Enough already

Last week, it looked like the rift in the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) between Prime Minister K P Oli and co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal was finally settled after a compromise deal between the two leaders allowing Oli to stay on as prime minister till April next year, and electing Dahal as party head.

Then the two drove off to see President Bidhya Bhandari so she could be a witness to the deal. However, at that meeting on 14 July, Oli did not mention handing over the prime ministership. Dahal’s was immediately suspicious that Oli was backtracking, and called his daughter Ganga Dahal to post on Facebook that there was no deal.

The honeymoon did not even last 24 hours. This new evidence shows what little trust there is between Oli and Dahal, and how the party and country are held hostage by an ego clash between the two. There is nothing ideological about this, insiders say. It is not about principles. The Dahal faction doesn’t like Oli’s go-it-alone attitude, and the prime minister doesn’t see any reason to give up both elected posts.

De prime ministers Madhav Nepal and Jhal Nath Khanal, from Oli’s erstwhile UML, are piling on pressure on Dahal not to trust Oli’s words. And the prime minister has got two fence-sitting leaders, Home Minister Ram Babu Shrestha and former minister Bishnu Poudel, to his side.

This puts Oli in a majority in the NCP Secretariat, which he has been trying unsuccessfully to convince. Meanwhile, the Dahal faction is trying to hold the often-postponed Standing Committee meeting in which Oli’s group is in a minority. On Wednesday, 15 members signed a petition calling for a Central Working Committee meeting to solve the dispute in the party.

As the leadership standoff continues, second tier leaders fear that the party is heading for a split. Oli is waging paywar on Dahal – on Wednesday he dropped in unannounced at Bishnu Poudel’s residence in Bhaisepati, a move that was sure to make Dahal even more suspicious after the smiling faces went up on Facebook.

If the rift widens in the coming days, Oli may fall back on his option of passing an ordinance allowing parties to split. This would pave the way for him to revive the UML, which he has already re-registered. He has also been meeting opposition NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba, possibly to forge some kind of coalition to keep the NCP out.

The power struggle within the NCP is happening at a time when the country is facing health and economic emergencies. Unemployment is soaring, and there is a serious surge of coronavirus cases in Terai border cities with evidence of community spread.

At a time when the government’s entire focus should be on tackling these emergencies, it is preoccupied with a fight-to-the-finish between the two alpha males of the ruling party.
Lockdown may be over, but the pandemic is not

As the number of cases and fatalities rise in the central Tulu districts while the lockdown is being lifted, the debate is whether Nepal has now progressed from cluster to community spread of COVID-19.

The Ministry of Health maintains that we are still in the cluster stage, as per the WHO definition. However, epidemiologists in the Tulu say SARS-CoV-2 is now spreading in the community. Some cities are sealed.

Whether we are in the cluster or community spread stage is a moot point. This is an unending, full-time pandemic that is still raging in neighbouring India and around the world. Southeast Asia and Europe are being hit by a second wave. The only thing we know for certain is that there is still a lot we do not know about the virus.

But what we know is that this is one epic-calibre pandemic of the century. Human behaviour and exploitation is authenticity. Initially, jumping the species barrier it spread human-to-human. Then it piggybacked on global mobility through asymptomatic infections, ensuring virus carriers were not too far to be hidden.

The virus has now figured out a way to lie low, allow people to get complacent, so it can make a comeback. It might even mutate into strains to take advantage of different behaviour patterns and climatic conditions. The virus takes advantage of countries whose leaders are in denial or have underestimated it. After older people started taking precautions and staying home, it is now infecting the youth.

From the experience of countries that have done well to keep the virus in check, we now know only three things: wear masks, maintain social distancing, avoid large gatherings, and physical separation. That message has to go out, with behaviour change in the population.

Finance Minister Bishnu Prasad Poudel said a second lockdown made a boo-hiss on announcing on 21 July that the lockdown had been lifted. It was not true — long-distance travel and flights would resume on 17 August, bars, restaurants and schools would reopen, hotels would open only on 30 July.

But Nepalis itching to get back to business after four months of confinement only heard that 'the lockdown is lifted'. It gave them a false sense of security, shops opened, and there was a rise in returns from India. The announcement was premature, and it now threatens to undo the time we bought from the lockdown to put safeguards in place.

On 28 July, Nepal recorded the highest number of daily cases in nearly a month with 319 new COVID-19 positive people and 3,012 tested. Since then, it has been over 200 a day, with a record 1,463 cases for Kathmandu Valley. There are also record numbers of daily cases and fatalities in India, especially in states of Uttar and Bihar where widespread restrictions. India has now seen more than 2 million cases and 33,000 deaths, third highest after the US and Brazil, in Nepal, increased.

Cross-border mobility led directly to a surge in new cases in districts, and since long-distance buses will start operating again from 17 August on a question of time before the virus spreads in this midst. Nepal needs to get prepared.

Fed up with the government’s incompetence in handling the pandemic, young activists have been on a more vocal hunger strike in Kathmandu. On Thursday they completed 15 days without food and water. Caught up in an interpersonal struggle, the government is too distracted. The government needs to get a grip on its situation, and just do two things right:

1. Launch a massive nationwide awareness campaign: 'The lockdown may be over, but the pandemic is not. Take these precautions.'

2. Mass testing in the community. Questioning, tracing, and testing, to keep infections within clusters.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

2 years ago this week, Nepal Times published an article on the 30th anniversary of the 1980 Tulsipur Massacre. For decades, there has been a bitter fight between Nepal and India over the issue. Today, the issue continues to simmer.

The article highlights the need for peace and reconciliation between India and Nepal. The Nepal Times considers the Tulsipur Massacre as a significant event in the history of Nepal and calls for a resolution to the dispute.

23 years ago, this week, Nepal Times published its 20th print edition (5 August 2000). The third anniversary resonated with issues like politics, women empowerment, and environmental conservation. The stories printed were not only about the present but also set the stage for the future.

For the archives of Nepal Times of the past 20 years, site search www.nepaltimes.com

Online packages

Stop complaining, start contributing

People's Movement 1990, prachanda, Mulayat 2015, nepalbhu snb, nepal bhu

The story of Langtang cheese

Visit our site for this week’s Langtang cheese! Langtang’s making story is growing up! Langtang making story, and moving Nepal’s oldest cheese factory after the 2015 earthquake. Stop by page 5.

