

Impact of COVID-19 on Nepal-India Border and Borderland Communities.

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SUMMARY

Non-peer review

Impact of COVID-19 on Nepal-India Border

and Borderland Communities*

Abstract

Key words: open border, check unwanted elements, corona affected travellers, regulate border.

Nepal-India Boundary is 1880 kilometer long. There is an open border regime since centuries. Nepalese and Indian people cross the border from anywhere many times a day without any obstruction and interrogation from the porous border. However, unwanted elements have misused the open border.

During the COVID-19 pandemic period, open border was changed into completely closed border system. Lockdown was announced on March 24, 2020 from both the countries, restricting the movement of people. The borderland communities were not happy, as the border was closed for complete five months during pandemic. It affected their daily life as it was restricted the movement of travelers and frontier inhabitants.

The 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. Nepalese borderland 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. Besides, five

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million Nepali people would go to India for permanent and seasonal job. Similarly, nearly four million people come to Nepal for work annually. But this usual activities had been obstructed due to spread of corona virus.

There are 19 major border crossing points between Nepal and India. I made a case study on the impact of borderland community of Belhi-Sunauli (Nepal-India) crossing-point during COVID-19 pandemic period. This is one of the major crossing gates through which 1.28 million travelers crossed the border to Nepal and 1.36 million people entered into Indian side from Nepal during 2019, before the spread of corona pandemic. But during the pandemic period the movement of people was less than a thousand.

Nepal-India border must not be closed for ever, neither it should be open and open. Borderland community inhabitants have close relationship since historic times in terms of kith and kin, pilgrimage and social factor with each other. In fact, the border must be regulated during and after the Covid-19. It should have exit and entry points in designated spots along the border. ID card should be introduced while crossing the border. It should establish corona virus check-up desk with sufficient health workers at crossing-point. All the passengers must have been examined thoroughly whether they are carrying the corona virus.

Now, a new mechanism should be introduced at the border crossing points. In the immigration corridor, digital camera with a stand should be fitted over a desk. A traveler/passenger must put his identity card and COVID-19 cleared proof on the desk just under the fitted camera, that should be clicked within some seconds.

This system or mechanism could check and arrest the international criminals, terrorists and corona virus affected travelers on the border, not to let them misuse the international border between Nepal and India. (493 words)

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