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BIKRAM RAI

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 Bidya Bhandari so she could be a witness to the deal. However, at that meeting on 18 July, Oli did not mention handing over 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.

Ex-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 Bahadur Thapa and former minister Bam Dev Gautam, to his side.

This puts Oli in a majority in the NCP Secretariat, which he has been trying unsuccessfully to convene. Meanwhile, the Dahal faction is trying to hold the often-cancelled Standing Committee meeting in which Oli’s group is in a minority. On Wednesday, 152 NCP 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 psywar

on Dahal – on Wednesday he dropped in unannounced at Bam Dev Gautam’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 Tarai 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. 🇳🇵

13th day

The power struggle within the ruling NCP has overshadowed the country’s COVID-19 emergency. The government has no time to listen to young activists who have been staging their second hunger strike demanding immediate measures to control the pandemic.

The ‘Enough Is Enough’ campaign is led by 26-year-old activist who calls himself lih (*pictured above*) who has refused to be moved to hospital. On Thursday he was on the 13th day of his fast unto death under a tent at Kathmandu Darbar Square, and says his team members are “putting their lives at risk to save lives”.

They accuse the Health Ministry of breaking its promise on 26 June, and have among their demands: 100% PCR testing, timely results, safer quarantine facilities, full protection for frontline health workers, transparency in medical procurements, increased ICU capacity. lih and fellow-activist Pukar Bam are on IV fluid, and say they are willing to lay down their lives if need be to save the lives of Nepalis who could die from government incompetence in handling the pandemic. Another activist, Samariaa Shrestha was taken to hospital on Tuesday after 12 days of being without food and water.

On Wednesday, police arrested five Enough Is Enough campaigners near the Home Ministry at Singha Darbar, where they had gone to file a Right to Information application demanding details of how money for the management of the pandemic, as well as procurement of medical supplies, are being spent.

LOCKDOWN
MAY BE OVER,
BUT PANDEMIC
IS NOT
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

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Lockdown may be over, but the pandemic is not

As the number of cases and fatalities rose in the central Tarai districts this week, the big debate is whether Nepal has now progressed from cluster to community spread of the disease.

The Ministry of Health maintains that we are still in the cluster stage, as per the WHO definition. However, hospitals in the Tarai 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 unfolding pandemic, total caseloads are still rising 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

separation. That message has to go out, with behaviour change in the population.

Finance Minister Yubaraj Khatriwada made a boo-boo by announcing on 21 July that the lockdown had been lifted. It was not even true — long-distance buses and regular flights would resume on 17 August, bars, restaurants and schools were still closed, 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 returnees from India. The announcement was premature, and it now threatens to undo the time we bought from the lockdown to put



BIKRAM RAI

do not know about the virus.

But what we know is that this is one super-intelligent strand of RNA. It understands human behaviour and exploits it ruthlessly. Initially, after jumping the species barrier it spread human-to-human. Then it piggybacked on global mobility through asymptomatic infections, ensuring virus carriers were not too sick to be bed-ridden.

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 have mutated 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 inflicting the youth.

From the experience of countries that have done well to keep the virus in check, we know only three things work: limited mingling, acceptance of masks, and physical

Urgently needed: nationwide awareness campaign and mass testing

On 28 July, Nepal recorded the highest number of daily cases in nearly a month with 319 new COVID-19 positive people out of 5,032 tested. Since then it has been over 200 a day, with record highs for Kathmandu Valley.

There are also record daily cases and fatalities in India, especially in states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh which re-imposed restrictions. India has now seen 1.5 million cases and 35,000 deaths, third highest after the US and Brazil.

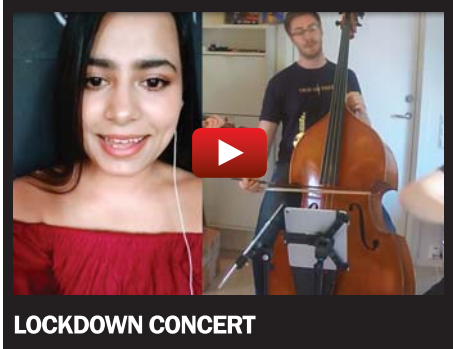
In Nepal, increased crossborder mobility led directly to a surge in cases in border districts, and since long-distance buses will start operating again from 17 August it is only a question of time before the virus spreads up into the mountains.

Fed up with the government incompetence in handling the pandemic, young activists have been on a second hunger strike in Kathmandu. On Thursday they completed 13 days without food and water. Caught up in an internecine power struggle, the government is too distracted.

The government needs to snap out of it, 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, quarantining and tracing, to keep infections within clusters.

ONLINE PACKAGES



LOCKDOWN CONCERT

Prevented from performing live by the COVID-19 lockdown, up-and-coming Nepali singer Rachana Dahal and Norwegian musician Eivind Rossback Heier link remotely for intercontinental internet concert during the COVID-19 lockdown. Read about the collaboration and watch their video. *Story: page 5.*

LANGTANG CHEESE

We lived close to the old cheese factory, at Thulo Syabru, for a year 1977-78, possibly the most beautiful place on earth (‘The story of Langtang cheese’, Gyalbu Tamang, #1020). Great news that cheese making has been revived.

Andrew Hall

■ Wonderful history. We lived in Am Pipal, ‘80-’83, and one of the highlights of our diet was Yak cheese. Now we have a cheese factory here in my home town in South Dakota, called the Valley Queen cheese factory. The men who started it were also from Switzerland.

Sigmund Stengel

■ Thank you for your excellent story. I was very glad to learn that Gyalbu's children were okay, but sorry to hear about the loss of your parents.

Kath March

■ Very inspiring story of rebuilding after the earthquake.

Shrikrishna Upadhyay

■ What an amazing autobiographical story. But even before the disaster, the history of the economics and culture of cheese in the Himalaya was really worth the read.

Kristine Hildebrandt

■ Gyalbu dai, your introductory statement- “I have PhD in cheese making” during CryoFroum, 2019 at ICIMOD still resonates in my ears. Your experience in cheese making is beyond this academic merit. It's truly special and meaningful.

Sunil Tamang

■ I tried the cheese in Nepal, it was very good. We liked Dhal Bhat a lot in Nepal, the only food we missed traveling was cheese.

Veronika Schaffelhofer

■ Fantastic memories. I remember Schultess and Doubach. Our Dad was an architect who built the cheese factory. Thanks.

Gerda Anita Weise

CHILDREN AND COVID

This is an important topic for consideration -- it reveals the cost of lockdown in terms of health and it shows why a general lockdown is not appropriate for Nepal (‘Children are collateral damage in Nepal lockdown’, Sonia Awale, #1020). Kathmandu may be a different case, but otherwise the best strategy is to ensure general observance of physical distancing, use of masks, quarantine of 14 days for those with symptoms in places where individual isolation is possible and constant hand cleansing.

David Seddon

FEMALE MAHOUT

I am thrilled to know of a female mahout! I am sorry your experience has been so negative (‘Don't follow my footsteps, says female mahout’, Mukesh Pokhrel).

