



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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37.1° C 5.5° C  
Dhangadi Jumla



Vehicles are disinfected at Jadubuti in the Capital on Thursday, the 24th day of the nationwide lockdown enforced to contain the spread of Covid-19.

POST PHOTO: ELITE JOSHI

## Experts call for equal emphasis on other infectious diseases amid Covid-19 crisis

With the onset of summer, infectious diseases like malaria, typhoid, dengue, and cholera could lead to epidemics of their own if focus stays on the coronavirus.

ARJUN POUDEL  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 16

Last week, Lalu Kumari Rokaya, of Thuli Bheri Municipality in Dolpa, died of excessive bleeding after giving birth. The health post closest to her was empty, as staff were unable to come to work due to the ongoing nationwide lockdown. Rokaya, a 22-year-old third-time mother, delivered at home, and didn't stop bleeding for six hours, resulting in death, according to health care officials.

In the past few weeks, numerous instances of women forced to give birth at home, sometimes resulting in the deaths of infants, mothers, or both, have been reported from across the country, according to the Department of Health Services' Family Welfare Division. With public movement prohibited across the country, women and health care officials have both been unable to get to hospitals and health posts.

"Some pregnant women have died on the way to hospital while others have died at home waiting ambulances or choosing unsafe delivery methods," Dr. Punya Poudel, chief of the safe motherhood unit at the division, told the Post. "We too are dependent on news media, as our official channel of reporting has broken due to the ongoing lockdown."

Institutional delivery, antenatal and postnatal care, immunisation and other services have all been halted, which is certain to have long-term consequences.

Poudel said that her office has been preparing a guideline to run the safe motherhood programme during the Covid-19 pandemic.

With the entire country so focused on preventing and preparing for a Covid-19 outbreak, other ailments,

sometimes life threatening, are not receiving the attention they require, say doctors. Many hospitals, even in the Capital, are only looking into emergency cases, and that too, if there are doctors available. Important services that require timely administration, like immunisation for infants, have all but stopped, as nurses and doctors stay home.

With the ongoing measles-rubella drive halted indefinitely, two children have already died and more than 150 others have been infected with measles-rubella in Dhading's Chepang settlements.

"If children do not get regular immunisation, it will affect their immune system in the long run," Dr. Jhalak Sharma, chief of the immunisation section at the Family Welfare Division, told the Post. "Although the government has not halted the immunisation programme, we have to admit that services are not being provided."

The nationwide lockdown, enforced by the government to prevent the spread of Covid-19 since March 24, has only complicated matters.

Although the government has declared free movement for health emergencies, there is often no public transportation available and it can be impossible to walk far while suffering from an ailment that requires emergency treatment. Police deployed to enforce the lockdown often do not allow citizens to pass, even if they are headed to the hospital. On Thursday, there was even a report from the Capital of police assaulting doctors for violating the lockdown.

Public health officials say that while the government needs to combat the coronavirus pandemic, other pressing health issues cannot be neglected.

>> Continued on page 5

## Many in Kathmandu Valley can neither stay here nor go home

Without adequate rations and no savings, many are making a long walk back to their hometowns.

ANUP OJHA  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 16

Sarita Tamang woke up at 2.30 am on Monday to ready her two children and all her belongings and leave for her village in Kavrepalanchok. She waited at her rented room in Dhobichaur for an acquaintance who had promised to pick her up and take her home.

"We had a plan to leave the Valley at night," said 40-year-old Tamang. "Fifteen of us villagers were planning to leave Kathmandu that night."

But the man never arrived, as he had been stopped by the police for violating the nationwide lockdown which has been in place since March 24. All non-essential public movement has been prohibited.

But people like Tamang are caught between a rock and a hard place—they can neither stay in Kathmandu nor



As last resort, people are taking long and arduous journeys to their home districts on foot.

POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

leave for their hometowns.

Up until three weeks ago, Tamang was working at a restaurant in Mahaboudha but since the lockdown started, there has been no work and she is fast running out of savings.

"It's been three weeks and we don't have food to eat and can't pay our rent," she said.

Tamang received a relief package from Kathmandu Metropolitan City a week ago, but that ran out quickly and she doesn't know when she will receive the next instalment.

"If the government can't feed us, why won't it send us home?" she said.

There have been numerous reports of people leaving the Kathmandu valley in droves to get back to their homes. Without public transportation, many are making journeys that are hundreds of kilometres long on foot.

>> Continued on page 5

## Government decisions unrelated to coronavirus fight draw criticism from all quarters

Decisions to form a land commission and appoint a top official at Nepal Airlines show misplaced priorities, critics say.

ANIL GIRI  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 16

After the medical equipment purchase fiasco earlier this month, the KP Sharma Oli administration decided to terminate a deal with a private company and bring in the Nepal Army to do the job.

It has been two weeks since the national defence force was entrusted with the task of signing a government-to-government deal to import medical equipment to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

The government has so far dispatched letters to five countries asking them for their interest in supplying medical equipment but only China and India have responded so far.

Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali has held two rounds of telephonic conversation with his

Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and requested that China provide the necessary equipment. But there has been no tangible progress as of now.

The Oli administration, which is facing criticism for its lackadaisical approach and poor handling of the Covid-19 situation, is now drawing flak for its misplaced priorities, as it has been taking a number of non-essential decisions.

These decisions include the formation of a new commission to distribute land to landless people and the appointment of an official at the Nepal Airlines Corporation.

The primary opposition Nepali Congress on Thursday issued a statement, censuring the government for what it called "misplaced priorities".

>> Continued on page 5

## विश्व महामारीको रूपमा देखा परेको कोरोना भाईरस संक्रमण नियन्त्रण गर्न सहयोग गरौं ।

नेपाल सरकार तथा सरोकारवाला निकायहरूले जारी गरेको नियम वा आग्रहलाई सबैले पालना गरौं ।



अति आवश्यक काम बाहेक घरबाट बाहिर ननिक्लौं ।



भीडभाड वा बढी मानिसहरूको उपस्थिति हुने सम्पूर्ण कार्यक्रमहरू बन्द गरौं ।



कोरोना संक्रमण जहाँ र जुनसुकै अवस्थामा पनि हुन सक्ने भएकाले मलाई केही हुँदैन, यहाँ कोरोना आउँदैन जस्ता धारणा नबनाऔं सजक र सतर्क रहौं ।



हालसम्म कोरोनाबाट जेष्ठ नागरिकहरू बढी प्रभावित भएकाले आ-आफ्नो घरमा रहेका जेष्ठ नागरिकहरूको विशेष ख्याल पुऱ्याऔं ।



मास्क लगाऔं, कुनै चिज छोएपछि वा घर बाहिर गएपछि अनिवार्य रूपमा सावुन पानीले हात धोऔं । सावुन पानीले हात धुन नमिल्ने अवस्थामा गुणस्तरीय स्यानिटाइजर प्रयोग गरौं ।



कार्ड तथा विद्युतिय कारोवार मार्फत बैकिङ्ग कारोवार गरी कोरोना संक्रमण विरुद्धको अभियानमा सहयोग गरौं ।

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MEDLEY

Inside the Post

National

The Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre under Nepal Army has started contacting people who have bought new sim cards recently to track people who may have returned home from abroad recently.

Opinion

It is nigh impossible to see the end of this crisis, even if we know it will end one day eventually. Bt will it be possible to pick up from where we left off as if nothing happened?

Money

The first three weeks of the lockdown saw revenue collection at Birgunj Integrated Check Post go into a steep dive as commerce passing through the country's busiest customs slowed to a trickle.

World

Parts of Europe moved cautiously to reopen their streets and economies on Thursday but the coronavirus pandemic was far from beaten and the World Health Organization warned the continent was still in the "eye of the storm".

Culture & Arts

Nepali short films made by aspiring filmmakers are exploring realistic, risky and experimental themes, giving cinema-lovers hope that with time if they transition to mainstream feature movies they can change the game.

News Quiz

- 1. Which of the following Gulf countries has asked other countries to take back their citizens?
2. Who has been appointed as the executive chairman of Nepal Airlines Corporation?
3. Opening of which border point sparked a local protest on Wednesday?
4. Where does Nepal rank according to the WHO 2015 report on global suicide rate?
5. Eleven people were released without tests from a quarantine facility in which district that later saw a Covid-19 case?
6. Which South Asian nation will allow opening up of some industries in rural areas after April 20 to reduce the distress caused by lockdown?



A health worker passes through a disinfectant booth at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital in Teku, Kathmandu.

On this day in history

UK concerned over nuke expert's arrest by Israel

LONDON - The British government has told Israeli authorities of its concern for nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu, who was imprisoned after making claims to a British newspaper about Israel's nuclear programme.

The Kathmandu Post April 17, 1993

Answers to News Quiz: 1(a), 2(c), 3(b), 4(d), 5(c), 6(a)

Quote of the day

Qatar used Covid-19 pandemic as a ruse to expel Nepali workers, Amnesty International says Page 3

"After spending days in inhumane detention conditions, many were not even given the chance to collect their belongings before they were put on planes to Nepal."

Steve Cockburn, Amnesty International's Deputy Director of Global Issues, on the treatment faced by Nepali workers at the hands of Qatari authorities.

Most read online

"We don't want to die in this desert": Nepali workers in the UAE plead to be brought home

For a month, the empty streets and parks of Sharjah, the third-largest city in the United Arab Emirates, were home to Ramesh Budhathoki and nearly 40 other Nepalis.

The pandemic is reinforcing social inequalities

On the second day of the lockdown, Ganesh Tamang began the long walk home. With just three packets of instant noodles in his bag, Tamang walked more than 80 kilometres to his home in Makwanpurgadhi.

Oli cautioning party members to keep distance from media reflects a lack of trust, leaders say

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's distaste for the media is not new. He has heaped scorn on the media in the past—sometimes for criticising him and at other times "for not reporting the good deeds" of the government.

Education Ministry plans online instruction as lockdown halts teaching-learning activities

The second day of the Nepali calendar marks the beginning of the new academic year in Nepal. However, as the country enforces lockdown as a measure to contain the spread of Covid-19, it is uncertain when schools will commence their teaching-learning activities.

Corrections

Our reporters and editors do their best to make sure our reporting is free from errors. But when we make mistakes that warrant correction, we will be transparent and clarify at the bottom of the specific article.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Get ready for one of your biggest emotional walls to come down—or be torn down. A very compassionate person wants to get to know you a little bit better!

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Your latest business venture represents a major opportunity to advance your financial status, and you should prepare yourself. If the best-case scenario works out, you need to know how to handle this evolution in your status.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Collaboration and teamwork is the way to go right now. The energy between you and several other people will be powerful to the point of revolutionary.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Are you using up all of your energy trying to make other people happy? Not only is this a bad idea, but it's an attitude that will only leave you unhappy, which is unacceptable.

LEO (July 23-August 22)

You should follow the trail to frivolity today. Find an idea that is totally out there and see where it leads you. There's no need to stick to your normal routine right now.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

If you know that someone is talking trash today, call them on it! The universe favors bold behavior more than it favors passivity.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Put on your explorer's hat if you go out for a walk today. Try to see everything as if it were a mysterious land. There are places you pass by every day that you've never really looked at before.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Today, like most days, following the herd will only lead you to the land of boredom. You need to take your own path to get any type of stimulation into your day.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

If a friend isn't happy with the amount of time you're giving them, they could let you know about it today. But before you get all defensive and angry because they feel so possessive about you, stop.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

You're reaching one of those critical points in a situation when you need to stop selling your ideas and start delivering on them. Show people who you really are and what you're capable of.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Have you ever tried to herd cats? If you need to organise something today, you might get the feeling that you've been given an impossible task.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)

All of your past choices have helped you become the person you are today. You should be very proud of all the lessons you've learned.

