From Remote Villages To Mt. Everest Base Camp,...

From P6

"At first they refused to come out of their homes, but I told them to maintain a safe distance and tell the doctors all the health issues they are facing," Subedi recalls. "Eventually they came out one by one and underwent testing."

This is an example of the challenges and lengths caregivers must go to in battling one of the world's most severe COVID-19 outbreaks in this landlocked, mountainous and impoverished country of about 28 million people, wedged between India and China. The World Bank estimates that about a third of Nepalis live close to the poverty line.

The pandemic is collapsing their already meager health system.

Nepal has been hit in recent months by the same COVID-19 outbreak that's raging in neighboring India. The country's Health Ministry says 97-percent of the cases it has sent for genomic sequencing reveal the B.1.617 variant first discovered in India.

The two countries are close physically and culturally. They both have Hindu majorities and share a porous 1,100-mile border. Millions of Nepalis work in India, and many of them traveled home to Nepal this spring, fleeing municipal lockdown restrictions during India's own COVID crisis. Remittances from abroad have slowed.

As Nepal struggles with the disease, there are also worries about a backlash: Dr. Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa, an epidemiologist based in Kathmandu, says migrant workers are being unfairly scapegoated for the virus. They're often among society's most vulnerable and poor already.

Nepali migrant workers return to Nepal at the India-Nepal border in Dhangadi, some 400 miles west of Kathmandu. Returning workers are often stigmatized because of fears they could be bringing the coronavirus pathogen from hard-hit India.

"A lot of people have started to blame the migrant workers, but they are not the only carriers. The other one is also our [former] king," says Sherpa.

Nepal's 73-year-old former king Gyanendra and his wife Komal reportedly tested positive for the coronavirus upon returning home in April from the Kumbh Mela, a giant Hindu pilgrimage in northern India, where millions of devotees took a ritual dip in the Ganges River – with little social distancing. Hundreds of thousands of Nepalis took part. The former royals were hospitalized in Kathmandu and have since recovered.

Sherpa says the royals' experience shows it's not just migrant workers bringing the coronavirus into India. Rich and poor Nepalis alike pass back and forth over the Indian border.

Even before the coronavirus hit, rural Nepalis in particular had little access to medical care. In the United States, there's roughly one doctor for every 385 people, according to World Bank data. In Nepal, the ratio is one doctor for about 1,430 people.

But most of Nepal's health workers are based in the capital Kathmandu and its surrounding valley, leaving huge swaths of the country with no doctors at all. So in rural Nepal, access to health care is almost negligible: The ratio is one doctor for every 150,000 people, according to another survey.

COVID-19 patients in Kathmandu receive oxygen as they wait outside a hospital for coronavirus patients that doesn't have enough beds for all those diagnosed. The photo was taken on May 13.

That was the backdrop for the country's worst COVID-19 outbreak, which began when cases started creeping up in April. Throughout May, Nepal confirmed its highest-ever daily tallies of new coronavirus cases – between 8,000 and 9,000 a day. A government dashboard shows nearly the whole country colored red, signifying the highest concentration of cases.

More than 580,000 Nepalis have become infected since the pandemic began, and the country has suffered more than 7,700 deaths. That means more than 2% of Nepal's population has tested positive for the coronavirus. By comparison, data from John's Hopkins University show about 1% of Americans have tested positive – in a much better-resourced health system.

Workers in protective gear carry the body of a person who died of COVID-19 or cremation on the bank of Bagmati River in Kathmandu. As a wave of infections sweeps Nepal, the only crematorium in Kathmandu Valley is struggling to cope with the flow of bodies.

Nepal's numbers are likely to be a vast undercount though, because testing is inadequate across most of the country.

"High up in the mountains, health facilities just don't exist," Karki explains. "The communities we work in are quite spread out, like there are four houses in one cluster, and another five houses 20 minutes' walking distance [away] in another cluster. So it's really, really difficult."

Nationwide, about 40% of coronavirus tests are coming back positive. But it can take up to two weeks to get test results. During that time, the infected person might spread the virus to many in their community.

While Nepal's outbreak appears to have originated in India, so too do many of the medicines and medical supplies used in Nepal. They're imported from India — and that's posing a problem now, as COVID-19 collapses supply chains on both sides of the border.

Earlier this year, when coronavirus cases were relatively low across South Asia, India donated one million doses of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine to its northern neighbor. The Nepali government also procured more doses from the World Health Organization's COVAX program, and from China. It ordered at least one million additional doses from the Serum Institute of India, the world's largest producer, and paid for them.

But in March, as India's own coronavirus caseload began to spike, the government halted exports. Nepal never got the remainder of its order. Many residents who'd received a first AstraZeneca dose were unable to get their second shot.