Freshwater dolphins make comeback in Nepal

Despite the endangered Ganges freshwater dolphins have made a comeback in Nepal, swimming upstream from India to the Karnali river. Nepal has the highest number of freshwater dolphin species in the world. But there isn’t enough to watch from this remarkable because of COVID-19.

Most visited online page

Vocal for Peace (Times) – Nepal government has announced that the campaign against blocking mass communication is over. The government has lifted the blocking of mass communication.

What’s Trending

Vocal for Peace (Times) – Nepal government has announced that the campaign against blocking mass communication is over. The government has lifted the blocking of mass communication.

Most popular on Twitter

Freshwater dolphins (Times) – Despite the endangered Ganges freshwater dolphins have made a comeback in Nepal, swimming upstream from India to the Karnali river. Nepal has the highest number of freshwater dolphin species in the world. But there isn’t enough to watch from this remarkable because of COVID-19.

Most commented

Freshwater dolphins (Times) – Despite the endangered Ganges freshwater dolphins have made a comeback in Nepal, swimming upstream from India to the Karnali river. Nepal has the highest number of freshwater dolphin species in the world. But there isn’t enough to watch from this remarkable because of COVID-19.

Q & A

Vocal for Peace (Times) – Nepal government has announced that the campaign against blocking mass communication is over. The government has lifted the blocking of mass communication.

Freshwater dolphins (Times) – Despite the endangered Ganges freshwater dolphins have made a comeback in Nepal, swimming upstream from India to the Karnali river. Nepal has the highest number of freshwater dolphin species in the world. But there isn’t enough to watch from this remarkable because of COVID-19.

Most read

Vocal for Peace (Times) – Nepal government has announced that the campaign against blocking mass communication is over. The government has lifted the blocking of mass communication.

Freshwater dolphins (Times) – Despite the endangered Ganges freshwater dolphins have made a comeback in Nepal, swimming upstream from India to the Karnali river. Nepal has the highest number of freshwater dolphin species in the world. But there isn’t enough to watch from this remarkable because of COVID-19.
SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

A fine drizzle, only seldom are we rewarded with a sun-dappled dawn or a spectacular many-hued sunset. The undulated earth is heavy and sodden, the grass downed, and flowers dashed. The floods and landslides of Nepal’s annual monsoon seem very real.

Inside the house, my entire early Nepali life is spread across the dining table. Haaps of folded photos, tattered letters, newspaper cuttings, slides and mementos, until I sorted into bygone years with the elusive hope of getting them selected, discarded and stacked into the big blue scrapbook. It is a slow and distracting process, perfect for long pandemic evenings.

During the early days of Tiger Mountain, with summer rain swelling rivers, closing roads and precluding tourism, normally, I would be travelling to promote Nepal’s heritage, jungle and trekking attractions. Our sources were mainly US and Europe in the 1980s, and with industry colleagues I would do sales tours and attend travel shows, encourage media visits and fashion shoots – anything to draw attention to Nepal’s incomparable culture, nature and mountains.

Between promotion trips, the feeding photos testify that you might find me salmon fishing in Iceland with Jim Edwards, hula-dancing to China for Lifeflight Travel, on a wildlife cruise to Alaska or scuba diving adventure trips in Eastern Sierra. With a marketing budget of close to zero – Jim was always a little vague about money – some of this travelling would have been possible without the sales of random friends, and the free standby tickets on Pan American Airlines that we represented in Nepal.

The joys of flying standby are overrated. Only if there was an empty seat could I board the flight, usually at the very last minute, a nail-biting stressful experience lingering nervously around check-in that I never got used to. Jim counselled to dress smartly as that improved the chances of getting upgraded – in those un-wake days Pan Am served caviar in first class but did not permit blue jeans. I regularly got stranded along their air-routes in Delhi, Frankfurt, London, New York, San Francisco, and once even ended up in Guatemala as the direct flights were full. Even checking the loads and in supplication to the power of the ground staff, never could one be sure to travel.

Other than hippos, I was most often asked about the Yeti, especially in North America where our Abominable Snowman was a sympathetic sort of Bigfoot and Sasquatch. Yetis featured in movies, expeditions, books and articles dedicated to investigating the existence of these mythical creatures, upright monsters of Himalayan folklore with distinctive fearsome and hairy characteristics, drooled by the Sherpas and other mountain peoples as well as throughout Tibet. Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation hosted Yeti service, with a startling status bearing an illustrator marking the RNAC headquarters at the bottom of New Road.

Many early Himalayan mountaineers have claimed sightings since climbing explorers Eric Shipton and Michael Ward first found a Yeti footprint in 1951 on the Mealing Glacier west of Mount Everest. Reports include hunched dark shapes disappearing over a ridgeline, huge boulders running across remote alpine snowfields, looming shadows appearing in biloards, and even, once, with their heads “scrawled off” by the beast. Such was its intrigue that Sir Edmund Hillary and Griffith Pugh mounted a winter expedition in 1960 and 1961 to Saltwaling and Khumbu in search of the Yeti, a Sherpa word meaning “wild man”, with the writer and painter Desmond Doig as the “official reporter”.

Edmund’s “Yeti search gave us many exciting moments as we tracked down the threads that seemed so often to be leading to an unanswerable answer, but never did. At the end of it all, we reached a definite conclusion that the Yeti was a myth.” With Sherpa headman Konchoh Chomol and Khimlung monastery’s conical-shaped Yeti scalp, they toured the world to tell the story and make scientific tests. Desmond recorded their lack of findings in his book, High in the Thin Cold Air.

Amongst the dusty negatives on my table are contact sheets of photographs I took of Desmond Doig at Bodmin in 1960 being interviewed for an ITV film about the Yeti presented by Arthur C. Clark. Our hunt was “a great grand mess. Any self-respecting Yeti would have kept way away from us... with our 660 portals, 200 Sherpas and about 40 of us.” Desmond loved any fanciful unsolved mystery, so preferred to keep his options open.

Twisting anthropologists and researchers, the elusive Yeti continues to confound science. Yeti-obsessed ecologist Daniel C. Taylor, author of Yeti: The Ecology of a Myth, found a trail of footprints during a 1983 search of the Harun, but eventually concluded that it is more likely to be a bear. Yetis still court controversy as we saw recently with the absurd Visit Nepal Year 2020 painted sculptures that divided national opinion.

The closest I came to any Yeti was when American scientists, Jeff McReynolds and R W Croxen stored a silver tin trunk of 1972 specimens from the Upper Barun Khola in the cupboard under the stairs in the Saneba house. I vividly recall Jeff showing me the white planter cases of alleged Yeti footprints, which have since gone missing.

