



## Focused COVID-19 Media Monitoring, Nepal



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

**Date: May 24, 2021**  
Kathmandu, Nepal

## EMERGING THEME(S)

- 7,598 new COVID-19 cases, 193 deaths reported on May 23; infection rate down by 5.7 per cent this week; doctors emphasize importance of going for test for those showing symptoms including fever, common cold, body aches; cases rising rapidly in Sudurpaschim Province, new hotspots like Hungi in Palpa emerging
- Symptoms similar to that of black fungus seen in 5 COVID-19 patients at Birgunj's Narayani Hospital
- Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli says government making efforts to vaccinate everyone against COVID-19 before the polls, slams criticism of call for elections
- Public health experts have appealed to the government to repeal its call for elections; call for November polls amidst the pandemic is an unforgivable, callous move of the government, say public health expert; observers says elections not possible, will only invite disaster; Nepal Medical Association labels it an insensitive move
- President Bidya Devi Bhandari issues COVID-19 Crisis Management Ordinance-2078 that calls for an integrated treatment system to be implemented under a unified hospital under Ministry of Health and Population; a health emergency may be declared if situation so demands
- UK to provide 2,000,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine to Nepal under COVAX; will be useful in inoculating those who've taken the first dose of Covishield
- Kathmandu, other places facing shortage of Cetamol; Sudurpaschim Province faces shortage of essential drugs used to treat COVID-19 patients; Province 1 labs suspending PCR testing due to shortage of reagent needed for the test
- Sudurpaschim ambulance drivers infected after ferrying COVID-19 patients, fear they might spread the infection; say risk is greater as local levels haven't managed separate ambulances for COVID-19 and non-COVID patients

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<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.

- People refusing to stay in isolation facilities, fleeing in Baitadi
- Government to give Rs 1,000 as motivation allowance to Pashupati Area Development Trust staff burning bodies of COVID-19 victims, nothing for Nepal Army personnel doing the same work

## RECURRING THEME(S)

- Those above 65 waiting for their second jab of Covishield, which according to World Health Organization has to be administered by June for the vaccine to be effective; government mulling increasing gap between the two doses to 12-16 weeks
- Healthcare workers still waiting for their risk allowance due from since October-November 2020

## ISSUE(S) IN FOCUS

Nepal reported 7,598 new cases of coronavirus infection on May 23. With this, the nationwide coronavirus infection count stands at 513,241. Likewise, 193 more deaths were reported. In the same time period, 7,664 people recovered from the virus after which the active caseload adds up to 115, 547.<sup>2</sup>

The number of COVID infections has reduced by 5.7 per cent this week as compared to the last week.<sup>3</sup>

The number of COVID-19 cases has remained stable in Kathmandu Valley in the past one week. However, the infection has been increasing in villages across the nation, and in different provinces. Two weeks ago, the infection was spreading fast in Gandaki, Lumbini, and Bagmati provinces. It is spreading in Sudurpaschim Province, and Provinces 1 and 2 at present. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> THTOnline

<sup>3</sup> Setopati

As COVID-19 infection has been spreading rapidly, doctors have emphasized on the importance of going for testing if anyone is showing symptoms including fever, common cold, body aches.<sup>5</sup>

COVID-19 has been spreading rapidly in Sudurpaschim Province despite the prohibitory orders in place. The infection rate was 42.05 per cent there when the prohibitory orders were imposed on April 29. It was 44.65 per cent on May 19.<sup>6</sup>

Fifty-seven people died in the first wave of COVID-19 in Sudurpaschim Province. There are 2,373 active cases of infection in the province at present, and 428 people have died as of now. The death rate due to the second wave increased all of a sudden since April 29.<sup>7</sup>

Hungi in Rambha Rural Municipality of Palpa has become a COVID-19 hotspot. However, it takes at least a week for the report of RT-PCR tests to come. There are plans to conduct RDT tests as the Antigen Test kits are not available there.<sup>8</sup>

Forty-four cases of COVID-19 infection have been recorded in the same tole (locality) of Hilihang Rural Municipality of Panchthar. The locals have suspected the infection to have spread from a wedding ceremony held there.<sup>9</sup>

COVID-19 infection is being seen in most households of the Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City. Locals are terrified as the number of infections as well as people dying due to the infection is increasing there.<sup>10</sup>

Healthcare workers have claimed that COVID-19 infection has surged in the Hetaunda Sub-Metropolitan City and Thaha Municipality of Makawanpur district due to formal programs and unnecessary gatherings.<sup>11</sup>

