Behind the masks

Sonia Awale

January 2021 was the first country in South Asia to start the Covid-19 vaccination drive. Today, despite delays and a devastating second wave, close to 13% of the population is fully vaccinated.

Recent surveys show that 97% of Nepalis would take the Covid vaccine if available. Used to pollution, mask wearing is also high among urban Nepalis.

With minimal vaccines and mask resistance, Nepal should have by now had the pandemic under control. And although the spike in cases after the lockdown was partially lifted in July is flattening out, the daily death rate is still high and the risk of a new Covid-19 surge is greater than before.

Expects say the vaccination drive appears to have created a false sense of security among those with jobs to believe that they are now fully immune to the coronavirus.

Ironically, the government's promotion of masks also may have been too successful — with many thinking it will protect them from the virus even if they crowd around. A case in point is the Sagarmatha festival crowd in Makawanpur earlier this week.

If you are going to crowd in that way for an extended period of time, there is no point in wearing a mask,” states epidemiologist Lhamo Yunglon Sherpa. “Many still don’t know that the virus transmission is through the airborne route, and we cannot be careless knowing how infective the delta variant is and that the majority of the people are still unvaccinated, particularly children,” she adds.

Masks and vaccines just reduce infections and serious symptoms, they are not foolproof. And epidemiologists warn that available vaccines do not stop even those who are vaccinated from contracting the virus. New studies have also shown that even the protection vaccines provide will be waning off, so Nepalis with jobs will be needing third booster shots even before the eligible population is fully vaccinated.

Covid-19 vaccines now live by ensuring that infected people do not have serious symptoms, and do not require hospitalisation. But vaccinated people can be carriers at the same rate as those unvaccinated if they have been infected with a delta variant.

“What I am seeing now is a surge of overconfidence among younger people who are vaccinated, they are thinking everyone else is not yet vaccinated, especially us Danish-Tibetan nurses,” says virologist Shee Balbhadur Pun at Yaku Hospital. "We are creating an ideal condition for the next surge or the third wave to take place."
Challenge of the millennium

The most tangible collateral damage of Nepal’s recent conflict is its electrification grid. Politicians have weaponized the US-supported Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) infrastructure grant as much of the needed project stock is in."
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Nepal needs weather stations in the Himalaya

This year's monsoon floods highlighted the urgent need for high-altitude weather monitoring stations.

Rijan Bhakta Kayastha

The assessment done is a beginning and the next step is to set up a network of weather stations across the Himalayan region, which is being constantly washed down by heavy monsoon rains.

Nepal has four main glacier-fed river basins: Kali Gandaki, Trishuli, Marsyangdi, and Mahakali, and 19 other sub-basins. The catchment area of these rivers also stretch across the Himalaya into China. These are 3,076 glaciers and 2,270 glacierized lakes in Nepal. And that is also permissible above 6,000m.

Nepal’s rivers are fed by groundwater discharge, monsoon rains, and glacial melt. However, the hydrological responses of snow-covered and glacierised areas are distinct from other areas. Depressions from past glacial advances behave differently when exposed to heavy rainfall, as we continue to witness in Bhirkot basin of the Lumang Lotsa since 1995.

Climate change is now affecting both the monsoon dynamics and the state of snow/glacier in the Himalaya, and we have to be aware and prepared for the consequences.

Besides extreme weather events, the geological structure of the watershed also needs to be taken into account so that a detailed risk assessment can be made before embarking on expensive water supply projects in the Melamchhi, and deciding on the location of future hydropower plants, bridges, and roads.

Past studies have already declared many areas of the Melamchhi watershed a hazardous zone and not suitable for construction of houses and other infrastructure. If such warnings had been heard and timely precautions taken, the damage this monsoon would have been considerably less.

But in this monsoon, the government of Hydrology and Meteorology, all the warning and forecast on the increased air temperature increased by 0.5°C and 0.02°C per decade from 1977 to 2014. The warming is higher in the Himalayan region than elsewhere. This means that even under the best-case scenario, the Himalaya could lose up to one-third of its permanent ice for the rest of this century.

This means increased hazard from snow and ice avalanches, flash floods due to the discharge of super-glacial lakes, or Glacial Lakes Outburst Floods (GLOF). There is a danger that these disasters will be more intense and frequent as the weather systems change.

In October 2014, the power cyclone Hudhud which measured 26 km in diameter at noon in the Bay of Bengal and made a direct hit on Central Nepal, dumping rain and snow in the Annapurna region, killing 43 persons (including trekkers) in glaciers and avalanches. Indian and Nepali meteorologists had sent out warnings and forecast heavy precipitation. However, due to the lack of proper risk reduction mechanisms and safety management skills, casualties, and damages occurred.

In January 2020, four Kesen trekking groups were lost and were swept away by an avalanche at Deurali on the Annapurna Base Camp. Although there has always been risk of avalanches in the Himalayas, heavy snowfall with warming trends have increased the objective danger. A group from the Indian Geological Survey of India warned trekkers in the area of the heightened risk.