The precious trunk was confiscated by customs at Kathmandu airport when British zoologist Andrew Laurie tried to ship it out for Jeff in late 1974. Andrew remembers: “A tranquilizing gun had inadvertently been tucked in the bottom of the case, and I was nearly arrested for illegal possession of firearms.”

The planter footprints were sized by customs officials as “national treasures” and never seen again. A recent attempt to locate the silver tin trunk in the government go-downs was unsuccessful.

As I return to my painstaking picture sorting, I reflect that after the onslaught of so many monsoon rains, there is unlikely to be anything left of the crumbling Yeti relics.
Sheryl Lee

Nepal’s schools have been closed now for nearly five months, and while some have shifted to online classes, Zoom and YouTube are not the answer for schools in the districts. Teachers hear many students will be dropped from their classes physically reopen.

Ishika Pandey, 15, is a student in her village in Lamjung and dreams of becoming a nurse to improve healthcare standards in her village. Sheyra Thapa, a fellow with the Teach For Nepal project says she is one of many young, curious and keen students. For the past three months, Pandey has been attending television classes broadcast by the government. Because she lives so far from the nearest school, her father scoops her for spending too much time on schoolwork at home, she says.

“I have to do all the household work. The village women also come inside the house to take care of the kids,” she says. “My parents didn’t go to school so it’s hard for them to believe my education should get the same attention.”

Pandey is determined to continue her studies, but has seen classmates and friends lose interest in school during these months because some do not have access to televisions or radios. Those who are quickly discouraged without teachers physically present to hammer home the importance and walk them through difficult problems, she says.

“Relying on technology won’t work for us,” says Malia Uddin, an alumnus of Teach For Nepal, an organisation that aims to address the lack of education in the country. “COVID-19 has to end, schools have to start. That is the only way out.”

School closures brought about by the pandemic have affected more than 1 billion students worldwide. According to UNESCO estimates, the out-of-school children in the poorest countries are effectively out of school now because they lack tools for web-based learning, compared with 20% in the richer ones.

In developing countries like Nepal, school closures have wiped out recent gains in education, write Malia Dutt, an education specialist at UNICEF. There is also growing evidence of learners being pulled back into child labour, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO). At Teri Higher Secondary School in Sindhupalchok, the district nearby all the students enrolled are subsistence farmers. Children often drop out because they cannot afford school, a situation that has worsened during the pandemic as family members working in Kathmandu and India have lost their jobs, and had just started recovering from the 2015 earthquake.

Typically, 15 out of the 100 students drop out every year. This year, they estimate many more children will not be re-enrolling when schools reopen, and two or three of those may not be able to return to school when they want.

The Terai School has started a new mobile classroom initiative, in which teachers ride up to villages, gather students outside, and conduct lessons.

Teacher Ishim Tamang says one way to help his students, many of whom have been out of touch. “We tell them why education is important, why they should study,” he said. “If they forget about school and may have to get married.”

Studies have shown children are less susceptible to the coronavirus, and interventions aimed at them might have a relatively small impact on reducing transmissions. Yet, the learning gap between rich and poor will likely grow during the pandemic, and closing schools for five months causes children in low and middle-income countries to lose more than a year’s worth of learning, another Brookings report found.

Nuruta Rai

Nepal’s education system was in crisis long before the pandemic hit. But with schools closed now for four straight months, remote learning has also exposed the class divide in access to education. There was already poor quality of instruction in government schools, and parents often were showing their children to more expensive private institutions. But this inequality in schooling has been further exacerbated by the need for remote instruction due to the COVID-19 crisis.

While better endowed schools are conducting online classes, the digital divide has meant that a majority of schools and students in the country have been left out. By making self-contradictory rules, the government has sowed further confusion. It announced classes would be conducted through ‘alternative’ systems, but did not specify what the students had necessary equipment and at home for distance learning. Even in Kathmandu Valley, many students do not have Wi-Fi at home to take online classes, so the situation in the remote districts is much worse. Meanwhile the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology just issues directives, tells schools conducting regular online classes not to charge fees, but without making alternative provisions for teacher salaries.

In May, the ministry issued the ‘Student Learning Facilitation Guide for Alternative System’ which mentioned radio, television, online and offline lessons, self-learning, and remote teaching as methods to be used. But uneven access to technology has created a divide in the past four months between those who get to learn who does not.

“The main problem with alternative learning systems is the digital divide,” explains Shishir Khanal, co-founder of Teach For Nepal. “The only way to bridge this is to go back to face-to-face teaching by organizing staggered classes with precautions, or for teachers to physically visit students’ homes maintaining distance. But many schools have been converted to quarantine centers.”

A survey of access to technology in Tulipaur in the western Terai recently showed that even in the town, only 6% of students in government schools had Wi-Fi at home. Only 23% in higher education bad radio sets at home for FM classes.

Most private schools have been taking online classes for the past two months until the private school organisation PASSON decided to shut all online classes to protect the government’s decision not to allow them to take fees from parents.

There is technology gap among students even in Kathmandu Valley. At the Pragati Shishu Salan School in Lalitpur, only a quarter of students are taking online classes.

Principal Suraj Prasad Ghimire says the school is conducting classes for lower grades through radio and tv, and for higher classes online. He adds: “Students in the Valley studying in government schools are from weaker economic backgrounds, and do not have the equipment to take online classes.”

Some students feel inferior because they do not have Wi-Fi or computer access to online classes,” says Ghimire. “It is good that we are able to do something, but this is not accessible to many.”

Even before the government decided on alternative instruction, Sathapati had already started remote learning through a local radio station’s 33 public-private partnerships, while many of the 90 private schools are doing online classes.

In Kathmandu Valley, there is a total of 500 private and public schools. According toewan Man Dangol, spokesperson of the Kathmandu Municipality, most schools have effectively implemented an alternative learning system. Apart from using Zoom and Messenger, schools are broadcasting lessons through radio and tv.

Digital divide exposes class divide

The prolonged COVID-19 lockdown has brought out the inequities in Nepal’s education system...
Norway-Nepal lockdown concert on the Internet

Prevented from performing live, musicians from the two countries link remotely to record concerts

When singer Rachana Dahal met musician Tino Treble at a concert at the Norwegian Embassy in Kathmandu last year, they had already killed off and talked about collaborating.

Then the pandemic struck, and Heitor’s plans to return to Norway for the sixth time to continue his orchestra project had to be put on hold. But Heitor did not let a pandemic come between them, and contacted Rachana Dahal.

