



**SHEDDING IT:** Som Prasad Pahadi of the NEA substation in Lagankhel switches off electricity to Chapagaun for its regular Thursday morning power cut.

GOPEN RAI

## SWITCHED ON

As pre-monsoon showers brought much-needed rain this week, the Nepal Electricity Authority reduced power cuts by one hour a day from this week. But consumers still face up to 12 hours without electricity in a country said to be the richest in hydropower in the region.

The five-month Indian Blockade drew attention to this failure to harness hydropower and the growing dependence on petroleum imports. The government announced the Energy Crisis Reduction and Development Decade to end power cuts within a year and generate 10,000 MW of electricity in 10 years. Nepalis have heard

these promises before and have ridiculed the targets.

Officials at the Ministry of Finance are finalising the new budget for presentation this weekend. Will Prime Minister KP Oli's government set aside the resources to end the energy crisis? Will there be incentives for quick solar and wind energy projects? The Ministry of Energy wants Rs 7 billion to supply 1,000 MW by next winter. But mega hydro projects have been delayed by the earthquake and Blockade, and to meet the shortfall, the government is upgrading transmission lines to import another 300 MW from India.

### POWER STRUGGLE EDITORIAL PAGE 2

Nawaraj Dhakal, Director of the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre, says the new budget is important because it would be Nepal's first fiscal planning after the blockade: "We are expecting the budget to restart nearly 300 earthquake-damaged micro hydro projects, and renewable energy subsidy for earthquake survivors."

International investors are in Kathmandu next week for the Nepal Power Investment Summit 2016 to attract energy partners. Hydropower developers expect policy changes in the budget, including tax incentives for hydropower construction. Khadga Bahadur Bista, President of Independent Power

Producers' Association says: "Because of the quake and blockade we need *force majeure* incentives for energy projects." Om Astha Rai



### Mustering up energy to face the future

BY OM ASTHA RAI  
PAGE 14-15

### Nepal: The future power house of South Asia

BY SUJIT ACHARYA

### Kickstarting solar projects

BY AVISHEK MALLA  
PAGE 4



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# POWER STRUGGLE

We laugh at our leaders when they promise to end power cuts not because we are unaware of Nepal’s energy potential, but because we are aware of their ineptitude

Prime Minister KP Oli is the victim of his own success in cultivating a reputation for swift repartees. But what worked to disarm reporters and get legislators rolling on the aisles with laughter when he was in the opposition, is now landing him in trouble. As head of government, his jokes seem callous, disrespectful and inconsiderate.

Which is why his remarks on why rhinoceros conservation should concern every human being, piping cooking gas to every home, Nepal having its own merchant marine fleet, striking crude oil deposits in the Tarai and generating wind power, have been the butt of ridicule. And rightly so because when he makes these wild promises at a time when Nepalis grapple with day-to-day survival, the Prime Minister comes across as someone who is out of touch with reality.

However, to be fair, each of these grand declarations have merit and can be implemented. Most modern cities have gas utilities through mains just like urban water supply, ocean-going ships have in the past flown the Nepali flag in the high seas, and Nepal can indeed be self-sufficient in power very rapidly by harnessing hydro, wind and solar energy.

Prime Minister Oli’s target of generating 10,000 MW of electricity in the next ten years is actually quite conservative. Nepal can generate much more in that time if we only had the political will, and a leadership team with vision and integrity. One of the biggest lessons from the Indian Blockade is that we should immediately fast-track hydropower, utility-scale solar stations and wind farms to make the country energy self-sufficient. The surge in petroleum imports from India is making us economically bankrupt and politically subservient.

Oli sounds like just another leader promising to turn Nepal into Switzerland or Singapore, and we have heard it all before. In 1994 Prime Minister K P Bhattarai promised to wash the streets of Kathmandu with Melamchi water, 22 years later we are still waiting for the project to be completed. In 2008, the elected Maoist government led by



Pushpa Kamal Dahal said Nepal would generate 10,000 MW within ten years. A decade has nearly passed and we have added barely 40 MW capacity to the national grid.

In 2009, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal laid out an even more ambitious plan: generating 25,000 MW in 20 years. But because it came from a man who once said we could export power to China via microwave radiation, he was mocked.

The trouble is that Nepal’s leaders have always been talkers, not doers. Their targets are set so far into the future, beyond their political lifespans, that they don’t really have to think about implementing them. Dahal laid out a 10-year strategy, but resigned after just nine months in power in 2009. Nepal also stepped down within 10 months of promising mega power.

Successive governments have declared energy emergencies four times in the last decade. The latest was by the Oli administration in February this year after the Indian Blockade. The purpose was to streamline ministries, end red tape and expedite projects, but none of that happened even though it was a real emergency.

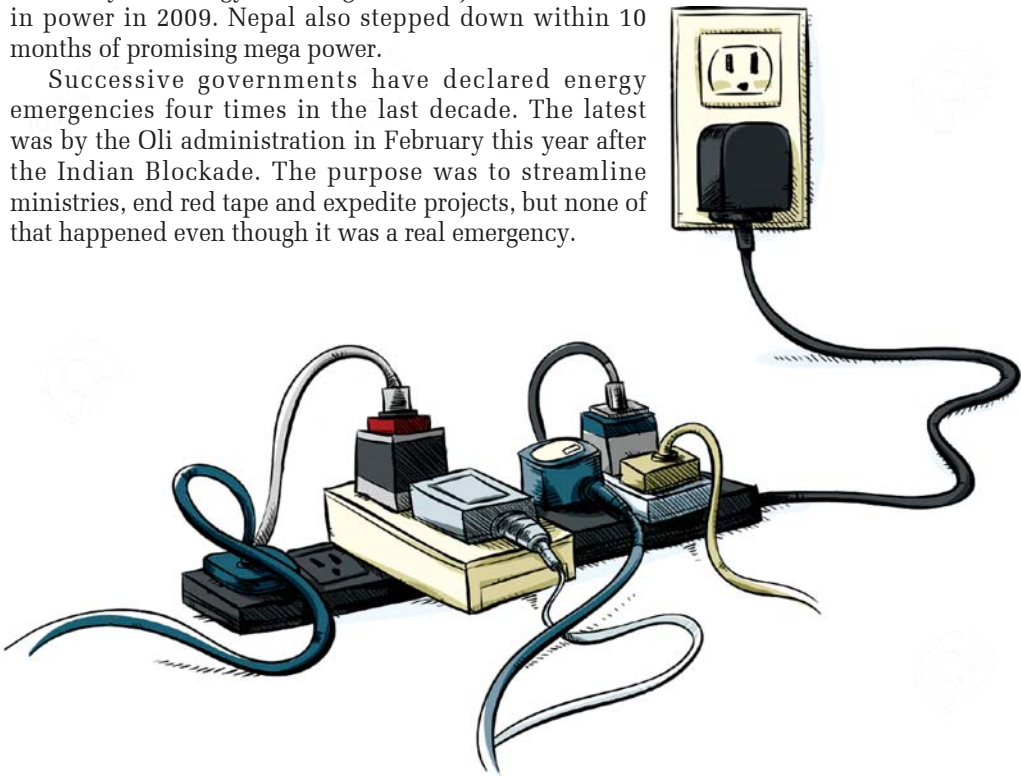
As our Energy Now special coverage in this issue (pages 4-5, 14-15) shows, the statistics are a stark reminder of governance failure. Nepal’s electricity demand is 1,300 MW, we generate less than half that. There is suppressed demand, so if there was enough power people would start using more electrical appliances and demand would quickly surpass 10,000 MW in the next ten years.

When we laugh at our Prime Minister when he promises to end power cuts within one year, it is not because we are unaware of our potential, but because we are aware of the fecklessness of our political leadership. As a result of this failure, Nepal’s import of petroleum from India has quadrupled in the last two decades – from 550,000 KL in 1995 to 1.8 million KL in 2015. Our petroleum import bill

has soared six fold in the last 10 years: from Rs 20 billion in 2005 to Rs 125 billion in 2015.

