





# Lines on a map

Legally, treaty-wise, and under international law, the entire Limpiyadhura basin at the source of the Mahakali River is Nepali territory.

But, as we are all painfully aware, international law does not apply in geopolitics. Might is right. Laws are laid down by the victors.

So, it does not seem to matter that more than 200 years ago, the Sugauli Treaty of 1816 between the East India Company and the defeated Gorkhalis agreed to the main channel of the Mahakali River as Nepal's western border.

After the Mutiny of 1857, the Survey of India maps cunningly moved the border to

Indian map showed not just the original 336sq km of Limpiyadhura within India's external boundary, but for the first time also depicted a whole 66sq km swath of the east bank of Lipu Khola also as Indian territory. That is when the manure really hit the fan.

Last week, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, in the presence of top Indian Army generals, inaugurated by video conference a 70km stretch of road to the pass. A photo-op while both countries were in lockdown was intriguing in itself, but the timing could not have been better for Nepal's embattled Prime Minister K P Oli.

There is nothing like an external threat to unite Nepal's snarling political factions, and sure enough Oli's detractors in the NCP suddenly went quiet this week on strident demands for his resignation.

## Why should a neighbour respect your boundary if you yourself never cared where it is?

India has never historically been bothered about winning the hearts and minds of Nepalis. It believes in carrying the big stick, and Kalapani has opened up bad memories in Nepal's cybersphere of the 2015 Blockade. This put pressure on the Nepal government to 'do something', so it fired off a note verbale or two, and flew up an APF unit to set up an outpost 12km from India's new road.

Foreign Minister

Pradeep Gyawali on Monday handed Indian Ambassador Vinay Mohan Kwatra a note protesting India's 'unilateral action' in building a road in Nepali territory. But India's position is bilateral -- Beijing is on the same page as New Delhi on the dispute.

Lipu Lekh has come up at various times in India-China meetings: during Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh's visit to Beijing in 1999, by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to Delhi in 2005, and by President Xi Jinping in India in 2014. A joint communiqué between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi in 2015 in Beijing listed Lipu Lekh as one of the Himalayan passes through which the two countries agreed to conduct trade.

For the first time, protests in Kathmandu were directed not just at India, but also China. Yet, Nepal's leaders did not broach the subject during President Xi's state visit to Kathmandu last October.

There is not much tiny Nepal can do when its two gigantic neighbours decide to snub it. But Nepal could revise its own official map, and take up the matter with both Chinese and Indian leaders. For neighbours to take us seriously, we must have leadership with self-respect and the vision to act in the long-term national interest.



Lipu Khola, a tributary of the Mahakali that flows down from Lipu Lekh pass. That was the original sin. The distracted rulers in Kathmandu, then as now, had no idea what was going on in that far-flung edge of Nepal.

After independence, India inherited the British survey. So, when the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi says, like it did this week, that the new road to the Chinese border 'lies completely within the territory of India' it is an understanding based on those maps.

In the 1950s, Nepal had allowed Indian security forces to set up 17 checkpoints along the border with China, and one of these was on the strategic Lipu Lekh Valley. Following the Sino-Indian war Nepal told India to remove its personnel in 1969 – but the one in Kalapani was allowed to stay. And they have been there ever since.

Nepal's own official maps show Lipu Khola as the boundary between Nepal and India, and not the Mahakali River. Ultra-nationalists cry themselves hoarse about 'big bully' India, but why would a neighbour respect your boundary if you yourself never cared where it is?

It was common knowledge in Kathmandu that the Indian military had a base there. Elected rulers in Nepal after 1990s used this to stoke anti-Indian nationalism for political benefit, but did nothing about it.

Then on 2 November last year, an official

## 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

In his Plain Speaking column titled 'Letting go' in issue #502 of Nepali Times 10 years ago Prashant Jha gave some unsolicited advice to the Maoists about demobilising their People's Liberation Army militia. Jha noted three problems for the Maoists with keeping the PLA. Excerpt:

Despite last week's retreat and the alienation of a section of the Kathmandu population, the Maoists remain the most powerful political party in Nepal.

And that is the problem. Unless they are weakened, they will not be allowed to govern the country, for their agenda is too dangerous to be allowed a free reign. The past year has essentially been a battle to this end. Non-Maoists are trying to weaken the Maoists by stoking their internal divisions and coopting sections of their social base. The Maoists are countering this by expanding their organisation on the ground, keeping up popular agitations, and creating one enemy after another to keep the flame of 'revolution' alive



## ONLINE PACKAGES



EARTH SCHOOL

Watch drone footage of the Dwarpaeswor School in Kavre that was completely destroyed in the 2015 earthquake and rebuilt using sustainable, eco-friendly and seismic resistant rammed earth design that could easily be replicated to schools across Nepal. Story: [page 9](#).

### VEGGIES

This will increase corruption and illegal import of vegetables ('Nepal lockdown chance for self-sufficiency in veggies', Ramesh Kumar, [nepalitimes.com](#)). Government can provide subsidies to Nepali farmers but if it restricts import, Nepali farmers and supply chain may focus more on meeting demand and profit over quality. There should not be monopoly, a competitive market is the only option.

**Bibek Acharya**

■ No doubt production cost is lower in India. But Nepali veggies can compete with India if we can eliminate middlemen.

**Pradip Np**

■ There is an opportunity for all those migrants returning home from India and overseas.

**Bijaya Shrestha**

■ People need to buy from local farmers and support them. Would be great though, if farmers in Nepal used less pesticides.

**Ra Izaa**

### MEASLES OUTBREAK

UNICEF has reported that the delay of vaccine transportation due to halt in airway travels ('Meanwhile, a measles outbreak in Nepal', Shiva Upreti, [page 5](#)). We really lack leadership to think through all angles not just what mainstream media covers.

**Gyurme Sherpa**

### STRONG SCHOOLS

Nepal has many talented and competent engineers and architects ('A new class structure', Monika Deupala, [page 9](#)). If only the construction designs were followed strictly by the head honchos.

**Shivaji Prasad Upadhyay**

■ This is awe-inspiring. What an amazing achievement.

**Kate Hoole**

### TRAFFIC IN KATHMANDU

This is what happens with slightest easing of the lockdown and our authorities are incapable of dealing with it ('Traffic jam again in Kathmandu', Manish Paudel, [nepalitimes.com](#)). This is the reason why I prefer lockdown, public health first and then economy.

**Sanjay Shrestha**

■ It's like the floodgates have just opened. Chaotic planning. We will never learn.

**Sunil Sakya**

■ What a joke. We are sending open invitation to the COVID-19.

**Sanjaya Joshi**

### LIPU LEKH ROAD

We have to deal with India and China on equal terms. ('The India-Nepal-China geopolitical tri-junction', Kunda Dixit, [nepalitimes.com](#)). We can't afford to antagonise anyone. It just won't work.

**Raj Shrestha**

■ Let's just hope that our leaders will start building the required foundations to graduate the country from the corrupt and self-satisfied mentality we are subjected to today.

**Satyajit Pradhan**

### ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENTS

This is why they should also have working models of the project area in the EIAs so every one can see what they plan to do and the local community can have an input regarding biodiversity of the area ('Nepal's Environment Impact non-Assessments', Yadav Ghimire, #1009). This technique works and it is not so expensive to build a scaled module.