CROSSWORD

- ACROSS
1 Dance movement
5 Cluster
9 Immature raptor
14 Coat length
15 Pocket flaw
16 Windy City airport
17 October birthstone
18 On the briny
19 Piece of turf
20 Similar to ruby or topaz
22 "The — Falcon"
24 Biscotto
26 — go (release)
27 Stings
30 The Daily Planet reporter (2 wds.)
35 Marshal's band
36 Drew near
37 Noted cheese town
38 Wheel track
39 Coiling around
42 Hubbub
43 Stoltz or Clapton
45 Technical sch.
46 Pilot's OK
48 Course taker
50 Tuna salad ingredient

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED
Crossword grid with words filled in: RARE, KITH, INLAW, EMIR, IDEA, SOUSA, CONGENIAL, LICKS, AUG, TKO, FLASKS, PROPHET, PANE, SOD, WINDSOR, FLOSS, SINKS, DUE, DART, BATTY, IDLE, AMA, WILTS, LOSER, PLAINLY, RAW, BELLOW, APOERA, BALE, ENTERTAIN, BILGE, SAIL, ATON, STEED, TENS, PONY.

13x13 crossword grid with numbers 1-71 indicating starting points for clues.

SUDOKU

9x9 Sudoku grid with numbers 1-9 and difficulty rating: ★☆☆☆☆



A staff member of the National Innovation Centre works on the development of a respiratory equipment in Kathmandu. The centre has been making protective gear and medical equipment to address their shortages triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Police sub-inspector beats up health worker in Dharan

**PRADEEP MENYANGBO**  
DHARAN, APRIL 16

A health worker from Bisnupaduka Health Post in Dharan was beaten up by a police sub-inspector on Thursday morning.

Chandra Prakash Khanal, a health assistant of the health post, was visiting a patient's house in Panibari Dharan, on Thursday morning when he was stopped on the way by Sub-inspector BR Raut.

Khanal claimed that Raut questioned him for being outside during the lockdown and proceeded to beat him for defying the stay-at-home order.

"He hit me even after I showed him my ID card issued by the District Administration Office," Khanal said.

Following the incident, health workers in Dharan protested outside the city office demanding action against the officer.

In the last few weeks, several meetings have been held in the District Administration Office to facilitate the health and sanitation services during the lockdown.

"What happened today was unfortunate. The police must exercise caution when dealing with situations during this pandemic," Umesh Raut, chief at the Health Division of Dharan city office, said.

"The health workers returned to their work on Thursday noon after the District Administration Office and the city mayor assured them that such incidents will not happen again in the future."

There are more than 150 health workers including public health officers, auxiliary health workers, health assistants, nurses and women volunteers working in various health institutions in Dharan.

## Qatar used Covid-19 pandemic as a ruse to expel Nepali workers, Amnesty International says

Over 400 Nepalis were deported last month after local authorities accused them of not abiding by government measures while thousands continue to live in labour camps.

**CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL**  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 16

The Qatari authorities used the global health pandemic of Covid-19 as a cover-up to expel Nepali migrant workers illegally, according to Amnesty International.

The human rights advocacy group has accused the Qatari authorities of rounding and expelling dozens of migrant workers after telling them that they were being taken to be tested for Covid-19 in March.

Amnesty International said on Wednesday it had interviewed 20 Nepali male migrant workers who were apprehended by Qatari police, alongside hundreds of others, last month.

According to the organisation's statement, the detainees were told by the police that they were being taken for Covid-19 tests and would be allowed to return to their accommodation afterwards. However, they were taken to the detention centre and kept in appalling conditions for several days before being deported to Nepal.

"None of the men we spoke to had received any explanation for why they were treated this way, nor were they able to challenge their detention or expulsion," said Steve Cockburn, Amnesty International's Deputy Director of Global Issues, in the statement. "After spending days in inhumane detention conditions, many were not even given the chance to collect their belongings before they were put on planes to Nepal."

Last month, more than 400 Nepali workers were deported to Nepal after the local authorities accused them of violating the Qatari's government measures of containing the virus.

According to the rights group's research, on March 12 and 13, hundreds of migrant workers were rounded up and detained by police in parts of Doha including the Industrial Area, Barwa City, and Labour City while they were away from their accommodation, carrying out errands or shopping for groceries.

Some of these workers told Amnesty International that the police specifically told them that they were being taken for coronavirus tests and would be brought back to their accommodation later. Other workers shared that the police spoke to them in Arabic, and the only word they could understand was 'corona'.

"We were asked to stop to test for the virus. Police told us that the doctor would come and check the virus. But they lied to us," one of the 20 Nepali workers interviewed told Amnesty International.

Nepali migrant workers were then crammed into buses and taken to a detention facility in the Industrial Area where their documents and



The human rights advocacy group has accused Qatar of rounding up dozens of Nepali workers in the name of conducting Covid-19 tests and expelling them.

mobile phones were also confiscated, before having their photographs and fingerprints taken, according to the human rights group.

These workers were detained in inhumane conditions alongside scores of migrants from various countries. They were held in overcrowded cells without beds or bedding, and not given enough food or water. Out of the 20 interviewed by the Amnesty, only three said they had their temperature checked while they were kept in the detention centre.

"The jail was full of people. We were given one piece of bread each day, which was not enough. All the people were fed in a group, with food lying on plastic on the floor. Some were not able to snatch the food because of the crowd," said another Nepali worker, according to Amnesty International.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 has gripped the gas-rich nation, labour camps where thousands of workers, including Nepali workers, live in squalid conditions have turned into 'coronavirus prison'.

Workers are not allowed to step out of these camps where scarcity of basic needs, poor hygiene and overcrowded accommodation facilities have forced these workers at higher risk of coronavirus infections.

"It is disturbing that the Qatari authorities appear to have used the pandemic as a smokescreen for further abuses against migrant workers, many of whom feel police misled them by saying that they were to be 'tested'. Covid-19 is no excuse for arbitrarily rounding people up," said Cockburn.

Qatar has remained one of the most favoured labour markets for Nepali workers for years. Currently, Qatar hosts more than 400,000 Nepali migrant workers most of them are working on construction sites in the 2022 FIFA World Cup hosting country.

After cases of Covid-19 started multiplying in the industrial area and the

camps, Qatar, in its desperate attempts to control the spread of the contagious disease, sealed off the workers' camps and those ignoring measures were met with deportations.

Some of these Nepali workers had come to know about their deportation only while being taken to the airport. These workers were not even given adequate time to collect their belongings while others were not given the chance to collect anything at all.

"I was handcuffed and treated like a criminal. I was taken to my camp to collect belongings, but how could I collect and pack the luggage since my hands were chained?" said another Nepali worker, according to the Amnesty.

Some of these Nepali workers were expelled on March 15 and others on March 19. None of these workers was able to challenge their detention or expulsion and some shared that the police threatened to bring criminal charges against them and keep them in the detention facility longer if they complained or tried to challenge the situation.

The human rights advocacy group has called on the Qatari authorities to ensure that any worker detained and threatened with expulsion is informed of the reasons and allowed to challenge them. Furthermore, it urged that Qatar should also ensure effective remedy and reparation for any worker whose rights have been violated.

The Qatari authorities must also ensure all migrant workers' right to health is fully protected during the Covid-19 crisis, said the statement.

"The authorities must provide reparations for the way that these men have been treated, and consider allowing those who have been expelled to return to Qatar if they so wish," Cockburn added in the statement. "The men's employers must also urgently pay the salary and employment benefits they are owed."

## Action should be taken against police personnel who manhandled doctors, probe committee concludes

DSP Umesh Lamsal, chief of the Maharajgunj Police Circle, has been recalled to the Metropolitan Police Office, Ranipokhari after the incident.

**SHUVAM DHUNGANA**  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 16

Departmental action should be initiated against police personnel who reportedly manhandled three doctors in Kathmandu on Wednesday night, an official investigating the incident said.

The security personnel from Maharajgunj Police Circle reportedly manhandled three doctors, two from Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital and one from Kanti Children's Hospital, while returning home after their shift on Wednesday night.

"We held a meeting with the doctors at the health ministry this afternoon as part of our investigation," said Deputy Superintendent Hobindra Bogati of Metropolitan Police Range, Kathmandu, a member of the Senior Superintendent Kiran Bajracharya-led committee.

"We reached a conclusion that departmental action should be initiated against personnel involved in manhandling the doctors," said Bogati after the probe team invited the doctors and the police personnel involved in the incident for a discussion.

Deputy Superintendent Umesh Lamsal from Maharajgunj Police Circle was also recalled to the Metropolitan Police Office, Ranipokhari, for investigation.

On Thursday morning, Nepal Medical Association, the organisation of doctors, denounced police action and demanded that those involved be brought to the book.

"The government on April 4 passed a decision that the home ministry shall ensure security for doctors, nurses and technical health workers involved in the prevention, control and treatment of Covid-19," the association said in a statement.

"But such a condemnable incident with the doctors has stunned us."

If action is not taken against the guilty, it could affect healthcare services across the country, the statement read.

"Nepal Medical Association wants to warn the government and all other concerned not to create a situation that will cause health workers and doctors to stop working on the frontline during such sensitive times."

The incident on Wednesday night came amid criticism that law enforcement agencies have been using unwarranted force against civilians to enforce the lockdown.

The government first imposed the lockdown on March 24 and since has extended it three times, with the latest extension applicable until April 27.

As per government instructions, police have beefed up security in the Capital.

## Nepal Army starts contacting people who bought SIM cards recently

Officials are working under the assumption that those who returned to Nepal from abroad would have bought new mobile numbers.

**BINOD GHIMIRE**  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 16

The Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre under Nepal Army has started contacting people who have bought new SIM cards recently to track people who may have returned home from abroad recently.

A team of 20 army personnel have been assigned to call up people who recently bought SIM cards. During the inquiry so far, of 9,523 people contacted, 616 people were found to have come to Nepal from abroad and 19 of them reported symptoms that matched with Covid-19.

"We refer such people to the nearest hospital where they can be tested," Nepal Army Spokesperson Brigadier General Bigyan Dev Pandey told the Post. "We are going to follow up on those who have reported symptoms."

The centre, through the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, had sought the list of new mobile numbers issued between March 14 and March 24, the day the nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of the contagious virus started. Officials assume that people who return home from abroad generally get a new SIM card at the border crossing or at the airport. However, not

everyone who bought a new SIM card during the period is a returnee.

As most of the Covid-19 cases in the country have been reported in people who have returned from abroad, the government is using a host of measures to get returnees tested. The army said it is working closely with the other government entities to test returnees and quarantine suspects.

The method has so far traced 19 people with symptoms matching Covid-19.

Nepal Telecom and Ncell have provided the list of around 64,000 new mobile numbers issued during the period. Nepal Telecom has provided a list of the new SIM cardholders to the Department of Health Services as well.

Rajesh Joshi spokesperson at Nepal Telecom, the state owned telecommunication provider, said 193,000 people have bought the company's SIM card from March 1 to April 5. A total of 20,000 numbers issued from March

14-24 have been handed over to the army.

Similarly, an official at Ncell confirmed that records of new subscribers have been handed over to the centre. "We have provided the list of mobile numbers issued without giving other details," said the official on the condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to talk to the media.