Direct Aid Nepal

INDIA-NEPAL BORDER

I was at Belahiya border yesterday (‘Heightened COVID-19 risks at India-Nepal border’, Mukesh Pokhrel, nepalitimes.com). There is no checkpoint at the Nepali side. Few people with luggage and everything crossed from India to Nepal like they would have before the pandemic.

Siraj Ahmad

BACKLESS DEBATE

I wore what I wanted today and didn't bother to ask anyone's permission. (‘Nepali women turn their back on misogyny’). Although for safety's sake maybe cover up while on a bike.

Kesang Doma

CONTRIBUTE, DON'T COMPLAIN

Therei much people have been doing (‘Stop complaining, start contributing’, Anil Chitrakar, #1020). But it's the system that's problematic.

Bikkil Shapit

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING

Stop complaining, start contributing

by Anil Chitrakar

People's Movement 1990, monarchy, Maoist war, 2015 earthquake, the Indian blockade and now COVID-19, Nepal's haven't stopped complaining despite improving quality of life. It is now time to start contributing. Don't miss the very last of this popular ½ Full fortnightly column.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



The story of Langtang cheese

by Gyalbu Tamang

Visit our website for this *Nepali Times* Weekend Longreads about cheesemaker Gyalbu Tamang's moving story of growing up in Langtang herding yaks, and reviving Nepal's oldest cheese factory after the 2015 avalanche.

Most popular on Twitter

Most commented

Freshwater dolphins make comeback in Nepal

by Unnati Chaudhary

The endangered Gangetic Freshwater Dolphin have made a comeback in Nepal, swimming upstream from India to the Karnali river to breed during the monsoon. But there are few to watch them this monsoon because of COVID-19.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
"While development agencies are busy writing up guidelines for #mountain people to adapt to #ClimateChange, these same people have been doing so for decades." Alton Byers on how local lore is as useful as satellite imagery in research of glacial #floods.

Karma Tenzing @karma10zing
Development Agencies prey on local knowledge & their ancestral way of life...And publish it as their "research" findings with solutions already being applied (often spending millions of dollars). In the end, there's little benefit to anyone else but their own funding. #Regressive

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#COVID19 has affected over a billion students worldwide. In #Nepal, school closures have wiped out recent gains in #education. There's also growing evidence of learners being pulled back into child labour. @unicef_nepal @UNDPNepal @ILO_Nepal @Teach4Nepal

Er. Bijaya corona (Quarantine) @WhitedwarfU
Though the grownups could brush the situation aside by citing 'Pandemic', the school going children have been hard hit, both socially and psychologically. These kids are at the verge of becoming mentally disturbed and online class is a far cry for the majority of the population

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Are we air-brushing #history by toppling statues? Adulatory statues may represent past atrocities or #inequality, but keeping them visible may help remind the present generation of historical wrongs, argues of Iván G Somlai of EthnoBureaucratia.

Anmol Paudel @nmlpd
Obvious solution: Keep historical statues in museums, i.e. Nazi monuments in Berlin. Even in the best case, they still promote a myth of genius/pure good/pure evil. For example, the article assumes Mother Teresa would be a universally uncontested statue, but she is a controversial figure.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepal ends COVID-19 lockdown Cabinet decides to lift restrictions from midnight Tuesday, but limits public gatherings. All domestic and international flights would be allowed to operate regular flights from 17 August. #Nepal #lockdown #COVID-19

Mishu Shrestha @MishuShrestha
I am scared & I really don't understand how our government is being so irresponsible. We haven't done enough tests yet... do we have enough beds in hospitals? Are we all prepared for the worst to come? Does our government have any back up plan or strategy?

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Over 400 wild animals have died in road kills across the country in past 3 years. The number is only likely to go up as we upgrade our highways. #Nepal is now building more underpasses so animals do not have to risk crossing highways. @tufanjee @WWFNepal

Rajen Limbu @rajenlimbu1
Good News for wild animals and they are beautiful assets of Nepal. Thank you to Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and #WWF

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

20 years ago this week, *Nepali Times* published an exclusive on the 50th anniversary of the 1950 Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty. Two decades later, the border dispute between Nepal and India shows that tensions persist. Excerpt:

Was it coincidence, or planned? Prime Minister Koirala chose 31 July to embark on his trip to India. It was exactly 50 years ago on this day that the infamous Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty was signed. The treaty with a newly independent India was entered into by the last Rana Prime Minister, Mohan SJB Rana.

The same issue has an interview with Deputy Speaker Chitra Lekha Yadav in which she talks about women in Parliament, gender mainstreaming, women as leaders, women in politics. Not much has changed in the politics of patriarchy in Nepal. Excerpt from interview:

"For some reason it is only women parliamentarians who are expected to raise women's issues. I think gender issues should be the concern of the state as well as of lawmakers, irrespective of gender. I believe it is the responsibility of all the MPs to help boost the participation of the weaker members of the society in the process of democratisation and



20 years ago, this week, *Nepali Times* published its #3 print edition (2-8 August 2000). The third edition revolved around issues like politics, women empowerment, culture and environment. The stories printed 20 years ago are as relevant today as they were then. None of the problems have been solved.

national development. Women lag behind males in various social fronts, and that should be a matter of concern to people's representatives

Another report titled 'Rubbish politics' written by Hemlata Rai is on the politics of garbage management in Kathmandu. Another problems that has not been addressed in 20 years. Excerpt from the report:

Nothing in Nepal is what it seems. This is also true for the rotting piles of rubbish on the sidewalks. This is no ordinary trash: someone is letting it pile up to make a political point.

During his first tenure as a Local Development Minister back in 1991, Ram Chandra Poudel, embarrassed by public outrage over trash piling up on the streets, promised an end to Kathmandu's chronic garbage crisis.

Today, Poudel is back as Local Development Minister (and Deputy Prime Minister to boot) and the garbage is still here. And once more, just as in 1991, the heaps of rubbish signify the tussle between Poudel's ministry and the office of Kathmandu's mayor.

Kathmandu's long-suffering citizens are fed up. For them, the garbage is symbolic of everything that is wrong with politicians and their petty fights that is ruining the country.



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Sorting through history for the Yeti

Whether it exists or not, this mythical monster of Himalayan folklore is Nepal’s top tourist attraction

Great grey clouds steal the light and weigh down the sky — no chance of glimpsing any passing comet or rising moon. Relentless rain fills the days, quieting the birds and hammering the plastic sheets that cover the roof’s leaking tiles. Rising to a deafening roar then quieting to



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyval

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

Inside the house, my entire early Nepal life is spread across the dining table. Heaps of faded photos, tattered letters, newspaper cuttings, slides and memories, untidily sorted into bygone years with the elusive hope of getting them selected, discarded and stuck into the big blue scrap book. It is a slow and distracting process, perfect for long pandemic evenings.

