



GOPEN RAI

Power to the people

What a difference one man makes. In May, Som Prasad Pahadi appeared on the front page of *Nepali Times* (above, inset) as he juggled with the load-shedding schedule at the Lagankhel Substation as the capital reeled under 12 hour daily power cuts. On Thursday, Narendra Adhikari (pictured) was at the same spot, but didn't have much to do since there is no more power to cut.

Kulman Ghising has become a celebrity overnight for removing load-shedding in Kathmandu Valley, and the question in everyone's lips is: will there be electricity rationing this winter?

Ghising says he will manage generation and distribution in such a way that there will be

no load-shedding. His plan is to further cut peak hour supply to big consumers so there will be enough power for everyone.

NEA Spokesperson Prabal Adhikari says the utility is working to increase Indian power import from 80MW to 220MW for the dry season. He said the capital will get 24 hours of electric supply even if it means cutting more hours from industries.

Adhikari explains: "If we can make timely imports and internal generation as planned, we will just have a shortfall of 100MW in the dry season compared to the situation now."

Kulman Ghising was lucky to be at the right place at the right time and benefited from a convergence of circumstances. More

than 70MW of hydropower has recently been connected to the national grid, and NEA plans to add up to 103MW from new hydropower projects like Khani Khola, Upper Madi, Upper Marsyangdi and others by end-December.

A late monsoon means rivers are still flowing above normal, and this has maintained maximum generation levels from run-of-river schemes. Thus, supply is at an all-time high just as demand has fallen steadily because of household and office photovoltaics.

All Ghising had to do since taking over at NEA was to manage distribution by cutting a few hours of peak hour power to various large consumers who had been paying off NEA officials, and spread that to households

across the country.

However, much as Ghising would like to deliver uninterrupted power, the supply-demand arithmetic doesn't add up. The current electricity deficit is 450MW nationwide and it will rise to 535MW in the upcoming dry season.

Sipping tea by his desk at the Lagankhel Substation, in-charge Suprabhat Bhandari said: "The peration work load has gone down by almost 90 per cent since we don't have to keep track of the load shedding schedule anymore."

Shreejana Shrestha



POWER STRUGGLE
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

POWER STRUGGLE

If it was any other product, load-shedding of electricity would have been called what it is: black-marketing.

Speak to anyone in Kathmandu these days, and the subject invariably turns to the unexpected windfall of having electricity 24 hours a day. And in every conversation it is Kulman Ghising whose name comes up, he is spoken about with a combination of awe and admiration. A person few had heard of till about a month ago is now a national hero.

Ghising has done something no one had thought possible: banished load-shedding from the capital. For the first time in a long time, we have seen a government that has actually solved a problem faced by the public.

Constant power supply is a given in most countries, but you can be pretty sure that people who get rationed electricity only 8 hours a day live in a failed state. Yet, Nepalis are so inured to shortages and shoddy services they stopped complaining about the lack of electricity long ago. We have come to expect so little from our governments that load shedding was taken as a given.

Within months of being appointed to the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) in September, Ghising proved we had no power because the powerful grabbed most of it. All he did was shuffle things around, manage demand and supply, stop 24-hour power supply that some influential industries and individuals were being provided in return for kickbacks, and voila, there was enough for everyone.

He also streamlined transmission, and changed the chief at the Siuchatar Load Dispatch Centre where the decision about who got power and who didn't was made. As our investigation on page 14-15 of this edition shows, people up and down the line were profiting by perpetuating the shortage. If it was any other product, load-shedding of electricity would be called black-marketing.

The rot was so deep we doubt if this would have been possible for so long without the collusion of everyone up



BIKRAM RAI

and down the line: from past Ministers of Energy or Water Resources to successive NEA bosses since 2006, and even the controllers in Siuchatar.

To be sure, Ghising was lucky to be at the right place at the right time. He benefited from a fortuitous confluence of circumstances. More than 70MW of hydropower has recently been connected to the national grid, and another 75MW will soon be added from private producers. A healthy and late monsoon means rivers are still flowing above normal, and this has maintained maximum generation levels from run-of-river schemes. Power imports from India through the upgraded 400kVA Dhalkebar connector is at a steady 80MW after political and technical hurdles were overcome. Luckily for Ghising, supply is at an all-time high just as demand has fallen steadily because of household and office photovoltaics.

