





# A humanitarian emergency

If there is just one deed Prime Minister K P Oli's reincarnated government should perform in the month it has to try to prove it has the confidence of Parliament, it is to make up for the time it wasted in handling the pandemic so far.

The inexcusable negligence of the past year has added to decades of neglect so that the country's second Covid-19 spike has overwhelmed an underprepared health system.



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

Last year's first wave exposed gaps, especially in border testing, quarantine centres, hospital beds, oxygen, medical personnel, and drugs. It gave us enough time to prepare.

A large part of the problem is structural: political leaders lacking accountability, a lethargic state, the corruption and greed that drives the private medical-industrial complex. We do not even have a reactive government, we have a government that does not react at all.

Much before the pandemic was on the horizon, Govinda KC had been on serial hunger strikes pressing for reforms that would make healthcare more affordable and accessible to more Nepalis. Many called him "mad".

The one advantage Nepal has is that India serves as an early warning system of what is to come 2-3 weeks later. The curve is flattening in north Indian cities, but we have advance warning to prepare for the second wave now ravaging rural India. Many of these villages are just across the border from Nepal.

The virus has infiltrated nearly every family in even remote hamlets in this country. The health care system there is not just rudimentary, it is non-existent. No one is testing, and when people die it will not even register in the Ministry of Health's official daily Covid-19 count. A village in Rolpa this week tested 43 people, the PCR results came back a week later with 42 positives. Left to fend for themselves, local governments are struggling to cope.

The challenge for the government, as always, is to set priorities and deliver results. At Monday's Cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Oli made a call to arms to wage war on the

virus. The Health Ministry will now lead a 'Unified Command' to coordinate response. What happened to the CCMC?

The first order of business is to manage the supply chain for medical oxygen. Kathmandu Valley alone produces 12,000 cylinders a day, but its hospitals need 22,000. Cylinders are being flown in from China, Oman and elsewhere, but the bottleneck now is gas production.

Remdesivir and plasma therapy are over-hyped, expensive steroids are unproven. Physicians advocate Paracetamol for early fever, oxygen when saturation drops below 92, and the cheap and easily available steroid Dexamethasone, which is shown to significantly decrease mortality in patients requiring oxygen. Public service announcements on

proper masking, distancing and being careful must go beyond mobile ringtones, and better social enforcement is needed.

A lockdown is not the cure-all. It just buys us time to conduct mass testing and vaccination. Nepal started out well with vaccines in March, but it ground to a halt after the Indian ban on Covishield export.

India has reportedly assured us that Nepal is 'priority' when shipments resume. The least Delhi can do is allow the Serum Institute of India to send the one million doses Nepal already paid for, so that those waiting for their second doses, and others left out in the 59-65 age cohort can get their shots.

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

US President Biden has promised to supply 80 million vaccines in the next six weeks to countries around the world, but it is not clear if the list includes Nepal. Meanwhile, the French dump AstraZeneca doses people are refusing to take. Canada is sitting on a stockpile that is reaching its expiration date. On Monday, Unicef made an urgent appeal to G7 leaders to protect themselves by vaccinating the world.

Nepal's health crisis is already a humanitarian emergency. Together with rapid international response, Nepal's leaders have to demonstrate the same acumen they have shown for fighting each other to fight the virus.

## Nepal's leaders need to demonstrate the same acumen they have shown for fighting each other to fight the virus.

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### How times have not changed

Back in 2001, the infighting within the then ruling party Nepali Congress reached a point where it paralysed the country helpless even as its people suffered through the ruinous Maoist insurgency at its peak.

Raising healthcare standards, improving the quality of education and equitable development was an afterthought, much like it is now as political leaders fight it out during a pandemic. How the times have not changed!

For much of the past year until now Prime Minister K P Oli's administration had been bogged down with intra- and inter-party power struggles, preventing it from concentrating on battling the pandemic.

As a result, the country and its health system are at a breaking point with the second wave spreading unchecked. As our reports this week reveal, people are now dying due to the lack of oxygen, not strictly succumbing to Covid-19.

Nonetheless, these lines from the editorial 20 years ago this week in issue #43 18-24 May 2001 might as well have been written today. Excerpts:

Analysts have come up with many analogies to describe the present state of the nation: a patient in intensive care, a village on a volcano, a boat



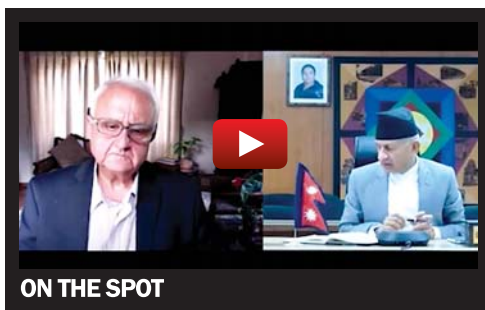
that has sprung a leak, a truck falling off a cliff. But the best one we have heard so far in the cocktail circuit is a jet with a major systems malfunction that is diving towards the ground, while the captain and co-pilot are busy punching each others' faces, as a hijacker behind them holds a gun to their heads. Go figure out who is who.

Pretty soon, at the rate we are going, there will be nothing left to fight over. Here we are, confronting one of the most perilous times in our nation's history and our elected politicians are behaving as if it is plunder as usual. At a time when we need a national consensus, we are at our most divisive. At a time when we need decisive leadership, we have vacillation

and a twiddling of thumbs. At a time when we need transparency and accountability, the looting has gone into high gear. At a time when we need to be delivering health care and education on a war footing, we are footing a war. And there is even a sickening scramble on to pocket kickbacks on the paraphernalia to fight that war.

From archives material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

## ONLINE PACKAGES



Watch our *Saglo Samaj* tv magazine program with a special interview of Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali where journalist Kanak Mani Dixit asks him about the government's response to the pandemic so far, and its strategy to deal with the crisis now that there is a brief respite from the political stalemate. Interview: *page 4-5*.



Go online to watch two episodes in which host Kanak Mani Dixit takes us on a tour of Lumbini, Tilaurakot and Ramgram to talk to archaeologists, monks and Buddhist scholars about the importance of these historical and religious sites.

### OXYGEN IN DEMAND

Ministry of Tourism needs to cancel Everest Expedition 2021 ('Nepal's diaspora comes to the rescue', [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)). Return the permit fees and call it off. Imagine how many cylinders are stocked up there for 2,000 climbers?

**Vairochana Sherpa**

Those cylinders are bought from hard earned money of our migrant workers so I hope it reaches to needy and ill people instead of being piled in someone's storage.

**Sabina Shrestha**

Meanwhile, O2 canisters aplenty available to all those paying money to climb Nepal's mountains. Also worth asking - how many are just laying around, discarded on the slopes of those mountains?

**Alex Ferguson**

### SECOND WAVE

Until and unless the people realise that the state is in an emergency, the political system - irrespective of how fancy it may sound - will neither flourish nor institutionalise ('We knew the tsunami was approaching', Anita Bhetwal, #1061).

**Shail Shrestha**

The current recommended gap between two doses of Covishield is 14 weeks. Hopefully there will next batch for the 2nd dose of our above 65 age group but it's not going to come from India.

**Sabina Shah Pahari**

Vaccine mix and match is being considered in Canada and will likely be approved ('We knew the tsunami was coming', Anita Bhetwal, #1061). Maybe those in Nepal who've received first jab of AZ/Covishield from India can be given a second dose of another vaccine through a different supply chain.