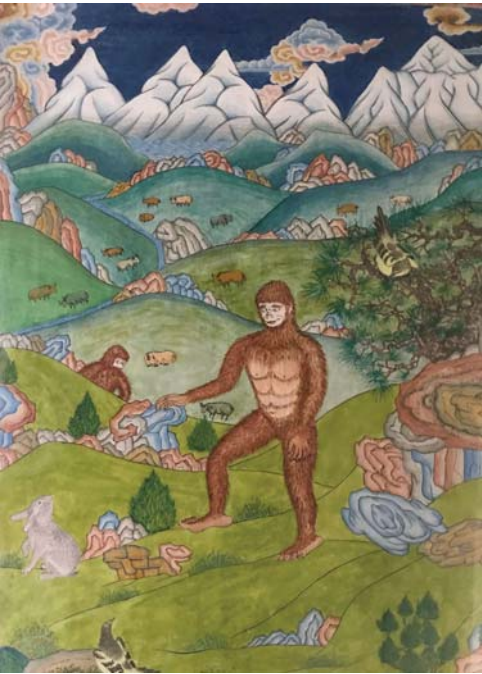
During the early days of Tiger Mountain, with summer rains swelling rivers, closing roads and precluding tourism, normally I would be travelling to promote Nepal’s heritage, jungle and trekking attractions. Our source markets were mainly US and Europe in the 1980s, and with industry colleagues I would 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 fading photos testify that you might find me salmon fishing in Iceland with Jim Edwards, leading trips to China for Lindblad Travel, on a wildlife cruise to Alaska or scouting adventure trips in Eastern Siberia. With a marketing budget of close to zero — Jim was always a little vague about money – none of this travelling would have been possible without the sofas of random friends, and the free standby tickets on Pan American Airlines that we represented in Nepal.

The joys of flying standby are overstated. 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-woke 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 hippies, I was most often asked about the Yeti, especially in North America where



PHURBA CHITTEN SHERPA

our Abominable Snowman was sympathetically equated to 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, dreaded by the Sherpas and other mountain peoples as well as throughout Tibet. Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation boasted Yeti service, with a startling statue bearing an inflight tray 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 Menlung Glacier west of Mount Everest. Reports include hunched dark shapes disappearing over a ridgeline, huge baffling tracks crossing remote alpine snowfields, looming shadows appearing in blizzards, and even yaks with their heads “screwed off” by the beast. Such was its intrigue that Sir Edmund Hillary and Griffith Pugh mounted a winter expedition in 1960 to 1961 to Rolwaling and Khumbu in search of the Yeti, a Sherpa word meaning ‘wild man’, with the writer and painter Desmond Doig as the ‘official reporter’.

Hillary wrote: ‘Our Yeti search gave us many exciting moments as we tracked down the threads that seemed so often to be leading to an astounding answer, but never did. At the end of it all, we reached a definite conclusion that the Yeti was a myth.’ With Sherpa headman Konchok Chombi and Khumjung 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 Bodnath in 1980 being interviewed for an ITV film about the Yeti presented by Arthur C Clark. Our hunt “was a great gaudy mess. Any self-respecting Yeti would have kept way away from us ... with our 600 porters, 200 Sherpas and about 40 of us.” Desmond loved any fanciful unsolved mystery, so

preferred to keep his options open.

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

The closest I came to any Yeti was when American scientists, Jeff McNeely and E W Cronin stored a silver tin trunk of 1972 specimens from the Upper Barun Khola in the cupboard under the stairs in the Sanepa house. I vividly recall Jeff showing me the white plaster casts 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 1975. Andrew remembers: “A tranquilizing gun had inadvertently been packed in the bottom of the case, and I was nearly arrested for illegal possession of firearms.” The plaster footprints were siezed by customs officials as “national treasures” and never seen again. A recent attempt to trace the lost 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. 🇳🇵

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‘A decade of work lost in 4 months’

Nepal’s volunteer teachers fight the crisis in rural education caused by the COVID-19 lockdown

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 fear many students will have dropped out when schools physically reopen.

Ichksha Pandey, 15, is a student in Nauthar village of Lamjung and dreams of becoming a nurse to improve healthcare standards in her village. Shreya Thapa, a fellow with the Teach for Nepal project says she is one of the sharpest students in class, a keen and curious learner.

For the past three months, Pandey has been attending television classes broadcast by the government. But it is difficult when her father scolds her for spending too much time on schoolwork at home, she says.

“I have to do all the household work because there is no one else in the house to take care of it,” she says. “My parents didn’t go to school so it’s hard to make them believe my education should get the most priority.”

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

“Relying on technology won’t work for us,” said Moin Uddin, an alumnus of Teach For Nepal, an organisation that tries to address the inequities in education in the country. “COVID-19 has to end, school has to start. That is the only way out.”

School closures brought about by the coronavirus have affected more than 1 billion students worldwide. According to UNDP estimates, 86% of primary 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, writes Maida Pasic, 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 Terse Higher Secondary School in Talamarang of Sindhupalchok district nearly all families of 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 school’s 600 students drop out every year. This year, they estimate many more children will not be re-joining classes when schools reopen, and the next two monsoon months are crucial.



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

Teacher Bhim Tamang says each one-way trip can take up to two hours due to poor roads. But it is the only way to get to his students, many of whom have been out of touch. “We tell them why education is important, why they should study,” he said. “Or they will 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 full year’s worth of learning, another Brookings report found.

“Reopening schools – when it is safe to do so – must be a priority otherwise we will see a devastating impact on children who are falling behind,” Pasic of UNICEF wrote.

With so many young futures at stake, Nepal’s teachers have rallied to keep their students engaged and learning, even from a distance. Teach For Nepal fellow Anup Buyo creates and uploads science videos on YouTube, then pays for his students’ mobile data so they can gather classmates in the same village to watch them together. Afterwards, they video call him with their questions.

Still, he worries. “Their foundations are very poor and they will certainly forget everything we taught before this lockdown. It’s a decade of work lost in months,” he said.

Teachers are hoping the Nepal government can provide them with more support as they try to get students back on track. “Support in terms of workbook copies, internet facilities and expenses for visiting villages and communities,” said Anish Manandhar, another Teach For Nepal volunteer teacher.

Other volunteers like Samrita Maharjan say that as teachers they try to do their jobs during the lockdown school closure, but it is stressful. During a typical Zoom lesson, only four or five of Maharjan’s class of 60 students from Saraswoti Model Secondary School in Tanahu turn up. Most have no internet access, others cannot operate Zoom.

“It’s not even their fault. Never in their lives have they heard of online classes. Using Zoom is new and scary for them,” she says.

The government has acted slowly, schools closed without viable alternatives for remote learning, and more students are dropping out as their teachers struggle to reach them.

“I wouldn’t blame the students because we can’t even cater to their learning in the right way,” Maharjan says, “if the virus is spreading at that speed, our execution must be double the speed right?” 🇳🇵

Digital divide exposes class divide

The prolonged COVID-19 lockdown has brought out the inequities in Nepal’s education system

Nunuta 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 were sending their children to more expensive private institutions. But this inequity 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 ensure that students had necessary equipment at home for distance learning.

Even in Kathmandu Valley, many students do not have access to computers and WiFi to take online classes, so the situation in the remoter districts are 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’s salaries.



In May, the ministry issued the ‘Student Learning Facilitation Guide for Alternative Systems’ 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 in-person teaching by organising

staggered classes with precautions, or for teachers to physically visit students’ homes maintaining distance. But many schools have been converted to quarantine centres.”

A survey of access to technology in Tulsipur in the western Tarai recently showed that even in the town, only 6% of students in government schools had WiFi access at home. Only 21% in higher education had radio sets at home for FM classes.