In two of the worst disasters in recent times, 42 people, including 13 Japanese trekkers, were killed in November 1996 when the Gokyo region near Mt Everest was hit by an unprecedented blizzard. In October 2005, 18 people including trekkers were killed in snow storms and avalanches in Manang.

These and many other disasters show that pre-cyclonic monsoon storms hitting Nepal at the peak of the trekking season must be more closely monitored and their local impact forecast accurately to early warning for specific areas can be issued. Fatalities can be reduced by findings ways to warn local communities, lodge owners, local governments, trekking outfitters and guides, and build local capacity in search and rescue.

The importance of high altitude weather and snow monitoring stations was also shown by the sudden increase in snow depth (1.6m) on the Rikha Samba Glacier in Mustang (5,200m) during the Hudhud cyclone on 15 October 2014.

A similar snow depth sensor on Yala Glacier in the Langtang Valley also showed 5.0m increase in snow depth on the same day. Although the purpose of these sensors was scientific research into the impact of climate change on snow depth, and not for hazard prevention, the data could have been used for early warning about storm hazards in the high mountains.

The lesson for us is that it is essential and urgent to strengthen the capacity of hazard risk reduction by letting local government and communities have access to real-time data.

The Himalaya has seen historic GLOF, and these debris flows are expected to be bigger and more frequent with climate change. On April 8, 2015, the Dwar Tea glacial lake overtopped after an avalanche and released of water that was killing three and destroying a hydropower plant, 14 bridges and 35 houses.

The disaster prompted the government to start studying glaciers and glacial lakes in Nepal, and major GLOF events haven’t been recorded. Risk reduction has also involved lowering the water levels, and in the case of Lake Kusum, by 6m. In the case of Kaski, it has been drilled. A study by the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) identified 47 glacial lakes in Nepal, China, Russia and India as potentially dangerous. Of these, 13 are in Nepal, 9 in China, and 1 in India. Of the potentially dangerous lakes in Nepal, 17 are on the Arun River basin, out of which only 4 are in Nepal and 13 in upstreams in Darramgad, India.

Most of the immediate risk to these lakes and outflows is not present, in the Arun River, therefore, emanate from across the border but it is not a concern for now, as in cooperation in early warning.

On June 18, 2021, heavy rainfall caused landslide blocked the Rongbi River in China, a tributary of the Tama Kosi. The Chinese authorities informed Nepal about the possibility of a flash flood in the kindle dam that was breached.

Fortunately, the Chinese also drained the lake giving the possibility of a flash flood. In such circumstances, advance warning and snow monitoring station would have been a blessing as it would have been a time to evacuate the area.

Rijan Bhakta Kayastha

Editor-in-Chief, Nepal Patrika, Professor in the Department of Geography and Environment at Kathmandu University.

Pratiksha Bank

Coke it is:
Coca-Cola owns 86% of 2.12 million capital it is a capital of the state of Myanmar. As of 2014, the country’s biggest companies are Coca-Cola and Nestlé. Nepal was not interested in share tranactions and performed operations, as capital gains and dividends were paid. The Nepali government of Revenue Investigation has imposed an inquiry.

Oil prices up and inputs:
Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) that once again raised the price of petroleum products, also increased its output of gas prices, giving it up to Rs 1.5 billion and joined up prices, said NOC spokesperson Sant Man Madakar.

Evenv air traffic and call center:
Nepali Airlines has raised the price of domestic flights, taking the total number of flights to 100 from 120.

Dishtvome Fibernet

Free subscription to Dish Home TV, free Dish Home On Air, 90 days membership, and others. The service will be offered to major cities in Nepal.

City Express Tap Tap Send
City Express will offer tap and go international money transfer service TapTap Send to four airports in Nepal. The service is available in Bhaktapur, Kathmandu, Sankhu and Patan.

CATERPILLAR FOUNDATION

Caterpillar has partnered with local international organization to provide Covid-19 relief materials in Nepal. Caterpillar Nepal's director has visited the government's site on the new year of the year of the new fiscal year at the end of the new fiscal year.
Afghanistan abandoned

The US abandoned Afghanistan, we must abandon the American notion of Afghanistan as a nation to be lost or won

Aneetika Mejumbad

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ot-wrangling images and stories have flooded the media sphere over the last few days. Hundreds of photos showing the airport, clanging to the undertones of snick in desperation, journalists in huddling or seeking seats to leave, people in streets and in camps feeling the violence that has preceded the fall of province after province to the Taliban.

The reality with which the Taliban have been able to take control over the entire country has surprised everyone including the Taliban themselves. However, while the speed may not have been foreseen, the collapse of the government has not seemed inevitable for some time, especially after the steps taken by the US in rapid succession since the Doha deal; they struck with the Taliban in 2020.