Generating more electricity to be self-sufficient in energy, and then exporting peak power to northern India at premium-price to redress our balance of payments should have been Nepal’s national strategy. The Indian Blockade should have been a wakeup call, but it looks like our leaders are still pretending to sleep.

Solar and wind energy can be stopgaps to cover shortfalls till new hydro projects come on line. Their advantage is low cost and quick installation. Luckily, hydro, wind and solar are all renewables: together they will help us have an ecologically, economically and politically sustainable energy solution.



Times

THIS WEEK

KUNDA DIXIT

**Most reached on Facebook**  
Tourism for the people, by the people by *Kunda Dixit*  
Unique eco-green hotel in Pokhara is a global model for self-sustainability.  
(6,137 people reached)

**Most shared on Facebook**  
Tourism for the people, by the people by *Kunda Dixit* (23 shares)

**Most popular on Twitter**  
Wages of sin, Editorial  
(49 retweets, 85 favourites)

**Most commented**  
Buddha's birthplace on his birthday by *Seulki Lee*

**Most visited online page**  
Tourism for the people, by the people by *Kunda Dixit*  
(1,923 views)

YOUR SAY

www.nepalintimes.com

**TREAD CAREFULLY**  
I liked Kanak Mani Dixit's advice to send a special envoy of unquestioned stature to India ('Tread carefully', Kanak Mani Dixit, #809). But is there such a person among us, particularly after the Indian blockade that poisoned relations between Kathmandu and New Delhi? It was highly undiplomatic on the part of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to send his special envoy to Kathmandu to dissuade Nepali leaders from promulgating the constitution. But Nepali leaders are not smart, either. Lawmaker Narayanman Bijukchhe has publicly claimed that 22,000 Nepalis, including politicians and bureaucrats, are in the payroll of the Indian government. Is it not a matter for the government to investigate?  
**Bal Bahadur Tamang**

**RECOGNITION AND RESPECT**  
It is not right to criticise the government for failing to address Madhesi demands ("Recognition and respect", Navin Jha, #809) when Madhesi parties themselves are not serious about a breakthrough? They have refused to participate in talks with the government. They did not even attend an all-party meeting organised by Prime Minister KP Oli. It shows they are not serious about ending the present political crisis through talks. If they shy away from talks, how can a consensus be forged between the ruling and the agitating forces?  
**Dinesh Nepali**

**WAGES OF SIN**  
The editorial reminds the NC of the Hungarian proverb: 'If you are among crooks and remain silent, then you too are a crook' ("Wages of sin, Editorial, #809). Are you implying that the NC is not one of the crooks that Nepal is cursed to be ruled by? I grew up in the Panchyat era, and there were political crooks even that time. But after the advent of democracy, the situation went from bad to worse. The supreme leader of this gang of new crooks was the NC boss Girija Prasad Koirala himself. So  
**Anonymous**

it is absolutely ridiculous to insinuate that the NC is different from UML or Maoists.  
**BNS**

**THE PAVILIONS**  
Agreed, there should be other hotels like The Pavilions ('Tourism for the people, by the people', #809). But such businesses require huge investments and unless the government provides needed incentives like subsidies no one is going to adopt this model.  
**Narayani Shrestha**

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #810

Q. Is unification of Maoist parties good for Nepal?

Total votes: 201

■ Yes 31.42%

■ No 48.85%

■ Maybe 18.73%

Weekly Internet Poll #811

To vote go to: www.nepalintimes.com

Q. Will the government be able to end load shedding in two years as promised?

Times

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BIKRAM RA

# Contempt of State

Politics as entertainment only got better last week as the lunatic fringe went through convulsions, mutiny and high profile splits. Mohan Baidya's CPN Revolutionary Maoists, a near forgotten entity that considers elections to be a capitalist trick, was torn asunder as Comrade Badal (Cloud) jumped ship amid cries of revisionism and treason.



## MOVING TARGET

## Foreign Hand

In the past your scribe wondered why the press bothers with such ridiculous parties with so little support but now feels grateful for the comic relief. There aren't many countries on earth that still feature communist factions battling it out in epic sagas of betrayal and power-lust.

As Comrade Cloud's faction went through the motions of setting up a new party Prachanda (Awesome) was waiting with open arms, promising high level posts and dowry galore back in the mother of all Maoist parties. It felt like being privy to the mating rituals of an exotic, endangered species as Awesome and Cloud were reunited, the stuff of Kollywood, and in the heat of the moment the looniest tune of them all, Matrika Yadav and his band of Marxists (Feverish) joined the unity parade.

The sight of grown men sporting teen-age nicknames, puffed up with self-importance as they debate the finer points of a discredited ideology, is as good as it gets these days and would be even funnier if the whole song and dance wasn't a ruse.

It's surely no coincidence this sudden push for Maoist unity comes at a time when thousands

of complaints on war-era crimes are being registered with the TRC. Perhaps the real reason for this newfound fraternity among communists, who normally squabble for a living, is the fear of prosecution, with the promise of impunity held out to all who join.

Prachanda's recent pleas to 'come home' were rebuffed by Baburam Bhattarai (BRB), who, in his new avatar as Capitalist Roader, declared it was time to 'polarise instead of unify' as he desperately tries to leave his past behind. In what sounded like an admission of guilt, Prachanda retorted that BRB can't escape responsibility for conducting the war 'that caused suffering' just because he 'joined hands with the bourgeoisie'.

If your correspondent could make this stuff up he'd be working overtime in Bollywood. The action continued apace as Prachanda got slapped with a

contempt of court charge last week, citing his statements at a recent program called 'People's War and Court Verdicts', (which just goes to show what's on his mind these days). According to the charge sheet the accused showed contempt of court by saying the judiciary was involved in 'conspiracy' and 'tried to create night in daytime', while boldly declaring he'd never abide by the court's verdict.

The Supreme Court has since ordered Prachanda to appear in person within three days (which he won't) or provide a written explanation (which he might) for such disrespect.

Perhaps a charge of contempt of state for all our leaders would be more appropriate. To be fair, the Maoists are only furthering an age old tradition dating back to the Rana period, when the rulers considered the state their personal property and rules only applied to others. The advent of democracy in 1990 brought little change to this mind-set, as leaders of all the mainstream parties showed contempt for the nation by frequently breaking the law to get what they want.


The Maoists only took this long standing ethos to new lows. While Congress and UML undermined the state through corruption and negligence the Maoists did the same by attacking and displacing it in districts they controlled.

All such behaviour denotes a profound lack of respect for the nation's institutions, differing only by degree and impact.

If Bollywood script-writers had their way our entire political

class would be banished to the wilderness to atone for their sins. Alas, such a happy ending eludes us and the recent political drama only produced yet another makeshift party: the CPN Maoist Center, which sounds like a downtown shopping mall selling hammers, sickles and ill-fitting suits, where the sales clerk indoctrinates you and parking attendant hijacks your car.

All Kollywood joking aside, there's little doubt Nepal has suffered from too much politics and too little policy over the past two decades. A troubling pattern is already well established, whereby the country is held hostage to the needs of a small cabal of individuals while the economy and people's welfare is completely neglected. Getting to the top through war and violence cost 10 years and a national trauma, followed by another 8 years pretending to write the constitution, milking the system while keeping the country constantly off-balance. Throw in another year for the earthquake and blockade and one wonders whether such instability will ever end, especially since most of the country's many problems stem directly from this chronic lack of effective governance.

Recent events indicate more trouble on the horizon. As the Maoists unite in their campaign against the judiciary/state the country's development, barely alive after 20 years of chaos, is sure to be sacrificed yet again in this latest pursuit of personal agendas. 

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# The future power house of South Asia

To send a key message to the world that Nepal’s energy sector is open for business, the Energy Development Council with the Investment Board of Nepal and the Ministry of Energy are organising the Nepal Power Investment Summit from 31 May to 3 June in Kathmandu.

For the first time ever, the entire energy sector of Nepal has come together to convey the message to the world that Nepal is ready to attract investors and partners in the development of our renewable energy resources.



