

Purpose of presentation

My study is concerned on :

- The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the southern border of Nepal with India.
- How the activities of the borderland community people of Nepal and India were affected during the pandemic period.
- Role of government agencies and organizations during and post-pandemic period.
- Suggest to regulate Nepal-India open border in a phase wise basis to:
 - Check the virus carrier travelers,
 - Obstruct unwanted elements, criminals, terrorists, narcotic holders, human traffickers, smugglers, fake Indian currency exporters.

Presented at the FIG Congress 2022,
11-15 September 2022 in Warsaw, Poland

Background

Location of Nepal

- Nepal is a landlocked sovereign state between two emerging Asian giants, India and China.
- Nepal shares 1880 km border with India on the south, east, and west and China 1439 km on the north.



- There is an open border regime along 1880 kilometer long Nepal-India Boundary.



- Nepalese and Indian borderlands community inhabitants could cross the porous border from anywhere many times a day without any obstruction and interrogation in a normal situation.
- During COVID-19 pandemic corona virus spread period (transitional period), the border was closed.
- After the relax of lock down, the border crossing points have been vigilant, i.e.
 - neither fully opened nor strictly regulated, after the pandemic case has gone down.

Case Study

- There are 20 main border crossing points between Nepal and India.
- I have taken Belahia - Sunauli (Nepal-India), one of the main crossings.



- It is located at mid-southern Nepal.
- This is the busiest crossing of all 20 border points.



Nepal Frontier Border-Crossing Gate



Indo-Nepal open border crossing point (Belhity Nautanua) must be converted into regulated border crossing point.
Indian Frontier Border-Crossing Gate



Belahia-Nautanua (Nepal-India) Border-Crossing Gates on both the Frontiers

Movement of travelers from the case study crossing point

1. Year before COVID-19 pandemic, 1.28 million travelers crossed this border point from ***India to Nepal*** (Sunauli-Belahiya):

Passenger coming from India to Nepal, annually (round figure)	Among them	
	Nepali citizens Returning from India to Nepal	Indian citizens entered from India to Nepal
1,281,600 persons annually	273,600	1,008,000

2. At the same time, 1.36 million travelers crossed this point from ***Nepal to India*** (Belahiya-Sunauli):

Passenger going to India from Nepal, annually (round figure)	Among them	
	Nepali citizens going to India from Nepal	Indian citizens Returned to India from Nepal
1,368,000 persons annually	486,000	882,000

3. Travelers commuting daily from **India to Nepal** (Sunauli-Belahiya) round figure:

National	On foot, bicycle, ricksha	by truck	by small vehicle	by Indian bus	by Nepali bus	Total passengers daily	Total persons, annually
Nepali	300	40	120	50	250	760	273,600
Indian	400	800	1,200	350	50	2,800	1,008,000
Total= 1,281,600							

4. Travelers commuting daily from **Nepal to India** (Belahiya-Sunauli) round figure

:

National	on foot, bicycle, ricksha	by truck	by Small vehicle	by Indian bus	by Nepali bus	Total passengers daily	Total persons, annually
Nepali	800	100	200	50	200	1,350	486,000
Indian	300	700	1,000	350	100	2,450	882,000
Total= 1,368,600							

Around 2,000 borderland people commute daily in one another frontiers.

Border management during COVID-19 pandemic

- During the COVID-19 pandemic period (24 March to 21 July 2020) :
 - Border management system was changed from open border to closed border on both the sides.



- Lockdown was announced on March 24, 2020 from both the countries in the same day, restricting the movement of people from both sides.
- However, the cargo truck vehicles had been relaxed to and from one country to the other.
- It affected the daily life of the borderland inhabitants.

Border Security force before COVID-19

- Before COVID-19 pandemic, Nepal had deployed 5,000 Armed Police Force (APF) along the border
 - in 120 border observations posts (BoP),
 - 40 APF personnel in each BoP on average.
 - 6 to 10 kilometer apart in the plain area and 8 to 15 km apart in hilly region



- Whereas, India had deployed 45,000 special security bureau (SSB) with 530 BoP, 2 to 4 km apart having 85 personnel in each and every BoP.
- There had been deputed immigration and customs officers, intelligentsia and security personnel in the border crossing check-points

Border Security force during COVID-19

- During Covid-19 pandemic period, Nepal border security force was expanded temporarily from 5,000 to 8,000 and 22,000 personnel.
- Border Observations Posts (BoP) increased from 120 to 320 and 500 numbers (including temporary) :
 - to vigil and obstruct the movement of people.
- It was enforced even not to let walk on the road without emergency situation.
- However, special passes were provided from the local body and district administration
 - to borderland community inhabitants to go to the funeral and ritual purposes on the other side of the border.
- Corona virus test health camp was established.



Border Security force after COVID-19

- When COVID-19 cases more or less subsided :
 - number of BoP has gone down to 228 number with 10,000 armed police personnel.
 - Number of 220 BoP at Nepal-India border (7,700 personnel).
 - Number of 8 BoP at Nepal-China border (200 personnel).
- There are police post, immigration and customs posts and armed police personnel patrolling along this Belahiya-Sunauli border crossing-point.
- They permitted to cross the border in a regulated manner.



Feeling of borderland community inhabitants

Before Covid-19 pandemic:

- Indian frontier inhabitants would use to come to Bhairahawa Nepali weekly open market to sell their farm products such as vegetables, fruits, milk, ghee and consumable goods in a higher price.