**Phil Privett**

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### A new class structure

by [Monika Deupala](#)

The 2015 earthquake provided Nepali architects a chance to look at lighter and stronger structures that also addressed seasonal variation in temperature, natural lighting and airiness. Visit [nepalitimes.com](#) for photo feature and drone video of a school in Kavre constructed with rammed earth technology.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**

### Has Nepal's lockdown just postponed COVID-19?

by [Sudyumna Dahal](#)

If history is a model, Nepal should expect a 2nd or 3rd wave of the COVID-19 in the future. Nepalis who have stayed home and sacrificed a lot to keep the virus under control deserve stronger leadership, transparency, and proactiveness.

**Most popular on Twitter**



### Nepal lockdown chance for self-sufficiency in veggies

by [Ramesh Kumar](#)

For a country endowed with the ideal climate for a large variety of organic vegetables, Nepal should have been an exporter of greens. Instead it imported Rs14.6 billion worth of vegetables from India and China last year. The pandemic is a chance to reduce this dependency. Read full story and join the online discussion.

**Most commented**

### Nepal's future normal

by [Anil Chitrakar](#)

The COVID-19 has given the world a chance to mend its ways, live more sustainably, be humble about inventions and gadgets, and realise how ephemeral our preoccupations are in the eternity that is nature.

**Most visited online page**

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
The #Nepal government machinery does not seem more prepared than when the #lockdown was imposed on 24 March. Worse, we are likely to be in a much more difficult situation if #COVID-19 spreads quickly, writes Sudyumna Dahal.

**Bhoj Raj Poudel @brpdl**  
Here is an excellent piece by economist Sudyumna Dahal on how the government has squandered the time that people have offered by suffering under 'lockdown' for almost two months and still doesn't have a sound plan if another wave comes around.

**Monkey Mountaineering @monkeymountains**  
An interesting read and worrying too- a resurgence of the virus in Nepal would be a real tragedy for the already hard hit travel industry there.

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
16% of Kathmandu's population had contracted smallpox at some time in their lives. And they were the survivors, the virus killed roughly 1 of every 3 it afflicted. Saga of smallpox until it was eradicated in this exclusive series.

**Akhilesh Upadhyay @akhileshU**  
Tom Robertson's 'History of Disease in Nepal' series is worth reading, reflecting (over) and archiving. Thanks Tom and @NepaliTimes

**Mahabir Paudyal @mahabirpudyal**  
Thank you Tom Robertson and @NepaliTimes for insightful articles.

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Jacarandas and Jams are Back! When new lockdown rules went into effect on Sunday, there were gridlocks at police checkpoints in Kathmandu. Photo and story by Manish Poudel.

**John Galetzka @john\_galetzka**  
I miss the jacarandas, but not the traffic.

**Prem Thapa @premrzorianban**  
Bicycle can be better alternative, during lockdown!



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# Nepal lockdown proves air quality can be improved

Switch to electric transport will protect health, and salvage Nepal's economy



PHOTOS: ABHUSAN GAUTAM

**CLEARING THE AIR:** (left to right) Mt Everest (arrow) visible from Chobar in Kathmandu for the first time in a long time. Looking west at sunset, Himalchuli and Manaslu with smoke rising from open garbage burning on the outskirts of Kathmandu.

Sonia Awale

On 10 May, for the first time almost anyone can remember, Mt Everest was visible from Kathmandu. From Chobar, Abhusan Gautam photographed the highest mountain in the world 200km away to the east, spotlighted by the setting sun.

Last week from Sarlahi district in the plains bordering India, journalist Chandra Kishore could see right across Nepal to Mt Langtang on the Chinese border.

With vehicles off the roads, factories closed, the air over Nepal was breathtakingly clean. Hospitals in Kathmandu Valley are usually crowded this time of the year with

patients suffering respiratory illnesses aggravated by pollution and dust, but in the past two months hospitals have registered a sharp drop in people seeking treatment for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), asthma, chronic bronchitis and allergies.

"Many of our COPD patients who need regular follow-up haven't shown up because their symptoms have eased. Some have called to say they don't require oxygen therapy anymore," affirms Raju Pangei, a pulmonary care specialist at HAMS Hospital.

The lockdown has led to a drastic drop in petroleum sales. Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) records show that in the first week of the lockdown, sale of petrol nationwide dropped

to 6%, although it has now climbed to 45% of pre-lockdown levels. The Sajha Pasal pump in Pulchok sold 241,000 litres of diesel in April, down from 609,000 in December.

"The reduction in diesel consumption certainly played a part in cleaning up the air," explains Sushil Bhattarai of NOC. "But from December, we were already selling cleaner Euro 6 diesel emitting less SOx, NOx and soot. That is why stopping and fining dirty tail pipes is the best short-term solution to air pollution."

However, despite the sharp reduction in fossil fuel consumption, Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu did not improve as much as expected in April-May. The reason was wildfires in Dhading, Nuwakot and Chitwan in early April. But even after the rains, open garbage burning in the Valley and crossborder pollution haze kept AQI at dangerous levels.

But vehicular emission is by far the biggest source of ambient air pollution in Kathmandu Valley, and according to one study accounted for as much as 70% of all particulate matter at street level. A 2017 survey by the Department of Environment states that PM10 from diesel vehicles alone contributed 34% of the air pollution.

The lockdown also improved the nation's economic health by cutting Nepal's petroleum import bill. In 2018/19, Nepal's import of petroleum products was at Rs200 billion -- 2.2 times higher than the country's total income from exports. Despite the recent collapse of global oil prices, this saving will be wiped out by the growth in the import bill in future if nothing is done.

Switching to electric public transport and battery vehicles to reduce the petroleum import bill by just 10% would save Rs21

billion a year – besides promoting domestic clean energy from hydropower, and improving air quality.

"What we are experiencing during the lockdown is just a short reprieve, it only went to prove that we can clean up Kathmandu if we want," says climate change expert Manjeet Dhakal. "But for long-term results we need to push cleaner energy options in road transport and the COVID-19 has provided us the perfect opportunity to electrify transportation and revive our economy."

However, with the economy in deep crisis the government will be under pressure to look for short-term measures to revive the economy. The temptation will be strong to go back to business as usual.

This was shown by the traffic jams this week after lockdown rules were relaxed. And when it is lifted, environmentalists are concerned that fear of the virus will keep people away from public transport, which already suffers from a lack of priority that it deserves.

"But the crisis is also an opportunity to reform our public transport system: digitise and electrify it and restructure routes," urges Bhushan Tuladhar, director of Sajha Yatayat. "The government can play more active role by coming up with functioning operational guidelines and provide financial help to promote electric transport. It will be really unfortunate to not have used this chance."

With the collapse in tourism, remittances and tax revenue there is pressure on the Finance Ministry to balance the annual budget due later this month. There are reports the ministry is thinking of removing the tax rebate on electric vehicles, which would be two steps back for the economy, health and environment.

