**FEBRUARY-APRIL 2020**

The situation report from the Nepal Peace Monitoring Project (PMP) covers the trends of the incidents since the beginning of 2020 and makes a comparative analysis of incidents before and after the lockdown. We compared the month before lockdown from February 24 - March 23 with the month after lockdown from March 24 - April 23. The PMP gathered data on violent and non-violent incidents before and during the lockdown period by compiling reports from all major online news portals, national dailies, local newspapers from 20 districts, and incidents reports directly submitted to us. The goal of the report is to deliver an update and understanding of the incidents happening surrounding the pandemic of Coronavirus to better respond to the situation and to promote peace. The numbers recorded in this report are based on the reports mapped by NepalMonitor.org.

**INTRODUCTION**

The whole world is facing an enormous challenge to end the spread of Coronavirus which has affected millions. The situation is critical and recognizing the possible implication of negligence the government of Nepal has followed some preventive measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 by implementing nation-wide lockdown, setting up test centers for the Coronavirus and isolation wards in different parts across the country. Until April 23, the number of positive cases had reached 47. However, the government has not yet been able to establish comprehensive deliverable strategies not only to tackle potential Corona cases but also to counter its domino effect in social, economic, and psychological sectors. To deal with this pandemic, there is a need to further intensify the existing efforts, enhance coordination and cooperation, make the required supply of logistics, and increase the number of testing, among the key priorities.

On March 24, the government announced nation-wide lockdown within a few hours of the second positive case being found, before the crisis would cripple the country. Notwithstanding this, the country was not prompt in taking crucial decisions; for instance, shutting down international flights, especially flights from high-alert countries and regions; sealing neighboring borders, in particular, an open border of 1800 km with India; buying the necessary and adequate number of health kits including, gloves, surgical masks, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); allocating adequate budgets and distributing requisite health kits and treatment equipment at the provincial and local level; and coming up with an effective health and economic relief packages for the citizens. On April 6, the government decided to extend the lockdown till April 15 after another local citizen tested positive for Covid-19.

The lockdown has heavily impacted workers in informal economic sectors making people in need more vulnerable. The crisis has forced internal migrants to return to their villages after losing their jobs in the capital and other cities. With no social security in place, the only avenue for the next meal is the relief package from the local government for most of the daily wage earners. However, the arbitrary nature of relief distribution in absence of reliable data on the economically vulnerable group has left many into doubting whether the people who most need the relief are the ones getting it. The perceived partiality in relief distribution has caused people to protest even at the times of lockdown. Some people have gone as far as to assault the local representatives and to vandalize the office of local level, venting their frustrations over the whole process. Similarly, the immigrants in the Gulf region are concerned in host countries due to unemployment and no option of returning home as the borders are closed and international flights banned. The mass effort to save lives by going into lock down has put one vulnerable group more at risk. Women and children who have to live with their abuser of domestic violence have limited or no way to escape during the lockdown. Addressing the issues of gender based violence (GBV) itself was a challenge in Nepal and now COVID-19 has further worsened it.

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak as a global pandemic, lives have been upended and economic activities disrupted around the world. The World Bank’s recently released South Asia Economic Focus anticipates a sharp economic slump in Nepal’s GDP, with growth projected to range between 1.5% and 2.8% in FY20, a dramatic drop from the previous forecast of 5.3%. As remittance accounts for over 29% percent GDP and as the service sector accounts for over a half of GDP, the health of the global economy deeply affects the economy of Nepal. A prolonged outbreak of COVID-19 would have a severe impact on the global economy and would decelerate or contract services and industrial production in Nepal as well.

Service industries like tourism, airlines, and hotels will be hit hard in Nepal until the global economy recuperates from the recession. The tourism and hospitality sector provides a larger scale of employment in the country. The workers at the lower rung, such as tour guides and porters are hardest hit because they depend on seasonal work for the entire year. For Nepal, as tourism is the second-largest earner of foreign exchange, this industry was expected to drive the country’s economic growth and contribute greatly to the high growth target of 8.5 percent that the government had set for this year, however, this industry itself tends to be in a financial crisis. The contribution of the
tourism sector to Nepal’s economy stood at 7.9 percent in the 2018/19 fiscal year. As the pandemic threat rises, the government also canceled its ‘Visit Nepal 2020’ campaign, which was launched in January this year with the goal of attracting 2 million foreign tourists. The impact has also been visible in manufacturing industries as most raw materials are imported from China.

