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Disappearance of justice

Bimala Dhakal's husband Rajendra was a human rights lawyer in Gorkha, and had to go underground because the authorities suspected that he had Maoist sympathies. In 1999, he was arrested by police in Tanahu. It has been 21 years, and Bimala has not seen her husband since that day.

Police came after her, too. So she left her job and family and moved to Kathmandu with three small children. It has been two decades of raising her children as a single mother, while knocking on the doors of the police and the courts, as well as being herself arrested and tortured by the military.

"The past is too painful to remember. I don't think many can even understand the kind of pain I have faced," says Bimala, who has almost given up hope of her husband ever returning.

Rajendra Dhakal is among over 1,300 people officially listed as still missing from the 1996-2006 Maoist conflict. Since the end of the war, and even after two transitional justice bodies were finally set up in 2015, families of the disappeared have got neither truth nor justice.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) have political appointees as office bearers. New commissioners were nominated in January, and have been rejected by conflict victim organisations. In April the Supreme Court ruled that the commissions could not offer blanket amnesty to those charged of serious human rights violations.

Conflict victims have come to expect very little truth or justice from

successive governments. The Nepali state today is made up of former enemies in that war, and although this has helped in the reconciliation process, it has come at the cost of justice for the families of the disappeared. Indeed, the ruling Nepal Communist Party is a merger of two parties, one of which is accused of murdering and disappearing leaders of the other till 14 years ago.

Not having a missing relative present continues to be an ever-present pain. This burden of ambiguous loss is multiplied among thousands of families across the country who need recognition of their suffering, information on the fate of the missing relative, and support to get on with their lives. Because it was mainly men who were disappeared, it is the women who need help because of the added burden of social stigma.

Because the government is no help, families of the disappeared and those killed by both sides have got together to form common pressure groups to demand justice. Mothers and wives of the disappeared in Bardia have set up a network to help families of the disappeared.

These days, Bimala watches Nepalis returning home from all over the world on the evening news. She says: "Deep down, I wish that maybe Rajendra could also come home like them."

Sabrina Dongol

nepalitimes.com
Full story of other families of the disappeared, go online.

30 August is International Day of the Disappeared, and Nepali Times will be bringing a series of features over the next few days on survivors of the decade-long conflict and the families the disappeared left behind.

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Some silver linings

It has become a cliché to say that every crisis comes with opportunities. But that does not mean it is not true. Will we grab the chance, is the question.

The 2015 earthquake gave Nepal the opening to build back better, and the reconstruction of monuments did revive traditional building practices. The five-month Blockade forced Nepal to look for alternative trade routes, even though the trans-Himalayan corridor is still confined to rhetoric.

The COVID-19 crisis is also an opportunity for a 'new normal' in agriculture, food self-reliance, more sustainable tourism, and reduction of urban air pollution. But the temptation is to go back to business as usual — and we probably will. But this crisis is a wakeup call.

As dark monsoon clouds gather over Kathmandu, we are reminded of another cliché — that behind them there is a silver lining.

Nepal's imports have fallen by 15.6% this year compared to the same period last year. The import bill went down to Rs1.12 trillion, saving the country some Rs120 billion. Most of this was because of a reduction in petroleum imports, which made up 15% of all imports last year.

Nepal imported Rs160 billion worth of petroleum products in 2020, a Rs52 billion drop from the previous year. Imports of steel, textiles, machinery and other commodities have also dropped sharply.

The lockdown has resulted in savings from Nepalis not travelling abroad, either for holidays or education. Nepalis spent Rs89 billion for travel abroad last year, and this year this figure has dropped to Rs53 billion. The amount of hard currency Nepalis exchanged to pay for school and university fees abroad also dropped from Rs46 billion last year to Rs26 billion in 2020 — a reduction of 44%.

Earlier this year, amidst uncertainty about the pandemic, there were dire predictions about a drastic drop in remittances. The World Bank projected a 14% decline in remittances this year, the Asian Development Bank (ADB)

had a worst case scenario of a 28.7% drop, and Nepal's own Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics forecast an 18% decline.

There was indeed a drop in March and April when banks and money transfer agencies closed. But remittances this year have already hit Rs875 billion, only 0.5% less than the preceding year.

The drop in outflow of hard currency and a rebound in remittances has had a positive impact on Nepal's balance of payments which improved from minus Rs67 billion last year to plus Rs2.8 trillion this year. Nepal's hard currency reserves now stand at \$2.15 billion — enough to pay for 14 months of imports.

To be sure, we have to wait and see if the remittances remain steady August onwards. The record high Rs101 billion for July was largely due to a backlog from previous months, workers bailing out families back home, as well as US dollar appreciation.

The global economic

downturn is expected to hit the economies of destination countries, and this will inevitably affect their migrant workers. However, there are positive signs. China's petroleum imports are almost at pre-pandemic levels, and this will boost oil and gas exports

from the Gulf and Southeast Asia. In addition, employers hit by economic slowdown will want to also scrimp on salary costs by hiring cheaper essential workers from abroad.

Economists like former finance secretary Ramesh Kharel are not so pessimistic. He says in our analysis (*page 5*) that Nepal may be shielded from the full impact of the crisis because ours is still largely a subsistence economy, and people have traditional coping mechanisms.

All this is not to discount the seriousness of the health and economic emergencies we face. About 500,000 young Nepalis enter the labour market every year, and nearly that number is expected to return to Nepal in the coming months from abroad. Where are the jobs for them?

Even if the macro-economic indicators are good, there is a real socio-economic and political crisis on the horizon.



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

Even if the macro-economic indicators are good, there is a real socio-economic and political crisis on the horizon

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

30 August is the International day of the Disappeared and on the week of 30 August–5 September 2000, a Nepali Times report questioned the Maoists' killing of a school teacher in Gorkha and burning school buses as acts to further the cause of 'revolution'.

It was 20 years ago this week was when Nepali Times editor Kunda Dixit was involved in the rescue of his brother Kanak Mani Dixit, who had gone missing on the last leg of his solo Annapurna Circuit trek. His personalised account has important lessons for why one should not trek alone in the mountains.

Meanwhile, the editorial pointed out the need to resolve the infighting between septuagenarians GP Koirala and KP Bhattarai with the then ruling party Nepali Congress.

Read excerpts:

Mao the designer revolution: Here in the mid-hills and forests of Nepal, where Mao's self-styled protégés are carrying on as if the Long March never ended, a People's War being waged in the name of the farmer's son from Hunan has claimed 1,450 lives in the past four years.

On 23 August, three days after Prachanda announced a new "strategic defence" offensive, Maoists hacked to death a primary school teacher in Gorkha, not the first cold-blooded murder of a non-combatant. The same day a group burnt two buses belonging to the Modern Indian School in Kathmandu.



Looking for my brother: It rained heavily all night. The roar of the Marsyangdi and the waterfall was deafening. Little did we know that only 2-3 km away Kanak was spending his third night out in the open, drinking rain, talking to wild animals to keep them away, and anchoring himself on rocks so that he would not slip off the ledge to the river below.

We left the lodge at six in the morning, and by 7:15 Raju had spotted a blue rucksack about 50 ft below the trail at Lili Bhir, a particularly slippery near vertical slope directly above a bend in the Marsyangdi. I looked straight down through binoculars and immediately recognised Kanak's purple cap.

Congress-K or Congress-G?: There is nothing wrong with political parties splitting, they do it all the time. Leaders of the Nepali Congress like to boast that theirs is a mass-based party. It appears to have become a mess-based one. Were it not the ruling party, none of us would have bothered. But the collective destiny of 23 million people is hanging while the cronies of these two septuagenarians play out their proxy battles.

The party should formally bifurcate into a Congress G and a Congress K.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



DYNAMIC CERAMIC

At Cera Nepal in Bhaktapur, new mothers and youth seeking recreational activities during the lockdown are taking pottery classes to distress while learning a new skill. Watch video in our YouTube channel.

HOTEL EVEREST VIEW

It's a wonderful site and the view of Everest and other peaks, on a clear day, is out of this world ('A Himalayan high', #1024). Never spent a night there but visited several times over the years with my trekking groups for breakfast on the terrace with that mind blowing view. Kudos to Miyahara san for his vision and perseverance with the project.

DevendraBasnet

• I was there in 1971. The hotel had not yet opened, still under construction. We had passed many porters on the way in carrying building materials, the ceramic toilets.

Richard Kauffman

• I remember Hotel Everest View Hotel fondly. Made several visits, my first was in 1974 and Captain Wick flew me. I have wonderful memories of viewing Mt Everest from the windows of the hotel. Thank you for making these memories.

Katherine Whitley

• I was there in 1982. The hotel was empty of guests and staff. My understanding is the hotel failed early on because too many guests suffered altitude sickness after flying directly to Syangboche without any acclimatisation. They were usually wealthy, but old, tourists.

Tony Sharpe

• I read this thoroughly and greatly appreciate late Miyahara's vision of building the hotel at the highest altitude at the time as well as Syangboche airfield.

Ang Rita Sherpa

KULMAN GHISING

My only concern once Mr Ghising is out and replaced by some sycophant is — we Nepalis will show our resilience and bear the load shedding brunt with a grunt ('Kulman Ghising's tenure at NEA in doubt', Ramesh Kumar, #1024). We'll start adjusting to the darkness while constantly badmouthing politicians. Because that's just us.

AnahimasNinjoa

• I hope his successor can follow in his footsteps - otherwise we will be back to those dark days of load shedding. The government should give him an extension for his enormous contribution.

Sujoy Das

• He has improved the administrative and technical losses prevalent in the system and helped exposed the load shedding syndicate that had been operating in shadows. His idea of developing a smart system will not only revolutionise the energy sector but will initiate the digital governance concept in Nepal based on the NEA database. My only criticism is he didn't do enough to bring the corrupted to the custody.