COVID-19 has spread at community level at Sadananda Municipality-1's Nepaledanda of Bhojpur due to lack of timely tests. Nearly 60 households of the area have been affected by the pandemic.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nagarik

<sup>5</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>6</sup> Nayapatrika

<sup>7</sup> Nagarik

<sup>8</sup> Kantipur

<sup>9</sup> Ratopati

<sup>10</sup> Ratopati

<sup>11</sup> Kantipur

<sup>12</sup> Annapurna Post

Itahari Sub-Metropolitan City sealed Sunaulo Basti in Ward-3 after 25 individuals in the settlement were found to be suffering from COVID-19 related symptoms.<sup>13</sup>

COVID-19 infection has been found in 12 people of Rakshirang Rural Municipality of Makawanpur. However, they have been roaming around freely, going to herd animals and other work.<sup>14</sup>

Fifty-two people have died due to COVID-19 in Tanahun so far. One more person succumbed, while 56 were infected on May 22 alone.<sup>15</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has emptied many houses across the nation — some have lost their parents, others their children. A single family has lost many family members to the virus.<sup>16</sup>

Olangchungola and Yangma, the high altitude settlements of Phaktanlung Rural Municipality-7 in Taplejung district have banned entry to outsiders for a week in an effort to stem the spread of COVID-19.<sup>17</sup>

Symptoms similar to that of black fungus (mucormycosis) have been found in five COVID-infected people at the Narayani Hospital of Birgunj. Two of them have died, one has recovered, and two are undergoing treatment — one of them underwent surgery on May 20.<sup>18</sup>

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has said the government is making an effort to vaccinate everyone against COVID-19 before the elections. Expressing his dissatisfaction at comparing the election expenses to vaccination, he said that getting treatment for an illness and use of sovereign rights are two different things.<sup>19</sup>

The Rastriya Prajatantra Party has said that fair and free elections are not possible without first controlling the COVID-19

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<sup>13</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>14</sup> Kantipur

<sup>15</sup> The Himalayan Times

<sup>16</sup> Kantipur

<sup>17</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>18</sup> Kantipur

<sup>19</sup> Onlinekhabar

pandemic.<sup>20</sup>

The government has been asking for vaccines, oxygen cylinders, and ventilators under grant assistance from different nations. However, it is ready to spend Rs 40,000,000,000 to conduct elections amidst the pandemic.<sup>21</sup>

The government has shown interest in expensive midterm elections rather than on comparatively inexpensive vaccination drive to save the lives of the public. There is no certainty of anti-COVID vaccine which costs around Rs 1,000 per person. However, the government is ready to spend Rs 2,500 per voter for the election purpose.<sup>22</sup>

The Biratnagar High Court has issued an interim order to the government to arrange for food for the poor and vaccine for all.<sup>23</sup>

Public health activists have appealed to the government to immediately take back its decision to conduct midterm elections amidst the pandemic immediately. They have warned that the huge amount of the state's resources will be used in the elections, and it will deprive the public of getting COVID-19 treatment.<sup>24</sup>

Nepal is witnessing the second wave of the pandemic from last month and positivity is hovering at over 40 per cent, the highest in the world. Yet another alarming aspect of the second wave is cases rising in the rural parts of the country where healthcare facilities are next to non-existent. And in the peak of the second wave of the pandemic, the KP Sharma Oli government has dissolved the House of Representatives and declared elections in November. This is a callous and unforgivable mistake of this government, according to Dr Tulsi Ram Bhandari, a public health expert at Pokhara University. Elections are not possible in the current situation and will only invite disaster, observers say.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>21</sup> Nayapatrika

<sup>22</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>23</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>24</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>25</sup> The Kathmandu Post

The Nepal Medical Association has said the government has been insensitive by announcing elections amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>26</sup>

President Bidya Devi Bhandari has issued the COVID-19 Crisis Management Ordinance-2078. As per the ordinance, an integrated treatment system will be implemented by operating a unified hospital under the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Population. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister will lead in the control and containment of the pandemic. The ordinance allows for the right of announcement of a health emergency.<sup>27</sup>

The government has formed a COVID-19 Directorate Committee under the leadership of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli. The COVID-19 Crisis Management Center (CCMC) will be under this directorate now. With this the CCMC Directorate under the leadership of Deputy Prime Minister Ishwar Pokharel has been dissolved.<sup>28</sup>

Health sector will get priority in the upcoming policies and programs of Karnali Province — the development of health infrastructure to fight the pandemic is one of the agendas for this.<sup>29</sup>

