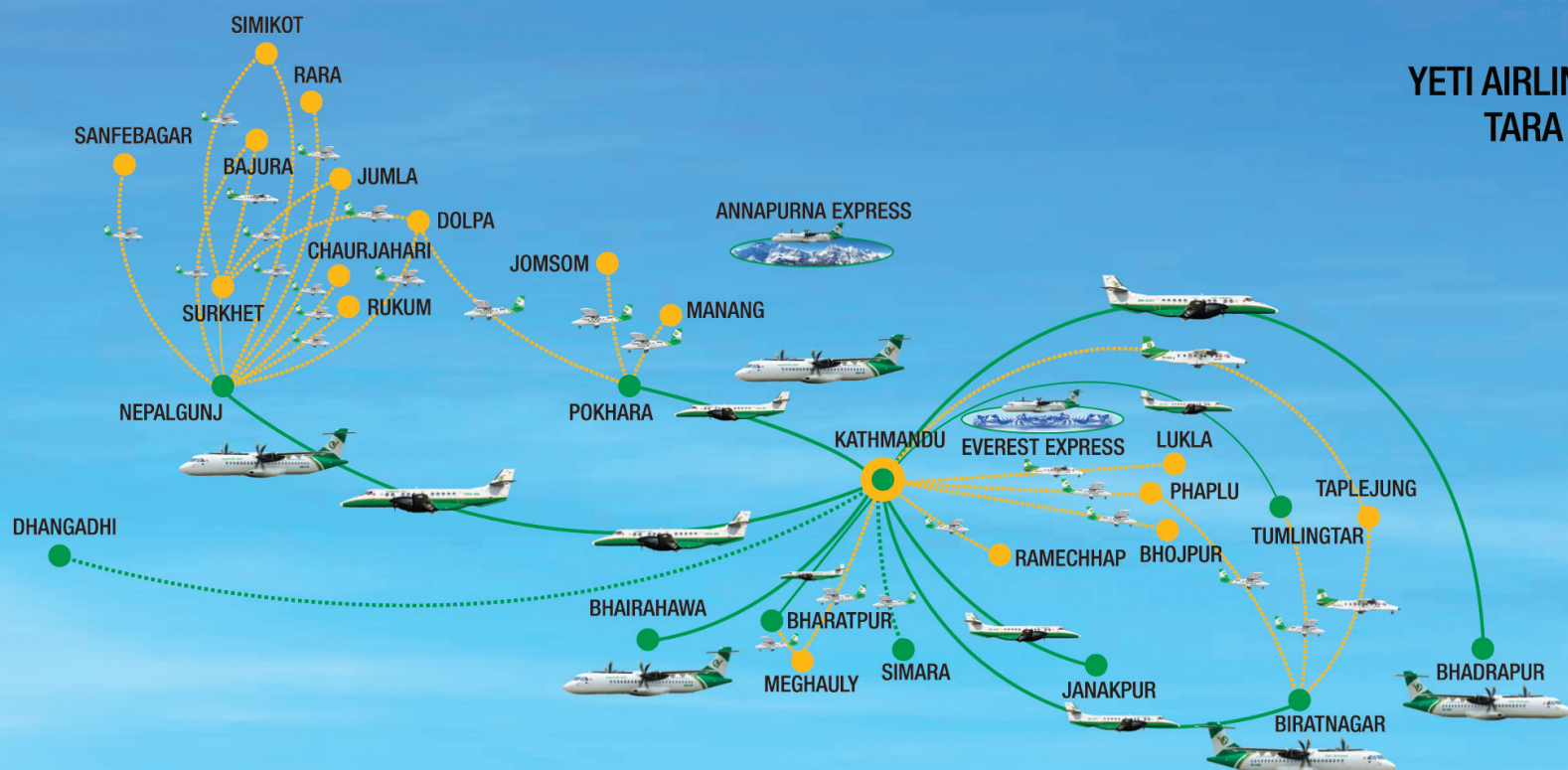
Wildflowers of Mount Everest offers easy-to-use graphical keys, botanical help, detailed

descriptions, and plant lore to identify and explore Nepal's remarkable flora. The app does not require a cellular or internet connection to run, so it can be used anywhere, whether on the trail or in your home. Users can create a list of the plants they see each day and email it to themselves or their friends.