Nepal Army records show that it has received 64,000 phone numbers (44,000 from Ncell and 20,000 from Nepal Telecom).

"Contacting people in the time of pandemic, has proven very effective in many countries. I am sure it will in ours as well," Joshi told the Post.

According to Pandey, the 19 who reported symptoms of Covid-19 were from Bhojpur, Dang, Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Baglung, Darchula and Makwanpur—most of them returned from India recently.

"We have found contacting people on the list very effective in finding out suspected individuals," he said. Along with making direct calls, the army has also deployed a mobile app on which it has received inquiries from 2,361 people. Pandey said officials are closely following 81 suspects.

## EDITORIAL

## Bring them home now

Nepalis are languishing abroad while the government dawdles.

It is baffling to witness the lack of empathy and respect the Nepal government has shown towards Nepalis trapped abroad. Even as the current lockdown continues to squeeze Nepalis at home—what with most of the economy, informal or otherwise, seeing a sharp downturn—Nepalis abroad face greater challenges. They are away from home, many without a source of income and with families relying on them back in Nepal, as the global economy shutters for the moment. Some have not only lost their jobs but have also been evicted from their accommodations. And yet, through all this turmoil, the Nepal government continues to refuse to take these Nepalis back.

As Nepal enters the fourth week of its lockdown, it can no longer claim that it needs more time to figure out how to bring back its citizens stuck abroad. It cannot continue to make excuses about the lack of quarantine facilities or the need for more planning. If the government is indeed still under-prepared to address the pleas of the stranded Nepalis, it needs to be held accountable for the weeks that have been wasted.

Migrant workers are known to suffer even in the best of times. The near half million Nepalis exploited—some to their deaths—in Qatar, as exposed by The Guardian in 2013, was only the tip of the iceberg. Research by Amnesty International in 2017 confirmed what the people of Nepal had known all along: The government itself had failed its out-migrants, and manpower agencies in Nepal itself began the 'cycle of debt and deception' which dragged down the workers into further and perpetual misery. However, with the countries playing host to migrant workers waging an uphill battle against Covid-19 and witnessing major economic downturns, the workers have begun to face unprecedented challenges.

In Romania, around 500 Nepalis have been forced to either stay home without pay, or take salary cuts. In Malaysia, usually a haven, comparatively, for migrant workers, Nepalis were being forced to work through a lockdown to earn their livelihood—at great risk to each other, as out-migrants often share cramped quarters. Qatar did not take any chances, and immediately deported all Nepali workers that it thought were endangering public health. Thousands of Nepalis continue to suffer right across the Nepal-India border, having been barred from entering the country after travelling hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres on foot to get home after India's lockdown was announced. The Post in this space has earlier also reminded the government of its duty to allow these migrants to cross the border, having set a precedent by rescuing 175 Nepalis from Hubei province in China.

Now, to add to the grisly list, it has come to light that nearly 40 Nepalis have been brought to the streets of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates—without much food, shelter for a limited time and having been cheated of fair wages. For most of these migrant workers, the exploitation and bias they have faced abroad comes secondary to the helplessness they feel at the government's refusal to allow them to return home. But it is the duty of the federal government to repatriate such Nepalis stuck abroad. Article 45 of the constitution 'guarantees that citizens will not be exiled', which surely the current situation counts as.

If the current government lacks the humanity to understand the current scenario, and even if it lacks the empathy to feel its citizens' plight, it surely cannot ignore the legal ramifications of essentially exiling its citizens en masse. Nepali migrant workers also contributed \$8.1 billion to the national income in 2018, something the government needs to keep in mind, should it think to continue discounting out-migrants. If the administration does not do right by the millions of migrant workers stuck abroad now, it may also face a different voting environment in the next election cycle.

## Lessons from Parasite during a pandemic



SHUTTERSTOCK

No other film in recent years has held up a mirror to society as starkly as the South Korean film has.

AMISH RAJ MULMI



In the critically acclaimed (and award-winning) South Korean drama Parasite (dir Bong Joon Ho), the Kim family is given a 'scholar's rock' by Min, their son's friend. The scholar's rock is a rock simply valued for its aesthetics among the Korean rich. Min believes the rock can increase material wealth, and is a perfect gift for the Kim family that is struggling to make ends meet, living in their semi-basement apartment where they have to steal WiFi. The viewer is presented with this bizarre imagery: a poor family receives a gift of a rock. As the son Ki-woo says, 'It's so metaphorical'. Later, the rock floats to the surface as the Kims' apartment is flooded during a thunderstorm. Their toilet is backing up; shit is everywhere. The Kims struggle to save their

belongings, as do their neighbours, desperation, and poverty, writ large on their faces.

On the posh side of town, a rich couple sleep in their vast living room as their son sleeps in a tent on their lawn outside. The thunderstorm has little meaning here. It has none of the menace it poses for the Kims; instead, it is a moment of calm despite the thunder and lightning, a child's adventure.

On the first day of the Nepali New Year, the Prime Minister similarly presented us with a 'scholar's rock', with his call to sing the national anthem and clap for the frontline workers of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was a bizarre rejoinder to a private sector initiative that imitated the Indian prime minister Narendra Modi's go-Corona-go appeal. It was a balm for the wounded urban class that feels locked in and desperate to 'do something'. It was an initiative made for social media. It was vacuous, and it wouldn't yield any results, except to soothe our collective selves by allowing us to believe we've done something in this 'war' against a pandemic.

Thankfully, it failed, for very few woke up at 8 and sang the national anthem. Perhaps our prime minister just does not command the same sort of belief in his citizenry as does his Indian counterpart? For, despite several policies that have hurt the lower classes—ban on cow slaughter, demonetisation, GST, CAA and NRC—the Indian middle class continues to support Modi,

as the response to his call to action showed. Oli, to put it bluntly, does not evoke such a following for a simple reason that his government has done little to earn the confidence of the Nepali citizen, one example being corruption during a pandemic. Although few post-1990 governments have evoked any sense of credibility among the Nepali public, this current government stands out in particular; for it is run by an inner coterie that considers itself Omni-potent.

One of the reasons why Parasite evoked such a global following despite its South Korean roots is because the themes it talks about are universal: inequality, not just in wealth, but also in how the state responds to its citizens. Gifting the Kims a scholar's rock is the same as clapping your hands during a pandemic: a coat of washable paint over tottering health infrastructure and the inequities laid bare by a tottering society. Workers walking hundreds of miles to get home; folks swimming across raging torrents in desperation; the invisibility of thousands—these are the new symbols of class divisions in an era of late-stage capitalism. Everywhere, it is the disadvantaged who are paying the price. In Mumbai, thousands of migrant workers were lathi-charged by the police after they protested the extension of the lockdown (while thousands others walked back, just as here). In the US, while the Blacks are disproportionately dying, the economic impact is hardest

Parasite evoked such a global following because its themes are universal.

on the marginalised working in low paying jobs.

In Nepal, as Covid-19 tests have risen, so have the numbers. The lockdown has been extended, and so will the woes of those at the bottom of the pyramid. It is nigh impossible to see the end of this crisis, even if we know it will end one day eventually. But will it be possible to pick up from where we left off as if nothing happened?

No other film in recent years has held up a mirror to society as starkly as Parasite has. By the end of Parasite, the viewer is in two minds about who the eponymous parasite in the title is. Is it the Kims, who inveigle their way into working at a rich family's home, or is it the wealthy family, whose wealth is built on the exploitation of the working class? Similarly, it took a pandemic to reveal the deep class divisions our societies had been hiding away. Money is an iron. Those creases all get smoothed out by money', one of the characters says in the film. It is, quite possibly, one of the most succinct ways to describe civilisation today.

## Covid-19, climate change and the future

The years ahead will be shaped by the choices we make in the coming weeks and months.

MADHUKAR UPADHYA

STARTING POINT



We find ourselves in the last quarter of the fiscal year, a critical time for the government as it prepares the budget for the coming year before presenting it in the parliament on May 28. But, given the Covid-19, planners will have sleepless nights as they struggle to figure out the level of revenue generation in the coming year because tourism and remittance, which contribute more than a third of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) combined, have been hardest-hit by the pandemic and will continue to suffer in the days ahead. Simultaneously, foreign aid may come to a grinding halt, with the exception of some multilateral agencies. On the expenditure front, there is not much that can be cut. It's hard to slash any ongoing development projects or social security benefits, which the state has generously started in the past decades. Moreover, they may have to increase access to these benefits as many jobs have been lost.

According to the WHO, the coronavirus pandemic is much more than a health crisis. The restrictions put in place by countries to protect health are already taking a heavy toll on the income of individuals and families, with profound, long-lasting socioeconomic consequences. The outbreak has pushed us into a new normal of high uncertainty.

Initial responses

Given that the impacts of the 2008 recession continue to reverberate across the world in almost every sector, experts warn that it will take years for the global economic order to recover from the current pandemic. The government's decision to restrict imports of



SHUTTERSTOCK

non-essential items, including luxury cars, demonstrates that it has already sensed the difficulty ahead.

There is no doubt that enhancing domestic production by reviving agriculture is the only way forward. And as the agriculture sector employs a large portion of the population, contributing about 27 percent of the GDP, the Ministry of Agriculture wasted no time in seeking suggestions from local governments to protect agriculture from possible impacts of the crisis. Experts scrambled to suggest initiating a package programme to employ returnee migrant workers and revive agriculture in order to avert a potential food crisis due to the disruption in supply of inputs in the coming year. It can be expected that the planners will heed these calls and formulate plans to revitalise stagnant agriculture.

Unfortunately, the level of agriculture production cannot be improved quickly as in a factory's assembly line; farming across our diverse geography has become more complicat-

ed due to increased impacts of climate change; little effort has been exerted to understand the consequences and developing remedies to correct them even less so. The rising ferocity of water-induced disasters we've witnessed over the years, which proved difficult to address even during more stable times, will be more complicated to fix in times of Covid-19 and its companion problems.

We are left with an agriculture infrastructure stripped of its workforces, who were forced to seek employment abroad, soil exhausted of nutrients, and now with a more unpredictable cycle of floods and droughts. Emerging impacts of the coronavirus must be assessed in conjunction with these existing circumstances before formulating plans.

Lasting crisis

We are in the midst of a lasting crisis. Remittance will continue dwindling due to the looming global recession. Even if it's available, workers may not earn as much due to the

weakened economies providing jobs coupled with a surplus of labour. The cliché that remittance-based economies wouldn't be sustainable seems to hold true at a very critical time.

Tourism will take years to resume because the outbreak has disrupted the financial security required for people to pursue travel abroad. What is spared by Covid-19 will continue to be impacted increasingly by climate change, making the economic base weaker while needs continue to rise. Globally, experts fear that the impending recession may easily slip into a depression and if that happens, the cushion required for us to emerge from it will either be too distant or not available at all.

Systemic issues which, in the past, we thought could wait because of our political priorities will now come to the forefront and demand prioritising. The most important of these issues is, of course, our food system which has increasingly turned into an import-based food system. Neither did we learn from

the 2008 food crisis, nor did we begin emphasising local production, despite the fact that the import bill for food was constantly rising.

Sadly, these harrowing times are coinciding with fledgling attempts to improve our flagging economy, which has an excessively widening income gap. Earnings of the top 10 percent of richest Nepalis have grown three times more than the poorest 40 percent since the mid-1990s. Ironically, this was when the 10-year-long insurgency began to fight existing inequalities. The unfolding crisis will exacerbate the inequality gap, with the poor losing jobs and income sources. Unemployment and inflation could flare-up resentment against the government. Therefore, it's a grim time for planners who need to see this situation through into the near future and take prudent steps.