UjwalUprety

• He has exceeded expectations and brought hope in his field and beyond. But would anyone be surprised if he doesn't get another term and a party apparatchik is appointed in his place?

ManoharBudhathoki

• He literally changed the face of Nepal. I hope he gets to stay for another four years. Shame if he is replaced...but we know the politics.

GyurmeDondup

FLIGHTS TO RESUME

Good to hear strict precautionary measures will be implemented — I just wish the same were in place for those re-entering from one of the worst Covid-19 affected countries, India ('Nepal to open regular flights from 1 September', nepalitimes.com).

Sue Chamberlain

INDIA-BANGLA BORDER TALKS

Thank you for this encouraging report on this unique friendly approach to boundary management ('India-Bangladesh border talks have lessons for Nepal', Prabhakar Sharma, nepalitimes.com). This should serve as reference materials for other international boundary problems in others if the world.

Bashir Shettima

HIV-COVID

Understanding that a good immune system does not prevent the virus from entering, but that it "fights" the virus more effectively, will encourage people to wear masks and promote hand washing ('Learning from HIV to fight Covid-19 in Nepal', Sonia Awale, #1024). Also, losing weight, stopping alcohol and quitting smoking are ways to eliminate more severe complications if one does get the virus. Knowing the difference between an infection and a virus is also important.

Gloria Monkeymind

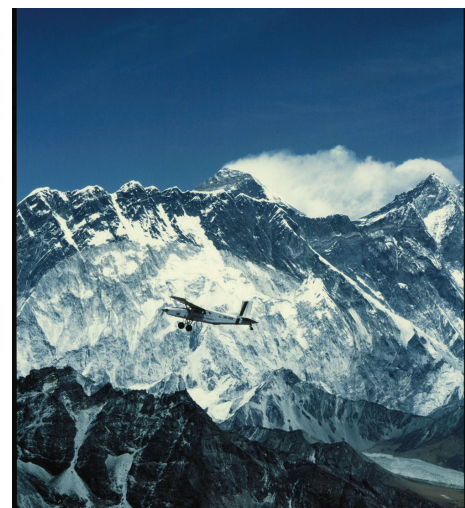
NO TO NOC

If the workers can use chartered flights to go to their desired counties, it is absurd to keep the students from flying out of the country ('Students objects to No Objections rule', SewaBhattarai, nepalitimes.com). The admission process of a large number of students is stuck due to NOC. Also, many students have already paid in excess of Rs4 million to their universities and are bearing the interest of that amount. Along with the financial burden, mental well-being of the students is also at risk.

Ishita Roongta

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



A Himalayan High

Tourism pioneer the late Japanese-Nepal Takashi Miyahara was way ahead of his time. This inspiring account of how he built Hotel Everest View and Syangboche 50 years ago, overcoming obstacles every step of the way was read by thousands and widely shared on social media. Translated excerpts from his book at nepalitimes.com.



Most reached and shared on Facebook



Most visited online page



Kulman Ghising's Tenure at the NEA in Doubt

by Ramesh Kumar

Kulman Ghising, the man credited with ending power cuts, is due to step down next month after four years as head of Nepal Electricity Authority. He may not get an extension because powerful businesses and their political patrons want him replaced. Head to our website for a profile of his achievement and to the comment section to join the discussion.



Most popular on Twitter



Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Japanese Takashi's Miyahara was Nepal's tourism pioneer. He even became a Nepali citizen in 2008 to contest elections. Read his inspiring account of how he built Hotel Everest View and Syangboche airfield 50 years ago.



Neelima Shrestha @NeelimaShr

This story of building Hotel Everest View & Syangboche Airfield 50 years ago, is awe-inspiring. Thanks for sharing. I first visited the Hotel back in 2003, it's very beautiful.



Netashwa Dixit @netashwa

Such a fine informative and historical write-up. Thanks.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Who is in charge in #Nepal? The Covid-19 control committee is acting like a government within a government, reports @AlishaSijapati.

#Covid_19 #politics #migrantworkers #publichealth



Krishna Joshi @krishna_joshi01

Who is in charge in Nepal? Nobody!! Does it look like anybody is in charge?



Purushottam Mudbhary @MudbharyPuru

The ad hoc decision of not allowing passengers from UAE to board the flight and flying the RA aircraft empty on Tuesday, leaving lowly paid Nepali workers stranded there, was an inhuman act by incompetent and irresponsible Head of CCMC Ishwar Pokharel, a stooge of an arrogant PM



Nirakar Pokhrel @unseenforces07

CDO raj is stronger than ever. Remind me again what the point of having 7 states, other than burdening of state coffers, increased taxes & the CM's with little to no work other than cutting ribbons and giving hasanas elsewhere



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Journalists also on the frontlines of #COVID19 Several reporters and photojournalists across the country have been infected. Many have constant fear of exposure and are also worried about losing their jobs as media companies start laying off staff. #Nepal



Shobhana GP @ShobhanaGP

Thanks @NepaliTimes for bringing this issue to the fore. Mental stress, fear of contamination and bringing it home to families on top of losing already halved incomes - just a few of the issues that journalists in Nepal face today.



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Biplanes and balloons over Mt Everest

Let's let our imagination soar during lockdown and remember those reckless men in their flying machines

The early 1930s were an era of aviation achievements when Charles Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic, Richard E Byrd reached the poles and Amy Johnson flew solo from London to Australia. Experimental flights were attracting not only swashbuckling, pioneering pilots, but also nationalistic sponsors keen to advance technology and force new scientific frontiers.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

This month a new biography is published about Lucy Lady Houston, a former chorus girl notorious as the richest woman in England who brushed aside scandal to become the patriotic financier of the first flight over Mount Everest, backed secret military research, and funded the creation of the Spitfire aircraft.

Still nobody had flown over the highest point on earth, and the British were galvanised into action to beat their European rivals. Supported by the Royal Air Force, Britain had the advantage of a newly developed supercharged engine (the Bristol IS3 Pegasus) in a uniquely modified aircraft with an open cockpit they named the Houston-Westland, recommended by the RAF as the fastest-climbing two-seater aircraft ever tested. Douglas Douglas-Hamilton Marquis of Clydesdale (later 14th Duke of Hamilton) was appointed chief pilot, seconded by Flt Lt David McIntyre, each accompanied by an observer cameraman.

Shipped by sea in crates to Karachi then reassembled, the two small Westland biplanes flew to the expedition base at Lalbalu airfield near Purnia in Bihar, due south of Biratnagar and some 160 miles southeast of Everest. The team was joined by three De Havilland Moths which had taken one month to fly out from UK, and large amounts of support equipment.

After all the preparation, by 3 April 1933 the clouds had dispersed and they were ready to meet the unknown challenge of flying over Everest. Climbing from the plains of India to an altitude of 34,000 feet over Nepal, the tiny planes' double wings delicately bound together with struts and stays were dwarfed by the towering Himalaya. Buffeted by severe wind currents and air bumps, blown sideways off course, dogged by downdrafts and faulty oxygen flows, then saved from collision



The Houston-Westland flown by Douglas-Hamilton and Stewart Blacker approaching Mt Everest on 19 April 1933. Photo by S R Bonnett from a chase plane.

AKG IMAGES



LISA CHOEGYAL

► Douglas-Hamilton and Blacker pose in the Houston-Westland in Purnia, Bihar in 1933 before setting out to overfly Mt Everest.



◄ Adventure filmmaker Leo Dickinson messing about with film footage at Kathmandu airport on one of the many reces needed to prepare for his balloon flights over Everest in 1985 and 1991

with icy rock faces by fortuitous updrafts, the two aircraft eventually scraped over the top of Everest, before circling safely back to Purnia.

Lord Clydesdale would never say how close he came to hitting the mountain other than to admit that it had been "cleared by a more minute margin than I cared to think about, now or ever."

But the first ever Everest flight had failed to collect the expected survey data and film footage because the photographer was unconscious with hypoxia, slumped on the open cockpit floor when his air hose split. After a test flight around Kangchenjunga, one aircraft got lost and was forced to

land at a busy railway station to ask for directions home.

Determined to complete their mission, a second Everest flight was made two weeks later on 19 April 1933 to collect the missing data. It had to be undertaken in great secrecy by the defiant aircrew, as it was expressly against the orders of the team leader, sponsor Lady Houston and insurance company who all felt enough had already been risked.

Despite so many close calls, the expedition was hailed as a resounding scientific and technical success, although they failed to detect any traces of disappeared climbers Mallory and Irving. Having captured the first images of the roof of the world with several passes over the peak, their closely guarded pictures helped inform British Everest endeavours, culminating in Tenzing and Hillary attaining the summit 20 years later.

The story is told in a couple of black and white documentaries Wings Over Everest in all its colonial, pith-helmeted splendour, and First Over Everest, giving due credit to 'His Highness the Maharaja of Nepal within whose territory Mount Everest stands'.

Eighty years later Douglas-Hamilton's grandson, Charles, retraced the maiden trip – we marked the neglected anniversary with a ceremony at the Nepal Tourism Board in 2013. The BAe Systems official who came with Charles confirmed that the groundbreaking 1933 Everest flight "had led directly to refinements in

aviation technology that allowed high altitude flights".

A couple of generations later, cameraman Leo Dickinson is another adventurer who likes to push the limits, pitting a fragile flying machine against the mighty mountains, and specialising in 'filming the impossible'.

He also enjoys a good joke. Short, bearded and sprightly, Leo danced around the Pilatus Porter plane, a tangle of celluloid film at his feet: "Quick, quick, kick it into the shade before it gets overexposed" he joked. Another one was "On this expedition we are experimenting with freeze dried water."