**Ajay Pradhan**

I don't know you, but I wish you a very fast recovery ('I'm down but not out', Anita Bhetwal, #1061). I'm from the United States. My wife and I have been to Nepal in 2017 and 2018.

**Ronald Meyer**

### NATURE

A well-written article with beautiful photography ('Nature's fragile gift to Nepal', Ajay Narsingh Rana, #1061). I love Nepal's natural world!

**Bryan Hitan**

### OLI ONCE AGAIN

Yeah, on the saddle like when Don Quixote attacked the windmill ('Nepal PM Oli back on saddle', Kunda Dixit, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)).

**Lal Bahadur**

### REMITTANCE

Development agencies have consistently been too gloomy about the resilience of remittances ('More remittance, more than remittance', Upasana Khadka, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)). There are many reasons why they have held up and even increased in 2020. Nepal will need everything it can get though, as the cost of the epidemic for the domestic economy will be huge.

**David Seddon**

### FIGHTING BACK COVID

How wonderful!! All Nepalis should encourage and support efforts like these ('Rural Nepal fights back Covid-19', Rural Nepal fights Covid-19', Masta KC, [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)). Let me know if I can be of help.

**Aashish Jha**

That is a good solution for Nepal. It needs more testing, and not only of people who are ill and have symptoms.

**beartsyNGO**

Exactly what is needed, door-to-door vaccination could also be planned so as to avoid crowding and boost mass immunisation.

**Anusha**

**Times.com**

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### I'm down, but not out

by Anita Bhetwal

*Saglo Samaj* tv magazine reporter talks about how she contracted Covid-19 while reporting on the story, and how she has been working from home despite fatigue and loneliness, just to keep her morale up. Read her experience and watch video on [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

**f Most reached and shared on Facebook**

### We knew the tsunami was approaching

by Anita Bhetwal

Despite the warning signs in India, we were complacent. A political power struggle delayed government response, and public ignored safety measures leading to a health crisis that Nepal is not equipped to handle. Follow our social media platforms for latest developments.

**t Most popular on Twitter**



### Nepal's diaspora comes to the rescue

by Upasana Khadka

Nepal's migrant workers in West Asia, who were left largely to fend for themselves by their government when the pandemic hit last year, have come to the rescue by dispatching oxygen cylinders home. Go online to read feedback.

**💬 Most commented**

### Concern in China over Nepal Covid-19 surge

by Aneka Rebecca Rajbhandari and Raunab Singh Khatri

The devastating second wave in South Asia has prompted Chinese netizens to urge their government to help Nepal. As such, 3,000 of the 20,000 empty oxygen cylinders gifted by China have been flown in. Another 2,500 cylinders have come overland through Kodari.

**🔍 Most visited online page**

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
The second wave is projected to peak with at least 15,000 cases a day by July. But nothing is stopping #Nepal from falling victim to the 3rd, 4th and more waves. The only way out of this #pandemic is herd immunity through mass #vaccination. @SagloSamaj

**Ajaya Deuba @AjayaDeuba**  
I hope before the catastrophic waves destroy the country, the government will wake up and look into tackling the situation with urgency. Political supremacy cannot be above the lives of many.

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Nepal Investment and Himalayan banks are merging in two months to become the largest financial institution in the country.

**Prakash Koirala @lightkoirala**  
Hopefully they will be able to achieve their growth goals quicker and scale up their banking operations. Customer's response/perception would be an example for other BFs as well. #BankingInNepal

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
"EU will stand by Nepal in hard times". Team Europe will do its part so that 20% of Nepal's population is vaccinated under the #COVAX initiative. Guest Column by Nona Deprez, Ambassador and Head of @EUinNepal.

**NirGhiSha @nirmalktm**  
Strong institutional commitment demonstrated by EU at a time when there is a deep state governing behind the scenes to loot state coffers and exploit people with the pretext of vaccines and medical service in Nepal amidst the pandemic.

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Nepali migrant workers in the Gulf region collectively raised money to rush 560 oxygen cylinders which arrived in Kathmandu on Saturday evening on a Nepal Airlines flight from Muscat.

**Prabhakar Bagchand @PBagchand**  
Those working in the Gulf region are our true Ambassadors. They are the ones who sweat it out in more than 50 degree Celsius to feed their children. Now they show their exemplary love and concern for their fellow citizens and mother land.

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Three days after he lost a confidence vote in Parliament PM Oli remains in office after dividing the other parties to ensure they could not muster the numbers to form a new coalition. Analysis by @kundadixit

**Forester @kuenvmgt504**  
All politicians have earned the eternal disgust and contempt from the suffering dying hopeless Nepalese.

**Times**

**f Nepali Times on Facebook**  
**t Follow @nepalitimes on Twitter**  
**📷 Follow @nepalitimes on Instagram**

Publisher and Editor: Kunda Dixit

Audience Engagement: Sahina Shrestha, Associate Editor: Sonia Awale, Layout: Kiran Maharjan

Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu

editors@nepalitimes.com | [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com) | [www.himalmedia.com](http://www.himalmedia.com)

Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518





A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 



# HIGHEST HONORS COME WITH HIGHEST STANDARDS

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



**TURKISH AIRLINES**

01-4438363 | 01-4438436 | [ktmsales@thy.com](mailto:ktmsales@thy.com)



# “Nepal is a priority for vaccine s



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



**Kanak Mani Dixit: Both the government and citizens are blamed for the second wave. But was it not the government's job to warn people of the risks?**

**Pradeep Gyawali:** It is true that there were lapses, we knew the wave was coming but the state was bogged down with party power struggles and that prevented us from concentrating on battling the pandemic. But it is not that the government has stood idly by, since last year we had added testing centres, HDUs, ICUs, ventilators. But this second wave was so aggressive, all this was not enough. For example, last year only the really serious patients needed oxygen, this time there are more patients needing critical care, which means more oxygen flow. Our preparations were not enough to

deal with the severity of the second wave.

**If the situation is so serious, why does the government not declare a health emergency?**

The existing Infectious Disease Act gives the government the power to punish those flouting rules to stop the spread of communicable diseases. Many have advised us that we should declare a health emergency which would allow the state to deploy private hospitals to treat patients, and get all agencies of the state to concentrate solely on health. But so far, the existing laws are adequate to deal with the situation.

**Are there plans to make the CCMC more effective?**

We set up the CCMC because the

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

**Maybe we need more than 'coordination'? Maybe we need more effective and accountable leadership.**

The Health Ministry gives a good daily briefing. But Covid response is not just a health issue, there are decisions regarding supplies, transport, enforcement that need to be conveyed better to the public.

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

**The prime minister told CNN that Nepal had the pandemic under control, a few days later in an appeal in The Guardian, he asked the international community for urgent help. Why this mixed message?**

It also depends on how the question is framed. CNN asked if it was true that the Covid-19 pandemic was out of control in Nepal. Even in the current situation, we cannot say it is out of control, and it is not. It is true that we are overstretched, and there are shortages of hospital beds and oxygen, but that does not mean that it is out of control, and we have surrendered. We have been telling the international community that

the country is in difficulty at the moment, and the reason is that we have a 1,800km open border with India. This has really stretched us to the limits.