The Home Ministry has instructed security agencies and district administration offices to put a complete ban on vehicular movement without permission, disobedience in following of public health protocols and protests in public places that would invite crowds, keeping in mind the COVID-19 pandemic. Those going against it could be jailed for a year. The move comes amidst the possible protest programs against the dissolving of the House of Representatives.<sup>30</sup>

The Ministry of Health and Population has released nearly Rs 3,000,000,000 for installing ICUs, ventilators and oxygen plants in 35 hospitals across the nation.<sup>31</sup>

The UK is providing 2,000,000 doses of vaccine against COVID-19 to Nepal. According to the Ministry of Health and

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<sup>26</sup> Baarhakhari

<sup>27</sup> Kantipur

<sup>28</sup> Kantipur

<sup>29</sup> Annapurna Post

<sup>30</sup> Kantipur

<sup>31</sup> Setopati

Population (MoHP), it is providing the said doses of AstraZeneca vaccine under the COVAX program. This vaccine will be useful in inoculating those who have taken the first dose of Covishield vaccine, according to Dr Jageshwar Gautam, Spokesperson at MoHP.<sup>32</sup>

Mayor of Rampur Municipality of Palpa Raman Bahadur Thapa has sought permission from the Ministry of Health and Population to buy anti-COVID vaccine. He has sought permission to buy 50,000 doses from India as there has been a delay in procurement of vaccines by the federal government.<sup>33</sup>

There is a shortage of Cetamol in the market of the Capital as well as different places of the nation. Retailers are selling a maximum five to 10 tablets only citing the shortage. However, the Department of Drug Administration has claimed to have a stock of medicine for three months.<sup>34</sup>

Shortage of very essential medicines used for the treatment of COVID-19 patients has hit Sudurpaschim Province hard. Doctors involved in the treatment of patients said that shortage of Vitamin C, zinc, dexamethasone and remdesivir, among other essential medicines, has hit hospitals in the province.<sup>35</sup>

There has been a shortage of reagent in Province 1 creating a situation where PCR tests might stop soon in the future.<sup>36</sup>

Laboratories doing PCR tests in Province 1 have started to shut down due to a shortage of reagent needed for the test.<sup>37</sup>

The ambulance drivers in Sudurpaschim have gotten infected while carrying COVID-19 patients. They fear they might spread the infection, and opine that the risk has increased as the local levels have not managed separate ambulances for COVID-19 and non-COVID patients.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Nagarik

<sup>33</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>34</sup> Kantipur

<sup>35</sup> The Himalayan Times

<sup>36</sup> Kantipur

<sup>37</sup> Setopati

There are multiple reports of people fleeing various isolation and quarantine centers in Baitadi, putting the communities at risk of a local transmission of the virus. COVID-19 cases are on the rise in Baitadi, a hill district of Sudurpaschim Province that borders India. The district has reported 867 cases. According to health officials, the virus is spreading rapidly in the district as the infected people and other suspected patients either refuse to stay in isolation facilities or run away from one.<sup>39</sup>

The government has announced provision of Rs 1,000 as motivation allowance to the staff of the Pashupati Area Development Trust burning the dead bodies of COVID-19 victims. However, the Nepal Army personnel deployed to manage COVID-dead bodies do not get any motivation allowance for the same work.<sup>40</sup>

A battalion of female cadres of the Nepal Army under the command of Second Lieutenant Aarati Rana Magar has been managing the bodies of COVID-dead in Mahottari.<sup>41</sup>

The COVID-19 is being confirmed in Nepal Police personnel deployed along the border. Four such officers deployed at Rani checkpost of Biratnagar have tested positive recently.<sup>42</sup>

The government had given the first dose of Covishield vaccine to those above 65 years of age in the last week of February. Now they are waiting for the second dose of the vaccine — there are more than 1,453,000 people waiting for it. They have to be inoculated by June 5 for the vaccine to be effective, as stated by the World Health Organization that says the booster dose has to be taken within eight to 12 weeks. However, the government has not decided on it. Vaccine expert Dr Shyam Upreti says the vaccine won't be effective if not taken on time.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>39</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>40</sup> Nayapatrika

<sup>41</sup> Annapurna Post

<sup>42</sup> Annapurna Post

<sup>43</sup> Kantipur

Around 86,000 individuals have not received the second dose of Covishield vaccine in Karnali Province, according to the data of the Provincial Health Directorate of Karnali Province.<sup>44</sup>