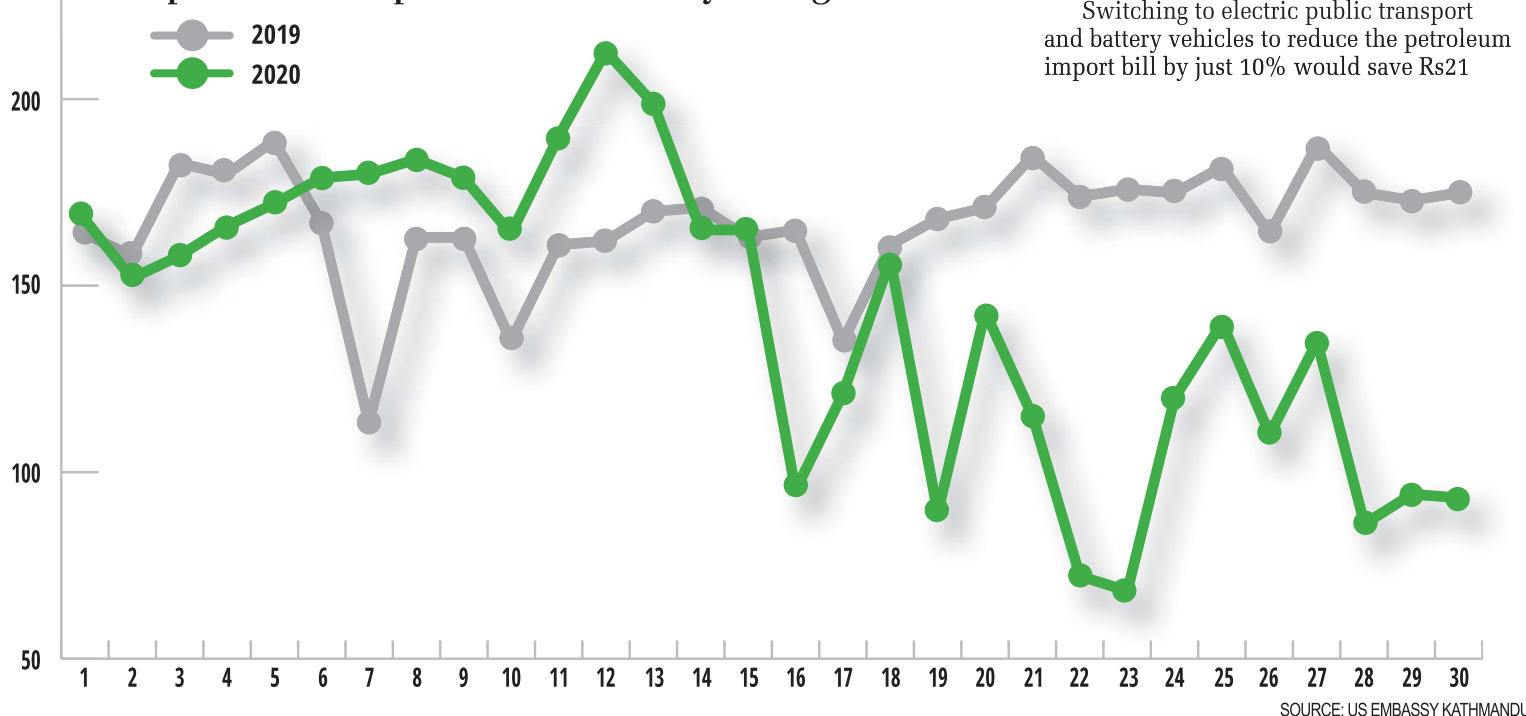
So, despite COVID-19 proving the benefits of reducing fossil fuel consumption, experts find it unlikely the government is going to change policy. The benefits of switching to cleaner energy are long-term, and the current economic crisis needs immediate solutions.

Before the lockdown, despite lack of infrastructure such as public charging stations, electric vehicles were making up to 10% all of all new sales. The government should now be pushing ahead with electrifying public transport, to narrow the trade deficit, lower air pollution, reduce Nepal's carbon footprint and protect public health.

As part of the Paris Agreement, Nepal will have to submit the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) later this year. Incentives on electric vehicles will need to be increased in line with our national commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as well as to reduce air pollution and protect public health.

Says Manjeet Dhakal: "The electric vehicle movement will go ahead whether the government wants it or not, but longer we delay incentives for renewable energy the more money we will waste and also damage public health." 🇳🇵

## Kathmandu Air Quality Index April 2019 and April 2020 PM2.5 daily average





# Lockdown gives distance learning a boost in Nepal

Home learning familiarises teachers and students with technology, and could help lift quality of instruction

Shristi Karki

In ordinary times, children would wake up in the morning and put on their uniforms, pack their bags, and leave for school.

This time of year, SEE students in Nepal would be making full use of their post-exam holidays, books and exams the last thing on their minds. University students would be in the thick of spring semester, some on the verge of graduating and going out into the world as young professionals.

But these are not ordinary times.

Nepal's baby steps towards distance learning has gotten a boost as the COVID-19 lockdown redefines schooling, replacing it with virtual classes. But the pandemic has also revealed how unprepared schools and teachers are to distance learning, and the existence of a digital divide despite the spread of data communication.

At Tika Vidyashram, a public school in Sanepa, principal Bimala Lamichhane had been advising students sitting for SEE exams to find educational materials on YouTube since the lockdown began. However, as the shutdown stretched on, Lamichhane along with her teachers resolved to conduct Grade 10 classes on Zoom.

But after trying for two days, Lamichhane realised that it was a futile exercise.

"Not every student was able to access Zoom, because none of the students have computers and only some had mobile data," she says. "Some of the students do not even get to eat properly during the lockdown, let alone have Internet access."

Her students thought it would be better to form a group on Facebook Messenger and conduct classes that way. Now, students take pictures of their assignments and upload them onto their Messenger group so that the teachers can evaluate them. Students who can access the Internet call their friends who



Usha Manandhar prepares for the SEE examinations by watching classes broadcast through Bhadagaun Television in Bhaktapur.

BIKRAM RAI

cannot, and pass along information.

"Simply advertising online classes is not enough when there is a lack of access," says Lamichhane.

Government schools in Nepal are notoriously underfunded, understaffed and lack infrastructure, which is why parents who can afford it send their children to more expensive schools. There is a fear that the COVID-19 lockdown will add to not just the digital divide, but also the gap between haves and have nots, and the disparity in the quality of education provided by public schools and private schools.

But Lamichhane thinks even better endowed private schools are having a difficult time adjusting. "Some private schools might be able to successfully conduct classes online, but there is no way most can communicate with 100% of their students," she says. "Be it a public school or private, this pandemic has shown that we are all on the same boat."

The reputed Shuvatara School

in Lamatar has been able to reach all of its 450 students and conduct classes online. With the help of the 3Di project, teachers have been conducting webinar-style classes via Zoom, and students hand in their assignments on Google Classroom.

Principal Khyam Timsina says that the first week was a trial period, but classes have been going on smoothly on the second week of their online academic year. And although online classes are not the same as real classrooms, Timsina adds, the students have taken to it.

For Shuvatara, there has been a positive consequence of conducting classes online. "This process has empowered our teachers, who have been learning a lot about IT and gaining mastery in the technical aspects of teaching," says Timsina, who says the lockdown has challenges but also offers opportunity for education.

"This pandemic has made us think about developing digital learning, which we perhaps would

not have done otherwise," he says.

"ICT in education is crucial, and hopefully, some much-needed attention will be directed towards building a digital platform that will help students well into the future."

However, the pandemic has brought into stark focus that although 96% of households in Nepal have mobile phones only a quarter of those polled in a recent nationwide survey said they used the Internet on a daily basis, and most used it to access Facebook and YouTube. But telecom companies are attempting to provide a solution to this problem.

NTC has introduced its E-siksha package, providing 2 data options to students at reduced cost. Schools can request the company to provide students access by giving NTC a list of their mobile phone numbers.

"We have a robust system," says NTC spokesperson Rajesh Joshi, adding that if schools take the initiative of communicating with their students about the service, most can easily go online with

high-speed 4G Internet in all 77 districts.

Still, many students are concerned about missing out on their classes due to the unavailability of the Internet, expressing their frustrations on social media. Even having constant access to the Internet doesn't mean that learning is easy.

A final year undergraduate student working on her thesis says that although she has been doing the research over the Internet, the lockdown has made it impossible to conduct fieldwork that she needs. Moreover, she has Zoom consultations with her thesis supervisor at 10 pm. "It is a new experience for all of us," she writes in an email to *Nepali Times*, "but we have had to adjust to it in order to utilise our time."