GUEST COLUMN

Sujit Acharya

This is also one of the first times that a meeting is being held that will bring together foreign investors, contractors, consultants and high powered speakers from all over the world. Large scale projects will be showcased and both foreign and Nepali companies will be exhibiting their products and projects at the event.

Nepal has always wanted foreign investment in energy, but it has not always been able to make a persuasive argument about why they should choose us. Investors do not put money in out of a sense of altruism, or just because a symbolic red carpet is laid out for them. They look at hard numbers, and if they add up and match the desired rate of return, only then will they show interest. Next week’s Summit will present



SHARMILA BUDHATHOKI

The Nepal Power Investment Summit next week will send a message to the world that Nepal is ready for foreign investment in renewable energy projects

Nepal has large scale opportunities in the renewable energy sector. The urban solar opportunity in the country could easily cross the \$1 billion mark. Hydropower projects from both the government and private sector showcased during the Summit are in a similar range.

Nepal offers the highest power purchase rates offered in South Asia for hydropower and solar energy. The highest electricity generation per unit from both hydropower and solar plants are again found in Nepal. We will prove that Nepal is the place in South Asia offering the highest returns on investments in renewable energy projects.

We are going to continue to make our case to investors and improve our regulatory environment. Next time, we plan to take the Summit overseas to where the investors are located. We will also be presenting the findings for policy improvements requested by our foreign delegates to the relevant stakeholders in the government, who will also be attending. 🇳🇵

Sujit Acharya is the chairperson of the Energy Development Council [sujit@edcnepal.org](http://sujit@edcnepal.org)



a clear case for Nepal as the number one destination in South Asia and the top three emerging markets in Asia to make renewable energy investments.

We want to promote Nepal as the future power house of South Asia, but large-scale investors have been discouraged by political instability and government hurdles. Yes, doing business in Nepal is risky. The frequent change of governments is one of the pitfalls. But

along with such risks investors find correspondingly higher rewards here than they would in other countries. Therefore, via this Summit we are clearly stating that we are seeking those investors in particular that are looking to make the highest returns in South Asia and also willing to take on such risks to achieve returns. But we are also acknowledging that we have to mitigate the risks and let investors know that we know where the problems lie. Higher risk-taking investors seeking higher returns will not pull out of Nepal.

## Kickstarting solar projects

AVISHEK MALLA

Nepal’s energy crisis spares no one: every organisation, from businesses and farms to schools and health clinics, struggles with it. Solar energy can be deployed more quickly than any other source to meet the country’s demand.

The Nepal government, in partnership with international donors, has made a commitment to diversify its energy mix, and provide incentives to kickstart the solar energy industry. Subsidy can be a very important tool for building a thriving solar industry, and has been used successfully in other countries. However, if not planned well, subsidies can potentially damage the market.

For example, in Spain and Italy highly subsidised solar programs were unsustainable due to high costs to taxpayers and were abruptly ended. But in Bangladesh 3.5 million solar home systems were deployed from 2002-2015 with a minimal subsidy of 10 per cent.



### URBAN SOLAR SUBSIDY PROGRAM

Customer type	Interest rate	Term	System size	Upfront payment required	Collateral
Commercial	50% discount on interest rate (~4.5%)	Up to 5 years	>1.5 kW	30%	Required for loans above 10 lakh
Residential	75% discount on interest rate (~2.25%)	Up to 5 years	>0.5 kW	30%	None

The California Solar Initiative led to the installation of over 2,500 MW of solar from 2007-2016. The majority of projects received financing, and did not require state-level subsidies.

In Nepal the urban financing program provides very low interest rates for commercial and residential solar in Kathmandu and other urban areas.

A commercial customer that gets a 4.5% interest on a Rs 100,000 loan would end up paying just Rs 1,865 per month over five years. This is in addition to traditional upfront subsidies, such as a flat Rs 20,000 payment for solar systems at urban households and a 60% subsidy (up to Rs 500,000) for urban public health

clinics and schools.

But this financing scheme has not been adopted by commercial entities (including NGOs, hospitals, businesses) because of lack of awareness and the risky bank collateral of Rs 1 million.

In California, solar only started to take off when banks started providing financing for solar projects without requiring additional collateral from customers. The solar equipment itself serves as collateral. A similar program could be implemented in Nepal to encourage banks to provide financing for solar without harsh collateral requirements.

There are several common themes for successful subsidy programs that have been deployed around the world:

**Subsidies should scale down over time:** While subsidies can kickstart a market, there will never be enough subsidy dollars to scale up to reach millions of customers. The goal should be to create a thriving solar market that doesn’t require subsidy.

**Monitoring and after sales service is crucial:** Customers need assurance that solar energy systems will work over the long term. Solar installers get financial incentive to make sure their systems produced maximum energy.

**Financing is a key part of the solution:** Nearly all of Bangladesh and California’s solar energy projects are completed with financing.

We are excited about the potential for solar energy in

Nepal, and are impressed by the commitment of the government and donors to make solar a meaningful part of Nepal’s energy mix. Subsidies can kickstart the market, but too much subsidy can hamper markets by making customers reliant on artificially low prices and by removing the incentive for private companies to innovate and develop solar solutions that can scale.

The urban financing program in Nepal is an exciting example of a scheme that has the right incentives to help the commercial solar market grow. 🇳🇵

Avishek Malla is the president of SunFarmer Nepal, a solar energy service company based in Kathmandu.



## PRIVATE SECTOR LEAD IN GRID SOLAR SYSTEM

Raj Kumar Thapa of Solar Solutions on what the current budget should look at to promote solar energy in Nepal.



GOPEN RAI

**Nepali Times: Why opt for solar when Nepal is so rich in hydropower?**

**Raj Kumar Thapa:** Solar should be seen as a complimentary energy source to hydropower and not as a competition. For the last 20 years we have focused largely on only one source of energy. Big hydro projects have been delayed due to political instability and lack of investment. We have built small run-off-the-river systems but these are not going to really solve the country's problem. Most hydro projects are working at 14% capacity during the dry season. It is time for Nepal to look at a mix of energy sources. Hydro is going to take a long time but the demand for electricity is going up no matter what.

**Where does solar fit into this energy mix?**

The load profile peaks in the mornings and evenings, but solar is perfect for daytime demand. At that time, hydropower can be stored and used during the peak hours.

**What are the advantages of solar over hydropower?**

Solar energy is more reliable, quick to implement, world over the costs of solar energy has come down and the technology has improved. A hydropower project takes three years to build but for solar it will take only six months. Agreed, solar is a bit more expensive but the load

centres can be closer. Currently, we lose almost a third of electricity generated in transmission.

**Should solar generation be decentralised or installed at utility scale?**

The best system in Nepal is to go for the grid connectivity systems. If we install solar projects that go up to 5 MW, 10 MW, or even 100 MW then our daytime load shedding will be removed in 2-3 years. The night time demand can be met through hydropower.

**Who should lead these projects?**

It will be more efficient if the private sector takes the lead. The NEA should restrict itself to buying and selling energy. All NEA has to do is identify locations, ask for a quotation for how much the private sector will be selling for. The whole tendering process can then be completely avoided so that suppliers don't go for less reliable technology.

**The market right now is being driven by subsidy, how sustainable is that?**

People are opting for solar now because of the subsidy, but once it's withdrawn things are going to stand still. Subsidies are a good way of promoting solar at first high interest rates make solar unaffordable. We have to find the correct balance. In Nepal, the time has come where it can be taken up commercially.

**What are the key concerns the solar industry wants addressed in**

**the current budget?**

The government has removed taxes on solar panels, inverter, batteries, which are major components and should continue. The subsidised interest rates should also be kept for some time to tackle energy deficiency with a multi-pronged approach. At the macro level, however, government has to give incentives such as tax rebates like they have given to hydropower. They should think of it as a mainstream energy and give it the same facilities. Centralised power is cheaper, so instead of subsidies for off grid projects in urban areas, bigger solar projects should get incentives.

### prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

#### Potent patents

Huawei filed lawsuits against Samsung in the United States and China for patent infringement seeking compensation for infringement of the company's intellectual property relating to cellular communications technology and software used by Samsung's mobile phones.



#### Be amazed by Honda

Sykar Trading recently introduced the new Honda Amaze in the market.



Equipped with Continuously Variable Transmission technology, the car will be available in S and VX petrol grades.

#### The new brew

Gorkha Brewery introduced a new line of alcoholic beverage 'Somersby Apple Cider' in Nepal in an event in



Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Available in only Kathmandu for the time being, the company plans to expand to other cities in the coming future.

#### Saffola in Nepal

Indian consumer goods company Marico recently introduced cooking oil brand Saffola in Nepal. The edible oil will be available in Saffola Gold, Saffola Active, Saffola Total and Saffola Tasty variants.



#### Phalano goes global



Phalano Luga, a Nepali designer brand started by cartoonist Rajesh KC has signed up with Angry Birds, Kung Fu Panda, Ice Age, Pokemon, Real Madrid and AC Milan to sell merchandise apparel in Nepal.

prabhu BANK



## ६ कारण छ...

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GOPEN RAI

The reason we go back every year to see productions by Studio 7 at the Hotel Vajra is because the core team of Sabine Lehmann (Director), Ludmilla Hungerhuber (Set Designer) and Shambu Lama (Lighting) never fail to inspire. From the Panchayat years in the 80s, through Democracy in the 90s, through the war and the brief stint of an absolute monarchy, until what we have today, Studio 7 has witnessed Nepal's leadership transformations with a critical eye. They use their decades of knowledge to bring us meaningful productions that ask us questions of ourselves, of our society and of

our place in the world. What draws us in is the promise of satire and humour -- both subtle and hilariously over the top. By the end of the performance, however, we realise that we have taken in much more than we had come for. We have journeyed with a character through an entire life's worth of learning, leaving the theatre with meaningful insight into the human condition. This is true as ever of their latest production, an adaptation of author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. The play opens with the rambunctious

Pilot (Raymon Das Shrestha), crashing his plane into the Sahara Dessert. He comes across our protagonist, The Little Prince (Karma), a wide-eyed boy who has journeyed from his home Asteroid B-612 and wants nothing but for the Pilot to draw him a picture of a sheep. This seemingly odd couple begin to come together when The Little Prince tells the Pilot of the different planets and asteroids he has visited on his way to Earth. We are transported to each of these planets with him. Our protagonist is tested severely throughout his journey by the worst

elements of humanity. These are represented by shockingly narrow-minded rulers of planets who govern areas barely large enough for them to stand on. Their huge egos limit them to the worlds they perceive through their senses for they have not understood the words that the story hinges on: "It is only with the heart that one can see clearly. What is essential is invisible to the eye". Those who have read the classic will be pleasantly surprised by the genius with which Studio 7 has combined and contextualised the characters. From the beautiful rose that The Little Prince left behind to the historically inaccurate Historian on Asteroid B330, the sets, costumes and creatures that the group have created together are highly inventive. It is in these smaller sequences that Studio 7's particular flavour truly comes through. The heart of the Studio 7 art calls for the audience's reflective detachment brought about by a very specific style of performance taught by director Sabine Lehmann. Relative new-comers, Kalsang Lama, Kundung Shakya and Sugam have managed to adopt this style in a short amount of time. The musician who goes by 'Gotsomethin' enhances the performances with music from all across the spectrum, wonderful effects and expert timing. The play begins with the bold colours of the Nepali flag, and this journey through red and blue is not one to miss. If you have never seen a play put on by Studio 7 before, this is the perfect first ride to catch. The stage is set for The Little Prince in all of us to open our minds, find the purity of our intension, and come to understand what is truly essential.  *Eelum Dixit* 27 to 29 May, 3 to 5 June and 10 to 12 June 7.15 pm onwards, Hotel Vajra, Dallu, (01) 4271545 Tickets: Rs 1000, 500 (for students)

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# Curator of history

AYESHA SHAKYA  
IN NEW YORK

In an illustrious career spanning over four decades, Gautama V Vajracharya has worn many hats: Nepali Sanskritist, art history scholar, author of multiple books on South Asian art and guest curator at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York.

Renowned within art circles globally as one of the focal people with knowledge in South Asian art and iconography, Vajracharya's achievements had humble beginnings. As a young boy growing up in the inner gallis of Mahaboudha in Kathmandu, Vajracharya spent most of his childhood in a family environment that put a huge emphasis on Sanskrit.

He was home-schooled by his father in Sanskrit until age 13 and later attended Samsodhana Mandala which laid the foundation of his knowledge of Indian and Nepali history. While still a student, Vajracharya met Smithsonian scholar Mary Slusser who was fascinated by his knowledge in Nepali art and introduced him to Pratapaditya Pal, Senior Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art at The Los Angeles Country Museum of Art. After assisting Pal in writing a book on Nepali art,



## Sanskritist Gautama V Vajracharya puts Nepali art history on the world map

Vajracharya got an invitation to work at the museum after which Vajracharya wanted to pursue his Master's degree in Claremont Graduate School but the lack of a Bachelor's Degree put his plans into question.

"My father did not believe in the Western schooling system and hence I had no formal degree. However, Mary Slusser was

familiar with the Dean and she vouched for me and my ability to learn," adds Vajracharya. He went on to complete his Master's Degree in History of Art and a PhD in South Asian Languages and Literature from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

"Even as a child, I was a logical thinker. If I can't find

logic in something, I can't believe it. It was because of the logical explanation of historical material that made studying historical methodologies so interesting," says Vajracharya.

After completing his studies, Vajracharya switched sides and continued to teach Sanskrit and Indian art and civilisation in the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Since retiring, he has published two books in Nepali and four books in English, namely *Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure* (2003) as a contributor, *Watson Collection of Indian Miniatures at the Elvehjem Museum of Art* (2003) and *Frog Hymn and Rain Babies: Monsoon Culture and the Art of Ancient South Asia* (2013).

His most recent publication *Nepalese Seasons: Rain and Ritual* was released in May 2016, along with an ongoing exhibition at the Rubin Museum of Art showcasing more than 50 works of art highlighting the deep interconnection between the natural environment and the people of Kathmandu Valley.

"Each object of art is related to a Nepali god of season, and the exhibition highlights the country's dependence on the rains and how monsoon still plays an important role in agriculture, culture and art," says Vajracharya.

A recurring theme in his research, Vajracharya states that



the references to the monsoon culture in deities and sculptures highlights the fact that Newari culture is agrarian and predates Hindu and Buddhist religious culture to at least 700 BC.

"Much of what is written about Newari culture is only by Western scholars. If it is not written about, our culture will be completely forgotten within 100 years," says Vajracharya whose role as guest curator at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York has boosted the profile of Nepali religious art in the global arena.

Vajracharya has also shifted his focus a bit. He says: "My previous books were written for scholars. But now, I write for everybody because I want the general public to understand."

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# KEEPING CHILDREN IN CLASSROOM



PICS: GOPEN RAI

**SAHINA SHRESTHA**  
IN KAVRE

For 16-year-old Sangita Magar, this school year marks an important milestone in her education — she will be appearing for her high school exams along with about half a million

children from across Nepal. Magar has been preparing carefully for the exam, but she worries about her results because studies have been disturbed by the earthquake which damaged the 24 classrooms of her two-storey Azad Secondary School in Banepa.

The government assessment team gave both buildings at the school red stickers. But when schools reopened last May, few classes still ran on the ground floor of the damaged building till it was taken down. Most classes are still held in temporary learning centres. Known as TLC, the bamboo

and tarpaulin shelters have become synonymous with the neglect and delayed response of the state to the needs of quake-damaged schools. Azad’s TLC have gaping holes on the bamboo mesh that make do as walls between classrooms, other schools in southern Lalitpur are even worse.