Most private schools had been taking online classes for the past two months until the private school organisation PABSON

decided to shut all online classes to protest the government’s decision not to allow them to take fees from parents.

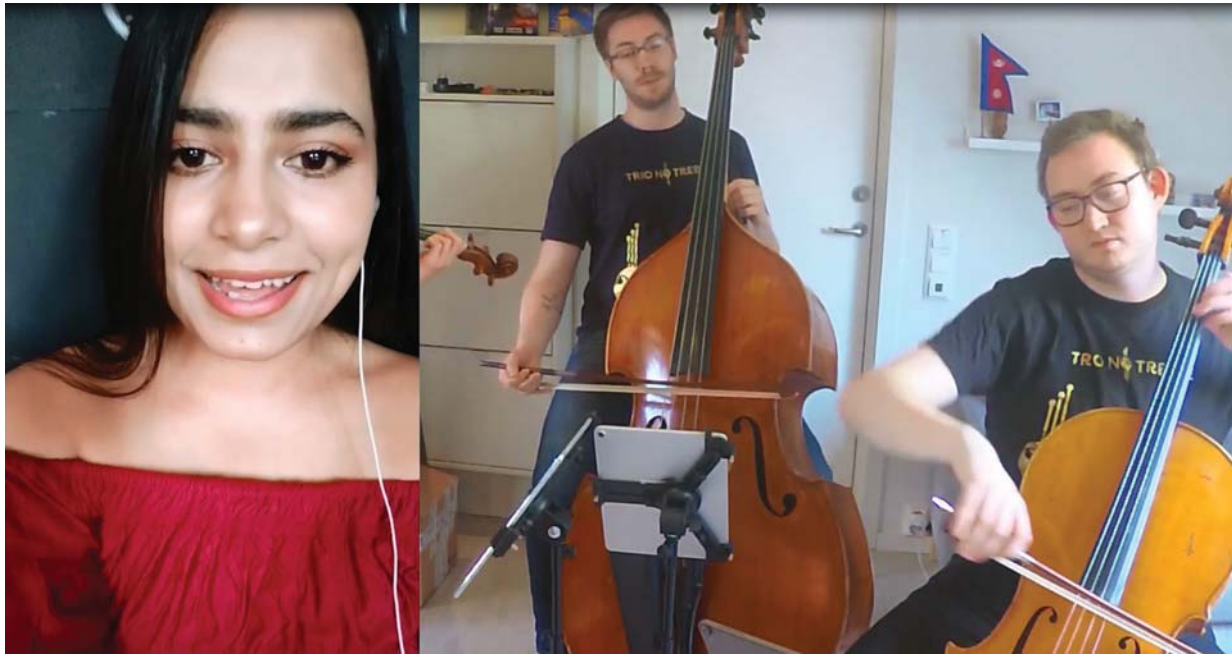
There is technology gap among students even in Kathmandu Valley. At the Pragati Shiksha Sadan School in Lalitpur, only a quarter of students are taking online classes.

Principal Surya Prasad Ghimire says the school is conducting classes for lower grades through radio and tv, and 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 the equipment for online classes,” says Ghimire. “It is good that we are able to do remote learning, but this is not accessible to many.”

Even before the government decided on alternative instruction Bhaktapur had already started remote learning through a local tv channel in its 33 public school, while many of the 60 private schools are doing online classes.

In Kathmandu, there is a total of 500 private and public schools. According to Ishwar 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. 🇳🇵



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 (right) met musician Eivind Rossback Heier at a concert at the Norwegian Embassy in Kathmandu in October last year, they immediately hit it off and talked about collaborating.

Then the pandemic struck, and Heier's plans to return to Nepal for the sixth time to continue his orchestra project had to be put on hold. But Heier 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 long months of the lockdown in Nepal.

In Norway, Heier is now playing 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, Heier 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," Heier said in an interview from Oslo. "It's great that we can make music together over the Internet, despite the corona. I hope we can do more of that 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, *Sapanako 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 life 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 eruption 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 crime 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 writing songs became an outlet for me."

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

Back in Norway, Heier 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, film 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," Heier recalls. "I then listened to her on YouTube, and I fell in love with her beautiful voice. Since the borders are closed, we are lucky to be able to interact and play together across the borders."

During his trips to Nepal, Heier found Nepali folk music fascinating and enjoys playing Narayan Gopal and Amber Gurung hits. The trio asked Dahal to choose any song she wanted, and she selected her latest release *Sapanako 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 Heier, 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 audience, 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." 📺

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Online Seedstars deadline

Applications are open to promising startups who want to take their business to new heights through the Online Seedstars



World Competition 2020/21. Apply now for a chance to receive a \$50K growth program investment and to represent your country on the global stage as you compete for the Global Winner prize of \$500K in investment. Final deadline for entries is 31 July. <https://vc4a.com/seedstars-world/online-seedstars-world-competition-2020-21/>

Qatar's 350 and 787

Qatar Airways has put its Airbus 380s in storage and will have a fleet of Airbus A350 and Boeing 787s. The four engined double-decker 380s emit up to 95% more carbon dioxide per block hour than



the other twinjets. 'We see the 350 with average age of 2.5 years and 787 as being more suitable to operate commercially and environmentally right now,' the airlines said.

Himalaya Airlines

Himalaya Airlines donated a portable ventilator and other medical items to AMDA Hospital in Damak and a PCR machine and other essential medical supplies to the COVID-19 Control Management Centre (CCMC) in Gulmi. the airline is also operating its fourth phase of repatriation flights from 7-17 August.

Etihad PCR tests

Effective 1 August, all travellers flying Etihad Airways from around the world to Abu Dhabi, and those transferring via Abu Dhabi onto other flights, will be required to show a negative COVID-19 PCR test result from a list of approved testing facilities listed on www.etihad.com/destinationguide. Etihad is collaborating with Mediclinic Middle East to offer departing PCR tests for a fee at home.

Ncell online

Ncell Private Limited and Higher Institutions and Secondary Schools Association Nepal (HISSAN), have agreed to Ncell's mobile



connectivity for online teaching and learning activities. Ncell will provide a special monthly subsidised rate.

Daraz Mahabachat

Daraz launched its shopping campaign Daraz Mahabachat Bazar until 4 August, under which customers can save while shopping and customers will get an additional 20% off via payments through eSewa.

Kia Sonet SUV

Kia Motors India has revealed its new production-ready Kia Sonet compact SUV at the 2020 Delhi Auto Expo. This is the Kia model to be made in India after the Seltos.

Nabil Bank QR

Nabil Bank has launched a QR based cash withdrawal facility Scan & Withdraw allowing customers to use its SmartBank App to withdraw cash amounts of up to Rs100,000 per day and Rs1 million per month.

Kumari Bank

Kumari bank has has agreed with Siddhartha Business group to allow



customers with Kumari Bank debit or credit a 10% discount on meals at restaurants and hotels.

NICAsia

NIC Asia has introduced its 'Digital Account Opening' service, whereby customers can fill out a form and send their personal information, photo, fingerprint, and signature digitally to open a savings account.