This situation report presents an update on the virus, its impact and the human rights violation during the time of this crisis. Even the health workers in the frontline who are working tirelessly are often being stigmatized and seen as someone who could be carrying the virus. Fake news regarding the virus via social media left the citizens in misinformation and trepidation. Whereas, many saw the crisis as an opportunity to cash in by overcharging on necessities such as face masks, hand sanitizer and other essential needs.

GENERAL TRENDS OF INCIDENTS BEFORE AND DURING THE LOCKDOWN PERIOD

NepalMonitor recorded 155 violent and 71 non-violent incidents during a month (February 24 - March 23) before lockdown and 149 violent and 25 non-violent incidents a month (March 24-April 23) during the lockdown. Several issues related to gender based violence (GBV), governance and political incidents triggered both violent and non-violent incidents. Before the lockdown, GBV witnessed the highest number of violent incidents with 82 cases recorded including those of sexual assault and domestic violence (See Fig: 1). Whereas, during the period of lockdown, the number dropped to 62. The decrease in the number of incidents recorded could be due to lack of access to report violence and proactive media reporting due to nation wide lockdown. There has been an increase in violent incidents related to governance which include violation of lockdown, protests regarding distribution of relief or aid and clashes with the police. Whereas, there was a significant drop in political related incidents (See Fig 1).

![Fig 1](image-url)

**Trigger of Violent and Non-Violent Incidents Before Lockdown**

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<th>Trigger</th>
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* A month before the lockdown includes the time period from February 24 - March 23

**Trigger of Violent and Non-Violent Incidents During Lockdown**

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* A month during lockdown period includes the time period from March 24- April 23.
During the lockdown, there was a decrease in violent incidents by four percent and a decrease in non-violent incidents by 65 percent (See Fig:2). Parsa district witnessed the highest number of violent incidents followed by Saptari, Kailali, Rautahat and Dhanusha (See Fig:2).

*When a month during lockdown is compared to the same before the lockdown. A month of lockdown period includes the time period from March 24 - April 23 and the month before the lockdown includes the time period from February 24 - March 23.

**Province-wise Violent and Non-Violent Incidents During Lockdown**

**Districts with Highest Impact During Lockdown**
The violent incidents resulted in 76 injuries and 30 deaths pre lockdown and 104 injuries and 27 deaths during the lockdown. This shows an increase in the number of injured persons by 37 percent and a decrease in the number of deaths as a result of violent incidents by 10 percent after a nationwide lockdown was announced on March 24 (See Fig: 3). Parsa district had the highest number of people injured as result of violent incidents followed by Sunsari, Saptari and Tanahu district (See Fig: 3).

**Fig 3**

**Province-wise Impact of Violent Incident During Lockdown**

**Districts with Higher Impact of Violent Incident During Lockdown**

**Impact of Violent Incidents Before and During Lockdown**

37% Increase in Number of Injured Person but 10% Decrease in Murders as a Result of Violent Incidents during lockdown*

*When a month during lockdown is compared to the same before the lockdown. A month of lockdown period includes the time period from March 24 - April 23 and the month before the lockdown includes the time period from February 24 - March 23.
INCIDENTS OF PROTESTS RELATED TO COVID-19

The crisis of COVID-19 not only confused and panicked people but also gave way to incidents of protests. A number of protests, both violent and non-violent, erupted across the country in response to the partiality in relief distribution, police violence against civilians during the lockdown, and allocation of Covid-19 hospital and quarantine in their locality among other causes. For instance, on February 14, residents of Bhaktapur protested against the government’s decision to use the National Drinking Water and Sanitation Training Center in Changunarayan-6, Bhaktapur as quarantine for students and crew members of Nepal Airlines who would come back from Wuhan, China. Similarly, on April 22, the local of Jirabhawani Rural Municipality started throwing stones at the office of the municipality after their demands for relief were not fulfilled even after a month from the lockdown. Whereas, on April 23 the cadres of then Rashtriya Janata Party (RJP) protested in Birjung demanding Narayani hospital should remain a general hospital and some other hospital in another place should be assigned as the level 2 COVID-19 hospital.