With no signs of additional doses of India-produced Covishield arriving anytime soon, there is uncertainty when the over 1.3 million people above 65 would be able to take their second shot. As such the government is discussing increasing the gap between the first and second doses of the vaccine to 12-16 weeks. Officials say India too has recently increased the gaps between the two doses of Covishield to 12-16 weeks, hence a decision in Nepal along that line is likely very soon.<sup>45</sup>

The government has been dilly-dallying over providing the risk allowance to healthcare workers. On May 3, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli had said the government will provide 50 per cent of their salary as risk allowance to doctors and healthcare workers deployed in COVID-19 treatment, along with treatment of their families and insurance. It has been two weeks since the announcement but the process has been too slow. They are yet to get the risk allowance since October / November last year.<sup>46</sup>

## OTHER(S)

## National News

### **HOSPITALS and HEALTHCARE FACILITIES**

The 50-bed isolation center in Changu Narayan Municipality of Bhaktapur is empty as COVID-19 patients admitted here have recovered. The infected ones can call and go there to stay in isolation.<sup>47</sup>

The health post of Ghyanglek Rural Municipality-5 of Sindhuli has been shut down after all healthcare workers there tested

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<sup>44</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>45</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>46</sup> Nayapatrika

<sup>47</sup> Nagarik

positive for COVID-19.<sup>48</sup>

Two health posts of Sindhuli have been shut down after COVID-19 infection was confirmed in the staff working there.<sup>49</sup>

The pressure of COVID-infected patients has once again increased at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital, Teku on May 23. As such they have been treating 19 patients on the verandah, chairs and floors of the hospital.<sup>50</sup>

People showing COVID-like symptoms — fever, cough and cold, and breathing difficulties — are being treated in ambulances in the District Hospital Sindhuli as all its isolation beds are filled.<sup>51</sup>

As Jaleswar Hospital lacks trained manpower, treatment of COVID-19 patients has faced problems. The Social Development Ministry of the Province -2 has deployed doctors to the hospital, but they have not yet reported for work. Five ventilators here have not come into use due to the lack of doctors and trained manpower.<sup>52</sup>

Every day around 15 patients in critical condition lose their lives in the course of treatment at the Bheri Hospital. In the face of increased pressure of patients, the hospital is treating COVID-19 patients by managing additional beds in every empty space available. Wards have been set up in three big halls. As the hall is open and everyone here sees every other person, we have to see people dying almost every day; everyone can imagine how such deaths rattle us, both the patients and their kin, causing them to lose confidence, said a relative of a COVID-19 patient.<sup>53</sup>

The government has released a budget to set up temporary COVID hospitals in all local levels. However, the local levels of Baitadi do not have doctors in such hospitals.<sup>54</sup>

Many critically ill COVID-19 patients are compelled to seek treatment outside Tikapur since the district hospital has not been able to run its ventilator service. Tikapur Hospital has seven ventilators at the ICU but they have been left unused even in the present crisis due to a lack of trained human resource to operate them.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kantipur

<sup>49</sup> Annapurna Post

<sup>50</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>51</sup> Kantipur

<sup>52</sup> Baarhakhari

<sup>53</sup> The Himalayan Times

<sup>54</sup> Nagarik

Due to a shortage of beds for COVID-19 in government hospitals of Kaski, many have been compelled to seek treatment in private hospitals — 427 patients were being treated at private hospitals and 116 at government hospitals as of May 19.<sup>56</sup>

With the number of coronavirus cases rising steadily across the country, thousands of families are struggling to admit their loved ones at hospitals. With beds in government hospitals occupied, the seriously ill have no option but to go to pricy private hospitals. And getting treated at private hospitals means bearing a heavy financial burden, most of it in the form of loans.<sup>57</sup>

The hospitals in Province 1 are facing the shortage of oxygen, beds and human resources needed for the treatment of COVID-19 patients.<sup>58</sup>

At Dhulikhel Hospital, the number of people coming with severe cases of COVID-19 has gone up significantly over the last two weeks and they are from villages. Earlier the hospital used to get patients mainly from Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, but now more cases are coming from remote villages, according to Biraj Karmacharya, Chief of the Department of Community Programs, of Dhulikhel Hospital, a Kathmandu University hospital. Of the total 120 beds in the hospital, 100 are occupied by COVID-19 patients, and the hospital gets an average of 15 new patients every day.<sup>59</sup>