Complete government approach

The years ahead will be shaped by the choices we make in the coming weeks and months. Before formulating plans, it's extremely important to note that the social, economic, and environmental dynamics are changing so quickly that conventional methods of making plans to respond to rapidly changing problems won't work for long. By the time plans are made and implemented, the ground reality will have changed drastically, making these plans redundant.

Furthermore, unlike springing into action after disasters, the time now demands swift but careful planning. It may require extraordinary measures such as suspending the constitutional provisions which give local governments the liberty to spend on activities of their choosing, such as building view-towers or extension of roads and ask all to focus more on agriculture.

We are trapped between the wreck of this novel virus-affected socio-economic reality and the snowballing impacts of climate change. Regular development plans with added measures may not be enough to keep the economic base from sliding in the warmer climate. If agriculture is to be recourse to maintain the economic base, climate impacts must be addressed with the same urgency and in the same spirit as we did with the coronavirus—a complete government approach. The government showed that it can take necessary, drastic steps when required. Remember, unlike pandemics, there is no vaccine being developed for climate change; it's here to stay.

# Workers making their way across districts on foot to reach their hometowns

### Authorities are asking respective local units to make arrangements for the passing workers' stay in quarantine facilities.

**AGANDHAR TIWARI**  
PARBAT, APRIL 16

Thirteen workers of the Tallo Modi Hydropower Project under the Phewa Constructions have been stranded in Chhisti, Baglung, since Tuesday. They were making their way home to Dailekh from Parbat on foot.

"We have been walking on hungry stomachs since Tuesday morning. We don't know if we can continue our journey home," said Jiraj Oli, one of the workers.

The workers had started their journey from Chuwa in Kushma Municipality on Tuesday morning after the project work was suspended in light of the protracted lockdown. However, authorities are raising concerns about their departure since people's movement has been restricted.

The Disaster Management Committee in Parbat has tightened people's movement from one local unit to another and one ward to another during the lockdown.

According to the workers, they had received a recommendation letter from the office of Kushma Ward No. 8, allowing them to make their journey home on foot.

On Wednesday morning, the committee held a meeting in Kushma to discuss how the group of workers went out of the district and received a recommendation letter.

"How could the workers leave the district amid such tight security?" said Amrit Subedi, the assistant chief district officer, adding that the administration will soon take them back to



POST PHOTO: AGANDHAR TIWARI

Locals governments are making arrangements for food and shelter for the stranded workers.

Parbat and arrange for their food and shelter.

Around 1,000 labourers are working in various projects under the Phewa Constructions in Parbat district. Rajendra Pahari, a representative of the construction company, said around 900 workers were sent home before March 31.

"Some of the workers are still stranded here. The local administration did not allow us to send them home after March 31. We have man-

aged food and shelter for the workers in Parbat," claimed Pahari, adding that 13 workers left the district without informing the office of the Phewa Constructions.

Meanwhile, 24 workers from a brick kiln in Kushma were found walking along the Mid-Hill highway on their way to Bardiya on Wednesday. But the District Police Office in Parbat restricted them from leaving the district and requested the local administration to arrange for their food and

accommodation.

Kalpana Ghimire, chief district officer of Parbat, said the local administration will provide food and shelter to the stranded workers.

"We will take action against the brick kiln operator, if found guilty, for sending the workers home," Ghimire said.

The workers claimed that they were forced to move out of the brick kiln, as the operator did not pay them a month's salary.

On Wednesday, 12 workers reached Besisahar from Marshyangdi on foot. They were on the way to their homes in Rukum, Salyan and Surkhet districts. Rabindra Man Gurung, deputy superintendent of police, said the police have requested contractor companies and local units to manage food and shelter for the stranded workers.

"We could not let them walk during the lockdown," said Gurung.

Chief District Officer Laxman Bahadur Khadka said the local administration has been coordinating with the local units to make all stranded workers stay where they are.

On Thursday morning, 12 workers from Lamjung were rescued by the police from the Prithvi Highway in Dumre, Tanahun. Badrinath Adhikari, chief district officer of Tanahun, said the workers were on their way to Kailali. "They have been rescued and taken to Damauli. We are going to keep them in a quarantine facility," said Adhikari.

(Aash Gurung from Lamjung contributed reporting.)

# Court issues order to rescue workers stranded abroad

### At least 20,000 Nepalis stranded in various Indian states wish to return home.

**POST REPORT**  
KATHMANDU, APRIL 16

The Supreme Court has issued an interim order directing the government to rescue migrant workers stranded in vulnerable conditions and to ensure WHO standard health services based on the situation.

The court does not explicitly talk about the Nepalis stuck at border points but lawyers say the interim order was meant for them as the government is under fire for not allowing them to return home.

Responding to a writ filed by advocate Shom Prasad Luitel, a single bench of Justice Sapana Pradhan Malla on Thursday asked the government for necessary homework to rescue the stranded Nepalis.

Luitel had demanded an interim order to the government to rescue all the migrant workers stranded abroad and also to bring all those stuck at border points without hindrance to Nepal and keep them in quarantine.

The government on Wednesday decided to evacuate Nepalis working in Afghanistan for the United Nations following the UN request but has not taken any move for evacuating those living in other countries.

At least 20,000 Nepalis wishing to come home and be with their families have been caught in the lockdown and are unable to return home. On Saturday, at least 800 Nepalis from various parts of India flocked to the Nepal-India border in Darchula but due to the lockdown in both countries,

they have been forced to stay on the Indian side without provisions of shelter and food.

"The government should prepare a report on the health status of migrants in the countries affected by coronavirus and ensure they receive WHO standard health service without discrimination and rescue those who are at high risk ensuring the individual rights of citizens and taking the interest of the larger population into consideration," states the interim order.

"Not only their mental and physical health, the government's indifference would put those dependent on the migrant workers at risk."

The KP Sharma Oli government has come under fire, including from his own party supporters, for leaving Nepali migrants high and dry during the pandemic.

Thousands of Nepalis working in India, most of them doing menial jobs, have been put out of work in the wake of the lockdown in India.

The Indian government has extended its lockdown period to May 3 to stop the spread of coronavirus, severely affecting tens of thousands of daily wage workers, including Nepalis, who are now scrambling to get back to their homes.

India and Nepal have agreed to take care of and feed each other's citizens stranded on the border until the crossings between the two countries are opened. Many Nepali migrant workers have been urging the government to rescue them while some countries have threatened to deport them.

# Government decisions unrelated to coronavirus fight draw criticism ...

>> Continued from page 1

"At this moment, we need medical equipment. Focus should be on controlling a possible outbreak and providing proper treatment for those who have been infected," reads the statement issued by the Congress Parliamentary Party. "The opposition party, civil society and all sections of Nepali society have extended support to the government in this time of crisis, but the government does not seem to be working seriously to contain the disease."

The government on Monday formed the commission and appointed Sushil Ghimire, a former tourism secretary, as executive chairman of Nepal Airlines, a post that had been vacant since January.

Tourism ministry officials have also objected to the Nepal Airlines appointment, saying the government ignored recommendations from various reform committees that the post be filled through open competition.

The government has also moved ahead with its plan to set up a defence university, another decision that many are calling ill-timed.

Finance Minister Yubraj Khatriwada, who is also the government spokesperson, made an announcement regarding the defence university on Monday while making public Cabinet decisions.

"The government has failed to set its priorities right," said Govinda Raj Pokhrel, former vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission who led the preparation of the Post Disaster Needs Assessment after the

2015 earthquakes.

"This is not the time to form a commission or fill vacant posts to appease party loyalists. The government should instead pull out all the stops to fight the pandemic," he said. "Treatment, medical supplies and the plight of the poor should be the focus."

Pokhrel also questioned the government for failing to address the concerns of thousands of Nepali citizens who have been forced to either stay hungry in Kathmandu or walk hundreds of kilometres home.

"Ministers are lazing around in their quarters after imposing the lockdown and people are off to their homes on foot without food and water," said Pokhrel. "The government has not done any homework on how it is going to address the problems faced by formal and informal service sectors. Instead of the commission for the landless, it should have formed a high-level committee to assess the impact of Covid-19 on the national economy."

The government decision to form a commission to distribute land to the landless people at this time of crisis has received criticism also because of past incidents where politicians exploited such institutions to provide land to party loyalists and their near and dear ones.

The Nepal Communist Party (NCP) has been censured also for appointing Devi Gyawali, a party loyalist, as the commission chair. Gyawali, a candidate from the then CPN-UML, had lost the Bharatpur mayoral election to Renu Dahal, a Maoist Centre candi-

date, in 2017. The two parties were then at each other's throats over the vote count. The two parties merged in May 2018.

Former prime minister Baburam Bhattarai has also criticised the decision to form the new commission, terming it a waste of time and resources.

"I fail to understand why the government is wasting its time and state coffers by forming a new commission," Bhattarai wrote on Twitter. "If we have to do scientific land reform [which we must do], work plans presented by the Bhim Gautam commission, which was formed during my tenure to implement the recommendations of the commissions led by Haribol Giurel and Ghanendra Basnet, can be amended and implemented."

Officials from the Prime Minister's Office, however, defended the government decisions.

"Some of the decisions regarding the formation of the [land distribution] commission and appointment at the Nepal Airlines were already in the pipeline," said Surya Thapa, press advisor to Prime Minister Oli. "As far as people walking home is concerned, the government has told everyone to remain where they are."

Thapa even criticised those who are trying to reach their homes.

"Who told them to defy the lockdown?" said Thapa. "I don't think that any Nepali is dying from hunger due to the lockdown. They should stop defying the lockdown. The federal government and other tiers of government will take care of them."

# Many in Kathmandu Valley can neither stay here nor go home

>> Continued from page 1

Images have appeared on social media of people carrying babies, clad only in slippers, and laden with possessions, all walking home.

Many say that they are walking home because the relief handed out by the government is inadequate or sub-standard and that they would rather be home, where they don't have to pay exorbitant amounts in rent.

According to the Metropolitan Traffic Police Division, 465,972 people left before the government enforced the lockdown. But hundreds more are believed to have left on foot during the three weeks of lockdown.

"It took my cousin Aatma Tamang and me 12 hours to get home on foot from Kathmandu," said 36-year-old Santa Tamang from Bakaiya Rural Municipality-6, who is a construction worker. "At least I am home. I do not have a problem with food and I am with my family now."

On April 9, the government decided

to allow people to leave Kathmandu for their homes, but inexplicably withdrew the decision immediately. Since then, there has been no word from the government, despite widespread outrage on social media regarding the plight of these people. On Thursday, the Home Ministry instead decided to begin detaining people violating the lockdown.

According to the National Human Rights Commission, the government has failed to provide relief for people working in the unorganised sector, compelling them to embark on a risky journey home.

In a statement, the constitutional human rights watchdog said that the federal, provincial and local governments had a visible coordination problem in the distribution of relief and asked all levels of government to ensure that everyone receives the necessary essentials.

The commission had monitored relief distribution in a number of

districts together with the Nepal Bar Association, the Federation of Nepali Journalists and the Nepal NGO Federation.

Government officials, however, say that they are aware of the difficulties many are facing due to the lockdown and are working on addressing their issues.