Karkhana CEO Pavitra Gautam believes that although online education is a way to engage students at a time like this when not much else can be done, this cannot be the only way to go about education.

"Be it a Learning Management System or Zoom, most of the time educators are not thinking about how engaged their students are with them," says Gautam, adding that there should be a deeper understanding about how kids learn rather than arguing over what tools and technologies are better.

Will this attempted shift towards the digital improve the quality of education post-pandemic?

Gautam says that if we just look at this as a way to engage students until the schools open back up and we go back to our old ways, nothing is going to change. Neither will things change if we look at this as a way to completely transform education into the digital.

"Technology is a tool that should support good teachers," he explains, "and although technology enhances capacity, amplifies the reach of information and can bring reforms it is not sensible to depend entirely on it. A blended model is going to be the best approach." 🇳🇵

## Online classes may widen digital divide ... but it will also allow Nepal to leapfrog in education

Madhu Sudan Dahal

Schools across Nepal are looking for viable options to continue the new academic year amid many uncertainties about the future. They have started online classes as the shutdown continues, and although online education will increase the existing digital divide in the nation, there are not many options.

The internet penetration rate in Nepal is 72%, out of which 55% have access to wireless services and 17% to wireline internet, and 96% of households have access to smartphones. However, most Nepalis use the internet only to access social media — especially Facebook and YouTube. So, online classes will not have a significant impact on students without proper groundwork and will depend not only on the availability of technical infrastructure, but also a basic technical knowledge on the part of students and teachers about how online platforms work.

This is the right time for the government to invest in education. The Education Ministry has allocated Rs70 million to launch online classes which will help start the movement, but will not be enough to give momentum to developing a new education system. At the same time, the government also needs to build a framework to expand internet connectivity to rural areas.

Additionally, Nepal Telecom and Ncell need to be persuaded to provide internet service to students at minimal cost and fulfil their corporate social responsibility. Service providers in Nepal are strictly business-oriented, which makes the internet an expensive luxury. Not every student can afford online classes, even if some service providers have offered lower costs at this time. Many students will still not be able to afford it.



A teacher prepares lessons to be broadcast through Bhadagaun Television in Bhaktapur.

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Online classes require at least 3G broadband access, which much of rural Nepal does not have. Wireless broadband is even more expensive. Currently, 1 Megabyte of internet costs Rs1, which means that an hour of online visual classes at the lowest video quality would require 300MB internet, costing students Rs300 every hour.

The best way to conduct the online classes is if academic institutions facilitate classes by making use of freely available educational platforms like Google Classroom, without charging

tuition fees to students. Only one-fourth of Nepali public schools have computers, and even fewer have internet connectivity.

We have to be aware of bridging the digital divide, but although bridging the digital divide could take time, bridging the knowledge divide among students across the country does not have to.

Reading materials can just as easily be disseminated through radio and television. A country that has seen a revolution in community radio is well placed to rely on its reach

to make sure that students are not deprived of necessary information. That is also distance learning, and it is a good start. But our goal should be to reach every corner of the country and to make Nepal digitally connected.

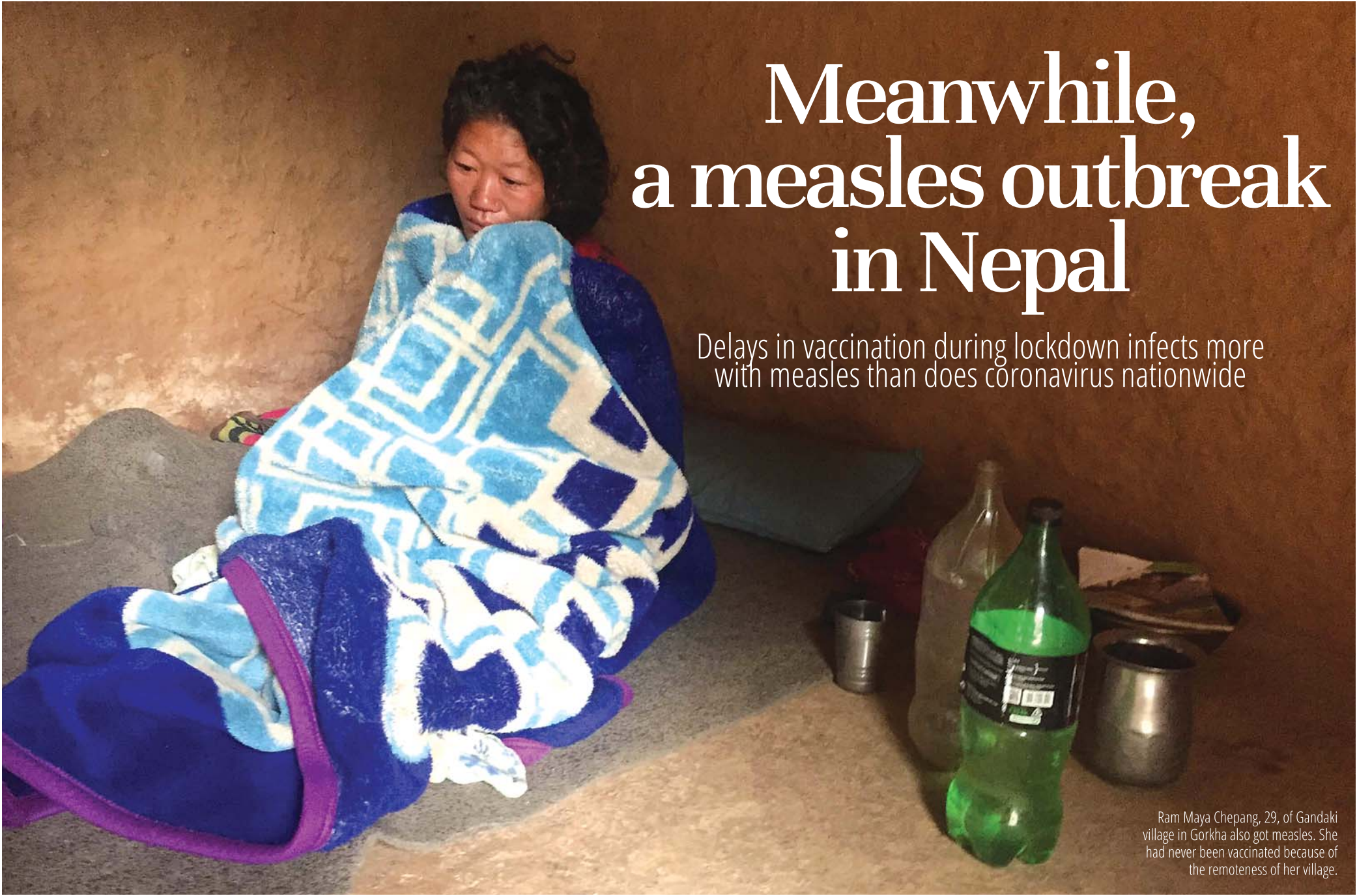
For educators, conducting classes online will mean navigating newer ways of monitoring and evaluating students. This includes being trained in conducting video conferences, webinars, and making videos for YouTube. Teachers will also have to adapt to the online format while prescribing lessons and assignments, focusing on idea-sharing and creative writing. Online classes will also be meaningless if institutions continue to set score by the three-hour-final-exam modality.

The digital shift can also pose challenges to educators. In this day and age, some students may actually be more technically savvy than teachers. This means teachers can actually learn from their students even as the students gain knowledge from them, making learning a two-way process. However, teachers need to be extra vigilant about some students misusing online platforms. Plagiarism, for instance, could flourish if students rely exclusively on the internet for academic work.