This 1991 expedition was aimed to fly a balloon over Sagarmatha, and we were tasked with helping with their Nepal support logistics. The four members consisted of adventure aficionados led by Leo with pilot Andy Elson, mountaineer Eric Jones and stropky Aussie veteran balloonist Chris Dewhurst. They remain the first and only hot-air balloons to have flown over Mt Everest.

Chris and Leo had made an earlier unsuccessful attempt to balloon over Everest in 1985 with an unruly bunch that had led to near-disaster. The team trained in skydiving in case of having to bail out, sought astrological predictions and practiced with flights at Bhaktapur and Bodnath.

On the actual flight, they used fuel too fast, failed to gain more than 26,500 feet altitude and were

forced to abort ten miles short of Sagarmatha. One balloon crash-landed into a tree and the other spread across a hillside before catching fire. Still, it stood as the highest alpine ballooning flight in history at that time.

A crew of three Japanese attempted to fly over Everest from the north side in 1990 but smashed their balloon into the side of a cliff, lucky to escape with their lives.

Leo and Chris were keen to complete their abandoned traverse of the world's tallest mountain. The logistics to fly from the Khumbu over Everest to the Tibetan plateau were complex, requiring unprecedented Nepali-Chinese permissions, and an army of porters and yaks to ferry the fuel cylinders, camera gear, and snaking balloon skins. After Buddhist blessings at Tengboche, they set up their own weather station at Gokyo to measure the jet stream whilst meteorological satellites monitored the mountain's moods.

Acclimatisation was an important part of preparation whilst awaiting perfect weather conditions, but rivalry amongst the leaders was causing rifts and threatening competition instead of cooperation for the daunting exploit ahead.

When the two balloons finally took off from the sacred shores of Gokyo lake trailing prayer flags and waving to locals, support crew and girlfriends, Leo was perched on a camera platform outside the basket. "Chris' ego means there is no space for me inside," he quipped.

The wind carried them up and away, whizzing past the shimmering summit of Sagarmatha at 100 miles an hour with Leo's suspended cameras capturing the unique perspective of the highest Himalayan landscape spread beneath their frail wicker baskets.

The expedition goal had been achieved, but technical problems were only just beginning. Communications collapsed, Chris jumped the gun, both balloons got separated soon after take-off, and the hot-air temperature was running too high, threatening to rupture the membrane. Gaining altitude, hypoxia affected all of them even with oxygen masks and, despite the additional canisters lashed to the baskets, they again burned fuel faster than anticipated.

Andy and Eric suffered the deadly silence that every balloonist dreads when the burners fail and everything goes out. With not enough oxygen in the atmosphere to keep the vital burners going, in order to reignite the pilot-light they had to balance on the basket rim with a box of matches.

Out of gas and spinning like a top, Chris was forced to make an emergency landing, crashing down in Tibet and being dragged across two miles of rugged rocky terrain. The flimsy balloons, expensive equipment and Leo's cameras were in smithereens, but the film survived as a classic Everest by Balloon.

It was left to our colleague, mountaineering operator Russell Brice, to pick up the pieces on the northern side in Tibet – Leo had broken ribs, all were badly shaken, and everyone agreed it was a miracle they survived. The voyage had proven that the extreme altitude and climatic dangers of flying hot-air balloons in the high Himalaya were so enormous that no one has been reckless enough to attempt the feat since. 🇨🇳



BALLOON OVER EVEREST

The first-ever balloon flight over Mt Everest hurtles past the East Face of the world's highest mountain at 160km/h.

Defying predictions, remittances still high

Overseas workers sent back record-breaking amounts of money to their families in Nepal in past 2 months

Upasana Khadka

Despite dire predictions about a drastic drop in remittances that Nepal gets from its workers abroad due to the Covid-19 induced economic downturn, money transfers have hit Rs875 billion which is only 0.5% less than the preceding year.

This is in stark contrast to the World Bank's prediction of a 14% decline, a worst-case scenario of a 28.7% drop by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the forecast of an 18% reduction by Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics.

During the initial months of the crisis in March/April remittances did take a sharp dip, but it has since picked up, rising steadily to Rs94 billion in May/June and Rs101 billion in June/July. Far from declining, the figures for the past two months are record high monthly inflows to date. (See graphs, right)

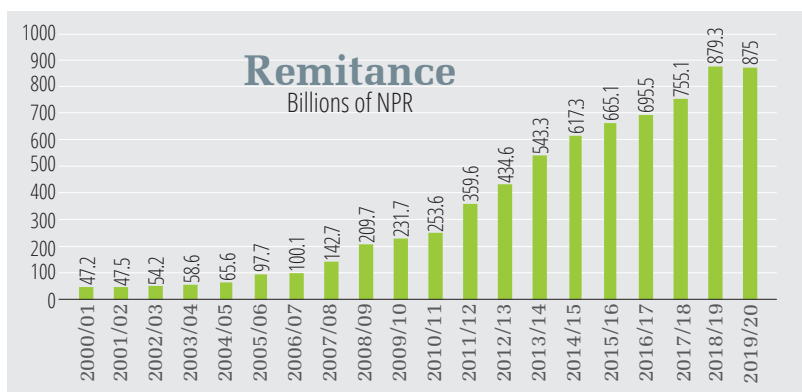
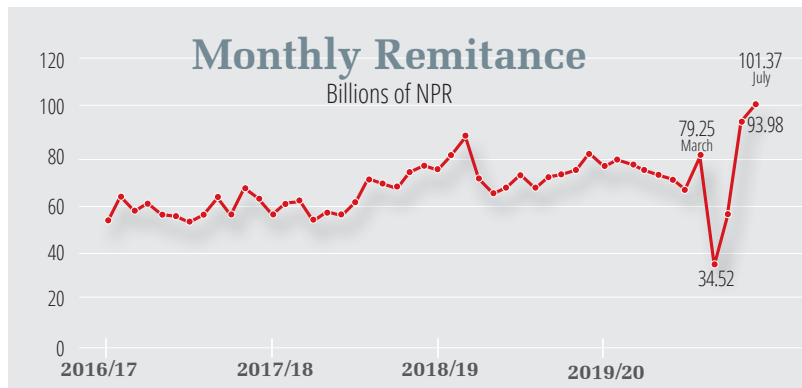
The annual growth rate of remittances till this year, which declined by only 0.5%, had been on a positive trajectory.

"In many essential sectors including manufacturing, Nepali migrant workers overseas have continued to work throughout the pandemic," explains Gunakar Bhatta, spokesperson at Nepal Rastra Bank. With news of the virus spreading in Nepal and complications with repatriation, many workers may now be weighing their options and deciding to stay back abroad.

Ramesh, a Nepali worker at WRP



PATTABI RAMAN



Source: Nepal Rastra Bank

Asia, a company making latex gloves in Malaysia, says that after the initial slump at the factory, there is now lots of work because of the global demand for gloves.

"We are now all working overtime. I just finished an 11 hour shift, 8 hours of my regular hours with 3 hours overtime," he told us over the phone from Kuala Lumpur. Other Nepalis employed overseas in storekeeping, domestic work, cleaning and security, considered essential services, have continued to work right through the pandemic.

Also, the volume of workers who have registered to return home pales in comparison those who have decided to stay back, either because they are continuing to work or they are in a wait-and-watch mode as their decision depends on the situation of their employers.

Ram, a Nepali worker in Qatar, says he holds his transfers when the banks are closed back home, but the pandemic has not stopped the monthly remittances to family in Nepal. "I send money home every month, just like I did before Covid-19, things have not changed much for me or my family," he says.

At the central bank, Gunakar Bhatta notes that contrary to initial fears, China's demand for oil has recovered to over 90% of pre-pandemic levels, which bodes well for Gulf economies and subsequent demand for migrant workers.

Some experts say the increase in the past two months in Nepal may be due to workers sending more money home to their families because their incomes have been affected by the lockdowns. The higher June-July figures could also be because of the backlog from earlier months of the lockdown.

"Migrants may have sent what is remaining of their savings from their bank accounts and their gratuity

if any. It is uncertain what the numbers will look like next fiscal year, remittance data for August will be a helpful indication," says Suman Pokharel, CEO of International Money Express (IME).

The Nepali rupee-US dollar exchange rate is at an all-time low of about Rs120, and in dollar terms total remittances this year have decreased by 3.3%, and in 2018/19 it had actually increased by 7.8%.

The outflow of overseas migrant workers decreased in 2019/20 compared to the previous year after the government stopped issuing labour approvals from the third week of March. In 2018/19, 236,208 new workers had left for foreign employment, and 272,616 migrants renewed their permits. This year, that number has decreased to 190,453 and 177,980 respectively.

Remittances in 2019/20 could therefore take a hit due to the reduction in both the flow and stock of workers due to shrinking demand and job displacements.

While the remittances this year have defied predictions, it masks individual stories of many migrant workers who have not only been unable to send remittances home, but are living in charity and desperate to return. Many are stranded due to uncertain and inadequate repatriation flights.

The Rs875 billion that was remitted this year will cushion to Nepal's economy. It also includes contributions from undocumented workers who send home money regularly but are not eligible for the government's repatriation support scheme for tickets and quarantine back home which is funded by the Foreign Employment Welfare Fund (FEWF). There is no alternate mechanism to mobilise the government's Covid-19 fund to support them. 🇳🇵

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AJAYA UPADHAYAYA

Economic cost of 5 months of lockdown

The country faces an even bigger challenge than Covid-19: economic collapse

Ramesh Kumar

As serious as the rapid spread in Nepal of the novel coronavirus looks, even more frightening is what the lockdown meant to prevent it will do to the country's economy. The health impact of the virus may pale in comparison to long-term damage to the country from a prolonged lockdown that enters its sixth month today.

It is difficult to make predictions on how Nepal's economy will fare till the end of the year because that will depend on how the virus behaves. But all indications are at SARS-CoV-2 is here to stay, and that it will resurface with added virulence in winter.