"It's not that the government has completely stopped discussions on ways to get people home," Minister for Federal Affairs and General Administration Hridayesh Tripathi told the Post. "The government is doing its homework and preparing to rescue them."

According to Agriculture Minister Ghanshyam Bhusal, a Friday meeting of the high-level coordination committee to combat Covid-19 will discuss the issue and hopefully take a concrete decision.

Binod Ghimire and Tika R Pradhan contributed reporting.

# Defying lockdown, vegetable carriers and ambulances are carrying people into Lamjung

**AASH GURUNG**  
LAMJUNG, APRIL 16

Despite the ongoing nationwide lockdown, movement of people across the country hasn't stopped. There have been reports of people using proxy routes to cross the Nepal-India border. In Lamjung, it's the loaded trucks that are ferrying in people from other districts.

This week, nine individuals arrived in Beshisahal from India and Birgunj on trucks, according to locals. The individuals, however, deny that they came from India. "Trucks carrying vegetables and essential goods are found to have carried people into the district," Rajesh Thapa, chair of Lamjung Chamber of Commerce, said. "Even ambulances are illicitly carrying passengers."

According to Pitambar Saru, chief administration officer at Kwhlosothar Rural Municipality, 23 individuals are currently quarantined across various facilities in the district.

"The quarantined individuals are those who recently entered the district during the lockdown," he said. "The security personnel express ignorance about their arrival."

Of the 23 quarantined individuals, 20 had come from Pokhara, two from Beshisahal and one from Kathmandu after the country enforced the nationwide lockdown.

On Tuesday, the chamber of commerce filed a letter of concern to the chief district officer asking to restrict the entry of vehicles from outside the district.

# Experts call for equal ...

>> Continued from page 1

"More people will die of other ailments if we neglect them and focus only on the coronavirus," Dr Basudev Pandey, director of the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division, told the Post.

The division is responsible for coordinating the public health response to the Covid-19 pandemic, but is also mandated to deal with other infectious diseases. With the onset of summer and the monsoon, cases of diseases like dengue, typhoid, malaria and cholera tend to rise, especially in rural areas where health care is already poor and health professionals are few and far between.

Three cases of malaria have already been detected in people residing in the quarantine zone in Banke, where dozens of people who returned from abroad are housed, and dozens of dengue cases have been reported from several districts, said Pandey.

Last year, a dengue epidemic that started in April in Dharan later spread to 68 districts, killing at least six and infecting over 16,000. "Cases of scrub typhus and severe acute respiratory problems are also on the rise," Pandey said. "We are worried that other diseases will kill more people than the coronavirus."

So far, 16 people, including three Indian nationals, have tested positive for Covid-19 in Nepal, with no fatalities.

The division has alerted health facilities across the country about the risk of other diseases, but the lockdown and the entire country's focus on the coronavirus are proving to be obstacles.

"We are facing difficulties getting reports from the districts, as health workers are unable to reach health facilities due to the lockdown," Uttam Raj Pyakurel, vector control inspector at the division, told the Post.

Given the poor state of Nepal's health care system and the country's vulnerability to infectious disease, it is vitally important that the government not underestimate the risk of another possible epidemic while dealing with the coronavirus, say public health experts.

"Common ailments like dengue, malaria, seasonal influenza and diarrhoeal diseases could kill a lot of people," said Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, a virologist at the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital. "We need to take precautionary measures to prevent such epidemics and also work to lessen the plight of patients with chronic conditions who have been deprived of treatment for about a month."

**NEPAL ELECTRICITY AUTHORITY**  
Transmission Directorate  
Grid Development Department

**Dadakhet Rahughat 132 kV Transmission Line Project**  
IFB No.ICB-DR-TLSS-076/77-01; Procurement of Plant for Design, Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of Dadakhet Rahughat 132 kV Transmission Line and Associated 132/33kV Dadakhet Substation

**ADDENDUM-2**

In accordance with the ITB 8.1 of the Bidding Document for the "Procurement of Plant for Design, Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of Dadakhet Rahughat 132 kV Transmission Line and Associated 132/33kV Dadakhet Substation (Single Stage Two Envelope Bidding) (IFB No: ICB-DR-TLSS-076/77-01)", following amendments have been made in the bidding Document.

S.No	Description/Clause of Reference	As in the Bidding Documents	To Be Replaced as
1	ITB 22.1	The deadline for online bid submission is: Date: 24 <sup>th</sup> April, 2020, 12:00 hrs. (Noon) (server time of PPMO)	The deadline for online bid submission is: Date: 24 <sup>th</sup> May, 2020, 12:00 hrs. (Noon) (server time of PPMO)
2	ITB 25.1	The bid opening shall take place at: .....Date:24 <sup>th</sup> April, 2020, 12:30 PM (Nepalese Standard Time)	The bid opening shall take place at: ..... Date:24 <sup>th</sup> May, 2020, 12:30 PM (Nepalese Standard Time)

**Government of Nepal**  
**Ministry of Urban Development**  
**Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC)**  
**Regional Urban Development Project (RUDP)**  
**Regional Project Implementation Unit (R-PIU)**  
Dhangadi, Nepal

**2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment on Notice for Opening of Price Bids**  
**April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

This notice is issued to all the concerned bidders who have submitted their bid and has passed in the technical bid as per the notice published in Republica National daily on March 29, 2020 are notified that the bid opening date and time has been amended as follows.

<b>Bid Opening Time and Date</b>	<b>11:00 Hrs Nepal Standard Time (NST) of May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020</b>
<b>Contract No. and Title :</b>	1) <b>Name of Work :</b> Construction and Rehabilitation of Road, Drainage, Footpath and Road Furniture in Godawari Municipality, Contract Id. No.: RUDP/ICB/KL/06-GD/RD/01 2) Upgradation and Rehabilitation of Road, Drainage, Footpath and Road Furniture of Suklaphanta Municipality, (Contract Id. No.: RUDP/NCB/KC/05-SK/RD/02)
<b>Bid Opening Time and Date</b>	<b>11:00 Hrs Nepal Standard Time (NST) of May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020</b>
<b>Contract No. and Title :</b>	1) Construction and Rehabilitation of Road, Drainage, Footpath and Road Furniture in Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City, Contract Id. No.: RUDP/ICB/KL/06-DN/RD/03

**Project Manager**

MONEY

FOREX

US Dollar	123.28
Euro	134.06
Pound Sterling	153.88
Japanese Yen	11.45
Chinese Yuan	17.43
Qatari Riyal	33.86
Australian Dollar	77.59
Malaysian Ringgit	28.19
Saudi Arab Riyal	32.81

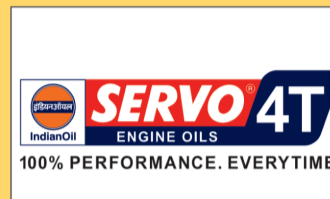
Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 77,000
Silver	Rs 720

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

GASOLINE WATCH



100% PERFORMANCE. EVERYTIME.

Petrol (Per Litre)	Rs 96.00/-
Diesel (Per Litre)	Rs 85.00/-
Kerosene (Per Litre)	Rs 85.00/-
LPG (Per cylinder)	Rs 1375/-

SOURCE: Nepal Oil Corporation

# Lockdown hits revenue collection at Birgunj Integrated Check Post

Collection reached 35.61 percent of the total revenue intake targeted for the period March 14 to April 11.



Birgunj Integrated Check Post is a major revenue source for the government.

**SHANKAR ACHARYA**  
PARSA, APRIL 16

The first three weeks of the lockdown saw revenue collection at Birgunj Integrated Check Post go into a steep dive as commerce passing through the country's busiest customs slowed to a trickle.

Sirsiya Dry Port fared a little better, but revenue collection here fell way short of the target.

According to Birgunj Integrated Check Post, collection amounted to

35.61 percent of the total revenue intake targeted for the period March 14 to April 11. The customs office collected Rs5.36 billion compared to its goal of Rs15.7 billion.

The drop in revenue collection at both customs offices means the target set for the entire fiscal year has slipped further out of reach.

The annual revenue collection target for the customs office is Rs140.890 billion. It had collected Rs100.440 billion as of mid-April which is only 71.31 percent of the goal.

Birgunj Integrated Check Post is a major revenue source for the government while Sirsiya Dry Port is counted among the five outstanding customs in the country.

Bimal Sah, information officer at Birgunj customs, said that the lockdown which started on March 24 prevented them from collecting as much revenue as expected.

"We were collecting revenue in a satisfactory manner as trade was going well. If the lockdown had not been extended, collecting Rs40 billion

in revenue in three months was no challenge for us," he said. But as the lockdown got extended till the end of April, it can be a problem, he added.

Imports through Birgunj Integrated Check Post was not halted during the lockdown. Liquefied petroleum gas and daily food items are being imported from India. But shipments have shrunk to only around 30 percent compared to normal times.

Sah said 150-175 cargo trucks carrying cooking gas and other goods were arriving from India daily.

Sirsiya Dry Port is also feeling the impact of the coronavirus lockdown on its revenue inflows.

The dry port was able to achieve only 64.47 percent of the total revenue target during the period March 14 to April 11. It collected revenue amounting to Rs2.3 billion against the target of Rs3.16 billion.

According to Jagdish Purbe, information officer at the dry port customs, they were able to collect Rs28.7 billion compared to its target of Rs41.88 billion for the current fiscal year.

Imports of goods from India and third countries are continuing, but the dry port has not been able to operate like before the lockdown, which has impacted revenue collection, said Purbe.

Goods have been arriving by railway from India and third countries daily, but as the importers are not able to take delivery of their cargo, they are piling up at the port. The yard at the dry port is filled with imported goods arriving daily as they are not being cleared, he said.

# Huawei chip unit ramps up domestic production as US restrictions loom



**REUTERS**  
SHANGHAI, APRIL 16

Huawei Technologies Co Ltd is gradually shifting production of chips designed in-house away from Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co Ltd (TSMC) and towards a mainland Chinese firm in preparation for more US restrictions, sources familiar with the matter said.

The move towards Shanghai-based Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp (SMIC) comes as Washington readies new rules which would require foreign companies using US chipmaking equipment to obtain a license before supplying chips to Huawei—rules that would directly affect TSMC.

It also highlights how US restrictions against Huawei can act as an impetus for Chinese companies to accelerate the development of home-grown technology.

The US government alleges Huawei, the world's biggest maker of telecom network equipment and a major smartphone manufacturer, is a national security risk as its equipment could be used by Beijing to spy, and has barred US firms from selling to the Chinese firm without a licence.

# China tries to revive economy but consumer engine sputters amidst coronavirus pandemic

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
BEIJING, APRIL 16

China, where the coronavirus pandemic started in December, is cautiously trying to get back to business, but it's not easy when many millions of workers are wary of spending much or even going out.

Factories and shops nationwide shut down starting in late January. Millions of families were told to stay home under unprecedented controls that have been copied by the United States, Europe and India.