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EVENTS



Girls in Tech podcast
Season 1 of The *Girls in Tech* Podcast, hosted by award-winning filmmaker and producer Zuzy Martin-Aly, will explore the evolution of tech as listeners hear from scholars, executives and creatives who are developing solutions to the world's biggest challenges. Learn more at the Girls in Tech- Nepal Facebook page.
11 August onwards



Organic Farmer's Market
Support local farmers. Buy fresh organic produce, delicious baked goods, dairy products, honey, homemade achaar and more at the Organic Farmer's Market.
Every Saturday, 7:30am-5pm, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, 9851245426

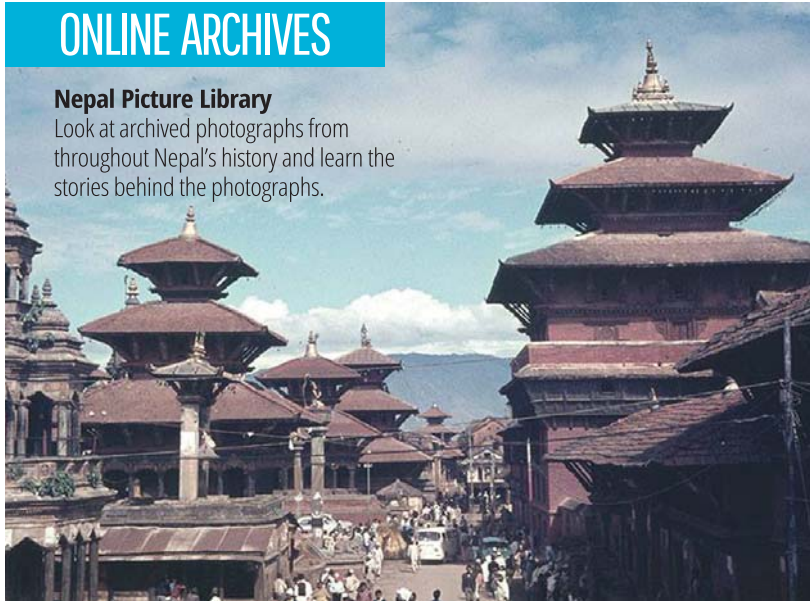
The Contextator
Colombo-based Acting Editor of Himal Southasian Shubhanga Pandey will share his insights on the post-COVID media landscape and emerging trends in South Asia on Episode 5 of *The Contextator*, a fortnightly talk-series that will provide informed, impartial opinions on Nepal's contemporary challenges Join the event at <https://www.facebook.com/qcbookshop/live>
2 August, 5pm-6pm

Writing Wednesday
Keep an eye out for KathaSatha to put up a prompt for #WritingWednesday, designed for 5 minutes of specific but low-stakes writing. KathaSatha will put up the prompt on Facebook. Share stories in the comments on KathaSatha's Facebook page. To share anonymously, send the story in Katha Satha's DMs or at kathasatha@gmail.com.

Weekend hike & yoga
Take a refreshing hike from Narayanthan to Tarebhir this weekend, with yoga to cap it off. Call Swaa Holidays for more details.
1 August, 7am, Price: Rs1111, Narayanthan to Tarebhir, 9851084973

ONLINE ARCHIVES

Nepal Picture Library
Look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal's history and learn the stories behind the photographs.



The world at home
Travel may be limited these days, but discovering incredible experiences from across the globe doesn't have to be. Get Your Guide's The world at home initiative brings top tours, activities, and attractions online. Find everything on Get Your Guide's YouTube channel.

Rare Book Room
Take a look at and read some of the most rare books in existence from across the world. Highlights include the works of Shakespeare, Benjamin Franklin, and Copernicus' De revolutionibus Go to www.rarebookroom.org and begin browsing.

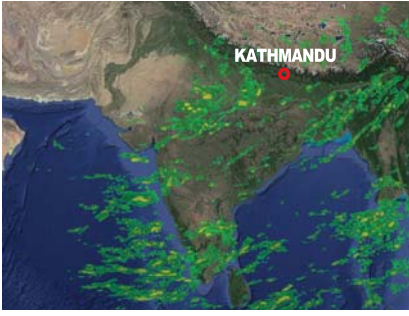
Oversimplified
On *OverSimplified*, history is not as contrived as it seems. Head on to YouTube and watch historical events- both widely known and unknown- get explained with depth and humour. Start from the detailed breakdown of World War I.






Heist Podcast
A true crime comedy podcast that delves 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 Stitcher, Apple Podcasts, and Spotify.

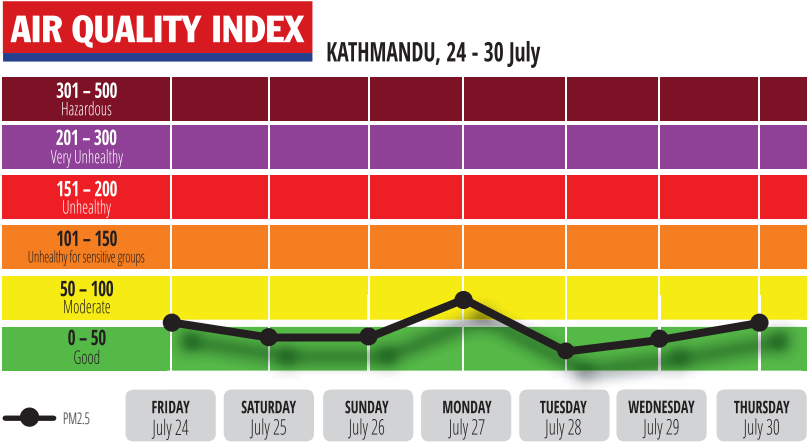


Going places together - qatarairways.com



KATHMANDU
The monsoon pulses are coming in back-to-back without a let-up this year. This is unusual, because Nepal usually has a few days of respite between bouts of heavy rain. After slamming into central Nepal this week, another front is sweeping in which will keep central Nepal in its spell into the weekend. The showers will get heavier into Saturday and Sunday, so don't put away those gumboots to navigate muddy streets just yet. There will be a slight let up next week, but July has seen 25% more precipitation in Kathmandu Valley than average.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 27° 20°	 27° 19°	 29° 20°



The lockdown is over and vehicles are back on the streets, but thanks to frequent showers, the daily average Air Quality Index continues to remain in either good or moderate zone. The spike on Monday was because it hadn't rained during the day and the particulate pollutants could not be washed down. With long-distance buses restarting from this week and more businesses opening up, pollution may get worse. No worries for this weekend, though, when heavy rains are forecast.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI


KRIPA JOSHI





ADOPT AND REHOME

Around the world there are millions of dogs and cats on the streets and in the shelters waiting for a loving family. When shelters reach overcapacity, strays could be rejected, or even euthanised. Adopting or rehoming an animal not only saves their life, but also free up space for another animal to be cared for. We also take business away from puppy mills that could be supplying animals for sale online, in pet stores or via classified ads. Animals are housed in poor conditions with improper medical care and often develop serious health problems down the road. Mother dogs are bred with little recovery time between litters over many years until they are too sick or old to continue. If you want to buy a purebred companion then do some research to find a good, reliable and responsible breeder where the animals are reared in a safe, clean and comfortable environment.
#FridaysForFuture



OUR PICK

For this 2016 American documentary film, directors Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani with their crew went undercover for 16 months to expose the poaching of elephants and the smuggling of ivory to China. The filmmakers take us on a wild journey from Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia to China, Hong Kong and Vietnam in its quest to investigate the flourishing but illegal multi-billion dollar ivory trade. *The Ivory Game* can be streamed on Netflix.