On 21 July when Finance Minister Yubaraj Khatriwada triumphantly announced that the pandemic in Nepal had peaked, and the lockdown had been lifted, traders, businesses and industries were cautiously optimistic. But since then there has been a surge, with cases and fatalities more than doubling in the past three weeks.

Aside from essential food and other items, business transactions are down by more than half since 24 March when the restrictions were first announced. Even when the lockdown was eased last month, the people's purchasing capacity had gone down and businesses did not really pick up.

The Rastra Bank estimates that it will take at least nine months after the lockdown is fully lifted for the economy to come back to previous levels. This means Nepal is not going to see a recovery this fiscal year. The central bank says 22.5% of those employed in the country have lost their jobs in the past five months of lockdown.

The central bank expects Nepal's economic growth rate to plunge from 6.9% last year to less than 1% this year. But the World Bank is even more pessimistic, it says the growth rate may even go into negative 2.8% if the crisis continues.

"Everything is at a complete standstill, there are no transactions taking place except people buying food from day to day," says Shekhar Golchha of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI). "The question is how long before businesses run out of cash to pay

salaries, and families run out of savings."

Factories along the Itahari-Biratnagar and Simara-Birganj corridors have been hardest hit not just by the plunge in demand but because workers who had returned from India after 21 July started falling sick.

One of those hit was Jagadamba Steels, whose Sahil Agrawal says: "The sale of steel rods had picked up somewhat after the lockdown was lifted, but after workers tested positive, the local administration closed the factories. Now, with the lockdown everything is closed."

Even worse hit is the tourism and aviation sector where revenue is zero for the past five months. Banks had given loans worth Rs1.1 trillion for hotels and restaurants, and had lent Rs40 billion to the transport sector. They are not in a position to replay even the interest, let alone the capital.

Imports are down 20%, from Rs1.7 trillion in the first half of last year compared to only Rs85 billion in the same period this year. That should be good news, but it means the government's tax revenue has gone down by more than half.

The middle class has been hit hardest with incomes falling. Of the 923,000 registered businesses in Nepal, nearly all are small and medium enterprises employing less than ten people. As a result, house and property transactions have gone down by half last month compared to the same period in 2019.

"Except for mobile phones, motorcycles, fast moving consumer goods, nothing else is moving," says Golchha. "Even when they do shop consumers are buying cheaper items, which is an indicator a drastic fall in income."

Even the sale of alcohol products are down by up to 80%. Bhat Bhateni Supermarket's Panu Poudel says turnover in the nationwide chain had picked up after 21 July, but was still down by a third, but now it is back to zero again.

But the real barometer of just how bad the crisis is can be felt in the banking sector where on the one hand liquidity is overflowing because of reduction in loan disbursement, but collection has also shrunk because of defaults. The print editions of the Nepali language press in the past month are full of bank notices for auctions of collateral property. However,

even if the property is up for auction, they may be no buyers.

In the whole of July-August the banks collected Rs34 trillion in loan repayments, but they lent only Rs28 billion. "The reason is that it is difficult enough just to survive for businesses, and they are in no position to take a loan to invest," says businessman Pashupati Murarka.

The government had told borrowers they had a grace period till December to repay bank loans without being put on the defaulters' black list, but it is looking like even that is being optimistic.

One ray of hope for businesses was that public spending would increase in the run up to Dasain, which this year falls at the end of October. But most businessmen have given up on a Dasain-Tihar revival this year. Car sales used to go up at this time, but the Nepal Automobile Dealers' Association has cancelled its annual auto show, and its chair Krishna Dulal says: "This year we are just trying to get by, there is no hope for sales."

With revenue down, the government will be forced to borrow. But the state borrowing already makes up 37% equivalent of the GDP, and it could go up to 51% by the end of this fiscal year. Economist Govinda Bahadur Thapa says the government may run out of money if the current trend continues. He says: "We have brought the economy to a standstill to save lives, but we need to save the economy as well. It is a very difficult balance."

Former finance secretary Rameshore Khanal is not as pessimistic. Although he does not discount the seriousness of the crisis, he thinks what could save Nepal is that it is still largely a subsistence economy and families have coping mechanisms to get by in times of extreme hardships. For example, remittances from Nepalis working overseas have not gone down despite predictions it would drop drastically.

He says the crisis also presents opportunities for the government. "We can have a pro-active policy to channel unemployed Nepalis to the jobs 1.5 million Indian workers used to do before they went home, and this would be the time to flood the market with liquidity in order to inject cash and raise purchasing power." 🇳🇵

prabhu Bank BIZ BRIEFS

Repatriation resumes

The government has resumed chartered flights to repatriate Nepali workers from abroad after cancelling them last week. Some 4,000 Nepalis are expected to return till 31 August in flights by Nepal Airlines,



Himalaya Airlines and some international airlines from Abu Dhabi, Doha, Kuala Lumpur, Riyadh, Dubai, Sharjah, Dammam, Incheon, and Singapore. After 1 September regular international flights will be allowed, but they will be limited to only 500 passengers arrivals per day in Kathmandu. Before boarding, passengers must all present proof of negative COVID-19 PCR test done 72 hours prior to departure.

However, countries where PCR tests are difficult to obtain, like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, can fly to Kathmandu without those reports, but have to stay one week in hotel quarantine on arrival in Kathmandu. They have to pay the hotel costs to the airline with their tickets.

The government says it will strictly not allow airlines to mix passengers with PCR negative tests with those who do not have those tests.

On 17 August, the Covid-19 Crisis Management Committee (CCMC) had abruptly cancelled permission for chartered repatriation flights that were previously scheduled till the end of the month.

Khukri Rum

Khukri Rum will support the upcoming movie from SHY Productions, *Gurkha: Beneath the Bravery*.



Beneath the Bravery, the story of Late Sergeant Kulbir Thapa — the first Gurkha to be decorated with the prestigious Victoria Cross award for gallantry. *Gurkha: Beneath the Bravery* is written and directed by Pradeep Shahi. Learn more at <http://gurkhamovie.com/>

Civil Bank

Civil Bank has introduced its new 'Premium Savings Account' savings deposit scheme



with an interest rate of 6% p.a. to customers. Internet banking, ATM card and SMS banking service will be free for all customers opening accounts under this scheme. Additionally, the bank will also provide an interest of 8.75% p.a. in individual Fixed Deposit.



NIC Asia

NIC Asia has introduced its 'Super Six Scheme', under which customers will get a discount worth Rs 500 on their

6th mobile transaction every week until 12 September. Additionally, the bank has also introduced the 'QR Refer and Earn' scheme until mid-October, where customers and QR merchants associated with NIC Asia can earn Rs750 for every new merchant they refer who opens a current account with the bank.

Global IME Bank

Global IME Bank has handed over traffic awareness sign boards and poles to the



Udayapur Traffic police branch. Bank Manager Global IME Rabin Raj Dahal handed over the Chief Police Deputy Inspector of Udayapur Traffic Police Hom Prasad Khanal in a program.

Sunrise Bank

Sunrise bank launched its 'Women's Savings Account' on the occasion of Tij. Per the scheme, female customers will be able to open a bank account for free, and there will be no charges on Debit cards, mobile banking, and Demat accounts for a year. Customers who want to start a business will also be provided special discounts on loans.

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VIRTUAL EVENTS



Online Discussion

Join 'The Anthropocene, Indigeneity and the Planetary Imagination' webinar where scholars Pasang Yanjee Sherpa, Austin Lord and Alston D'Silva will reflect on the ongoing online exhibition 'The Skin of Chitwan' and discuss their own research. Details to register are on Nepal Picture Library's Facebook page.
30 August, 7pm-9pm

The Contextator

Constituent Assembly member Renu Chand and legal expert Apurba Khatriwada will be in conversation with host Nayan P Sindhuliya to discuss politics around the constitution drafting process. Join the live event on the Quixote's Cove Facebook page.
30 August, 5pm-6:15pm



Dance lessons

Join Zumba, Jazz/Contemporary, and ballet classes with dancer Michèle van Alfen at SOLIS performing arts. Send an email at solisperformingarts@gmail.com to sign up for classes.
Fees: Rs1000

HOME

Comprising 5 themes, eight spaces, and 40 artists, this online exhibition exhibition from Kaalo.101 will attempt to question, address and challenge the idea of HOME within the virtual space. Join at <http://kaalo101.org/exhibitions/>
30 August



Quantum Hack

Join 'Quantum Hack', a 24-hour international hackathon that will include participants from 25 countries. The digital fair will host Apple's Steve Wozniak as he shares his ideas and experiences in tech. Register to be in the audience at <https://forms.gle/Wxerbt6ZSVGrzfY9>.
28-29 August

ONLINE GAMES

Microsoft Flight Simulator

Create flight plans to anywhere on the planet and fly the skies in highly detailed and accurate aircrafts from light planes to wide-body jets. Take up challenges of night flying, real-time atmospheric

simulation and live weather. Microsoft Flight Simulator includes 20 highly detailed planes with unique flight models and 30 hand-crafted airports. Charges apply.



GeoGuessr

This web-based geographic discovery game uses Mapillary to generate street views from around the world. Paying members can use semi-randomised Google Street View to guess places from around the planet. Find on the GeoGuessr website.

Arkadium

Arkadium is a veritable treasure trove of free games, no sign-up required. Browse through an online arcade of all types of games, from puzzle-based to numbers to memory-based. Go to the Arkadium website to get started.

Tetris

Tetris is sure to bring back a lot of childhood memories. Play the tile-matching video game for free online on the Tetris website.



Coolmath games

Find number and puzzle-based games on CoolMath games, a brain-training website where gaming meets logic. The games are suited to kids during lockdown.