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

I was in India in January, and we put forward our case for the AstraZeneca Covishield vaccine. Nepal became the second country in South Asia to start vaccinations. We got 1 million doses as a grant from India, after that we bought 2 million, of which 1 million doses were delivered. Then China gifted us 800,000 VeroCell vaccines, under the COVAX initiative we got 348,000 doses. India separately provided 100,000 doses for the Nepal Army. So we have received more than 3.2 million doses so far, and about 2.2 million so far have been fully or partially vaccinated which is about 8-9% of the total population. This means we rank 80th in the world in vaccinations, which is not bad. We paid for 2 million doses of Covishield at \$4 a dose, a price the government set, of which 1 million doses were sent immediately. But then the pandemic suddenly spread in India and the court and government there banned exports. There was no other reason for the non-delivery of the remaining 1 million doses, it was not because of any middlemen or commissions.

**But the Health Minister himself accused middlemen behind the delay.**

He was not talking about the 2 million. After this we tried to buy another 5 million doses from India and that deal did not happen because there was demand for vaccines within India itself, but it is true that the Serum Institute of India told us to talk to their authorised agent in Nepal. However, we said we sent you advance payment of which half the doses have not even

## prabhu BANK



### Clean mountains

Nepal Army's Mountain Cleaning Campaign 2021 to collect waste from Mt Everest, Lhotse, Makalu, Dhaulagiri, Pumori and Ama Dablam has reached halfway. The 112-member team comprising of army personnel and Sherpas have so far collected 21,167kg of waste, including human remains and the wreckage of a helicopter at Dhaulagiri Base Camp. The one year exercise has a target of removing 35 tons of trash off the mountains. "The operation has been arduous, and we are determined to retrieve even more waste in the second half of the project," says Lt Col Dipak Bhandari.

### Inflation down

Nepal's inflation rate this year is down to 3.1% from 6.74% same time last year. Nepal Rastra Bank says transportation prices have increased by 8.77% from last year, clothing accessories by 2.82%. Prices of ghee and oil is up 21.38%, meat by 12.61% and lentils 8.84%. Meanwhile, vegetable prices fell by 11.67%, spices by 8.46% and fruits 1.97%.

### Tourism recovery

The preliminary findings of Kathmandu Living Labs' Cities' Covid-19 Mitigation Mapping (C2M2) project point to an urgent need to protect tourism industry from Covid-induced collapse. Some 86% of the 200 respondents said they had negative savings due to the pandemic and 61% have seen their revenue stop completely, 65% had no job in the first wave and 48% reported zero savings. And despite government's provisions for formal borrowing, 60% of those who took loans during the pandemic secured them from friends and family.

"A flat policy will not consider different problems afflicting the hotel and mountaineering industry. The government must set up sectoral task forces to develop tailor-made solutions for each sub-industry," said former CEO of Nepal Tourism Board Deepak Raj Joshi, speaking at the virtual event.



### MCC clears EIA

The Ministry of Forestry and Environment has approved the EIA of the Electricity Transmission Project (ETP) funded by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC).

The ETP involves 314km of 400kV transmission lines and three 400kV sub-stations. The transmission lines will pass through 30 municipalities and rural municipalities in 10 districts. With Nepal's energy generation set to hit 5,000 MW in three years, Nepal's transmission lines need urgent upgrading.

"The achievement is an important milestone to help meet one

condition related to site access before the MCC Compact can enter into force," said Khadga Bahadur Bisht, Executive Director of MCA-Nepal, "The other important milestone will be ratification of the Compact."



### Poetry winners

The winners of a poetry writing contest organised by Daya Foundation and Rotary Club of Kathmandu Mid-town were announced at a webinar on Saturday 8 May. The theme of this contest was Expressing Identity & Culture, and had 150 entries. Winners from English and Nepali language categories recited their poetry and got prizes worth Rs 10,000 and Rs 5,000. Judges were, English Category: Keshab Sigdel, Lisa Choegyal, Bal Bahadur Thapa, and Salil Subedi. Nepali Category: Ram Prasad Dahal, Kumari Lama, Dhundi Raj Pahadi, and Thakur Sharma.



### FinMin Covid relief

The Finance Ministry has set aside Rs4.32 billion for hospitals to increase capacity and purchase equipment to battle the second wave. Of the allocated, Rs2.95 billion has been directed to 26 central and 9 provincial hospitals for ventilators, oxygen plants and oxygen tanks. The rest has been set aside for 25 other central and provincial hospitals to install High Dependency Units (HDUs).



# Shipments”



been delivered. It is unfortunate that without even understanding it, the opposition parties have turned this humanitarian issue into a political agenda.

We are in talks with Sinopharm to buy 2 million doses of VeroCell for delivery by June. The second is the Russian Sputnik vaccine for which we have already provided permission for emergency use, but the problem is that Russia is not producing enough. Even so, we have said we need 8 million doses, of which 4 million are required right away. We are waiting for their answer.

Then there is America which has booked and bought 60 million doses of AstraZeneca, and we have activated diplomatic channels to convince the Americans that they

should provide us some of these doses. In addition, we are also knocking on COVAX's doors. They have also put Nepal on a priority to provide enough vaccines for 20% of our population, which is 1.4 million doses.

**What of those 18 and above who should have got the Sinopharm vaccine, the 100,000 above 65 who didn't get their shots of Covishield, and why were the 59-65 age group left out?**

Our plan was to use the next consignment of 1 million doses to inoculate the 800,000 people in the 59-65 age group with the first dose, but when those vaccines did not come, we could not deprive those who had already got their first shots from their second doses.

So we decided to give it to the above 65, but even here as you point out, 100,000 were left out. So far, we have administered 1.75 million AstraZeneca Covishield, and for the second dose we need that same amount of Covishield, as well as for those above 65 who were missed out. Our strategy now is to get at least 2.5 million Covishield for this cohort, either from the Serum Institute or other AstraZeneca plants. For those below 65, we are trying the other vaccines, whichever we can get first. We are aware of those who were left out, and are trying to cover them as quickly as we can.

**The oxygen shortage is a disaster. What is being done to ensure adequate supply?**

We definitely did not do enough to install adequate oxygen generators in the past year. This time, after the oxygen crisis hit, we stopped the non-medical industrial use of oxygen which used to make up about 30% of our production. This meant we could deploy 10,000 cylinders from industries to hospitals. We have also directed all oxygen plants to operate at 100% capacity, and to increase production in others. We still need cylinders, but much more urgent is increasing the capacity to generate oxygen, and we are trying to increase the import of liquid oxygen, and bring in medium-sized air-based oxygen plants.

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

I don't think so. Ever since last year, we have tried to increase the capacity of the provinces and municipalities to deal with the crisis. What we were not prepared for was just how contagious and lethal this variant would be. Nepalganj got hit first and the infection rate there is still high, but they are managing. Butwal and Sudur Paschim Province are also under a lot of stress. Other than that, the hospitals and local governments are trying to cope with this crisis.

**How do you see the role of non-profits and civil society in dealing with the pandemic?**

Last year, we had to conduct an emergency repatriation of Nepali workers from the Gulf and Malaysia, and non-resident Nepalis played a very important role. This year too, Nepalis abroad have been helping, and I would also request them to continue lobbying with the governments of the countries they work in to assist Nepal at this time of crisis.

Within the country, it pains me to say this, but it seems that some sections of civil society feel that their sole role is to oppose everything the government does. As if they are not citizens unless they oppose the government. This is not right. Civil society includes media, NGOs, and others and which play an important role in disseminating correct information, to raise public morale at a time of crisis. This is not to say that the media

should suppress news about fatalities or the lack of oxygen, but when you say there were 9,000 new cases today why leave out the fact that 5,000 recovered? The government should not be alone in this fight, every citizen needs to be a part.