Reportedly called the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, the deal estranged the unconditional withdrawal of American troops. Desperately to leave the US administration acceded to the Taliban insistence of talks without the presence of the elected Afghan government — thus de-legitimising the leadership that President Joe Biden is today blaming for the collapse of the government.

So what of the 20 years of international support? The entire nation-building project led by the Americans, regardless of what President Joe Biden now says, was based on an American view of what a liberated Afghanistan and Afghans should look and sound like, often with little understanding of the ground reality.

Unfortunately, American military and financial power outstripped that of other nations severalfold times over, and this coupled with the belief in American Exceptionalism insured their overwhelming dominance. More nuanced approaches were run-rough and complex perceptions that could address the complicated realities were jettisoned in favour of the black-and-white you are with us or against us approach.

While there is much to laud on the Afghan government and the leaders, it is worth looking at how the current US withdrawal and the political leadership were instigated. In the initial period following the 2001 invasion, the US prevented the expansion of NATO in order to keep complete control of the security space, and subsequently blocked all attempts at allowing even the negotiated surrender of the Taliban leadership, thus driving them underground.

Over the years, international forces killed a large number of civilians, and the resulting rate of ‘collateral damage’ that turned a significant portion of the Afghan population against them as well as against the Afghan government they were supposed to help. While ‘introducing democracy’ to Afghanistan, the US went ahead with accepting a governance structure that concentrated all powers in the presidency with the extent that even any presidential style of governance remained a facade. It is thus an electoral system that kept out political parties — the building block of any democratic society.

Leaders of militias were exonerated and empowered despite the fact that some of them had a record mark of extreme brutality and predation on the local population. In later years, groups directly under the control of the US — and outside the ambit of the local army and police forces — were armed, often with little checks and control resulting in more for violence against civilians.

Finally, in order to meet an artificial timetable of ‘Afghan owned’ security, an Afghan army was built in a hurry despite obvious evidence of its weaknesses: the lack of adequate financial and combat structure, and inadequate training. Reports of high rates of desertion, and drug addiction in the ranks were ignored in pursuit of the goal of filling the numbers.

Over the years the Taliban regrouped and began to expand its footprint, enabled in some measure, by local discontent, access to safe spaces across the Pakistan border and the ‘live and let live’ deals struck in many areas.

In the past several years large parts of the country have been under the control of the Taliban or only nominally under the control of the government. In many areas, deals had been brokers for a building pattern whereby neither side would engage in operations, thus leaving the local population the space to lead relatively peaceful lives.

All of this was known to the US administration as it prepared to leave. What they had not counted on was perhaps the speed at which the government would fall. A more convenient gap would have allowed them to distance themselves from the disastrous political fallout a little better, and made their efforts to gaz-light an entire country appear a little more plausible.

As it is, the rapidity of events has left the emperor with no clothes, in usurpation of Afghan airspace to remove its own citizens while holding Afghan civilians at bay at gunpoint is now the last lingering image.

The uncertainty that has come with the Taliban taking power is fearful, and the news is real. But the truth is no one yet knows what kind of governance will emerge under Taliban 2.0. Will women be allowed in the public sphere? Will they have to adopt strict dress codes that will force them back into burqas? Will independent media be allowed to function? Will the Taliban seek to replicate the image of the state that they created between 1996 and 2001 when they controlled almost the entire country? Will they, as they have stated publicly, respect the rights of women including their right to education?

Already three rights are being caved in by talk of ‘within Islamic law’ which is open to scopic interpretation. What will the Taliban attitude be towards the minorities, especially the Shia Hazaras communities, some of whom were massacred when they were last in power?

For a section of the media, the terrorists have arrived. And while the rhetoric from the Taliban still sticks in the air, an important part of the story about the arrival of the Taliban in power, they do not tell it in its entirety. Most Afghans did not want the return of the Taliban, but many urban, educated Afghans used to freedoms are staying on, deliberately and consciously, willing to consider and find ways and means of navigating the new realities.

They are willing to unpick the issues and tackle them to try and create the space for living their lives, and all of us should be doing that too rather than treating Afghanistan and its people as a lost nation, or the situation as ‘game over’. The Americans have abandoned Afghanistan and the Afghans. It is time we in the region abandon the American approach towards Afghanistan as a nation to be lost or won, to be induced into the empire of aliens or rejected as an ‘enemy’ country.

With the fall of the Afghan government and the takeover by the Taliban, much of the strategic discourse in the regional media of the neighbouring countries has been consumed of winners or losers, a zero-sum game that tells the increasing influence of one country and condemnates the other. One popular narrative suggests that the return of the Taliban will lead to an Afghanistan-China-Pakistan nexus and that India has lost out.

It might be more pertinent from the viewpoint of strategic policy to look not at the convergence of interests but also at the divergences. China would like to see stability that will allow it economic engagement with Afghanistan. It has already invested heavily in the country’s mineral wealth and has been waiting to reap its gains.