"The app is suitable for students, educators, scientists, guides, and visitors interested in the beautiful wildflowers of Nepal's Mount Everest region. It will be

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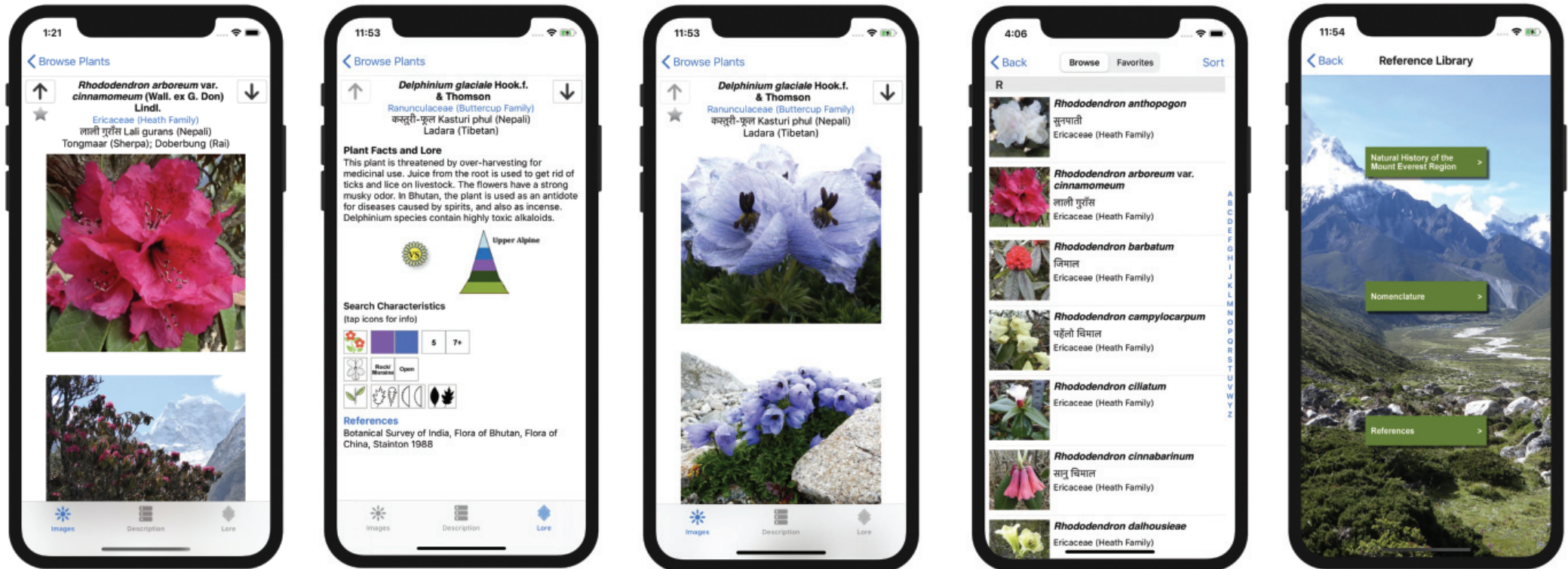
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Nepal’s flora

a useful tool for park rangers and scouts as they work to conserve the park’s floral diversity,” says Gopal Prakash Bhattarai, Director General of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation.

Designed for people who are complete beginners as well as experienced botanists, Wildflowers of Mount Everest will appeal to anyone who wants to identify or learn about plants in eastern Nepal.