DINING



The Chocolate Room
Enter a world of chocolate cupcakes, decadent brownies and chocolate of every size and shape. Between the chocolate, try the Peri Peri fries and milk shake.
Jhamsikhel, 9851056096



Erma Restaurant
Erma Restaurant offers an upscale fine dining experience with chef-curated continental dishes. Try the cream of beetroot soup, vegetable saslik, and the Erma house burger.
Hotel Shambala, Chakrapath (01) 4650351

Kairos Cafe
With a customisable breakfast, variety of juicy burgers and an assortment of Italian, Spanish and English cuisine, Kairos Cafe is a must for foodies.
7am-7pm, Jawalakhel, 9813493902

The Village Cafe
Get fresh, delicious, home-made Newa cusine from The Village Cafe delivered at home. Order the sel roti mix, frozen momo and khuwa. Call the cafe for deliveries, or order through Kathmandu Organics.
(01) 5540712 / 9842425127


Dhokaima Cafe
Monsoon menu at Dhokaima Cafe with new weekly lineups of fresh items specially prepared by Chef Ale.
(01) 5522113



Haadi Biryani
Craving a quick and easy Biryani? Haadi is the place to go or order from. Enjoy slow-cooked biryanis seasoned with a secret spice blend which come in clay pots that enhances the dining experience.
Dilli Bazaar (01) 4438444 / 9864334987

बालबालिका माथि हुने हिंसा, दुर्व्यवहार, शोषण भएको, जोखिमपूर्ण अवस्थामा रहेको वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने

फोन: नं. ९०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।



नेपाल सरकार

सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

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 big cat population, a new report shows that Nepal remains an important corridor for trafficking of tiger parts from South Asia to China.

More worryingly, there is evidence that ringleaders of smuggling networks who have been caught in Nepal smuggling tiger skin, 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) finally arrested in Kathmandu the notorious wildlife smuggler Kunjok Lama, who had been in the crosshairs of police in India and Nepal for two decades.

He was named by traffickers 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 Rasuwa yielded five tiger pelts, 36 leopard skin and 113kg 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 on Wildlife Enforcement in India* as the most important haul of endangered species in South Asia. The accused were sentenced to seven years in jail and fined Rs100,000 each. All were released 2012 after completing their jail time. All five mentioned the name Kunjok Lama (aka Kunjok Tsering Tamang) as being the ringleader of the smuggling operation.

Kunjok Lama's name had also popped up in successive seizures in India of wildlife contraband in Ghaziabad 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 India's Central Investigation Bureau had named Kunjok Lama as being behind the smuggling of at least 600 tiger pelts over the years.

He had since then been in the Interpol dragnet for the past 20 years until his arrest in Kathmandu last month.

Originally from Namkha village of Nepal's Humla district, Kunjok Lama has now challenged the Rasuwa 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 to the smuggling operation.

On 14 July, Judge Rajan Prasad Bhattarai of the Patan High Court wrote to the Rasuwa District Court asking for the files on the case. The court can call a hearing in the case within a day or two of the documents arriving. Kunjok Lama could soon be free again.

"If he is released on bail, even if the court ultimately decides he is guilty, he will disappear," predicts a police source in the CIB's Wildlife Pillar in Kathmandu. "And unless he is put on a travel blacklist, he will go abroad just like other smugglers we have caught before."



BURNING OUT: Seizure of tiger pelts and bones in Kailali in 2018 with those accused (*above*). Six of the eight arrested were Indian, and released on bail by a district court. They immediately escaped to India.

Konjuk Lama (*left*) was named in numerous seizures of tiger parts in Nepal and India, and was finally caught in Kathmandu on 25 June. But like apprehended high profile smugglers in the past, he may be released soon by Nepal's courts.

Lodu Dime arrives at Kathmandu Airport in 2018 (*left, below*) after being extradited from India where he was caught by a joint Indian security and Interpol operation.



skulls and claws and 122 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 Lodu Dime as the person who hired their truck for Rs100,000 to take the rice to Rasuwa. Police raided Dime's house in Baudha and confiscated wildlife contraband, eight passports and Rs4 million in various currencies.

Lodu Dime got himself cleared by the courts after paying a nominal Rs100,000 fine, and also freed his wife who had been arrested. However, the Appeals Court sentenced him in *absentia* to five years in prison. Despite this, records show that Dime kept travelling freely back and forth between India and Nepal.

With help from Interpol, Dime 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 Nuwakot to serve his five year sentence. But Dime appealed at the Supreme Court where the bench of Justices Mira Khadka and Dambar Bahadur Shahi decided to release him on only Rs45,000 bail. Dime then disappeared.

"The bail amount was negligible compared to the cash value of the contraband, the court never put a travel ban on him, and after jumping bail he was back to his smuggling activities," a Nepali CIB official involved in the

investigation told *Nepali Times*.

Police have now uncovered links between Lodu Dime and Kunjok Lama, and found that they sometimes worked together to make Nepal a collection point for wildlife smuggled from India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to be transported to China through Kodari, and later Rasuwa checkpoints.

In the past five years alone Nepal's CIB has caught red handed 73 tiger smugglers in 31 raids. Among them are nine Indians and two Chinese. Just in the past five years, the seizures have included 28 tiger pelts and 139kg of tiger bones. Although many of the tigers were probably poached in India, two tigers were found to have been killed in Nepal, one was poisoned and other electrocuted.

The nine Indians arrested in Nepal are from the Babriya forest-dwelling community who are expert wildlife trackers. One of them was Ramjas Banjara, who served as the link between poachers in India and smugglers in Nepal to who traffick wildlife parts to China.

Banjara 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 jails who are part of the smuggling network will soon be released," says Police Inspector Birendra Johari, who has conducted numerous sting operations against wildlife smugglers.

Of the six other Indian smugglers caught in a CIB sting operation in Kailali in 2015 that seized two tiger pelts and 40kg of bones, five were released on bail after paying Rs100,000 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 of Indian poachers in Nepal.

The Babriya also knew how to kill tigers without a gun which ends up damaging the pelt with bullet holes, and reduces its sale value. Since every part of a tiger can be sold in China and Vietnam, there is hardly any evidence of a tiger 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 and Thailand. But it notes that smuggling is also rife in Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

The report by the Vienna-based UN Office of Drugs and Crime investigated 600 incidents of tiger smuggling and found that parts of South Asia have become hotspots of tiger poaching and smuggling — using Nepal as a transit to China.

The report also notes that besides the threat to biodiversity and national security from criminalisation, there are also serious health implications of illicit wildlife trade: "The illegal trade in wildlife, which by definition does not go through proper sanitary and phytosanitary controls, 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 which was already under scrutiny for corruption, has been tarnished even more this month by the Supreme Court Chief Justice and another judge freeing a senior police officer sentenced to life imprisonment for brutally murdering his wife and burning her remains.