HOME DINING



Sel roti

Set some time aside during the day and make some sel roti to enjoy during rainy afternoons. Pair it with aloo ko achar and have it with tea. Leftovers can be great for breakfast as well. Find instructions on YouTube.



Aloo ko achar

Break out that family recipe and make some spicy and tangy aloo ko achar. Use mustard oil and lemon to enhance the flavour, and add fresh peas and cucumber if they're available. Have it with lunch and dinner, or enjoy with some crunchy chiura.

Thukpa

Nothing pairs better than thukpa and rain. Enjoy a steaming bowl made with fresh vegetables and flavourful meat. Find recipes online.



Lassi

Missing the lassi from Indra Chok this summer? Round up some yoghurt and dry fruits, whip up some kurauni, and make some at home. Classic lassi can never go wrong, but add some banana to make the recipe more interesting.



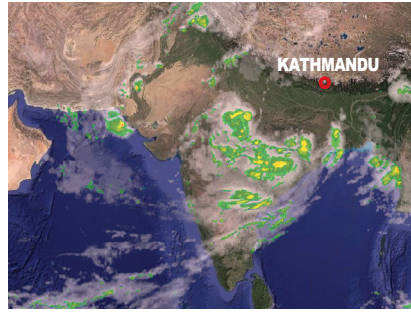
Chatpate

As the streets go silent during lockdown, bring the flavour of Nepal's street food home. Whip up some chatpate for an afternoon snack. Find instructions online or play with the ingredients and give it a fresh new spin. Don't forget the boiled potatoes!



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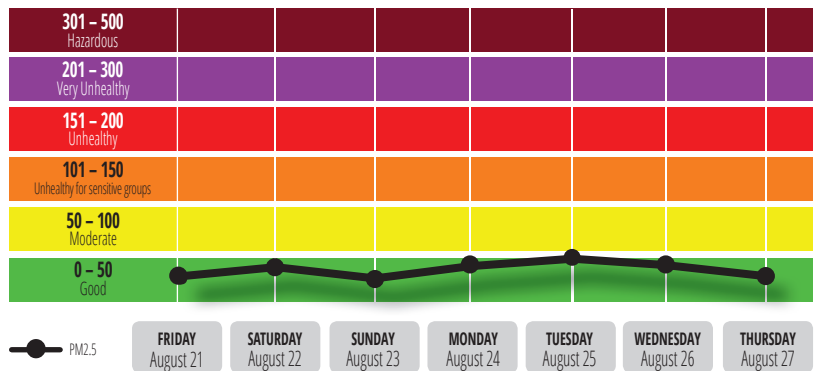


A huge monsoonal circulation crossed central India, grazing the Nepal mountains, bringing lots of rain this week. In its wake we have a brief respite of Dasain-like weather on Friday and over the weekend. There will be bright mornings with some brief, isolated squalls towards evening and night. However, heavy and sometimes destructive rains are expected to return early next week.



AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 21 - 27 August

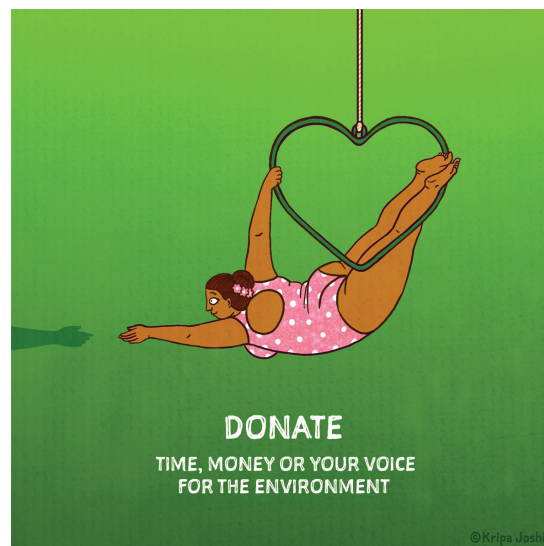


Restrictions on all movement and closure of businesses have done wonders for Kathmandu's otherwise polluted air. The concentration of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns was at an all time lows – average AQI stayed in the good 'Green' zone throughout this week. After a short break this weekend, more heavy rain is forecast from Monday which is more good news for air quality. Still, don't forget your mask, not to filter pollution so much, but to block virus-laden droplets.

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

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



There are numerous charities and non-profits trying to combat climate change. We can contribute by donating our time and money, or by lending our voices for the cause. For financial donations it is important to do some research to make sure the charities use the money efficiently and not for inflated salaries and overheads. It is worth looking into local and grassroots organisations. There are also plenty of ways to fight climate change that doesn't cost money. Volunteering is a great way to meet like-minded people, and to realise that we are not alone in the fight. Writers or artists can use our talents to convey ideas that will resonate with people. Teachers can discuss the issues with students. Activism comes in many forms and we can figure out how our capabilities and constraints could generate the biggest impact. #FridaysForFuture

OUR PICK



A Philadelphia couple Dorothy and Sean Turner hires a strange nanny named Leanne for their baby son, Jericho, who is actually a reborn doll. This is the premise of Apple TV+'s psychological horror *Servant*. The 10-episodes long web series featuring Lauren Ambrose, Toby Kebbell, Nell Tiger Free, and Rupert Grint in their finest has been renewed for a second season.

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

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।



नेपाल सरकार

सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

Resurrecting Kasthamandap from the rubble

Five years after the earthquake, a pavilion that embodied Kathmandu's cosmopolitanism is revived

Suvexa Pradhan Tuladhar

It was a quiet Saturday morning, and people were lining up for a blood donation drive inside the historic pavilion from which Kathmandu gets its name.

Four minutes before noon on 25 April 2015, the building started shaking. There was a frightening roar as nearby temples collapsed in clouds of yellow dust. Kasthamandap's ancient timber beams creaked and shook, but they could not withstand the force of the quake.

The structure collapsed before the blood donors could scramble out to safety, killing 10 of them. For the past five years this imposing pavilion, built on foundations said to be 1,500 years old, had just been a heap of rubble. But it is finally being restored.

Kathmandu was then on the historic trans-Himalayan trade route between India and Tibet, and Kasthamandap was the bustling rest house where buyers and sellers from the north and south mingled. The exchanges were not just of goods and commodities, but were also cultural and religious.

Kasthamandap means 'wooden pavilion', and legend has it that it was constructed from the timber of single giant tree. It is also colloquially called Maru Satha (empty rest house). Everything used to happen around Kasthamandap in the bustling Maru Bazar.

"You will still find people here selling old currency from Lhasa and India that have been passed on from one generation to another," says Alok Siddhi Tuladhar, a heritage conservationist and documentarian.

After it came down in 2015, there was controversy about how exactly to rebuild Kasthamandap. After much debate, restoration was entrusted to the Kasthamandap Reconstruction Committee, a citizen-led committee of 55 members made up of heritage experts, architects, government officials and the local community. Caged by its thick bamboo scaffold, the structure is now finally taking its original shape.

The first documented mention of Kasthamandap is from 1143 CE in a Namasangiti manuscript stored in Tibet's Saskya Monastery. This discredited the common notion that Kasthamandap was built by Laxmi Narsingh Malla in the 17th century. An excavation in 2016 by the Department of Archaeology and Durham University puts the origins of the site even further back to the 7th century CE.

Recent carbon dating also proved that a *mekh* (wooden joint) used in a wooden beam is even older — from the 5th century. Archaeologists have not found any evidence that there was a structure here from that far back,



and more site samples are needed. Archaeological digs have been delayed due to the pandemic and the cost of carbon dating.

Says project manager Manindra Shrestha: "Because we only found excavation evidence from just the central foundation, Kasthamandap might have been smaller in size during the 7th century."

This is disputed by Yagya Man Pati Bajracharya, a Buddhist priest who says he is a descendant of the original builders. "The dimensions

of Kasthamandap are ordained by religion, and that is supposed to be the way it is. I don't think it was smaller in the past."

Bajracharya is an authority on the subject and correctly predicted that there would be a nine-celled *mandala* under the central cell of the Gorakhnath Shrine. Sure enough, the excavations proved there was indeed a nine pit *mandap* in the foundation.

"That information was passed from generation to generation by my

DESTRUCTION TO RESTORATION:

Water colour from 1860 of Kasthamandap by Henry Ambrose Oldfield, who was a surgeon at the British Residency (above).

Reconstruction of the structure (left) using traditional techniques after the building collapsed in the 2015 earthquake, killing 10 blood donors inside (below).

ancestors," Bajracharya said. "There were written records, but these were destroyed by Jang Bahadur Rana during one of his tantrums."

Kasthamandap's origin is also shrouded in myth and legend. Bajracharya says it was built during the Licchavi era by a Buddhist priest and his own 43rd ancestor, as a rest house and mandap.

Another popular legend suggests that Kasthamandap was built from the wood of a single tree. The tree god Kalpa Brikshya visited Kathmandu once to witness the Machindranath chariot festival in human disguise. One of the Buddhist tantric priests recognised him and imprisoned the sage who promised anything for his freedom. The people of Kathmandu asked for timber to build Kasthamandap, and being the god of trees himself, Kalpa Brikshya magically created a massive tree enough to supply the Kasthamandap project.

But even after Kasthamandap was erected, there was so much leftover timber that two more buildings were constructed nearby whose names give away their origins: Sin Lyon Sattah (rest house built with leftover wood) and Sin Khon Mu Baha (Buddhist monastic complex built with spare wood).

"Kasthamandap's destruction was to be expected, it was not at all well maintained and past renovations were done in a rush," says Binita Magaiya, an architect involved in the reconstruction.

In 1960, Kasthamandap was

hurriedly repaired with cement for the visit of Queen Elizabeth without much attention to traditional materials. Due to this, one of the keystones that held the columns was improperly placed, and parts of the timber beam that was underground had rotted. This could not hold the monument's weight when the 2015 earthquake struck.