We have encouraged non-governmental organisations to help fight the pandemic, but without overlapping with the government, and to coordinate so that it conforms to our priority areas. We are also wondering why some of them are not putting in more effort. On the part of the government we will do our best to facilitate. Let's just try not to have a case of too much in one place, and too little in others.

We face difficult days. But however difficult they may be, they will soon pass. So let us keep our hope, beliefs and self-confidence levels up. Let us remember that only if we ourselves are safe can we make society secure.



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

TATA MOTORS  
Connecting Aspirations

TATA

NEW  
FOREVER

A WHOLE NEW WORLD OF POWERFUL  
& ADVANCED CARS FROM TATA MOTORS

NEXON  
With Electric Sunroof

TIGOR  
New Powerful  
BS6 Engines with AMT

ALTROZ  
India's Safest Hatchback

TIAGO  
New Powerful  
BS6 Engines with AMT

H5  
with Automatic Transmission  
and Panoramic Sunroof

SAFETY IS NEW FOREVER  
— GLOBAL NCAP —  
★★★★★  
Safest Range with 5-Star  
and 4-Star Rated Cars

DRIVING PLEASURE IS NEW FOREVER  
Multi-drive Modes  
Automatic Transmission  
Powerful BS6 Engines

DESIGN IS NEW FOREVER  
Panoramic Sunroof  
BS6  
ENGINE

SIPRADI TRADING PVT. LTD., An ISO 9001:2015 Certified Company,  
Thapathali 01-4250610, 4222150,4222152.

SIPRADI





# Buddha birthday in his birthplace

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



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

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

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

It turns out that there is a lot more to Lumbini than Lumbini. While the Ashoka Pillar and the Mayadevi Temple

mark the nativity site, there are the ruins of ancient Kapilvastu nearby — home of Siddhartha Gautam's father King Sudhodhan in Tilaurakot.

Archaeologists here are not only researching the ruins of the ancient town, but also relics left here by pilgrims over the centuries which reveal that Gautam Buddha, besides being the divine entity he is today, was also a historical figure.

Siddhartha Gautam was born in Lumbini in 623 BC while his mother Queen Mayadevi was being carried in a palanquin to her own home in Devdaha. Mayadevi gave birth while standing and clutching the branch of a sal tree, but died seven days later. Siddhartha was then raised by his aunt, Prajapati.

The birth is depicted in a 1,800-year-old stone sculpture found at the site, and further proof is a marker stone found in 1995 that locates the exact spot where the Buddha was born.

Then there is the pillar erected by Mauryan Emperor Ashoka in 249BC. Ashokan pillars are found

at holy Buddhist sites across north India, and the one in Lumbini has Pali inscriptions stating that the emperor had himself visited the place of the Buddha's birth in the 20th year of his reign.

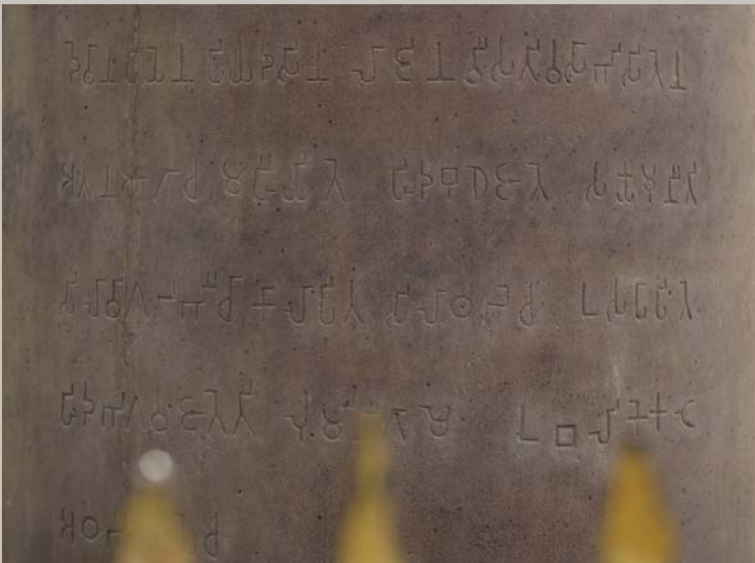
Chinese monk pilgrims Faxian and Xuanzang visited Lumbini and Tilaurakot in the 4th and 7th century CE, and described the ruins in detail. But it was only in 1889 that exiled Rana general Khadga Shumshere together with German archaeologist Alois Anton Führer found the pillar in the middle of a thick jungle that had started being cleared for railway sleepers in British India.

They found Ashoka's inscription on the column that was made of chunar stone, which must have been carried with great effort from as far as Banaras, 300km away. Like other Ashokan pillars, the one in Lumbini was probably also topped with an inverted lotus and horse finial carved out of stone. The damaged lotus has been found, and now rests next to the pillar, but the horse has not been located.

"It must be underground here somewhere, and if we excavate, we will probably find it," says Basanta Maharjan, a Buddhism scholar with Nepal's Department of Archaeology. "But we have not really done much excavation here, except for these pre-Mauryan structures."

It troubles Maharjan that Nepalis have taken Buddha's birthplace for granted and it has become an issue of national pride, and reduced to a populist 'Buddha was born in Nepal' slogan. "The whole world follows Buddha's teachings, but for us Nepalis we just sit and say Buddha was born in Nepal, we must learn to value Buddhist philosophy and learn from his teachings. Research and study into Buddhist philosophy also needs to happen in Nepal," archaeologist Maharjan says.

While the Ashoka Pillar and marker stones are pieces of clear historical evidence that Gautam Buddha was born in Lumbini, there are two pillars that indicate the births of the other two Buddhas. There was one dedicated to



## Greater Lumbini

Even before it was the seat of King Sudhodhan, father of Siddhartha Gautam, Tilaurakot already had human habitation dating back nearly 3,000 years. Remnants of those early settlements are now overlaid by ruins of the palace and the town that surrounded it.

In 1899 the Indian archaeologist P C Mukherjee came here and determined that Tilaurakot was indeed ancient Kapilvastu, the kingdom of the Shakyas dynasty. In the past decades, the area was studied by noted Nepali archaeologists Tarananda Mishra and Babu Krishna Rijal, who confirmed that finding.

A geophysical survey is now being carried out here by the Department of Archaeology and Durham University experts using special equipment to peer underground without digging and disturbing the site.



Kosh Prasad Acharya

"It is all forest and shrub on the surface, but beneath us is an elaborate network of paths, walls and buildings of that ancient kingdom where the Buddha lived till he was 29 years old," explains Kosh Prasad Acharya, former head of the Department of Archaeology. "These are relics of an extremely important part of our history."

There is now a detailed map of what lies below ground, and it shows that Kapilvastu had a north-south and east-west road grid. The poorer buildings with thatch roofs and mud walls were in the periphery, while more important people who lived near the centre had brick walls and tile roofs.

The writings of early Chinese travellers give a detailed description of what they said was Kapilvastu. Their written accounts of the ruins of the palace, the walls, paths and gates, from nearly 2,000 years ago tallies exactly with what has been found today by archaeologists.

"What is most exciting is that this is proof that King Sudhodhan's palace was here, and we are sitting here right now on the ground that Siddhartha Gautam walked on," Acharya says. "We now know where the roads were and have built wooden walkways right above them." (See right)

Tilaurakot is now a fascinating archaeological museum where visitors can walk around along wooden paths, following the footsteps of Siddhartha Gautam as a boy. The parts that have been excavated and mapped have clearly illustrated explanations of what ancient Kapilvastu looked like.