**GAPING HOLES:** The temporary learning centres at Azad Higher Secondary School (*left*) in Banepa have gaping holes on the bamboo mesh that acts as walls between classrooms. The students have a hard time concentrating on their studies due to heat and noise from other classrooms.

Students at Darbar High School attend classes in temporary learning centre made of corrugated tin (*above*).

“There is a lot of noise coming from the other classes and it is difficult to hear the teachers,” says Magar. “The heat and the rain make it difficult to concentrate.”

Since the earthquake, students have not been able to attend science and computer practical classes, their playground is occupied by the TLCs, and the girls use temporary toilets.

“Since it is hot inside, we try to come out of class every opportunity we get. It is cooler outside, the classroom is too cramped and we have constant headaches due to the heat,” says tenth grader Nabin Waiba. Teachers agree the students are more distracted and since the classroom space is small, they have not been able to monitor each student individually.

“There is a fear among students that the TLCs may become permanent classrooms,” says Prem Bahadur Bhujel of the School Management Committee. “But we are trying to build permanent structures instead of spending money in repairing the TLCs.”

Around 5,000 schools were affected by the earthquakes in the 14 districts last year, and more than 30,000 classrooms were either completely destroyed or damaged, leaving more than 100,000 children without a place to study.

While the government struggled to give a final shape to the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) to begin reconstruction and recovery, the TLCs at least allowed the children back into school. More than a year later, many of the classes are still conducted in tents.

Nearly 550 schools were damaged in Kavre, and 90 per cent of the classes are running in TLCs, according to District Education Officer Nandalal Paudel. He said half of them



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DOOMS



will be too leaky to use in the coming monsoon.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the government are reconstructing 11 schools in Kavre, but it will take a year-and-half to complete.

“Not all the TLCs are in bad condition, but schools with better leadership and resources have started to build semi-permanent structures,” Paudel says.

Reconstruction is not the only problem, it is also demolition of damaged structures. Even in the heart of Kathmandu at the Durbar High School the main building has a gaping hole and is so weak that students fear it will collapse on top of the TLC. “It is scary, the building could fall even without an earthquake,” says eighth grader Nischal Balami.

Meanwhile at the Sanskrit Secondary School, which shares the building with Durbar High School, students have moved back to the damaged building because they find the heat and noise in the TLC unbearable.

“We tried to reason with them but the students did not listen,” says principal Badri Prasad Dahal. “We don’t have a safe space to rebuild the school or to construct safer learning centers.”

Earlier this month, the Ministry of Education started the reconstruction of schools



(UNICEF) have also started work on 650 transitional learning centres in Gorkha, Kavre, Makwanpur, Nuwakot, Okhaldhunga, Ramechhap, Rasuwa, Sindhuli and Sindhupalchok.

“There is big pressure from the teachers, from parents to keep children in school,” says Marilyn Hoar of UNICEF. “People want to see the schools being built faster but we also need to make sure they are build safely.”

Sangita Magar knows one thing. It is impossible to study in a TLC. She says: “They need to rebuild our school, even if it is only one storey.”

in Lalitpur with the help of JICA in a project that will also include Dhading, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, Gorkha and Makwanpur. ADB is helping rebuild schools in Sindhupalchok, Kavre, Dolakha,

Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga, Kathmandu, Sindhuli and Bhaktapur.

The Post Disaster Recovery Framework published by the NRA plans to complete the recovery

and reconstruction process in five years at a cost of Rs 1.8 billion with 88 partners to rebuild 652 schools and 3,867 classrooms.

The European Union (EU) and the United Nations Children’s Fund

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## EVENTS



### Heritage walk,

Explore the alleyways of Patan in a heritage walk organised by the Rotaract Club of Kupondole and Know Your Heritage.  
11 June, 8 am onwards, Mangalbazar, 9849592287, <http://www.rckopundol.org.np>

### Narrating visually,

Master the art of visual storytelling in a three day workshop organised by photo.circle with instructors Robert Godden and Kevin WY Lee.  
15 to 17 June, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, Last day of registrations: 31 May, Send CVs to [mail@photocircle.com.np](mailto:mail@photocircle.com.np), USD\$165 + 13% VAT

### The Little Prince,

Mark your calendars for Studio 7's musical based on A.S. Exupery's famed novel The Little Prince.  
27 May to 12 June, 7 pm onwards, every Friday to Sunday, Hotel Vajra, (01) 4271545, Rs 1000, Rs 500 (for students)

### Futsal for women,

Join in on the fun and participate in the 5-a-side women's futsal tournament. Rs 3000 for team registration and Rs NPR for individuals.  
4 June, 10am to 5pm, Grassroots Recreational Center, Last day for registration: 27 May, <http://www.theWEunitedproject.com>

### Hidden treasures,

An exhibition of photographs and portraits of the Ranas from the private collection of Kamala Lama.  
Till 13 June, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4218048/ 4433930



### Critical Mass,

Join hundreds of other cyclists to encourage a biking culture in Kathmandu.  
27 May, 6 pm onwards, Jawalakhel

### Run in Langtang,

Gear up for the Lantang-Gosainkunda Half Marathon being celebrated on the occasion of the 38th anniversary of Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal. Registration fee: Rs 5000  
29 May, For more information: [www.taan.org.np](http://www.taan.org.np)



### Writing for arts,

Attend a three-day workshop on creative writing and the arts facilitated by editors of La.Lit, Prawin Adhikari, Niranjana Kunwar, and Rabi Thapa. Mail writing samples to [sgamatya@gmail.com](mailto:sgamatya@gmail.com).  
31 May to 2 June, 10 am to 2 pm, Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 9818239744, [www.artmandu.org/apply](http://www.artmandu.org/apply)

### BAC mela,

Local products, foodstuff and a second-hand garage sale plus entertainment for the whole family in BAC'S first monthly mela.  
28 May, 1 to 7pm, BAC Art Café, Pulchok, [www.bikaplaartcenter.org](http://www.bikaplaartcenter.org)

### Facing the camera,

A photography exhibition that traces the history of studio photography in Nepal.  
Until 12 August, 10am to 5 pm, Inner Courtyard, Patan Museum, (01) 5521492

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## DINING



### Moondance Restaurant,

One of the few places in Pokhara that you just can't miss; wash down its superb pizza and Lemon Chicken with a glass of mojito.  
Pokhara, (061) 461835

### Kaiser Cafe Restaurant & Bar,

Have a BBQ lunch and a glass of wine or beer inside the peaceful Garden of Dreams.  
Thamel, 4425341



### Café Soma,

Enjoy scrumptious brunch and indulge in crepes with sugar and lemon.  
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5528732

### Picnic,

Enjoy this Korean restaurant which offers heaping portions at affordable prices.  
Thamel, (01) 4442420



### Café Du Temple,

Famous for its delicious food, warm ambience and beautiful roof top view.  
Patan Durbar Square, 5527127

## MUSIC



### Music with Muktan,

Don't miss out on the live performance by Shubhani Muktan followed by DJ Badal Tamu and DJ Rucane Sresta.  
27 May, 7 pm onwards, Club Venice Discotheque, Sundhara, 981-8740245

### Top of the World Festival,

Join the Top of the World Festival at Jiri with music and art, held in celebration of Buddha Jayanti. Tickets available at [www.rocknrollnepal.com](http://www.rocknrollnepal.com).  
4 to 5 June, 11am onwards, Jiri, Dolakha

### Rock'estival,

Veteran music artists come together with newcomers in the industry to bring back the glory of rock and roll music.  
Rs 1500 (presale), Rs 2000 (door sale), 4 June, 7 to 11.30pm, The Victory Lounge, Durbarmarg



### Tribute to Slayer,

Vomiting Snakes gets together with some of the big names in Nepali music scene to pay tribute to late Jeff Hanemman, the guitarist of Slayer.  
Rs 300 (presale), Rs 500 (doorsale), 18 June, 2pm, Purple Haze, Thamel

### Live comeback,

Listen to Raju Lama and his band Mongolian Heart as they belt out some of their popular hits after a three year hiatus.  
28 May, The Victory Lounge, Durbarmarg

## GETAWAY



### Mum's Garden Resort,

Head out to Pokhara for a peaceful and comfortable stay in beautifully designed cottages surrounded by a lush green garden with great views of Phewa Lake and the Annapurna range.  
Lakeside, Pokhara, (06)1463468, [www.mumsgardenresort.com](http://www.mumsgardenresort.com)

### Hotel Barahi,

Enjoy a great view of the lake, cultural shows, a big swimming pool to beat the heat this summer or indulge in scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery in the hotel premises.  
Lakeside, Pokhara, 977-61-460617/463526



### Shangri-La Village Resort,

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Gharipatan, Pokhara, (01) 4420252/ 9808187015, Rs 5999 nett per person

### Balthali Village Resort,

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Balthali, Kavre, 9851075818



### Raniban Retreat,

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Phewa Lake, Pokhara, (01)4411855

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Click, upload, share has become a way of life for the selfie generation, and it is hard to imagine a time when studio photographs were limited and prized, and it took weeks to develop a roll of film.