The big hospitals of Kathmandu have started to treat all COVID-19 patients by arranging emergency beds even if they do not have sufficient beds. Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital, KIST Medical College, and Bir Hospital have been making temporary arrangements to accept all patients visiting them.<sup>60</sup>

After the major hospitals of Rupandehi have been turned into COVID-hospitals, non-COVID patients are finding it difficult to get treatment. Even those who could be saved with timely treatment have lost their lives.<sup>61</sup>

The Karnali Provincial Hospital has been a target of political push and pull. The provincial government has been causing obstruction in the Ministry of Health and Population's effort to put the hospital under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

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<sup>55</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>56</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>57</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>58</sup> Nagarik

<sup>59</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>60</sup> Kantipur

<sup>61</sup> Kantipur

The provincial government has been accused of not managing the hospital efficiently during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>62</sup>

Patarashi Rural Municipality of Jumla has brought a 40-bed institutionalized isolation center and five-COVID hospitals into operation.<sup>63</sup>

Koshi Hospital of Biratnagar has started a 62-bed COVID hospital with ventilator facility.<sup>64</sup>

Local units in Rukum (West) have added over 200 beds and 200 oxygen cylinders at various health facilities for the treatment of COVID-19 patients in the district.<sup>65</sup>

## **OXYGEN SHORTAGE**

The Nepal Oxygen Manufacturers' Association has said that oxygen cylinders are missing due to the unmanaged distribution system. There has been a shortage of oxygen cylinders in the factories as they are not being returned by users.<sup>66</sup>

The shortage of oxygen has eased somewhat compared to two weeks or so ago, but the demand is still high, according to manufacturers. There is no panic buying of oxygen now but demand continues to be high, according to Gaurav Sarda, Director of Kantipur Oxygen.<sup>67</sup>

The Ministry of Finance has given approval for another fund of Rs 178,770,000 to set up oxygen plants and HDU in 13 hospitals.<sup>68</sup>

It has been revealed that middlemen are playing a role in the oxygen industries and depots in the supply of oxygen in Nepal. This has led to oxygen not reaching hospitals as per the quota set by the Ministry of Health and Population.<sup>69</sup>

Five tankers carrying liquid oxygen have entered Birgunj from Raxaul since mid-April, according to the Birgunj Customs Point.

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<sup>62</sup> Kantipur

<sup>63</sup> Nagarik

<sup>64</sup> Nagarik

<sup>65</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>66</sup> Annapurna Post

<sup>67</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>68</sup> Kantipur

<sup>69</sup> Nagarik

Other oxygen tankers will also be arriving in Birgunj from Jharkhand in India in a few days, according to Harihar Paudel, Chief at the customs point.<sup>70</sup>

Bharatpur has started facing a shortage of oxygen. The increase in the number of COVID-19 patients faced with a decrease in the supply of oxygen from outside the Valley has made it difficult to address the demand for supply of oxygen, as per the hospitals there.<sup>71</sup>

An oxygen plant has been set up at the District Hospital of Lamjung. It will produce oxygen enough for 15 cylinders per day.<sup>72</sup>

### **DUTY and RESPONSIBILITIES**

Nine local levels in Doti district have started door-to-door campaign to contact-trace COVID-19 patients. Healthcare workers have started Antigen Tests on symptomatic and non-symptomatic patients.<sup>73</sup>

Healthcare workers have been providing home consultation and delivering nutritious foods at the doorsteps of those staying in home isolation in Bhotekoshi Rural Municipality of Sindhupalchowk.<sup>74</sup>

The strong willpower of healthcare workers is helping Tikapur Hospital to be efficient in the treatment of COVID-19 patients. Learning from their past experiences, they have been working to their full capacity.<sup>75</sup>

The Karnali Academy of Health Sciences Teaching Hospital has been the center of everyone's hope and trust amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It has mobilized nearly two dozen doctors and healthcare workers in and outside the Karnali district.<sup>76</sup>

All staff of local levels of Myagdi have been visiting villages within the district for swab collection, immediate Antigen Test of those showing COVID-like symptoms, monitoring and meeting with infected people by visiting their houses, distribution of

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<sup>70</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>71</sup> Kantipur

<sup>72</sup> Ratopati

<sup>73</sup> Rastriya Samachar Samiti (in The Himalayan Times)

<sup>74</sup> Kantipur

<sup>75</sup> Nagarik

<sup>76</sup> Nagarik

medicines, and taking critically-ill patients to the hospitals via ambulances.<sup>77</sup>