Dahal, 22, is an up-and-coming singer who has moved on from performing covers at venues in Kathmandu to composing originals with her own lyrics, and music during the lockdown in Nepal.

In Norway, Heitor is now performing in a string trio called Trio No Treble and has been recording ‘quarantine videos’ since the beginning of the global lockdown in March. With support from the Norwegian Art Council, the trio has conducted digital concerts in separated rooms, and have got Norwegian guest artists, including opera singers and violin players to participate remotely.

But for something different, Heitor contacted Rachana Dahal and asked her if she would be interested in an intercontinental internet concert linking Nepali and Norwegian musicians.

“Rachana has a fantastic voice,” Heitor said in an interview with Times. “It’s great that we can make music together over the internet, despite the corona. I hope we can do more often kind of collaboration with Nepali musicians, since we cannot come to Nepal this year.”

“I was so surprised by the invitation, and was glad to take on the challenge,” says Dahal, who decided to sing her new song, Separado Raja. “The result is an almost opera-like classical fusion that is uplifting in its message for the troubled times the world is in.”

The original full version of the song, far from being a yearning for a knight in shining armour coming to lift and carry away a young woman, has the message of empowerment for Nepali women — one that will resonate at a time when the Supreme Court reduced the sentence of a police officer who killed his wife eight years ago, and there was another acid attack on a woman in Kathmandu on Friday.

Rachana Dahal’s lyrics are an outpouring of suppressed emotions from the trauma of being sexually molested by her teacher from Grade 3 onwards for two years in a school in Lalitpur. For years, she kept the odious hidden from her family and friends, but finally decided to go public after hearing of others who had gone through the same abuse.

“After keeping it locked up in me for so long, I finally found that I could turn my pain into power through music,” Dahal said, “I finally had the freedom to fly, and this became an outlet for me.”

After giving up cover gigs, Dahal has come out with many other songs like Phumari (Which) mixing powerful lyrics with a free-wheeling almost jazz-like sound.

Back in Norway, Heitor says Trio No Treble had a lot of spring concert cancellations because of the coronavirus, including tours of Sweden and Russia. The ‘quarantine videos’ were a way for the trio to perform separately from home and edit the final version of the classical, folk or pop music together.

“Rachana and I met randomly in Nepal last year, and I was struck by her charisma, hospitality, and she was such a welcoming person,” Heitor recalls. “I then connected her on Youtube, and fell in love with her beautiful voice. Since the borders were closed, we are lucky to be able to interact and play together across the borders.”

During his trips to Nepal, Heitor found Nepali folk music fascinating and enjoys playing Narmak Ghajal and Anambar Gurung hits. The trio asked Dahal to choose any song she wanted, and she selected her latest release Separado Raja.

“It is a perfect song to do with strings, we made the arrangement of her song ourselves, and it is quite difficult to do a concert separately over the internet mostly because we can’t hear each other live. So it takes some time to get used to it, but it’s also a good exercise,” says Heitor, who is the only one in the trio who has been to Nepal.

But he says recording a concert separately over the internet cannot be compared to performing to a live audience. He adds: “You get a lot of energy by playing in front of audiences, and that inspiring energy you will never get from playing in front of a camera. That is why I hope one day soon we can come to Nepal to play concerts with Rachana.”
The Contestator
Co-founder and Acting Editor of Khabar Confidential, Pankaj Pandey will share his insights on the post-COVID media landscape and emerging trends in South Asia on Episode 5 of The Contestator, a fortnightly talk show that will provide fresh perspectives and meaningful opinions on Nepal’s contemporary challenges. Join the event at: https://www.facebook.com/onebookshop/
like
2 August; 5pm-6pm

Writing Wednesday
Keep an eye out for KathaGutha to put up a prompt on Writing Wednesday, designed for 5 minutes of specific but low-stakes writing. KathaGutha will put up the prompt on Facebook. Share stories in the comments on KathaGutha’s Facebook page. To share anonymously, send the story in Katha Satras’ UDA or at kathamusic@gmail.com.

Weekend hike & yoga
Take a refreshing hike from Nusanpurna to Larchoria this weekend, with yoga to cap it all off. Call Sauv Holistic for more details. 7 August, Tar, Panchali, Nusanpurna to Larchoria, NE040573

Over simplifed
On Oversimplified, history is not as complex as it seems. Head on to YouTube and watch historical events - both widely known and unknown - get explained with depth and humor. Sort from the detailed breakdown of World War I:

The world at home
Travel may be limited these days, but discovering incredible experiences across the globe doesn’t have to be. Get Your Guide’s ‘The world at home initiative’ brings to you awe-inspiring, authentic, and unique experiences right in the comfort of your home.

Rare Book Room
Take a look at and read some of the rare books in existence from across the world. Highlights include the works of Shakespeare, Benjamin Franklin, and Copernicus. ‘The revolutionaries’ Ga to www.rarebookshop.org and begin bewaring.

Heist Podcast
A true crime comedy podcast that dives into the characters, planning, and aftermath of some of the most audacious heists, robberies and scams around the world. From priceless art to millions in diamonds. Find the podcast on Anchor, Apple Podcasts, and Spotify.

Dining

Erma Restaurant
Erma Restaurant offers an upscale fine dining experience with curated continental dishes. Try the enam of beetroot ravioli, vegetable saltlik, and the Erma house burger. Vihar Chowk, Chitwan (01) 400357

Kairos Cafe
Kairos Cafe serves a customizable breakfast, using all juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine. Kairos Cafe is a must for foodies. 7am-9pm, Sankhuwasabha, NE036802

The Village Cafe
Get fresh, delicious, home-made noodles from The Village Cafe delivered at home. Order the set meal, frozen momos and khowa. Call the cafe for deliveries. A food truck through Kathmandu’s Organics. (01) 554712 / 9864523177

Dhokaiima Cafe
Morison menu at Dhokaiima Cafe with new weekly specials of fresh items specially prepared by Chef Ale. (01) 5219177

Raahi Biryani
Cooking is a skill and say Biryani? Hau! Is the place to go or order from. Enjoy slow-cooked biryanis seasoned with a secret spice blend that will Faully your palate that enhances the dining experience. (01) 4296840 / 9864185897
Lax laws make Nepal a haven for tiger poachers

Smugglers caught by investigators use legal loopholes and judicial corruption to escape

Tufan Neupane

Despite being the first tiger range country to claim last year that it has met the target of doubling its tiger population, a new report shows that Nepal remains an important corridor for trade in tiger parts and other illicit products.