The other historical site is in nearby Ramgram, where there is an ancient stupa that goes right back to the years after the Buddha died. It is one of the eight stupas where the Buddha's relics were kept.





Venerable Metteya



Basanta Maharjan

Kanakamuni Buddha in Niglihawa even before Ashoka came, and he enlarged it in 249BC. The other of Kakusandha Buddha in Gotihawa is badly damaged, but early Chinese travellers noted that it too had an inscription.

“Besides the Shakyamuni Buddha, this region was also the birthplace of two other Buddhas, and compared to the Buddhist sites in India like Bodhgaya and Kushinagar, I think Lumbini is more organised and better preserved,” Maharjan says.

Much of that credit goes to former United Nations Secretary-General U Thant of Burma who came here in 1967, and was so moved by its neglect that he wept. He convinced King Mahendra to promote the birthplace of the Buddha as a world heritage site.

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

“If it wasn’t for U Thant and Kenzō Tange’s masterplan there would be no trees and the sacred garden would have shops,” says Maharjan. “Thankfully, unlike many other holy places, Lumbini’s spiritual essence is intact.”

Even though he was not a

Buddhist, Tange’s master plan for Lumbini has deeply philosophical character. The nearly 8 sq km area is dominated by a north-south canal with amphitheatres, forests and wetlands on either side. At the southern end are concentric circles of the sanctum sanctorum: the sacred garden around the Mayadevi Temple.

The plan includes an eastern monastic set aside for Theravada Buddhism, and the west side is for Mahayana Buddhism. The master plan is still being broadly followed, but there are many showy edifices coming up in the monastic zone that do not conform to the Buddha’s teachings of simplicity and reverence for nature.

Among the monasteries representing Buddhism from Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, China, Japan and Myanmar, there is also the elegant Vajrayana Vihar, built with donations from thousands of people from Kathmandu Valley. The challenge is to keep to the masterplan and prevent Lumbini from being over-built as sects compete with each other to build grander monasteries.

Venerable Metteya, the monk who is vice-chairman of the Lumbini Development Trust, was born to a Hindu family in Kapilvastu and his vision is to turn Lumbini into an international centre for peace where world leaders and spiritual thinkers

can come to seek ways to end war, violence and to confront the planet’s environmental crisis.

“Gautam Buddha was a mediator who sought to bring peace between warring kingdoms in his day,” says Metteya. “We have to preserve this spiritual space not just as a pilgrimage site, but also as a centre for conflict resolution and nature protection.” Venerable Metteya says he gets proposals every day for new construction within the Lumbini zone, including for new monasteries and even one to build an enormous 100m high Buddha statue. “We will not entertain these, and on this the Nepali state is also clear,” he says.

The Trust is now finalising a Rs8 billion plan starting with sacred garden to enhance the open space. Before Covid there were 250,000 foreign pilgrims and tourists a year here, and 1.6 million Nepalis.

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

There are also plans to link the Greater Lumbini region with the Buddhist Circuit in India and Nepal for a time when pilgrims and tourists can return on the Buddha’s 2,645th birthday next year. 🇳🇵



Go online to the YouTube Channel of Saglo Samaj tv magazine to watch two episodes in which host Kanak Mani Dixit takes us on a tour of Lumbini, Tilaurakot and Ramgram to talk to archaeologists, monks and Buddhist scholars about the importance of these historical and religious sites. Saglo Samaj is broadcast every Monday evening at 8:30pm on DishHome Channel 130.



## Where Siddhartha Gautam walked

● Robin Coningham in Kapilvastu

We use a magnetometer for the geophysical survey of Tilaurakot which allows it to ‘see’ bricks under the ground. Burnt brick walls under the surface are more magnetic, so we can excavate only the necessary areas.

In the past, there was a belief that ‘all archaeology is destruction’ because we had to physically excavate the land, and in doing so we were actually destroying the site. The magnetometer is a better tool to quickly locate historical evidence without having to excavate anything.

Kapilvastu-Tilaurakot is the most well preserved archaeological site in South Asia, and is 2,700 years old. The eastern part lies unused and untouched by agriculture due to the area being naturally elevated, and quite densely forested in the past.

There are still jackals, jungle cats, and wildlife here, making this a mini nature reserve. We need to preserve Tilaurakot’ archaeological and historical value, but also its environment. Kapilvastu is just not an ancient city, it is a sacred region as well.

The Eastern Gate of the site is where Siddhartha Gautam left his family at age 29 to seek enlightenment two-and-half millennia ago. It is one of five to six gates around the city, which was three towns and three small settlements within the site.

We know that the city was abandoned, so the buildings are now very close to the surface. So are the ancient pathways that wind through the city. The increasing number of pilgrims had begun to wear away the archaeology on the surface, so we built a wooden platform over the ancient brick path. The planks serve not only to give visitors an idea of the grid plan of the city, but also to protect the site from wear.

The road over which the wooden planks now sit were 10m wide, with a long line of buildings on either side — shops on the front, and courtyard houses behind.

Visitors and pilgrims expect ancient Kapilvastu to have been a grand city with high walls, and domes, turrets and marble towers. The historic reality, however, is that the floors and walls of these buildings are mud, the foundations are brick, and the roofs are thatch, much like today’s Tharu villages.

However, we found that the palatial structure located at the highest point within the site, was fortified by 6m high walls made from rammed earth, inside which a forecourt led to a gate where we found evidence of huge set of bricks on either side for a guard post.

When the Chinese pilgrims visited this region during the 1st century CE, they described it as a largely abandoned city where the walls were still strong. These structures are quadrangular, with open courtyards, and are normally interpreted as monastic. However, some courtyard buildings on the site were built later on top of the fortification wall.



Kapilvastu-Tilaurakot is 2,700 years old, and is the most well preserved archaeological site in South Asia

We also found a large square area rich in magnetism, which tells us that there was a water tank. This is striking, because there are no previously known examples of civic architecture or infrastructure in South Asia during the 3rd century BCE.

When we first started excavating in Kapilvastu, what struck me the most was the material culture — the pottery, coins, terra cotta objects — which I thought would be remarkably different from excavations in Hastinapur, Taxila, and elsewhere.

We have unearthed coins from the 3rd century CE from Ayodhya on the site. There is evidence of diplomatic and commercial links in the form of way-stations, fortified enclosures, and wells between 13-15km apart on the same alignment as the present route from Lumbini to Tilaurakot.

We have this amazing mosaic of urban forms developing from Gandhara all the way down to Sri Lanka, which tells us that South Asia was part of a unified urban growth. This supports the existence of cultural corridors for the exchange of ideas, artists, craftspeople, goods, and faith. The notion that areas further out from the Ganges were slightly slower to develop is not the case.

The abandonment of this city marks a point in which it changed from deep conglomeration of communities within walls of a city to a more dispersed de-urbanisation. This corresponds to most settlements during the early historic period where city forms were lost, leading to feudalism.

To try to bring Kapilvastu-Tilaurakot alive through geophysical surveys in the absence of large excavation sites is a significant challenge. Archaeological interpretation is moving away from that view of Kapilvastu as a city of opulence to an understanding that in the early historic period, this was one of the most developed cities, but it was a place with timber fences and thatched roofs, and mud roads.