For a glimpse of simpler and more innocent age when families in Nepal trooped off to a photo studio to take portraits, photo.circle has put together 'Facing the camera' an exhibition of 60 images from family albums and archives. Digitised and reprinted for the exhibition, the images are from photo.circle's Nepal Picture Library initiative and are from Kathmandu, Dharan, Birgunj and Palpa.

Three brothers dressed in daura suruwal pose solemnly, group portraits of joint families, children posing by themselves, three generation of men all staring at the camera — the sepia images hark back to family life and the importance of print photography in decades gone by.

"As there were very few studios, people used to call photographers to public spaces and gather their family to click photos. This was probably how the idea of family portraits emerged



GOPEN RAI

in Nepal," explained Bhushan Shilpakar, who curated the exhibition for photo.circle.

The dress and the postures in the photographs indicate the status that people accorded to photography. Not a hair out of place, the subjects are in their best clothing and postures resemble that of the Rana and Shah royalty.

"Photographs afforded a sense of importance and early progression," writes Jebin Gautam, who researched Nepal's early studio photography and his explanations are placed

throughout the exhibition giving audience a deeper understanding of how the art form evolved.


Not only does the audience get a chance to explore the culture of that period, but we also see how technology impacted the kind of photographs that were taken. In most early photographs, the only movements are blurred children in family portraits. Due to the long exposures required, poses were limited to standing or sitting, and no movement. This changes as cameras get more sophisticated, and the public taste with it:



# EXPOSURE TO EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY

subjects are seen holding guitars, cigarettes, flowers and even posing as popular Bollywood celebrities, or wearing kimonos, jeans, saris, shades, hats and caps. One can spot a Bruce Lee, a Amitabh Bachhan, people dressed in police uniforms and even veils.

The pictures don't have any captions, and viewers are free to make their own judgements. With creases and folds, some of them torn at the edges, others defaced by fungus, each print holds its own story of how it survived all these decades.

The exhibition ends with a digital album showing recent photographs taken in studios. They are now in colour, with portraits of recent graduates posing with diplomas. With mobile phone cameras and Facebook taking over, the exhibition forces us to remember an earlier time of studio photography and its ritual importance. 

Smriti Basnet

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# THE FAMILY FANG

What is emotional abuse and how do you measure it? This is the crux of *The Family Fang* – a film that, considering its small budget, and independent origins, could have gone the route of massive self-indulgent histrionics, but instead manages the careful balance between dark comedy and psychological horror with a light, careful touch.



**MUST SEE**  
Sophia Pande

Based on a novel from 2011 by Kevin Wilson, *The Family Fang* was bought by Nicole Kidman's Blossom Films for adaptation. Fortuitously, the brilliant actor Jason Bateman came on board as both co-star to Kidman, and perhaps more importantly as director.

American independent films or 'indies' like *The Family Fang* can be

hit or miss, often descending into depicting minor existential crises that are particular only to young, middle class North Americans and thereby banal and entirely irrelevant to the rest of the world. A case in point are the mumblecore films – a particularly annoying development from early 2000 that involves barely intelligible, unscripted, mumbling, demotivated young urbanites looking glum because they cannot find the meaning of life.

Thankfully, Kidman and Bateman's joint venture from last year (the film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2015) is a tightly written, nuanced story about screwy families, unapologetic parents, and the ineffable but often inextricable bond between siblings.

Caleb Fang (played by Christopher Walken) and Camille Fang (Maryann Plunkett) are highly driven performance artists who stage incidents that upset the daily

quotidian rhythms of people's lives, filming their reactions and using them as art works. When their children are born, Annie and Baxter who are referred to by their parents, albeit playfully, as Child A and Child B become key catalytic elements in their pranks (I will not describe them for you here, suffice to say that are both hysterically funny and horrifying in equal parts) until the children revolt, unfortunately carrying their emotional scars into adulthood.

Kidman plays the adult Annie in her usual high strung manner, but thankfully, once again, Jason Bateman, as the adult Baxter provides a marvellous foil for his actress sister (yes, Annie is a famous actor). The younger Fangs live firmly away from the their kooky, sociopath parents, desperate to leave behind their widely celebrated, highly scrutinised childhoods when circumstances force them to return to the family home; the reunion is sweet, funny, and provides a great deal of insight to the very real bonds between parents and children, a set up that makes the rest of the film so much more poignant.

When the Fang parents embark on a road trip and are reported missing with their abandoned car full of blood, Annie and Baxter are convinced their incorrigible, ruthless parents have staged yet another art event. What ensues is a tragicomedy that will leave you bewitched, bothered, and bewildered.

[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

■ Trailer

## HAPPENINGS



MoFA

**SHALOM:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with Foreign Affairs Minister Kamal Thapa in Jerusalem on Wednesday where the two countries signed a bilateral agreement.



ANANDARAM DANGOL

**ABOUT MADHESIS WITHOUT MADHESIS:** Top leaders attend an all-party meeting presided over by Prime Minister KP Oli at Singha Darbar on Tuesday, which was boycotted by Madhesi parties.



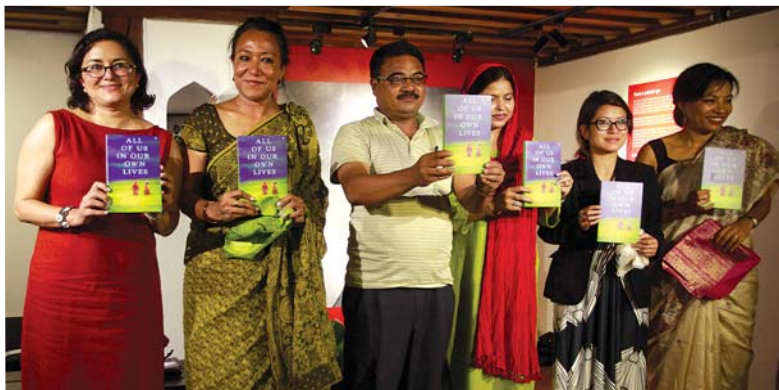
MADHESI YOUTH

**RED ARREST:** Police arrest activist Ishan (right) for defacing the gate of Singha Darbar, and journalist Shesh Narayan Jha (left) for taking his picture in Kathmandu on Sunday.



NEPAL POLICE

**RESPECT FOR NATIONAL ANTHEM:** Ailing musician Amber Gurung is felicitated by Nepal Police in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



GOPEN RAI

**NEW NOVEL:** Manjushree Thapa (left) at the launch of her new novel *All of Us In Our Own Lives* at Patan Museum on Wednesday.

हरेक ब्याइमा नेपालीपनको मिठाइ

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# Guilty until proven not guilty

Mukesh Pokharel,  
Centre for Investigative  
Journalism



Sashi Kumar Thitung

Sashi Kumar Thitung of Makwanpur sold fish and repaired bicycles. Four years ago, the police arrested him from his home for no reason at all. He was taken to court next day and charged with human trafficking. The Makwanpur District Court then slapped a 20 years sentence on Thitung. He is now in Bhimphedi Jail.

