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B^{360°} BUSINESS

**COVID19
HITS AVIATION
INDUSTRY**

**WOULD YOU
LAYOFF STAFF
DURING THE
LOCKDOWN?**

**HIGH EXPENSES,
WEAK RESPONSE**

**COVID EXPOSES
LEADERSHIP
CHINKS**

**FINDING
OPPORTUNITY
IN CRISIS**

GYANENDRA KHADKA
Venture Capitalist, Founder & CEO
XcelTrip & Gyapu Marketplace





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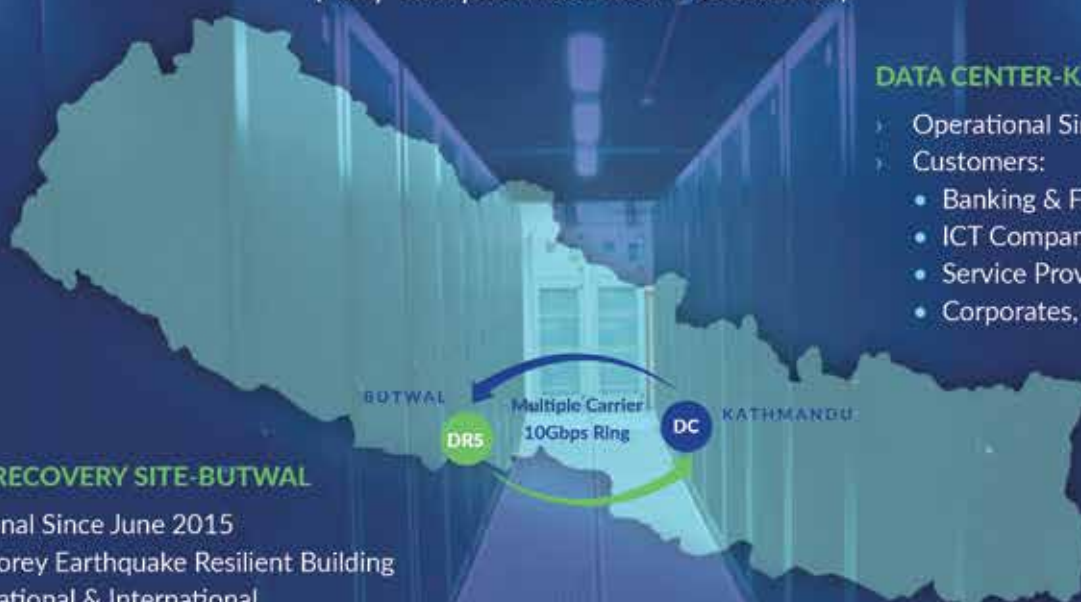
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Despite the uncertainty and restrictions, the pandemic has been a great teacher. It has brought to life the force of sheer resilience on which human life exists.

I see business owners struggle to reshape their reality, I see workers trying to keep their livelihoods intact, I see experts looking for answers to keep the economy from completely breaking down with businesses wiped out, jobs gone and a huge surge in debt; and this somehow makes me understand the power of cooperation and what it really means to be human.

Everywhere people are negotiating, cooperating and creating small spaces of function so that the economy does not fail, people are not left drowning in debt, and there is some form of livelihood available to everyone. And if we were to dismiss empathy from the wheels of economy, you can be certain that there would be hunger, illness and death in huge numbers.

People are breaking down unable to cope with financial pressures whether in the form of payment of bank interest, debts, or the very lack of relevance of their business model in the new context.

Caught in the lockdown, small businesses have been crushed and the sustained economic stress has even forced some entrepreneurs to take their lives. They say the worst is yet to come, and it leaves me questioning a system that is clearly apathetic to its people. I see hope only if people understand each other and reach out to tide over this crisis together.

Whether it is a landlord or a good neighbour, if we can just look out for each other at the very basic level, we can survive.

The World Bank reports that COVID crisis could push over a hundred million people into extreme poverty, and half of these people live in South Asia alone. Our greatest mistake at this time would be to place our trust in the government bailing us out. Intentions do not matter, results do. Today, reality is that leadership has failed its people in almost every way.

Times ahead will not be easy. We must remember that we are codependent and interlinked in our wellbeing – economic, social and mental – in almost every way. Use empathy in your judgment and actions every day, and that is probably the only thing that will sustain us.

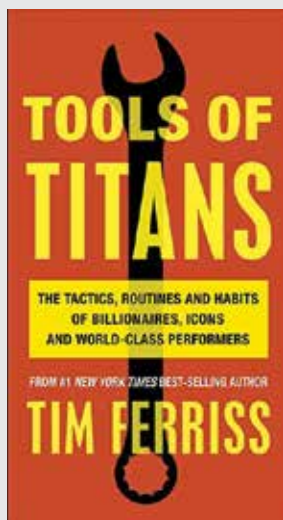
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charu Chadha'.

Charu Chadha
editor

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Tools of Titans: The Tactics, Routines, and Habits of Billionaires, Icons, and World-Class Performers

Author: Timothy Ferriss



From the author:

For the last two years, I've interviewed more than 200 world-class performers for my podcast, The Tim Ferriss Show. The guests range from super celebs (Jamie Foxx, Arnold Schwarzenegger, etc.) and athletes (icons of powerlifting, gymnastics, surfing, etc.) to legendary Special Operations

commanders and black-market biochemists. For most of my guests, it's the first time they've agreed to a two-to-three-hour interview. This unusual depth has helped make The Tim Ferriss Show the first business/interview podcast to pass 100 million downloads.

This book contains the distilled tools, tactics, and 'inside baseball' you won't find anywhere else. It also includes new tips from past guests, and life lessons from new 'guests' you haven't met.

What makes the show different is a relentless focus on actionable details. This is reflected in the questions. For example: What do these people do in the first sixty minutes of each morning? What do their workout routines look like, and why? What books have they gifted most to other people? What are the biggest wastes of time for novices in their field? What supplements do they take on a daily basis?

I don't view myself as an interviewer. I view myself as an experimenter. If I can't test something and replicate results in the messy reality of everyday life, I'm not interested.

Everything within these pages has been vetted, explored, and applied to my own life in some fashion. I've used dozens of the tactics and philosophies in high-stakes negotiations, high-risk environments, or large business dealings. The lessons have made me millions of dollars and saved me years of wasted effort and frustration.

I created this book, my ultimate notebook of high-leverage tools, for myself. It's changed my life, and I hope the same for you.

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GYANENDRA KHADKA
VENTURE CAPITALIST, FOUNDER AND
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Photo Courtesy: Gyanendra Khadka

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A CANVAS FOR TRADITIONAL & CONTEMPORARY
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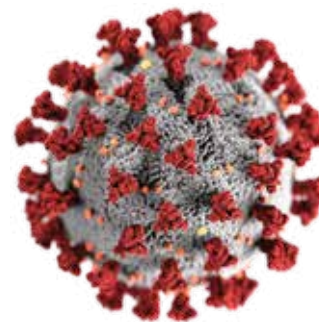
WOULD YOU LAYOFF STAFF DURING THE
LOCKDOWN? IF NOT, WHAT ARE SOME POSSIBLE
SOLUTIONS ENTREPRENEURS CAN TAKE TO HELP
THEIR BUSINESS SURVIVE AS WELL AS PROTECT
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HIGH EXPENSES, WEAK RESPONSE



FEATURE

WRITE TO US AT

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ON THE COVER

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HIMA BISTA
EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, WOMEN
LEAD NEPAL



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"THE STATE OF QATAR IS CURRENTLY WORKING ACCORDING TO 2030 VISION WHICH INCLUDES VERY AMBITIOUS NATIONAL PROJECTS SUCH AS BUILDING NEW CITIES AND BIG INFRASTRUCTURES. AND THUS WE WILL CONTINUE THE COOPERATION WITH NEPAL IN THIS REGARD. DURING THE PAST YEARS, IT'S PROVED CLEARLY THAT NEPALI MIGRANT WORKERS ARE AMONG THE BEST, HONEST AND RELIABLE PEOPLE. AND I HOPE TO SEE MORE NEPALI MIGRANTS IN THE SKILLED SECTORS ALSO."

H.E. Yousuf Bin Mohammed Al-Hail
The State of Qatar's Ambassador to Nepal

FACE2FACE

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"THE GOAL IS TO PRODUCTISE OUR SERVICES AS WE BUILD OUT THE AUDIO BEE BRAND, HIRE US-BASED SALES AND TECHNICAL TEAM LEADS. WE ARE ALSO IN A TRANSITION PHASE WHERE WE GO FROM A CULTURE OF BEING OPERATIONALLY FOCUSED TO BECOME A PRODUCT DRIVEN COMPANY. WE ARE HIRING RESOURCES IN NEPAL AS WELL TO CONTINUE THIS TRANSFORMATION. WE WILL ALSO LOOK TO SIGN CLIENTS AND RAMP UP SALES AS WE BECOME CAPABLE OF SCALING RAPIDLY OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. WHEN YOU ARE TRYING TO BUILD A GLOBAL BUSINESS IN SUCH A COMPETITIVE AND EXPLODING SPACE WHILE BEING BOOTSTRAPPED, IT TAKES ALL OF YOUR FOCUS AND THUS THESE ARE MY PERSONAL GOALS AS WELL."

Ayush Neupane
CEO of Audio Bee & Founder and CEO of
A.B.G.S. Group

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KTM

Born and raised in Chitwan, Gyanendra Khadka is the Founder and CEO of XcelTrip and Gyapu Marketplace. On completing high school, he went to Singapore for his Bachelors degree and then completed his MBA degree from Singapore Management University.

A venture capitalist, Khadka has funded 26 startup portfolios globally. He categorically invests in tech-based startups which deal in artificial intelligence, blockchain technology, virtual reality and artificial reality. He created a stir in the Nepali startup scene by announcing an investment offer of \$20,000 to 25 tech startups so that they can work their way out from the abyss of financial crisis caused by the pandemic.

Excerpts of a conversation with the versatile serial entrepreneur Gyanendra Khadka on his ventures in Nepal, cryptocurrency, the future of ecommerce and his interest in startups:

What does XcelTrip Global do and why the need to start XcelTrip Nepal?

In 2016, I had the urge to invest in my own company rather than just fund others. That is when I launched XcelTrip from the US which operates globally from four countries: Malta, Singapore, US and India. We have inventory of 15 lakh hotels and 400+ airlines. XcelTrip is an OTA platform like booking.com and Xpedia. XcelTrip is the world's first blockchain based travel platform.

Now about XcelTrip Nepal: I met Aditya Baral, Country Director of XcelTrip Nepal, who was then associated with Nepal Tourism Board, when he visited Singapore for the promotion of VNY 2020. After long meetings, it was decided that XcelTrip Global would work to promote the VNY 2020

internationally. It was a new opportunity for us and I had always wanted to do something in Nepal and for Nepal. Because of the efforts of Aditya Baral and Saurav Pradhan, Head of Business Development, XcelTrip Nepal, our company could become the official travel partner for Nepal Tourism Board. We signed a promotional campaign with NTB for four years to promote Nepal throughout the world. Besides, in our attempt to promote the country keeping VNY 2020 in mind, we launched XcelTrip in Nepal in December last year. XcelTrip Nepal is the country's only OTA.

XcelTrip Global is entirely based on cryptocurrency, how does that work for XcelTrip Nepal?

Every year four billion dollars is lost in the labyrinth created by the travel network





FINDING OPPORTUNITY IN CRISIS

GYANENDRA KHADKA

Venture Capitalist, Founder and CEO, XcelTrip & Gyapu Marketplace

Text: Ujeena Rana

and no one knows where that large sum goes. We are actually trying to solve that problem with XcelTrip Global. We accept major cryptocurrencies. Today, there are more than 200 million cryptocurrency users in the world. I am a crypto investor myself. We accept four major cryptocurrencies: Bitcoin, Ethereum, Litecoin, Dash in conjunction with my own cryptocurrency, Xcel Token. Additionally, we accept Visa Card, Master Card, WeChat pay. We have removed PayPal because of major problems we faced. This is for international transactions.

But we cannot use cryptocurrency in Nepal so we registered as XcelTrip OTA. We created a separate domain for Nepal. The system required that we accept the payment gateway in use in Nepal. We have used Himalayan Bank's payment network for Visa Card and MasterCard and for mobile banking, we work with Fonepay, eSewa, Khalti, IME Pay, Connect IPS, Prabhu Pay, basically all Nepal's local payment gateways. With these we can book Nepal's 500-600 hotels and five domestic airlines as well as book hotels and airlines across the world.

For example, if you have eSewa or bank card of any bank in Nepal, you can book hotels and airlines that will take you from Nepalgunj to Kathmandu, Kathmandu to Singapore, and Singapore to Los Angeles with Nepal's card. This is a facility we are offering for the first time in Nepal. Internationally, we accept block chain technology, for Nepal, it is local currency.

What is the status of XcelTrip Nepal now since VNY 2020 has been canceled and the pandemic is hampering your prospect of dominating the domestic travel market in Nepal?

I see opportunity in every crisis. I take risk in every venture that I plunge myself in. When I provide funding for any start-up, it is the concept that I fund, we don't see anything with physical existence. Three

years back, I had come to Nepal to invest but I was thoroughly demotivated. But not now. When I launched XcelTrip in Nepal, I found that Nepal does not have any OTA platform and the market is dominated by OYO and booking.com. When I came back to Nepal, I studied the country and travelled within. As a result of an intensive research but largely credited to the mammoth experience of our core team members in the travel sector in the country, the team could take control of Nepal's tourism network. However, the pandemic rained our parade.

Even then, we have meetings almost every day. Prior to the lockdown, we had readied packages for domestic tourism. Take for instance "Ramro Pokhara, Ghumaou Pokhara" campaign. With this slogan, we had partnered with 28 hotels in Pokhara and had already started the Pokhara campaign. But we stopped our work after the lockdown was announced.

The good thing from the lockdown is that for the next one to one and a half years, we will be unchallenged in Nepal's domestic tourism market. I am very much excited on behalf of XcelTrip because now we need not compete with OYO or booking.com for the next 12 months or so since they will not operate in Nepal. We are encouraged by that. Nonetheless, the bad thing is that Nepal's entire tourism sector was dependent on international tourists. Hotels and airlines might not get international tourists for the next 8-12 months or even longer.

A few months back, hotels in Nepal did not know of our existence, and since OYO and booking.com won't be in the market, now we are the only company that will bring customers to their hotel rooms. That is the easy route created for us by the COVID 19. Now, we need to work on 'how do we cash in on

this opportunity' and 'how to penetrate the domestic market'. For that we are all geared up and prepared for when the lockdown is eased and we march into promoting tourism for domestic travelers. We have readied 19 destinations and we have already partnered with a few travel agencies and have prepared tour packages, also for the Kathmandu Valley.

Circular economy is very important for a country like Nepal. Domestic tourism immensely supports the circular economy of any country. Today, the world is talking about circular economy; if we look at the size of domestic tourism in Nepal, it can sustain tourism in Nepal. That's why I am very excited about XcelTrip Nepal.

Why venture into the ecommerce market in Nepal? What does Gyapu Marketplace strive to fulfill?

The lockdown launched Gyapu Marketplace in the ecommerce market in Nepal. It was never our plan to launch Gyapu so soon, however the situation tempted us to launch it sooner than anticipated. Gyapu Marketplace was launched three days into the lockdown.

When it comes to ecommerce, whatever the existing ones like Daraz, Sastodeal and the others are doing, we are also doing the same thing. Technology is not different. The only difference is 'what new' are we offering to the customers which the existing ones have failed to do. Operation and service wise, definitely we have taken a new and different approach.

Even if the ecommerce market is moving ahead creating disruption in the field of technology, vendors are not pleased with the ecommerce platforms. Vendors complain that even the biggest ecommerce platforms do not pay them even after 1-2 months. We have already started listing more than 100 vendors from Civil Mall. We are approaching other malls

as well. Malls have not been in operations but we are approaching the vendors with the deal that we will make their products sell.

We entered the market with a tactic and that was a promise to the vendors that we will pay them within a period of 3-5 days. We don't want to earn money by holding the vendors' money. We need to do our own business.

Secondly, the ecommerce platforms have suffocated the vendors. I have come to know that ecommerce platforms get upto 40% commission which in a way is also a trend everywhere. The new approach we have adapted is for the next 12 months we are not charging any commission, zero percent commission from the vendors. Now how do we profit? For the next 12 months, we will only invest. We need to pay only for the staff and operations and marketing cost. To capture the market, we have introduced this new strategy.

Thirdly, the trend is that customers need to pay delivery charge. For the first 12 months we are not charging delivery fee either. We will deliver your products at your given address for free. Besides, during lockdown almost all ecommerce platforms and delivery companies delivered the product within 2-4 days. Three days after the lockdown we launched our ecommerce site, but we delivered within 24 hours of the order placement. We got hold of vendors like Vishal Group and other business houses overnight which ensured a good inventory of products. Another issue was that of vehicles for swift delivery. I asked around, got my friends cars, my wife's car, my own driver had to do double shift. That is how we collected seven vehicles and delivered products within the valley. All we were concerned was to establish the concept in people's mind that Gyapu delivers products on time. Now we are scratching our heads to come up with ways to make

“
Instead of imposing ban on digital currencies, if the government could have regulated its usage, billions of dollars in the form of foreign investment could be brought into Nepal.



the products available to the customers within six hours of the order.

Currently, we have 3500 plus products listed on our website. In the initial phase of the lockdown we did not have many products but over time we have accumulated enough vendors. We have also partnered with Salesberry and FabIndia. Daily we have 200-300 products listed.

You have been hailed as a game-changer for blockchain startups in the Silicon Valley and worldwide. What made you bet on the blockchain technology? What is its future in Nepal?

I was operating a garment factory in Thailand where we manufactured baby mattress called BabyTemp. The inventor of Tempura brand, a Swedish brand, after he sold the company to an American company, I got hold of him and worked with him to conceive the idea for BabyTemp. There have been cases of infant mortality worldwide when babies turn on their tummies in sleep. To solve that problem, we created a product called BabyTemp which consisted of four products: baby positioner, a mattress, a pillow and a quilt. The package was very costly and we sold at 250 euro and we sold in Sweden only. These were made in Thailand. That business, plus I had three hotels in Bangkok. During the same time, energy drink products were trending. In 2013, one of my American friends was about to manufacture an energy drink called Oregan Bang. I was requested to invest in that company and therefore I became the Chief Investor. I invested a total amount of 1.4 million dollars in his company in multiple installments. To my great dismay, without informing me, he sold the company to a buyer. I had taken a risk without paper work, trusting a friend and had invested such a huge amount in his company. I then headed to the US to sue him. While in the US, I was introduced to the world

of blockchain. I was offered to invest in Bitcoin. I started investing in blockchain with an initial amount of \$300,000. I then moved back to Thailand because that is where my business was.

When Bitcoin started doing well and Ethereum was introduced and the blockchain technology was hailed from all corners, I started travelling to the US often. Then in 2014, when I entered the Silicon Valley, a great atmosphere had already been created of blockchain technology. Within a week, I invested \$60,000 in 2-3 companies.

Instead of working in the hotel business for more than a decade in ROI, I thought why not I sell everything and start investing in this since I saw tremendous potential and future in it. In 2014, after selling everything there, I moved to the US. I started a venture capital firm and that is when I started funding startups in California. The companies I started investing in were all tech-based: AR, blockchain and some mobile apps. Currently, I have investment in more than 26 startups.

It is said that all your ventures are self-funded despite being from a humble background and being self made. How did this happen? And how do you decide which startup to invest in?

My father was a teacher and my mother a homemaker. I established everything myself. I am a selfmade man. The BabyTemp mattress that my company manufactured did extremely well in Sweden. The product had huge margin. It did not even cost me 40-50 euro. All the three hotels in Bangkok were my own but I did not own the land. I also invested in the stock market. I have been a trader since the beginning of my career.