It is always a privilege when you see Buddhist pilgrims surrounding an excavation trench, and witness their devotion. This gives us a responsibility to ensure that sites like this are protected and interpreted. 🇳🇵



**Robin Coningham** is a British archaeologist and academic, who led the excavation of the Maya Devi Temple in Lumbini. He is the author of *The Archaeology of South Asia: From the Indus to Asoka, c6, 500BCE-200CE*. From an interview with Kanak Mani Dixit in *Sago Samaj* tv magazine program.





**America Nepal Medical Foundation** is setting up isolation centres in Kathmandu. Visit [anmf.org/home](https://anmf.org/home) to fund the project.

**Feed the Hungry Nepal** is arranging for food supplies to those who need it, as well as oxygen cylinders. Donation details on Facebook.

**Oxygen For Nepal** is collecting funds to buy at least 1,000 oxygen cylinders in the next two months. Visit <https://linktr.ee/creasionorg> to help the initiative.

**Pipal Tree** is running a matched giving appeal through funding platform The Big

Give to raise Covid funds for rural Nepal. Support the cause.

**Give2Asia** is partnering with nonprofits to support frontline health workers and institutions responding to the coronavirus pandemic. Online donations open.

For assistance to Bayalpata Hospital in Far-Western Nepal, contact Nyaya Health Nepal: [srijana.devkota@nyayahealthnepal.org](mailto:srijana.devkota@nyayahealthnepal.org) or +977 9851093920

**100's group** is collecting oxygen cylinders and getting them to Covid patients. Find information on where to donate and whom to contact on Facebook.

ONLINE EVENTS

Virtual heritage tour

On the occasion of International Day for Biological Diversity, this instalment of the Virtual Heritage Tour series designed by Story Cycle will take viewers on a journey to Bankatta in Chitwan. Make reservations on a Google form at Story Cycle's Facebook page. 28 May, 4pm-5pm

MoNA exhibition

Look at MoNA's exhibition Key Sketch on Facebook, which showcases art spanning from 1938 to 2020 by noted Nepali artists Ananda Muni Shakya, Siddhi Muni Shakya, Prem Man Chitrakar, Lok Chitrakar, Uday Charan Shrestha and Samundra Man Singh Shrestha. Until 22 May

#HerJourney

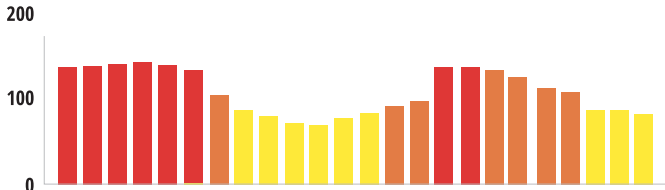
The guest for this instalment of Girls in Tech-Nepal's #HerJourney series will be London-based software consultant Sweta Chandak. Chandak has a 15-year experience in writing code, and has consulted UK companies including Financial Times, Geoplace, Sky, HMRC, and Homeoffice. Tune in to the event on Girls In Tech - Nepal's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/GirlsinTechNepal](https://www.facebook.com/GirlsinTechNepal)). 22 May, 5pm-7pm



The Tropical Cyclone Tauktae brought widespread pre-monsoon rain to Nepal, with parts of Central Nepal getting up to 80mm on Thursday. The core of the system will be blown eastwards by the jetstream, and out of way. However, there is quite a bit of residual moisture in its wake, which will be pushed up along the mountains by convection systems, resulting in isolated thunderstorms. Expect the temperature to get up to more normal level of 29-30 Celsius in Kathmandu. Another circulation is developing over the Bay of Bengal, and will turn into Cyclone Yaas which will start bringing more rain to eastern Nepal next week, affecting the Everest climbing window.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
28° 18°	29° 18°	30° 18°

AIR QUALITY INDEX







AMIT MACHAMASI

# LOCKED UP

How to cope with prolonged restrictions, and the string of bad news

This spring, a new variant of Covid-19 was identified in India that quickly made its way to Nepal through the open border. We saw a surge in the number of people testing positive, and the death toll increased dramatically.



LIFE TIME

Anjana Rajbhandary

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

It has been said that the main reason for this catastrophic spread in India and Nepal was the lockdown that abandoned without the population being fully vaccinated. It is understandable that in our countries, the idea of a lockdown may not work as well because a majority of the population still lives off daily wages.

When the lockdown started last year, many claimed that hunger would take their lives before the virus. This time, it is both hunger and the virus killing people. The government is partly to blame: it was unprepared for a second wave it knew was coming. The people also became complacent after the infection rate dropped dramatically last year.

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

People started gathering without

caring about whether they could catch the virus and infect others. Most people still seem to believe that the virus spreads because of others, and not because of them.

'Optimism bias' is a term in psychology that explains how people believe they are likely to experience good outcomes, and less likely to experience bad outcomes. People did not acknowledge or admit that the virus could have spread because of them, but blamed 'others'.

Whatever the reason might be for this deadly second wave, we are in the thick of it now, and till the state manages to take control of the situation and look after citizens, it is up to each one of us to take care of ourselves.

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

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

## 1. Take a break from news and social media

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

## 2. Re-evaluate your news sources

We want to stay on top of what

is happening in our country, but many news sources are click-baits scrambling for views, so you may not know what you are reading is the whole truth, or a series of selected facts that distort what is happening. Make sure your source of news is reputable and objective, and stick to one source if possible.

## 3. Accept your level of control

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

## 4. Seek positive news

It is all right to unfollow and block people that annoy you, and bring you down. Try to distract yourself by reading inspirational quotes, happy stories or watch funny videos. If it helps, detox yourself from social media, give yourself a day or a few days off the Internet altogether.

## 5. Choose healthy distractions

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

## 6. Try breathing exercises

The reason breathing exercises have gained so much popularity these days is because they work. Try timed breathing exercises

because they will help your mind feel calmer and over the course of a few days, it will be easier to manage your mind. Try this: inhale for 4 seconds, hold it for 7 seconds and exhale for 8 seconds, and do this 10 times.

## 7. Take care of your physical health

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

## 8. Eat well

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

## 9. Stay connected with family and friends

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

## 10. Stay hopeful

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

**Anjana Rajbhandary** lives and works in Chicago. She writes this fortnightly *Nepali Times* column *Life Time* about mental health, physical health and socio-cultural issues.

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



# Helping Nepalis breathe

● Tufan Neupane

On 12 May, 15 Covid-19 patients died in Rupendehi and Nepalganj after the hospitals there ran out of oxygen supply. Another 18 patients died the next day in Kathmandu's Bir Hospital and Trauma Centre because they could not get their oxygen cylinders refilled in time.

Private hospitals in Kathmandu Valley including Medicare, MediCiti, Om, Helping Hands, Longevity, Karuna, Voyodha, Madhyapur Thimi, and Star stopped admitting coronavirus patients, saying they had enough medical oxygen only for existing patients.

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

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

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

All coronavirus deaths in hospitals are lumped together under Covid-19 fatalities, however there

There is a big difference between succumbing to Covid-19, and patients dying due to the lack of oxygen

needs to be a distinction between whether a patient died despite being given all the care necessary, or because the oxygen supply ran out.

These are two completely different conditions and should be treated as such, says a retired chief justice of the Supreme Court. Health is a basic human need and it is the state's responsibility to ensure it, he says, the patients did not die of Covid, but because of negligence.

A bench of Supreme Court Justice Bankumar Shrestha on 11 May ordered the government to 'Facilitate the supply of oxygen and medicines required for the treatment of those infected ... and immediately dispense human resources taking into account the increasing number of patients.'