Healthcare materials are being checked via a fast track method in Birgunj customs. Vehicles carrying liquid oxygen need not stop anywhere at either Indian or Nepali customs point. The paperwork is being done after letting the vehicles pass through the customs points.<sup>78</sup>

Lack of proper management of the bodies of COVID-dead has created a problem in Sindhuli. The COVID-19 Crisis Management Center has warned of taking action after complaints were made of not burning the bodies of COVID-dead properly in the Kamalamai Municipality.<sup>79</sup>

## **HELP and AID**

Nepal Telecom (NT) will provide free voice calls for a month to all healthcare workers across the nation. The offer has been brought forth by NT to thank frontline healthcare workers working amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>80</sup>

A joint meeting of Division Forest Office, Community Forest Consumer Mahasangh and Udayapur District Mahasangh held in Gaighat on May 19 decided to provide free firewood for cremation of bodies of COVID-19 victims. The firewood would be provided to the families of the deceased as per the recommendation of the local level.<sup>81</sup>

The meeting of COVID-19 Crisis Management Center in Surkhet has decided to manage the bodies of COVID-dead who are from poor families or do not have a kin free of charge.<sup>82</sup>

The Province 1 government has provided healthcare materials — oxygen cylinders, PPE, sanitizers, surgical masks, dead body bags among others to the Ilam Hospital for the treatment of COVID-19 patients there.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ratopati

<sup>78</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>79</sup> Kantipur

<sup>80</sup> Ratopati

<sup>81</sup> The Himalayan Times

<sup>82</sup> Ratopati

Various local units, hospitals and organizations in Rupandehi, Kapilvastu, Gulmi and Arghakhanchi districts of Lumbini Province have come together to help install oxygen plants to scale up COVID-19 treatment in some of the worst-hit districts in the Province.<sup>84</sup>

Essential healthcare materials needed for the control, containment and treatment of COVID-19 have been handed over to Sindhuplachowk on the initiation of the Speaker of House of Representatives Agni Prasad Sapkota.<sup>85</sup>

More than 13 tons of healthcare materials brought from Singapore have been handed over to the government. It has been said that the help worth over Rs 250,000,000 has been possible with close coordination between Tamsek Foundation Singapore, Lotus Life Foundation Singapore, Gorkha Brewery, Nepal Government, different ministries, diplomatic agencies, and non-resident Nepalis.<sup>86</sup>

A total of 2,000 oxygen cylinders gifted by the Chinese government have arrived in Nepal, while other healthcare materials have also started to come in. The Chinese government had announced to provide healthcare materials worth 10,000,000 yuan to Nepal under grant assistance.<sup>87</sup>

The Government of the People's Republic of China, the provincial governments as well as other organizations in China have provided various medical equipment and supplies to help Nepal fight COVID-19.<sup>88</sup>

The US sent a cargo aircraft containing important medical supplies on May 22 including surgical masks, face shields and gloves. The Government of Switzerland has provided support of various medical equipment and supplies to Nepal.<sup>89</sup>

Australia is providing an additional AUS\$7 million (Rs 635 million) in funding to Nepal to support its COVID-19 response.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Nagarik

<sup>84</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>85</sup> Ratopati

<sup>86</sup> Baarhakhari

<sup>87</sup> Nayapatrika

<sup>88</sup> The Himalayan Times

<sup>89</sup> The Himalayan Times

The Nepal Red Cross Society has handed over COVID-related healthcare materials that it got with the support from Chinese Red Cross Society to the Ministry of Health and Population.<sup>91</sup>

The World Health Organization has said it will send healthcare materials to Nepal in a few weeks. Oxygen concentrators, testing kits, tents, hospital beds, and PPE are the major items to be given.<sup>92</sup>

International Organization 'Back to Life' has helped Bagmati Province with health materials worth Rs 17,000,000 by handing over an oxygen concentrator, high frequency mobile X-ray machine, and PPE, masks among others.<sup>93</sup>

Shree Sundarkand Mitra Mandal, a religious and social organization, has started serving food twice a day at just Rs 20 to COVID-19 patients and their attendants at the Bheri Hospital, Nepalgunj. The cheap price meal has given a huge relief to COVID-19 patients and attendants alike as they do not have to venture outside searching for food.<sup>94</sup>

NCell Axiata Limited on May 21 handed the first batch of over 150 oxygen cylinders to the Ministry of Health and Population extending its support to the government to mitigate the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.<sup>95</sup>

A group of youth in Kathmandu has brought 550 oxygen cylinders from China.<sup>96</sup>

