



## Focused COVID-19 Media Monitoring, Nepal



# Focused COVID-19 Media Monitoring Nepal<sup>1</sup>

*-Sharpening the COVID-19 Response through Communications Intelligence*

**Date: August 24, 2021**

Kathmandu, Nepal

## EMERGING THEME(S)

- Nepal reported 1,548 new COVID-19 cases, 24 deaths on August 23; 22 districts of country in the red zone as of August 22; COVID-19 cases increasing in Banke, the hotspot during second wave; chance of fully vaccinated people getting infected rising in Nepal due to carelessness of people, point out health experts
- Coverage rate of vaccines against other infectious diseases dropped in 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic pointing to serious long-term health consequences for children
- COVID-19 positive Morang residents opting for home isolation without doctors' consultation leading to their worsening health, most times ending in deaths; doctors urge the infected to visit hospitals on time; serious COVID-19-recovered suffering from health issues like hair loss, diabetes, heart and nervous system related diseases
- Nepali Hindus mark Janai Purnima with much fervor amidst COVID-19 pandemic despite government urging all to mark festivals symbolically; health experts urge caution as festival crowding could lead to surge in coronavirus cases

## RECURRING THEME(S)

- Auditor General has pointed to irregularities in budget allocated for management of COVID-19; Gandaki Province has not used healthcare materials worth millions of rupees procured for COVID-19 management

---

<sup>1</sup> This intelligence is tracked through manually monitoring national print, digital and online media through a representative sample selection, and consultations with media persons and media influencers.

## ISSUE(S) IN FOCUS

Nepal's coronavirus caseload reached 748,981 on August 23 with 1,548 more people testing positive for the infection in the past 24 hours, while the countrywide COVID-19 mortality toll increased to 10,533 with 24 more fatalities. Nepal's COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 93.5 per cent, the fatality rate at 1.5 per cent, while the active COVID-19 case count currently is 38,351.<sup>2</sup>

The rate of COVID-19 infection has been increasing continuously in Nepal since Asadh (June-July). A total of 22 districts of the country are in the red zone on the basis of the risk of infection as of August 22. The government has made different policies, plans and directives to involve the federal to local levels in the control of the pandemic. Yet a proper coordination lacks between the different levels of the government despite the country going through two waves of the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

The cases of COVID-19 infection have again increased in Banke, which had become the hotspot during the second wave of the pandemic. New infections and deaths due to COVID-19 are being recorded in the district every day. The hospital beds are being filled with infected patients. The number of patients visiting the Bheri Hospital of Nepalgunj is increasing daily, and the majority of them are in critical condition.<sup>4</sup>

The chance of people vaccinated against COVID-19 being infected has been increasing in Nepal. Being vaccinated does not mean one will not get infected; rather being vaccinated means it prevents an infected person from getting serious, according to infectious disease expert Dr Sher Bahadur Pun. People who have taken both doses are going around carelessly thinking that they won't be infected, and this has increased the risk of infection, he said.<sup>5</sup>

The coverage rate of vaccines given to children against different diseases reduced in 2020 in Nepal due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will lead to a long-term increase in the rate of the infection of infectious diseases, mortality, and being disabled, the experts have warned.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> THT Online

<sup>3</sup> Baarhakhari

<sup>4</sup> Nagarik

<sup>5</sup> Baarhakhari

<sup>6</sup> Onlinekhabar

The people in Morang testing positive for COVID-19 are staying in home isolation without consultation of doctors. They are being taken to the hospital only after their condition becomes critical which has led to many losing their lives due to health complications. Nearly 95 per cent infected people of Dang prefer home isolation as they don't get treatment easily while the hospital beds are not usually empty. Lack of well-managed home isolation centers has led to people being deprived of treatment, causing their deaths.<sup>7</sup>

There is a high risk of COVID-19 infected people losing their lives in home isolation or isolation centers of local levels without monitoring and treatment facilities, as per doctors. As such one needs to visit the hospital on time. Dr Santa Kumar Das, Coordinator of COVID-19 Management Committee of Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, requested people not to stay in home isolation till their condition becomes critical. He requested them to visit the hospital if they experience any kind of difficulty.<sup>8</sup>