Although distance learning might feel difficult for educators and students, many universities around the globe had already been doing this successfully before the pandemic. Students experience university education without having to physically appear in class and are evaluated through their assignments, presentations, open-question exams — all without it negatively affecting students' academic experience or the quality of education provided by the institution. 🇳🇵

**Madhu Sudan Dahal** is a researcher and senior engineer at Nepal Telecom.





Delays in vaccination during lockdown infects more with measles than does coronavirus nationwide

Ram Maya Chepang, 29, of Gandaki village in Gorkha also got measles. She had never been vaccinated because of the remoteness of her village.

### Shiva Upreti in Gorkha

When Gita Chepang’s four-year-old son Rabin developed a raging fever, started vomiting, had diarrhea, body pain, and rashes she feared it might be the “corona” everyone was talking about. Then a neighbour, 29-year-old Ram Maya Chepang, also complained of similar symptoms.

They failed to respond to an expensive allergy medicine given by a local pharmacy. So, Gita called Jhalak Maya, a doctor at a nearby health post.

“She checked my son, and said he had measles,” she recalls, “she scolded me for giving the boy the allergy medicine, and told me to isolate him.”

Ram Maya Chepang is a single mother, and her school-age daughter and son go to the market to sell vegetables and there is no one to take care of her all day. Three other children from one household in the village of Huiling also got measles, and had raging fever for two weeks before they got better.

In late April, local health officials started getting reports that the Chepang neighbours were not the only ones infected. More than 160 people in two villages along the Dhading and Gorkha districts in central Nepal were affected.

The villages of Benighat in Dhading and Gandaki in Gorkha which first saw the outbreak a month ago are on either side of the Trisuli River. Villagers from here go down to the highway to sell their produce, which is why there is a danger of it spreading further.

The Chepangs living in these remote areas were already in missing pockets where vaccination campaigns did not reach even in the best of times. But this year, the government’s immunisation drive for measles and other diseases has been delayed because of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Sita Shakya, who heads the local health



Young mother Patali Chepang with her baby, who also has measles, and was never immunised.

department says there are many other remote villages along the border between the two districts who have not been immunised and are at risk of getting measles.

“The local vaccination centre is in Syadul, which is a three-hour walk away from the two villages, and most mothers do not want to make the journey with their children,” she says. Two children have already died in Dhading during the current outbreak.

The two who died were two-year-old Anisha Chepang and an eight-month-old baby who had not been vaccinated for measles, according to Benighat mayor Shankar Duwadi. In fact,

he says, none of the 160 infected in the two districts had ever been inoculated.

Shyam Bahadur Chepang from the area believes that the disease was spread during the weekly market when people mingled. “You go to sell your vegetables, and then return with the disease,” he said.

Simultaneous with the COVID-19 scare, measles outbreaks have also been reported from several districts including Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and the eastern Tarai. Health officials blame the restrictions on mobility, lack of public transport and suspension of vaccination drives for the sudden outbreak.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that spreads through droplets after sneezing and coughing just like the COVID-19. Although about 100,000 measles cases used to be reported in Nepal annually till 20 years ago, it had dropped to 100 in annual cases in the past few years.

Lack of awareness about the disease appears to be a part of the problem. Bhim Lal Chepang, who lives in one of the villages where the outbreak happened says most people in the village know nothing about the disease. “We do not know how it spreads, and we don’t even know if there is a cure,” he says, adding that most in the village still go to local shamans.

Hoping to educate the locals, Jhalak Maya Chepang, a member of the Prajapati Community Health Unit, instructed the villagers not to touch one another and warned mothers to protect their children from going out. Yet, many locals are not following instructions.

“Along with my four-year-old, I also have a two-year-old son and his cousins often play together. It is impossible to tell them to stay away from each other,” says Gita Chepang.

Ram Maya Chepang also did not physically distance herself from her children, yet got infected even though her children are fine.

Ward Chair Tulsi Regmi says an immunisation drive is being launched in the two villages and surrounding settlements, and 11,154 children were vaccinated last week. He admitted that awareness drives had not been carried out because of the remoteness of the villages and the lockdown.

However, Sumana Gurung of the Syadul public health unit says mothers were suspicious of a recent vaccination drive. “They picked up their children and ran away when we approached. They were worried that their children would cry, or even die. Most mothers were scared of their husbands scolding them for immunising their children,” Gurung added. 🇳🇵

## Pre-existing diseases may kill more children

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) warned this week that about 6,000 young children could die every day from preventable causes during the next six months while attention is focussed on the coronavirus pandemic. Hospital records show that children are relatively safe from the virus which attacks mainly people above 70 years. But UNICEF says the additional deaths would largely occur in low- and middle-income countries with health systems that are already weak, and may be overwhelmed by the pandemic response.

“Under a worst-case scenario, the global number of children dying before their fifth birthdays could increase for the first time in decades,” UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said in a statement. “We must not let mothers and children become collateral damage in the fight against the virus. And we must not let decades of progress on reducing preventable child and maternal deaths be lost.”

Health experts have warned that far more children could die because of the disruptions in health services, delays in

vaccination campaigns and travel restrictions caused by lockdowns than by the coronavirus itself.

The epidemic has focussed the attention of governments in developing countries to COVID-19, forcing them to postpone public health measures and divert resources.

<https://www.unicef.org/rosa/press-releases/millions-pregnant-mothers-and-babies-born-during-covid-19-pandemic-threatened>



UNICEF



## VIRTUAL EVENTS

## Art Exhibition

The Museum of Nepali Arts presents Nepal's first 360° virtual contemporary art exhibition featuring 19 prominent artists and their work under lockdown. Go to [www.mona.com.np](http://www.mona.com.np) for virtual tour.

14 May



## SOLIS classes

Enroll for SOLIS Performing Arts' online ballet, acting and jazz classes while at home. Call up or go to Facebook page.

9808478339



## In Conversation With

Photographers Rohit Giri and Roshan Giri will be the guests in Sattya Media Art Collectives' 'In Conversation With...' to talk about snake rescue and conservation. Join them on Facebook and Zoom.

15 May, 3pm

## Coding Webinar

IIT Nepal is bringing you a webinar series on different topics to start a coding journey for beginners to utilise your free time during lockdown. This session is targeted for fresh students who have just joined the college and pursuing their careers in the IT field.

16 May, 1pm-4pm, 9851161198, 9851224985

## Vocal Technique Masterclass

Explore the basics of vocal technique with instructor Maria Fajardo. Practice tricks guide for a journey as singer no matter the style of music you are interested in. For details, go to Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory's Facebook page.

16 May, 2pm, 9813556945



## Short Story Contest

Send in best short stories to *The Writer Magazine* for a chance to get your story published and win \$1000. Any genre is fair game as long as the story is a work of fiction under 2,000 words.

Deadline: 2 June

## ONLINE ISOLATION



## VICE

Watch documentaries about anything and everything from all over the world on the VICE YouTube channel. Start from documentaries about Nepal's honey harvesters, *The Nepalese Honey That Makes People Hallucinate*.



## Shilpee Theatre

Plays from Shilpee Theatre are on YouTube channel. Watch *COMA*, and their adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*.

## Virtual Tour

Nepal Heritage Documentation Project visits Patan's monuments right from home, and learn about the historic heritage site in the process. Visit website for details.

## Boju Bajai

Listen to Itisha Giri and Bhrikuti Rai as they talk from across two continents about politics, media and feminism in South Asia.



## Project Gutenberg

Catch up on classics on public domain. Search for literary classics at Project Gutenberg. Download ebook formats suited to individual devices.