It was a case of mistaken identity based on a complaint lodged by Bindiya Tamang who was lured to India and sold to a brothel in Mumbai in 1989. Bindiya returned to Nepal after 22 years and filed a human trafficking case against her husband Sitaram Thing, and his friends Shyam Bahadur Bomjan and a man who went by name ‘Satya’.

Sitaram and Shyam Bahadur were arrested, after which police nabbed Thitung because his nickname was ‘Shakte’ and it sounded like ‘Satya’. Thitung, who can barely read or write, was made to sign a three page long statement prepared by the police.

We revisited Thitung’s case files and even met the accused husband Sitaram Thing, who is also in the same jail. “I told the police that they had got the wrong guy,” he told us. “I don’t know Thitung, and he was not person who went to Mumbai with me to sell my wife. They didn’t listen and framed an innocent man.”

Bindiya died six months after giving a statement to the court in June, 2012 in which she said Sashi Kumar Thitung was innocent and had no role in her being trafficked. Desperate, Thitung wrote to the Parliamentary Hearing Committee from prison, pleading his innocence. He is now awaiting a Supreme Court verdict on his petition.

Attorney General Hari Phuyal admits Nepal’s criminal justice system needs a major overhaul. “There is something really wrong when most innocents languishing in prison are from poor and marginalised sections of society unable to prove their innocence.”

Three years ago, Chitra Bahadur Majhi and his son Kamal from Okhaldhunga, got into a scuffle with 60-year-old Gyan Bahadur Majhi from the same village. But Gyan Bahadur went missing later the same day. His wife filed a police complaint against Chitra Bahadur and his sons, Kaml and Surendra.



Chitra Bahadur Majhi with sons Kamal and Surendra

ALL PICS: CUJ

The government lawyer told them a disappearance charge wasn’t sufficient to lodge a case. So, Gyan Bahadur’s family went to the police claiming that the accused had publicly admitted to murdering him. Chitra Bahadur and his sons were arrested.

But the supposedly-dead Gyan Bahadur returned to the village after five months. After spending 65 days in jail for something they’d never done, Chitra Bahadur and his sons were given a clean chit by the district court which also fined Gyan Bahadur’s nephew for filing a fabricated case.

was arrested by police on charges of drug smuggling. Having spent 18 years behind bars, Arbindra was released on parole in 2014. He believes he was framed by an aquaintance, Aadam Khan, who was peddling drugs.

“The police demanded Rs 50,000 to settle the case but I was innocent, so I refused,” Sharma recalls. But, the Kathmandu District Court slapped him with seven years in prison and a Rs 250,000 fine.

Arbindra Sharma served his seven year jail term and an additional year for failing

to deposit fined amount when then Supreme Court judge Khil Raj Regmi’s bench ruled that he would have to serve additional 15 years and pay a fine of Rs 500,000.

“I regret coming to this country. I wasted best years of my life in prison,” says Sharma, brimming with tears.

In some cases, the police are also under social pressure to file cases, like in the case of Sarswati Subedi from Dhading district who worked at Krishna Prasai’s home in Anamnagar in Kathmandu. Post-mortem confirmed that

Saraswati had committed suicide, but social pressure and public outrage forced police to file a complaint against Krishna Prasai and his family. Despite police investigation showing no foul play, then Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai ordered police to file a case. Prasai was later acquitted.

Pashupati Bhuj was a hotel owner in Butwal, who tried to mediate in a brawl outside nine years ago in which a man was killed. Police arrested him after finding blood stain on his shirt. The Rupandehi District Court sentenced Bhuj to life in prison. Eight years later, the Supreme Court ruled him innocent and he was freed. But Bhuj says his life has been ruined.

“In cases like human trafficking, kidnapping, or drug offences, innocents getting tough sentences because police, government lawyers and judges do not take time to dig deeper,” admits a police official who has investigated several such cases.

Talking on the condition of anonymity, a judge admitted being swayed by public pressure in cases of sexual assaults and human trafficking: “Sometimes we are compelled to overlook the truth due to intense public pressure.”

(Additional reporting by Rabindra Upreti in Mahottari and Kumbharaj Rai in Okhaldhunga)



Jugal Kewat

Jugal Kewat of Mahottari was arrested and sent to Jaleswar prison when the police mistook him for a person with the same name, who was involved in a robbery. When the family presented his citizenship certificate, it was revealed that Kewat was being charged for a crime committed 15 years before he was born. He was released after a week.



Arbindra Das Sharma

Arbindra Das Sharma is from Tamil Nadu and came to Nepal in the late 1970s to work in a garment company. On a chilly December morning, in 1997, he

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# Mustering the energy to



Petroleum is volatile, wind is uncertain, solar has storage issues, there is no alternative to large-scale hydropower

OM ASTHA RAI

When India turned off the tap on Nepal's petroleum imports for five months last year, Ranjana Silwal (*pictured, top, right*) spent entire days waiting in line for precious cooking gas. She then bought an electric stove, and realised that it was more energy-efficient and cost-effective than gas.

Silwal started cooking on electricity, as did tens of

thousands of Nepali families. But overloaded transformers started exploding all over the country. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) reported 35 transformer explosions in just one day in November in Kathmandu.

"I wanted to use my electric stove, but there was no electricity," Silwal recalled. "But if there was enough electricity, no one would use gas cylinders."

The Indian Blockade was a stark reminder to Nepalis that dependency on imported fossil fuel is not sustainable and it was time to have a national policy to switch to cleaner, cheaper and more efficient energy like electricity, solar and wind.

During the blockade, Prime Minister KP Oli made ambitious promises to rid Nepal of electricity rationing in one year. Early this month, the government announced a target to generate 10,000 MW electricity by 2026 and talked about fulfilling 'basic' and 'actual' demand.

Water resource analyst Ratna Sansar Shrestha says the prime minister's promises ring hollow, and is puzzled by what Oli meant by meeting 'basic' and 'actual' demands. "It will be a waste of

time to pin our high hopes on what the prime minister says. His target is 10,000 MW in 10 years, but we already need 6,000 MW right now if we really want to provide power in adequate quantum to industries and replace fossil fuel."

Despite having a potential to generate 43,000 MW of electricity, Nepal's per capita electricity consumption is less than 100 kWh – the lowest in South Asia. Nepal's installed hydropower capacity is just 787 MW, which is less than half of

the demand. The import of 90MW from the Dhalkebar-Muzzafarpur transmission line doesn't even make a dent on the shortfall.

Shree Raj Shakya of the Centre of Energy Studies (CES) says: "People have woken up to the need for an integrated policy



BIKRAM RAI



# face the future



BIKRAM RAI

is very low because people know electricity is scarce. The latest National Energy Strategy Report by the Water and Energy Commission Secretariat shows that firewood still contributes 77 per cent of Nepal's energy needs, and trailing much behind is fossil fuel with just 8 per cent. The share of electricity is only 2 per cent, and solar is not even 0.5 per cent.

Shakya of the CES says this is a very precarious situation. "Over dependence on just one source is a threat to our energy security. We must reduce our dependence on biomass and fossil fuels, and promote hydro, solar, wind and other clean energies." An optimum energy mix would reduce the share of biomass to 25 per cent to protect our forests.

The milestone in energy was the 1992 Electricity Act, which opened Nepal to private and foreign investment in hydropower. New power projects quickly came on line and Nepal actually had a surplus

of electricity in the mid-1990s. But the Maoist conflict delayed all power projects, leading to worsening power cuts for the last 12 years.

Analyst Ratna Sansar Shrestha does not entirely blame the war for delayed power projects. He says the real reason is the tendency on the part of investors to sit on hydropower licenses for long periods without beginning projects. The Ministry of Energy has issued licenses for projects to generate more than 12,000 MW, but he says licenses for 8,000 MW worth of electricity are being held by foreign companies, mostly Indian.