Says Rajesh Shakya, the head of Kasthamandap Reconstruction Committee, "The traditional methods of construction would not have failed. Every joint and corner was originally designed to withstand earthquakes."

Traditional seismic-resistant building techniques had copper shoes below the timber columns to extend their life stones to distribute the weight equally across the base. These technique are being revived.

With little to no architectural record of the original Kasthamandap, restoring the great structure from scratch was not easy. When the building came down, many of its elements were lost or mishandled. The Committee has been looking for some of the missing pieces for five years, most of a priceless 6m wooden frieze with Buddhist-Hindu motifs was recovered, and is being reinstalled.

"It was like a 3-D jigsaw puzzle, the picture does not come together even if one piece is lost," explains Shrestha.

Thankfully, German architect Wolfgang Korn's architectural drawings of Kasthamandap contained detailed measurements of Kasthamandap, and these proved invaluable in accurately recreating the structure.

Restoration architects also relied on sketches, paintings and old scripts to come up with the blueprint. It was not just getting the design right that was difficult, there were also very few who still had the necessary skill sets for rebuilding.

"There are few workers with traditional skills left in Kathmandu, and we have to bring craftsmen from Bhaktapur," said Shrestha, adding that each part of the restoration process is being meticulously recorded for future generations.

The saying goes that in Kathmandu the temples are for the gods, palaces are for kings, and *satal* (rest houses) were for ordinary people. And Kasthamandap was the biggest of its kind. Even on 25 April 2015, it was serving as a venue for public charity event.

Community effort was necessary in rebuilding a monument that had such great local significance. The resurrected Kasthamandap has also revived Kathmandu's intangible heritage of a sense of community and perhaps also the ancient cosmopolitanism of the pavilion.

Tuladhar says: "Kasthamandap was a home where everyone was welcomed, commoners and nobility, travelers and locals. It still embodies that spirit." 🇳🇵



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Race against time

There can be no selective indignation as racism remains tenaciously ubiquitous around the world

George van Driem

The great Nepali linguist बल्लभमणि दाहाल Ballabh Mani Dāhāl was the driving force behind the monumental dictionary नेपाली बृहत् शब्दकोश *Nepālī Brihat Śabdakoś*, the most authoritative edition of which appeared in the year 2040 (1983-84AD). Yet few will remember that this renowned lexicographer spent two years languishing in prison.

He was incarcerated in Phālgun 2017 (February-March 1961) and released from prison two years later on grounds of poor health in 1919. Twenty years later, his superb work of lexicography was published. His crime had been to indulge in forbidden love. His wife too was an eminent scholar, the renowned linguist सम्पदा सुब्बा Subhadrā Subbā, but he was a Brāhman and she was a Limbū, or rather a Limbunī.

The caste system is thousands of years old, but after the Gorkhali conquest of the Newa kingdoms in the Kathmandu Valley and the subsequent unification of Nepal, new legislation was needed to regulate the relations between the many castes, ethnic groups and language communities that had been incorporated into the kingdom.

In 1854, Jang Bahādūr Rānā promulgated the मुलुकी ऐन *Mulukī Ain*, an elaborate piece of legislation which regulated in painstaking detail how transgressions against caste would be punished in Nepal. The original manuscript of the law even contained one chapter on same-sex inter-caste pollution in order to sanction cases where two members of the same sex, but not of the same caste, had engaged in amorous activities.

Jang Bahādūr Rānā brought back a printing press from Europe in 1851, and the first printed version of the *Mulukī Ain* was published in the 1890s. The chapter on same-sex pollution was not included in the printed versions of the law because such material was not deemed suitable for a large readership, but Jean Fézas published the omitted chapter of the original manuscript in the *Journal Asiatique* in 1983.

The law meticulously detailed numerous punishments, ranging from fines and cruel corporeal punishments to the death penalty for transgressions against caste purity. Each type of inter-caste transgression was weighted differently, and the various fines for smaller transgressions were precisely counted out in rupees and pice.

Quite logically, punishments meted out for inter-caste pollution were far more severe in cases involving a man and a woman than in cases involving two men, and lesbian love lay entirely beyond the purview of the law. Between two amorous men, there was no risk of offspring of mixed genealogy, and the honour of a woman was not besmirched.

The severity of the prescribed punishments was based on which caste was doing what and to whom. Moreover, two members of an inter-caste liaison were not punished with equal severity. Close study of the stipulations of this penal code reveals the labyrinthine thinking inherent to the racist psychology of caste in fascinating detail.

With the imprisonment of Ballabh Mani Dāhāl, the Draconian provisions of the *Mulukī Ain* were no longer being enforced to the letter. His case became a *cause célèbre*. In 1963, after his release,



भिममती पङ्याङ्गु Bhimmatī Panyāngu, mater familias of the author's loving Limbu family

the *Mulukī Ain* was replaced by new legislation under King Mahendra.

I had the privilege of knowing both Ballabh Mani Dāhāl and Subhadrā Subbā, and it is relevant to reflect upon the fact that within living memory an inter-caste marriage was viewed as flagrant enough a violation against the sacrosanct institution of caste as to constitute a punishable offence.

Fortunately for us, Ballabh Mani Dāhāl did not languish in prison forever but went on to produce the greatest work ever of Nepali lexicography. Meanwhile, attitudes have changed, and increasing numbers of people have begun to embrace inter-caste unions with a passion. Yet ethnic stereotypes are deeply embedded in our psyche, and attitudes change only gradually.

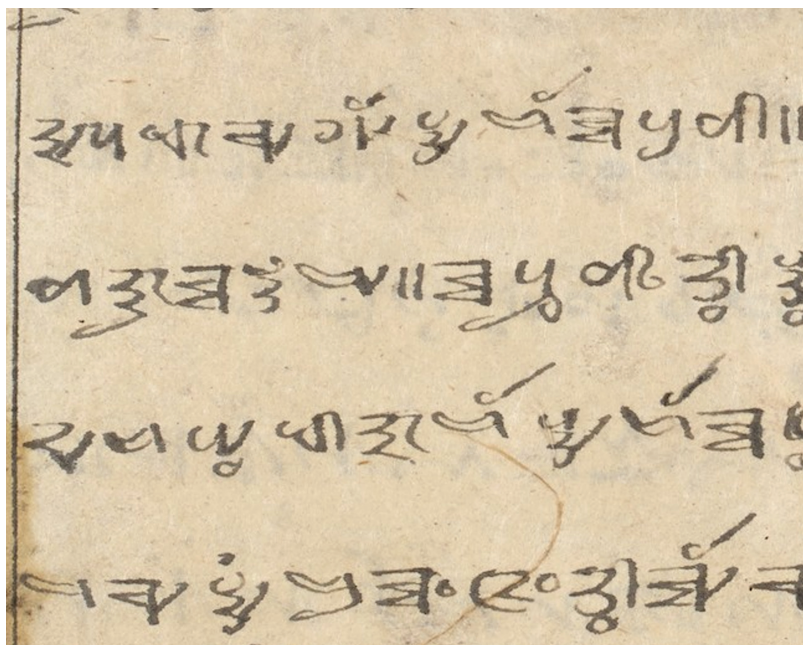
In 2000, I was warning myself in the sun, sitting on the broad staircase of the house of a well-to-do *Nuvākotī* Brahmin family. An auntie at the top of the stairs called out to the family on the ground floor to shoo me off of the stairway and to have them sweep the stairs.

It was all very well that her nephew had brought home a म्लेच्छ *Mlecch*, but she needed to be able to descend the stairs of her own house without having her caste purity being polluted by an untouchable कुइरे *kuire*. Needless to say, she deeply disapproved of my friendship with her nephew, who later accompanied me to Europe and settled in Amsterdam and who now, for all intents and purposes, is very much a Dutchman.

Immigration and naturalisation in the opposite direction are impossible. In stark contrast to the openness of western Europe, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, xenophobic legislation in Nepal enforces an ethnic bias that seals off Nepali society for immigration.

Even with the written approval of His Majesty King Birendra, it took Lt. Col. John Philip Cross 32 years, 6 months and 2 days before he was granted citizenship. When his struggle was finally rewarded, the legendary Gurkha figure was already deep into his retirement. Yet he is the lucky exception. This grudging attitude with respect to Nepali citizenship reflects a mind-set firmly rooted in the racial attitudes of the *Mulukī Ain*.

People pay for their phenotype



in Nepal and India. People who look like Nepalis or Indians can freely enter Bhaktapur or stroll around Kathmandu's historical centre. European citizens of South Asian extraction and even certain friends of mine from Hong Kong and Thailand are not charged because the criterion is a purely racial one. Imagine the public outcry if only people of European ancestry were allowed to freely stroll around the centre of Paris without being charged. Imagine the hue and cry if people who were judged not to 'look European' were charged more to ascend the Eiffel Tower.

In the 1980s, any friendship of mine with a Brahmin or Chetri was viewed with undisguised suspicion by the loving Limbu family with whom I lived in Limbuwan. In fact, I was carefully guarded against consorting too closely with any members of the पानी चल्ने जात *pānī calne jāt* or 'water-pure castes' of the *Mulukī Ain*, who the Limbu refer to colloquially by the unflattering term *cwal kelakpa* 'water lickers'.

The Directorate of Education in Gangtok has been producing Limbu schoolbooks since the 1970s, but in eastern Nepal in the 1980s families lucky enough to have retained deteriorating old Limbu manuscripts guarded these precious heirlooms in secrecy. For over a century the possession of books



The lovely couple who became Kamala's parents, Donald Jasper Harris and Shyamala Gopalan

in Limbu script had been a capital offence in the kingdom. The only completely intact old Limbu books from eastern Nepal were rescued by Brian Houghton Hodgson, to whom these texts had discretely been entrusted. The manuscripts are now safely stored out of harm's way in the British Library in London.