But the main breakthrough happened after 2013. I invested cheaply in bitcoin. Moreover, the tech companies and startups that I had invested in experienced 5000 to 10,000

times profit. There was this Canadian company where I had invested \$66,000 in 2016, and I received 20% stake. But I sold it for \$3.2 million. That company raised 20 million. I got lucky. That is just a solitary case.

Largely because of my investments in blockchain and bitcoin, I could fund other companies and startups. Also I was an early adaptor for Ethereum and Litecoin. There were companies from China and South Korea entering the Silicon Valley offering one share for 10 cents. And when I invested \$10,000 in those companies my return was multifold. The valuation in equity kept on increasing.

I started my own company in 2016. I have not taken any money from anyone. But from 2021, my aim is to get funding for XcelTrip Global.

From the 26 companies, my time for exit from 5-6 companies is this month. I will get money from them. There is no such profit like investing in startups. I invest in startups but I pay them for example \$20,000 or \$40,000 in a period of two years. These startups are based in the US, Mexico, Brazil, Canada, Switzerland and Israel as well. The startups are into Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, Virtual Reality, Imagine TV in Canada, Artificial Reality.

Your views on Nepal Government's take on digital currency.

When I heard the news, it must be about three years back, that the Nepal Government has banned Bitcoin and Blockchain Technology, I was in the US and I took it as a great mistake on the part of the Nepal Government. Instead of imposing ban on digital currencies, if the government could have regulated its usage, billions of dollars in the form of foreign investment could be brought into Nepal. For bitcoin mining, electricity is required and Nepal has the capacity to produce 85,000 MW of electricity. The hydropower projects lack funding and the

internal investment is not ample. And if bitcoin miners or mining companies are sent the message across that Nepal is open for mining, they would certainly come to Nepal. Individuals and companies have spent billions of dollars to have their mining companies in Vietnam, Thailand and America. I also have friends who have opened Bitcoin companies.

When I was in the US, I had sent a group comprising of a Chinese billionaire's son; Iceland has one of the biggest mining companies in the world run by Americans, I had them in the group too and two other friends. I had them meet Sushil Pokhrel who is into the hydropower business, who would further introduce them to the ministers. But after sometime of the meeting, there was news that cryptocurrency in Nepal has been banned.

Still if Nepal is to regulate bitcoin mining and blockchain technology, the country can still attract billions of dollars on the ground that wages is cheap, electricity is cheap, and there are people ready to invest in Nepal. My friend has established a bitcoin mining company in New York with \$250 million capital but he is always on the edge of his seat since he does not know when the Federal will trouble him.

Moreover, blockchain technology has a great role in digital transformation. Only by developing software for foreign companies by Nepali engineers, Nepal will not establish itself as a country with strength in technology. There should be tech related disruption evident for the world to witness.

There is a different investors' community in the blockchain technology, we could attract them. If Nepal is made a tax haven, if the country is made fit for investment, if for 10 years 'my second home' system is established in Nepal, if taxation system is made easy, foreign investment can be lured in. The country, instead of going

“

The good thing from the lockdown is that for the next one to one and a half years, we will be unchallenged in Nepal's domestic tourism market.



after the tax collection for those 5-10 years, if it establishes as a tax haven country, thousands of jobs can be created within. Such an environment can be created if only Nepal revisits and corrects its stand on blockchain technology.

Nepal is a small market for me in terms of blockchain technology. I don't have much interest and gain in selling and buying and trading in bitcoin. But if the technology is regulated in Nepal, the country can attract many investment opportunities.

You announced that you would support the startup movement in Nepal by offering \$20,000 to 25

startups. What was the reason, especially now?

I am guided by three principles:

1. I want to establish myself in Nepal. 2. I want to invest in companies other than XcelTrip and Gyapu and 3. I need to have my startup profiling.

My main identity is not the CEO of XcelTrip and Gyapu Marketplace. I am a venture capitalist. I saw the lack of investors in the startup landscape of Nepal. Traditional investors are there but in tech startups you need to invest in concept, which they fail to comprehend. Moreover, the investors want the returns within a year.

I have been tempted to invest in Nepali startups for a year now. Investors are few and startups are increasing. I can invest less but can get great equity. If in the pre-pandemic time or post-pandemic time, I had invested 1 crore, maybe I could not even have received 10% equity but today in the pandemic, companies might offer me 40% equity with the same amount of investment. I am a businessman and I am guided by the same mindset. My investment might be a humongous support to the startups, but this is an opportunity for me. Venture capitalism is a fresh space in Nepal.

Moreover, we have to encourage the startups. I want to get myself in the startup market. Therefore, I made the offer. Besides, the exposure of XcelTrip and Gyapu will be there among tech-startups. It is more advantageous for me to fund an existing company than establish my own third company.

But those 25 startups are all tech-startups. So far, we have selected four tech startups. When I invest in a company, I see the person behind the concept. I don't care if the person is a 17 year old lad or 70 year old man. If the person is a powerhouse of energy and exhibits aggressiveness to succeed I will invest in his/her company. A tech-founder should be ready to dedicate 18 hours of the day for the company. I myself work 16-17 hours a day because you as the founder need to walk that extra mile. XcelTrip and Gyapu consume my energy and time. During the lockdown, I brought 12 Gyapu staff members and created rooms for them at the office and also housed them at the nearby hotel.

Additionally, the problem that the tech-founder is wishing to solve is important for me to understand. I don't invest in ideas that are a mere duplication of existing ones. The problem-solving concept of the founder is what I look for.

For a company to be strong, it is not just the marketing department that has to prove its worth and not just the founder, the concept has to be genuine, innovative, and the most important aspect is if the product is scalable.

And lastly, the startup that I want to invest in, I assess how will that help me expand my two companies.

How do you read the business ecosystem in Nepal?

The business mindset of Nepalis is limited. The problem I see is not with the business people in Nepal but with the country's regulation. Neither could Nepali policy allow Nepalis to comfortably expand their business outside the country nor have they received any major incentives from the government's side. Also, Nepalis have not till date invited foreign investor or investment openly.

No matter how educated and technologically informed the millennial generation is, the investor is the father or the grandfather with traditional investment mindset and therefore, except for 3-4 business families in the country I have not witnessed many showing any predilection towards technology related businesses. In the next 1-2 decades, you will see today's startups reign the business market in Nepal. They will secure the top position in the profit-making list and today's business families will be left far behind. Change is inevitable and today's startups are the harbinger of that change in the entrepreneurial landscape in Nepal. That is the global trend. Take facebook, tiktok or Zoom for example.

Nepali entrepreneurs are smart and innovative, all they lack is proper environment from the government and from investors.

I am working with the idea to expand XcelTrip and Gyapu in other parts of South East Asia in 2021. I am eyeing Vietnam. Till date, no startup

has crossed the border but Pathao has entered Nepal's border from Bangladesh and Daraz from Pakistan and Paytm might enter the country from India and might devour e-Sewa's market share because they have the money. Except for Wai Wai, no other company has expanded outside the country.

If given an opportunity, I would love to invest in Tootle. I have always shown interest to invest in it. It is a great concept. It is a workable concept. But I suppose, it requires an impetus to catapult from point A to the next level. Besides that, I am eyeing food delivery services like Foodmandu and FoodMario. I am also in talks with them. I am interested in 14-15 companies in Nepal. I am in constant talks with them.

What will traveling be like post COVID 19?

If the COVID 19 curve is flattened, domestic travel should begin from July. If people get to know that the lockdown is eased, they will come to the street in numbers. Further, people are bored stuck at home for almost three months. Those who have the spending capacity, those who know the value of travelling, those who want to travel will travel even that be for two days.

Even if a mere 5% of Kathmandu residents decide to travel within the country, they will populate the hotels in Nepal. Domestic tourism should have been promoted in Nepal earlier. But hopefully because of this pandemic, the perspective of tourism ministry, tourism entrepreneurs and citizens will concentrate on domestic tourism. Let's take the example of China and India, outbound tourism is nothing compared to inbound tourism. Domestic tourism is crucial for the reinvigoration of tourism sector and economy in the country. XcelTrip Nepal is putting its efforts together to market internal tourism. But the hotels are not ready to open before Dashain. But we are making every endeavor to persuade hotels to open up.



Every year four billion dollars is lost in the labyrinth created by the travel network and no one knows where that large sum goes. We are actually trying to solve that problem with XcelTrip Global.

But HAN has stated that it will be difficult for hotels to come into operations before six months or more?

Given that everything gets better, we can open up restaurant and hotel business from July. HAN will not pay the hotelier's loan; the state will not pay their loan either. Almost all the hotels have their share of bank loans to pay. Also for the VNY 2020, most have increased the number of rooms adding

to the amounting loan. The burden of the restaurateurs and hoteliers will not be shared by anyone. The loss that XcelTrip Nepal will suffer has to be faced by me alone.

The day the situation starts getting better, one by one the restaurants and hotels will open up. And Nepalis too will leave home to travel within the country. My business is by making people travel, domestic tourism will prosper and hotels

will open business for guests. There is no other alternative or else they should close down forever. This is not a fallacy. Who had thought that there will be a great market for luxury cars after the WW II.

Entrepreneurs are demotivated and distraught. Before there is "business as usual" what should they be doing?

It is the right time for business people to internalise, ask themselves about the nature of their business and to identify the identity of the business. Post-pandemic for the next 12-18 months, the impact of it in their business needs to be evaluated. Keeping the nature of the business in perspective, if an entrepreneur or a business person thinks that the business won't sustain in the next 12-24 months, s/he should close shop. If the business person himself is bankrupt and cannot even pay the rent or the staff, then keeping the business open just for the sake of keeping the business open will make no sense.

You should also be able to find opportunity in distressing situations. In my case, I launched Gyapu after three days of the lockdown. Also, I realised that during lockdown, startups will start to experience financial crisis. I saw opportunity in that to invest in them. These sorts of opportunities, business people should be able to read. I doubt there will be any sort of relief package from the government or the banks for businesses.

You have to be able to assess the situation and know how deep your pocket is and if you shall be able to continue shouldering the financial burden. Cash flow is important in business; you need to evaluate the situation of cash flow. The buying and selling of land will be in jeopardy, banks won't give loan, could be that you cannot withdraw all the money in your bank account. I am not trying to paint a grim picture, but you should be able to face the worst situation. **B**

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HIGH EXPENSES WEAK RESPONSE

Text: Pushpa Raj Acharya

Controversies over procurement of medical equipment to fight against the coronavirus pandemic has led the public to question the government's intent. Additionally, access to testing, management of quarantines, multiple levels of relief measures are all highly inadequate and inefficient thereby failing to justify the expenditure stated by the authorities.

In the second week of June, the government has disclosed that Rs 9.87 billion has been spent so far on COVID-19 response. Immediately after the government's disclosure of expenses, mass of youth dissatisfied from the weak response from the government staged protest in front of the Prime Minister's residence in Baluwatar. The protest began with the hashtag Enough is Enough (#EnoughisEnough) which immediately resonated with the public and has gained mass popularity with protests now being staged across the country demanding that the government increase PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests, effective contact tracing, test and isolation of infected, improve quarantine facility ensuring

safety in line with WHO standards, and expand medical facilities as early as possible. More ventilators and hospital beds are required, and personal protective suit must be ensured to all those providing frontline services during the pandemic. Protestors have been urging the government to provide relief to the most vulnerable and daily wage earners who do not have access to basic sanitation and hygiene to protect them from the deadly virus.

From the parliament to the streets, the government

is being criticised heavily for its high expenses and weak and ineffective response. "The government's weak response poses risk of community transmission and people could lose more lives in these concentration camp-like-quarantines where people die due to unavailability of ambulance and medicines," said former health minister Gagan Thapa adding, "Lack of preparedness from the government despite availability of enough time for preparation has caused this pathetic situation."

Protests are further triggered as another controversial figure, a former minister of the Oli cabinet, who was sacked after the bribe deal in purchase of security printing, Gokul Prasad Baskota came to defend the government. Baskota, a figure mired in controversy, has asked those seeking detailed expenditure of the pandemic response to track the expenses of sub-national governments, provinces and palikas.

Following these developments, the government unveiled expenses worth Rs 8.39 billion for COVID-19. A large chunk of the funds at Rs 3.91 billion was spent on medicine and medical equipment procurement. The government has presented the expenses as follows:

Expenses title	Amount
Drugs and medical equipment purchase	Rs 3,908.8 million
Healthcare infrastructures	Rs 1,125 million
Human resource mobilization	Rs 58.3 million
Quarantine	Rs 135.5 million
Others	Rs 401.5 million

Apart from this, the government has disclosed the

expenses from the sub-national government. Reportedly, palikas (local government) have spent a total of Rs 2,985.1 million and provinces have spent Rs 1300 million on COVID19 response. Province-wise expenses are as follows:

Province	Expenses
Province 1	Rs 193.5 million
Province 2	Rs 133.9 million
Bagmati	Rs 136.7 million
Gandaki	Rs 154.2 million
Province 5	Rs 77.9 million
Karnali	Rs 239.2 million
Sudurpaschim	Rs 364.8 million

(Source: Fund Operation Committee led by Vice-Chairperson of the National Planning Commission)

The government has claimed that the aforementioned amounts have been spent on pandemic response to include relief for the poor, tests, quarantine management, health care facility and food distributed to the people staying at the quarantine and isolation facilities and those being treated in the hospitals. "The entire response from the top to end was managed within a very short period of time while abiding with all the legal and administrative procedures," said Minister for Health and Population Bhanu Bhakta Dhakal, "The expenses of all three-tier governments will be audited by the supreme audit institution. If anyone is found allegedly involved in corruption, there will be proper investigation from concerned authorities."

Battling with COVID-19 on fragile ground

The government has been battling with the COVID19 on a very fragile ground which could cause huge loss of lives and the economy. The government has enforced nationwide lockdown for 80 days, however completely failed to utilise the lockdown period for preparation to expand the capacity of hospitals, quarantines, isolation wards as well as re-opening the economy. Most importantly, the government could not provide relief (cash or kind) to daily

labourers, poor and vulnerable communities. It is suspected that there is embezzlement of public funds which the government claims was spent for the COVID-19 response in two and a half months of the current crisis.

"Government could have taken help from experts and professionals to cope with the pandemic which is a gigantic task but the authorities have taken it so lightly," said former minister Thapa, adding "We have started our journey to fight against coronavirus without PPE which was the basic minimum."

Thapa is the parliamentarian who has tabled the 'proposal of public importance' in the parliament to draw attention to needful instructions to the government for preparedness to cope with the deadly virus when Nepal saw its first case in February 2020. "The government has turned a deaf ear when there was enough time to be prepared," said Thapa, "We were aware that migrant workers from India and other countries will return losing jobs due to stringent measures taken by the various governments to stem the spread of virus."

The government has continued with RDT (Rapid Diagnostic Test) kits despite WHO warnings at the inefficacy of the kits. There have been several reports of migrant workers who were allowed to go home after they tested negative on RDT and were later found infected by the virus. The lack of PCR testing capacity has created immense dilemma and vulnerability for the health system itself. Very recently, the government has expanded testing capacity to 7,000 each day. According to minister Dhakal, the government will expand the PCR testing capacity to 10,000. The government has also withdrawn its decision to allow asymptomatic individuals to go home without test after completing 14-day long quarantine period after the government faced mounting criticism from the public.

Controversies in procurement

Essential medical equipment procurement of the government landed into a series of controversy as the government selected a firm named Omni Business Corporate International. The government had handed over the contract of procuring medical equipment worth Rs 1.25 billion to Omni immediately after the enforcement of nationwide lockdown. The firm had no prior experience of supplying medical equipment and was reportedly handpicked by the High Level Covid19 Prevention, Diagnose and Treatment Committee led by the Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Ishwar Pokharel. The first consignment of the medical equipment brought from China through chartered flight arrived in Kathmandu on March 29. The equipment was sent to the provinces immediately, however it was found to be substandard and incomplete. The price of the products was high when compared to the market rate. Following a public outrage, the government scrapped the contract with Omni on April 7 which has reportedly supplied equipment worth Rs 280 million in the first consignment, according to the Department of Health Services. After cancellation of the deal with Omni, the government awarded the contract to purchase specified medical equipment worth Rs 2.25 billion to the Nepal Army. Subsequently, the Department of Health Services has issued a bid notice for other interested suppliers worth Rs 402 million.

Recently, another consignment of medical equipment brought by the Nepal Army arrived into the country, however, it is reported that the cost of equipment is even more expensive than what was supplied by Omni. The government has been able to collect Rs 4.83 billion from voluntary contributions of institutions and individuals, however its failure to properly manage the funds is causing great dissatisfaction among people.

Price comparison of medical equipment:

Equipment	Purchased by Omni	Purchased by Nepal Army	Purchased by Dept. of Health Services
Surgical Mask	\$0.32	\$ 0.43	\$0.12
N-95 mask	\$7	\$2.95	\$2
Protective shoes cover	\$2	\$2.44	\$0.34
Protective goggles	\$18	\$2.40	\$5.22
Face shield	\$2.50	\$1.50	\$3.61
Examination gloves	\$0.20	\$0.16	\$01.12
Gaun	\$16	\$19.80	\$16.48

(Source: Price sheet released by the concerned suppliers)

Today every tax payer of the country and every youth is demanding answers and solutions from a government that is mired in controversy and corruption charges and repeatedly fails to deliver on its citizens' needs. Crisis leadership in any country in the world must go beyond self and party interest. Today young protestors have taken to Satyagraha fasting without food and water in an attempt to bring the government to create a transparent and accountable system to fight COVID 19, a system that will ensure that every Nepali – irrespective of their social status or background – has a fighting chance against the virus. Is that too much to ask? #EnoughIsEnough **B**

MUSEUM OF NEPALI ARTS

A Canvas for Traditional & Contemporary Masterpieces

Text: Avant Shrestha



L to R: Samundra Man Singh Shrestha, Rajan Sakya, Raj Prakash Man Tuladhar, Ritesh Shahi

In the imposing scale of the current events, art may seem unimportant but it has the ability to heal and give hope. Museum of Nepali Arts (MONA) was originally set to launch on February 2 on the premises of Kathmandu Guest House in Thamel. According to the description

on the museum's webpage, it aims to revive traditional art, give freedom to neo-traditional art and explore inventiveness in contemporary art though realisation. But in the time of the pandemic an uncertain future lies ahead for the local art scene that might take months or years to come back

to normality. However with the core aim to expand knowledge, interest and awareness around this discipline, MONA aims to showcase the traditional and contemporary works of the past and present master artists and have turned to virtual platforms to engage audiences at this time.

Inspiration

Rajan Sakya, CEO of KGH Group of Hotels, Resorts & Travel and the Director of MONA, believes that Nepali art can be dated back to 1500 to 2000 years. "I believe before any of the modern civilisations were born, we started working on the most complicated art,"

he states. However, Nepali art, which has such rich history, is in danger of fading away in an increasingly fast changing world. Most of the great works of Nepali art have been denied a wider audience, and MONA aims to break this restrictive barrier.

According to Sakya, “MONA was conceived about two years ago. It was essential to take the initiative and dedicate a small museum to Nepali arts. Art is important because it is our identity. If you look at what differentiates us Nepali from other people in the world is our culture and our heritage. We are Nepali because we follow a certain tradition, we follow a certain religion, and our way of life makes us different from any other people in the world. But it is equally important to understand that the seed of our culture and heritage is actually art.”

The Need to Promote and Preserve Nepali Art

The tourism sector mainly focuses on promoting mountains and countless religious sites and temples. Art, on the other hand, remains untouched. This trend, according to Sakya, attributes to the lack of promotion about the local arts and the artists. As a result there are not enough platforms dedicated to showcase or to promote Nepali arts.