Neither China nor Russia would like to see unrest on their borders/ near borders. China’s buffer with Afghanistan borders Xinjiang, and China has been critical of the way the US has withdrawn troops rather than happy about the exit of its strategic competitor. Russia has been deeply concerned about the problem of drugs flowing from Afghanistan, and even collaborated with the US in counter-narcotics measures.

Iran and Pakistan will both bear the brunt of the exodus of refugees from Afghanistan and while Pakistan has provided safe sanctuary to the Taliban, allowing them to grow in strength and capability from the safe haven, the Taliban’s power in Afghanistan may make it more difficult to operate against their own home-grown terror networks.

Until now, regional political power has been exercised at the behest of the Americas with countries it considers to be intimate kept out of the way. That template will have broken down with the American departure, and political change in Kabul.

But a regional approach based on common interests, short, medium and long-term can be found only if the countries do not look for the zero-sum approach. And, what about all of us in the region? Can we leave it to our governments?

Aneetika Mejumbad is a London-based journalist. She has worked in Kabul for 10 years.
How to prepare for the 3rd Wave

Nepal- Johns Hopkins University Covid-19 Vaccine Advocacy Group

The second wave ravaged most South Asian countries and left a trail of damage in terms of growth and transmissibility. It was more devastating than the first, with increased hospitalisations and deaths. It was no longer a disease that fell to endemicity in the elderly and immunocompromised, but could have severe long-lasting complications in healthy, young people as well.

The infectious nature of the virus hit South Asia the second time was later found to be a new strain called the Delta variant, first identified in India.

A recent study in China reported the Delta viral load to be 1,280 times higher than that of the classic viral strain, causing the higher transmission rates. Although the infectivity of the Delta variant seems to have slowed in South Asia, it is currently ravaging many Southeast Asian countries. This variant is known to be the dominant strain circulating in many countries and newer variants of the Delta called ‘Delta plus’ have been detected in Nepal.

One thing is clear — vaccination against Covid-19 has not been enough to reduce serious illnesses and death even against the Delta variant. But rather, there should be strict implementation of COVID-19 protocols and case numbers should go down in order to fill the void in the overcrowded and under-capacity system as follows:

- Secure enough oxygen cylinders and oxygen generators and transport to the hospital infrastructure to manage surge in hospitalisations
- Secure enough hospital beds
- Set up new isolation centres in the hospital
- Rapid antigen tests to be widely used in places where the PCR test cannot be implemented.

The rapid surge in Covid infections in the second wave instilled new fear in many people resulting in fear of losing jobs and social distancing being more strictly followed. Non-credible evidence suggests that vaccine hesitancy has also reduced.

We need to further strengthen the capacity of health facilities to deal with surges in cases by establishing Covid-19 wards at primary health care centres (PHCC) and community health facilities and supplying skilled health workers, oxygen cylinders and hospital beds to such facilities.

The next clear gap is testing, volume and capacity. Compared to other countries, Nepal is not testing enough and needs to ramp up testing nationwide.

For instance, the daily Covid-19 tests in the country, as of 8 August was much lower at 0.34 in Nepal compared to 2.57 in India, 2.83 in Australia and 31.18 in the United Kingdom. Testing services need to be expanded in the rural areas as such facilities are disproportionately higher in Bagmati provinces and urban areas. It has been a year and a half since the start of the pandemic, and yet PCR lab services have not reached all districts.

If not PCR, at the least rapid antigen testing services should be made continuously available in every district until such PCR labs can be set up to prepare for a potential third wave. Data from testing is vital to understand the epidemiology of the virus and its transmission - person, place and time. The data points required consistently to track this virus.

It is also essential to address testing hesitancy that is driving individuals with Covid-19 like symptoms to stay home without being tested. Addressing the social stigma associated with Covid-19 positive status via trusted members of the community can help reduce testing hesitancy.

Although the government has increased quarantine measures for unvaccinated travellers entering through international flights, its enforcement remains weak even in such points without providing proof of vaccination or having gone through screening is no longer acceptable. We have to put forth the larger health and wellbeing of our communities and societies that we will enter post travel.

Just as important are case contact tracing efforts which the local level wards are given the responsibility to implement and oversee. Local municipalities struggling with contact tracing efforts should increase their human resource capacity immediately and be strictly monitored by the province health directorate.

It is vital to actively inform the close contacts of the previous week about being tested positive and ask them to quarantine and get tested as well.

When in doubt, it is important to get tested and self-isolate, so as to prevent spreading the infection to your close and loved ones.

Local municipalities who are responsible for contact tracing also need to ensure masking, distancing, crowding and provide hand washing services in public spaces.

As Covid-19 vaccine supply slowly increases, the government needs to ensure equitable vaccine distribution, and at the same time closely communicate the importance of getting vaccinated as well as the risks associated with them.

At the vaccination sites, staff or security personnel should screen those in queue to whether they meet the eligibility criteria. This would prevent those not meeting the eligibility criteria for the specific vaccination driven from wasting their time and avoid misunderstanding and conflict.