More worrying, there is evidence that ringleaders of smuggling networks who have been deemed guilty of killing tiger skins, teeth and other organs to China have either used political connections to get light sentences, or have jumped nominal bail.

On 25 June, Nepal’s Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) filed arrest warrants in Kathmandu in the notorious wildlife smuggler Kunjor Lama, who has been in the crosshairs of police in India and Nepal for two decades.

He was named by traffic officers arrested in every major seizure of tiger and other wildlife contraband in Nepal and India in recent years and investigation agencies in both countries and Interpol were on the lookout for him.

One of the biggest hauls 15 years ago in Raneuwa yielded five tiger pelts, 36 leopard skins and 11kg of tiger bones. The Nepal army arrested five smugglers who were trying to take the contraband to the Chinese border concealed in a cargo truck, and handed them over to the Langtang National Park.

The seizure made international headlines and was cited in The Handbook of Wildlife Enforcement in India as the most important case of endangered species in South Asia. The seized was sentenced to seven years in jail and fined Rs100,000 each. All were released 2014 after completing their jail time. All five mentioned the name Kunjor Lama (aka Kunjor Tewa Tsiganam) as being the ringleader of the smuggling operation.

Kunjor Lama, who had also popped up in successive seizures in India of wildlife contraband in Chhindwara near New Delhi in 1999, in Uttar Pradesh state in 2000 and in Madhya Pradesh in 2008. He was named by those caught as the main ringleader in smuggling operations and was arrested in 2005. The Investigation Bureau has named Kunjor Lama in the Interpol’s dragnet for the past 20 years until his arrest in Kathmandu last month.

Originally from Namkha village of Nepal’s Humla district, Kunjor Lama has now challenged the Raneuwa District Court’s decision to keep him in custody at the Patan High Court, saying he has been framed and should be freed — even though police have mobile records from those caught in 2005 that Link Lama was at the smuggling operation.

On 14 July, Judge Rajan Pratap Singh of the Raneuwa District Court wrote to the Raneuwa District Court asking for the files on the case. “I have to make a decision in the case within a day or two of the documents arriving, Kunjor Lama could soon be bailed,” the judge said.

“If he is released on bail, even if I am not satisfied with the case he is guilty, he will disappear,” predicts a police source in the CBI’s Wildlife Unit in Kathmandu.

“And unless he is put on a travel ban as he has done in the past, we will go ahead just like other smugglers we have caught before.”

Indeed, Lama has travelled extensively in and out of Kathmandu even after he was implicated in the 2005 raid, and immigration records show he has been in the US twice since then.

A 2018 census in Nepal showed that the country had 225 wild tigers in national parks, which is double the population in 2009. This made Nepal the first country among tiger range countries that had given themselves the target of doubling the number of tigers by 2022.

Nepal has one of the strictest laws on hunting of endangered animals among South Asian countries, with up to 15 years jail terms and/or Rs 1 million in fines. However, court records show no one has ever received this maximum sentence even in major smuggling operations like the one in 2005. The perpetrators have either used legal loopholes or paid bribes to evade the minimum sentence.

Legal patronage, corruption in the judiciary and poor law enforcement mean hefty penalties for wildlife smugglers have never been implemented, and many end up free to resume their smuggling activities.

Another high-profile smuggler who has escaped prosecution is Loshi Bhusal (otherwise known as ‘Desai’), who was arrested in 2012 after a cargo truck driving from Kathmandu to the Chinese border in Raneuwa was apprehended.

Hidden behind sacks of rice were five tiger pelts and six pelts with 512 pieces of tiger bones, skulls and claws and 132 fangs. Conservationists calculated that the contraband must have come from at least 31 dead tigers.

The driver and truck owners were arrested, and they named Loshi Bhusal as the person who hired their truck for Rs 100,000 to take the tiger to Raneuwa. Police raided Dinesh Bhusal’s house in Bardia and confiscated wildlife contraband, eight tiger skins, one full and three strips of tiger skin in various currencies.

In court, Dinesh was cleared by the courts after paying a nominal Rs100,000 fine, and also fined his wife who had been arrested. However, the Appeal Court sentenced his wife to five years in prison. Despite this, records show that Dinesh kept travelling freely both to China and India.

With help from Interpol, Dinesh was finally caught in New Delhi in 2017 after the Indian CIB found he was involved in poaching tigers in Madhya Pradesh. He was extradited to Nepal in 2018 and sent to the District Jail in Nawalpari to serve his five-year sentence. But Dinesh appealed at the Supreme Court, where the bench of Justices Mira Khadka and Dhami Bahadur Shadhi decided to release him on only Rs45,000 bail. Dinesh then disappeared.

“The bail amount was negligible compared to the cash value of the tiger skins that were worth $200,000,” says Nepali CBI official involved in the investigation told Nepal Times. Police have now uncorked a number of illegal activities involving Kunjor Lama, and found that they sometimes worked together to make Nepali collection agents trap tigers from the wildlife smuggled from India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to be transported to China through Kathmandu and other Rasuwa checkpoints.

The nine Indians arrested in Nepal are from the Rasuwa forest-dwelling community who are expert wildlife trackers. One of them was Kenneth Simon, who had the link between poachers in India and smugglers in Nepal to traffic wildlife parts to China.

Ranjan was caught in Bardia with one tiger pelt and 15kg of tiger bones, and was handed the minimum sentence by law of five years in jail by Nepalganj Court, and was released in April after serving his term.

“Notorious smugglers get only the minimum five years in jail, and Indian smugglers in Nepal’s jagirs who are part of the smuggling network will soon be releasing smuggled endangered species,” says Police Inspector Birendra Jobari, who has conducted numerous sting operations against wildlife smugglers.

Of the six other Indian smugglers caught in a CIB sting operation in Kalaiyil in 2019 that seized seven tiger pelts and 40kg of tiger bones, five were released on bail after paying Rs490,000 each and immediately escaped to India. This was the first time that so many Indian smugglers had been caught in one operation in Nepal, confirming the involvement ofIndian smugglers in Nepal.

