



Focused COVID-19 Media Monitoring, Nepal



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-Sharpening the COVID-19 Response through Communications Intelligence

Date: September 22, 2021

Kathmandu, Nepal

EMERGING THEME(S)

- Nepal reported 1,036 new COVID-19 cases, 5 deaths on September 21; rate of COVID-19 infection has declined significantly, seen at 9.7 per cent in recent days, lowest in the country this year
- India looks at resuming exports of COVID-19 vaccines in October quarter
- Cabinet gives approval for COVID-19 Crisis Management Bill to be placed before the Parliament
- Pfizer says its COVID-19 vaccine works on children aged 5-11 years
- Nepali nationals returning home for the festival season from foreign shores need to have PCR negative report of 72 hours, complete vaccination certificate; if not, they'll have to stay in 10-day hotel quarantine

RECURRING THEME(S)

- Reopening of in-person classes in schools has left parents in a dilemma; Madhyapur Thimi Municipality to reopen schools for physical classes only after Chhath in mid-November

¹ 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 786,577 on September 21 with 1,036 more people testing positive for the infection in the past 24 hours, while the countrywide COVID-19 mortality toll increased to 11,053 with five more fatalities. Nepal's COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 95.9 per cent, the fatality rate at 1.4 per cent, while the active COVID-19 case count currently is 21,524.²

The rate of COVID-19 infection has declined significantly in Nepal in the past week. The infection has been seen in 9.7 per cent of the people tested in recent days. This is the lowest infection rate in the country this year. Along with that the number of people being admitted to the hospitals has also significantly decreased. With this the ICU beds of the big hospitals of Kathmandu Valley are lying empty.³

India will resume exports of COVID-19 vaccines in the October quarter, prioritizing the global vaccine-sharing platform COVAX and neighboring countries first as supplies rise, said the country's health minister Mansukh Mandaviya on September 21. The country's monthly vaccine output has more than doubled since April and is set to quadruple to over 300 million doses next month, the minister said adding that only excess supplies would be exported.⁴

In what can be a much-needed respite for Nepal, India on September 20 announced that it would resume exports of COVID-19 vaccines in October to COVAX, and neighboring countries. For Nepal, which is struggling to secure enough doses, the announcement comes as good news, as COVAX too has committed vaccine doses enough to inoculate 20 per cent of its population. On top of that, Serum Institute of India has yet to supply 1 million doses of the 2 million doses for which the Nepal government paid in February this year.⁵

It has been confirmed that the 1 million doses of vaccine procured by Nepal will arrive in October with India announcing to resume the exports of the COVID-19 vaccines.⁶

² THT Online

³ Setopati

⁴ Reuters (in The Himalayan Times)

⁵ The Kathmandu Post

⁶ Nayapatrika

Experts have suggested that the government provide the 100,620 doses of Pfizer vaccine that Nepal is receiving under the COVAX facility to children aged 12 to 17 years with underlying health conditions. The Ministry of Health and Population however has been preparing to give this vaccine to those above the age of 55 with underlying health conditions and for use in super specialized hospitals.⁷

The Cabinet meeting of September 21 has given approval to present the COVID-19 Crisis Management Bill before the parliament. It has also approved COVID-19 Crisis Management Order 2078 BS.⁸

Pfizer said on September 20 its COVID-19 vaccine works for children aged 5-11 years and that it will seek US authorization for this age group soon, a key step toward beginning vaccinations for youngsters. The vaccine is already available for anyone 12 years and older.⁹

The Non-Resident Nepalis, those who have gone for foreign employment and studies have started returning home with festivals like Dashain, Tihar and Chhath approaching. The Department of Immigration has made the PCR negative report done within 72 hours and a vaccine certificate proving that one has taken the complete doses of the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory for such people. Otherwise, they need to stay in a 10-day hotel quarantine.¹⁰

Sumitra Dwadi sent her daughter to school on September 20 four days after in-person classes were resumed. However, she said she is extremely concerned about her daughter, 8, because of the coronavirus threats. Dawadi's concern encapsulates the predicament of almost all parents. Despite warnings from public health experts, authorities in many districts and local units of the Kathmandu Valley have allowed operation of in-person classes. Experts say authorities' decision to allow in-person classes have left parents with Hobson's choice — there are no online classes and sending children to school is the only option.¹¹

⁷ Kantipur

⁸ Baarhakhari

⁹ The Associated Press (in The Kathmandu Post)

¹⁰ Ratopati

¹¹ The Kathmandu Post

At a time when Kathmandu and Lalitpur Metropolitan Cities are being criticized for ignoring health experts' advice against reopening schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic, neighboring Madhyapur Thimi Municipality has decided to resume its schools only after Chhath, which falls in mid-November. "We have directed all educational institutions within our jurisdiction not to run physical classes until Chhath festival," said Madan Sundar Shrestha, Mayor of Madhyapur Thimi Municipality. "We still have 4-6 persons below 18 years who are infected with COVID-19. Opening schools is still risky," he said.¹²

OTHER(S)

National News

Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Gyanendra Bahadur Karki has said Nepal will inoculate all eligible citizens with the COVID-19 vaccine within Chaitra (April 13), as per the government's target. He also claimed the government has been taking the vaccination drive ahead effectively.¹³

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur has expressed his unawareness regarding the commuting of vehicles at the border checkposts. Hoteliers and entrepreneurs of Birgunj area had gone to the Prime Minister to express their concern regarding the closure of checkposts since last year's lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been complaining that the restriction of public transport entering Nepal from India has affected the tourism business there.¹⁴

Nepali students have paid nearly Rs 25,000,000,000 for their studies in foreign universities amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹² The Kathmandu Post

¹³ Ratopati

¹⁴ Nagarik

The number of students wanting to go abroad to pursue their studies amidst the pandemic has not reduced — a total of 29,978 students have taken approval to study in foreign nations. The amount higher than that of the annual budget of major universities of the country is being spent for studies in foreign universities.¹⁵

International News

World leaders are returning to the United Nations in New York this week with a focus on boosting efforts to fight both climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, which last year forced them to send video statements for the annual gathering.¹⁶

The United Nation's intellectual property agency said on September 20 that innovation marched forward last year (2020) despite the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. Technology, pharmaceuticals and biotech industries boosted their investments, even as hard-hit sectors like transport and travel eased back on spending.¹⁷

Noting that COVID-19 may be heading towards endemicity in India, vaccinologist Dr Gangandee Kang said on September 20 local flare-ups that will be smaller and spread wider across the country may add up to form a third wave of the pandemic, but the scale will not be like before. The endemic stage is when a population learns to live with a virus.¹⁸

India conducted the lowest number of daily COVID-19 tests since mid-August on September 19, but the health ministry urged local governments not to let their guard down during the festival season. States and federally controlled territories carried out 1.18 million tests on September 19, down from 1.56 million on September 18 and against a capacity of more than 2 million.¹⁹

Ukraine has extended a state of emergency that allows regional authorities to impose COVID-19 restrictions until the end of 2021 to tackle a surge in infections, the government said on September 20. "Due to the worsening epidemic situation, the government at an extraordinary meeting decided to extend the adaptive quarantine till December 31, 2021," it said.²⁰

¹⁵ Nayapatrika

¹⁶ Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)

¹⁷ The Associated Press (in The Himalayan Times)

¹⁸ Press Trust of India (in The Himalayan Times)

¹⁹ Reuters (in The Kathmandu Post)

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²⁰ Reuters (in The Himalayan Times)