While efforts are being made by the government to add new sites for distribution of vaccination proof certificates for migrant workers, it should immediately digitise this process bearing in mind that such certificates can be the passport to access public spaces and indoor activities in many countries.

To prevent a third wave, local governments need to ensure that every Covid-19 positive individual is safely isolating at home or institution by following appropriate guidelines. Every individual should consult the nearest healthcare providers or government Covid-19 hotline numbers on how to safely isolate at home and avoid risking other family members.

More importantly, local governments need to consider re-establishing community-level institutional isolation centres to ensure that low-income individuals who do not have access to a single-use bedroom or bathroom at their homes do not put others in the family or community at risk.

On the research front, more work is needed to understand the evolving nature of the virus, to develop vaccines and correct them to detect and monitor the type of virus circulating in the country.

Regular large-scale sero-survey should be conducted to provide a snapshot of the disease burden and track how infections progress through the population over time. Today, Nepal has already conducted four rounds of nationwide sero-surveys within a span of little over a year.

Although small, the proportion of the fully vaccinated population is growing, so it is very important to actively investigate and report the breakdown of cases and hospitalisations by vaccination status.

This is important for public health experts to monitor the effectiveness of the vaccines to prevent severe illness and contribute towards the research and monitoring of ‘breakthrough’ infections among the fully vaccinated.

Until the majority of the population nationally and globally gets vaccinated, Covid-19 will endure. In the meantime, we must maintain and strengthen public health measures that work: proper masking, physical distancing, frequent handwashing, respiratory and cough hygiene, ensuring good ventilation and avoiding crowded places or closed settings.

With only 12% of the Nepal’s fully vaccinated as of 22 August, and the highly transmissible Delta variant circulating in the country, it is critical now more than ever that each of us individually need to be accountable.

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JAB, MASK, DISTANCE

Sonia Awale

Recent studies have shown that an individual infected with delta variant even of vaccinated can have a high viral load – as high as that of an unvaccinated person. This means they can be carriers of the virus just like unvaccinated people. The real surge in Covid cases last year took place after the festivals when millions of Nepalis travelled from Kathmandu to their home villages and took the virus to the remote corners of the country. This resulted in higher fatalities, especially in rural Nepal, with limited health care facilities. A recent report found that despite fewer cases, Dolpa, Mugu, and Humla districts had fatality rates of 7%, 6% and 5% respectively – compared to only 0.9% in Kathmandu.

The delta variant and its higher transmissibility despite vaccinations have made the situation worse this time around. Covid-19 is here to stay, and managing it requires behavioural change and taking safety measures such as hand washing, physical distancing and wearing a necessary part of our lifestyle. Earlier this year, researchers at Yale and Stanford University run a large-scale randomised controlled trial to identify a precise combination of strategies that are successful in changing mask-wearing habits.

They found their NORM strategy worked well. NORM stands for:

- No cost masks distributed at scale
- Offering information about mask-wearing
- Reinforcement in public places by intercepted non-wearing
- Modelling and endorsement by trusted leaders

After a successful pilot trial, Lahore with 5 million people, NORM is being scaled up to cover the whole of Pakistan. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is aiming to reach 81 million people with NORM methods. In India, the program is being tried out in Guwahati and other cities by the Self Empowered Women's Association (SEWA).

Mask-wearing rates have tripled where NORM methods have been implemented, helping save thousands of lives. The campaign was launched earlier this month in Nepal in the densely populated urban centre of Thimi, Sauraha's rural areas, and Makawanpur which has been battered by earthquakes and floods.

The plan is to distribute up to 450,000 masks through volunteers who go back to the community every 10 days to monitor progress and uptake. The pilot will be scaled up across the country with one million masks donated by Fanes, a US clothing brand arriving in Nepal shortly.

The NORM pilot in South Asia is being funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre (COMC) of the government in Nepal.

We hope that the NORM mask-wearing approach will enable behaviour change throughout our nation and help in curbing the negative effects of Covid-19,” says Brig Gen Anu Narayani, who heads the medical division of the COMC.

Forst Adhikary of the NORM-Making Mask Project in Nepal says the campaign has been reserved well, with many more local governments willing to participate.

She says: “Despite the vaccine rollout there is still a bit of uncertainty. So we must educate the public that even after vaccination we must follow safety protocols, which only comes with behavioural change, which is what we are trying to do.”

How to get QR coded vaccine certificates

Vaccine certificates are now the new passports for international travel. Many of the changes in the way we travel have come about in recent years, with COVID-19 vaccination records required to present a WHO-approved yellow card at airports. In Nepal, there were long queues at the airport, with long waits at the health check points to verify vaccination before the flight took off. The process has been streamlined.

Once you have received your vaccine certificate, you can register your details at an online platform set up by the Ministry of Health. The certificate is linked to an electronic database that is managed by the Ministry of Health's National Vaccination Information Management System (NVIMS).

The Ministry of Health has also introduced electronic health cards, which can be accessed through the NVIMS platform. This allows healthcare providers to easily access vaccination records and other health information.