During the month before the lockdown, the PMP recorded 22 governance and 27 political related protests whereas, during a month of the lockdown, political incidents significantly decreased to 3 incidents and the governance related incidents to 19 (See Fig 4). There was a decrease of 89 percent in political incidents and the decrease of 14 percent in governance related protests. Figure 4 shows a rebound in the governance related protests after an initial slump starting as far back as a month before the lockdown. Given the dissatisfaction over the relief distribution in the local level, we may see a continued rise in governance related protest back toward the previous level over the next few weeks.

Fig 4
Protests Before and During Lockdown

*When a month during lockdown is compared to the same before the lockdown. A month of lockdown period includes the time period from March 24 - April 23 and the month before the lockdown includes the time period from February 24 - March 23. Data used for the above chart subject to the final quality control approval.
The first case of Coronavirus was confirmed by the officials from the Health Ministry. A Nepali student aged 32 who returned from Wuhan tested positive for Coronavirus.

175 students were brought back to Nepal from Wuhan and were placed in quarantine in Bhaktapur.

The government decided to stop issuing on-arrival tourist visas temporarily.

The government shut Rasuwagadi border to prevent the spread of Coronavirus after the number of infections in China soared.

The Ministry of Health confirmed that all 175 students tested negative for Coronavirus.

A meeting of the high level coordination committee for prevention and control of Coronavirus decided to add 115 ICU beds and 100 isolation beds in Kathmandu valley.

The government announced lockdown across Nepal.

The government banned all passengers including Nepalese from entering Nepal from European territories including UK, West Asia and Gulf region.

The national assembly was suspended indefinitely due to Coronavirus.

Three Indian nationals aged 37, 44 and 55 residing in a mosque in Birgunj Metropolitan city tested positive for Coronavirus taking the total positive cases to 12.

Second case of Coronavirus was confirmed on a 19 year old Nepali student who came back from France.

The government announced lockdown across Nepal.

A 19-year old woman who travelled to Kathmandu from Belgium via Qatar tested positive for Coronavirus.

A meeting of the high level coordination committee decided to extend the lockdown for one more week.

A woman from Baglung who travelled from Qatar to Kathmandu tested positive for Coronavirus.

A 21 year old man from Kailali and 41 year old man from Kanchanpur who returned from India and a 34 year old woman who was a relative of the woman who returned from the United Arab Emirates tested positive for Coronavirus.
CIRCULATION OF FAKE NEWS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA DURING COVID-19

During a health crisis, rumours and fake news can cause fear, distress and stigma putting the lives of many at risk. In the age of social media, one is just a click away to share fake news to reach thousands of people and create panic. Rumours in social media claiming that spicy noodles, drinking alcohol, eating food such as garlic, onion and turmeric can prevent the virus have been shared by hundreds of users. For the same reason of spreading fake news on social media, a youth was arrested for posting an audio clip saying that six patients tested positive for COVID-19 at Norvic hospital in Kathmandu. The hospital denied the rumour and demanded action against the person. On the same day, the Nepal Army denied the rumours about using helicopters to spray disinfectants to control the spread of COVID-19. Similarly, a pastor from Pokhara was arrested on March 23 while he was preaching that the followers of Jesus would not be affected by the virus. According to the police he might be imprisoned upto six months for preying false information as disease does not discriminate.

In April 18, after two Muslim women dropped few 10 rupee notes from their pockets while walking around Janakpur, in a few hours a video circulated in social media accusing them trying to spread COVID-19 by spitting on the notes and throwing it in a public area. After the video went viral, the women were taken into custody and a diagnostic test was performed on them. Both of them were tested negative. The suspicion against Muslims increased recently after 14 people majority of Muslim men were tested positive for COVID-19. The targeting of the muslim women was largely driven by Islamophobia which spread rapidly through social media.