The Shaktiya also know how to kill tigers. With a trap, and often ends up damaging the pelt with bullet holes, and reduces its sale value. Since they are not allowed to be sold in China and Vietnam, there is hardly any existing market for tiger pelt that has been poached. Wildlife smuggling has increased during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The UN’s World Wildlife Crime Report 2020 says that there has been a marked increase in the poaching of tigers between 2007 and 2018, mainly in India. In China and Vietnam, it notes that smuggling is also rife in Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

The United States’ UN Office of Drugs and Crime investigated and concluded that the “unusual focus of the UN on wildlife crime is driven by the serious health implications of illicit wildlife trade. Those who buy, sell, transport and consume wildlife are at increased risk for serious health implications of illicit wildlife trade. Those who buy, sell, transport and consume wildlife are at increased risk for serious health implications of illicit wildlife trade. The illegal trade in wildlife, which does not go through proper sanitary and health inspection, can potentially lead to the spread of zoonoses, such as SARS-CoV-2 that caused the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The reputation of the court system in Nepal is so corrupt that it is not even remotely ready for scrutiny or corruption, has been tarnished even more this year. Nepali Justice and Criminal Justice and another judge freeing a senior police officer sentenced to life imprisonment for allegedly murdering his wife and burning her remains.

There has been intense media spotlight on another bench of the Supreme Court which this month released on bail a member of a prestigious family who had killed a woman while driving under the influence of alcohol last year.
Tracing past glacial floods in Kangchenjunga

Satellite imagery is useful, but involving local people in research can often help fill gaps in research of glacial floods

Alton C Byers

Glacial lake outburst floods are highly destructive events, usually caused when stored lake water is suddenly released by a triggering event that can include moraine dam failure, snow and debris avalanches, as well as heavy rainfall.

There have been at least 25 major glacial lake outburst floods in Nepal that we know of, most having occurred since the 1960s and onset of global warming trends, receding glaciers, and new glacial lake formation.

Perhaps most famous is the Langtse: Bhush flood of 1985 in the Tana Valley in Khumbu which killed at least 20 people, destroyed a nearly completed hydropower facility, and took out bridges for nearly 100km downstream.

Two years ago a scientific paper about a 1980 GLOF in the Kangchenjunga region caught my eye, written by the renowned Japanese geographer Teiji Watanabe in 1980.

The only documentation that Watanabe could find was a short piece in the Times of Nepal of April 1980 reporting that a flood had occurred in the Tana Valley. Damage included "all the homes in Olungshung Gela village, bridges, and downstream settlements, with at least 100 human fatalities.

Using topographic maps and aerial photographs from 1978, and 1992, Watanabe was able to determine that the source of the flood was the Kangchenjunga glacier lake, about 8km south of the border with Tibet (see map, right).

On 28 July and August the 1980 GLOF from Sagamar had occurred in 1980, but that its debris had blocked a small river to the south, creating a new lake named Chicho.

For the next 40 years, no GLOFs were reported in the Kanchenjunga region. This was odd, since during the same period Nepal had experienced dozens of GLOFs.

And so we set out from first begun in the 1970s and April last year to see if we could update the statistics before the climate change impacts in what had now become the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA). The next day a three hour drive to Taplejung, and we spent the next six weeks on foot.

Kanchenjunga is the world’s third highest mountain at 8,586m, located in eastern Nepal on the border of Nepal, Sikkim in India, and Tibet in China. Initially thought to be the highest mountain in the world, several attempts to climb it were made in the early 1960s to 1970s by the Germans and British.

But it wasn’t until 25 May 1975 that the mountain was first summited by Greg Bond and Joe Brown, in a British expedition.

The region’s location at the intersection of three floristic provinces — the Indo-Malayan, Paleartic, and Sino-Japanese — creates one of the most biologically rich landscapes of the eastern Himalaya.

There are 3,198 species of plants that have been recorded in the region since botanical investigations first began in the 1840s and continue to this day.

Even before the pandemic, tourism was limited in the KCA compared to other protected areas of Nepal, perhaps owing to its remoteness and lack of publicity. Five rustic lodges have been built in recent years in Lomak Kharka (pavement), providing food and shelter for the 200 trekkers arriving each spring, and 600 in autumn.

We were faced with the fundamental question of how to go about reconstructing the history of GLOFs in a region with absolutely no written, media, or scientific documentation.

As a start, we decided to interview local people. This is still somewhat unusual in the physical sciences in general, and in research related to glaciers in particular, for reasons that are not entirely clear. Geologists like to take field measurements, drill ice cores, analyse satellite imagery, and measure peak flows and flood volumes through the use of sophisticated flood modeling but for some reason the insights and experience of local people has been strangely lacking in scientific study of GLOFs.

The original plan was to trek from Taplejung due north to Yangma, and then west to Nangama glacier lake, so that we could see firsthand, and for the first time by scientists, what this place looked like. But by interviewing local people along the way, primarily those over 75, a new story started to take shape — one that totally changed the original itinerary of visiting Nangama glacier lake only.

We were told that an older person who was knowledgeable in the region’s history lived in the upper part of Taplejung, about a 20 minute walk away. We left immediately, walking through the rice fields and up a steep incline to a beautiful house overlooking the Tana River below, the home of Barachan Limbu, 83 (picture).

Limbu had spent 21 years in the Indian Army, and was now enjoying his days at home under the care of one of his daughters, a registered nurse. He was also a storehouse of local knowledge, and over the next hour described how instead of only one GLOF in the region since the 1960s from Nangama, there had been five major floods that local people still remembered and could describe, including one that happened nearly 100 years ago, in 1921.

Table 1 shows the five floods as identified by Barachan Limbu. The most recent was in 1986.

---

Chinsho Pokhri

---

Nangama Lake

---

Map of flood areas

---

Lake

Cross sections used for estimating modified discharge

---

2 km

---

N
Kushyala Lena Uyak, 72, of the 43-year-old Dangben lowland community.

Barachan Limbu, 81, of Lekaparo at his farm.

Talaha Lama, 71, and Durnling Lama Sherpa, 42, of Lekaparo.

occurred in the upper branch of the Tamor River, one in 1963 and one in 1968, were a complete mystery. And for people to still remember a GLOF from the upper Ghunes valley in 1921, meant that it must have been a very large flood indeed. Armed with this new and unexpected information, we decided to alter our journey by branching off to the west and following the Tamor River to the village of Chilchaur Gala, also located on the Great Himalayan Trail route, to try and get the story on the 1963 and 1968 floods. Once there, we were directed to Kushyala Lena Uyak, 72, caretaker of the Deke Chilingong Gomba built 450 years ago (above). Uyak informed us that as supposed to the 1960 Nagong flood destroying the lower part of the village (a physical impossibility, since the Yanga Khola runs to the east of the Tamor River). It was in fact the 1963 Olangchung Gala 1 flood that caused the damage.