One of MONA's ambitions is to become a platform where people from different generations can come together to appreciate the Nepali arts. Plus, the underlining vision is to become one of the places a tourist must visit when they come to Nepal. With their collections of masterpieces, it is clear that they are moving in the right direction. Sakya explains, “Nepal is home to artists whose works are in demand in art museums and galleries around the world; however we rarely know about these bodies of work let alone be able to see and appreciate these arts. In order to increase that appreciation, among the newer and young generations,



“According to Sakya as much as 99% of art buyers are foreigners. Needless to say, one of the best ways that local art can gain momentum and raise the art economy is by Nepali people investing in art.”

and to increase their pride we created this platform. So this museum is to encourage, motivate and to make every Nepali proud of our culture, heritage and identity. This was the main reason that we established the museum.”

Preservation of the arts is a massive undertaking for a country which is as culturally unique as Nepal, MONA is a step in that direction. Intricately detailed Nepali arts have not

gained the same reputation as for example Barnett Newman solitary blue-lined art piece that fetches millions in the international scene, but Sakya believes that Nepali art can have the same reputation. He says, “Art is something that can be collected. We talk about all the arts in the international stage that are being sold and traded for millions. Similarly, we have to raise the economic value of Nepali art.”

Majority of the local paintings are bought by foreigners, both tourists and collectors. According to Sakya, as much as 99% of art buyers are foreigners. Needless to say, one of the best ways that local art can gain momentum and raise the art economy is by Nepali people investing in art.

Challenges

On being asked about the challenges in establishing the museum, Sakya responds, “I was so passionate about this project, I made it central to my existence, and perhaps that is why I never felt that any of the obstacles were challenges.” He continues, “Of course, all of the art here is owned by MONA, we didn't borrow and put them on display, it is the property of MONA. Some of the masterpieces are really not something we can go out and buy. You have to wait for it to be complete. Some of these paintings have taken two years to complete and there are other paintings that we will add in the museum which have been in the making for the last 15 years.” Artists dedicate their lives to their craft, and thus Sakya says he paid the sum demanded by the artists and did not negotiate.

360 Degree Virtual Exhibition

During the lockdown, Museum of Nepali Arts conducted a 360 degree Virtual Exhibition titled ‘Tangential Stress 2020’ and ‘Inception - A collection of Nepali Masterpieces’ which went live on May 14 and June 5 respectively. Sakya says, “If there was no lockdown, I would most probably have not done

it. In fact, I would have done it but at a later stage. It was a very depressing time and these exhibitions were a way of giving some hope to the artists and the people, plus we can evidently claim that during such a bleak time, Nepal's creativity hasn't died.”

The 360 degree Virtual Exhibition was the first of its kind in the country and probably the first virtual exhibition conducted in South Asia. “The entire exhibition would occupy at least 30 minutes of the viewers' time”, Sakya shares. He elaborates, “We made the premise of KGH's garden into our platform and dedicated specific areas, and when people moved into that virtual exhibition, they got to see a little bit of the hotel and the art as well. This museum is inside the hotel and it is very important that I showcase this museum to people abroad. By establishing this museum, I focused mainly on Nepali people, so that the Nepali people are really proud of who we are and what we have.”

The exhibition includes 35 to 40 masterpieces. The entire set for the exhibition took a total of three weeks to complete. And unlike a physical exhibition, conducting an online exhibition is an opportunity to reach a wider market. Based on the success, there does seem to be future for such exhibitions in Nepal. Sakya stresses, “When you look at the inflow of tourists we have in Nepal which accounts to about one million visitors as opposed to a virtual exhibition where millions can see our art, the market is huge, it's the entire world.”

MONA's opening was supposed to be on February 2, which is actually, 02.02.2020, an auspicious date; but due to the pandemic, the museum will launch with a soft opening on July 9 where they will be exhibiting 35 of the masterpieces. Sakya aims to host a grand opening after 5-6 months depending on the global pandemic situation. **B**



Covid Exposes Leadership Chinks

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT NOT IMMUNE TO SAME MALAISE



Basant Chaudhary is a Poet, Writer, The Chairman of BLC and Basant Chaudhary Foundation. (feedback@basantchaudhary.com)

Calamities can bring out both the best and the worst in leaders. The real test of leaders takes place when things turn tough. Those with real mettle do themselves and their people proud. They save nations.

The impact of Covid-19 on humankind has been unprecedented in intensity and magnitude. In its hitherto unending sweep, the virus pandemic is devouring lives, economies and businesses around the planet, cutting across communities, faiths, castes and creeds without discrimination.

Covid has been a great equaliser in that sense, killing rich and poor alike. The mightiest and richest of nations have been humbled by a microbe whose true nature and structure has defied the

best scientific minds. The anti-Covid vaccine as yet remains a creature of human hope. The reality resides somewhere on the distant horizon. Howsoever scary and sordid the scenario may be, it has done well to shake off some of man's arrogance. Also, Covid has put man in his place by reminding that it is man's own making. So the suffering too will be borne by mankind. For too long have we been playing with nature. Retribution direct and real has taken its toll so ruthlessly first time in living memory.

Let's move to the more practical and pragmatic facet of the issue at hand. The idea is to analyse how political leadership can wreak havoc on all sections of its country or society because of its ideological predilections or sheer foolhardiness of a self-proclaimed charismatic leader.

Let's move to scenic Italy where most unseemly developments crushed the country's medical infrastructure and people's spirit. It needs to be noted that Italy is among the well endowed countries of Western Europe. So far, its population of just over six crore people was ably serviced by one of the best healthcare systems in the region.

Covid infection is petering out in Italy in the first week of July with 34,854 scalps under its belt. Total cases stood at 241,419. Of the currently infected 14,500 persons, 71% are in critical stage. Indeed, disheartening numbers for a developed country!

To understand the Italian enigma, please incorporate another figure in the analysis. The number of Chinese living in Italy is 3,10,000. The high number is explained by the recent spurt of Chinese investment in Italy: 29 deals worth \$ 2.8 billion. Italy was lagging behind other European Union countries vis a vis Chinese investment. Italian trade zones and ports were soon open for China.

Gratified by Beijing's largesse Italy chose to be, in March 2019, EU's only country to join China's much tom-tommed Belt and Road Initiative. Chinese tourists flocked to Italy. Following Covid's outbreak in China's Wuhan city, Italy suspended flights to China on January 1. But when China frowned upon the move, the Italian President Sergio Mattarella whimpered on February 2 that his country stood by China. Florence's Mayor Dario Nardella went to ridiculous lengths by urging his citizens to hug Chinese

tourists and visitors in a show of solidarity. They did and Covid caught Italy by the neck. Economic indebtedness to China cost Italy thousands of lives and its reputation too.

COVID crisis was not well managed in Brazil. Stats first. Population: just over 21 crore. Deaths: 64,365. Cases: 1578376. Currently infected: 5,35,396 of which 2% are in critical condition. Horrifying figures!

A far-right fan of US Prez Donald Trump, Bolsonaro loved to describe Covid as 'a little cold'. Voluntary quarantine seemed good enough to him. He blabbered about miracle drugs even as thousands of his countrymen perished, medical infrastructure broke down, businesses fell apart and protesters rioted in the streets.

Similar erratic and arrogant behaviour has been often displayed by captains of industry. We have witnessed business behemoths simply vanishing from the world of commerce. The scope for destruction is enormous. Like the civil society, young managers too have the responsibility to abide by ethics to contain unbridled autocracy within their corporations. Nobody is beyond the rule of law and corporate governance.**B**



COVID 19 HITS AVIATION INDUSTRY

The COVID 19 virus has impacted and devastated the economy creating immense financial losses and significant uncertainties. Governments of most countries around the globe are still enforcing migration controls, closing of borders, and also imposing people lockdown and home-quarantine measures so that the health care system can be toughened up to contain the pandemic.

The aviation industry is among one

of the most severely affected. As per International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), in four months i.e. from February to May, a loss of \$118 billion has been borne by air carriers, \$36 billion dollars by the regions of airports (domestic and international) and \$4 billion by air navigation service providers globally.

Airline companies started suspending flights to China from February in the wake of coronavirus outbreak and Nepal took the decision to suspend all flights from March

22. Initially the suspension was till March 31 but has since been extended. During this time, only repatriation and cargo flights - domestic and international - have been conducted.

B360 spoke to some of the country's leading aviation professionals – both domestic and international - to understand the impact of COVID 19 on their operations and Nepal's preparedness to resume flights in the new normal.

ABDULLAH TUNCER KECECI

General Manager Nepal, Turkish Airlines



How has the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown situation affected your airline?

Covid 19 pandemic affected the airline industry very deeply. Of course it affected our operations. In pandemic conditions, you cannot just think about your operation, you have to think about the health condition of passengers and employees more than anything. We are working with the Health Ministry of Turkey very closely. We stopped our operations from March 26 to June 1 all around the world. On June 1, we started operating domestic flights and after June 10 we started our international operation as per the compliances of the countries bilaterally.

Is Turkish Airlines prepared to resume flights taking all precautionary measures and necessary social distancing guidelines or should the travel ban

still be imposed since the number of Covid 19 affected are increasing in Nepal?

We have to learn to live with existing conditions. Of course, all details have to be discussed since human health is our first priority. We don't look for short term operation. We are working for a continuous operation with precautions. All the risks have to be minimised. All the needful measures have to be taken and at the same time we need to continue our lives.

What are your views on the social distancing SOP issued by CCMC, CAAN and TIA? Would Turkish Airlines want to take additional safety measures?

I can see there are works being done in Nepal by associated officials. Officially the standards of the airport and authority in Nepal and our company standards have to be considered together to make safe operations. We are sharing our standards both ways

and trying to reach a better standard altogether. There is close contact between the authorities and airlines for that.

Is being allowed to carry just 40-50% passengers of total capacity a possible solution?

There is already international standards advised by IATA and concerned authorities for international flights. Half passengers on a flight does not look like a solution and a feasible method for anyone. Precautions for normalised operation seem more adoptable. Both commercial side of operations and health measurements have to be considered together.

What are the financial implications on your airline?

Turkish Airlines is the flag carrier of Turkish Republic. We are a strong airline. We have the largest network in the world flown by our airlines.

It's true that every airline is facing financial difficulty but at the same time they are all trying to manage the situation. They are taking some financial precautions accordingly and we are also doing the same. We are making all plans to resume flights as soon as possible in all our destinations. Air travel is a need for people and we already started continuing our services with many destinations with health and safety measurements. Everybody has to learn how to live with the existing conditions so let's talk about a better future.

Are there any relief packages being offered by governments to airline companies?

There are many relief packages in many countries. Airlines flying from one destination to another are giving the opportunity to country to be in close contact with the rest of the world for business, leisure, visits and many other reasons to travel. We appreciate the support in these times. Countries have announced airport costs, fuel, handling costs, etc. being reduced till the end of year to encourage airlines to start flying to their destinations. They have also announced some relief packages for the employees of airlines. They announced some tax exemptions for some period. This is a difficult period and everybody in the industry must support each other to come back strongly soon. Tourism industry has to be kept strong. Tourism is a must for Nepal. I believe there is a huge potential in Nepal. Our plans have to be ready for the future and for that we need to support each other. If any hotelier, restaurant owner, guide, handicraft worker has to close their business or aren't able to sell their products because of the current situation, I and everyone should feel the pain. Then the industry together will be strong. We can increase the examples. We must motivate ourselves for better future together by supporting and understanding each other more.

MANJANI D. SHRESTHA

Marketing Chief - Sales and Marketing
Summit Air



How has the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown situation affected your airline?

We all are aware how badly Covid 19 is affecting everyone globally. This deadly outbreak has affected all sectors of society. Manufacturing industries, agriculture, health, education but the most affected sector being tourism, Covid 19 impact on aviation sector is severely decimating. The tourism industry broadly includes travel, trekking, rafting, hotel, airlines but many more other informal sectors also support the value chain the industry has.

Is Summit Air prepared to resume flights taking all precautionary measures and necessary social distancing guidelines or should the travel ban still be imposed since the number of Covid 19 affected are increasing in Nepal?

We are ready to operate flights taking all necessary precautions imposed by the CAAN. Before opening the flights for commercial operation, we have been operating repatriation flights for three major sectors like Humla, Dolpo and Lukla where surface

transport is hard to get. These flights have been operating for those local peoples who were stranded in Kathmandu due to the lockdown since from March 23. While operating these flights, we have been already following the SOP imposed by CAAN.

What are your views on the social distancing SOP issued by CCMC, CAAN and TIA? Would Summit want to take additional safety measures?

Social distancing SOP issued by CAAN, TIA would be very effective and praise worthy if only we could actually implement that rule. We are afraid we can hardly stick to that rule after the flights are opened for general public and we will have the departure lounges and check-in counters filled with passengers. Implementing the system of filling the form of Passenger Locator Form is very difficult and time consuming for both airlines and passengers. Storing the filled form in long run will not be possible so the form should be developed in digital format. For safety measures, as imposed by CAAN we are also implementing the same

guidelines for passenger i.e. compulsory mask, hand sanitizer, no hand baggage, disinfection of the aircrafts and the ramp buses after every flights. We are taking care of our staff both in airport and office. Before joining duty everyone needs to go through temperature check and hand sanitizing. Wearing a mask is compulsory.

Is being allowed to carry just 40-50% passengers of total capacity a possible solution?

Requiring social distancing in the aviation sector is also a serious issue. Carrying just 40-50% will mean closing down. Most STOL operators have seat capacity of 16/17 persons only. Maintaining the occupancy of 40-50% on social distance guidelines is impossible to sustain. To solve this problem, all operators have forwarded the same SOP. For the STOL operators, 80% of revenue is generated from tourism, and because of Covid 19, the tourist arrival will be completely zero. The affect this will have on our business is unimaginable. To solve this problem, we will need to increase the fare or to get a

subsidy from the government.

There are mainly two tourist seasons; spring and autumn. At the beginning of spring season, because of the coronavirus pandemic, the whole tourism season was completely destroyed. Being an airlines professional from STOL operations, I must say, among the three aircraft operators, the helicopter companies have been impacted badly followed by the STOL operators and then the trunk operators. All operators are bound to reduce their operation because of the lack of business for fully fledged operations. Most of the operators are planning to operate only 50% of their operation approximately for six months once the lock down is removed. This will reduce flights, revenue, and definitely reduce jobs.

Are there any relief packages being offered by governments to airline companies?

Government has announced some relief packages in its recent budget announcements which includes providing loan at concessional interest rate of 5%. Similarly the Central Bank has issued a draft of refinance procedure targeting the corona affected sector. This will somehow provide relief but not enough for tourism to overcome this crisis. CAAN has given some waiver in landing and parking fees. Company is bearing big losses but there is no situation of bankruptcy at present. Company can sustain up to six months to a year by opting for a cost cut down method and if debtors' recovery can be done as planned.

We can assume that there is very less possibility of tourist arrival from Western countries for another one year. To revive in this crisis period, the government is promoting domestic tourism but domestic airlines won't be able to survive from domestic fare only. Therefore, government subsidy is essential for the promotion of domestic tourism as well.

RUPESH JOSHI

Director – Marketing, Sales and Ground Handling
Buddha Air



How has the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown situation affected your airline?

We have been conducting zero commercial flights from March 24 so there is zero revenue in the company although we have been conducting some international chartered flights. Buddha Air is bearing a loss of Rs 90 million per month which is why the staff is getting paid 50% of their normal salary. There have been talks to start normal flight operation from August 1 and we are hopeful that it will happen.

Is Buddha Air prepared to resume flights taking all precautionary measures and necessary social distancing guidelines or should the travel ban still be imposed since the number of Covid 19 affected are increasing in Nepal?

Yes, we are. Buddha Air conducted a trial on June 25 to operate domestic flights which was attended by pilots and officials of Buddha Air. In the

trail, we presented all preventive actions against Covid 19 such as measuring temperature of the passengers at the airport entrance, sanitising the passengers and the aircraft, maintaining physical distancing in vehicles used within the airport to reach the aircraft, etc. All the officials involved in the trial flight were made to wear masks and were prohibited to use the airport toilet along with keeping the safety of the pilot, crew members and airport officials in mind.

Regarding elongating the travel ban, I don't think it is a good idea. The concerned authorities should learn from other countries the measures they have taken to control the spread of the virus and also allowing travelling to continue simultaneously. There is always a way, we just need to discover, plan and imply.

What are your views on the social distancing SOP issued by CCMC, CAAN and TIA? Would Turkish

Airlines want to take additional safety measures?

The SOP issued by the CCMC, CAAN and TIA is based on World Health Organisation's and International Air Transport Association's SOP to provide necessary safety measures and precautions at the airports and aircrafts. We totally agree with the SOP and have adopted the same in our aircrafts. The SOP includes all the necessary safety measures and I don't think anything needs to be added though we are researching on what else could be added to our own SOP.

Is being allowed to carry just 40-50% passengers of total capacity a possible solution?

Operating flights at just 40-50% is impossible and such will not even cover our operating cost. If any incentives from the government like government paying for the empty seats, price cut in fuel charges, etc are done, then it might be possible to some extent.

What are the financial implications on your airline?

Since Buddha Air is a 22 year old company, we have been in profit for 20 years and we incurred loss only due to the pandemic. So financially Buddha Air is good and not on the verge of bankruptcy.

Are there any relief packages being offered by governments to airline companies?

The government has issued relief packages for the aviation industry which includes reduction of loan interest rates from the banks, free parking and so on. But the interest rate thing also depends upon the banks because the government has given freedom to the banks to charge or not charge the interest amount. There can be additional relief packages that the government can announce; for example: deduction in fuel charge.

BINOD SAPKOTA

CEO, IME Travels, GSA of SalamAir



How has the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown situation affected your airline?

Covid 19 pandemic is by far the most dreadful catastrophe in aviation world and the lockdown is creating ripple effects. Airlines have insurmountable monetary loss. Besides, thousands of employees have lost their jobs. The situation is very grave. But we are hoping that it will be recovering very soon and will be normalising because in this 21st century people can't stay in one place for long so it will definitely revive very soon.

Is SalamAir prepared to resume flights taking all precautionary measures and necessary social distancing guidelines or should the travel ban

still be imposed since the number of Covid 19 affected are increasing in Nepal?

Yes, SalamAir is ready to resume flights to Kathmandu once the travel ban is lifted in Nepal and other countries. SalamAir is capable of handling necessary measures as required by the respective country's law.

What are your views on the social distancing SOP issued by CCMC, CAAN and TIA? Would SalamAir want to take additional safety measures?

The SOP issued by the concerned authorities does include all the precautionary measures that need to be adopted during the current situation. But the SOP should

be created and revamped as per the requirement of situation.

Is being allowed to carry just 40-50% passengers of total capacity a possible solution?

Just carrying 40-50% passengers is not a good solution to sustain in business. If coronavirus is to spread, it can spread to entire passengers and it will reach their family too. Though there is a saying "something is better than nothing", I would like to recommend our government to open all airlines with maintaining the social distance followed by WHO and respective government rules.

What are the financial implications on your airline?

SalamAir is capable of handling this disaster. It is a moderate size budget airline funded by the Government of Oman so there is no sign of bankruptcy.

Are there any relief packages being offered by governments to airline companies?

Regarding relief package offered by the government, it is not clear yet. I think homework on this is going on. Our request with regulatory body is to reduce landing, parking and others charges of civil aviation, ground handling charge of NAC, fuel charge of NOC it gives some relief to airlines.



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ARCHANA KHADKA

Director - Corporate Department and
Spokesperson, Nepal Airlines Corporation



How has the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown situation affected your airline?

Covid 19 pandemic has hit the aviation sector hard round the globe and Nepal Airlines is no exception. However we have been continuously operating cargo charter, passenger charter and repatriation flights as and when needed.