STIGMATIZATION AGAINST HEALTH WORKERS AND PATIENTS OF COVID-19

The pandemic COVID-19 has created anxiety and stress in communities across the world. Moreover, it has stigmatized health care workers, suspects and patients of COVID-19 and people who have recently returned from abroad. For instance, a nurse at the dialysis unit of Lalitpur’s Alka hospital quit her job and went back home in Kapilbastu as her landlord demanded her to choose between her hospital job and her rented room in Kathmandu. According to the landlord, as a nurse she was at risk of contracting the virus and they couldn’t take the risk of having her stay in their house. The hospital has been providing food and shelter to staff who have not been able to go back to their rented rooms due to discriminatory behavior by the landlords. On March 31, police arrested a landlord in Ghorahi, Dang who asked his tenant, a staff nurse, to leave the flat as he feared contracting the virus from her. In Sindhuli, health workers have been forced to live in hospitals after landlords refused to let them in due to fear of risk of getting infected by the virus. About 22 health workers have faced such abuse in Sindhuli.

Similarly, Prasiddhi Shrestha, the second person who tested positive for Coronavirus after returning from France, faced severe negative comments and death threats in social media accusing her of bringing the virus to Nepal. Since the virus is highly contagious with high mortality rate, the stigma associated with it can significantly impact the person’s overall well-being. It is necessary to intervene against this stigma through an urgent advocacy by the community leader and policy makers.

USE OF FORCE DURING THE LOCKDOWN

On April 15, the police beat up three resident doctors of Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital and Kanti Children Hospital who were returning home after finishing their duties, for violating the lockdown. Even when they showed their ID cards, the police did not stop beating them. The Metropolitan Police Office pulled Umesh Lamsal, the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) and in-charge at Metropolitan Police Circle, Maharajgunj, from his duties after the incident. Similarly, on April 16, a woman one her way back after buying medicine was beaten by the police in Kalanki.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 CRISIS ON MIGRANT WORKERS AND THE FLOW REMITTANCE

Emigrants and migrant labour workers play a significant role in strengthening Nepal’s economy as remittances contribute to almost quarter of the country’s GDP. As a result of the pandemic, remittance sent by the migrant workers is expected to drop by 14 percent in 2020 bringing along economic hardship. In 2019, Nepal was among the countries which brought in large amount of remittance of $8.64 billion. As the government of India imposed a complete lockdown across the country from March 24, thousands of Nepalese working in India started walking back home. About two million Nepalese live and work in India, many as low wage laborers. From March 22, all the open borders with India were closed and all international flights were banned to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. For daily wage workers and laborers, the lockdown means that they are now deprived of their only source of income. On March 24, the suspension bridge that connects India to Nepal in Darchula opened for a day where about 500 Nepalese had gathered on the Indian side demanding to let them in. Similarly, on March 27, the Nepali authorities rescued 225 Nepalese from Darchula by opening the bridge. On March 30, three Nepalese swam across the Mahakali river from India to enter Nepal as the borders closed. They were detained on
the Nepal side border by the security personnel.\textsuperscript{21} Moreover, dozens of dead bodies of Nepali migrant workers are stranded for weeks in the destination country due to travel restrictions, restricting the families to perform the final rites of their loved ones.\textsuperscript{32}

In another instance, the authorities in Qatar used COVID-19 as an excuse to deport 400 Nepali migrant workers.\textsuperscript{33} According to Amnesty International’s interview with 20 Nepali men who were arrested by the police, they were told that they would be tested for the virus and later would be allowed to return to their accommodation. However, they were taken to detention center and kept there for several days in an horrific condition and later sent back to Nepal.\textsuperscript{34} None of them received any explanation as to why they were treated that way nor were they able to go against the detention and expulsion from their jobs.