Flood waters originated in the Tiptop glacial lake to the northwest, which was the source of a second and smaller GLOF in 1968. Approximately 43 houses were destroyed by the 1963 flood, either by undercutting of the river bank below or by a lake that formed when debris blocked the flood downstream for a while. Most people who lost their homes and property moved to Kathmandu. The cause of both the 1963 and 1968 floods was thought to be a result of massive ice avalanches from the Chilchaur Himal (6,269 m) to the north of the lake.

We then trekked for two days to Tiptop glacial lake, for the most part following a newly constructed road from Olangchung Gala to the Tiptop Pass (5,065 m) to Tibet. Along the way we meet a group of NCA employees from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, scouting out a new site for a checkpoint location. Wildlife poaching and sales to China were major problems in the region prior to the pandemic and the checkpoint was designed to try and curb the illegal trade. The group was also building community infrastructure in an effort to promote the development of home stays as well as more nature-based economic development in the region. Once they had checked our research permits, they expressed a strong support for our work and wished us the best of luck.

Returning to Chilchaur Gala several days later, we next set out for the village of Yanga to the north. Along the way we saw two bears, a red panda, a variety of rainforest sunbirds, and old growth stands of junipers, rhododendrons, and firs trees with diameters of 1 meter.

A road was being built on an upper ridge to the west to Yanga, but the path along the river and old growth forests also contained painted boulders with surveyor’s markings that suggested a road might be built along the river as well. A number of people that we interviewed felt that such a road would not be needed, would result in the destruction of the old growth forests, and have negative impacts on the tourism trade as a result.

As tourism will definitely return to the region at some point in time, officials and local communities might do well to heed these words of warning, or lose a valuable source of income as well as incentives for biodiversity conservation.

At Yanga, we met Talaha Lama, 71, an eyewitness to the 1960 Nagong flood (above) who remembered graving his yake in what had been three distinct water stress areas covering approximately 4.5 km below the terminal moraine when the GLOF occurred. He heard a deafening noise and a large dark cloud descending from the lake area, followed by a gale that rose above the high-water mark, “like a fountain” and accompanied by “strange sounds.” Water then emerged from the terminal moraine, growing larger by the minute. The flood was “big, muddy, with stones clashing against each other.”

Floodwaters rose and lowered at intervals, indicating the pulse-like nature reported for GLOFs elsewhere in Nepal. Lama said that Chilchaur Gala was formed by the blockage of the Palchok Khola by flood sediments and debris.

Another interpretation of the flood, as reported by Damaru Lama Sherpa, 62, also of Yangmaitu that the lake had been inhabited by a local deity or spirit (Khanga), similar in appearance to a giant turtle, who became angry with the local people and caused the GLOFs as a consequence. But before the flood he could hear “strange sounds” which presumably came from the Khanga.

The turtle then floated down valley in the flood waters until it reached the bridge at Yanga village. Refusing to go under the bridge, the turtle’s body blocked the flood water, resulting in a temporary lake upstream that dammed hillslopes and grazing land, but which drained when it decided to continue downstream.

The flood was also linked by religious leaders to the fact that “modern people have become wicked, so bad things happen.” Their final wish of a GLOF site was to be Lkhon Glacier, en route to Kanchenjunga North Base Camp. This was the source of the 1955 Lkhon Glacier, which is of particular interest because, nearly 100 years after its occurrence, it is still mentioned by people throughout the Tamor watershed. Lakpa Chetsum Sherpa, 88, of Ghunes (above) said that his ancestors had come from Tibet and settled at Kanchurchen, a govt (likely pasture) downstream of the Lkhon Glacier, some 500 years ago, where they farmed and tended yak.

When the flood destroyed almost all of their fields in 1921, his grandfather, whose wolf was among the fatalities of the flood, moved to Ghunes, where the family has lived ever since. Lakpa Chetsum Sherpa also reported that another small flood of the Ghunes River had occurred in “either August or September” of 2011, the approximate time that a deadly earthquake (6.9 magnitude) occurred in the Kanchenjunga region that killed an estimated 115 people, which brought our total number of new, unreported floods from the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area up to a remarkable six, in addition to the 1960 Nagong GLOF.

The massive breach in the terminal moraine of Lhonak, and deposits of debris at the foot of the moraine, are testimony to the power that the flood must have possessed. Most people walk by such features and ignore them for the beautiful and ice peaks jutting above, never realizing that they are walking in the middle of a catastrophic event that changed people’s lives, and view of the world, forever. Over 100 years might not seem a lot, but we haven’t connected with few people along the way.

Back in the US, it was March of 2020 before we were able to start transcribing the recorded interviews and designing a framework for a scientific research paper. While rumours of a strange global virus were circulating, my PhD student, Rohan Baburn Chand, a recently-minted PhD student at University of Wisconsin and, coincidentally, one of Tej Natwals’s students, Mohan’s 2020 PhD thesis was, in fact, about the development of glacial lakes in the Kanchenjunga region, and he was able to document the occurrence of five of the six GLOFs reported by local informants using before and after remote-sensing images, mostly through the presence or absence of breach terminal moraines, and deposits.

Jonathan Lea, graduate student in engineering at the University of Wisconsin Madison, developed a numerical simulation model of the Nagong GLOF, which strongly suggested that it was triggered by an ice debris avalanche of some 900,000 m³ of ice. Many people had thought, causing a surge wave that breached the terminal moraine and released an estimated 11 million m³ of water, with debris from the flood filling the Kola river below to form what is today known as Chilchaur Gala, part like local people.

Tjekk Strømm, anthropologist at Aarhus University, developed a framework for glacier history as a tool in reconciling past GLOFs with local information. He also provided essential information about mountain cultures and religious beliefs that further our understanding and interpretations of maps of the land converted. Plant ecologist Elizabeth Syers was responsible for taking many of the field measurements of the Nagong glacial lake and terminal moraine, as well as informed others about the need to consider how this numerical modeling.

Together, the contributions resulted in our scientific paper published in the journal of The Journal of Glaciology. In summary, modern tools such as GIS, satellite imagery, and flood modeling are increasingly sophisticated and valuable tools for understanding our changing world, but they have their own temporal and analytical limitations as well. Local people in research can help to fill these gaps. While development agencies now have guidelines for mountain people to adapt to climate change, these guidelines have been developed so far without these people being called in to discuss.

After the breach (each flood mentioned killed many people and destroyed properties), they find ways to adapt (move to Ghunes, grate the higher), and they think of ways to prevent the flood in the face of a history of unexpected GLOFs. At the very least, being informed allows people for us, as well as the shock and completely unanticipated challenges through COVID-19 and the global pandemic.