In order to get your QR coded vaccine certificate, you will need to register your details on the NVIMS platform. This can be done online or through a mobile application available for download on both Android and iOS devices.

To register for your QR coded vaccine certificate, visit the NVIMS website and follow the instructions provided. This will allow you to access your vaccination records and other health information in a secure and convenient manner.

For more information, visit the NVIMS website or contact your local health authority.
LEARNING RESOURCES

TED-Ed
Find hundreds of animated lessons on topics ranging from visual arts to mathematics. Go to the website for free talks, or dig directly to TED-Ed’s YouTube channel and start watching.

JSTOR
Need resources for a thesis or research project? JSTOR has hundreds of ebooks and academic journals on its platform at open access.

Kurzgesagt
Kurzgesagt - In a Nutshell releases animated educational videos on scientific, technological, political, philosophical and psychological subjects. 7 teachers, parents, or casual viewers are looking for creative educational material, and the Kurzgesagt YouTube channel is up to the challenge.

Martin Chautari
Watch Martin Chautari discussion sessions on topics ranging from feminism to parenting in Kathmandu. Sessions available on the Martin Chautari Facebook page. Or look for resources at http://www.martinchautari.org.

GETAWAY

Green Valley Resort
Located 3 km away from Bagmati River, the resort is a perfect getaway for the weekend. As the first ray of sun warms up the chill around the Tamang Valley, Shree-Pal Rakti Resort (977) 7546861. A large memorial trough is sitting right across Nepali’s banner in Sattal, a Rae Nag, your mean heavily overweight central and eastern Nepal, the area is covered with the misty mountains. The local villages have a particularly pleasant landscape, which is perfect for a short trip. For those who want to explore the area, there is a mix of local and national routes available to explore.

Peacock Guest House
Housed in a Midight Home, the 3-star rated New-style building provides splendid views of the Gokarna Taal and the Shiva mountains. Bedroom (80)-98361829. Mystic Mountain
Situated amid the forest of Nagarkot, the resort is exclusively quiet using ultra modern designs and world-class comfort.

Midas Resort
Perfect for family, Midas Resort offers comfortable, contemporary suites and views of Kathmandu Valley. Take a walk around Dilbeshwar before looking into a Nepali restaurant. Get details on the Facebook offer on Facebook.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

OUR PICK

Kuwait’s The Old Guard: the 2021 comic book adaptation directed by Ojia Prieto-Gmehmied. It tells two century-old imperial memorials who have fought battles across Asia, but a new book is a new season to learn more.

Dining

Chez Caroline
Chez Caroline is the go-to for authentic French and continental cuisine in Nepal. The restaurant offers parking and salad bar service too. Try the Puff de Cuissard with sautéed and Chaus potato rillettes and a slate cream and hot chilli sauce.

Pho99
Enjoy Vietnamese cuisine with Pho99 including fresh spring rolls, lemon tea, and curries, along with Vietnamese special dishes, the delicious Pho. Check out the menu on Foodbasis.

Lhagpa’s Chulo
From Nepali (bhat), Newari Khajo, Sama (bhat), Tibetan Boa and Thai green curry, Lhagpa’s Chulo has a variety of cuisines to offer. The gluten-free option is to die for.

#SERIOUSABOUTBEER
WE PUT SERIOUS HOURS IN YOUR HAPPY HOUR.
A few months ago, a friend of mine finally left an unhappy marriage after years of struggle. Her husband was emotionally and mentally abusive, but she was expected to be patient and tolerant like a good Nepali wife and daughter-in-law. She also had to put up with his wandering ways.

When she mustered up enough courage to tell her parents about it, they told her he would change if she worked on her marriage. When her in-laws found out about her son, they blamed her, saying she was not a good enough wife.

But after years of working on her marriage unsuccessfully, and with support from her parents, she decided it was time to call it quits. But this decision was met with harsh criticism, people calling her an "embarrassment to the family" for leaving her husband.

How is her walking away from an unhappy union and an abusive husband a disgrace to our culture, but not his cheating? Why is she being called names, but her husband's philandering does not even raise an eyelash?

Our society accepts these double standards with closed eyes. Men and boys get away with doing whatever they want, no one bats an eyelash. But if a woman or girl chooses to prioritise her well-being over ill-treatment in her own family, it is everyone's business, she is labelled immoral and disrespectful of our culture or traditions.

When her husband's cheating and abuse of her was exposed, no one questioned him about disrespecting the sanctity of the marriage or his lack of morality. But when she decided to pursue her happiness, she was called out for her lack of respect in ending a relationship after years of trying.

Is this ethical or even logical? When men choose to stray, our society stays quiet and looks the other way, but when women try to stand up for themselves, they are met with societal threats and shamed.

If it is strength and courage to tolerate injustices and abuse, why does anyone not talk about how wrong it is to cheat and mistreat others?