Shrestha proposes raising the bank guarantee from investors to discourage them from sitting on river projects, expanding the transmission network and upgrading infrastructure. "We have a huge electricity market within Nepal, and we must cater to it before exporting hydropower to India," he says. 🇳🇵



that ensures that our energy sources are diverse, cleaner, and sustainable. It is now time for the state to wake up."

Electricity demand has already exceeded 1,300 MW, and is expected to reach 1,600 next year. Experts say the demand

## Sunny and windy tomorrows

The five-month Indian Blockade was a blessing in disguise for Nepal's solar industry. The Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPCC) had declared a solar subsidy for city dwellers, but few had taken up the offer. But during and after the Blockade, the sale of solar photovoltaic (PV) cells increased dramatically (*see interview page 5*).

About 600 households have installed PV cells in Kathmandu after the blockade began in September of last year, and installed capacity from solar has now crossed 40MW. This week, the AEPCC revised its policy, declaring more solar subsidy for those whose houses were destroyed by last year's earthquakes.

"Solar subsidy is an excellent policy," says Jagan Nath Shrestha, President of Nepal Solar Energy Society. "We are making slow but steady progress in generating solar energy. Hydro is definitely our top priority, but it takes years to build one hydro project, but solar is right here with minimal

subsidised investment and can be up and running in no time."

But the AEPCC is wary about people installing solar only as long as there is a subsidy. Ram Prasad Dhital of the AEPCC explains: "This is why our subsidy policy requires people to invest their own money, too."

Prime Minister K P Oli was ridiculed when he proposed the development of wind power, but it is not a wild idea. Nepal has the potential to generate 3,000 MW from wind energy, with the hills on the rim of Kathmandu Valley alone capable of producing 70 MW.

Wind is erratic and utility-scale solar power needs storage for non-daylight hours, they can never be alternatives to hydropower. But relatively quick and easy installation and low operational costs, experts believe, give Nepal the potential to have a sunny and windy future.

## Be smart, go electric

SMRITI BASNET

Just as awareness about building seismic-resistant homes lasted only a few months after last year's earthquakes, the public demand for electric vehicles that soared during the Indian Blockade appears to have tapered off.

Kathmandu's traffic jams are as bad as ever, the import of petroleum products for the ever-growing numbers of diesel buses, trucks, petrol-driven cars and motorcycles have soared.

"It seems the public has a very short term memory," says Cabinet Shrestha of Agni Incorporated, which sells the Mahindra e2O battery cars in Nepal (*pictured*). Sales doubled during the blockade, but interest has now waned.

High taxes on electric vehicles still put them out of the range of most potential buyers. And while Nepal has a long history of electric public transport with the first ropeway connecting Kathmandu to the plains installed 85 years ago, and upgraded in the 1970s. An electric trolley bus line connected Kathmandu to Bhaktapur. None of these are operational today.

"They were hugely successful until shut down, and they go to prove that electric transportation is feasible in Nepal," said Bhushan Tuladhar of UN-Habitat.

The Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport had drafted an Environment-friendly Vehicle and Transport Policy, but its guidelines have not been implemented. Some experts hint darkly at the powerful groups lobbying the government to prevent tax rebates and subsidies for electric vehicles in the coming budget.

What is proven is that except for a provision two years ago to cut excise tax on electric cars by half, and the waiver of road tax, successive government haven't shown the political will to make an aggressive push to cut petroleum demand by introducing electric transport.



GOPEN RAI

"To raise demand, petroleum has to be less attractive," said Tuladhar. He said increasing petrol prices and ploughing the revenue into development of electric transportation market could be a win-win.

With recent innovation in lithium-ion batteries, electric vehicles have now become the rage with most mainstream manufacturers like Nissan, Chevrolet, Toyota and Honda entering the market with affordable e-vehicles. But the lack of incentives in Nepal has kept sales stagnant.

"We will just have to wait until the big manufacturers start promoting electrical vehicles," said Bibek Chapagain, an e-car enthusiast. "They also need longer range to be more acceptable to the public."

With the new budget due next week, Bhusan Tuladhar feels the government should promote electric vehicles, especially for public transport, to reduce traffic congestion, air and noise pollution, and reduce the growing trade deficit with India caused by the rise in demand for petroleum products.

Bhutan has announced that 70 per cent of its private cars will be electric in the next decade, and this is the kind of political commitment that is missing in Nepal. Most experts don't expect a breakthrough in the new budget.

"When we plan for energy, we have to look at not just the supply side but the demand as well. If tomorrow we have a surplus of electricity, what are we going to do with it?" asked Tuladhar. "If planned properly electric trolley buses, electric Bus Rapid Transit system or electric railways can be a reality."





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News in Briefs

Due to space constraints, many important events taking place in the past 24 hours did not make it to page one. All the same, being a newspaper of record, we must mention them briefly in passing so that, centuries hence, researchers poring through the dustbins of history can glean interesting facets of early 21st century life in Nepal. No item of news is therefore too trivial for us, as we can see from a peek into this week's episode of News in Briefs:

**Visa Relaxation for Old Geezers**  
Kathmandu - In an effort to lure visitors back to Nepal, GONe has announced a special category of Relaxation Visa for senior citizens in the autumn of their lives, it is learnt.

Details are sketchy, but sources confirmed that octogenarians and above will find safe haven in Nepal for the remainder of their natural lives provided they agree to certain terms and conditions like: not to

make rude remarks on Twitter about our rulers, bequeath a large chunk of their assets to the national exchequer in their last will and testament, and to respect local culture by adhering to Nepali standards of hygiene and sanitation. In return, GONe will provide each retiree a free voucher for a once-in-a-lifetime Tibetan Sky Burial, and a guaranteed fast-track roundtrip to heaven and back to be reincarnated as an Asiatic One-Horned Rhinoceros calf.

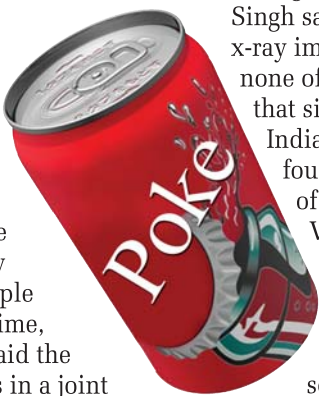
**Acute Acronym Shortage Hits NGOs**  
Kathmandu - Non-government Organisations (NGOs), Quasi Non-government Organisations (QUANGOs), Fly-by-night International Non-government Organisations (FLAMINGOs) and Mainstream Non-government Organisations (MANGOs) are facing an acute shortage of acronyms which is delaying registration of new organisms, it was revealed today at an all-Nepal Convention of Government-supported Non-government Organisations (GONGOs).

"I don't see how we can go on like this," said the incoming secretary of the un-governmental group, INSECT. "At this rate, the registration of new NGOs will grind to a halt." The outgoing chairperson of another non-governmental orgasm, HERPES, agreed: "This is an emergency. The government should do something about it."

**Coke and Pepsi to Merge**  
ATLANTA - Faced with huge losses after allegations that pesticide residue was found in samples of colas in the Sub-Indian Continent, Coke and Pepsi announced today that they are merging. "People were mixing us up all the time, so we decided why not?" said the CEOs of the two companies in a joint statement. The new company, Poke Inc, is now the largest manufacturer of carboniferous beverages on the planet. The

new fizzy giant will soon launch a range of new products, including Poca Cola, Diet Coksi, Frite, and Poke Lite.

**Journo Held**  
Kathmandu - A journalist carrying a large stash of counterfeit Indian currency hidden inside his fake bottom was held up by police at the airport today. "We apprehended the perpetrator for questioning because he was walking suspiciously on all fours as he went through the x-ray machine," DIG Vijay Singh said. "On closer examination, his x-ray immediately raised eyebrows because none of us had seen haemmorrhoids of that size before." Besides counterfeit Indian currency, the journalist was also found in possession of several items of fake news. Said DIG Vijay: "We knew the news was totally fabricated because none of the quotes were properly sourced."



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