The Association of Nepal Chartered Accountants and Sarwanga Swasthya Sadan have brought a 300-bed isolation center into operation in Nagarjun Municipality, Kathmandu.<sup>97</sup>

Hamro Oxygen Udhyog has provided 1,200 oxygen cylinders to the Trishuli Hospital of Nuwakot.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> The Himalayan Times

<sup>91</sup> Annapurna Post

<sup>92</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>93</sup> The Himalayan Times

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<sup>95</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>96</sup> Nagarik

<sup>97</sup> Nagarik

The PCR tests of suspected COVID-infected people in Kathmandu Metropolitan City will be done from at least two places everyday from 11:00 am.<sup>99</sup>

The number of pregnant women and new mothers visiting healthcare facilities has reduced due to fear of COVID-19 infection and the prohibitory orders. The hospitals have also asked them not to visit hospitals except in case of an emergency. As such they are at increased health risk.<sup>100</sup>

The lockdown and prohibitory orders imposed to control the pandemic have affected daily wage workers from the Dalit and marginalized communities of Province 2. The local, provincial, and federal governments have not brought about any programs to help those who are losing lives due to starvation.<sup>101</sup>

More than 130,000 workers directly engaged in the approximately 3,500 restaurants in the Valley have lost their incomes after they closed. And with the eateries shuttered, thousands of jobs in the online food delivery sector have also evaporated.<sup>102</sup>

Many people with disabilities in Bhaktapur district have been affected the most as a result of the prohibitory orders. Many disabled persons are running small-scale businesses that have been dented by the adverse impact of the pandemic. They are finding it difficult to support themselves and their families without any income source.<sup>103</sup>

The public has been suffering due to the curtailing and black marketeering of daily essentials — they are forced to pay a high price for low quality goods.<sup>104</sup>

A pharmacy operator in Morang has been arrested for black marketing of masks.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>99</sup> Baarhakhari

<sup>100</sup> Kantipur

<sup>101</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>102</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>103</sup> Rastriya Samachar Samiti (in The Himalayan times)

<sup>104</sup> Annapurna Post

Nepal Police has raided three sanitizer industries — one from Lalitpur and two from Kathmandu — after it was learnt that they had been producing sanitizers using the chemicals harmful to human health.<sup>106</sup>

If COVID-19 infection is not controlled now, it might increase in the coming days, according to the Ministry of Health and Population. Even if the number of infections is decreasing at present, they can increase if the public health protocols are not followed, it has said.<sup>107</sup>

Experts have concluded that just prohibitory orders are not sufficient to control the spread of COVID-19 infection in the country. Public health expert Dr Sharad Wanta argues that Nepal has not imposed prohibitory orders strictly like in other countries. As people of the same family are being infected, the virus is being transmitted from one member to another gradually, which has not reduced the number of infected for a long time, as per infectious disease expert Dr Sher Bahadur Pun.<sup>108</sup>

Prohibitory orders have been issued in Janakpurdham to control the spread of COVID-19 infection there, but those defying it are aplenty. Locals are seen visiting the markets freely citing religious, family and social work. Healthcare workers there are worried that the infection will spread with such behaviors.<sup>109</sup>

The District Administration Office Rautahat has extended the prohibitory orders by a week effective from May 21 midnight.<sup>110</sup>

The Education Department of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City on May 16 published a notice to all private and community schools in the City to complete the final exams by June 3. Many government schools say conducting the exams is not possible as most of their students have already left the Valley and many of them are unreachable in lack of access to either telephone

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<sup>105</sup> Baarhakhari

<sup>106</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>107</sup> Baarhakhari

<sup>108</sup> Baarhakhari

<sup>109</sup> Baarhakhari

<sup>110</sup> The Himalayan Times

or the Internet, while many parents say the children are not psychologically ready to sit for the exams amid rising infections and deaths due to the pandemic.<sup>111</sup>

Teachers who are part of the Institutional School Teachers Union have complained of not getting their salary during the period of COVID-19-induced lockdown.<sup>112</sup>

The Federation of Computer Association of Nepal has asked the government to make maximum use of digital technology to stop the spread of COVID-19.<sup>113</sup>

As a precaution against COVID-19, the Nepal Rastra Bank will now allow commercial banks to open only six of their branches in Kathmandu Valley. Likewise, development companies can open four, and financial companies will be allowed to open three branches only.<sup>114</sup>

Nepali nationals can now leave the country on chartered flights which have been allowed to fly into the country to rescue foreign citizens. According to Buddhi Sagar Lamichhane, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Nepalis can buy tickets and travel abroad on chartered flights as per a ministerial decision of May 12.<sup>115</sup>