Byers has spent much of the last 40 years identifying, photographing, and cataloging specimens of subalpine and alpine flora of eastern Nepal. “Two things make this field guide special,” she says. “First, the Sherpa elders who have graciously shared plant lore and stories to give us a glimpse of the cultural importance of each

species. Second, the botanical experts from all over the world who have volunteered their knowledge to help us understand the unique and specially-adapted plants of Mount Everest.”

The Wildflowers of Mount Everest app is available from the Apple App Store and Google PlayStore for \$7.99. The authors will periodically update the app to include new species and other content, at no additional charge to users. 🇳🇵

Elizabeth A Byers is a vegetation ecologist studying rare plant species and climate change vulnerability of plants. She has been studying and photographing the flora of Nepal for nearly 40 years. Appalachian.ecology@gmail.com <http://www.highcountryapps.com/WildflowersOfMountEverest.aspx>

Flora of Nepal Project

The Flora of Nepal Project is an international partnership tackling a knowledge gap identified in Nepal’s National Biodiversity Action Plan. The project is coordinated by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in partnership with the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology, the Government of Nepal’s Department of Plant Resources, Tribhuvan University’s Central Department of Botany and the University of Tokyo, and draws on the expertise of taxonomic experts throughout the world.

The Flora of Nepal Project is supported by High Country Apps which is dedicated to developing applications that deliver high quality natural history information with an intuitive, easy-to-use interface. It partners with expert botanists and photographers to provide information of the highest quality in its mobile field guides.

High Country Apps will donate a portion of the app proceeds of Flora of Nepal to support field costs of Nepali students or buy field equipment to allow them to conduct botanical studies.

Link to High Country Apps: <http://www.highcountryapps.com/WildflowersOfMountEverest.aspx>

Direct links to the app in stores(\$7.99):

Apple: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/id1479336982> (live on April 2)

Google Play: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.emountainworks.android.everestfieldguide>



Tourism down? Use the pause to learn about flowers.

Tourists and trekkers will be flocking back to Nepal before long. For guides, now is the time to learn new skills and increase their confidence and knowledge so that when business picks up again, clients will rave about you and about their experience in Nepal.

A fun skill-building activity is offered by the Wildflowers of Mount Everest app, the first plant identification app written specifically for Nepal. This is an enjoyable way to learn the flora of eastern Nepal’s upper elevations. It is designed for beginners and experts alike, with easy picture-based keys, information about local lore, and plant facts. The richly illustrated app includes 557 species of wildflowers, shrubs, and trees.

WILDFLOWERS 101

A video introduction to the new phone app that lets you identify Himalayan wildflowers easily. Prepare for your next trek in Nepal so you can know and admire not just the mountains, but also Nepal’s beautiful flowers.

nepaltimes.com

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Living with cancer during the coronavirus

A young cancer survivor describes the ordeal of treatment during Nepal’s lockdown

Rinzin Norbu Lama

It hit me like a shock wave. The world stopped, leaving me completely alone and lost.

It was the morning of the 15 June, 2017. “Your liver has developed lesions, the markings of a cancer,” said the doctor in a solemn voice. “You will need a liver transplant if you want to survive.”

Finally, I could speak. “How much would that cost?” I asked. He answered my question with a question of his own: “Do you have 40 lakhs?”

I am from the Tsum Valley, and the first generation from my family that went to school. I have always wanted to be an agent of positive change in my society and country, and to build a better future for the sacred valley where I was born.

During 2015 earthquake, I helped coordinate rescue and relief services and provide essential supplies to remote Tsum Nubri communities. That is why in 2017 I was nominated by the Naya Shakti Party as a candidate for mayor for my rural municipality in Tsum. Campaigning was not easy, I had to walk up and down the mountains to meet constituents, we ate whatever we found, and slept wherever we could.

For years, I made a living guiding trekkers through the remote mountains of my beyul. They would often be out of breath climbing the high trails, but I was never exhausted myself. The campaigning should have made me more fit, but I felt strangely weak. Something was not right with my body.