What is more shocking is how some women choose to blame the woman instead of the man in these matters. How can they not feel the pain and suffering of women living in hell, but pretend to be happy?

It was not easy for my friend to walk away, she knew choosing to do so would be met with more obstacles and malicious rumours. So the least we can do is to support her.

The current situation of men and women in the society is quite worrisome and unbearable. The situation of women is not improving.

The government, the police, and the judiciary can do nothing. The police department is full of corruption and the government is too weak. The judiciary is full of corruption.

What can we expect these institutions to do? Is it not a great irony that we have laws to protect women but these are not being effectively enforced?

The government has a duty to protect the rights of women, but they are not doing anything. The judiciary is full of corruption and the police department is full of corruption.

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The government, the police, and the judiciary can do nothing.
Migrants are victims of mistreatment and exploitation by their own relatives and friends in the heart of Europe

Namrata Sharma

The Nepali restaurant is located in the richest country of the European Union, and its Facebook page is full of recommendations from guests lavishing effusive praise on its cuisine and service. The page also contains a post from its owner saying that the restaurant’s chefs and staff prepare all meals with great care so that guests leave with satisfaction and good memories.

What the Facebook page does not say is that the chef and staff had been made to work more than 18 hours a day as virtual slaves with their bank accounts, in the hands of an abusive owner.

Luksemburg is Europe’s smallest country, and has the world’s highest GDP per capita. It is one of the founding members of the European Union, as well as one of its four capitals, and is also the seat of the Court of Justice of the European Union.

Some of the restaurant’s regular customers could have been rich Europeans and those who work on human rights. However, they were oblivious to the mistreatment and abuse of the restaurant’s Nepali staff by its Nepali owner.

“I arrived in Luksemburg in October 2015 with a work permit. I was hired as a chef, but was asked to do all the shopping, carrying heavy goods into the store, cleaning and other chores. I was promised a four-hour working day, but ended up doing 128 hours a day.”

Rinod’s passport was taken away from him, and his phone calls were monitored. After he found the situation intolerable, Rinod asked his relative for his passport and money, but he lost his temper and beat him with anything he could lay his hands on.

His employer opened a bank account in Rinod’s name and would deposit about £2,000 every month. But the restaurant owner kept all the passwords himself and Rinod could not access his account. The owner then withdrew most of the salary he had deposited, and gave only £500 to him. At first, Rinod says he did not complain because he thought that was the way things were done in Luksemburg.

Luksemburg’s unwritten agreement with his relative was that he would work for free for one year to repay him for the work permit. But he ended up working at the restaurant for no salary, no leave and no weekends for most of the 3.5 years.

When I did not do as asked, he hit me with a metal tandoor skewer or a ladle,” Rinod recalls. “There were many nights when I could not sleep because of the pain from the beatings, and the pillow would be soaked with blood from wounds in my ears.”

Rinod would plead with the employer to take him to hospital to get stitches, but was not allowed. After nearly four years of this, Rinod’s father died and he asked his employer for leave. When the owner refused, Rinod got relatives back home to buy a one-way ticket back to Nepal, and never went back to Luksemburg.

Both Rinod and Shyam thought the prospect of a job in Europe would change their lives, and trusted a fellow-Nepali employer. But while Rinod returned to Nepal because he could not bear the mistreatment, and did not want to turn against his relative, Shyam lodged the complaint with the authorities.

Rinod and Shyam talked to us separately, and one did not know that the other was in touch with Nepal Times. But the pattern of abuse and the method of exploitation, they described unprompted, were identical in both cases.

In July, three of the Nepali workers complained to the Non-resident Nepali Association in Luksemburg, and a section of the interaction was recorded by someone there. Shyam also said he had to work 16 hours a day without holidays, not allowed breaks or to meet with other Nepalis “I was
Nepalis in Luxembourg

months to bring their families over. Luxembourg law allows restaurant owners to import cooks if a citizen who qualifies for the job cannot be found.

That is how Khusi himself brought his brother over in 2009, who is now well settled with his family in his own house. “But I had never heard of any Nepali not paying 18 months salary to a fellow Nepali,” he added.

Like other countries in Europe, Nepal also tries to come in Luxembourg on student visas by paying agents in Kathmandu up to Rs. 6 million. He warned Nepali youngsters not to get duped, since the cost of living is very high, and it is difficult to pay living costs and school fees by working. With the pandemic, there are also fewer jobs in the service industry. Most are now working on home delivery and take away.

After the interaction with the NRN, the restaurant owner’s mother and father pleaded with Shyam and his colleagues not to press charges against their son. In an audio recording of a telephone conversation that Nepali Times provided, they can be heard apologizing to Shyam about the way their son treated him.

Shyam then asks them why they did not speak up even though they knew that their son was abusing employees. The restaurant has remained closed since the four employees left and filed the complaint.

Many Nepalis in Europe have said in interviews that they are not surprised by this story from Luxembourg. The practice of Brenda and relatives misusing the work permit in restaurants to engage in human trafficking is said to be rife.