## QUARANTINE DINING



## Da-Pow

Craving momo during lockdown? Order through Da-Pow and eat to heart's content. Or get egg *kima* and *aloo chop*. Go to Facebook page for menu. Order from Bhojdeals or Food Dole

Delivery: 11:30am-4pm  
(01) 4428652, 9840399355



## The Village Cafe

Get Fresh, Delicious, home-made food from The Village Cafe delivered at home. Order *sel roti* mix, frozen momo and *khuwa*. Call the cafe for deliveries, or order through Kathmandu Organics.

Delivery: 4pm onwards (01) 5540712, 9842425127



## Attic

Missed Attic's signature Royal Aloo while staying at home? Then get it home delivered. Go to Attic's Facebook page to see what else is on offer.

Delivery: 12pm-6:30pm, 9801222550, 9801222551, 9801222554

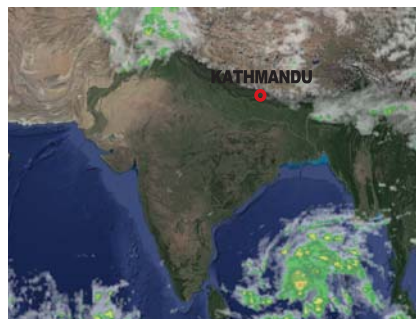
## Full Moon Pizzeria

Go to The Full Moon Pizzeria Cafe's menu on Foodmandu to order all things pizza. Order large supreme pizza for whole family. Delivery: 10am-6:30pm, 9869540023

## Tasneem's King Kitchen

Order Tasneem's mouthwatering biryani, or peruse through their menu for your fill of flavourful, spicy and savoury dishes. Order from Foodmandu.

Delivery: 12pm-7pm, 9801121212

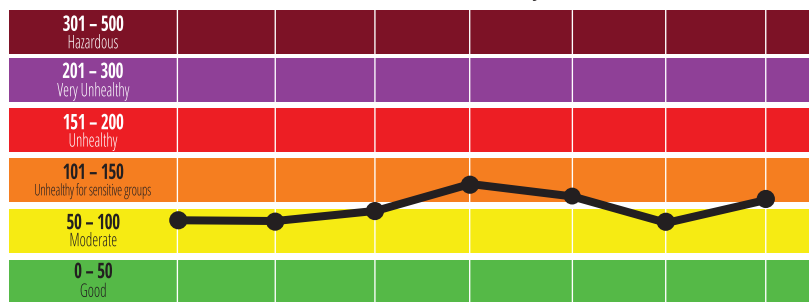


Summer is finally here, the maximum temperature in Kathmandu this weekend will hit 27-28 degrees for the first time this year -- after staying 3-4 degrees below normal for most of April. What this also means is convection systems rising along the mountains, leading to isolated thunderstorms into the next few days. There is some wind-blown sand from the western desert, so sky will be hazy.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
26° 17°	27° 17°	28° 17°

## AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 8 - 14 May



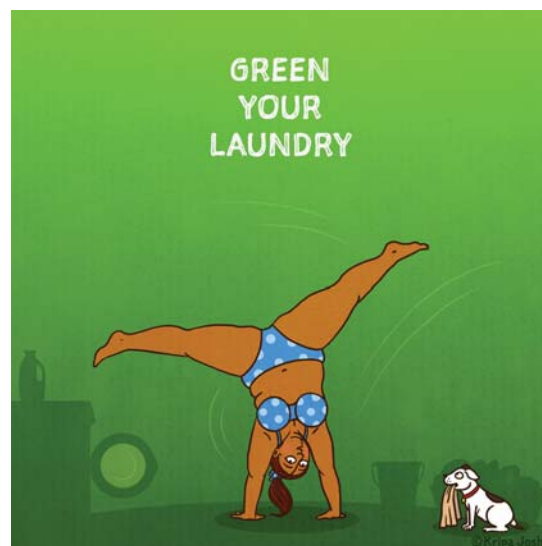
PM2.5	FRIDAY May 8	SATURDAY May 9	SUNDAY May 10	MONDAY May 11	TUESDAY May 12	WEDNESDAY May 13	THURSDAY May 14
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Now that the pre-monsoon showers have tapered off and the summer is here, the Kathmandu's daily average for Air Quality Index (AQI) is wavering between Moderate and Unhealthy. As traffic picked up because of the lockdown being relaxed, we saw a spike in pollution on Monday and Tuesday. We also saw the arrival of dust from a sandstorm that battered north India this week, taking the concentration of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns above 100 to the Orange Zone.

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

## ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



Laundry has a big impact on the planet because it takes a lot of energy to heat the water and normal detergents can have ingredients like phosphates that aren't good for you, your clothes, or aquatic ecosystems. Just washing in cold water can make a big difference since heating the water accounts for 90 per cent of the energy used. There are also more eco-friendly detergents available now which are biodegradable, made from plant based ingredients and phosphate-free. You can also make your own detergent by using soap nuts (*Rittha*) and white vinegar. Soap nuts are tree seeds that produce a soapy substance when put in water and vinegar are a natural fabric softeners as it balances the pH of soap. They leave your clothes soft and free of chemical residue.

## OUR PICK



This week the *Nepali Times* picks the 90s' hit American sitcom *The Golden Girls* to binge-watch during this extended lockdown. A light-hearted comedy series ran for seven seasons and has a total of 180 episodes. Released in 1985, the series stars Beatrice Arthur, Betty White, Rue McClanahan, and Estelle Getty as four single older women who give out sassy friendship and love goals, relevant even to this day and age.

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



# Overseas Nepalis on the COVID-19 frontlines

From New York to Malaysia Nepalis are providing life-saving services during the pandemic

Upasana Khadka

On Tuesday, as the world paid grateful tribute to nurses, thousands of medical personnel from Nepal were on duty across the world caring for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although there have been no recorded fatalities in Nepal, across the world 78 Nepalis had died from the coronavirus as of 11 May. Most of them were in the UK (50) and the United States (15). There are reports some among the 5,472 testing positive are nurses and care-givers in those countries.

“It has been very difficult for me to perform cardio-pulmonary resuscitation on COVID patients, knowing their survival rate is low,” says Jenny Lamichhane, a New York-based Nepali doctor. “I stay with them in their rooms, praying for them. People should not die alone, but visitors are not allowed in hospitals or nursing homes and most die alone.”

Even prior to COVID, as a geriatrician, Lamichhane has seen relatively more deaths and helped families cope with their loss. She adds: “But COVID has shaken all our training, expertise and experience.”

There are said to be 1.5 million immigrants employed in the US health care system as doctors, registered nurses and pharmacists. Another 263,000 immigrants with health-related degrees are working in non-health, lower paying jobs in hospitals.

There is a shortfall of 43,000 medical staff in US hospitals which have also reported a lack of personal protection which often have to be rationed or reused, putting the medical professionals and their patients at risk.

“We have had to reuse soiled N95 for weeks, and see both COVID and non-COVID patients wearing the same gear. When new masks and gowns arrive there is brief celebration, and they are distributed like presents. But things have gradually improved,” another New York-based Nepali physician who preferred not to be named said.

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that over 9,000 healthcare workers have contracted the virus in the United States, with 27 deaths, as of April 15th.

“It is both emotionally and physically taxing. I am not used to dealing with so many deaths,” says the Nepali doctor in New York. “I have not seen my husband for weeks due to fear of transmission, and going home alone after the emotional and physical turmoil has been difficult. But it is rewarding to see patients go home after fighting overwhelming odds.”