The Kuwaiti authorities have allowed resumption of outgoing flights to Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, starting May 18; however, many Nepali migrant workers have been affected by the international flight suspension enforced by the Nepali authorities. If only international flight suspension was not in place in Nepal, or had our government allowed flights from Kuwait, many Nepali migrant workers would have returned home by now, according to an official at the Nepali Embassy in Kuwait.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>112</sup> Nagarik

<sup>113</sup> Kantipur

<sup>114</sup> Baarhakhari

<sup>115</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>116</sup> The Kathmandu Post

Nearly 70 per cent of civil servants are stuck at their homes following the prohibitory orders. The government has not been able to make use of them due to a lack of effective policies and plans.<sup>117</sup>

## International News

The vaccines developed by Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca have been found to be effective against the Indian variant of coronavirus. After two weeks of taking both doses of the vaccine, Pfizer-BioNTech was found to be 88 per cent and AstraZeneca 60 per cent effective against the virus.<sup>118</sup>

Official death tolls from the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to be a “significant undercount”, the World Health Organization said on May 21, estimating that the true figure of direct and indirect deaths could be two to three times higher.<sup>119</sup>

Waiving intellectual property rights for COVID-19 vaccines will not be enough to narrow the huge supply gap between the rich and poor countries, the head of World Trade Organization said on May 20.<sup>120</sup>

A global health summit that underlined the growing disparity between the rich and poor countries during the pandemic has closed with pledges by pharmaceutical companies to deliver more than 1.3 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to low- and middle-income countries this year.<sup>121</sup>

The COVID-19 vaccines currently being deployed in the fight against the pandemic in Europe appear to be able to protect against all variants that are circulating and causing concern, the World Health Organization’s regional director Hans Kluge said on May 20.<sup>122</sup>

As the world’s largest maker of vaccines, India was always expected to play a pivotal role in global efforts to immunize against

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<sup>117</sup> Kantipur

<sup>118</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>119</sup> Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)

<sup>120</sup> Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)

<sup>121</sup> The Associated Press (in The Kathmandu Post)

<sup>122</sup> Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)

COVID-19. However, a mixture of overconfidence, poor planning and bad luck has prevented that from happening.<sup>123</sup>

India's COVID-19 deaths rose by 4,194 on May 22 and infections were spreading in rural areas.<sup>124</sup>

India on May 21 said that it was working to alleviate a shortage of medicine used to treat a rare fungal disease hitting COVID-19 patients. In this battle of ours, another new challenge of black fungus has also emerged these days, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted. Cases of mucormycosis or black fungus have surged in India, mostly among COVID-19 patients. At least 7,250 such cases have been found across the country as of May 19, according to local media.<sup>125</sup>

Special hospital wards will be set up in India's capital New Delhi to fight 'black fungus', authorities said on May 20 as the life-threatening infection surged among coronavirus patients. Authorities say thousands have developed Mucormycosis or black fungus across India.<sup>126</sup>

About 9,000 people are reported to be suffering from black fungus in India.<sup>127</sup>

The Indian government has given instructions to the companies concerned to remove all social media posts mentioning 'Indian Variant'. It has said that since the World Health Organization hasn't called B.1.617 as Indian Variant, it would be wrong to do so.<sup>128</sup>

The death toll from COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean passed 1 million people on May 21.<sup>129</sup>

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has tested negative for COVID-19 after a worker at her residence was confirmed to be infected.<sup>130</sup>

People in the world's leading economies remain overwhelmingly nervous about returning to life as normal even after being

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<sup>123</sup> The Associated Press (in The Himalayan Times)

<sup>124</sup> Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)

<sup>125</sup> Reuters (in The Himalayan Times)

<sup>126</sup> Agence France Presse (in The Kathmandu Post)

<sup>127</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>128</sup> Onlinekhabar

<sup>129</sup> The Kathmandu Post

<sup>130</sup> Reuters (in The Himalayan Times)

vaccinated against COVID-19, a survey released on May 21 found. A mid-year update of the Edelman Trust Barometer suggested that 65 per cent of people described themselves as being “still in a pandemic mindset”.<sup>131</sup>

The International Monetary Fund on May 21 unveiled a US\$50 billion proposal to end the COVID-19 pandemic by vaccinating at least 40 per cent of the population in all countries by the end of 2021 and at least 60 per cent by the first half of 2022.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Reuters (in The Himalayan Times)

<sup>132</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)

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