But such is the desperation of young Nepalis for jobs that they are willing to risk all for a current income to support families back home. Many of them tolerate the abuse and exploitation, and are also well aware and fearful of the human trafficking in European countries.

Service Info Trullo, which supports victims of human trafficking in Luxembourg says that the investigation and judicial process could take up to three years. It says the restaurant owner could be held for three years and later deported, around labour laws to exploit their employees is not new.

Dark shadow of the European dream

During my recent trip to Europe in 2019, I visited many Nepali restaurants, interviewed their Nepali owners, and met with employees. I also met government officials and visited police departments.

In Luxembourg, it was not easy to get information. After the initial difficulty in restaurants workers suddenly went quiet when asked about their working conditions and seemed intimidated. Owners kept us at high level: they were helping fellow Nepali attain their own dream.

I soon found out that the reason was that many of them are victims of physical and mental torture, not aware of their labour rights in Europe because of lack of education or being unable to speak the local language. They trusted the employer who was often a relative or friend from back home.

It was Luxembourg, the country where the Court of Justice of the European Union is situated, that migrant workers were facing some of the worst violations of their human rights at the hands of fellow Nepalis.

Outwardly, the restaurants looked spic and span, the guests were all well-groomed, and seemed to be from the higher echelons of society. The Nepalis all said they were happy. But behind this veneer, I had a nagging feeling that it was all too good to be true.

Sure enough, after some digging, I found a similar story in what I had uncovered in India earlier. Together with human rights activist Arvind Gaur, who started the campaign against the human trafficking of Nepalis by a Luxembourg restaurant owner in 2019, after which the French government took action on the perpetrator.

Like in Finland, some migrants who had entered Luxembourg legally were being abused and denied basic human rights, including the right to decent working hours and salary as per the labour laws of the country, right to safe housing and good food and the right to live with dignity.

The stories of Shyam, his family and colleagues prove that there are Nepalis who themselves rose up the ranks to be restaurant owners who are now preying on vulnerable and desperate people from the home country.

There is another label for this human trafficking — anyone who is made to work in a different place than their home country without a fair salary, housing, food and health services are victims of human trafficking, even if they are not subject to physical, sexual, mental and sexual violence.

Shyam and Brenda’s Nepali employer has all the legal paperwork for their contract and basic details. Still, they were exploited. It is now up to the authorities there to find out how such violations could occur in a country which has such strict safeguards.

Namatra Sharma

Namatra Sharma is the former chair of the Centre for Indian Cultural Relations in Luxembourg. The article has been developed with the support of the More Project Film, Jauntner Film, and Force One.

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Flying during the pandemic

Now that human beings are learning to fly again after being locked down for two years by the pandemic, we have the opportunity to re-discover the romance and thrill of swooping through the air like an eagle, a crow, or Superman.

Thanks to vaccine passports, air travel is much safer now. We now have the chance to once more relive the excitement of airline travel, with an added sense of adventure. Rock Bottom Airlines, for example, is struggling to stay airborne through this crisis, so they have cut peanuts and Sprite on domestic flights. (Motto: “If you pay peanuts, you are a monkey.”)

The austerity measures mean you no longer get cotton ear plugs because hungry passengers have been known to eat them. But bags are still gone, and you can throw up into the seat pocket in front of you in case you are so inclined.

In case of overbooking, the restroom cubicle has been converted into executive class with the toilet seat for one extra premium passenger.

The great thing about travelling on Air Thrombus or Fly By Night Airlines during the pandemic is that one has to wear masks, which means one is protected from having to inhale body odours of a fellow passenger on the bulkhead aisle seat whose snot can be detected from the cockpit.

Since the price of aviation fuel has been hiked again this week, Nepal’s domestic airlines are reducing cost by replacing turboprops with gliders. This allows airlines to cut unnecessary fuel costs, lessen cabin noise, and help Nepal become carbon neutral by 2050.

Air Hauwahti, for instance, just conducted a successful Johannesburg-Kathmandu test flight that had to make an emergency landing in Ulaanbaatar because of a sudden change in wind direction.

Because every second a plane is on the ground means it is not earning revenue, they have designed jets that can stay in the air longer. In fact, long haul flights now have gorgonic wards since passengers will get old in flight.

The pandemic has made life stressful, resulting in a dramatic rise in air rage. It is now in addition to masks, it is advisable to board your next flight wearing a padded boxing headgear and a groin guard — you never know what kind of person will be sitting next to you and how they will react if you tell them they are not supposed to take the mask off while sipping their bloody mary.

Passengers arriving at Kathmandu airport three days later will also have noticed the health desk where folks in PPEs will aim laser-guided thermal guns at your head. Further along, there are armed guards to apprehend any suspicious-looking microorganism trying to sneak into Nepal without filling out the CDMC form.

We must remember to immigration officials are there for our protection — it is their job to make sure we protect the country from bringing in NSOs or syneric virus.

The Ass