Fortunately, the situation in New York is improving with a significant reduction in the number of COVID-19 patients. Daily deaths have also gone down. However, there are



This Nepali physician in New York says after initial shortages there is now enough personal protection equipment.



Jenny Lamichhane at work, and after, in COVID-19 ward in New York.

warnings of a second wave.

Lamichhane was at a nursing home in New York for a month as coronavirus cases peaked, and says that compared to hospitals, nursing homes are much less-equipped with masks and gloves.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world in Malaysia, Nepalis are working overtime in factories making latex gloves to meet the surge in global demand. Malaysia produces 65% of the world production of rubber glove industry, and is expected to export 225 billion units this year.

In October 2019, glove exports by Malaysia-based WRP Asia-Pacific had been banned by the US Customs and Border Protection for using forced labour at its plants in Malaysia. But in March, as the global pandemic hit the ban was lifted.

## COVID-19

Over three quarters of the close to 382,000 Nepali migrant workers in Malaysia are employed in manufacturing, including of medical supplies.

“First we stayed home for over a month because of the US ban, then we worked part-time, and now we are pulling 12-hour shifts,” says Krishna, who works at WRP Asia-Pacific in Kuala Lumpur. “My ageing parents are concerned about the disease, and are pressuring me to come home. I tell them I am safe, my hours are good and the money is for our future so I try to remain optimistic.”

While workers like Krishna are indoors in factories making life-saving healthcare equipment, other Nepali migrants outside are subjected to large-scale unannounced raids and discrimination.

Nepalis are frontline workers in the stressed healthcare system in New York and in glove factories in Malaysia, proving the vital role migrants play regardless of their legal status or profession. The expectation that the visibility of migrants’ contributions during this crisis will lead to lasting shifts in migration governance is, however, questionable.

Public memory is short-lived but even in the midst of the pandemic, while foreign doctors like Lamichhane are saving lives inside New York hospitals, the Trump administration has temporarily banned immigrants from seeking permanent residency while working on plans to halt work-related visas as well.

Says Jenny Lamichhane in New York: “I used to cry every day in the beginning, due to stress of being exposed and bringing it home to my 21-month daughter. But when families started to thank me for taking care of their loved ones, it made me realise that my impact goes beyond my patients. Giving them emotional and moral support gives me strength, and makes me feel a little better.”





The flat and functional roof of the Janasewa Primary School in Makwanpur which was rebuilt after being destroyed in the 2015 earthquake.



Girls playing on the school roof



The 'Pink Classroom' is spacious and well-lit.



Children use a staircase to go up to the roof play space, and slide down during lunch break.

# Nepal's school gets roof to play in


School prototype for seismic Nepal is this sustainable roofscape design

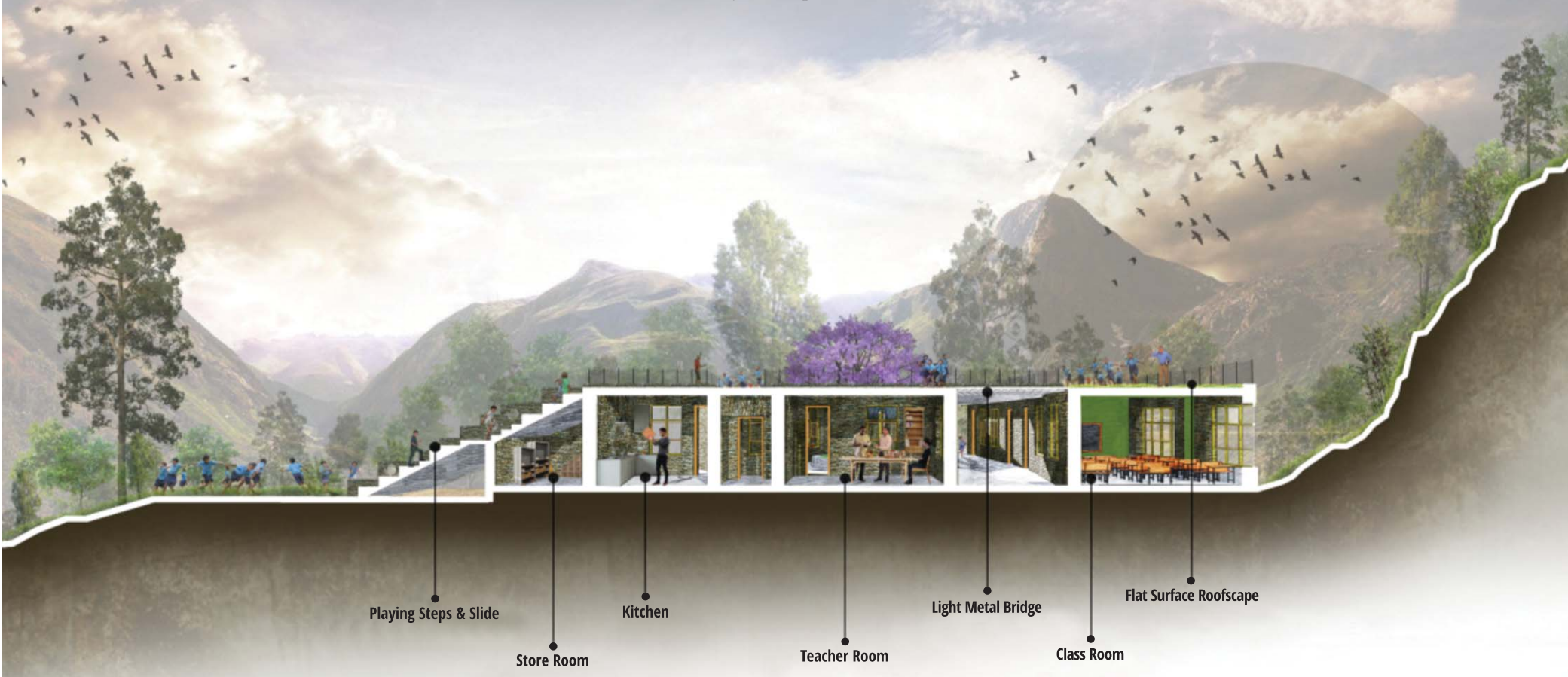
Sapana Shakya  
in Makwanpur

When schools reopened in June 2015 two months after the earthquake, students attended class in tents or temporary classrooms. They used untreated bamboo, plywood panels, razor-sharp corrugated steel sheets that were dangerous and offered no protection against the elements. One of the 8,000 school destroyed five years ago was the Janasewa Primary School and its two classrooms in Makaldamar of Makwanpur district south of Kathmandu. After schools reopened, local Chepang children attended class in a makeshift shed. The Sustainable Mountain Architecture (SMA) team in Kathmandu surveyed the Makwanpur site to see if a larger school with four classrooms, a staff room and kitchen could be built. The

major challenge was that with the steep slope on three sides and the mountain on the other, there was not enough space for the children to run and play. The team decided to use the roof. The school design is inspired by the Open Air School concept in Europe in the 1920s, which were airy, bright and less cramped. The most famous example of this is the school designed by Dutch architect Johannes Duiker in Amsterdam (1930) which is still running. Schools and kindergartens all over the world are being designed with purposeful roofscapes. Be it the Fuji kindergarten (2007) by Tezuka Architects in Japan, where the gigantic oval shaped roof deck allows unfettered learning and play for children or Skanderborggade (2005) in Denmark by architect Dorte Mandrup, where she had to be creative with the small plot given. In the Makwanpur school, SMA designed the four classrooms in the shape of a trapezium arranged like a bow tie. This shape allowed the functional need for more entry/