This week, China donated to Nepal another one million doses of its Sinopharm vaccine. The government is allocating them to residents age 60 and up. But overall, fewer than 3 million COVID-19 shots have been administered in Nepal so far. Barely 3% of residents have had both doses.

This crisis comes at a particularly unstable period in local politics: Nepal's president dissolved parliament last month for a second time in less than six months. Early elections are scheduled for November, though the courts are weighing several legal challenges to that. The turmoil has sent protesters into the streets despite orders to stay home amid the coronavirus threat.

Meanwhile, record numbers of fresh COVID-19 cases have overwhelmed even the best-equipped urban hospitals in the capital Kathmandu. The scenes are similar to those in neighboring India: Sick people dying in hospital parking lots, unable to get care. Others dying at home, unable to find an ambulance. Shortages of hospital beds, oxygen and anti-viral drugs.

"A Situation For Which We Were Not Trained"

Dr. Anup Subedee, an infectious disease specialist in Kathmandu, says his phone has been ringing off the hook.

"Very frantic calls asking, 'Save my father's life! Arrange an ICU bed!' — which we are almost always unable to do," Subedee says. "It's those kind of calls in the middle of the night. So it's mentally very taxing."

He works at HAMS Hospital, an elite private facility in the capital. But even there, the past few weeks have been brutal, he says.

"We couldn't admit new patients at all, because admitting someone new means we would not be able to provide enough oxygen for someone already in the hospital. So we had to turn away a lot of patients coming in very sick. We couldn't even advise them where else to go," he laments. "That was something we could not forgive ourselves for. It's a situation for which we were not trained." Subedee says caseloads have stabilized at his hospital in recent days. He's cautiously optimistic Kathmandu's wave may be plateauing. But he says infections now appear to be rising in smaller towns and villages.

"There are numerous people with cough and fever, and no test kits available for them at all – needless to mention, any contact-tracing, quarantine or isolation facilities for them," Subedee says. "So I'm sure people are dying completely undiagnosed even without the dignity of even having a [coronavirus] test."

Nepal's COVID-19 outbreak has even spread to the highest point on earth: Mount Everest, on Nepal's border with China. Trekking guides say at least 100 people — climbers and guides — have tested positive at Everest base camp, though Nepal's government has denied that.

"Everest to them represents a source of revenue. But there are a lot of tourists and local climbing guides who are already sick," Sherpa, the epidemiologist, says.

Nepal is allowing Mt. Everest climbs — an important part of their economy — despite the risk of COVID-19. Guides say at least 100 people have tested positive at Everest base camps (pictured, above), though Nepal's government has denied that.

While China banned foreign climbers from its side of the mountain during the pandemic, Nepal reopened its side of Everest to everyone this year, foreigners and locals, after its mountaineering season was canceled in 2020. As a result, China says it's setting up a "line of separation" atop its side of the peak, to keep climbers from the Chinese and Nepalese sides of Everest from mixing if they reach the summit on the same day.

Sherpa is concerned that while foreign climbers can afford to get airlifted to Kathmandu if they get sick on Everest, many of their local support staff cannot.

"Look at Mount Everest, there is no road! Even the few hospitals, they are supported by Swiss donors," she says. "There is no government hospital where there are ventilators, an intensive-care unit, or oxygen."

Back in Namanta, the village in the foothills where the World Neighbors charity organized coronavirus tests, the situation is still dire. So many locals are sick that they've been unable to care for their livestock. Animals are running loose around the village.

"They've been hit really hard – and forget about having hospitals or decent basic services," says the charity director Karki, sighing. "COVID cases in urban areas may be slowly declining, but in rural areas it feels like they're increasing. Whole villages are falling sick."

After that visit from health workers she arranged for the villagers last month, their tests came back: Seventeen out of 22 samples tested positive for the coronavirus. That's a 77% positivity rate. Six residents were so sick they had to be evacuated down the mountain to a distant hospital.

The rest of Namanta's residents are still isolating in their homes. They've run out of fever medicine. In the absence of any additional medical care, they're just following the lockdown rules, staying at home – and hoping this outbreak passes.

NPR correspondent Lauren Frayer reported this story by phone from Mumbai, India. NPR producer Sushmita Pathak contributed from Hyderabad, India.

What a Floyd Mayweather loss would actually...

From P5

Can't get enough boxing and MMA? Get the latest in the world of combat sports from two of the best in the business. Subscribe to Morning Kombat with Luke Thomas and Brian Campbell for the best analysis and in-depth news, including a complete preview of everything Floyd Mayweather vs. Logan Paul below.