Allan Cyers, PhD in a Senior Research Associate and senior ecologist of Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). A summary of this article, nearly published in Tijdschrift, can be downloaded here.
The plastic pandemic

Increase in plastic materials to counter COVID-19 risk threatens to undo a decade of work to reduce waste

Sonia Awale
and Ramesh Kumar

The coronavirus pandemic was a boon for nature everywhere. The air became cleaner, traffic trails turned pristine, for once the summit of Mt Everest was desecrated, and worldwide carbon emission dipped by 25%.

However, there are dark clouds in that silver lining. The COVID-19 crisis has unleashed a plastic pandemic, reversing the momentum of a decade of efforts against single-use plastic worldwide, including Nepal.

Personal protective gear (PPG) like disposable gowns sewn from polyester or polyethylene, surgical masks and N95 respirators are made from non-decomposable polypropylene fibres. Face shields and visors use polycarbonate or polyvinyl chloride. Coveralls are made with high-density polyethylene (HDPE). Most of these are single-use plastic.

During the peak of the outbreak, hospitals in Nepal produced more than 240 tons of waste per day against 40 tons normally—with most of the waste being plastic.

The United States is projected to generate an entire year’s worth of medical waste in just two months dealing with COVID-19, according to Fivet & Sullivan.

The Nepali government has reported an increase in plastic and styrofoam waste from 1,500 tons a day to 6,300 tons daily due to soaring home deliveries of food. In Nepal, there are no exact figures, but the lockdown showed the increase in plastic waste from provision stores, relief distribution to the destitute during the lockdown, and quarantine centres.

For lack of better alternatives, aid workers have given plastic plates and cutlery for meal distribution and full plastic bags and thin single-use plastic for packaging.

“From a humanitarian angle the use of plastic for medical purposes and in relief is important, but it has long-term environmental impact. Which is why we need a replacement for cheap and easily accessible single-use plastic,” says Kishalal Acharya of the Himalayan Climate Initiative.

She adds, “Another emerging problem is the improper disposal of face masks. These made of polypropylene and are even worse than plastic because they are even more difficult to recycle and reuse.”

Across South Asia, floods are becoming worse in cities because of waterways choked by plastic waste. Plastic pollution in Nepal has been known to worsen the impact of floods during the monsoon by clogging up drains and rivers, as happened in Bhaktapur and Thimi in 2018, and a serious example in Kathmandu.

Bhaktapur Mayor Sanj Pradhan said Hanumante River in his municipality invariably bursts its banks even in normal rainfall, and despite it is not a big river because of blocked drainage.

Pradhan told Nepal Times “The river is like a gutter that is flooded every year because waste blocks the channels and drains.”

A three-year regional study by ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development)’s SANSAM (South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics) shows that 13.7% in Nepal and 22.3% in Bangladesh are at the risk of flooding because of the lack of proper waste management system. Unlocking drains would limit flooding to 5.5% in Kathmandu, the report says.

Sushma Lama, who worked on the study says, “Solid waste, including plastic, must be properly managed to reduce the risk of long-term flooding in cities. Just building sewers will not solve the problem. Plastic pollution is already a major cause of floods, it can be disastrous in future.”

While local plastic bags are used once and thrown away in Kathmandu Valley every day, and it now forms more than 16% of the city’s garbage. Of the 644 tons of plastic waste generated in Nepal every day, 131 tons and up to 126 tonnes of plastic, paper and raffia it makes to landfill sites.

Plastics, being petroleum-based, take at least 500 years to break down. Killing aquatic and land animals. Microplastics also find their way into the human food chain. Heavy metals, chemicals in plastic can alter hormones and chromosomes, leading to cancer and damage to the reproductive system.

The Nepal government has repeatedly tried to introduce a ban on single-use plastics, but industrialists enjoying political protection have successfully blocked all previous attempts.

Former Environment Minister Ganesh Shak tried but failed to implement a plastic ban he introduced in 2008. The Plastic Bag Regulation and Control Guideline introduced in 2013 was not effective either in discouraging plastic use.

The government could not even enforce a ban on plastic in the so-called compound in Central Secretariat in Singh Darbar. A Gazette notice on 14 April 2013 banned use of bags thinner than 30 microns, but it was overthrown by the earthquake only 10 days later.

The ICIMOD study also revealed that the state of garbage disposal significantly affects real estate prices which are on an average 25% higher and up to 55% higher in areas with proper solid waste management system. Similarly, the price of a house with a blocked sewer is just 11% lower.

An estimated 76% of the daily domestic waste in Nepal’s cities are biodegradable, but it is not customary to segregate garbage. Often, organic and non-perishable waste is disposed of together in plastic bags. Garbage collectors also do not sort waste, which ends up directly at the landfill.

Siddhi that is fast becoming a plastic mountain (below)

Sorting garbage at home has been shown to significantly reduce the volume of waste, allowing households to make their own compost, recycle and reuse as well as reduce the cost of garbage collection. Pinpointing time and place and placing for communal garbage collection and placing waste on curbside can be solutions to prevent bypassed disposal of solid waste.

Bhaktapur residents pay Rs 100 a month for garbage collection and are willing to pay up to 30% more for proper waste management. This is an additional Rs 1 billion more than what the municipality has been charging for waste management.

“This means local governments could better manage the problem of solid waste without too much effort that requires only the will to implement,” says Math Nepal. Bhaktapur has been trying to reduce waste at source by buying plastic waste from households at Rs 10 per kg, which it then sells to recyclers. The municipality also provides subsidy to those who want to turn their organic waste into biogas.

Bhaktapur has shown that, if there is political will, plastic waste can be reduced. And by just decoupling plastic in drains and rivers, it is also protecting wildlife along the Bagmati River in Chitwan National Park directly downstream.

The good news is that the global plastic recycling rate is also growing with the help of new technology, and that is also having an effect in parts of Kathmandu. Polythene is being replaced by re-usable bags at shopping malls, restaurants and hotels discourage straws and plastic wrapping, and plastic straws are replaced by stainless steel straws at some party venues.

While plastic-based PPAs have been vital in countering the spread of COVID-19 and are life savers for frontline health workers, if the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is over, then a move towards paper packaging and materials.

Sajha Adhikari Ashaya: “The prolonged lockdown has meant that people are purchasing less, and are using fewer plastic items. We can build on this momentum to reduce plastic pollution in future.”