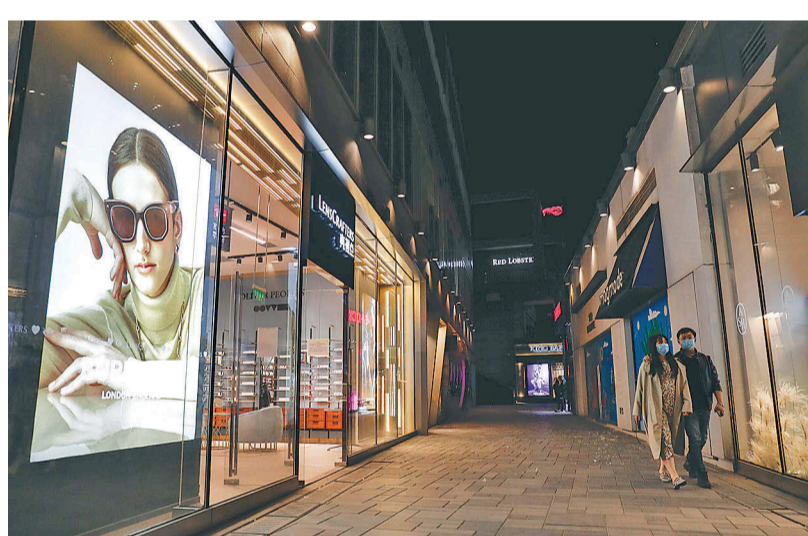
The ruling Communist Party says the outbreak, which had killed more than 3,340 people among more than 82,341 confirmed cases as of Thursday, is under control. But the damage to Chinese lives and the economy is lingering.

Truck salesman Zhang Hu is living the dilemma holding back the recovery. The 27-year-old from the central city of Zhengzhou has gone back to work, but with few people looking to buy 20-ton trucks, his income has fallen by half. Like many millions of others, he is pinching pennies.

"I put off plans to change cars and spend almost nothing on eating out or entertainment," he said. "I have no idea when the situation will turn better."

Factories reopened in March after President Xi Jinping visited Wuhan, the city at the center of the outbreak, in a sign of confidence the virus was under control. But the consumers whose spending propels China's economic growth are still afraid of losing their jobs or catching the virus.

They are holding onto their money despite official efforts to lure them



A couple walk through the capital city's popular shopping mall in Beijing.

## Economists earlier forecast China would bounce back as early as this month.

back to shopping malls and auto showrooms.

Data due out Friday is expected to show the economy contracted by up to 9 percent in January-March, its worst performance since the late 1970s.

That is a blow to automakers and other global companies that hope

China, after leading the way into a global shutdown, might power a recovery from the most painful slump since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

"What is not fully back, or is completely missing, is the demand," said Louis Kuijs of Oxford Economics.

In Europe, the first tentative steps at winding back economically crippling restrictions were also running into resistance, as shoppers stayed away from the few stores that were reopening and some workers feared the newly restored freedoms could put their health at risk.

The streets of Rome were largely deserted despite an easing of restrictions this week that allowed some businesses to reopen.

In China, e-commerce got a boost

when families stuck at home bought groceries and other items online. But forecasters expect little to no growth in this year's total spending on clothing, food and other consumer goods.

Some cities have resorted to handing out shopping vouchers and trying to reassure consumers by showing officials on state media eating in restaurants. Consumption is a smaller share of China's economy than in the United States and other high-income countries but accounted for 80 percent of last year's growth.

Economists earlier forecast China would bounce back as early as this month. They cut growth forecasts and pushed back recovery timelines after January-February activity was even worse than expected.

Bernstein Research says auto sales might fall by as much as 15 percent, deepening a 2-year-old slump in the global industry's biggest market.

With factories closed and some 800 million people told to stay home, consumer spending shrank 23.7 percent from a year earlier and manufacturing fell 13.5 percent. Auto sales plunged 82 percent in February. Projections of full-year Chinese growth, previously close to 6 percent, are now as low as zero.

That is dragging down global growth forecasts. The International Monetary Fund says the world economy might contract by up to 3 percent, a far bigger hit than 2009's 0.1 percent loss during the global financial crisis.

Other Asian economies, which are more exposed to global trade, are unlikely to see quick recoveries and will likely follow the West into a downturn, according to Morgan Stanley.

# Gold glitters as Thais sell jewellery to make ends meet



Thais flock to sell gold as demand for cash increases after the partial shutdown caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus disease hurts the local economy in Bangkok, Thailand.

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
BANGKOK, APRIL 16

Thais are flocking to Bangkok's Chinatown to sell their gold jewellery as the price of the precious metal spikes and the economy tanks due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Gold surged to a seven-year high on Tuesday to \$1,731.25 an ounce, following global moves led by the US to reinflate economies with trillions of dollars of stimulus measures.

That has boosted the price of gold across the world, tempting many to sell their stocks of the precious metal at a time of economic hardship without recent precedent.

Many Thais buy gold jewellery as an investment in times of plenty, to be sold when prices rise or belts tighten.

In Bangkok, where a virtual lockdown has taken root for a fortnight, hundreds flocked to Yaowarat, Bangkok's Chinatown, to trade brace-

lets, necklaces and rings for cash as local gold prices jumped more than 20 percent.

"I don't have any savings so I decided to sell the gold I have for cash to keep me afloat during this time," Thanakorn Promyuing, a 39-year-old street vendor told AFP.

Traders have bought tens of millions of dollars' worth of gold since Tuesday, according to Jitti Tangsitpakdi, a chairman of a trade association.

"One shop bought 200 million baht (\$6.1 million) of ornaments and bars," he said, explaining businesses whose revenue has been strangled by the lockdown are being forced to sell their gold savings.

"Their businesses are in bad shape; better to sell gold and keep cash," he added.

"In over 60 years and I never seen people queue like this to sell their gold."

# Apple rolls out cheaper iPhone as pandemic curbs spending

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
NEW YORK, APRIL 16

Apple is releasing a new iPhone that will be vastly cheaper than the models it rolled out last fall when the economy was booming and the pandemic had yet to force people to rethink their spending.

The second-generation iPhone SE introduced on Wednesday will sell for as little as \$399, a 40 percent markdown from the most affordable iPhone 11 unveiled last year.

Higher-end versions of the iPhone 11 sell for more than \$1,000. Online orders for the iPhone SE will begin Friday, with the first deliveries expected April 24.

Even before the pandemic, many people had begun to balk at the substantial price tags for smartphones that weren't that much better than the ones they already owned. That pushed Apple to step up its emphasis on music and video services to the more than 1 billion people who carry around at least one of their internet-connected devices.



The second-generation iPhone SE.

High-priced gadgets are expected to become an even tougher sell as the economy plunges into its deepest downturn in more than a decade.

Apple maps out its products many

months in advance and the new iPhone SE isn't a direct response to the economic meltdown hatched by the pandemic. Even though the iPhone SE will sell at a price that seems right for the tough times ahead, it is an extraordinarily difficult time to introduce a product, said Wedbush Securities analyst Daniel Ives.

"Apple faced a tough decision to make and ultimately decided to release and green light this smart phone to the market in hopes of gaining contained success out of the gates," Ives wrote.

The new iPhone SE is an update to another low-cost model that Apple released four years ago. Apple stopped selling the original iPhone SE in 2018.

The updated Phone SE is essentially the same as the iPhone 8 and 8 Plus, which came out in 2017. The iPhone SE won't share the same displays and cameras carried by the newer iPhone 11 models. But it will be powered by the same A13 processing chip that's inside the more expensive iPhone 11.



Farmers weed a sugarcane field at Arjunthara Municipality-5 in Jhapa.

## Israel's Netanyahu, Gantz miss midnight deadline to form unity government

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
TEL AVIV, APRIL 16

Israel's parliament speaker Benny Gantz and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu missed a deadline to form a unity government on Thursday, prolonging the country's unprecedented political crisis.

The right-wing premier Netanyahu and centrist Gantz, Israel's former army chief, have gone head-to-head in three stalemated elections over the past year.

Following the most recent vote last month, both men fell short of a majority and neither had a clear path toward a viable governing coalition.

With the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in more than 12,500 confirmed infections in Israel, there were widespread calls for an interim emergency alliance.

A Netanyahu-Gantz deal would have given the Jewish state its first stable government since December 2018 and offered a rare period of political calm during a global health crisis that is taking a devastating economic toll.

President Reuven Rivlin said that if they failed to meet his midnight deadline he would likely ask Israel's parliament, or Knesset, to nominate a candidate to become prime minister. Throwing the decision to the Knesset would almost certainly create further uncertainty and could push Israel towards another election.

Gantz, who heads the Blue and White alliance, was given a deadline of four weeks to form a government following the March vote after receiving a majority of recommendations from the 120-member Knesset.

But he was unable to do so given the bitter divisions within the anti-Netanyahu parliamentary bloc.

After being elected Knesset speaker, Gantz pledged to use the remainder of his grace period to seek a deal with Netanyahu. Minutes before that mandate expired at midnight on Monday, Gantz and Netanyahu asked Rivlin for an extension, insisting they were close to a deal.

## Europe still 'in eye of the storm' despite moves to ease virus lockdowns

European residents began to emerge from their homes, some feared it may be too soon.

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
LONDON, APRIL 16

Parts of Europe moved cautiously to reopen their streets and economies on Thursday but the coronavirus pandemic was far from beaten and the World Health Organization warned the continent was still in the "eye of the storm".

Since emerging in China late last year, the virus has turned the world upside down, killing tens of thousands, forcing half of humanity indoors and raising the spectre of a second Great Depression.

Hope that its spread has peaked in Europe and the United States has seen some countries take tentative steps to ease restrictions, with US President Donald Trump set to unveil plans on Thursday for lifting lockdowns across the world's top economy.

But with global cases and deaths still growing, and fears of a second wave of infections in previously hit countries, officials are warning that life around the world will not be returning to normal until a vaccine is available. "We remain in the eye of the storm," the WHO's regional director for Europe, Hans Kluge, said in an online news conference from Copenhagen.

Positive signs in Spain, Italy, Germany, France and Switzerland were overshadowed by sustained or increased levels of infections in other countries, such as Britain, Turkey, Ukraine and Russia, he said.

"It is imperative that we do not let down our guard."

More than two million people have been infected with the virus around the world and 137,000, including 90,000 in Europe, have died, according to an AFP tally.

Hard-hit parts of Europe have seen a slowdown in infections and deaths in recent days, with Spain recording 551 new deaths on Thursday, almost half of the daily toll at its peak.

After weeks on strict lockdowns, Spain and Italy have begun to ease restrictions, allowing some businesses to reopen.

Germany on Wednesday also announced initial steps to reopen some shops and gradually restart



Health workers gesture as citizens show their support from their balconies and windows, amid the spread of Covid-19, in Barcelona, Spain.

REUTERS

schools, Denmark began reopening schools for younger children after a month-long closure and Finland lifted a blockade of Helsinki.

Trump has promised swift guidelines on reopening parts of the United States, telling reporters his "aggressive strategy" against the virus was working and that "the data suggests that nationwide we have passed the peak on new cases".

"We'll be the comeback kids, all of us," said Trump.

As European residents began to emerge from their homes, some feared it may be too soon.

"I think people should still hold out a little longer because I think it's going to come back again, not as

intensely, but the pandemic is going to come back a little bit," deliveryman Gean Carlo Minaya told AFP in Madrid.

In other parts of Europe, severe restrictions were set to remain in place for weeks, with Britain expected to extend its lockdown measures later Thursday. United Nations chief Antonio Guterres said only a "safe and effective vaccine" can return the world to normal, hoping that could be available by year-end.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation offered \$150 million and called for global cooperation to ready vaccines, but its chief executive laid bare the challenge facing humanity.

"There are seven billion people on

the planet," said Gates Foundation CEO Mark Suzman. "We are going to need to vaccinate nearly every one. There is no manufacturing capacity to do that."

Even with a vaccine, the virus is expected to lay waste to the global economy, with the International Monetary Fund warning that \$9 trillion could be lost in a second Great Depression.