Paul's trainer, Milton Lacroix, told CBS Sports he believes that lackadaisical stance will ultimately sink Mayweather by saying although he believes the five-division champion is taking the fight seriously, "I don't think he is taking it as if [Paul] is going to do any collateral damage."

The reality for Mayweather is that a loss of any kind would have the potential to put an enormously large stain on how painstakingly he has put his legacy to the maintenance of his perfect record. Then again, maybe that's the beauty in how Mayweather set this fight up.

As an exhibition, the result of the fight has no standing on Mayweather's 50-0 record from a historical perspective at all. The built-in excuses of everything from age to the giant gap in weight between the two could also be activated to help clean the initial - - and largely unavoidable -- gaping wound that would be caused by the embarrassment of losing this type of fight.

Then again, Mayweather didn't get to a spot where he could call himself "TBE" without knowing the financial realities of every situation. Mayweather will only add to his riches with this fight, which he has compared to robbing a bank in broad daylight. A loss, for however damaging it might feel in the moment, would only stoke the fires for an even bigger rematch, not to mention an inevitable fight with brother Jake.

The even bigger mess to clean up, however, in the aftermath of the internet breaking should Paul do the impossible would be boxing's reputation.

The idea of crossover entertainment fights -- such as the ones the Paul brothers have become the leaders of putting on, evidenced Jake signing with Showtime -- have been a slow or even non-existent sell to the sport's old guard of traditionalists. A win this big and seemingly impossible for an outsider against the very best of the most recent era could be received as a damaging black eye to the current state of business.

Or, one could look at that relationship for what it really is and realize that, for as long as this Paul-brother bubble lasts from the standpoint of inflated PPV sales, it's a rising tide of attention-grabbing headlines and renewed interest in the sport that raises all ships who preach undying love for the sweet science.

Muhammad Ali infamously fought 15 rounds (in what some consider a precursor to mixed martial arts) against pro wrestler Antonio Inoki in 1976 while still an active fighter and accumulated the damage of countless leg strikes in a disappointing draw that had little to no longterm adverse affect on Ali's brand (save the remaining juice it squeezed from his legs).

Former UFC champion Tim Sylvia was also knocked out with one punch by 48-year-old Ray Mercer, a former heavyweight boxing titleholder, in a 2009 MMA bout on a smaller promotion which, after the initial shock and shame, was largely forgotten.

Granted, Mayweather-Paul is happening on a much, much larger stage than the previous example and involving two of the most famous people in sports and pop culture across the globe. And the old phrase of "the internet never forgets" is probably a lot more true when one of the participants built his name upon clowning himself and others in order to mine internet gold.

Ellerbe, for what it's worth, isn't worried.

"He is having fun. Floyd knows how to handle himself and he has done a phenomenal job of being TBE," Ellerbe said. "This is an exhibition. He has accomplished everything one could ever want to in the sport being an active fighter. He is retired and I am very proud of him for walking away from the sport. He became a billionaire in the sport, the first to ever do it. He came from poverty and that's through hard work and dedication and having a great team. He was able to walk away and retire from this sport with all of his faculties and pass on the torch to the younger generation."

Only Mayweather hasn't exclusively walked away and clearly still has one foot in the door. It's just hard to believe Paul has enough in him to stomp on him and somehow sway the "Bragging Rights" into his favor.

"Bragging rights?" Lacroix said. "The only person who is bragging is going to be us. Floyd is going to be in misery."

Afghan Advertisement

AA 769

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN
Administrative Office of The President (AOP)
National Procurement Authority (NPA)

Project ID: P168266
Grant No: D4530AF
Project Name: Payment Automation and Integration of Salaries in Afghanistan (PAISA)
Assignment: APS Licenses Upgrades/ AfPay Systems Development Including Hardware Payment switch at APS
NPA Reference No: NPA/DAB/1400/G-197/ICB

Notification of Intention to Award

The National Procurement Authority (NPA) is supposed to award the contract, **APS Licenses Upgrades/ AfPay Systems Development Including Hardware Payment switch at APS,** under the Reference No: **NPA/DAB/1400/G-197/ICB** with **LNT Netlink Technologies L.L.C (License No: 577375)** Address: **(312 Alkhaleej Center, Bur Dubai UAE),** in the amount of **USD 389,941 (US Dollars Three Hundred Eighty Nine Thousand, Nine Hundred and Forty One)** inclusive of all local taxes. Bidders who appeal reconsideration or have any objection, they can submit their application within 10 Business Days to the National Procurement Authority, Pashtoonistan Watt, Kabul, Afghanistan from the date of announcement.
This Notification does not constitute award of the contract. The contract shall not be awarded until the notice provided elapsed and complaints, if any received, is addressed.