After the elections, I walked four days to reach Kathmandu to see my doctor. I had to find a matching organ donor. And where would I find Rs4 million?

From Kathmandu, the news of the diagnosis spread through my village. A young monk from Tsum sent me a message, offering to donate a lobe of his liver. With his act of kindness came hope, encouragement, and a raised possibility that I might make it.



Rinzin Norbu Lama on documentary filming assignment in 2013.

Unfortunately, he was not a compatible match. A friend offered. Then another. Indeed, I found out there are many kind and selfless people out there, and felt honoured and grateful for their bodhichitta compassion.

But I learnt that Nepal’s law only allowed close relatives to be organ donors. This made it next to impossible for me to have a life-saving operation in my own country. But then a miracle happened. My own brother, a Buddhist Lama came forward as a donor and he was a match. This man with a pure and compassionate heart offered to save my life by giving me a part of his.

Given the stage of my disease, it was not possible to have the surgery in Nepal, and I had to go to India. But first, I had to make it through all the government red tape. It took three weeks to first prove my citizenship, then prepare and present documents to the district office and its health department. I had to obtain a no objection letter from the medical board, and then collect documents from the Ministry of Health, Foreign Affairs, and the Embassy of Nepal in New Delhi.

In the meantime, my liver was deteriorating. Then there was the issue about money. My godfather and mother, who once funded my education in Kathmandu, stepped in once more



After a liver transplant in New Delhi in 2018.

to raise the money to pay for my medical costs.

Through my go-fund me campaign, people from all walks of life supported me emotionally and financially, making my transplant possible. It reinforces my belief that life is all about love and compassion.

I live near Swayambhu, and I can feel the spiritual energy of the shrine every day. While in India for the treatment, I took the 10 hour journey to Dharmasala and met His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His words “I will bless you and pray for you” lifted my spirits, making me feel physically stronger. His personal Amchi gave me traditional medicine using Sowa-Rigpa.

It has been a year and a half now since my transplant. But in March, I had symptoms of jaundice which meant my liver was not functioning as it should. On the day after Nepal went into COVID-19 lockdown, I was admitted into Teaching Hospital.

I was under high immune suppression medication, but was kept in the Emergency Room for six hours, at risk of opportunistic infections. In the evening they sent me to a COVID-19 isolation room even though I had not been tested, and had no fever or symptoms. A COVID-19 patient was nearby, coughing.

After complaining to the nurse and doctor-in-charge, they finally moved me to a general ward. There is no teamwork in this hospital, the level of care was poor and ad hoc. The patient next to me had TB. Soon enough, I contracted pneumonia. I was rescued from the hospital just in time, and am recovering at the home of my American god-parents near Kathmandu.

Among the many lessons I have learnt from my ordeal is that Nepal needs to revise its laws. Many patients and their families are already struggling with their illness and lack of money, the least the state can do is make the paperwork easier.

The law about limiting organ donors to immediate family was made to prevent commercial organ trade, but what if there are willing donors who are not family, like in my case?

It is also the responsibility of the state to make transplants affordable and accessible. I wish Prime Minister K P Oli a speedy recovery from his second kidney transplant, but he may not be aware of how difficult it is to navigate the bureaucracy for a transplant in this country.

I do not want others to go through what I did. The disease is bad enough, but for ordinary people like us everything is made much more difficult. The government needs to amend its laws and policies to allow affordable transplants in state-of-the-art facilities, so Nepalis do not have to go abroad. It would save costs for patient families, and prevent large amounts of money from leaving the country.

There are many who emotionally, physically and financially helped me through this process, and I cannot thank them enough. Especially my soulmate Chand, who left her job and family to be with me in Delhi. I pray for the long life of all of these incredibly generous people. They have given me a ray of hope as I experience and explore the impermanence of life. It has no beginning and no end. Our body is a host and the soul lives on forever. 🇳🇵

Rinzin Norbu Lama is a documentary filmmaker and youth politician from Samajbadi Party Nepal.

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