Is NAC prepared to resume flights taking all precautionary measures and necessary social distancing guidelines or should the travel ban still be imposed since the number of Covid 19 affected are increasing in Nepal?

We are ready to operate flights taking all precautionary measures as suggested by the WHO. In my view, operations of flights with proper precaution should be allowed in order to stimulate the economy.

What are your views on the social distancing SOP issued by CCMC, CAAN and TIA? Would Summit want to take additional safety measures?

It's indeed good effort by CCMC, CAAN and TIA. Our organisation is working on its own Covid 19 SOP manual which is under process of authorisation.

Is being allowed to carry just 40-50% passengers of total capacity a possible solution?

Discussion around operating domestic operations with certain guidelines is going on. It will be finalised soon.

Are there any relief packages being offered by governments to airline companies?

Government has already brought some sort of package in terms of subsidy in parking charges. However we are hopeful of getting comprehensive relief package that can address the loss we had to bear because of non operation of schedule flights. **B**

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“TIA has been bearing a loss of Rs 750 million per month since the lockdown began even though we have been operating medical, cargo and rescue flights. Till date, we have sent more than 10,000 people to their respective countries and have even been operating domestic cargo and repatriation flights which are nominal sources for our income. Not just airline companies but airports are also facing a big loss due to the pandemic. We are trying to run the airport with whatever limited resources we have in the hope that when the pandemic ends, we will be back on full scale operations”.



Debendra KC
General Manager
Tribhuvan International Airport

General Manager of Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA), Debendra KC, has been in the aviation sector for more than 30 years. His journey in the aviation industry started while he was preparing for his first year post-graduate examination. “A friend told me about an advertisement for air traffic controller training. I applied, got selected and did a one-year training course,” recalls KC. After that, he was temporarily appointed at TIA and soon got his first posting to Jomsom where he served for about two years. After that he served in Darchula and then at Balewa Airport in Baglung for three and a half years. When Balewa Airport closed in 1992, KC was posted to Jumla for about six years. He then returned to his hometown, Pokhara where he served as an Active Controller, Rated Controller and Training Officer for six years before becoming the Pokhara Airport Manager. From there, he was transferred to Kathmandu. At TIA, he was appointed as Airport Security Chief for two years and Aviation Security and Airport Operation Director for three years. He was thereafter relocated to Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) as Airport Security Director for two years after which he was transferred to handle

the corporate sector as an Acting Deputy Director-General going on to become the Deputy DG. He then served as Academy Chief of the Civil Aviation Academy. "As the Academy Chief, I tried to organise maximum trainings so that we could produce two groups of air traffic controllers, two groups of rescue and fire-fighters. I ensured that a lot of trainings were based outside of Kathmandu in different areas of Nepal," he shares. He focused also on trainings for security police and customs. "One of the significant achievements was when we acquired certification from the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) for our Academy as a trainer and full member certificate. I am proud of that," he states. That meant that the Academy could organise trainings not only for Nepalis but also for foreign nationals.

After the Academy, he was transferred to CAAN Headquarter as the Deputy DG for Domestic Airports and then was reassigned to TIA as General Manager where has been serving for eight months.

In an interview with Dibesh Dangol from B360, Debendra KC talks about the current operations of TIA, relief measures for airline companies, plans and improvements at the airport, safety processes during the pandemic, Nijgadh International Airport and the EU ban. Excerpts:

Nepali flight carriers have been operating repatriation flights for now. Are regular flights on the pipeline anytime soon?

We have always wanted to extend the destinations of our national flight carriers. The cargo and repatriation flights that Nepali airlines have been operating are proof of our airlines and pilot capabilities to operate flights to those

countries. Currently, the issue is being looked after by CAAN, the Ministry and the Government. The repatriation and cargo flights are being operated with coordination between the aviation authorities and governments of the respective countries.

We are connected with ICAO, CAAN and the Ministry and have made a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on how to run the airport during this pandemic. We are working together with international airlines and domestic airlines but unfortunately, the condition is getting further challenging as the number of the affected people is increasing daily. Right now our concern is focused on the airport and handling the flights that bring rescued passengers.

IATA has projected airlines will post record net loss of \$84 billion this year and will remain in red in 2021. Are there any statistics collected by TIA or CAAN regarding the loss being borne by Nepali airlines companies due to the pandemic?

We are aware of this and have put forward this topic to CAAN as per enquires and suggestions of the airline companies, Airlines Operator's Committee Nepal (AOCN) and Airlines Operators Association of Nepal (AOAN). We don't have the exact numbers right now but have asked the airline companies to submit their data.

As for TIA, the airport has been bearing a loss of Rs 750 million per month since the lockdown began even though we have been operating medical, cargo and rescue flights. Till date, we have sent more than 10,000 people to their respective countries and have even been operating domestic cargo and repatriation flights which are nominal sources for our income. Not just airline companies but airports are also facing a big loss due to the pandemic. We are trying to run the airport with whatever limited resources we have in the hope that when the pandemic ends, we will be back on full scale operations.

We have already raised the concerns of airline companies and the organisations regarding IATA's projection to CAAN and they been coordinating with the Ministry and the Government. CAAN has already put forward concerns regarding relief measures from the government. We have to wait for the government's decision and the decisions issued by the government will then be coordinated with the airline companies.

Though TIA has fulfilled social distancing requirements at the airport, its efficiency has been questionable.

Questions have been raised due to our small terminal and the high numbers of aircrafts. For social distancing requirements, we are making maximum available arrangements at the airport. The Covid 19 Crisis Management Committee (CCMC) is coordinating with our embassies abroad and the government of those countries to bring back Nepalis from abroad. We are operating a maximum of 10 flights a day to ensure we do not have long queues which goes against the social distancing norms.

I think after the situation normalises and we are back to work on full scale, we may not have to be bound by the social distancing norms which isn't possible in any airport in the world.

Can you take us through the process every arriving and departing passengers will go through in both the domestic and international sections of the airport?

The SOP has been developed as per the special guidance from ICAO, International Air Transport Association (IATA) and CAAN.

The departure starts from ticketing. Before issuing tickets, we have told the airlines, GSAs and travel agencies to ask passengers for two types of documents: health certificate certifying that the person is Covid 19 free and a form

consisting of the passenger's personal information like name, address and contact numbers. The passenger will then come to the golden gate (main gate) of the airport. No visitors are allowed during this pandemic situation and the taxi or bus capacity should be half of the total capacity. Doctors and security personnel at the gate will check the passenger's documents and his/her temperature. If the passenger has medical issues and high temperature, s/he will be sent to the hospital or will be given medical assistance. If not, s/he can enter the airport terminal following the social distancing rules of the airport. The passenger will then go through the security check while entering the departure terminal. Inside the departure terminal, sanitizers have been placed at various points and wearing face mask has been made compulsory for all passengers and airport personnel. Then they will stand in a social distancing queue at the airline counter to check-in. We have placed barriers at the international and domestic airline counters so no direct contact is made between the airport staff and the passenger. After that, they will go to immigration following the social distancing queue and then will go to the sterile waiting hall which has been completed during the lockdown period. Alternate seating system has been exercised at the sterile hall for the current situation. The buses will then take the passengers to the aircraft and from there it is the responsibility of the aircraft authority.

The arrival of the passengers is also the same. They will need to have two sets of documents saying they are free from Covid-19 and their personal information document. 40 passengers will come from the aircraft at a time, will go through a health desk managed by the Teku Hospital where they must provide those documents and then will go to the immigration

process and custom area following the social distancing rules. At the immigration, the passengers will have to register the province they are from or want to go to. The busses waiting outside the arrival gate of the airport will take those passengers to the respective provincial quarantine zone established by CCMC.

Have other domestic airports also begun to implement social distancing requirements or is it just TIA that CAAN is concentrating on?

CAAN has already circulated the SOP to all the domestic airports as well depending upon the terminal and airport capacity. The main airports like Pokhara, Biratnagar and Bhairahawa have already started the social distancing requirements. The airlines have also issued their own SOPs to their customers. Both international and domestic airlines are very much aware of the social distancing and safety procedures they have to take and implement until this pandemic situation ends.

What's the reopening plans of TIA or CAAN going forward?

People were already wearing masks here in Kathmandu because of the pollution and now it has become more important. Wearing masks and following social distancing norms aren't bad, but we can't force it after things normalise. We can only advise passengers. I think the passengers themselves will realise the importance of wearing masks, using sanitizer and social distancing even after the pandemic ends and follow these procedures without our intervention or strict rules.

The resuming of the airport solely depends upon the spread of the virus at the national and international level. The number of infected people is increasing globally and we must be aware of both the domestic and international situations. It also depends upon the government and the steps they want to take to open domestic and international travel. We can just



send our suggestions to them, but the final decision regarding when and how to open the airports fully or phase wise depends upon them.

What's your view on the controversial construction of Nijgadh International Airport?

Being a biology student I know we must preserve nature, but as an aviation professional, Nijgadh International Airport is a very necessary project because Kathmandu Airport cannot be expanded anymore. We cannot have double and parallel runways here at TIA and whatever expansion work was possible has been done already. We recently completed the expansion of the runway by 300 metres, construction of two new parking bays to accommodate two wide-body aircrafts or three narrow-body aircrafts, and the construction of arrival walkway which directly connects the immigration to the taxi parking. Nijgadh International Airport

is important because it is a full-fledged airport project and the place was selected as per the feasibility studies conducted by experts. The airport must be built so that Nepal and Nepalis can benefit from aviation and travel industry. Also, CAAN has already pledged to plant 6 million trees as replacement of almost 2.4 million trees that are needed to be chopped down for the construction of the airport with the help of Ministry of Forests and Environment in Bara and its neighbouring districts.

I don't think any aviation stakeholders are against the construction of the Nijgadh International Airport. Questions will be raised when any sort of development work is being done and we must welcome them openly. It is the responsibility of the concerned authorities to listen to the questions and answer accordingly with facts. Nijgadh airport is not just a prime project for CAAN or

the Ministry. It's a national pride project because the tourism industry is one of the high potential industries that can contribute largely to the economy of Nepal. We are poor but are rich in heart and resources. We should use our resources to develop our country. An example can be taken of Kulman Ghising. Thanks to him we don't have the load-shedding problem anymore. If we can do the same thing in the aviation and tourism sector, it would be great for the economic development of Nepal.

What's the status of the EU ban?

EU ban is different. Nepal follows and is a member of ICAO, an organisation which has 193 member countries. We are following all those norms set by ICAO but are also continuously trying to improve on the suggestions from the EU. Nobody in this world is perfect. We are trying to have all safety and security measures in Nepali airlines and airports as suggested by ICAO and EU.

What new improvements have been made at the airport besides social distancing markings?

We were able to complete the runway extension by 300 metres and have already started the new sterile waiting hall. We are demolishing the old waiting hall because of the safety zone concern raised by EU and ICAO. We have added two more parking hangers to accommodate two wide-body aircrafts. Currently, we are in the process of marking in those hangers. The lighting at the airport's runway has also been improved. We are in the process of adding two more luggage belts to take the number of luggage belts to six.

Making improvements at the airport is a never-ending project. Running the airport and increasing the facilities simultaneously is not an easy job because it creates disturbances in operation. But, the demand is increasing and we have to increase the physical facilities accordingly. **B**

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IF NOT, WHAT ARE SOME
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
ENTREPRENEURS CAN
TAKE TO HELP THEIR
BUSINESS SURVIVE
AS WELL AS PROTECT
LIVELIHOODS?

RUPESH PANDEY

MD, RP Group Nepal



Would you layoff staff during the lockdown?

This is a question that I am being asked by people almost regularly these days. My answer to this is a resounding NO. For me, the business that I am doing is a people's business. My staff is not just employees but like my family and one does not leave his family in distress. Times like these make you think to the core, to your true values and I think it is with those values that one should take such decisions and not by numbers and thinking about money only. Money is here today but can be gone tomorrow. The people in my life are the ones with whose support businessmen like me grow. This is a team effort. I might be the captain of this team but in the end, it's the team that wins or loses. If I lay off my staff during these times, then as a captain, I might win, but that win will be

a very short one. Having said that, the reality on the other side is that such lockdowns make it extremely difficult to survive and businesses have to take some harsh decisions. If I am considering my people as my team, then if needed (god forbid) I might have to think of asking for their support in taking no bonus or lower pay for some time till the difficult time ends but I won't be laying them off unless until there are serious issues with their performance.

What are some possible solutions entrepreneurs can take to help their business survive as well as protect livelihoods?

This depends a lot on the nature of business but still a few things hold true for all. I think the first and foremost, businesses need to clearly understand their financials – where does the money come in and where does it

go. They need to find ways to continue to earn through other mediums during these difficult times and they need to curtail their expenses to any extent possible. A few of the expenses could possibly be deferred and many could be avoided. A bigger business should look at halting all their capex during these times. As it is said, necessity is the mother of all inventions, businesses need to sit and think of ways in which they can still serve their customers under lockdown conditions. I have heard a few businesses taking orders for their goods via apps. Ideas like these need to be explored. Going digital wherever possible will surely help business in these tough times as well as in longer duration. For many businesses a lot of funds are stuck in accounts receivables and they should do whatever is in their power to start getting these funds, even

if it needs to be discounted. Also sometimes, drastic times throw some smaller pockets of opportunity and one could focus on that even if for a short time to make ends meet. Like in the Corona times, I know a lot of smaller businesses shut their core business and started working on producing, supplying or trading in essential items like sanitisers, masks, PPE kits, safety gears, sanitisation etc.. Money from these small but surely needed ventures helps to tide over. One thing is clear these days– Businesses that are rigid and not willing to change with times and sometimes change very fast with times will not survive for very long.

AJIT BARAL

Co-founder, FinePrint



Would you layoff staff during the lockdown?

I would hate to lay off our staff during a financial crisis like the one we are witnessing now. Companies depend on the time, energy, creativity and hard work of its staff to grow and prosper. So it is morally wrong for any company to furlough or lay off its staff even at a time when the company is feeling the financial pinch. But if the financial strain is so severe that a company cannot remain afloat without sending some of its staff on unpaid leave or packing them off, then I think the company should be allowed to do so. That is, the company should only lay off its staff if not doing so would jeopardize its very existence. Once fired, a laid-off staff member can find another job sooner or later, but if a company goes bust, it can rarely rise up like the phoenix from the ashes.

What are some possible solutions entrepreneurs can take to help their business survive as well as protect livelihoods?

A company will be rewarded with greater loyalty from its employees if it came

to their rescue in difficult times. So it is in the long-term interest of companies to play the role of saviour. But this is easier said than done in times like the current Covid-19 pandemic and every company has to think of innovative ways to help its employees without putting its existence at risk. One way could be a cut in salary with the agreement to refund the cut later when the company gets back to sound financial health. Another option could be to cut down working days so that none of its staff is rendered income-less. Still another option could be to furlough staff on a voluntary or need basis until the business bounces back. If none of these things is possible, then the company should identify staff members most likely to be hit hardest by the loss of salary and provide them at least something to tide over the crisis.

Protecting the livelihoods of one's staff and one's future in the time of a crisis is a tricky business. Those who can balance the two will come out stronger from the economical disasters unleashed by the coronavirus pandemic.

ASHUTOSH TIWARI

Managing Director, SAFAL Partners



Would you layoff staff during the lockdown?

Running various businesses as the CEO or equivalent for the past 14 years has taught me that two things matter most for business success: (a) luck, and (b) a relentless execution of the business fundamentals. Given Nepal's unpredictability with regard to supply chains, cash collections, government policies, and general market volatilities, I have always advised businesses and our clients to create and keep a rainy-day fund. Such a fund helps them weather difficulties that can last anywhere from three to six months, if not more. I have practiced what I preached. As a result, for now, I do not see lay-offs at my firm. As it is, we try to keep a small but highly productive team.

What are some possible solutions entrepreneurs can take to help their business survive as well as protect livelihoods?

Looking ahead, structural unemployment or unemployment of skilled people for a long time kills confidence and morale. It

makes the overall economy unproductive, thereby making everyone poorer in the long run.

On lay-offs, I have advised other companies to negotiate mutually agreeable pay-cuts, furloughs and other means of keeping employment on without being cut off from the jobs altogether. Lay-offs can be efficient for the firms in the short run, but costly in the long run for both the firms and the society. The economy loses because skilled people are idle and unproductive. And the firm loses because once a trained employee leaves, all the organisational knowledge, know-how, networks and connections also leave with that person.

Contexts vary, and that means that not everybody finds this advice practical. This is understandable. This is where the government needs to look ahead for macroeconomic stability, and step in to help businesses with some payroll support so that long-term unemployment does not weaken the productive capacity of the economy.

SHAILENDRA RAJ GIRI

Managing Director, merojob.com



Would you layoff staff during the lockdown?

Laying-off may not be required in my company until all the staff cooperates and collaboratively works to bring back the company in an original or better shape. If things go worst beyond the capacity of the company, we will be left with no option than to lay off on a lot wise gradually.

What are some possible solutions entrepreneurs can take to help their business survive as well as protect livelihoods?

Leaders flourish in the time of crisis. This is also an opportunity for entrepreneurs to take a corrective action, re-align the business, innovate new product/services as per the possible new-normal, engage employees for learning and creativity, learn new essential skills and expand knowledge to get prepared for worst situation than this. Survive and revive should be the common goal of employers and employees to protect livelihoods of each other.

BASANT BAJRACHARYA

Managing Director, Basanta Adventure



Would you layoff staff during the lockdown?

We are not laying off any staff but trying to pay them at least half of their salary until we start business.

WWW.



<http://www.b360nepal.com/>



COVID19 and Contractual Performance: Lease Agreements



Bikash Singh Bikash Singh graduated from Kathmandu School of Law, Purbanchal University. He works in the corporate law team of Pioneer Law Associates.

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The Covid 19 outbreak has created difficulties in subsistence of livelihoods, health and safety of people including disruptions of global market, trade and commerce. More particularly, the effect of the pandemic has caused difficulties in contractual obligations of parties. As a result of supply chain disruptions, restriction in mobility, cash flow shortages, the maintenance of contract has become very difficult, and in some cases, impossible for the parties.

1. LEGAL PRINCIPLES RELEVANT TO COVID 19 AND NEPALESE CONTEXT

A. Force majeure

'Force majeure' is a contractual concept used as a risk allocation tool

which enables a party to claim for an excuse of performance of contract in occurrence of an exceptional event. Force majeure clause provides the exhaustive list of events such as earthquake, flood, wars, etc. considered

as force majeure events. In context of COVID 19, wordings such as 'disease', 'pandemic', 'epidemic,' 'governmental actions' or even catchall phrases like 'outbreak of illness' or 'health emergency' could suffice for the purpose of force majeure.

Generally for force majeure events to trigger, such event:

(a) must be beyond the parties control, (b) should be unforeseeable at the time of contract, (c) even after occurrence, party could not reasonably have avoided such event and (d) such event should not be attributable to any of the party. The force majeure events may (a) suspend or delay the performance of contract (generally) or (b) terminate the contract itself (in case of frustration). Force majeure clause is dependent upon the wordings of the contract. In absence of such clause in contract, default legal provisions of Civil Code 2017 (Section 531) will apply. Generally, force majeure event entitles the parties to claim for (a) extension of time or (b) claim for reasonable costs incurred due to suspension or delay of performance.

B. Doctrine of frustration

Frustration is a legal principle in contract law which enables a party to terminate the contract due to occurrence of an extraordinary event which frustrates the purpose of the contract. In other words, it makes the performance of obligations under contract impossible for parties.