In the developing world, there are growing fears of a collapse in social order as food becomes scarce—with the situation especially acute in Africa and Latin America. In Riyadh, G20 nations of the world's major economies announced a one-year debt moratorium for the world's poorest nations.

## BRIEFING

### WWII veteran raises £12 m for UK health workers

**LONDON:** A 99-year-old British World War II veteran on Thursday completed 100 laps of his garden in a fund-raising challenge for healthcare staff that has captured the heart of the nation, raising more than £12 million (\$15 million, 13.8 million euros). "Incredible and now words fail me," said Tom Moore, a captain who served in India, after finishing the laps of his 25-metre (82-foot) garden with the help of his walking frame.

### Virus could cause upheaval across Middle East

**GENEVA:** Coronavirus outbreaks across the Middle East threaten to shatter the lives of millions of already destitute people in conflict zones, and could fuel socio-economic upheaval, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on Thursday. Curfews and lockdowns imposed as public health measures to stem spread of the virus are already making it difficult or impossible for many to provide for their families, it said. The Geneva-based agency, in a statement naming Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan, called for authorities in the volatile region to prepare for a "potentially devastating aftermath" and a "socio-economic earthquake".

### Italian mob seeks to profit from outbreak

**ROME:** Italy's mafia clans are taking advantage of the coronavirus pandemic to buy favour with poor families facing financial ruin, prosecutors and officials say, and are offering loans and food in what is seen as an age-old recruitment tactic. After decades of campaigning to curb the influence of the mafia in its traditional strongholds of southern Italy, officials and charitable groups say the pandemic has created new opportunities for organised crime to regain people's loyalties.

### Ukraine, separatists begin prisoner swap

**KYIV:** Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine began a prisoner exchange on Thursday, according to the Ukrainian president's office and separatists. The exchange comes as part of an agreement brokered last year at a summit of the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France. The aim is to take confidence-building steps that could lead to an end of the six-year war in eastern Ukraine. (AGENCIES)

## Pandemic could erode global fight against other diseases

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Lavina D'Souza hasn't been able to collect her government-supplied anti-HIV medication since the abrupt lockdown of India's 1.3 billion people last month during the coronavirus outbreak.

Marooned in a small city away from her home in Mumbai, the medicine she needs to manage her disease has run out. The 43-year-old is afraid that her immune system will crash: "Any disease, the coronavirus or something else, I'll fall sick faster."

D'Souza said others also must be "suffering because of the coronavirus without getting infected by it."

As the world focuses on the pandemic, experts fear losing ground in the long fight against other infectious diseases like AIDS, tuberculosis and cholera that kill millions every year. Also at risk are decades-long efforts that allowed the World Health Organization to set target dates for eradicating malaria, polio and other illnesses.

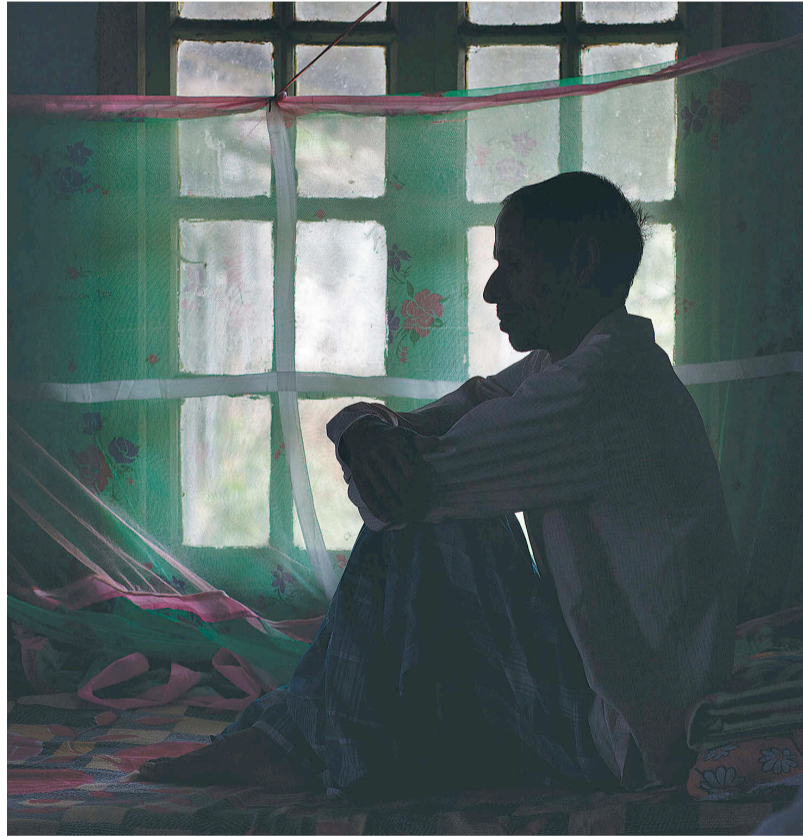
With the coronavirus overwhelming hospitals, redirecting medical staff, causing supply shortages and suspending health services, "our greatest fear" is resources for other diseases being diverted and depleted, said Dr John Nkengasong, head of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That is compounded in countries with already overburdened health care systems, like Sudan. Doctors at Al-Ribat National Hospital in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, shared a document detailing nationwide measures: fewer patients admitted to emergency rooms, elective surgeries indefinitely postponed, primary care eliminated for non-critical cases, and skilled doctors transferred to Covid-19 patients.

Similar scenes are unfolding worldwide. Even in countries with highly developed health care systems, such as South Korea, patients seeking treatment for diseases like TB had to be turned away, said Hojoon Sohn, of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, who is based in South Korea.

About 30 percent of global TB cases—out of 10 million each year—are never diagnosed, and the gaps in care are concentrated in 10 countries with the most infections, Sohn said.

In Congo, already overwhelmed by the latest outbreak of Ebola and years of violent conflict, the coronavirus comes as a measles outbreak has killed over 6,000 people, said Anne-Marie Connor, national director for World Vision, a humanitarian aid organization.



In this March 24 photo, a tuberculosis patient sits on a bed at a TB hospital in Gauhati, India. Doctors fear focus on the Covid-19 pandemic could waylay efforts to combat other diseases.

AP/IPS

The cascading impact of the pandemic isn't limited to treatment. Other factors, like access to transportation during a lockdown, are threatening India's progress on TB. Patients and doctors can't get to clinics, and it's difficult to send samples for testing.

India has nearly a third of the world's TB cases, and diagnosing patients has been delayed in many areas. Dr Yogesh Jain in Chhatisgarh—one of India's poorest states—and other doctors fear that means "TB cases would certainly increase."

Coronavirus-related lockdowns also have interrupted the flow of supplies, including critical medicine, protective gear and oxygen, said Dr Marc Biot, director of operations for international aid group Doctors Without Borders. "These are difficult to find now because everybody is rushing for them in the same moment," Biot said.

The fear of some diseases resurging is further aggravated by delays in immunisation efforts for more than 13.5 million people, according to the vaccine alliance GAVI. The international organization said 21 countries are reporting vaccine shortages following border closures and interrup-

tions to air travel—mostly in Africa—and 14 vaccination campaigns for diseases like polio and measles have been postponed. The Measles & Rubella Initiative said measles immunisation campaigns in 24 countries already are delayed, and it fears that more than 117 million children in 37 countries may miss out.

Dr Jay Wenger, who heads polio eradication efforts for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said recommending the suspension of door-to-door polio vaccinations was difficult, and while it could lead to a spurt in cases, "it is a necessary move to reduce the risk of increasing transmission of Covid-19."

Programs to prevent mosquito-borne diseases also have been hampered. In Sri Lanka, where cases of dengue nearly doubled in 2019 over the previous year, health inspectors are tasked with tracing suspected Covid-19 patients, disrupting their "routine work" of destroying mosquito breeding sites at homes, said Dr Anura Jayasekara, director of Sri Lanka's National Dengue Control Unit.

During a pandemic, history shows that other diseases can make a major comeback.

## South Korea ruling party wins big parliamentary majority

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
SEOUL, APRIL 16

South Korea is among the first countries to hold a national election during the pandemic

South Korea's left-leaning ruling party won a landslide election victory, results showed on Thursday, after the coronavirus pandemic turned the political tide in President Moon Jae-in's favour.

His Democratic party secured the largest absolute majority in the National Assembly since the advent of democracy in 1987, on a turnout of 66.2 percent, the highest at a parliamentary election for 28 years.

Just a few months ago Moon was threatened by scandals over power abuse and sluggish economic growth, while critics called his dovish approach towards North Korea unrealistic.

But the South's relatively quick and effective handling of the epidemic—it has also exported test kits to at least 20 countries—was a boon for Moon and his party ahead of the polls, largely seen as a referendum on his performance.

Koreans' confidence in Moon's administration was boosted by his so-called "coronavirus diplomacy", including recent phone calls with at least 20 national leaders, said Minseon Ku, a politics scholar at Ohio State University in the US.

She added that the president had successfully framed the pandemic as an "opportunity for South Korea to restructure its economy—capitalising on industries like AI and biopharma".

That sat well with voters, "coupled with South Korea's global recognition" for its handling of the outbreak, Ku said.

In a statement, Moon said he felt a greater sense of responsibility than joy at the outcome.

"We will never be conceited but listen more humbly to the voice of the people," he added.

South Korea was among the first countries to hold a national election during the pandemic, with citizens still asked to maintain social distancing after enduring one of the worst early outbreaks of Covid-19.

All voters were required to wear protective masks, clean their hands and don plastic gloves, and undergo temperature checks on arrival at the polling station.

Those found to have fevers cast their ballots in separate booths disin-

## China sees drop in imported coronavirus cases but local infections rise

REUTERS  
BEIJING, APRIL 16

China reported fewer new coronavirus cases on Thursday that involved travellers arriving from abroad, but said locally transmitted infections rose, with the capital Beijing seeing new local cases for the first time in more than three weeks.

To prevent a rebound of the epidemic as business activity resumes, an increasing number of Chinese provinces have begun offering coronavirus testing to the public. At the same time, local authorities are offering coupons to residents in hopes they will spend money to revive an economy ravaged by the outbreak.

New imported cases dropped to 34 on Wednesday from 36 a day earlier, the National Health Commission said, down for the third straight day, amid stringent border checks, reduced international flights, and a ban on entry by foreigners.

But the number of locally transmitted cases rose to 12 from 10 a day earlier, with Beijing seeing three new local cases, the first since March 23.

The other new local cases on Wednesday were in the provinces of Heilongjiang and Guangdong, both of which have been battling an influx of infected travellers, mostly Chinese nationals returning from abroad.

Overall, mainland China reported 46 new confirmed cases on Wednesday, the same as a day earlier, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 82,341.

On Thursday, state television reported that President Xi Jinping had approved the withdrawal of 4,000 army medical personnel who had been sent to the central province of Hubei, where the outbreak originated, in another milestone as the province and its capital city Wuhan return towards normal.

Earlier this month, Wuhan lifted a lockdown that had paralysed the city of 11 million for more than two months in a drastic effort to contain the virus.

South Korea uses a mix of first-past-the-post seats and proportional representation, and Moon's Democratic party and a sister organisation took a total of 180 seats in the 300-member National Assembly.

South Korea uses a mix of first-past-the-post seats and proportional representation.

The main conservative opposition United Future Party (UFP) and its satellite secured 103.