In 1983, a low-caste man in rural eastern Nepal who was twice my age took the trouble to explain to me that it was grammatically incorrect for me to address him as तपाईं *tapāi*. He asserted that only a foreigner could make such a mistake. Nepalis of high caste would, he insisted, never commit the error of using the deferential pronoun तपाईं *tapai* to address someone of his low artisanal caste. I should address him as तिमी *timi*, he insisted, whilst he addressed me as हजुर *hajur* and तपाईं *tapai*. In Nepali, pronominal usage has begun to change slowly, but such changes should be allowed to evolve naturally and not be forced by meddlesome politicians or language activists. The intricacies and the sheer beauty of the Nepali pronominal system is a topic on which I published a study last year.

Kamala Harris is not black.

In molecular genetic terms, we have understood for over half a century that distinct 'races' as separate subspecies of humankind are a fiction.

Kamala Harris is not *black*. She is

a human being. More specifically, Kamala Harris is not a negress. Her father appears to be a mulatto (French *mulâtre* or *câpre*) or perhaps a quadroon (Portuguese and French *quarteron*). Her mother was Tamil. So, she could be described as half-caste, but all such words are nowadays considered taboo by the squeamish, who wrongly think that any such label can diminish our humanity.

Besides, there exists a more precise term. The English word used in the Caribbean for an Indian and African *métissage* is dougla, sometimes written doogala. The term ultimately derives from Hindi दोगला *dogalā* 'half-breed'. In the caste-ridden society of the Indian subcontinent, the term implicitly used to carry the unpleasant connotation of 'bastard'.

Such traditional terms are not only more specific than the new construct 'black', but also less misleading. Barack Obama is described as the first 'black' president of the United States, but in view of his parentage he is no less of a 'white' man. The historically relatively novel and entirely artificial social construct 'black' fails to reflect any such sense of balance and ends up being no more informative than the label थिमल *thimāhā*.

As a politician, Kamala Harris will naturally be professionally inclined to posture in whatever way may strike her as most expedient at the moment. Yet, whichever way she chooses to identify herself in terms of her Asian, African and European ancestry, later this year she will have to change her name, as someone joked in Nepal's social web, from कमला हारिस् to कमला जितिस् .

The politics of 'race' has seen precious few parallel developments. Instead, by sanitising their language with euphemisms, people unwittingly admit to being ashamed of their own or someone else's ancestry. We say Viśvakarma instead of *kāmī*, and in the United States people say Afro-American instead of negro. Yet being bashful about biology, instead of being bold and brave, can backfire. 🇳🇵

Prof Dr George van Driem holds the chair for Historical Linguistics at the University of Bern in Switzerland and has for half a century nurtured an abiding love for Nepal.



Puneeta Sharma working on the restoration of the 160-year-old water colour on paper painting by Rajman Singh Chitrakar of a Tibetan antelope at the Zoological Society London.



The painting of the chiru antelope with Rajman Singh Chitrakar's caption below the margin

An antelope and an artist

An obscure 160-year-old painting from Nepal reveals a hidden history during restoration

Rabin Giri

A painting of a rare Tibetan antelope by a Nepali artist gifted by Jang Bahadur Rana to the British resident in Kathmandu in the mid-19th century has come alive thanks to the painstaking work of a British restoration artist of Indian descent.

The story of the 160-year-old painting from Nepal, and how it came to be stored at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), is an intriguing tale of the convergence of history, art, zoology and politics.

In 2014, Puneeta Sharma was looking for a graduation project at the Camberwell College of Arts in London and was going through the ZSL's archives when, in a collection of wildlife art from Britain's colonial possessions, she came across the painting of a *chiru*, the Tibetan antelope prized for its wool.

The fine shatoosh fur from the necks of baby antelopes is used to weave the finest pashmina shawls which are so valuable that the graceful animal that grazes on the western Tibetan Plateau has been hunted almost to extinction, because it takes the fur of four baby antelopes to make a single shawl.

There is even a theory that the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814-16 was fought because the East India Company wanted access to the high Himalayan passes to Tibet that were then controlled by the Gorkha Empire.

"It was a natural urge that made me want to preserve this work of art," Sharma recalls. "Much of it was because the artwork belonged



Close-up of the antelope's head reveals the fine detail.



The magnified caption in Rajman Singh Chitrakar's handwriting.

to Nepal, a close neighbour of my parents' country."

The gauche painting was water colour on Nepali lokta paper, measuring 83.5 x 63.5cm and was deteriorating with age. Even more intriguing were two inscriptions on the painting. One was a Devnagari caption, and the other in English at the back read: 'Birds and mammals done by my painter. Sent to me by Jung Bahadur.'

This was in the handwriting of Brian Houghton Hodgson (1820-43) who was the first British Resident in Kathmandu, a keen naturalist and who served as one of the earliest links between Kathmandu Valley and the outside world.

Hodgson spent more of his time immersing himself into Kathmandu's culture, indigenous inhabitants and researching Nepal's incredible biodiversity than being a

listening post for the Company. At his own expense he trained a group of Nepali research assistants to collect plant and animal specimen, preserve and paint them.

One of his apprentices was Rajman Singh Chitrakar, whose pencil sketches are an important pictorial record of 19th century Kathmandu Valley. As it turns out, the Devnagari caption below the painting was by Rajman Chitrakar.

Puneeta at first thought it might be Hindi, and sought the help of her parents who had left India to settle in UK in 1970, but they could not make sense of it. Her grandmother in India could not decipher it either. Then she approached her uncle Major General Vijay Kumar Dutt, who had served with Gorkha troops in the Indian Army.

He translated the Nepali sentence roughly to read: "The deer

is roaming in the king's jungle."

It turns out that although the painting was by a Nepali artist, the *chiru* antelope was not from Nepal at all. In his book the *Prisoner of Kathmandu: Brian Hodgson in Nepal*, Charles Allen (who died last week at the age of 80) says the antelope was in fact reared at a monastery in Tibet of the Tashi Lama, the second spiritual leader after the Dalai Lama.

The *chiru* was gifted to the king of Nepal, who gave it to Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa, who then passed it on to Brian Hodgson because of his interest in exotic Himalayan wildlife. But the antelope never got used to the heat in Kathmandu and died within a month at the British Residency in Lazimpat. Hodgson then sent the fur and horns of the animal to Clarke Abel at the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta.

Rajman Chitrakar painted the antelope, and from Hodgson's writing at its back one can surmise that Jang Bahadur gifted this painting and others to the British Resident, with whom he was close.

The *chiru* was one of the first mammals that Hodgson introduced into the world, personally naming the species, the *Patholops hodgsonii* in 1834. According to ornithologist Carol Inskipp it is believed that Hodgson transported specimens of 9,512 species of animals and birds from Nepal and Darjeeling to the UK. Among them, 124 species had

never before been classified.

Hemsagar Baral, who represents ZSL in Nepal says that much of what we know today about Nepal's biodiversity is still from Hodgson's records in the 1830s, and the drawings and paintings done by his Nepali assistants. In fact, even though it has not been sighted in Nepal for 200 years, the *chiru* is recorded in the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act of Nepal as an indigenous endangered species.

For a more exact translation of Rajman Chitrakar's inscription in the back of his painting, we approached archivist Shamik Mishra at the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya in Kathmandu. Mishra's translation is somewhat different from that done by Puneeta Sharma's military uncle: 'This *chiru* animal lives in the snow in the jungles of China's Thiri state.'

Puneeta Sharma now works as a conservator in the Royal Collection Trust at Windsor Castle. Her thesis titled *The Convergence of a Watercolour and Gauche Painting 1840* has recorded the painstaking restoration of the painting that was framed, and moved from the ZSL's warehouse to a pride of place on the wall of its library.

She says: "Many visitors are attracted by this beautiful painting, and 160 years after it was created, Rajman Chitrakar's painting is still introducing Nepal to the world." 🇳🇵



No one really knows what Rajman Singh looked like, but this is how his descendant Madan Chitrakar imagined him for a postage stamp in 2012.

As India peaks, Covid-19 spreads rapidly in Nepal

Sonia Awale

Although the initial wave of coronavirus cases in Nepal were from across the border in India, public health experts now say it makes no sense to blame imported infection because the virus is now spreading in the community.

India is now the country with the third largest caseload with over 3.3 million confirmed cases, and up to 70,000 new infections every day—the highest in the world. More than 60,000 people have died. But compared to its 1.3 billion population, this is still low, and India’s fatality rate of 1.87% is one of the lowest globally.

Yet, age-adjusted mortality rate paints an entirely different picture, which looks very similar to that of Nepal – SARS-CoV-2 is killing far higher percentages of younger people than in developed countries.

Covid-19 similarities between India and Nepal do not end there: already poor health infrastructure in both countries are overwhelmed, there is societal stigma, health workers are infected, politicians have died, and the movement of migrant workers has affected people on both sides of the border.

What happens in India has always impacted Nepal because the two countries share an open border, and this pandemic is no different. Indian states bordering Nepal are some of the most affected: Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar have 477,517 cases between them.

Nepal saw the first surge of Covid-19 cases in late March when hundreds of thousands of Nepalis working in India come back home following lockdowns in both the countries. Between 8 March and 2 July alone, an estimated 500,000 Nepalis returned from India. While they were quarantined in the first few weeks, later arrivals were allowed to go straight home to their villages for self-isolation.

“Nepal will always be at the risk because of the porous open border, even during the lockdown thousands of people managed to sneak in illegally,” says Sher Bahadur Pun of the Health Ministry. “Even if we are able to control the spread of the virus in Nepal and bring the cases down, we will never be safe until the virus spreading is not under control in India.”