People who have recovered from mild and serious COVID-19 infection have been suffering from health issues like hair loss, problems in heartbeat, diabetes, heart attack, and nervous system related diseases, according to doctors. According to Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, Chief of the Research Division at the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital, they are showing symptoms of new diseases after recovering from COVID-19.<sup>9</sup>

Hindu devotees celebrated Janai Purnima on August 22 by visiting temples, holy rivers and ponds across the country with fervor in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though the government had appealed to the people to avoid crowding and mark the festival at home due to the spread of coronavirus, people were seen thronging the holy sites.<sup>10</sup>

As the season of festivities enthruses Nepalis, the government has urged all and sundry to avoid gathering in or around religious sites and to celebrate the festivals as a formality and abide by social distancing norms. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Chief District Officers of all 77 districts have been directed to ask the authorities to control gathering at

---

<sup>7</sup> Annapurna Post

<sup>8</sup> Annapurna Post

<sup>9</sup> Nagarik

<sup>10</sup> The Himalayan Times

religious sites. The Ministry's direction comes after the country witnessed large number of gatherings on August 22 across major religious sites on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Janai Purnima.<sup>11</sup>

From early morning on August 22, most of the Hindu shrines across the country including Kathmandu Valley were crowded with people observing the Raksha Bandhan rituals. In the Valley, Pashupatinath Temple, Gokarneshwar, Koteshwar Mahadev Temple, Kuleshwar, Baglamukhi and Mahalaxmasthan among others saw devotees in large numbers until noon, while many people visited their relatives to celebrate the festival. "We tried our best to convince people to avoid crowding but nobody seems to be listening. And we can't shoot them or beat them up with batons," said Durga Prasad Dahal, Chief of the Metropolitan Police Circle. He said his office had deployed police in the morning to curb crowding. Doctors say crowding during festivals provides a perfect platform for the coronavirus to spread and could lead the country into a third wave. Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, Chief of the Clinical Research Unit at the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital said that after a week, the country could see a surge of new infections. "And if a new variant comes in, then the situation might turn worse," he said.<sup>12</sup>

The Newars of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur are going to miss the celebration of Gai Jatra this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Except for observing certain rituals, there will not be any processions, dance performances and other cultural activities on the day of Gai Jatra, that falls on August 23 this year, and the following days.<sup>13</sup>

The locals of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur celebrated this year's Gai Jatra on August 23 wearing masks due to the risks of the COVID-19 infection.<sup>14</sup>

The Gosainkunda Area Development Committee had cancelled this year's mela due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet as the public vehicles were plying in Rasuwa, nearly 5,000 pilgrims visited Gosainkunda area for the mela this year from Nagpanchami (August 13) to Janai Purnima (August 22).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> The Himalayan Times

<sup>12</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>13</sup> The Himalayan Times

<sup>14</sup> Onlinekhabar

There have been irregularities in the budget allocated for the management of COVID-19 infection, according to the report of the Auditor General. The Ministry of Health and Population and the bodies under it have been found to have spent the money as meeting and contract allowances — that are not related to the COVID-19 in any way. The Bir Hospital does not have a record of the amount spent on the treatment of COVID-19 patients. The private hospitals have been charging money on patients randomly, as per the report.<sup>16</sup>

The government hospitals of Gandaki Province have procured healthcare equipment worth millions of rupees keeping in mind the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the equipment have not come into use even when the third wave of the pandemic is approaching, and the Office of the Auditor General has raised questions on them not being used.<sup>17</sup>

## OTHER(S)

### National News

Minister of State for Health and Population Umesh Shrestha said that 20,000 medical professionals and healthcare workers should be recruited in public health facilities across the country to meet the demand. He assured that 33 per cent of the population would be vaccinated against COVID-19 by mid-October this year and all eligible beneficiaries would be vaccinated by mid-April next year.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Nagarik

<sup>16</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>17</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>18</sup> Rastriya Samachar Samiti (in The Himalayan Times)