Moon's position was not at issue as he is directly elected, but the absolute majority means he is likely to be less of a lame duck than previous presidents towards the end of their single five-year term.

## Main conservative opposition United Future Party and its satellite secured 103 of 300 seats.

"It should give his administration greater momentum," said Andrew Yeo, a politics professor at the Catholic University of America.

Former North Korean diplomat Thae Yong Ho became the first defector ever to be directly elected to the South's parliament, winning for the UFP in Seoul's wealthy Gangnam district.

Thae shed a tear as he sang South Korea's national anthem after his win was confirmed early Thursday.

Another defector, Ji Seong-ho, was also elected to a proportional representation seat for the UFP.

But it was the Democratic former prime minister Lee Nak-yeon who put himself in pole position to succeed Moon in 2022 by defeating UFP leader Hwang Kyo-ahn—also a former prime minister—in a high-profile contest for Jongno in central Seoul.

The conservative party had "failed to rebrand" itself after the impeachment of former president Park Geun-hye, which "limited the boundary of support to older generations and core support regions", Ji Yeon Hong, a professor at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, told AFP.

The conservative party had 'failed to rebrand' itself, said analyst Ji Yeon Hong.

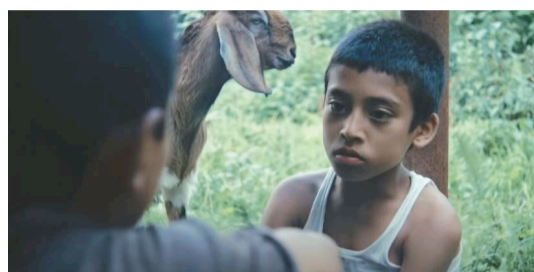
# 5 short Nepali movies you should definitely watch

Need an escape from the lockdown? We got you covered with these short films.

ANKIT KHADGI  
KATHMANDU

**M**aking a short film is difficult. While ample opportunity and time is afforded to those making feature-length films, to draw character arcs and develop plots (also sub-plots) which can cover various time periods, short films often focus on telling a story of one character in a limited time sphere.

Nepal's feature film market is booming, but the exposure of short films made by aspiring filmmakers has been only limited to film festivals. So, if you want to explore how Nepali short films are evolving you should definitely catch these movies, where directors have worked with realistic, risky and experimental themes, giving cinema-lovers hope that with time if they transition to mainstream feature movies they can change the game.



## Babu

A recent release, Babu by Eelum Dixit is a heart-warming tale that reflects the psychological impact of migration on the various generations. Based in a semi-rural setting, the main character is Babu, a school-going child who lives with his parents and a caring grandfather. While they are happy with whatever they have, the devastating 2015 earthquake shakes the family, and in order to recover from the catastrophe, Babu's father, like many other villagers, decides to take a job in a foreign country. The absence of his father affects Babu deeply, who even at a young age tries to be a help to his family. The director depicts a relatable story and successfully makes viewers empathise with the characters' struggles and

sufferings.

The screenplay is subtle and nuanced, and the cinematography refreshing: it is so nice to watch a film that is not plagued by shots without purpose, a method employed by most Nepali films. The camera movements in the movie make the movie viewing experience more enjoyable, while the actors' performances are so moving that viewers will definitely miss their loving grandfathers.



## Chyanti

Chyanti is an earnest story that reflects the struggles of those who decided to join the Maoist force during the ten-year long civil war, how they were torn from their loved ones for hope the revolution would make their lives better. Chyanti follows a Maoist soldier who returns home after three years to celebrate Dashain.

Sani is the daughter of the Maoist soldier who finds a confidant in a goat. She treats the goat like her own friend and talks and takes care of the four-legged animal. But when her father returns home he trades Chyanti with another goat that breaks Sani.

Director Veemsen Lama uses Chyanti, a goat, as metaphor to symbolise the insignificance of human life in those days, as killing and trading people was as easy as trading livestock. The film is available on YouTube.

## Nifty

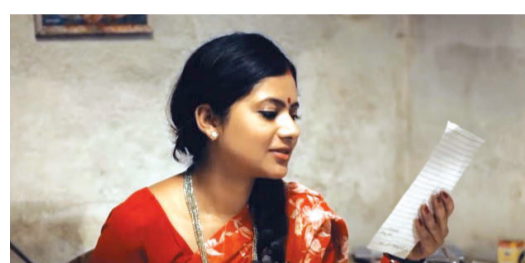
Have you ever imagined the various stages of a love story, told from a fish's perspective? Playing with such an experimental theme is Aneel Neupane's Nifty. It is a breath of fresh air, reflecting the spirit of



the current filmmakers' generation, which is trying to push the envelope with their knowledge and skills.

The film begins with blurry shots. From a plastic bag, a fish is transferred to an aquarium. It is a gift, which a girl gives to her girlfriend, and it's from that fish's perspective we witness their love story and how it unfolds. The film does not have any dialogue, but great music which sets the tone of the film. However, it's the masterful use of technical and aesthetic techniques that makes this movie so powerful. The outstanding cinematography and camera movement, paired with the perfect colour tones, makes viewers feel like they are keenly observing the ups and downs of the relationship between the two characters.

Give your all attention to this out-of-the-box film on YouTube.



## Savitri

Can the heart be still and beat for only one person? Will you ever feel attracted to another person, even if you are with someone else? Based on the story, Typist, by Bhawani Bhikshu, Savitri deep-dives into the human heart, an often fickle thing—it can feel for one human when you are with someone

else. Popular mainstream actor Keki Adhikari plays the lead, a typist, who has a soft spot for her colleague even though she is married to another man.

Based in 1995, director Sujit Bidari delivers a tale of a woman who is smitten by her senior at work. While the original story was way ahead of its time, the director has created a thoughtful piece of art by making the film not about a woman who is guilty of infidelity, but of a woman struggling to overcome her sexual urges.

Adhikari brings soul to the main protagonist, with a commendable performance making the audience sympathise with the feeling tussling in her mind. Savitri delivers a realistic presentation of an often undiscussed issue, and it should be watched.



## InTransm15sion

While for some the television is an idiot box, but what if it could predict the future? Playing with this idea, Drishti Bagdas's InTransm15sion is a story of how a factory worker's life changes after he finds an antique television which broadcasts programmes 15 minutes ahead of actual time, allowing him to see into the future.

This leads him to make bets on cricket matches, allowing him to fill his pocket one match after another. The idea may not be novice, but with the available resources the director succeeds in showing how shortcuts and greed can destroy people's lives.

With decent acting performances, a universal story and an intriguing unfolding of events, this short movie (available on YouTube) is great content to pass some time.

# Screens keep us connected but are disruptive to in-person communication

Screen time can disrupt a fundamental aspect of our human experience—paying attention to one another's eyes.

TRACY DENNIS

**D**igital technology has been a lifeline during the COVID-19 health crisis. Yet, its impact on human relationships remains complex. It allows for work and connection in many domains, but does so in ways that are often intrusive, exhausting and potentially corrosive to face-to-face relationships.

The debate about technology's effect on overall mental health rages on. Some researchers claim smartphones have destroyed a generation, while others argue screen time doesn't predict mental health at all.

After years of research on the topic, I have come to the conclusion that screen time can disrupt a fundamental aspect of our human experience—paying attention to one another's eyes.

Smartphones, even more than older technologies like television, have been aggressively designed to control and capitalize human attention throughout the day by drawing people's fingers and eyes down to a screen and away from one another. Increasingly, people can't look away.

## It's all in the eyes

Human beings are almost unique among animals—including closely related primates—in our ability to share meaning and collaborate on goals through the coordination of eye gaze.

From the earliest days of life, babies tune into their caregivers' eyes to find comfort and decipher emotion. As they grow, people build on these skills and learn to lock eyes with social partners to communicate and collaborate.

The whites around human eyes are large, making them highly visible to partners. The result is humans are able to track the direction of each other's gaze with exquisite accuracy. Some argue this evolutionary adaptation was fundamental to Homo sapiens' advancement as a species.

## Still Face

Today, with the ubiquity of mobile technology, visual synchrony between people is frequently disrupted. Are humans becoming strangers to each other's eyes—and does it matter?

My colleagues and I studied this question by repeating an experiment developed over 40 years ago called the Still Face.

In the experiment, parents freely play with their young children, but then are instructed to be unresponsive by holding their faces still and inexpressive for a few minutes.

This still face period is followed by a period of repair called the reunion, when parents respond normally again.

The three-part experiment—play, still face, reunion—creates a microcosm in which researchers study the broader effects of parental withdrawal and document the importance of repairing social disconnection.

This classic experiment inspired us to conceptualise the impact of screens on the parent-child relationship as one big naturally occurring Still Face. In our

study, we modified the still face period so that parents, instead of keeping their faces still, were unresponsive while using a smartphone—looking down, with eyes locked on screens in front of their young children for two minutes. We also asked parents to report on how much time they typically spent on screens at home.

Children became distressed and despondent when they could not connect with their parents. If parents reported spending high levels of time on screens at home, children showed less emotional resilience and greater difficulty reconnecting with parents once the two-minute period was over.

Screens aren't poison, but should be viewed as the interlopers and disruptors they are.

## 'Phubbing'—snubbing someone for your phone

In a second study, yet to be published, we looked at the power of shared gaze in the context of adult problem-solving. We assigned pairs of adults to work together

on a difficult puzzle task. One of the adults in the pair—a research assistant, posing as a participant—continually interrupted the joint work by breaking eye contact, texting and talking on their phone. In the control group, the pair worked together to solve the puzzle without interruption.

Like the study with parents and children, the effects of breaking reciprocity and connection through eye contact were far from trivial. Adults not only found being "phubbed" by their problem-solving partner to be rude, they also showed less happiness, more anxiety and heightened attention to negative rather than positive

information in an assessment immediately following the experiment.

## Put technology in its place

Screens are not poison, but should be recognised as the interlopers and disruptors they are. Put phones away when with others. Consider it the height of rudeness to have a device out during conversations, meals, meetings or in the middle of family game night. Human beings have evolved to rely on social cues like eye gaze to learn about self and others in childhood and to communicate and collaborate effectively throughout our lives.

—Associated Press/ The Conversation

## How does the coronavirus spread?

The virus is spread through droplets. It can be transmitted into the air from coughing or sneezing, which people nearby can get through their nose, mouth or eyes. It can also transmit to people from a coronavirus-infected person through handshakes, or through some objects like pen, door knobs and stair bannisters touched by a person infected with the virus.

### General Symptoms

**Dry Cough**

**Fever**

**Shortness of Breath**

**Headache**

**Confusion**

**Sore Throat**

## 6 Preventive measures

- 1. Wash your hands thoroughly**

Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly at least for 20 seconds after touching a suspected contaminated surface.
- 2. Cover your mouth**

Cover your mouth with masks while coughing or while being with someone who is coughing. Avoid reusing masks. Change it constantly. Discard your masks properly in a dustbin.
- 3. Avoid sharing/ using personal items**

Don't share your personal items like pens, mouse and digital devices and avoid using those used by others.
- 4. Avoid touching your eyes, ears and nose**

The virus can enter your body easily when you touch your eyes, ears and nose quite often, as it usually can remain in these places for a longer period of time.
- 5. Avoid crowds**

Don't be at big gatherings as much as possible. Since the possibility of virus transmission from one person to another is so high, crowds should be avoided as much as possible.
- 6. Don't hesitate to seek medical advice**

If you have a fever or flu-like symptoms, immediately consult your doctor. Seek medical advice and follow your doctor's advice.

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