\textbf{NATIONWIDE LOCKDOWN AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN AND GIRLS}

The government of Nepal has issued stay at home orders for more than a month now to prevent the spread of COVID-19 further increasing the existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities. The outbreak of the virus has put women and girls at risk of domestic violence and violence by relatives or intimate partners due to increased tension in the household caused by economic hardship.\textsuperscript{35} The PMP recorded 82 incidents of GBV before the lock (from Feb 24 - Mar 23) with 20 incidents of domestic violence and 59 incidents of sexual assault including rape. Similarly, during the period of lockdown (March 24 - April 23), 62 incidents of GBV were recorded with 18 incidents of domestic violence and 44 incidents of sexual assault including rape (See Fig 5). According to the PMP’s data there has been a decrease by 25 percent during the lockdown compared to the data before the lockdown. It is important to note that due to the nation wide lockdown, the number of cases reported and published in the media could have decreased and the actual number is likely to be much higher.

\textsuperscript{21} When a month during lockdown is compared to the same before the lockdown. A month of lockdown period includes the time period from March 24 - April 23 and the month before the lockdown includes the time period from February 24 - March 23.
CORRUPTION AND BLACK MARKETING

The government began the crackdown after frequent reports of black marketing and over price on items. On March 5, the Department of Commerce, Supplies and Consumer Protection Management fined a total of Rs. 430,000 to several sellers for overcharging customers after conducting a raid on seven pharmacies and surgical shops in Kathmandu.36

On March 15, the police seized over 106,800 face masks from Dallu and 100,000 units from places of Kathmandu like Thamel and Maha Boudha.37 Similarly, on March 18, the police seized one million face masks from a warehouse in Swoyambhu, Kathmandu which were stockpiled to be sold in the black market.38 As the outflow of people from Kathmandu increased, some transport entrepreneurs saw this as an opportunity to overcharge the passengers as they panicked and rushed to go home. For instance, on March 21, the police arrested 23 transport operators and their workers from different parts of Kathmandu valley for over charging the passengers.39

On April 1, Provincial Assembly member of Bibeksheel Nepali Party filed a complaint against Minister of Health and Population Bhanubhakta Dhakal at the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority for misusing the state fund in the procurement of medical equipment for COVID-19.40 In a press release by the party, they claimed that the medical equipment was procured at prices which were four times higher than the market rate.

On April 7, Nepal’s Honorary Consul for Kyrgyzstan and executive director of Shankar Group of Companies Sulav Agrawal caught red handed while negotiating the price of infrared thermometers with police men dressed in civil dress as buyers.41 He demanded Rs. 15,000 for each thermal gun which was sold in the market for Rs. 3500.

On April 11, the Department of Commerce, Supplies and Consumer Protection took action against two meat shops and six gas and grocery stores in Kathmandu as they were found guilty of selling goods at high prices to the consumer during the crisis.42 Also the Department of Drug and Administration warned the public to be careful as poisonous hand sanitizers are being sold in the market.43
CONCLUSION

The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown has affected the people of every stratum but more so the workers in the informal sector and service sector, emigrants, and the people from marginalized groups. This report shows a decline in the number of violent incidents during the time of lockdown. However, it goes without saying that the likelihood of domestic abuse at the time of lockdown is higher as women who live in an abusive environment are compelled to spend more time together with their abusive partners or family members. Non-violent activities in a month of lockdown also saw a decline but there has been a surge in governance-related incidents especially since the third week of lockdown due to the protests related to relief distributions and the incidents of violence during the enforcement of lockdown. These protests are further likely to increase if the local governments are unresponsive or partial in the relief distribution process. The government is monitoring the black markets but we may see a surge in the black marketing should the government fail to ensure the supply of essential goods.