C. Nepalese Context

Section 531 of Civil Code 2017 (2074) ("Civil Code") provides for the exemption of obligations in the event of fundamental change of circumstances. This provision is similar to doctrine of frustration. The events constituting change in circumstances include (a) illegality, (b) in occurrence of events beyond human control such earthquake, flood, landslides etc., (c) destruction of subject matter of contract (d) death or disability of person in relation to contract requiring personal performance. This rule does not apply in situations where contract performance becomes onerous to parties due to (a) performance becoming difficult, (b) it leads to less profit or loss (c) in occurrence of strike or lockout (d) and

performance default by third parties.

In a lease agreement, the primary obligation of house owner is to provide access to premises and for tenant it is to make payment of the rent amount. Therefore, until and unless there occurs a situation of destruction or inhabitability of premises, where the performance is impossible, lease agreement will not generally be protected by above mentioned legal provision.

2. COVID 19 AND LEASE AGREEMENT IN CONTEXT OF NEPAL

Nepal implemented country-wide lockdown from March 24 to June 14, 2020 as a measure to avoid the spread of Covid 19. One of the worst hit sectors due to this lockdown is the commercial sector. There are a huge number of business houses, shops, hotels, etc. who have taken space on lease (Commercial Tenants/Tenants). Most of the tenants have full dependency over the earning from their commercial activity conducted in such spaces of owners (House Owners).

Amidst this uncertainty, the parties to the lease agreement should carefully review their agreement clauses and if



needed, seek legal advice to ascertain their rights and obligations.

3. ISSUES RELATING TO LEASE AGREEMENTS:

A. Payment of rent

The difficulty in payment of rent amount by tenants could be resolved through quarterly rent payments, request to waive rent payment and others. On March 29, 2020, the government called for house owners of daily wage-based labourers to not charge one month's house rent and committed to exempt house rent tax of the said month. But there is no any substantial decision taken in relation to the status of commercial lease agreements. Recently, upon the request of tenants, 70% of house owners around Thamel, Kathmandu have agreed to provide 50% rent exemption for a period of six months to commercial tenants.

B. Payment of tax

As per the decision of the Cabinet, notice of IRD and ensuing litigation at the Supreme Court, taxpayers are required to file for income tax and VAT filings within 30 days from the date of official lockdown lifting order from GoN. It is to be noted that tax deferral is provided as per Income Tax Act and it does not extend to be applicable for the payment of rental tax by natural persons whose rental income is governed by Local Finance Acts. In practice, there are instances where some municipalities in Kathmandu have provided exemption of rental income to house owners

C. Obligation to remain open for business:

Commercial lease agreements have a continuous operation requirement which require the tenant to remain open for business for a minimum number of hours on specific days during the term of lease. Given the outbreak of COVID

19 and the government orders for closure of businesses, tenants were found defaulting in payment and house-owners got frustrated about their lost earnings. The pertinent issue here is whether the government restrictions requiring the closure of business can take precedence over a tenant's promise to remain open.

Protection from eviction

The GoN via notice in the Nepal Gazette on March 29, 2020 imposed a moratorium on eviction of tenants from their existing leased premises by house owners throughout the lock-down period. The notice does not provide clarity as to whether it was applicable for residential or commercial evictions, or both. The notice seems to be applicable for both kinds of lease agreements as the legal provisions do not distinguish between the two. In practice, police have arrested few house owners who have evicted medical staff however it shows that the threat of eviction is still pervasive and prevalent.

4. RECOMMENDED APPROACH

The issue at hand has moved beyond contractual remedies to the matter of leniency and convenience of parties. Section 398 of Civil Code provides space to the house owners and tenants to reconsider or change the terms of agreement. Similarly, under Section 533 of Civil Code, parties are autonomous to revise the terms and conditions of the agreement. The revision of agreement could be done by way of amongst others, extension of time for rent payment, downsizing of rental premises, adjustment with future rental payments, etc.

In the absence of clear directions from the government, it will depend on the relationship between the tenant and the house owner, the house owner's commercial decision, tenant's history in the performance of the terms of the lease, and other business considerations as a temporary solution to the crisis. **B**

BUSINESS 360

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RONB: Influencing How Nepal Consumes Its News

Text: Sajeet M. Rajbhandari

Few Nepali pages on the internet have gained as much prominence as Routine of Nepal Banda. Started almost a decade back in 2011, when the craze for social media was still somewhat new, Routine of Nepal Banda (RONB) today has amassed over 1.9 million followers on Facebook, 781 thousand followers on Instagram, and holds the current spot for the #1 trending Viber community in Nepal. What was just a casual page dedicated to posting city lockdown routes during an era where strikes and political instability were commonplace, it has since become the go to source for information that is quick and reliable for countless Nepalis.

26-year-old Victor Paudel, who is the founder and one of the admins for the RONB pages recalls, "I had just finished my tenth grade when we started Routine of Nepal Banda. Back then I had been into sports journalism and had been helping out some seniors on a website called givemegoal.com. When RONB started, we'd help out these journalist dai's with their posts and they'd help us with news information." Perhaps it was because of the situation then, RONB always enjoyed good reviews and a healthy growth. Paudel shares, "Back then people really needed updates about bandas, and what the situation was like in different places. So even when we just had a thousand or so likes, we received a lot of support on what we had been doing." He further adds, "The page really blew up after the earthquake, because of the updates and information that we had circulated during



photo Courtesy: RONB

the crisis. It was then when we realised that we could do something much bigger with it (RONB)." As of now, RONB has been registered under the name Routine of Nepal Pvt. Ltd., and is recognised as an online media company. However while RONB may be registered as a traditional media outlet, the way it functions

is radically different to how other traditional media houses have been working. "If you were to count our salary-based employees, you would only find around five people work for RONB. A lot of what we do is possible because of volunteers and freelancers that reach out to us. These local level volunteers constantly notify

what is happening through calls, messages and emails." Says Paudel who vouches for the positive impact that citizen journalism has had on the company.

As a matter of fact, RONB's reliance on citizenship journalism might have been exactly why they have had such an impressive growth rate. At



the time of writing, Socialbaker.com estimates that the RONB Facebook page is growing at a rate of 1200 plus new followers each day. And as this number grows, the number of information sources that RONB has grows alongside. While big corporate media giants might carry a lot of hidden biases that stem from sponsorships and investments, an independent media outlet that relies on its own audience for information creates a much-needed alternative to mainstream media. Paudel shares, "Political and business news aside, we think that the content that the people send our way is likely to be what other people want to know more about as well." He goes to reaffirm RONB's faith in citizen journalism, stating that the company wants to bring to light stories that are useful to everybody and doesn't work to benefit only a select few.

Another one of RONB's key selling points is that it only features brief informational bites rather than the highly researched stories that newspapers are known for. Paudel believes that these snippets of news are perfect as readers are always in a rush. "People often just read catchy headings which ends up misleading them," he claims. He then adds, "We try to condense all the necessary information into a handful of lines so that people can get quick information without being misled." These news snippets aren't the only procedures that RONB has in place to avoid misinformation. Paudel assures that the admins abide certain gatekeeping measures in order to avoid biases. He shares that RONB doesn't often publish a political or business story, and on the occasion that it does, it is to highlight an incident rather than to promote an opinion. This also means that RONB ends up missing on trending

WHILE THE NAME ROUTINE OF NEPAL BANDA WAS A CLEVER TAKE ON THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT THAT EXISTED DURING ITS INCEPTION, THAT ENVIRONMENT HAS SINCE DIED DOWN. NOW PAUDEL CLAIMS THAT THE COMPANY HAS BEEN DEBATING ON WHETHER OR NOT THEY SHOULD STICK WITH THEIR ICONIC NAME OR GO FOR SOMETHING THAT SUITS THE TIMES.

incidents at times. "We are always glad to raise the voices of people, but most of all we want to publish and propagate positivity rather than simply put out negative content," tells Paudel.

With posts currently averaging at 1.5 lakh to 2 lakh hits on Instagram and around 3 lakhs to 4 lakhs on Facebook, one would assume that RONB would be drowning in sponsorship deals. While that does hold true, RONB hasn't always been open to all the long list of offers that have come its way. In fact, the company has

a picky list of criteria when it comes to who it features. "We emphasise on promoting local brands and films; and that too only enough to fulfill our costs of operation," says Paudel. For RONB, sponsorships aren't simply advertising a product on their pages, but rather also being useful information that might benefit or interest their audience. RONB has also developed a habit of promoting independent activists, creators and local stories that they think will have a positive impact on their audience. By doing so, the company feels that they are able to give these impactful people and stories a wider platform; be it a prominent activist or a novice photographer.

While RONB's stats have always enjoyed a healthy growth, it has also had to face some bumps along the way. For instance, while RONB's Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages have soared, the Routine of Nepal Banda app has struggled to garner momentum. Released on the Playstore in August 2015, the app has only enjoyed around 10,000 downloads, a low number in comparison to the millions it has on other platforms. Paudel acknowledges this issue, stating that perhaps it was because they couldn't find anybody to properly run the project along with it being a high budget endeavor. Regardless of this setback, the company is now working towards designing a website under the name, 'RONBpost.com' where the media company plans on posting longer blog like stories that could connect to users looking for more information on a short post. The company also faced further dilemmas when it came to the relevancy of their popular title. While the name Routine of Nepal Banda was a clever take



on the political environment that existed during its inception, that environment has since died down. Now Paudel claims that the company has been debating on whether or not they should stick with their iconic name or go for something that suits the times. While no official changes have been made, the company itself is legally registered under the name 'Routine of Nepal', opting to leave out the contentious 'Banda.'

RONB has certainly come a long way over the nine years that it has existed. In this time period their content has undergone some strong changes and put more emphasis on their credibility. There is no doubt that what started as a simple Facebook page created by a teen has now grown into a strong media force of its own. "Even till a few years back, I would have never expected RONB to be a registered business," Paudel recounts. He then adds that regardless of whether they wanted too or not, time has nudged them to move forward. **B**



Copper: Regaining Value At Pre-Pandemic Levels



Vivek Risal is associated with Mercantile Exchange Nepal Limited in the capacity of Manager in Research and Development Department. He can be contacted at r&d@mexnepal.com

The king of industrial metals was trading in the range market from 2017 till 2019. The global economy was moving forward and so was copper, digesting any market forces and reflecting the state of affairs as it were. Copper is efficient when used as a conductor of heat and electricity and is consumed for building material as a constituent of various metal alloys. During this period, copper had dethroned its counterpart gold as the most sought after industrial metal.

However, with the emergence of the pandemic in the first quarter of 2020, copper prices indicated the change in the global economic landscape. Having commenced at \$2.7932 per pound, the prices plunged by 30% to reach \$1.9628 per pound in March at the height of the pandemic in China. The level was the lowest since February 2016. However, prices have since recovered in the following three months from April to June rising to \$2.6588 per pound at the time of this article.

Although the march to recovery is well on, it will require ample hawkish news from major economies. While



Coronavirus has dominated the headlines, the disease is not the only risk factor. The US is still at trade war with China. The difficult times may have eased the tensions between the two powerhouses but the arguments have rekindled in the recent days.

An Indispensable Commodity

The status of the manufacturing industry will impact the demand for the metal. Copper is vital to technology. It is the designated key economic reader since it moves the market based on its demand in multiple applications and uses. However, copper as an investment commodity does have its limitations. Traders do not turn to it in times of uncertainty and conundrum like they do to gold and silver. When the global economy is observing a downturn in the form of recession or slowdown, the demand for the industrial metal also decreases due to lowered consumption.

Domination of China

China is the world's major player in the global copper industry holding a major presence within the global copper supply link. Being the largest consumer and also

one of the largest producers, China's impact on the metal cannot be undermined.

Given the resurgent nature of the global economy before slow down due to COVID 19, all driving factors showed that copper prices were on the verge of breaking the resistance level of \$3 per pound, a breakthrough not observed since June 2018.

The industrial production figures for China in 2019 were constantly higher than the numbers in 2018. But the beginning of 2020 showed a different picture. The months of January and February reported a combined -13.5% vis-à-vis 2019. The assessments coincided with the arrival of the pandemic.

Boom in Asian Trading Activity

With the slump in prices of copper, the participation of traders and resulting trading activities during the Asian time zone has fast-tracked. According to CME Group, trading during Asia time zone, demarcated at 8 am to 8 pm in Singapore, inclined 4% in comparison to the same period in 2019. Additionally, the figures also accounted for 34% of the total average monthly copper futures traded in the first quarter of 2020. This significant

trend has continued through April and May, with 35% of the volume in transactions.

The Asian economy has climbed the ladder and become the supreme leader in the consumption of copper accounting for 70% of the global refined copper usage in 2018 as per International Copper Study Group (ICSG).

In a comparative study with the statistics of 1960, the Asian markets have come a long way and leapfrogged all others in a surprising revelation. In 1960, the leader in the race was the European market with 57% and the Asian market was languishing behind with only 10%. How the tables have turned in favour of the Asian market is a testimony of the emergence of the territorial powerhouses mainly in the form of China and India.

Conclusion

Despite the flagging global economy and the resulting global copper equations due to the pandemic, trading activities remain robust, especially in the Asian markets. The return of higher copper prices is slowly gaining momentum and the race towards pre-pandemic levels and \$3 per pound is on the cards. **B**

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Zhao Li Ying

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“The goal is to productise our services as we build out the Audio Bee brand, hire US-based sales and technical team leads. We are also in a transition phase where we go from a culture of being operationally focused to become a product driven company. We are hiring resources in Nepal as well to continue this transformation. We will also look to sign clients and ramp up sales as we become capable of scaling rapidly over the next few months. When you are trying to build a global business in such a competitive and exploding space while being bootstrapped, it takes all of your focus and thus these are my personal goals as well.”



AYUSH NEUPANE

CEO OF AUDIO BEE & FOUNDER AND
CEO OF A.B.G.S. GROUP

Ayush Neupane is the Founder and CEO of A.B.G.S. Group and CEO of Audio Bee, a brand delivering services primarily related to audio, text and image data. After completing his A-Levels from Buddhanilkantha School in 2007, he worked as a stringer with The Kathmandu Post, as guidance counsellor for A-Level students with Trinity College, and also taught a bridge course at Intel Institute for some years. Neupane then went to the US in 2009 to pursue a BS degree in Economics at Saint Peter's University where he graduated with Honours in 2013. While studying for his undergrad, he joined Fidelity Investments, the largest mutual fund company in the US at the time, as a Margins and Money Movement Intern for four months in 2011. A year later, he joined Marsh & McLennan Companies, a Fortune 500 company, as an IT Internal Audit Intern where he worked for a year.

On completing his undergraduate degree, he worked for a year as a Data Analyst with JOOR, a leading fashion wholesale marketplace. Neupane then decided to return home and founded the A.B.G.S. Group in November 2014. The

company is a Kathmandu-based multinational specialising in providing Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) solutions for businesses through speech transcription, segmentation and annotation, raw audio collection, Natural Language Processing (NLP) training data creation, validation and labelling, captioning and tagging, relevance check, validation, and judgments services.

In January 2019, he co-founded Audio Bee with a business partner in the US. "For now, Audio Bee is only a brand but will become a standalone company soon," says Neupane. In an interview with **Dibesh Dangol** of **B360**, Ayush Neupane talks about the inspiration behind establishing the A.B.G.S. Group and Audio Bee, the services they provide, their target clients and the market scope. Excerpts:

What led you to establish ABGS Group and Audio Bee?

I wanted to come back to Nepal to become a businessman. Once I was able to convince my parents that returning as early as possible was a good idea if I was to do business, I came to Nepal from the US one year after I did my undergrad degree even though I had an H1 visa. The company that I worked in the US was outsourcing data entry tasks to vendors in India and I had already seen the opportunity to start with them.

Audio Bee was an evolution of the business of A.B.G.S. Group. I have a business partner in the US that was able to source speech-to-text and Automated Speech Recognition technology training (AI and ML data training) projects for one of the largest technology companies in the world in 2017. We have been slowly building our capabilities in this field since then.



What services do you offer and who are your target clients?

I dabbled in providing digital marketing services to local clients through my father's inactive marketing agency but that ended up being very hard because Nepali clients do not have a good understanding of what digital marketing is and we ended up being limited to doing social media specific tasks only. We have moved away from this and now offer speech-based AI/ML data training and software solutions only. We recently started doing translations too but this is for the AI/ML data training space as well.

Our target clients are companies like Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Apple, Facebook, Huawei, Alibaba and so on who are investing heavily in Speech to Text (STT) and Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) technologies. However, it is very hard to get those companies as our clients and thus we are happy to sub-contract projects of those companies from other companies that have them as their client.

We currently employ over 200 people in Nepal in full-time and freelance roles and we employ a further 250 people in other parts of the world. Since these jobs can be done by people on flexible terms, it has created new digital job opportunities for people who otherwise would not have been able to get them elsewhere in Nepal or other developing countries. Speech-based work is a lot tougher than other AI/ML training tasks and thus we are also generating a trained workforce in this space.

Do you provide your products and services to the Nepali market as well?

We plan on doing something in the Nepali market as well but it is very hard to find clients in Nepal for the type of work we do, also due to the high costs associated with such technology. Our services can also be used in the Language Services Provider (LSP) space where we can offer translation and localisation services for someone like the Nepal Tourism Board.

My partner in US helps with financing and compliances else it would not have been possible to run a global business where we need to make micro-payments to tens of thousands of people in more than 100 countries every year. On the other hand, our team has been designed to operate seven days a week (24 hours 5 days a week) and thus it helps manage clients and our distributed workforce easily. My greatest asset is my team that takes ownership of the business which allows me to focus on tackling a few aspects of the business at a time. I have been lucky to hire people who have been able to grow in their roles as the business has grown.

What is the market scope for companies like yours?

This is a fast growing space globally that the likes of Cloudfactory which has large operations in Nepal have been able to grow as well. They have raised \$78 million in financing which is a testament to how large this sector is, though we are focusing on a small niche of speech data AI/ML data training. The local market is negligible while the global market has tremendous opportunities. A lot of new companies are springing up everywhere to work in this space.

What's next?

The goal is to productise our services as we build out the Audio Bee brand, hire US-based sales and technical team leads. We are also in a transition phase where we go from a culture of being operationally focused to become a product driven company. We are hiring resources in Nepal as well to continue this transformation. We will also look to sign clients and ramp up sales as we become capable of scaling rapidly over the next few months. When you are trying to build a global business in such a competitive and exploding space while being bootstrapped, it takes all of your focus and thus these are my personal goals as well. **B**

“The State of Qatar is currently working according to 2030 vision which includes very ambitious national projects such as building new cities and big infrastructures. And thus we will continue the cooperation with Nepal in this regard. During the past years, it’s proved clearly that Nepali migrant workers are among the best, honest and reliable people. And I hope to see more Nepali migrants in the skilled sectors also.”

H.E Yousuf Bin Mohammed Al-Hail joined the service in the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1997 and he is the current Qatari Ambassador to Nepal, a position he has held since 2016. His entire career experience has been within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and as a diplomat he has held the position of the Qatari Ambassador in South Africa, Kuwait and the UK.

In an interview with Avant Shrestha, Ambassador Yousuf Bin Mohammed Al-Hail talks about his experience as Ambassador to Nepal as well as aspects of Qatar – Nepal relationship.

How important is the Qatar – Nepal bilateral relationship?

I can say that the bilateral relations are excellent; the two countries are cooperating in the international forums. We have signed several MoU's and we were honored by a visit of Rt. Hon. Mrs. Bidya Devi Bhandari the President of the Republic. The Nepali community working in my country enjoys all the deserved appreciation from the leadership and people of the State of Qatar.

For the future, the objective is to increase the bilateral trade especially in the field of agricultural production. During my time as ambassador, Nepali fruit exports started to reach Qatari markets and is highly welcomed by customers. More effort is needed through exhibitions and mutual visits which we have already signed an MoU with Nepal Chamber of Commerce. Agriculture and

Food Security will benefit both countries. After the blockade, the State of Qatar is more open for food production and collaboration, and that actually did a great job to achieve self-sufficiency.

