A MODERN PLAGUE

Fourteen years ago, Nepal reported its first case of dengue fever. Now, dengue patients can be found even in the Kathmandu Valley, nearly 1,400m above sea level. The disease has spread as a result of climate change, which has created warmer, more hospitable environments for the Aedes mosquito to breed and bite.

Insight

Dr. Ishan Gautam from Tribhuvan University examining stagnant water at a rubbish dump site in Bhaktapur.

Dengue struck his father, daughter at the same time

When dengue first emerged in Nepal in the 2000s, the disease was rare. Last year, the capital city, Kathmandu, was covered in dengue fever. This year, the country reported 37 dengue-related deaths.

Tens of millions of people, including 40 per cent of the world’s population, live in areas where the Aedes aegypti mosquito can spread the virus. The World Health Organization estimated that every year, 390 million dengue infections occur, with more than 96 million cases of severe dengue. That number is expected to increase sixfold by 2085 as a result of climate change.

Nepal is not the only country that has a suitable climate for the Aedes aegypti mosquito. During the monsoon season, usually from June to September, Nepal’s wettest season, stagnant water in pools, gutters and near water pumps and irrigation ditches can become a positive habitat for mosquitoes to breed.

This year, the Nepal Health Research Council set up a dengue research lab in Kathmandu to increase the country’s diagnostic capacity. The lab has already tested 27 Nepalese patients for the mosquito-borne disease.

In the worst-case scenario, said Dr Acharya, a quarter of the population would be exposed to dengue by 2085 as a result of climate change. This would be exposed to dengue by 2085 as a result of climate change.

There is no specific treatment for dengue fever. In severe cases, patients are treated in hospitals.

In 2015, the number of dengue cases was 370,000. Last year, the number was reported to be 400,000. 

A study by the World Health Organization found that the dengue virus is expected to spread to 84 per cent of the world’s population by 2085 as a result of climate change.