With the changing dynamics of violent and non-violent incidents during this pandemic, NepalMonitor will closely be monitoring violent and non-violent incidents along with other important issues such as black marketing, corruption, xenophobia, and stigmatization against health workers in these difficult times.
1. See: Nepal Goes into Lockdown, to Come into Force From Tuesday
2. See: Nationwide Lockdown Extended till April 15
3. See: Nepal: Economy
4. See: Nepal Received Rs.784 As Remittance | New Spotlight Magazine
5. See: Nepal Development Update
6. See: Nepal tourism generated Rs 240 billion and supported 1 million jobs last year: Report
7. In this report, the period of pre-lockdown includes the time frame between February 24-March 23 and the period of lockdown includes the timeframe from March 24 to April 23.
8. See: Locals Protest Decision to Quarantine Health Workers, NAC Crew in Nagarkot
9. See: Locals Protest and Vandalize in parsa Demanding Relief
10. See: Protest in Birjung Demanding COVID-19 Hospital to be Designated Elsewhere
11. See: Stop the Spread of Fake News
12. See: Youth Arrested for Spreading Rumours of COVID-19 Cases
13. See: Norvic Hospital Refutes Rumours of hiding COVID-19 Cases
14. See: Army Dismisses “Helicopter Spraying Disinfectant at Midnights” Rumours
15. See: Pastor Held for Misguiding Followers with COVID-19 Misinformation
16. See: A Worrying Rise in Islamophobia Ever Since a Number of Muslim Men Were Diagnosed with Covid-19
17. See: As Covid-19 fears grow, some medical personnel face eviction from their homes
18. Ibid
19. See: Police arrest landlord for evicting a staff nurse from her rented house in Dang
20. See: Landlords Forcing Health Workers to Stay in Hospital in Sindhuli
21. See: First she tested positive for Covid-19. Then she started getting death threats
22. See: Police baton charge doctors, NMA demands action
23. See: Police take action against DSP Lamsal for ‘beating’ doctors
24. See: Police Beats Woman Returning After Buying Medicine
25. See: Nepal Stands to Lose Rs. 145 Billion in Remittances This Year
27. See: Hundreds of Nepalese stuck at India border amid COVID-19 lockdown
28. Ibid
29. See: Nepalis Are Swimming Across the Mahakali to get Home
30. Ibid
31. See: Nepalis Are Swimming Across the Mahakali to get Home
32. See: Bodies of Dozens of Nepali Migrant Workers Await Repatriation as International Flights are Shut Down Due to Pandemic
33. See: Qatar Used Coronavirus Pandemic as a Ruse to Expel Nepali Migrant Workers, Amnesty International Says
34. See: Qatar: Migrant Workers Illegally Expelled During COVID-19 Pandemic
36. See: Government Cracks Down on Price-Gouging By Pharmacies and Surgical Shops
37. See: Police Seize One Million Masks
38. Ibid
39. See: 23 persons Held for Fleecing Passengers
40. See: Complaint Lodged Against Health Minister Dhakal at CIAA
41. See: Consul for Kyrgyzstan Agrawal Arrested for Black-Marketing Thermal Gun
42. See: Govt. Fines Eight Firms, Including Meat Shop, During Lockdown
43. See: Covid19 Roundup, 9 April: Migrants Cross Mahakali, Rapid Test Kits and Substandard Sanitizers Proliferate

ENDNOTE
The Nepal Peace Monitoring Project (PMP) is a joint initiative by Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP) | NepalMonitor.org. Building on the NepalMonitor.org platform, the PMP focuses on violence and contestation, with a view toward improving our understanding of, and response to, violence and conflict in Nepal. The PMP also provides an instrument to measure progress against Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Targets 16.1 (reduction of all forms of violence and related death rates) and 5.2 (elimination of violence against women) in Nepal.

The PMP monitors:

Violence: any incident involving the intentional use of physical force against another person or group that results or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, or other forms of physical harm to persons or damage to property.

Non-violent contestation: demonstrations, protests or other types of non-violent events that involve collective action and may be of potential significance to violence dynamics in Nepal. This includes strikes (bandh), hunger strikes, padlocking and other forms of political protest. Incidents involving intimidation and threats but no direct physical violence are also tracked.

The PMP uses a broad range of information sources, including national and district-level newspapers, and reporting from police, human rights organizations, international agencies, civil society organizations, and citizens directly. For each incident, the PMP collects detailed information on the following variables: time and location of the incident, form of the incident, weapons used, reported cause/motive of the incident (political competition, land dispute, communal tensions, crime etc.), affiliations of perpetrators and victims, human impacts (broken down by gender and age) and damage to property.