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

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



## The two Nepals in the

Climbers on Mt Everest and Covid-19 patients are both dependent on bottled oxygen for their survival

● Lesley D Junlakan

Scrolling down through my Facebook feed these days I see posts chronicling the latest news about climbers summiting Mt Everest, and next to them the pleas from Nepalis for help for a loved one—an elderly father, a diabetic sister, a cherished child—struggling to breathe due to Covid-19 and in desperate need of a hospital bed, a ventilator.

The contrast is too great, too extreme. My mind struggles to cope, to accept these two polar opposites. How can they co-exist? How can these be the two faces of a single country?

If there is any link between them, then it is this: both the climbers, who have paid anything in excess of \$50,000 for the privilege of summiting the highest mountain on our planet where the oxygen saturation (SaO2) in the body (normally 98-99%) can fall to as low as 40%, and the patients suffering from a severe attack of Covid-19 are in Death Zone: both are dependent on oxygen canisters for their very survival.

But the expedition team members have made a conscious decision to brave such harsh conditions whereas patients finding themselves at death's door are there through no fault of their own.

Nepal's battle with its first wave of Covid-19 caused the much-lauded Visit Nepal 2020 campaign to crumble along with the hopes and dreams of many thousands of people working in the trekking and expedition sectors.



The Summit ridge of Mt Everest on 11 May.

DAMIEN FRANCOIS

Agency owners, guides and porters, seemed to have been surprisingly successful, in spite of the government's mish-mash policies and the people's growing boredom.

Lockdowns and so-called 'loose-downs' led to a lackadaisical attitude to masks, social distancing and hand hygiene. To the surprise of even the experts, after reaching a daily caseload peak of 5,743 on 21 October, right at the start of the back-to-back festivals of Dasain and Tihar, instead of soaring out of control as expected, the numbers of daily infections started to slowly decrease. Throughout February and March this year they remained either in double-digits or the low one-hundreds.

Few tourists filtered back to Nepal for the 2020 autumn season after the international airport, closed for so many months to all but repatriation and charter flights, reopened. The tourism sector started to pin its hopes on Spring 2021.

Many trekking agencies, in critical financial straits, encouraged their regular and prospective clients to come and enjoy trails that were less crowded than usual. However, most potential travellers were wary, all too aware of the risks involved. They were perhaps deterred by the lack of visa on arrival and the protocols, or simply bound by their own countries' travel

restrictions and economic malaise.

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

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

This policy contrasted starkly with that of neighbouring China: for the Spring expedition season only Chinese



# again



AMIT MACHAMASI



- ### Oxygen Cylinders
- Storage for pressurised gaseous oxygen in various sizes.
  - Must be transported to and from refilling plant.
  - Can be connected to hospital central manifold.
  - Used in ambulances.



- ### Oxygen Concentrators
- Portable home or hospital electrical device to concentrate oxygen from ambient air.
  - Provides bedside oxygen to one or more patients depending on capacity.
  - Limited flow.



- ### Oxygen Generators
- Generates gaseous oxygen from ambient air for central hospital manifold systems or to fill cylinders.



- ### Liquid Oxygen
- Gas compressed into liquid oxygen and stored in large tanks at hospitals or distributors.
  - Needs to be refilled by liquid oxygen tankers from factory.
  - Distributed to high-pressure flow in hospitals and to refill normal gas cylinders, or 100-200l liquid oxygen tanks.

## NEPAL

Supply-Demand in cylinders per day



**Demand:**  
Kathmandu Valley:  
**30,000**  
**Total Nepal:**  
**40-50,000**

shortage being a human rights violation.  
Hospitals in Kathmandu need 22,000 cylinders of oxygen a day, but presently there are only 12,000 cylinders available per day—both because of the lack of cylinders being sent for refills, as well as insufficient oxygen production.  
Till a month ago, Narayan Dutta Timilsina of the Nepal Oxygen Producers Association was confident that there was enough generation capacity to meet demand, but the number of serious Covid cases rose so steeply that everyone was caught unprepared.  
For example, on 25 April as the



**Supply:**  
Kathmandu Valley:  
**6,000** from oxygen plants  
**3,000** in hospitals  
Rest of Nepal:  
**10,000** cylinders from oxygen plants  
**1,000** cylinders in hospitals  
**Total Nepal:**  
**19,000** per day

number of infections started rising, there were 252 Covid patients in ICU and 65 were on ventilator. By this week, there were more than 1,500 patients in ICU and nearly 400 needing ventilator support.  
Grande Hospital, one of Kathmandu's biggest private centres, has 80 Covid-19 patients, and all of them need oxygen for which it needs at least 200 cylinders a day. It can only get 50.

The Lumbini Provincial Hospital in Butwal needs 700 cylinders a day for its Covid patients, and it was assured 300 a day by the local government. It is not even getting 200, and has been turning serious patients away.  
“Oxygen is not a luxury, but an essential basic need. Hospitals need to ensure adequate supply, and the government must help,” says the former director of Epidemiology

and Disease Control Division Baburam Marasini.  
It may be too early to hope, but there are indications that the graphs for daily new infections is flattening, and the numbers who have recovered is also rising.  
On Wednesday, there were a total of 8,173 new cases, 2,635 of them in Kathmandu Valley. There were 246 fatalities in the last 24 hours. While the test positivity rate is still high at 37.4%, there were 7,989 recoveries.  
In addition, 3,000 of the 20,000 empty oxygen cylinders gifted by China have been flown in. Another 2,500 cylinders have come overland through Kodari, and Nepali workers in the gulf have collected money to send at least 1,000 cylinders.  
Private groups are also stepping in to fly in oxygen concentrators and generators. On Monday, Indian Ambassador Vinay Mohan Kwatra assured that India would increase its quota of liquid oxygen for Nepal. 🇳🇵

# Death Zone



AMIT MACHAMASI

were to be allowed to climb the north face of Everest which straddles the border of Nepal and China's Tibetan Autonomous Region.  
And amazingly Nepal's tactic worked: more than 400 climbers joining over 40 expeditions are on the mountain this season. More than 150 had already made it to the summit before the jet stream pushed in this week, and there were two fatalities on 12 May.  
This is the busiest year ever on the mountain, even exceeding 2019 when, unthinkable, there were queues of climbers staying dangerously long in the Death Zone as they waited their turn to get to the summit.  
Most overseas expedition members started to arrive in

Nepal towards the end of March, allowing them sufficient time for team-building and acclimatisation activities before making their final summit bids, the traditional 'weather window' for this usually occurring in the third quarter of May. It was at this precise point that things started to go awry in India, with the inevitable knock-on effect in Nepal.  
India, like Nepal, seemed to have been able to control its first wave of Covid and figures remained in a beguiling trough throughout February, even dropping to below 10,000 cases per day. Then, inexplicably, a change set in and numbers started to inexorably rise, crossing the 100,000 cases per day mark on 4 April.  
Coincidentally or otherwise, this was the fourth official