There has also 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 26 major glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) events 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 Langmoche ‘flash flood’ of 1985 in the Thame Valley in Khumbu which killed at least five 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 1998.

The only documentation that Watanabe could find was a short piece in the *The Rising Nepal* of 28 June 1980 reporting that a flood had occurred in the Tamor Valley. Damage included ‘...all the houses in Olangchung Gola village’, bridges, and downstream settlements, with at least 10 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 Nangama glacial lake, about 8km south of the border with Tibet (*see map, right*).

Oblique aerial photos taken in 1978 and 1992 clearly showed the

breached terminal moraine and deposits that not only a GLOF from Nangama had occurred in 1980, but that its debris had blocked a small river to the south, creating a new lake named Chheche.

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

And so we set out from Bhadrapur by jeep on 18 April last year to see if we could update the status of GLOFs and climate change impacts in what had now become the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA). The next day a three hour drive to Tapletok, and we spent the next six weeks on foot.

Kangchenjunga 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 1900s to 1930s by the Germans and British.

But it wasn’t until 25 May, 1955 that the mountain was first summited by Georg Band and Joe Brown, in a British expedition.

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

There are 5,198 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 Lhonak *kharka* (pasture), providing food and shelter for the 200 trekkers arriving each spring, and 500 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.

Glaciologists like to take field measurements, drill ice cores, analyse satellite imagery, and recreate 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 studies

of GLOFs.

The original plan was to trek from Tapletok due north to Yangma, and then west to Nangama glacial 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 glacial lake only.

We were told that an older person who was knowledgeable in the region’s history lived in the upper part of Tapletok, about a 20 minute walk away. We left immediately, walking through the rice fields and up a steep incline to

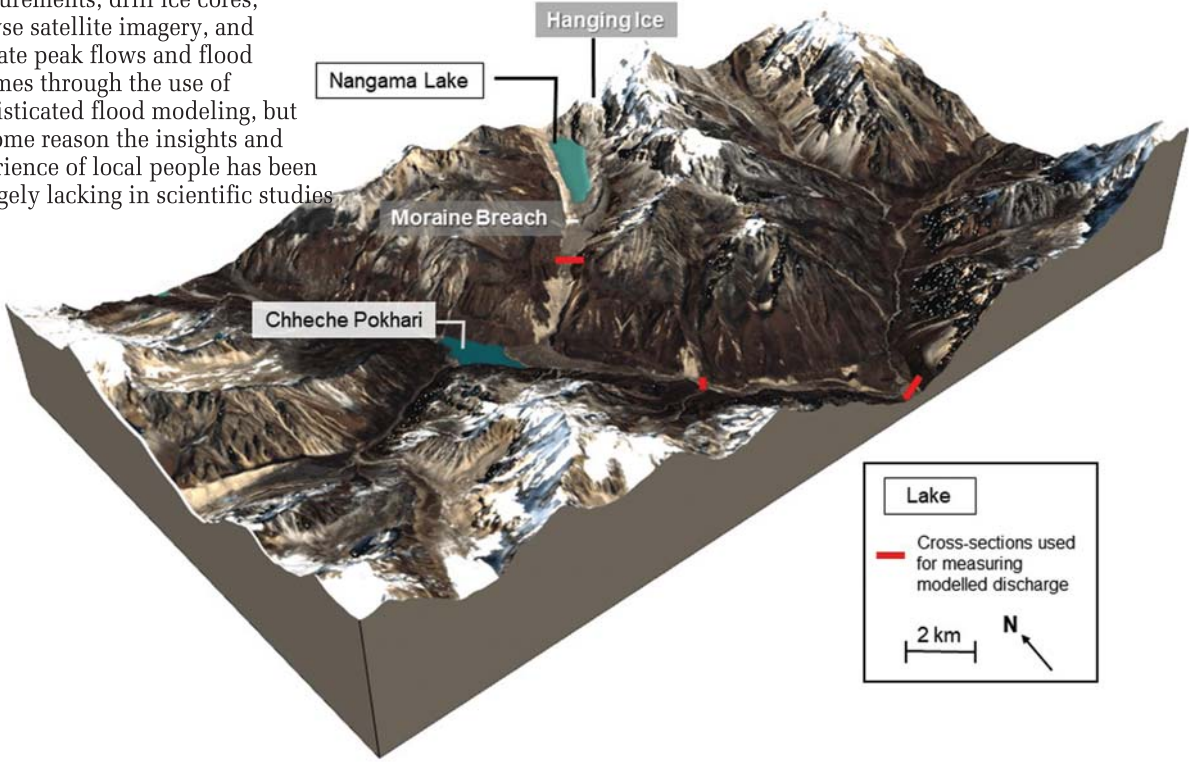
a beautiful house overlooking the Tamor River below, the home of Barachan Limbu, 81 (*pictured*).

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 1980s 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 3 shows the five floods as identified by Barachan Limbu. The most recent was in 1986,



Lakpa Chhetan Sherpa, 88, of Ghunsa village.





ALL PHOTOS: ALTON C BYERS



Tahwa Lama, 71, and Damling Lama Sherpa, 62, both of Yangma.



Kushophula Lama Ukyap, 72, at the 450-year-old Olanchun Gola monastery.



Barachan Limbu, 81, of Tapletok was our first informant.

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 Ghunsa 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 the village of Olanchun Gola, 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 Kushophula Lama Ukyap, 72, caretaker of the Deki Chholing Gompa built 450 years ago (*above*). Ukyap informed us that as opposed to the 1980 Nangama flood destroying the lower part of the village (a physical impossibility, since the Yangma Khola runs to the east of the Tamor River), it was in fact the 1963 Olanchun Gola 1 flood that caused the damage.

Flood waters originated in the Tiptola glacial lake to the northwest, which was the source of a second and smaller GLOF in 1968. Approximately 45 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 Chhochenphu Himal (6,269 m) to the north of the lake.

We then trekked for two days to Tiptola glacial lake, for

the most part following a newly constructed road from Olanchun Gola to the Tiptala Pass (5,095 m) to Tibet. Along the way we meet a group of KCA 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 holding community consultations 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 Olanchun Gola several days later, we next set out for the village of Yaphu to the north. Along the way we saw two bears, a red panda, a variety of resplendent sun birds, and old growth stands of junipers, hemlocks, and fir trees with diameters of 1 meter+.

A road was being built on an upper ridge to the west to Yaphu, 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 was not 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 Yangma, we met Tahwa Lama, 71, an eyewitness to the 1980 Nangama flood (*above*) who remembered grazing his yaks in what had been three distinct pasture areas covering approximate 4.5 km² below the terminal moraine when the GLOF occurred. He heard a deafening noise and a large dust cloud descending from the lake area, followed by a wave 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 Chheche Pokhari was formed by the blockage of the Pabuk Khola by flood sediments and debris.

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

The turtle then floated down valley in the flood waters until it reached the bridge at Yangma village. Refusing to go under the bridge, the turtle’s body blocked the flood water, resulting in a temporary lake upstream that

damaged hillslopes and grazing land, but which drained when it decided to continue downriver.