How has the pandemic affected the bilateral relationship in regard to the issue of Nepali migrant workers?

Covid-19 is a global pandemic that has affected all businesses in the world. It caused hard effect on all countries due to lockdown policy, which is a necessity to combat the spread of the virus. The State of Qatar is giving all the care and support for the workers to protect them from infection as well as treatment of all infected citizens and expats is being done with the same medical care. Since State of Qatar recorded very low death rate due to corona, the bilateral relations and labour agreement is not affected by the pandemic. There is a joint committee responsible for updating the 2005 agreement.

What are the major challenges that you as an Ambassador have to face during the pandemic?

As I said, it's a difficult time and I pray that it will end soon. Even during the total lockdown in the Embassy, I continued work with very minimum staff and limited duty hours and continue our communication with Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also one of the challenges is the suspension of international flights and I hope airports will open soon. However, the good thing is that cargo flights continued and as

you may know Qatar Airways is among a very few companies that continued to transport people and medical supplies during these hard times.

It is reported that demand for manpower from Qatar will see a drop after infrastructures for the upcoming World Cup 2022 is completed, is that true?

Let me first express my appreciation for the Nepali migrant workers as they are doing very good in all sectors they are engaged in. The State of Qatar is currently working according to 2030 vision which includes very ambitious national projects such as building new cities and big infrastructures. And thus we will continue the cooperation with Nepal in this regard. During the past years, it's proved clearly that Nepali migrant workers are among the best, honest and reliable people. And I hope to see more Nepali migrants in the skilled sectors also.

The Qatar Football Association signed a five-year collaboration agreement with the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) on October 23. The agreement brings QFA and ANFA closer as they look into ways and means to develop the world's biggest sport. Your thoughts.

Football is very popular in the State of Qatar and also here in Nepal. The agreement indicates the intention of the two Football Associations to work together for the development of the popular sport as you know both of us are under Asia Football Confederation. Nepal's ANFA

can benefit from the service ASPIRE Academy in the State of Qatar in terms of training, team preparation for tournaments and treatment of sports injuries, and experience sharing and friendly matches could have good effect for the common interests.

Are there any opportunities for Qatari investors in Nepal's hydroelectricity, tourism and infrastructure development?

Hydropower is one of Nepal's potentials and it is a very promising sector as the country is endowed with unique natural resources. I hope there will be lots of success for the Nepal government plans in this regard as well as tourism and infrastructure. The State of Qatar has expressed intention to cooperate in investments in Nepal as we have achieved good steps in terms of MoUs such as avoiding double taxation, Chamber of Commerce, Agriculture. I hope both countries would sign the protection of investments MoU to pave the way for the Qatari business sector to invest in Nepal.

How has Qatar achieve economic prosperity in such a short period?

The vision of the leadership and unified Qatari people for achieving development is key to our success. The State of Qatar is also open for global skills and experiences and using effective and updated management systems. I can say from experience that development success requires planning, patience and determination. **B**



**H.E. YOUSUF BIN
MOHAMMED AL-HAIL**
THE STATE OF QATAR'S AMBASSADOR TO NEPAL

“Analysing the ban in Nepal from an economic perspective - according to trade statistics from the Ministry of Finance, Nepal’s total import value for the financial year 2018/19 was Rs. 1.4 trillion or around 12 billion USD. Imported wines and spirits represented only 0.19% of this. The ban can therefore only have a negligible impact on the balance of payments issue, which was cited by the government as its main rationale.

Notably, the government does collect substantial revenue from these imports in the form of excise and customs duties on these alcohol products. The ban translates to the government forgoing almost \$55 million annually through this new policy (much of which will instead be diverted to the criminal black market).”



**SURIYA PRABHA
PADMANAABHAN**

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS

As a protectionist measure with the aim of checking depletion of forex reserve during the pandemic, the government has barred import of luxury vehicles and certain foods and alcoholic beverages.

The records of the Department of Customs show that Nepal, in fiscal year 2018/19, imported alcoholic beverages and related products worth Rs 3.54 billion. The government earns 2.5 times the revenue from customs and

excise, excluding VAT. There are several renowned foreign liquor brands that have an established market in Nepal.

Traders fail to understand the government’s move considering it is a very small percentage estimated at 0.19% impact on forex reserves whereas the resultant trade deceleration and unintended consequences such as increase in illicit trade and counterfeit products can have a long term impact.

The Transnational Alliance

to Combat Illicit Trade (TRACIT) is a private sector initiative to mitigate the economic and social damages of illicit trade by strengthening government enforcement mechanisms and integrating supply chain controls across industry sectors most impacted by illicit trade. TRACIT draws from industry strengths and market experience to build habits of cooperation between business, government and the diverse group of countries that have limited

capacities for regulatory enforcement.

Suriya Prabha Padmanaaban is a policy advisor and lawyer specialising in international trade, intellectual property law, and global governance. She is a consultant operating between Paris and Bangalore and her clients include international business organizations and multinational corporations including CropLife International, the International Chamber of Commerce and P&G. Her focus areas include anti-counterfeiting and piracy, capacity building and consumer protection. She holds an LL.M. in Intellectual Property and Technology Law from the National University of Singapore and is admitted to the All India Bar.

In an email interview with B360, Padmanaaban shares her views on the recent import ban on alcohol in Nepal and how TRACIT works around restrictive and unstable policies in countries like Nepal that fluctuate their rules and regulations without proper measures leading up to such decisions. Excerpts:

How do you view the recent ban on import of liquor in Nepal?

On March 29, the Government of Nepal banned import of alcoholic beverages to protect the country’s foreign currency reserves in the face of the public health and economic emergency. TRACIT recognises the seriousness of the COVID-19 crisis and understands the need for rigorous and sustained government action in these unprecedented times. However, there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that bans on

alcoholic beverages drive illicit markets and are financially counterproductive.

We are concerned about the unintended consequences of these measures in Nepal. Illicit alcohol can lead to severe public health consequences due to contamination with toxic ingredients such as methanol (which can lead to blindness and death). Its trade supports organised crime, political corruption and terrorist networks. It also deprives governments of much-needed revenue, particularly, when it involves counterfeiting or smuggling of high value (and highly taxed) international wines and spirits.

Prohibition measures are detrimental to our efforts to hold back illicit alcohol and are the last thing we need during the COVID-19 crisis when health care systems are under strain, government budgets are limited and with unemployment swelling, and businesses struggling to stay above water.

How do you work around restrictive and unstable policies in countries like Nepal that fluctuate their rules and regulations without proper measures leading up to such decisions?

Just in the last three months, TRACIT has worked with several governments to demonstrate the impact that alcohol bans have on driving illicit markets along with illustrations of the related economic and social impact. Heightened awareness and education on the problem of illicit alcohol is an essential ingredient to motivate governments to reverse such blanket decisions. TRACIT works with the private sector to evaluate the implications of such bans and devises solutions that governments can implement to promote responsible consumption of alcohol and mitigate illicit trade.

For example, TRACIT issued an Illicit Alcohol Market Alert (<https://www.tracit.org/covid-19.html>) warning governments that COVID 19 related prohibitions on alcoholic beverages result in unintended adverse consequences. For example, in Mexico, more than 100 people have recently been killed by unknowingly

consuming tainted, toxic illicit alcohol. Prior to the Mexican government's enactment of the COVID 19 dry laws, there were no reports of fatalities linked to the consumption of illicit alcohol. In India, the government lifted alcohol bans in response to rapid and significant excise tax losses and increase in illicit alcohol trade. In South Africa, the illicit trade of alcohol is now bigger than it has ever been, effectively increasing from 15% to 100% of the market.

Nepal would be considered a volatile market. Just how important is it to TRACIT members? What are the wider economic impacts on business and the government?

Nepal is an important market for several of TRACIT's member companies. The decision of the government to ban the import of alcohol has a slew of diverse repercussions on the operations of these companies.

Firstly, such sudden and spontaneous regulations create an unpredictable and precarious environment for businesses to operate, affects continuity in their supply chains and impacts consumer reliability on their brand. This may also caution other unrelated sectors from operating in the country due to such impulsive changes in the law.

Further, this severely impacts the ability of a company to invest resources in a local market confidently, which has direct consequences on the government's ability to generate FDI and secure employment for its population. Finally, as noted, import bans propel the manufacture and sale of counterfeit versions of the banned products. This burdens companies' as well as the government's budgets to police such illicit activities and prosecute perpetrators.

Do protectionism measures such as the import ban during a crisis actually work for or against the economy from your standpoint?

We have noticeably clear evidence from our experiences in several national markets that, overall, bans on alcohol drastically impact government revenue generation. In recognition, several governments including India, South Africa, Sri

Lanka and Zimbabwe that had initially imposed a ban during the pandemic have now reserved their decision.

Analysing the ban in Nepal from an economic perspective - according to trade statistics from the Ministry of Finance, Nepal's total import value for the financial year 2018/19 was Rs. 1.4 trillion or around 12 billion USD. Imported wines and spirits represented only 0.19% of this. The ban can therefore only have a negligible impact on the balance of payments issue, which was cited by the government as its main rationale.

Notably, the government does collect substantial revenue from these imports in the form of excise and customs duties on these alcohol products. The ban translates to the government forgoing almost \$55 million annually through this new policy (much of which will instead be diverted to the criminal black market). Beyond this immediate impact, the government's already strained budget would also be disbursed for enforcement and monitoring of the ban.

Moreover, once international tourists start visiting again, they will expect the brands that they know and trust to be available. If consumers cannot buy legal alcohol, they will start looking for it on the illegal market. This may have potentially disastrous consequences for Nepal's tourism industry (both from an economic and safety standpoint) - which is also one of the largest revenue generators for the country.

TRACIT's fight against illicit alcohol is only one among various other sectors. Could you tell us a little more about these efforts especially in the context of Asian markets? What are some of the solutions?

Yes, TRACIT employs a cross-sector approach to fight the problem by recognising the transitional and interconnected nature of illicit trade. We rely on business' important role in shaping the regulatory response to illicit trade. We do this by facilitating stakeholder dialogues among the key sectors impacted by illicit trade - ranging from pharmaceuticals and consumer goods to wildlife, forestry and others. This could be in the form of intelligence or data

sharing, mobilising resources and expertise to effectively control illicit trade and mitigate associated supply chain abuses.

Asia is an important market for our members and as a first step, we studied the extent that countries are equipped through their policies and initiatives to combat illicit trade. To measure this, we commissioned The Economist Intelligence Unit to produce the Global Illicit Trade Environment Index (<https://www.tracit.org/featured-project-global-illicit-trade-index.html>). The Index expands upon an Asia-specific version, to score 21 economies on the extent to which they enable or prevent illicit trade. This generated much-needed attention on the issue within the region to provide perspectives and new insights on nations' structural capability to protect against illicit trade. The findings are intended to help policy makers identify areas that merit greater attention and to jump start the process of implementing strategies. Building on this success, we launched specific programs in the region. For example, in response to the Index's findings, with our support, the government of Myanmar stepped up efforts to fight illicit trade and formed the Illegal Trade Eradication Steering Committee empowered by the Ministry of Commerce. The Committee coordinates state-level departments and establishes policies, strategies and programmes to control illicit trade. These commitments offer a model that any government - developing or developed - could replicate.

TRACIT is now engaging other countries in the region to develop model solutions - regulatory and legislative - with the support of our members. Fundamentally, these would include: increasing government-business partnerships, engaging more deeply with neighbouring countries, intensifying public awareness, increasing enforcement and prosecution of illicit activities, rationalising tax policies and relaxing onerous regulations that often promote illicit trade. **B**

COVID CRISIS COULD PUSH 100 MILLION PEOPLE INTO EXTREME POVERTY, NEW WORLD BANK STUDY SAYS

The surge in extreme global poverty would be the first increase since 1998.



JONATHAN MILTIMORE IS THE MANAGING EDITOR OF FEE. ORG. HIS WRITING/REPORTING HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT OF ARTICLES IN TIME MAGAZINE, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, CNN, FORBES, FOX NEWS, AND THE STAR TRIBUNE.

The economic consequences of the COVID 19 lockdowns are well-chronicled.

In the US, more than 100,000 businesses have been wiped out. More than 40 million jobs are gone. The federal debt has surged to \$26.3 trillion.

These are daunting figures and serious problems. But in some ways, they are not the worst part of the story. The United States, after all, is an incredibly wealthy nation. The vast majority of the poorest among us are still relatively well off from a material perspective, with access to shelter, running water, food, and other amenities and forms of assistance. It's a fact often unspoken that the poorest counties in the US struggle with obesity.

Obesity is a serious matter, but many parts of the world struggle with a more severe form of malnutrition: hunger. Sadly, many of the most economically depressed parts of the world stand to see tens of millions of more people slip into extreme poverty, a new World Bank study says.

"Poverty projections suggest that the social and economic impacts of the crisis are likely to be quite significant," the report states. "Estimates based on growth projections from the June 2020 Global Economic Prospects report show that, when compared with pre-crisis forecasts, COVID 19 could push 71 million people into extreme poverty in 2020 under the baseline scenario and 100 million under the downside scenario."

Most of the increase will occur in places already suffering from high poverty and hunger. Projections show that roughly



half of the individuals falling into extreme poverty—which the World Bank defines as "living on \$1.25 or less a day"—live in South Asia, while more than a third come from Sub-Saharan Africa.

South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa already are the poorest regions in the world. In fact, a separate World Bank report shows that the five most populous countries in these regions—India, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Bangladesh—account for half of the world's extreme poor.

The new figures are even worse than a previous World Bank analysis, published in April, that projected the COVID 19 crisis would push about 50 million people into extreme poverty.

Whether the total ends up being 50 million or 100 million, the surge in extreme global poverty would be the first increase since 1998.

Some might argue 100 million people pushed into extreme poverty is simply collateral damage in the greater war against COVID-19. Pandemics are not wars, however. They can't be defeated, only

Some might argue 100 million people pushed into extreme poverty is simply collateral damage in the greater war against COVID-19. Pandemics are not wars, however. They can't be defeated, only endured and, at best, mitigated.

endured and, at best, mitigated.

The World Bank is careful to say the economic fallout stems from the "COVID crisis," but that's a bit euphemistic. The economic fallout stems primarily from the global reaction to COVID—mass economic lockdowns—not the virus itself.

We know this because we can compare the economic carnage to past pandemics. Via Ryan McMaken at Mises Wire:

Specifically, we can look to the pandemic of 1957–58, which was more deadly than the COVID-19 pandemic has been so far. We can also look to the 1918–19 pandemic. Yet we will see that neither produced economic damage on a scale we now see as a result of the government-mandated lockdowns.

This thoroughly undermines the claims that the lockdowns are only a minor factor in economic destruction, and that the virus itself is the real culprit.

The CDC estimates that as of May 18 this year approximately ninety thousand Americans have died of COVID-19. Adjusted for population size, that comes out to

a mortality rate of 272 per million. This is (so far) less than half the mortality rate for the 1957–58 flu pandemic. In that pandemic, it is estimated that as many as 116,000 Americans died. Yet, the US population was much smaller then, totaling only 175 million. Adjusted for population size, mortality as a result of the “Asian flu” pandemic of 1957–58 was more than 660 per million.

That’s the equivalent of 220,000 deaths in the United States today.

Yet, Americans in 1957 did not respond by shutting down commerce, forcing people into “lockdown,” or driving unemployment up to Depression-era levels. In fact, reports show that Americans took little action beyond the usual measures involved in trying to slow the spread of disease: hand washing, staying home when ill, etc.

The 1957 pandemic was even more deadly than the 2020 coronavirus, but its economic impact appears to have been mild. Via D.A. Henderson et al. in Public Health and Medical Responses to

the 1957–58 Influenza Pandemic:

Despite the large numbers of cases, the 1957 outbreak did not appear to have a significant impact on the U.S. economy. For example, a Congressional Budget Office estimate found that a pandemic the scale of which occurred in 1957 would reduce real GDP by approximately 1% ‘but probably would not cause a recession and might not be distinguishable from the normal variation in economic activity.’

The Spanish Flu offers a similar scenario. The deadliest pandemic of the 20th century “left almost no discernible mark on the aggregate US economy,” write economists Efraim Benmelech and Carola Frydman. “According to some estimates, real gross national product actually grew in 1919.”

The economic costs of the lockdowns are relevant considering there is widespread discussion as to whether the US should once again close its economy in light of recent increases COVID cases, even though deaths continue

4 There is certainly room to debate the effectiveness of lockdowns, but while doing so we should not ignore lockdown costs economic and psychological, both of which carry severe ramifications for human beings.

to decline and evidence suggests COVID 19 is weakening.

Proponents of lockdowns say they are motivated by protecting lives, which no doubt is true. Yet evidence suggests lockdowns are not particularly effective at curbing the spread of COVID-19. Indeed, in the US the states with the strictest lockdowns have the highest fatality rates.

There is certainly room to debate the effectiveness of lockdowns, but while doing so we should not ignore lockdown costs economic and psychological, both of which carry severe ramifications for human beings.

“One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results,” the economist Milton Friedman famously said.

If the first round of lockdowns ends up thrusting 100 million people into extreme poverty, that is a cost too severe to ignore—whatever the intentions of those enforcing them.

Source: fee.org

WWW.



<http://www.b360nepal.com/>



The Inability To Adapt



Prithvi Khadka is the CEO of Digital Mercari, a boutique marketing agency specialising in business growth through paid media and emails.

After reading several of the most popular books on business, I can confidently conclude one thing. Even though all books are unique to the author and the message they try to convey, there are always some topics that remain a common thread. Fact is that change is the only constant and people and businesses can only succeed as they adapt to the roadblocks they face: a very important quality!

The only constant in our reality however most always originate from a concentrated area, the United States and some states in Europe. They have managed to become 'market leaders' at revolutionary, progressive and technological changes, a trait common to several generations in the past.

The only difference? The information and influence of these used to take decades to bear fruition during that time. Now interconnectivity with access to internet makes any event or idea worthy of attention anywhere in the world become a worldwide phenomenon in a matter of hours.

The problem is that despite nations wanting to be progressive, they fear the disruption that technology will bring and will create roadblocks with the unchanging systems.



Consider this: the advent of online shopping for the West began in mid 2000. Nepal began implementation from mid 2010. Despite the delay of more than a decade, our system was not ready to adapt to this change. There are many reasons but one that comes to the fore is the unplanned, haphazard urbanisation which leaves the country with lack of identifiable addresses for delivery. Online businesses have thus been forced to take on a disproportionate risk of accepting cash-on-delivery as opposed to implementing online money transfer. Fast forward to 2020 and e-commerce still faces the obstructions of poor infrastructure, bad planning, corrupt and incapable leadership and in general, the system's inability to adapt.

Another example is the government's decision to ban advertising on social media

platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Youtube for companies in Nepal. The mass-proliferation of social media has proven to be a life-force for new, small businesses globally because of the explosive and highly profitable output provided by marketing through these platforms. Not only is it more financially accessible for local or small businesses but also has better options for reaching the target segment of the business. Some internet sleuths point fingers at the lobbying of traditional media companies for the ban and their inability to adapt to online mediums. Additionally, the government was not able to tax these industries, and sought answer in a ban.

Not using advanced targeting options that allow you to reach your ideal customer, not using sales funnels to encourage the customer to buy your product, and with no brand image focus, Nepali businesses tend to implement without adequate knowledge and skill. As the world moves

into ClickFunnels and Shopify era, Nepali businesses are still sitting on the fence of whether or not they need a website or a social brand presence.