exit space towards the courtyard and partly in the need for good acoustics inside the classroom. The design is earthquake resistant, comfortable and takes the climate and seasons into account -- different from all the hurriedly made schools in 2015 or the standard design which do not address context, orientation and weather. The two interior curved corners use local river stones that contrast with the unique colour for each of the four classrooms. Bright hues of pink, green, blue and yellow promote playfulness and stimulate learning. Playing steps of different heights can be used for seating during a group congregation or a theatre performance. Once at the level of the roof, children can actually run around via metal bridges that connect the rooftops of their classrooms. To reduce heat gain during the warmest months, the two classroom blocks are placed on the northwest and the northeast

of the site. The 350mm thick stone masonry walls work efficiently as natural thermal mass and keep the buildings warm in the winter and cooler in the summer. The large sal tree on the southwest of the site shields the sun in summer. The rounded corners in the design allow free flow of the wind across the courtyard and help cross ventilation naturally. In the shaded open centre of the school, a newly planted jacaranda parasol will cover the children sitting around the stepped down courtyard. Movement of the children and the air were two important starting points for the design. Due to the airflow, the school is comfortable during the hot months, and the playful roof circuit is used by the children every day.  **Sapana Shakya** is an architect with Sustainable Mountain Architecture, a Nepali non-profit founded by Anne Feenstra to promote innovative pro-people, pro-ecology, pro-local building techniques.







Aerial view of Dwarpaleswor School in Kavre that was completely destroyed in the 2015 earthquake and rebuilt using a seismic resistant rammed earth design.

KIDS OF KATHMANDU



ARUN RIMAL

The school under construction in 2018 on the ridge above Panchkhal Valley, blanketed in winter fog.

# A NEW CLASS STRUCTURE

Kavre school is rebuilt using rammed earth walls to make classrooms stronger and more climate-friendly

Monika Deupala  
in Kavre

Nearly 8,000 schools were destroyed in the 2015 earthquake in central Nepal, and more than 33,000 classrooms collapsed. The death toll in the earthquake would have been much higher than 8,000 if the disaster had not struck on a Saturday when schools were empty.

The earthquake provided Nepali architects a chance to look at lighter and stronger structures that also addressed seasonal variation in temperature, natural lighting and airiness.

One of these is the Dwarpaleswor Secondary School in Mandan Deupur of Kavre which was destroyed in the earthquake of 2015. Architect Arun Rimal of Office of Structural Design based in New York says he took into

account the terrain and location on a ridge with a stunning view of the Panchkhal Valley below and the Himalayan panorama beyond.

"We incorporated canopy spaces into the design on all four

sides of the building allowing students to interact with outdoor space in between the classes," says Rimal, who has also employed the same rammed earth technique in the school that he used in the award-winning Bayalpata Hospital in Achham.

Rammed earth is more sustainable, uses mostly local clay, insulates the classrooms from excessive heat and cold,

and is sturdier. The earthquake provided the opportunity to replace the dingy and crowded classrooms of standard government schools, most of which collapsed or were badly damaged in 2015.

Construction of the school was supported by Kids of Kathmandu, Sustainable Future, Moving Mountains, Fundacion Heres, Karma Improvement Project and Netflix and inaugurated on 20 January. 🇳🇵



The new building of Dwarpaleswor Secondary School constructed with rammed earth technology hugs the contour of a Kavre mountainside amidst mustard terraces.

KIDS OF KATHMANDU



The rammed earth walls insulate the classrooms, make the school ecofriendly, earthquake resistant, and provide protection during monsoon rains.

ARUN RIMAL



JAMI SAUNDERS

Students who survived the 2015 earthquake enjoy the bright and airy interior of their new classroom lit by solar electricity at Dwarpaleswor Secondary School.



JAMI SAUNDERS

The library is comfortable, colourful and well-stocked with children's books in Nepali and English.





KUNDA DIXIT

# Change, don't just adapt to COVID-19

The worst thing Nepal can do in response to the global pandemic is merely try to get back to normal

Bishal Thapa

Nepalis are adept at adapting. Five years after the devastating earthquake, wooden planks still prop up damaged houses. We lurch from one crisis to the next, making do with what we can.

This time around, we must change, not just adapt.

One analysis estimated that a recovery package would cost the government Rs200 billion. The package recommended, unsurprisingly, measures we knew we should have undertaken much earlier: invest in small and medium enterprises, improve social services, build infrastructure, improve governance, modernise agriculture, promote industries, generate employment.

All of these responses will be repeated in the Finance Minister's budget speech due soon. It is as if this crisis simply wound back the clock to let us see what we should have done but had failed to do.

Take the financial sector. Amid concerns that borrowers will struggle to repay their loans, the Rastra Bank announced several relief measures, including reduction in interest rates, a moratorium for working capital repayment, increasing liquidity, extending refinancing and encouraging more lending.

These measures are a vivid illustration of how we adapt, but fail to address the underlying chronic challenges. For

economic growth during normal times and, more so, to bounce back from a crisis, Nepal's financial sector critically needs a modern, comprehensive, robust insolvency and bankruptcy protection framework. We should have had this a long time ago.

Insolvency and bankruptcy protection rules are the hallmarks of modern financial systems. It governs the relationships between borrowers and lenders. When structured properly, it encourages entrepreneurship and helps restructure enterprises which are fundamentally sound but have been somehow unable to pay their debts.

Healthy economies value honest failures that are not based on malfeasance or fraud. Success makes great stories. But it is the willingness to risk failure and the ability to bounce back from it that is the true engine of economic growth.

Nepal's current framework for insolvency and bankruptcy are outdated and draconian. Under a bankruptcy, businesses are given little room to restructure. Debt recovery digs into the borrower's personal credibility and unpledged property. The defaulter's ability to bounce back is destroyed.

As we emerge from this crisis, many enterprises with weak underlying fundamentals will fail. They should be allowed to fail. Rather than short term relief which may artificially sustain them, an insolvency and bankruptcy protection

framework would have allowed the enterprises to fail with dignity and provided the space to do something else.

This crisis is so serious that even enterprises with sound fundamentals will fail. Here again, an insolvency and bankruptcy protection framework, rather than short term relief, would have done better by providing them a mechanism to restructure their business and ride out the crisis.

Short term relief measures are critical to this response. But we now have two choices: adapt and accept relief measures and move on, or accept the relief measures but force government to modernise its existing insolvency and bankruptcy protection framework.


There is already adequate understanding of modern insolvency and bankruptcy mechanisms in Nepal. Its importance and need, particularly in modernising our economy, is extensively acknowledged. Despite this, robust insolvency and bankruptcy protection to replace existing outdated financial regulations has never been brought forward. Nobody understands why, or where the resistance lies. But mysteriously, it never gets done.

All businesses should default on their loans until such time that government brings such a protection framework. It could be immediately approved as an executive

order. Several Nepali financial experts working together could have it developed and ready for cabinet approval within a week. That would be about as much time as it took the Prime Minister to approve two extraordinary ordinances, get it endorsed by the President and have it rescinded.

It is highly irresponsible to call on everyone to default on their loans. Mass defaults could trigger a larger financial crisis. But listen, a virus jumped out of a bat and infected a human. This has unleashed a pandemic, which has in turn spawned an economic crisis that is being compared to the Great Depression.

Millions of Nepalis are unemployed. Thousands of our workers are stranded abroad desperately awaiting safe passage home. Infections are still rising. And throughout this crisis, the highest authority of government, the Prime Minister and his ministers, are embroiled in a senseless power struggle.

What will you do this time? Will you rebuild and strengthen your house or prop it up with a wooden plank? Insolvency and bankruptcy reforms are only one example. Across sectors, we must not just try to adapt, but bring long-lasting change. 



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**COVID-19**