Nepal-India Weekly Open Market,
Hari Bansa Jha (2010), The Economy of Terai Region of Nepal, cover page



- Nepalese borderland community people would go to Indian Sunauli market to buy sugar, salt, spices, daily necessities and cotton clothes in a cheaper rate in comparison to Nepali market.
- But, during COVID-19. lockdown period, movement and daily activities of borderland community people were obstructed.

Feeling of . . .

- They felt it as harassment.
- The borderland communities were not happy, as the border was closed for eight months during COVID-19 pandemic period.
- Border closure had affected also the wedding programme of the borderland inhabitants.
 - For example, twenty-year-old Nepalganj Municipality inhabitant Ali Shaiyad's marriage had been stalled for months and months.
- Scheduled to tie the knot with a boy across the border in April, the wedding kept being postponed indefinitely as the border was closed due to corona virus pandemic (Himalayan Times Daily, 2020).
- The postponed wedding ceremony was held after the border crossing movement was relaxed in some extent.

Covid-19 pandemic situation in Nepal

<i>Date</i>	<i>Total test (PCR)</i>	<i>Confirmed Case</i>	<i>Recovered</i>	<i>Death (Total)</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
January 23, 2020	1	1			First identified
May 16	281	281	36	1	First death
March 24 to July 21, 2020	NA 319,872	2 23,948	1 16,664	0 80	80 death in 120 days during Lockdown period
July 22 to August 19, 2020	323,835 554,388	18,094 28,257	12,648 17,700	50 156	106 death in 29 days
August 20 to Sept 13, 2020	566,220 831,362	29,645 54,159	17,964 38,697	181 474	293 death in 24 days during Restricted period
Sept 14 to December 31, 2020	851,405 1,932,477	56,788 260,593	39,576 252,359	510 2,690	2,180 death in 109 days
Till December 31, 2021	4,859,355	828,431	811,958	11,554	8,864 death in one 2021
March 23 to May 5, 2022	5,517,174 5,648,397	978,426 978,884	965,394 966,730	11,951 11,951	0 death in 44 days
May 6 to September 1, 2022	5,650,847 5,891,935	978,914 997,526	966,747 982,366	11,952 12,002	51 death in 120 days

Note: 17% confirmed case of total PCR test./ 98% Recovered of total confirmed case/ 1.2% death of total confirmed case.

Source: Ministry of Health & Population Nepal & Nepal Corona metre

Vaccine used in Nepal

Regarding the vaccine used in Nepal,

- The first jab of one million doses Covisheild (Oxford-Astrazeneca vaccine) was started on January 27, 2021.



Dr. Sagar Rajbhandari (Right side) and Dr. Anup Bastola, SukraRaj Tropical & Internal Disease Hospita, Teku, Kathmandu, taken first jab vaccine

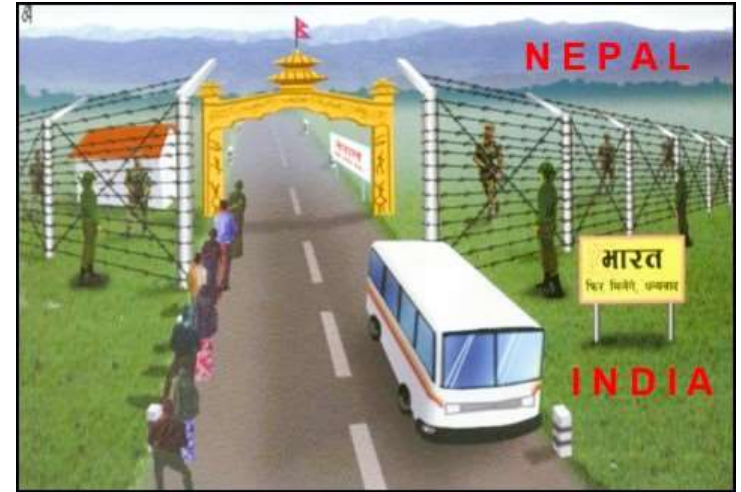
- The second phase jab was started from 16 May 2021 with the Chinese vaccine (Sinopharm's Vero Cell BBIBP-CorV) and Indian COVAX with 3.5 million doses.
- The third and booster dose was started from 17 January 2022 with Indian Covax and Chinese BBIBP-CorV vaccines.
- Until the end of March 2022, with the use of total vaccine in all three jabs
 - 19,115,357 people (65.5 percent of the total population) have been fully vaccinated and
 - 2,183,913 (12% of vaccinated people) have taken booster shots.

(Kathmandu Post Daily, 2022),

Conclusion

Nepal-India border must not be closed, neither it should be open and open.

- It should have exit and entry border crossing points in designated spots along the border.
- It should establish COVID-19 virus check-up health desk.
- All the passengers must produce Virus free certification or should have been examined thoroughly whether they are carrying the corona virus.
- After the rigorous health checking, they should permit to enter into the immigration desk.



Suggestion

- ID-card system should be introduced while crossing the border.
- In the immigration corridor, digital camera, with a stand, should be fitted over a desk.
- A traveler/passenger must put his/her ID Card or citizenship certificate card on the desk, just under the fitted camera.
- After clicking the digital camera, he/she should take back ID and
 - proceed out of the corridor to cross the international border.
- At the same time, he should be monitored by CCTV cameras from inside the corridor and digital image should be saved into the monitoring devices.
- It should be permitted, in a regulated way, to cross the border to:
 - genuine passengers, virus free travelers and borderland community inhabitants
- This system strengthens the relation of borderland communities of both frontiers.





Panoramic view of hilly area of Nepal

Thank you