The inability to adapt to the times was the downfall of a global brand like Nokia, and it is definitely going to hold back businesses in our nation. Whether you are holding on to traditional beliefs, regressive policies or holding back from opening up international transactions, the inability to adapt to the changing times will affect the economy adversely in the long run. The global pandemic has forced the nation to adapt to technology in education, governance and development but it needs to make progress in all sectors to ensure Nepal is not on a different calendar in time. **B**



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5 Must Have Apps For Every Smartphone User

Text: Sushil Neupane

Ever since the introduction of the first iPhone back in 2007, smartphones have grown to become arguably the most versatile tools that have ever been mass-produced. A part of the reason that smartphones have become so popular is that they offer a plethora of apps that can have amazing utilitarian functions. The availability of apps is also the reason why some mobile platforms became obsolete and some have effectively taken over the world.

Today, we will be talking about five mobile applications that we recommend everyone to have on their mobile devices at all times. All of the applications in this list are applications that we have used extensively and will definitely come in handy on a daily basis. Don't you worry, all the applications in this list are available to both Android and iOS users.

Evernote

Evernote is a list keeper, note taker, voice recorder, to-do manager, and webpage clipper. So it is a Swiss army knife of digital note-taking. The beauty of this app is that it has multi-platform compatibility and can be used with Android,



iOS, Windows, macOS, and basically any platform that can load a webpage. And trust me, Evernote has enough features baked in that it could give some word processing applications a run for their money.

The feature that I find the most helpful is the ability to save web-clippings. Let's say you are researching some articles on the internet and you found an article that you will be needing later. Instead of copying the URL of the webpage and compiling a list that will take you another fifteen minutes to decode

the next day, you can simply save the web clipping and have everything you need saved to your account which is conveniently synced across devices. The best part is that it leaves out all the things that you won't need like ads or the webpage misc.

And that is just the tip of the iceberg, you might be slightly overwhelmed at first but I assure you, you will find many ways to put it to good use once you get the hang of it.

Gaana

Gaana is a music streaming service that I have been using this app for over four years now and I must say it has a huge library. Sadly, you will not find any Nepali music on this platform but apart from that, there is really not much to complain about. You will find everything from the old classics to the now-trending K-pop. If you do get the premium subscription for around Rs 500 per year, you can download all your favorites and play them anytime you want.

I must admit that its competitor Spotify does have considerable brand appeal, but since that platform is not yet available in our region, Gaana is the next best thing. Apart from the brand colours and the app layout, the contents of both these platforms are practically the same.

The best feature of this platform is that it will urge you to discover music that you never knew you would like. The home page is very adaptive and lists out the latest releases, greatest hits, and recommendations based on your past interactions. Gaana ensures that there are no obstacles between you and your music. The only complaint I have is that the notification chime is not as per my liking.

LinkedIn

It really doesn't matter who you are, if you are engaged in any profession whatsoever, chances are LinkedIn will amplify your credibility and reach exponentially. LinkedIn allows you to create a professional brand for yourself which will showcase your profile, expertise, recommendations, and connections. I wouldn't normally put it this way, but LinkedIn is the Facebook of the business world.

The platform hosts over 500 million professionals from 200 countries so being on LinkedIn means that you are effectively putting up your profile to be seen by thousands of possible opportunities. The data that you view on LinkedIn is also socially approved so your connections can clearly see how many people and companies endorsed and recommended

"I've been using Evernote for years and the feature I like the most is the business card scanner. Under the camera note, you can find a business card mode. You just have to point your phone in that direction and it does all the work for you."

Ram Chandra Bhandari
Managing Director,
Vega Pharmaceutical

“LinkedIn is better than other social media platforms because there is no spam or junk content. Everyone tries to be civilised, professional and honest. Plus, you are more likely to find new business. So it’s less bothersome and more beneficial.”

Kamal Shrestha

Merchandiser and Creative Designer
Yuko Handicrafts

your skills. Having professional endorsements, recommendations, and testimonials on your profile will undoubtedly add to your credibility.

Not just that, you can also hunt for jobs or research new clients or companies that you come across. With LinkedIn groups, you can also find people who share your professional interests and build a powerful professional network. And, having all that in the palm of your hand is simply too good to pass on.

Snapseed

Snapseed is best defined as a middle-ground between a full-fledged image editing application and cool Instagram filters all packed into one easy to use package by Google. So, you must have a pretty good idea about what we are dealing with here. The USP of this platform is the level of control that you as a user have over the degree of the effect applied. If you are someone who takes photos from your smartphone camera, it’s safe to say that Snapseed will give you the tools to up your photography game.

This powerful image editing software can even work with raw camera files. Yes, you heard that right! Snapseed can make fine-tuned adjustments to exposure and detail levels without hampering the data of the original raw file. I personally know some photographers who have exported their photos from their laptops to their smartphones just to make a few

adjustments with Snapseed. It’s not that they could not do it on a computer, but doing it on Snapseed is that much easier.

Even for a novice, there are some pretty easy yet effective edit options like double exposure, lens blur, expand image, and a whole bunch of fun filters.

Turbo VPN

Although smartphones are super convenient, they also have the potential to put you at risk. The importance of digital security is real. Every time you connect to the wifi at your coffee spot, a restaurant, or any other public network for that matter you become vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Using a VPN adds an extra layer of security to your device, and Turbo VPN is the best free VPN client out there.

Turbo VPN is a simple VPN client that hides your internet traffic from anyone who tries to intercept your information via your network. On top of that, you can use Turbo VPN to unlock regional content like Instagram music, YouTube music, or a new Netflix library. You just have to pick the location of the server you want your device to show. Say you choose the United States, you gain access to almost all of the regional content that was blocked in Nepal. One potential downside is that you will not receive personalized ads, if you cared about those in the first place. **B**

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CDC Group establishes presence in Nepal

CDC Group Plc, the UK's impact investor for Africa and South Asia, welcomed Rabi Rayamajhi as Country Representative for Nepal. Rayamajhi joins CDC from the Department for International Development (DFID) Nepal where he was a private sector development advisor for four years and led projects in the financial and SME sectors. Prior to his role at DFID, he provided advisory support to the Investment Board of Nepal in promoting foreign investment and executing large-scale infrastructure projects in waste management, hydropower and cement. He started his career at Standard Chartered Bank and has an MBA qualification from Singapore Management University.

Srini Nagarajan, Head of Asia at CDC, said, "We welcome Rabi to CDC as our Country Representative in Nepal. His expertise in private sector development and extensive knowledge of the investment environment in Nepal will boost CDC's priority of providing increased long-term capital support to businesses and bolstering sector growth in the country. Rabi will be instrumental in strengthening our partnership with businesses and broadening our presence in Nepal as we work to enhance corporate governance, develop environmental and social strategies, promoting skills and job creation that power Nepal's economy."

Rayamajhi took the office at CDC's representative office in Kathmandu, where he is working closely with CDC teams across Asia. He will assist CDC Group to accelerate their commitment to invest more capital in Nepal, and support local businesses to advance their commercial success as they work to adopt internationally recognised environmental, social and governance standards. With a mandate that includes providing counter-cyclical financing during financial crises, CDC is playing a role in protecting jobs and

businesses. The firm's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has three areas of focus: 'preserve', 'strengthen' and 'rebuild'. CDC's goal is to support the economic stability that will improve the lives of millions of people in Africa and South Asia.

Rabi Rayamajhi, Country Representative for Nepal, said, "I am proud to be representing CDC in Nepal and supporting the execution of the organisation's mission to bring about lasting development impact and widespread economic growth in Nepal. In only a short period of time, CDC's commitment to Nepal's finance and infrastructure sector has resulted in improved access and connectivity throughout the country. I am keen to get to work on developing local partnerships that will continue to boost business growth and improve the lives of millions of people."

NMB Bank signs repeat loan mandate with International Finance Corporation (IFC)



NMB Bank has signed a repeat loan mandate with IFC, a member of the World Bank Group for IFC Loan of USD. 25 Million. NMB becomes the only bank in Nepal to receive consecutive financing from IFC over a span of two years.

This FDI will be the first of its kind being ushered into the country by a commercial bank in the current scenario and is set to give a morale boost in difficult times.

The mandate was exchanged between Sunil KC, CEO of NMB Bank and Santosh Pandey, Acting Resident Representative, International Finance Corporation, Nepal.

The credit line so extended shall enable NMB to meet the gap in financing being experienced by MSME/SMEs

in the midst of the setbacks caused by Covid-19 and also to encourage new entrepreneurs in the said segments.

Loan size USD 25 Million shall be utilised to support the Government of Nepal's growth plans and shall be invested in strengthening the priority sector industries, especially SME/MSMEs and Green Projects.

Online nomination starts for ICT Award 2020



The online nomination/application for the fifth edition of the ICT Award, a prestigious award in the information technology field in Nepal organised by Living with ICT, started from June 22 and will be open till July 31. The ICT award for this year has been delayed due to the COVID-19 crisis. The award ceremony, which is held on August 17 every year, will now be announced at a favourable time after the deadline for online application is over.

This year, ICT Award will be organised in 11 different categories. The Innovation Driven Crisis Response ICT Award and the Woman Icon ICT Award categories have been added this year.

Startup ICT Award, Product ICT Award, Rising Student ICT Award are the categories related to innovations and startups. Pioneer ICT Award, Nepali Diaspora ICT Award, ICT Entrepreneur Award and Media Person ICT Award are given to individuals. Digital Governance ICT Award and Digital Education ICT Award are given to government organisations. The ICT Award, which started in 2016, has so far honoured more than 30 individuals, organisations, companies and products in various categories.

This year, there are 12 jury members and 10 more jury advisory members to make the selection process of the award

systematic and easy. The selection process will take place in different stages. Online and SMS voting will also be conducted in certain categories.

In order to nominate and apply for the award, visit the www.ictaward.org and select the relevant category and submit the online form. When submitting details in the form, the applicant must include any video content that reflects the profile of the nominee.

Dabur launches Dazzl Disinfectant Floor Cleaner



Dazzl Disinfectant Floor Cleaner is touted as a highly effective in cleaning dirt from the floor compared to ordinary floor cleaners. It is scientifically tested to give sparkling floor while killing 99.9% germs with a pleasant floral fragrance. The brand is currently available in 500ml and 1000ml SKU at Rs. 140 and Rs. 265.

Air Sanitizer by Odonil has also been launched considering the consumer demand for air sanitiser during this pandemic, available at Rs. 238 in the market. It can be used in all home spaces and offices to fight air borne germs.

Datsun offers "Buy Now, Pay in 2021"

Acknowledging difficulties and limitations of Nepali consumers, Pioneer Moto Corp, the sole authorised distributor of Nissan and Datsun in Nepal, has come up with offer 'Buy Now, Pay in 2021'. Consumers are not obliged to pay EMI and interest for six months. The company bears all the liabilities for this period and consumers will get exclusive attractive discounts.

Datsun Redi go 0.8L and 1.0L and Datsun Go with 1.2L powerful engine are available in the market. On purchase of Datsun, consumers will be benefitted with extra various car accessories including one year insurance, one year free road tax and three years warranty and servicing. This offer is valid till the stocks last and conditions may apply.

Ford launches special offer for its customer on the latest BS6 compliant 2020 Ford vehicles



In its quest to 'Go Further' delivering the highest level of customer satisfaction, G.O Automobiles, authorised distributors for Ford vehicles in Nepal, launched a special offer for its customers on its latest BS6 compliant 2020 make Ford vehicles on June 26.

The major components of the offer has been 10 years finance facility, 30% down-payment, Deferred Payment Facility, COVID Insurance for a family, Special Cash Discount, one year insurance, Exchange Bonus, Loyalty Bonus along with three years warranty, three years free servicing and more. 10 years finance facility gives customer ample time to pay back as well as monthly EMIs will be low. The company feels that this is the best offer in the Nepal market as the offer is valid on fresh 2020 make vehicles. The offer has been constructed in a way to aid customers take a right decision.

G.O Automobiles has also been offering Ford Online Showroom, wherein customer can call and explore the vehicle desired online without customer needing to come to the showroom. This online assistance has made the purchase decision for customer possible.

166 stranded Nepalis repatriated from Oman via SalamAir

A SalamAir flight from Muscat, Oman repatriated 166 Nepalis on June 16. The flight was conducted via coordination between the Embassy of Nepal in Oman and SalamAir to bring

home the Nepali citizens. The embassy has requested the Nepalis to have the corona test at a place of their choice as the report of the corona test has been made mandatory for Nepalis returning to Nepal. Passengers had bought the tickets themselves and the flight fare had been declared by Embassy of Nepal, Oman. For Nepalis returning to Nepal, SalamAir charged 115 Omani Riyals; Rs. 36,106 as per the exchange rate on the flight date. IME Travels, a travel subsidiary of IME Group, is the General Sales Agent (GSA) of SalamAir for Nepal.

Samsung Plaza launches new website

As an extension to its digital platform, Him Electronics, the authorised distributors of Samsung electronics and home appliances, launched new website for Samsung Plaza (www.samsungplaza.com.np) on June 21. The new site showcases the features and price of Samsung products making it easy for customers to purchase Samsung products from the safety of their home. Seema Golchha, Director of Him Electronics, shared, "We are excited to launch the new website as a next step to further distinguish our presence in the marketplace with a stronger, more streamlined identity that will thrive for years to come. We look forward to serve our customers by providing new experiences of purchasing Samsung products in safety and comfort of their home through our newly launched website."

Nepal Red-Cross Society partners with Coca-Cola to support the fight against Covid 19

Nepal Red-Cross Society has partnered with the Coca-Cola Foundation to heighten the safety of frontline health workers and volunteers who are assisting patients during the Covid 19 pandemic. The project aims to provide safety gears and disinfectant items to health workers and frontline workers in public hospitals dedicated

for Covid 19 treatment, in all seven provinces in the country. The overall objective of the project is to serve approx. 60,000 health workers across the country including doctors, nurses, blood technicians, ambulance drivers, medical technicians, people in quarantine centers and community members at risk of Covid 19.



In this regard, the first handover ceremony commenced on June 30 on the premises of the Ministry of Health and Population in the presence of the Minister Bhanu Bhakta Dhakal, representatives of Coca-Cola in Nepal and Nepal Red-Cross Society. As a first phase of the project, safety gears and health equipment were handed over to Minister Dhakal for the health workers of Sukraraj Tropical Hospital, Teku as received by the Hospital Director, Dr. Sagar Kumar Rajbhandari.

The Art of Living Nepal celebrates International Day of Yoga virtually with Surya Namaskar Yogathon Challenge

The Art of Living Nepal celebrated a week long International Day of Yoga – IDY 2020 program in a grand way with participation from diverse walks of life through the use of technology. The International Day of Yoga has been celebrated annually on June 21 since 2015, following its inception in the United Nations General Assembly in 2014. The Art of Living Founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar played a significant role to establish June 21 as a day for celebration of yoga across the world. Nepal has also been celebrating the International Day of Yoga since its inception and considering the current situation; The Art of Living Nepal announced various

programmes and activities to celebrate International Day of Yoga through online platform. The programmes and activities included Yogathon: Surya Namaskar Challenge of 54 sets (108 rounds) and Sri Sri Yoga Course in which participants of Sri Sri Yoga course joined live exclusive yoga session with Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

Xiaomi launches Redmi Note 9 in Nepal



Xiaomi, one of the global technology leaders, announced the launch of Redmi Note 9 in Nepal on June 26. This is the second phone in the Note 9 series that has been launched. Together with the recently launched Redmi Note 9 Pro, the new Redmi Note smartphone line up continues to flaunt cutting edge design and innovation without the flagship price point.

Sourabh Kothari, Country General Manager, Xiaomi Nepal said, "We are thrilled to launch yet another smartphone in the Note 9 series in Nepal. Redmi Note 9 is a remarkable addition to our Redmi Note line and with features like the 5020 mAh battery, 48MP camera and the MediaTek Helio G85 processor, we hope the Mi Fans will love this product."

Redmi Note 9 has a 48MP main camera and 8MP ultra wide-angle lens. Its 2MP macro lens and 2MP depth sensor complete the quad-camera setup and a 13MP camera is positioned in-display to allow for maximum front screen display size.

It has an aspect ratio of 2.39:1, the same format commonly used in films, and with six different kaleidoscope options, everyone can shoot quirky, eye-catching videos in an instant, while the all new

document mode transforms your smartphone into a pocket-sized scanner.

Redmi Note 9 has an all-new look with the immersive 6.53 inch DotDisplay protected by a Corning Gorilla Glass 5 on the front. It features an array of other fan-favorite features and comes with the TÜV Rheinland low blue light certification for long-lasting eye comfort, and splash-proof nano coating for accidental spills.

The phone will be available for Rs 22,999 across over 1800 Mi Preferred partners, Mi offline stores, retail partners and online partners Daraz and Sastodeal very soon. The 4GB+128GB variant will be available in two colours; midnight grey and forest green.

UNL announces next step in the evolution of skin care portfolio, reiterating its commitment to a more inclusive vision of beauty

Unilever Nepal Limited announced today the next step in the evolution of its skin care portfolio, with the rebranding of its brand Fair & Lovely. Taking forward the brand's journey towards a more inclusive vision of beauty, the company will stop using the word 'Fair' in the brand name 'Fair & Lovely'. The new name of Fair & Lovely will be announced after necessary regulatory approvals.

Over the last decade, Fair & Lovely's advertising has evolved to communicate a message of women empowerment. In early 2019, the brand's communication moved away from benefits of fairness, whitening and skin lightening, towards glow, even tone, skin clarity and radiance which are holistic measures of healthy skin. UNL also removed any visuals or words on Fair & Lovely's packaging that could indicate a fairness-led transformation, including the removal of two-faced cameo showing shade transformation, as well as the shade guides.

UNL upholds principles that no association should be made between skin tone and a person's achievement, potential or worth.

Sanjiv Mehta, President-South Asia, Unilever said, "We are making our skin care portfolio more inclusive and want to lead the celebration of a more diverse portrayal of beauty. In 2019, we removed the two faced cameo as well as the shade guides from the packaging of Fair & Lovely and the brand communication progressed from fairness to glow which is a more holistic and inclusive measure of healthy skin. We now announce that we will remove the word 'Fair' from our brand name Fair & Lovely. The new name is awaiting regulatory approvals, and the pack with the revised name will be available in the market in the next few months."

Fair & Lovely is a pioneering technology that has made multiple skin health benefits available to millions of consumers at an affordable price. Fair & Lovely has a combination of vitamin B3, B6, C & E, glycerine, UVA and UVB sunscreens and allantoin, which are known to improve skin health and protect the skin from external aggressors and environmental pollution. The product works to improve skin barrier function, boost the skin's microbiome, improve skin firmness and smoothen skin texture to enhance radiance and glow holistically.

In Nepal the Foundation www.fairandlovelyfoundation.com.np was launched in 2019. Fair & Lovely Scholarship Program awards educational scholarships to women with aptitude, drive and ambition, to carve a place of pride, based on self-reliance, for themselves in society. Fair & Lovely Career Foundation helps to provide and encourage young girls and women to grow and take forward their dreams by bringing world class scholarships right at their fingertips.

Sujeev Shakya's new book to be Nepa-laya's first primary e-BOOK release



As with all business sectors, the publication business in Nepal has also been hard hit by the corona pandemic. However, the crisis also offers an opportunity to take the Nepali publication industry to the e-commerce and e-platforms. Nepa-laya has been making all its publication available through various mediums in addition to the regular traditional printed form. Nepa-laya books are now available worldwide through Amazon and Barnes & Noble networks. English edition of the books are also available as e-books on Kindle. Due to language barrier, Nepali books were not available as e-books as widely as desired.

"We tested various platforms developed locally in the past, but due to technical glitches it could not be continued," shared Kiran Krishna Shrestha of Publication Nepa-laya. "During the lockdown, one of our online booksellers, Thuprai came up with a new e-book solution and we were convinced of the outcome. Hence, we have now uploaded all our books on their platform. During the past month of lockdown, we were happy to see more than thousand copies of our books being bought as e-books on Thuprai," he added.