China extends reach in Hong Kong over Tiananmen Square vigil

In the face of a new national security law and the arrests of political activists, people in Hong Kong still took to the streets on June 4 to commemorate the 32nd anniversary of the massacre at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China.

Victoria Park, in northern Hong Kong, usually draws thousands of people waving candles to memorialize the still-unknown number of people who died during the Chinese government's crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989. But this year, Hongkongers who dared to show up in person were met with signs from police warning of their possible prosecution, and Victoria Park was barricaded shut.

Officially, 2021's Tiananmen Square remembrance was canceled by the local government because of the coronavirus pandemic, as it was last year. But activists told the BBC that they see this year's intervention as a step to silence dissent on the island, one of the few places in China where the 1989 Tiananmen Square activists have been allowed to be commemorated.

Last year, when police closed Victoria Park to the Tiananmen Square commemoration, demonstrators knocked down the barricades and continued their candlelight vigil. It was the first time the Hong Kong government had tried to stop the demonstration in 30 years. But since then, the Chinese government passed a new security law, which makes it easier to punish protesters and gives the mainland more control over Hong Kong.

The morning of June 4, the vice chair for the pro-democracy group Hong Kong Alliance, Chow Hang Tung, was arrested for posting about the remembrance online. Among other posts promoting the memory of Tiananmen Square, Chow called for people to "turn on lights everywhere, mobile phone lights, candles, electronic candles…" on her Facebook page the day before her arrest.

MCC bears transportation costs...

From P1

In addition to MCC's endeavors to tackle the challenges and develop the Aynak Copper Project, it has always tried to assist local people in whatever way it can to improve social wellbeing, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the statement further said.

In the early stages of the pandemic in April 2020, MCC donated medical supplies that included test kits, gloves, and face-masks. Similarly, in May 2020 during the pandemic lockdown, MCC donated foodstuff to the local people around the Aynak Copper Mine project. The food items included rice, flour, cooking oil, and sugar, the statement added.

"By the same token, MCC donated 70,000 facemasks to the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum of Afghanistan. The MoMP warmly welcomed the donations and thanked MCC for its timely assistance to protect its personnel during the pandemic."

MCC has been negotiating with the Government of Afghanistan to tackle the challenges related to Aynak since 2018. While the President of Afghanistan has approved MCC's proposal of modified open-pit mining method, there are still some pending unresolved technical issues to be solved in the future phases of negotiations. If the present contract renegotiations yield results, the development of Aynak Project will bring about tremendous economic benefits to the people of Afghanistan, the statement said.

The MCC hoped that the renegotiation between them and the Government of Afghanistan concludes as soon as possible so that the project could be developed in a win-win situation.

The Kabul Times

On reforms in Uzbekistan to enhance the role...

From P6

In 2019, the President made a decision on the development of the activities of the press services of state bodies, ensuring their openness to the people, close interaction with the media, journalists and bloggers, promptly informing the media and society on topical issues, as well as raising the status of press secretaries to the level of deputy head of organization.

It should be noted that currently more than 600 press secretaries carry out information activities in Uzbekistan. The measures taken made it possible to saturate the information field of Uzbekistan with information about the ongoing reforms and the work of state bodies in this direction.

Hence, today more than half of the news information flow on the Internet is formed through the active work of the press services of state bodies.

On September 14, 2019, a Public Council for the Development of the Information Sphere and Mass Communications was formed at the Parliament of the country in order to increase the importance of public organizations in shaping public opinion on topical issues in the information sphere.

It includes representatives of the media, public organizations, science and culture, as well as deputies, independent experts and specialists from other institutions of civil society.

On December 25, 2020, the Law "On Amendments and Additions to the Criminal, Criminal Procedure Codes of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan On Administrative Responsibility" was adopted, according to which of the sanctions of Articles 139 (Libel) and 140 (Insult) of the Criminal Code were penalties in the form of imprisonment are excluded.

As a result of the policy pursued, there has been a dynamic expansion of Uzbekistan's information space. In particular, over the past five years the number of registered media outlets has increased by 352 to 1,866, of which 630 are Internet media. At the same time, there are more than 1,300 users who identify themselves as bloggers and are actively engaged in media activities.

It should be emphasized that the national media began to actively perform the functions of public control, they began to pay attention to the coverage of the ongoing reforms, helping to identify and resolve issues of concern to the population, which favorably affects the activities of state bodies, local executive authorities when taking operational measures to eliminate significant shortcomings in their work.

In conclusion, it can be noted that the modern agenda of Uzbekistan includes active measures to further ensure freedom of speech and development of the media, and also remains open for fruitful and constructive cooperation with foreign countries and international organizations in this area.

Today it is clear that media activity and freedom of expression have a strong place in the new Uzbekistan's policy of openness.

Uzbekistan Embassy