The cleaning staff of the Birgunj Metropolitan City have been deployed on duty without health safety gear. They don't have masks, gloves and boots. Fearing the risk of COVID-19 infection and other diseases, the staff demanded raincoats from the contractor who employed them, but their demands have not been heard.<sup>19</sup>

A total of 559,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine provided by the Japanese government under grant assistance via the COVAX program arrived in Kathmandu on August 23. With this Nepal has received 1,614,740 doses of vaccine from Japan.<sup>20</sup>

The possibility of the locals of Udayapur, who received the first dose of Vero Cell vaccine nearly a month ago getting the second dose on time is slim as the vaccine has not arrived yet. Nearly 24,600 people will be deprived of the second dose.<sup>21</sup>

China has informed that Nepal's import of goods from two northern border checkpoints — Tatopani of Sindhupalchowk, and Rasuwagadhi of Rasuwa — will not be possible immediately. Stating that COVID-19 infection has increased in different parts of China, it has urged Nepal to practice caution in these checkpoints. According to Ram Prasad Regmi, Head of Timure Customs of Rasuwa, the Chinese side has informed that imports won't be possible for more than 10 vehicles from Tatopani, and nine vehicles from Rasuwagadhi until the COVID-19 infection comes under the control.<sup>22</sup>

The Chief Executive Officer of Golbazar Municipality of Siraha Shreedhar KC has arranged treatment fees for his relatives infected with COVID-19. The Municipality has also decided to bear the treatment cost of its staff and public representatives infected with COVID-19 while on duty. However, the people from poor communities are deprived of treatment due to their financial condition.<sup>23</sup>

The students of 10 private engineering colleges have started protesting against the colleges for charging full fees like when they were having physical classes despite teaching them online only amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>20</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>21</sup> Nagarik

<sup>22</sup> Nayapatrika

<sup>23</sup> Nagarik

<sup>24</sup> Kantipur

The number of passengers taking domestic flights in Nepal has increased significantly amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 1,210,000 passengers have travelled to different destinations of the country via the Tribhuvan International Airport in the last six months.<sup>25</sup>

A total of 194 tourists visited the Manaslu area of Gorkha amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in the last fiscal year. In the previous years, as many as 5,000 tourists used to visit the area.<sup>26</sup>

## International News

A team of experts formed by the Indian government has concluded that the third wave of COVID-19 pandemic will reach its peak in October in India and children will be affected the most in this wave.<sup>27</sup>

The discovery of a single local COVID-19 case in New Zealand was enough for the government to put the entire country into strict lockdown this past week. While others may see that as draconian, New Zealanders generally support such measures as they worked so well in the past. Elsewhere around the Pacific, though, Japan is resisting such measures in the face of a record-breaking surge, instead emphasizing its accelerating vaccine program. And Australia has fallen somewhere in the middle. The differing emphasis on lockdowns versus vaccines — and how effective such strategies prove to be in beating back the Delta variant — could have far-reaching consequences for the three countries' economies and the health of their citizens.<sup>28</sup>

Malaysia's new Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said on August 22 he will invite opposition leaders to join the government's special committees to address the COVID-19 crisis, seeking to stabilize politics after years of turmoil.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Nayapatrika

<sup>26</sup> Nagarik

<sup>27</sup> Setopati

<sup>28</sup> The Associated Press (in The Himalayan Times)

<sup>29</sup> Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)



## Contacts for further details

### Dr Sunoor Verma

Strategic, Risk and Crisis Communication Consultant  
World Health Organization, Country Office for Nepal  
[sverma@who.int](mailto:sverma@who.int)  
[sunoorv@gmail.com](mailto:sunoorv@gmail.com)

### Ms Tsering Dolkar Gurung

NPO (Communication, Media and Public Information)  
World Health Organization, Country Office for Nepal  
[gurungt@who.int](mailto:gurungt@who.int)

***WHO's COVID-19 response in Nepal is made possible through the generous support of the Government of Azerbaijan, the Government of Canada, UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO), Government of Germany, and USAID.***

Reference Code: 21AUG24MM\_013