Realising the possibility, the new Nepali e-book platform has generated for the Nepali book market, Nepa-laya now plans for a primary e-book release for one of its upcoming titles. The book authored by Economic Analyst Sujeev Shakya, titled Arthat Pariwartan will be Nepa-laya's first title to be released primarily as an e-book.

"I am extremely excited to offer my new book as an e-book in the Nepali book market," said author Sujeev Shakya. "As the

title of my book also concurs, this is the change (Pariwartan) the book market is heading towards and I am hopeful this will be a new beginning for the Nepali book industry as well," he said. The book is scheduled for release to coincide with the start of the new Nepali fiscal year.

"As another experiment, we plan to release separate chapters before the book launch," said Kiran Krishna Shrestha of Nepa-laya. "We want to experiment the music launch model where we make single releases before unveiling the album. Hence, we will release four chapters as singles prior to the book launch," he revealed. The single chapter release will be done on weekly basis starting June 18, and will be available for reading on Thuprai App for Rs.15, while the complete book will be available upon release at Rs.250. A feature in the App has been developed to identify individual buyers of single chapters who will be automatically discounted while buying the whole book later.

"This model can be a pioneering icebreaker for the saturated book market in Nepal. As an economist, I see this as an opportunity for the entire book industry in Nepal" said Author Sujeev Shakya.

As a bonus feature, the chapters will be made available with an audio option, where the readers can also listen to the chapter being recited by the author himself. "This audio feature is a glimpse of our upcoming venture, which is to bring all our books formally in audio-book format," said Kiran Krishna Shrestha of Publication Nepa-laya. "With the rising young Nepali population familiar with the language but unable to read and write in Nepali, we see a big scope for Nepali audio books."

The e-book release of Arthat Pariwartan is planned for July 14. The recent release can be read through the Thuprai App, or by connecting to <https://thuprai.com/read/nepal-sano-desh-hoina/>

TOP PICK



Nivita Pradhan

Vice President, NYEF

Nivita Pradhan is the Vice President of Nepalese Young Entrepreneurs Forum (NYEF). She holds an MBA degree from the Ace Institute of Management. Pradhan oversees international partnerships and communications of Hydro Solutions, a family business with interests in hydropower, manufacturing, education, real estate and tourism sectors. She is also an investor in startup projects. Listed here are her pick of top brands:

Top 3 apps I use the most

- WhatsApp
- Gmail
- YouTube

5 things I want to do as soon as the lockdown is over

- Coffee with friends
- Visit my grandparents
- Help out more than giving donations only during these times
- Get a haircut
- Go for a hike



3 favourite restaurants

- Nina's
- Saigon Pho
- Le Mirch

A destination in Nepal I want to travel to

- Rara Lake

3 companies in Nepal doing well during the pandemic

- Bhatbhateni
- Khalti
- eSewa

3 women-run businesses I admire

- Aama ko Achar
- Khaalisisi
- Kazi Studios



5 global entrepreneurs who inspire me



- Sarah Blakely
- Jack Ma
- Warren Buffett
- Ambica Shrestha
- Mukesh Ambani

Gadget I cannot do without

- My phone

4 new things I tried during the lockdown



- Yoga
- Learnt to bake Eclairs
- Cooked Tteokbokki from scratch
- Caught up on reading

Music on loop

- "Laakhau Hajarau" by Yabesh Thapa

Top 3 TV series I have been binge watching



- Money Heist
- Go Back Couple
- Big Bang Theory

A charity I want to support

- Animal Nepal or Sneha's Care

The best work advice I have received

- From my Dad, Gyanendra Lal Pradhan: "If something is beyond your control, don't stress over it. Look for ways to overcome it. If you are still confused, seek a mentor."

HI5



Suvani Singh

Co-founder, Quixote's Cove

Photo: Swarup Ranjit

Suvani Singh and her partners started Quixote's Cove as a book shop in 2009. But they have gained popularity not just as a traditional bookshop but for the literary events they organize and their work with schools and colleges to set up libraries and manage projects with a focus on developing a reading and writing culture. They also supported the founding of Word Warriors, Nepal's first spoken word poetry group, in 2010 and continue to engage thousands of young people interested in art, literature and poetry through this platform.

Currently, they are managing the U.S. Embassy Book Bus, a mobile library and creative learning space, through which they work with communities all over Nepal. The Book Bus functions like a public library that serves its community by providing access to information, conducting innovative education programs, creating safe spaces for communities of practice, and encouraging free expression. Moreover, they also work with a pool of writers and translators to provide publishing services like writing, copy editing and translations. And they occasionally publish books through their imprint, Safu. Notably, during this pandemic, they are producing digital content as well.

Quixote's Cove has multiple verticals. They have diversified into creating content in different mediums over the past decade. Being surrounded by books, writers and artists means there is never a dearth of ideas to explore and stories to tell.

In this edition of B360, Suvani Singh shares with our readers the five things that have impacted her work and life.

Working Amid Challenges

The creative sector in Nepal is an emerging

“I will refrain from engaging in an exercise where I have to imagine one person holding so much power that they are able to change a world event. Change comes through collective effort so if we wish to undo something, then we should reflect on our failures and work on sustainable and egalitarian solutions.”

industry. Nepal has a rich cultural and artistic history but our educational system and policy regimes are not designed to support creation and innovation. Within such a scenario it is imperative for any person seeking to think outside the box to learn from people working in different industries and coming from diverse backgrounds to engage in a variety of perspectives. If the diversity in Nepal is represented in every level of the economy and governance, it will be easier to veer towards a more creative and innovative culture that can address the problems of today and mitigate the injustices of the past. There are also a lot of challenges in creating feminist work spaces in Nepal. And so I am thankful for the advice, suggestions and critical feedback I continue to receive from people I work with. It helps me identify

my blind spots, learn from my mistakes and better my practice.

Living for Others

I am inspired by the many people who have stood up and continue to stand up against inequality. Looking at the world today, it is disheartening to see how some of us have continued to profit and prosper on the misery and pain of others. The people who stood up against these systemic forces, many of whom lost their lives to the violence that these regimes internalise, have directly contributed to the freedoms we enjoy today. Our freedom and self-expression are luxuries that are constantly under threat from the totalitarian ideas of people, who imagine themselves as heroes and saviors. I draw inspiration from those who dedicate their lives for the creation of a better tomorrow, one that doesn't just replicate the systemic oppression of the past.

The Working Culture

I realised very early on that being able to start a business was a privilege and this has significantly influenced the way our work has moved forward. The history and traditions that shape my privilege have been challenged by people in the many democratic movements that have shaped Nepal. Unfortunately, the extractive system that I am embedded in has only gotten stronger and more insidious. Much of this realisation shapes the work we do and the working culture we seek to realise. We've tried to create safe spaces, but that doesn't put us beyond criticism and fault - you have to feel safe to express yourself but with this comes a responsibility to your peers and to yourself,

else you've just gone ahead and created an aristocracy of exclusion. I believe that trying to make our businesses and society more inclusive is our collective responsibility.

Learning and Unlearning

Working closely with young people from diverse backgrounds is what I am most grateful for. My team keeps me grounded as I learn a lot from their experiences and their perspectives guide me in learning more about myself and the changing work landscape. New developments, ideas and externalities - like the ongoing pandemic - provide both opportunities and challenges for us to adapt our work, learn and grow. Over the past decade, I have worked with three generations of youth who have now moved on elsewhere. It is a pleasure to see some of them fulfill their potential, continue to struggle and come out stronger. It is a constant reminder that things are always in flux and will never remain. I am always trying to make our work and working process reflective of our evolving values and the changing realities of today's world. Creating a work space that provides a safe space for our team members to be themselves and challenging them to become better professionals and people means that you have to consistently be learning, unlearning and re-imagining, re-creating and re-doing.

Change is a Collective Effort

I will refrain from engaging in an exercise where I have to imagine one person holding so much power that they are able to change a world event. Change comes through collective effort so if we wish to undo something, then we should reflect on our failures and work on sustainable and egalitarian solutions. **B**

GET FIT

EXERCISING AFTER LOCKDOWN HERE'S WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



Sandesh Palungwa Limbu, Certified professional fitness instructor, founder of RAGE Fitness, and specialises in mixed martial arts.

After staying home for months during the lockdown, you will require to exercise caution as you get back to your work and workout routines. The one thing anyone of us must never forget is that COVID 19 is still a part of the ecosystem, and getting yourself exposed unnecessarily is not wise at all. Please continue to maintain the hygiene and safety protocols even though it may often seem cumbersome and unnecessary.

Talking specifically about exercise, some of us have remained active and worked hard on our fitness and health, while many of us have remained sedentary or inconsistent in exercise. If you are part of the latter group, I would suggest that you take things slowly and rev up your workouts in a planned way. Start with 50 percent of volume and intensity of what you were doing prior to the lockdown and gradually work your way up. After the first week, you should be working out at 75% and in three weeks, you should be at the level you left off pre lockdown.

A few things you should keep in mind during these times:

AT THE GYM

- Gyms are not yet open, but when they do, you should be certain that they follow extra measures of safety and hygiene.

- At the gym, avoid numbers. Focus on your workout routine and move out as you get done.
- Always wipe the stations down yourself before touching any equipment. Leave it clean too as a basic courtesy to the next person.
- Avoid taking showers in the gym and do not spend extended time in the locker room.
- Between you and others instead.
- During group classes, you must ensure that you are at least six feet apart from the next person. Do wash your hands before and after the workout.
- Stay well hydrated, start slow, listen to your body and don't forget your warm up and cool down sessions.

considerably reduced outdoors provided you stay aware and avoid unnecessary risks.

- Sports that do not involve shared contact such as golf, badminton and tennis need not be avoided.

Your physical fitness is incomplete without proper attention to your nutrition and mental wellbeing. Eat fresh and home cooked meals only, stay



- Carry your own sipper, towel and sanitiser to avoid any contamination.
- If you have any concerns for safety, discuss it with your trainer or the manager at the gym.
- Wearing a mask during light workouts is not a problem if you do not have respiratory or cardiovascular conditions. You may find yourself getting fatigued and your body temperature rising while wearing a mask while working out. It is always better to ensure there is proper ventilation and enough physical space

OUTDOORS

- Walking and running outdoors is only recommended in wide open spaces where you can keep at enough distance from others.
- Avoid touching any kind of surface outdoors.
- Always keep a mask and sanitiser at hand.
- Stay hydrated and dress according to the weather.
- Avoid socializing and meeting with people. A distant hello should not be misconstrued for being snobbish in these times.
- Risk of infection is

hydrated, and spend at least 10 minutes at the beginning and end of your day on meditation or simply quiet time with yourself. Stressing over what you cannot control is neither good for your mind or your body, things may seem a little difficult as we readjust and readapt to the post covid world, but focusing on the positives and looking after and honouring our bodies will help make life simpler and better. **B**

ALLOWING FEMININITY TO FLOW



Sadhguru. Named one of 50 most influential people, Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, a bestselling author & poet. Sadhguru has been conferred the "Padma Vibhushan" by the Government of India in 2017, the highest civilian award of the year, accorded for exceptional and distinguished service.

Never before in the history of humanity has a woman had the opportunities she has today, simply because technology has leveled the playing field. When physical strength was determining life, naturally masculinity would dominate. Now that technology has leveled things, whether you are a male or a female, your physical strength is no longer the deciding factor as to how far you can go.

However, we still continue to magnify this simple biological difference that nature has created, to the extent that what should have been only one aspect of our life unfortunately has seeped into every aspect of our life. You do not have to be a man or a woman in every aspect of life. You can just function as a human being. But in today's society, we have established these things in such a hardcore, straight-jacketed way that we think this is nature's way. It is not. The segregation is purely social. We need to work ourselves out of this baggage.

The most important thing that a woman should guard against is trying to become like a man. Because of this baggage that has existed for such a

long time, a woman may think that everything masculine is superior. This whole idea of what is superior and what is inferior is very masculine. If you look at life, everything has a role to play.

The reason why the 'masculine' has been more important than the 'feminine' till now is because during all these thousands of years of our existence as human beings, our core focus has been survival. Just going and getting food was such a hard task. Only in the last 50 years, our food got really organised. Now you can just go into the supermarket and buy whatever you want.



Today, for the first time, humanity is at a point where we can relax our survival attitudes a little bit. If we relax our survival instincts, you will see, naturally the femininity becomes very significant. But unfortunately, modern societies are not relaxing their survival instinct; whether it is a car or a home or whatever, we are just raising the bar.

Right now the whole world is ruled by economics. When money is the only important thing, masculinity becomes the most dominant part of our social structure. Unfortunately, we are moving in that direction.

Femininity is being totally obliterated in many ways, especially in Western societies, and it is beginning to happen in India also.

Masculine and feminine attributes should be looked at in terms of two qualities, not in terms of male and female because there are women who are more masculine than men, there are men who are more feminine than women. If the feminine has to really flourish, if it has to flow, we need to create a society where our values are more spread out to all aspects of life. When music, art, love, care, when all these things become as important as

hold back anything. That is a woman's way of operating. That is the best way to operate in the world.

When you operate out of personal ambition, you may do a lot of things, but not necessarily towards your own wellbeing or anybody's wellbeing. Global warming for example is just a consequence of unbridled human activity. If we continue like this without any concern for what is around us, we will ultimately neither have a man nor a woman left.

If femininity found a better expression on this planet, maybe our stock market would not hit great highs, but generally people would smile more, be a little more happy, a little more loving; life would be a little more beautiful. After all, it is in pursuit of human wellbeing that all activity is done. But that has been completely forgotten because the way of the masculine world is to go somewhere without much attention to what is here and now. The 'feminine' is not trying to go anywhere; the 'feminine' is happy where it is. If these two aspects are in balance, we will go somewhere but we will also enjoy where we are right now. That is what needs to happen in the world. **B**

economics, then a woman has as much role or even more of a role in life than a man. A home, a social structure, a nation, or humanity as a whole is not complete unless the feminine also finds full expression. You must make this happen in your own lives, around you and in the society. Otherwise, we will live very incomplete, lopsided lives.

Today, everybody is ambitious and wants to achieve success. But that is a very foolish way. There is a way to achieve success without being fired by ambition. If you are concerned about everything around you, you will naturally do your best; you will not



HIMA BISTA

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WOMEN LEAD NEPAL

Hima Bista is the Executive Director of Women LEAD Nepal, an organisation that grooms young Nepali women to become future leaders and change catalysers. Every year WLN invests in an inclusive group of young women to enhance their skill sets and provide

leadership opportunities. The young women then go on to drive social changes in their schools, communities, nation and the world. Some of the flagships programs are LEAD Course, Young Women's Political Leadership Institute (YWPLI) and OWN IT Nepal.

Bista identifies herself as a feminist striving to build an inclusive society. She is also a social justice activist who will not rest until all forms of gender based violence are abolished. As part of her efforts, she actively supports the causes of Dignified Menstruation and Rage Against Rape.

Bista has over 20 years of experience in the development sector. Prior to Women LEAD Nepal, she worked as the Managing Director of Nyaya Health Nepal | Possible. In that role, she was responsible for ensuring people living in remotest areas of Achham and Dolakha had access to basic



A LEADER INSPIRES, MOTIVATES AND USES THEIR EXPERIENCE TO MENTOR THE TEAM. A LEADER WILL SUPPORT THE TEAM WHILE ENCOURAGING THEM TO GROW, OWN THEIR DECISIONS, AND LEARN FROM MISTAKES. A LEADER WILL WALK WITH THE TEAM ACROSS THE FINISHING LINE. BUT A BOSS IS SOMEONE WHO DEMANDS, ORDERS AND USES FEAR AS A TOOL TO GET THE WORK DONE.

healthcare services. In the past, she also worked as the Head of Human Resources for DFID Nepal, UKAID.

Bista holds a Master's degree in Business Administration from Kathmandu University School of Management and MPhil in English from Institute of

Advanced Communication, Education and Research.

What's your definition of leadership? Is more expected of leaders in the trying times like the COVID crisis?

Leadership is about influencing, motivating and guiding a group to accomplish the common goal. Of course more is expected during these testing times. We are challenged with a situation none of us have faced before. When Nepal endured the earthquake in 2015, all of us tried to be useful to the best of our knowledge and went to support the most affected communities. But this time, all of us are confined to our homes, working remotely. This situation has pushed leaders to be pragmatic, open-minded and creative. Compassion by the leaders is the call of the day. We cannot afford to be rigid to the old style of managing and leading and need to adapt to changing circumstances and act urgently.

Whose leadership skills come to your mind when a 'great leader' is mentioned?

My current favorite is Jacinda Kate Laurell Arden, the Prime Minister of New Zealand. I absolutely admire Gloria Steinem, Benazir Bhutto and Sheryl Sandberg. These days I am awed by Mahua Moitra and how she leads the parliament. I also have tremendous respect for BP, not only as a literary figure but also as visionary. And lastly, I am greatly inspired by Rosa Parks. She is the epitome of how to lead a movement to its ultimate goal.

What distinguishes a leader from a boss?

A leader inspires, motivates and uses their experience to mentor the team. A leader will support the team while encouraging them to grow, own their decisions, and learn from mistakes. A leader will walk with the team across the finishing line. But a boss is someone who demands, orders and uses fear as a tool to get the work done.

What is your leadership style?

I believe in leading by example. I do not like to micromanage for it kills innovation, opportunities for growth, and learning from failures. I do not like to deflect and I am always there to take the blame for any failure in the system. Participatory approach is key to me and I value women leaders. I am also a fearless leader, for I believe being scared is a barrier for a leader, clouding one's judgment. I believe I am humble and carry compassion but am uncompromising when required.

Any incidence at Women Lead Nepal that you can recall which tested your leadership skills?

I am working with the youth at Women LEAD Nepal. This requires me to assess and read situations through their lens. I joined the organisation when it was going through a transition. The leadership passed from the founders to me, a person who was unknown to the team. This was a challenge but a challenge I have loved. It required me to prove myself in the eyes of these amazing young women in Nepal who are so passionate and dedicated. It took time for me to build that trust, to prove that I am a capable leader who will not compromise on the mission and values of the organisation. I feel gaining their trust is my greatest achievement at Women LEAD Nepal.

What happens when people in power and authority cannot demonstrate leadership acumen?

The institution falls apart. One may think you are getting away with deflection but in reality, it is actually the slow death of an organisation. It applies for the nation too. Incompetent leadership leads to a failed system with loopholes for corruption and staff with laid-back attitude. People in power need to be accountable to their stakeholders; and transparency is the key. Failure to comply with good governance breeds nepotism, groupism and unhealthy power struggle.

How are women as leaders different from men leaders?

There definitely exists a difference. Women leaders have bigger challenges and we need to be more resilient. Women leaders in the public sphere are also leaders in their private sphere, doubly burdening them. Their challenges then become unpredictable. It is not easy to break that barrier as it means compromising on several factors.

My experience shows that when men stand for each other, it becomes almost impossible to break that clique. For women building that solidarity itself is a huge task. If you are to lead, creating that circle of trust involves compassion, emotional intelligence and a lot more effort. Even more, when women leaders are vocal, we often see harsh criticism and unfortunately their silence is seen as being weak.

Are leaders born or built?

I see it as both. Some have this natural talent that needs a gentle push towards the right direction. In others we can see the potential, uplift their voices and groom to lead. That grooming may take years but strategic mentoring polishes leadership quality.

When should leaders hang up their boots?

I look at it from two aspects:

1. Leading from the frontline: this is generational and comes with age. A time comes when you have to understand that the next generation is ready to lead. A hard thing to accept but a leader is someone who sees this. Retirement from leadership is not the end but a change of guard.

2. Play an advisory role: experience is critical and that knowledge should be shared. I believe institutional memory of the generation above always stands as a foundation and it is up to the next generation to assess and not dismiss. **B**



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