day of the Kumbh Mela festival in Haridwar, attended by an estimated 9 million Hindu pilgrims and now dubbed a 'super spreader event'. Nepal's former King Gyanendra Shah and Queen Komal Shah were among those who tested positive after returning from the festival to Kathmandu.  
As the alarming increase in figures continued and many countries, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the traditional employment bases for Indian labourers, started to ban flights from Delhi, many thousands of Indians rushed to transit in Kathmandu, taking advantage of a gaping administrative loophole and completing their formalities at the Indian Embassy before catching their onward flights.  
At the same time, Indian pilgrims flocked to the remote Nepal region of Mustang, largely Covid-free throughout the first wave, to pray at the holy temple in Muktinath and enjoy the hot springs at Tatopani.  
Meanwhile, just as most expeditions were hunkered down at EBC, the daily case figure in Nepal started to increase to 9,000 daily this week (compared with almost 300,000 in India). A near Nepal-wide lockdown was announced on 29 April and will probably last another month. Both domestic and international flights are also grounded.  
As the situation in the Kathmandu Valley in particular became increasingly serious, alarming reports of Covid-19 cases started to come from first EBC and then Dhaulagiri Base Camp. Climbers were initially thought to be suffering from HAPE (high altitude pulmonary edema), which is a life-threatening accumulation of fluid in the lungs that can occur even in otherwise healthy people at high altitude.  
It was only after being airlifted to Kathmandu and PCR-tested that the correct diagnosis of Covid-19 were made. The symptoms of HAPE and Covid-19 are eerily, and dangerously, similar: low oxygen levels, acute difficulty in breathing, fever and lung fluid.  
Although reports continued to filter in of Covid-19 at Base Camps, and climbers are being evacuated, some climbers' personal blogs were severely critical of the lax attitude being taken towards Covid prevention

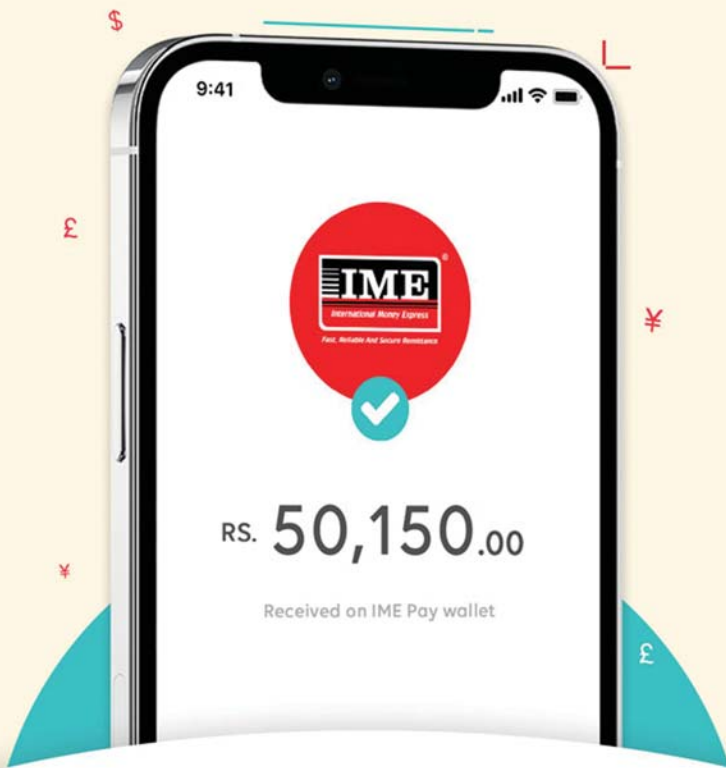
both in the individual team camps and communal areas. Invariably, social media posts by the team leaders themselves completely ignored the issue.  
In the early evening of 7 May, the Sherpa rope-fixing team reached the summit of Everest. Among them was Kami Rita Sherpa, marking his record-breaking 25th summit even as the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Nepal neared 400,000 and the fatality tally approached 4,000. The positivity rate in the Valley was over 40% in the Valley, and as high as 70% in Banke.  
Facebook communities like the Nepal Covid-19 Support Group started being inundated with requests for help, advice, and above all for life-giving oxygen.  
If the situation on Everest were not already bizarre enough, then the following Reuters report added the final touch: 'China will set up "a line of separation" at the summit of Mount Everest to prevent the mingling of climbers from COVID-hit Nepal and those ascending from the Tibetan side as a precautionary measure ... It was not immediately clear how the line would be enforced on the summit, a tiny, perilous and inhospitable area the size of a dining table.... A group of 21 Chinese nationals are en route to the summit on the Tibetan side.'  
On the Nepal side there was a complete denial that there was any Covid-19 at Base Camp, even as mountaineers were being helicoptered out daily. The last straw of decency and honesty had irrevocably snapped.  
Now I am left wondering how those Nepalis who have lost their loved ones to Covid-19 will feel as the first 'real' conquests of Everest on its 'strictly separated summit' by wealthy climbers rather than largely anonymous Sherpas started being announced—knowing that the feats have been achieved with the aid of supplementary oxygen.  
The Bahraini Royal Guard team was first up there at 06:00 on 11 May, and many have followed since. And how will those summiters feel on their return to Kathmandu, to find a city being ravaged by Covid, a severe oxygen shortage ... and few flights home. 🇳🇵

A native of the UK and resident of Thailand, Lesley D Junlakan has been a frequent visitor to Nepal. She was in Kathmandu for most of 2020 and is currently locked down in Budhanilkantha where she is learning Nepali.





विदेशबाट पठाएको रकम  
सजिलै **IME Pay App** मा  
प्राप्त गर्नुहोस्।



IME Complex, Panipokhari, Kathmandu, Nepal  
+977 1 4217600, 4430600 / 4425800 (Fax)  
facebook.com/imeremit  
info@imeremit.com.np  
www.imeremit.com.np

Toll Free :  
**16600 151515**  
(For NTC users only)



## Ass as Ambassador

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

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

And by now, the party whips have flogged the living daylight out of all MPs. In addition, every one of them has stabbed everyone else in the back, and vice-versa. There is no one remaining to back-stab anymore, so now they are stabbing each other in the front. In the wild, there is a parliament of owls, but here in Nepal we are one step ahead — we have owls in parliament.

PM Ali's refusal to swear his allegiance to God almighty while taking his oath of office proves that his Unfed Marxist-Leninist-Atheist party believes that religion is the opium of the asses. He must have been smoking something else during the swearing in by Madamn President.

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

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

Anyhoo, my back-of-the-envelope calculation shows that by not having badass ambassadors for the past 14 months, Nepal's national exchequer saved \$25.8 million. This is no mean feat. Now, all that money can be spent on erecting the Republic Monument and Viewtower in Thankot.

Besides monetary savings, not having Ambassador Extraordinaries and Plenipotentiaries for so long also meant that Nepal's envoys did not make political gaffes, and indulge in other extra-curricular activities. However, we do not envy the PM having to reward hangers-on and cronies, appease coalition factions, and balance demands of the political parties.

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

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

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



The Ass

vianet | अब सबै connected



१ वर्षको नयाँ subscription लिन मन छ  
तर बजेट  
अलि कम छ?



vianet

EMI

Easy Monthly Internet

अब भ्यानेट EMI अफर अन्तर्गत पाउनुहोस् १ वर्षको इन्टरनेट सहित  
जडान खर्च र डिभाइसहरुको मूल्य सजिलै EMI मा तिर्ने सुविधा !

सबै कर र शुल्क सहित  
१२ महिना अवधिको EMI **रु. १२५६** मात्र



For more information

01-5970444, 9801046410

✉ sales@vianet.com.np | 🌐 www.vianet.com.np | 📱 vianetnepal | 📷 vianetfth

Now available in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Banepa, Birgunj, Butwal, Bhairahawa, Biratnagar, Chitwan, Hetauda, Pokhara, Lekhnath, Dadeldhura, Dhangadhi, Tandi, Itahari, Inaruwa, Dharan, Damak, Birtamode, Kritipur, Panauti, Nepalgunj & Kohalpur.