The flood was also linked by religious leaders to the fact that “modern people have become wicked, so bad things happen”.

Our final visit of a GLOF site was to the Lhonak Glacier, en route to Kanchenjunga North Base Camp. This was the source of the 1921 Lhonak GLOF which is of particular interest because, nearly 100 years after its occurrence, it was still mentioned to by people throughout the Tamor watershed.

Lakpa Chhetan Sherpa, 88, of Ghunsa (*above*) said that his ancestors had come from Tibet and settled at Khangpachen, a *goth* (yak pasture) downstream of the Lhonak Glacier, some 500 years ago, where they farmed and herded yak.

When the flood destroyed all of their fields in 1921 his grandfather, whose wife was among the fatalities of the flood, moved to Ghunsa, where the family has lived ever since. Lakpa Chhetan Sherpa also reported that another small flood of the Ghunsa River had occurred in “either August or September” of 2011, the approximate time that a deadly earthquake (6.9 magnitude) centered in the Kanchenjunga region occurred that killed an estimated 111 people, which brought our total number of new, unreported floods from the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area up to a remarkable six, in addition to the 1980 Nangama 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 snow and ice peaks jutting above, never realising that they are walking in the middle of a catastrophic event that changed people’s lives, and view of the world nearly 100 years ago. We certainly wouldn’t have known anything about the glacial lakes and moraines if we hadn’t consulted with local people along the way.

Back in the US, it was March of 2020 before I was finally 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, I contacted Mohan Bahadur Chand, a recently-minted PhD student at Hokkaido University and, coincidentally, one of Teiji Watanabe’s students.

Mohan’s 2020 PhD thesis was, in fact, about the development of glacial lakes in the Kanchenjunga region, and he was rapidly 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 of flood scars, breached terminal moraines, and deposits.

Jonathan Lala, graduate student in engineering at the University of Wisconsin Madison, developed a numerical simulation model of the Nangama GLOF that strongly suggested that it was triggered by an ice/debris avalanche of some 800,000 m³ of material, just like local 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 damming the Pabuk Khola river 2km below to form what is today known as Chheche Pokhari, just like local people had said.

Milan Shrestha, anthropologist at Arizona State University, provided the methodological framework for oral history as a tool in recounting past GLOF events. He also provided essential information about mountain cultures and religious beliefs that helped our understanding and interpretations of many of the interviews conducted.

Plant ecologist Elizabeth Byers was responsible for taking many of the field measurements of the Nangama glacial lake and terminal moraine that Jonathan Lala considered to be essential to his numeric modeling.

And Teiji Watanabe, whose article from over 20 years ago about the Nangama GLOF sparked the launch of our 2019 expedition, shared his vast expertise and more recent thoughts about the continued dangers of glacial lakes in the Kanchenjunga region.

Together, the contributions resulted in our scientific paper published earlier this month in the journal *Sustainability*. In summary, modern tools such as GIS, satellite imagery, and flood modeling are increasingly sophisticated and valuable to our understanding of our changing world, but they have their own temporal and analytical limitations as well. Involving local people in research can help to fill these gaps. While development agencies are busy writing up guidelines for mountain people to adapt to climate change, the same people have been doing so for centuries.

They suffer (each flood mentioned killed many people and destroyed millions in infrastructure), they find ways to adapt (move to Ghunsa, graze the cattle higher), and they press on. Their resilience in the face of a history of unexpected GLOFs could provide some valuable lessons for us all, as we face the shock and completely unanticipated challenges imposed by COVID-19 and the global pandemic. 🇳🇵

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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 respite for nature everywhere. The air became cleaner, trekking trails turned pristine, for once the summit of Mt Everest was deserted, and worldwide carbon emission dipped by -26%.

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

Personal protective gear (PPE) like disposable gowns are made from polyester or polyethylene. Surgical masks and N95 respirators are made from non-woven polypropylene fibre. 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 Wuhan produced more than 240 tons of waste per day against 40 tons normally – with most of the waste being plastic PPEs.

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

The Thai 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 evidence shows a big 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 use plastic plates and utensils for meal distribution and well as polythene 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 Shilshila Acharya of the Himalayan Climate Initiative.

She adds, “Another emerging problem is the improper disposal of face masks. These are 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 after a sudden squall.

Bhaktapur Mayor Sunil Prajapati says Hanumante River in his municipality invariably bursts its banks even in normal rainfall, and despite it not a big river because of blocked drainage.

Prajapati told *Nepali Times*: “The river is like a gutter that is flooded every year because waste blocks the outlets and drainage.”

A three-year regional study by ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development)’s SANDEE (South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics) shows that 12.7% Bharatpur in Nepal and 22.3% of Sylhet in Bangladesh are at the risk of flooding because of the lack of proper solid waste management system. Unblocking drains would limit flooding to 5.5% in Bharatpur, the report says.

Mani 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.”

More than a million 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 204 tons of plastic waste generated in Nepal every day, 131 tons end up in the streets, drains, rivers and some of it makes it to landfill sites.

Plastics, being petroleum based, take at least 500 years to biodegrade, killing aquatic and land animals. Microplastics also find their way into the human food chain. Harmful chemicals in plastic can alter hormones and chromosomes, leading to cancer and



damage to the reproductive system.

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

Former Environment Minister Ganesh Shah tried but failed to implement a plastic ban he introduced in 2008. The Plastic Bag Regulation and Control Guideline introduced in 2011 was not effective either in discouraging plastic use.

The government could not even enforce a ban on plastic in the walled compound its central secretariat of Singha Darbar. A Gazette notice on 14 April 2015 banned on bags thinner than 30 microns, but it was overtaken 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 57% higher in areas with proper solid waste management system. Similarly, the price of a house with a blocked sewer is at least 11% lower.

An estimated 70% 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 are disposed of together in plastic bags. Garbage collectors also do not sort waste, which ends up directly at the landfill in Sisdoile 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 reduce as well as reduce the cost of garbage collection. Pre-determining time and day and placing for communal garbage collection and placing trash cans for pedestrians are other ways to prevent haphazard disposal of solid waste.

Bharatpur residents pay Rs30-100 a month for garbage collection and are willing to pay up to 30% more for proper waste management. This is an additional Rs5 million 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, this requires only the will to implement,” says Mani Nepal.

Bharatpur has been trying to reduce waste at source by buying plastic waste from households at Rs9 per kg, which it then sells to recyclers. The municipality also provides subsidy to those who want to turn their organic waste into biogas.

Bharatpur has shown that if there is political will, plastic waste can be reduced. And by not dumping plastic in drains and rivers, it is also protecting wildlife along the Narayani River in Chitwan National Park directly downstream.

The good news is that the global movement against the use of plastic is also having an effect in parts of Kathmandu. Polythene are being replaced by re-usable bags in shopping malls, restaurants and hotels discourage straws and plastic wrappings, and paper plates have replaced Styrofoam at some party venues.

While plastic-based PPEs have been vital in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 and are life savers for frontline health workers, if the SARS-CoV-2 persists longer there may have to be a move towards paper packaging and materials.

Says Shilshila Acharya: “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.” 🇳🇵



BIKRAM RAI