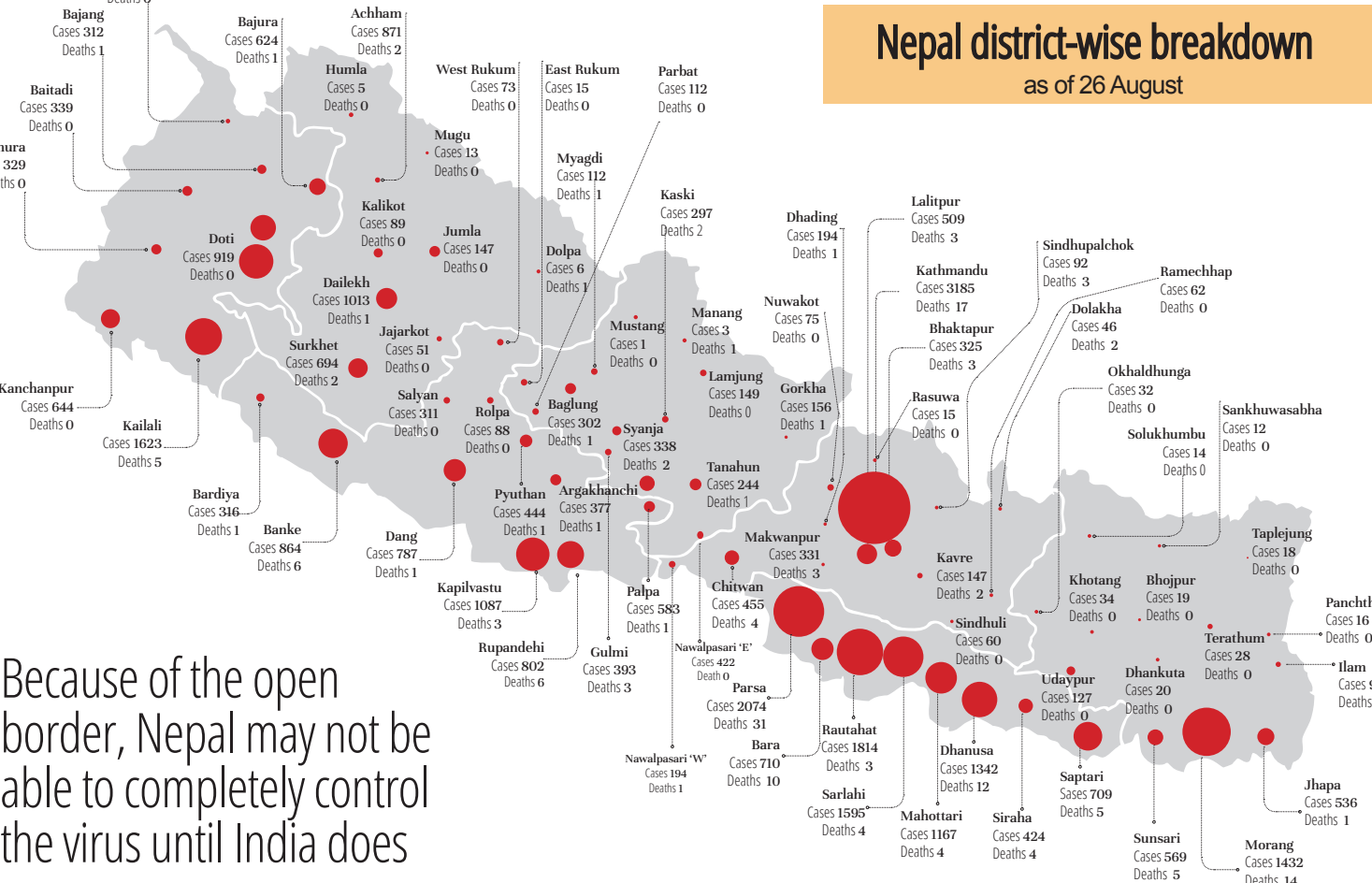
The second wave of infections happened after Nepal’s lockdown was relaxed on 21 June, at a time when Covid-19 was raging across Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Thousands of Indian workers poured across the border to rejoin jobs in factories along the Tarai industrial corridors.

The border district of Parsa, which had brought the virus under control, was suddenly hit by an outbreak that spread like wildfire. From Birganj, the virus travelled easily to Kathmandu, making the Valley the next hotspot.

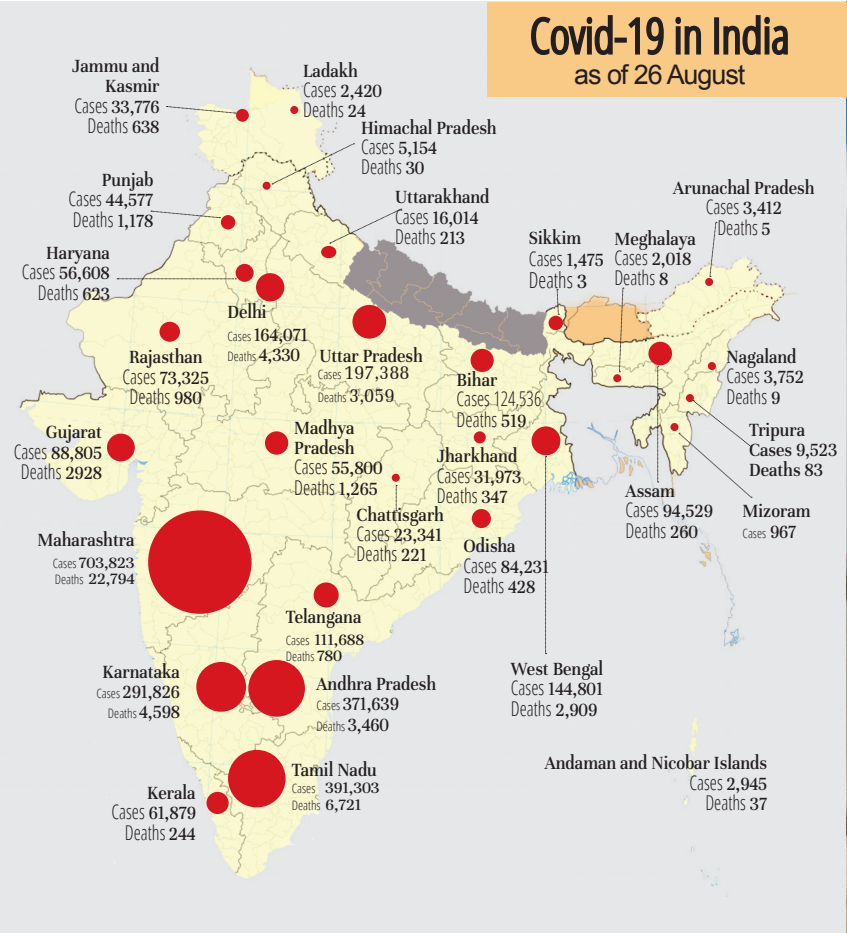
As of 27 August, Nepal has registered 35,529 confirmed cases with 183 fatalities. On Thursday there were a record 1,111 new cases in Nepal and another record-breaking 377 in Kathmandu Valley. Ten of Nepal’s 77 districts now have over 1,000 cases, Kathmandu leads with 3,455 cases. Nationwide, the recovery rate has dropped from 73% in July to 56.7% now, and most new cases are symptomatic, or patients are serious enough to need ICU care.

It is now clear that the clusters have merged and are spreading in the community. But just like with polio eradication, Nepal will not be able to fully defeat SARS-CoV-19 until the virus it is under control in India.

Because of this, public health experts say Nepal has no choice but to enforce



Because of the open border, Nepal may not be able to completely control the virus until India does



distancing, mask wearing, hand-washing and other precautions. The current lockdown in Kathmandu has been extended till 2 September, and experts say that since the virus is here to stay we have to learn to live with it.

“If we can successfully implement safety measures and control the movement of the people at the border and inside the country, what is happening in India should not affect us so much,” says public health expert Sameer Mani Dixit, who is a strong advocate for test-trace-treat instead of complete shutdowns.

For example, despite India’s heavy daily caseload and fatalities, the country has opened limited domestic and international flights, trains, public transport and shops. This has reduced the hardship that the most vulnerable suffered initially.

There are also lessons to be learned from Delhi, which used to be a hotspot. The recovery rate there has surged from 55% in June to 90%, and its aggressive testing, tracing

and home isolation are measures Nepal could easily emulate.

The ‘Kerala Model’ is also worth noting: public health authorities there prioritised early detection through extensive testing, widespread contact tracing, and 28-day quarantines for everyone infected. Despite being the first state to report a case of Covid-19, and having a huge population of returnees from the Gulf, Kerala has among the lowest fatality rates in India.

“These models are particularly useful because over half of our cases are still asymptomatic, which means we need to keep up active contact tracing, mass testing and surveillance,” says Sher Bahadur Pun.

“We also still need to better communicate safety measures, having a figure that the public trusts endorse masks and distancing will be very effective because lockdowns are not a long-term solution. Behavioural change is,” adds Pun, pointing out that public messaging by Amitabh Bachchan helped

spread awareness in India.

Indeed, lockdowns only seem to provide a false sense of security and would have been unnecessary if the public had adopted the safety measures after 21 July. The economic cost of five months of Nepal lockdown, and the lack of treatment of existing diseases threaten to far outweigh benefits of continued restrictions.

Recently, the Nepal Health Research Council decided to allow international researchers to conduct Covid-19 vaccine trials in Nepal as part of a global effort to stop the virus. There are at least 30 vaccines in clinical trials across India. However, experts warn that vaccine by themselves are not a panacea.

Says Sameer Mani Dixit: “It looks like we are very close to peaking in Nepal, which is not to say there won’t be sporadic spikes, it will continue to happen until we have a vaccine. But in the meantime mandatorily wearing masks and not crowding will be the way of life of the future.”