All Ghising did since taking over at NEA is to manage distribution by cutting a few hours of peak hour power to various large consumers and spreading that to households

across the country. A couple of ministers and NEA chiefs who tried to do the same thing previously were sacked. The machinery of load-shedding was so well-oiled everyone got their share of payoffs from the big boys, and integrity was not tolerated.

The NEA is now saying that it can obviate power rationing in Kathmandu Valley at least till February. After that power cuts could return because the gap between supply and demand is just too big. But it will be nowhere near what we suffered last year this time.

Kulman Ghising is fortunate to have political backing from Energy Minister Janardan Sharma and Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal who seem to have decided that ensuring 24-hour power is the most effective thing they can do to restore the Maoist party's credibility. It is also a stroke of luck that Energy Secretary Anup Upadhyay is not just any old bureaucrat shunted in from another ministry, but an electrical engineer himself.

Ghising's next challenge is to unbundle the NEA into three separate companies for generation, transmission and distribution — a proposal that has been around for 20 years but kept getting shelved because the combined utility was too much of a cash cow for greedy politicians.

A much bigger danger is that political pressure from those who have benefited from load-shedding over the past decades will be too much for Ghising to bear. He is already feeling the heat from NEA unions affiliated to the three main parties, who had been siphoning off load-shedding kickbacks. Some NEA Board members were found to have faked board minutes to undermine Ghising and have been hauled over the coals.

Kulman Ghising would be well-advised to cover his back, and the public should show its appreciation for a man who proved to all of us that some people still value personal integrity and the national interest.

Times

THIS WEEK



MICHAEL KOBOLD

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Thundu Sherpa, 46 by Michael Kobold
On Monday morning as the earth shook, the diametrically opposed worlds of mountaineering and horology lost a legend. (12,446 people reached)

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Kakistocracy, Editorial
(34 retweets, 57 likes)

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Most visited online page
Melamchi flows to Kathmandu by Om Astha Rai

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

TRIAL BALLOONS
Why do you think India can do whatever it wants in Nepal ('Trial balloons', Om Astha Rai, #835)? What about mighty China? It is foolish to think that China will allow India to have a free hand in Nepal.
Prithbi Gurung

■ There's no argument that our economy is largely dependent on remittances and foreign aid. GDP is very low, and so is our HDI. There is hardly any leader in the nation who talk about development issues as everyone is too busy doing their petty politics.
Pushparaj

#IWALKFREELY
I was molested from behind while I was praying at Pashupatinath Temple. Sexually depraved Nepali men of all ages, abuse us women every day. (#IWalkFreely, #835). They grope and pinch and grab. This is how women are treated in New Nepa.
Binita Shrestha

THE ASS
You have given it a lot of thought Mr Ass ('Workable models for federalism, the Ass, #835)! I really think the government should consider all of these options.
Tenzn Tsono

■ The 3,948 province model is an excellent idea. Now let us talk about moving the capital to Kagatigaun, moving TIA to Kabre VDC and transforming Singha Durbar into a 23 star hotel. Thamel should be recognized as a metropolitan city/province and given a special tax free status with government officials banned from entering.
Bairagi Khukuri

■ If at all we need provinces, then just five according to the five existing development regions based on geography, not ethnicity. Water is going to be the bone of contention in future.
R Joshi



CORRECTION
Due to a layout error in Issue # 835, the wrong picture was used in the front page blurb pointing to a tribute to Thundu Sherpa (*correct photo, left*).

Arpana Shrestha @appu_arpana

Here's to breaking stereotypes! You can be a mom, a wife, a daughter,..... and also a bodybuilder.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes

After receiving the medal, Nanita Maharjan told Nepali Times: "There is nothing a woman cannot do."

Sujala Pant @SujalaPant

Relentless earthquakes and after-shocks. Taking away the lives of illustrious Sherpas.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes

On Monday morning as the earth shook, the diametrically opposed worlds of mountaineering and horology lost a legend.

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #836

Q. Will water from Melamchi river flow out of Kathmandu's taps by September 2017?

Total votes: 478

Yes 26.29%

No 45.04%

Maybe 28.67%

Weekly Internet Poll #836
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Who should be more responsible to break the political deadlock?

Times

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Publisher and Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit

Associate Editor: Om Astha Rai | Design: Kiran Maharjan

Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu

editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518

Marketing: Arjun Karki, Surendra Sharma rachanas@himalmedia.com | Advertisers: Ram Krishna Banjara | Subscriptions: Santosh Aryal santosha@himalmedia.com

Printed at Jagadamba Press | 01-5250017-19 | www.jagadambaprp.com

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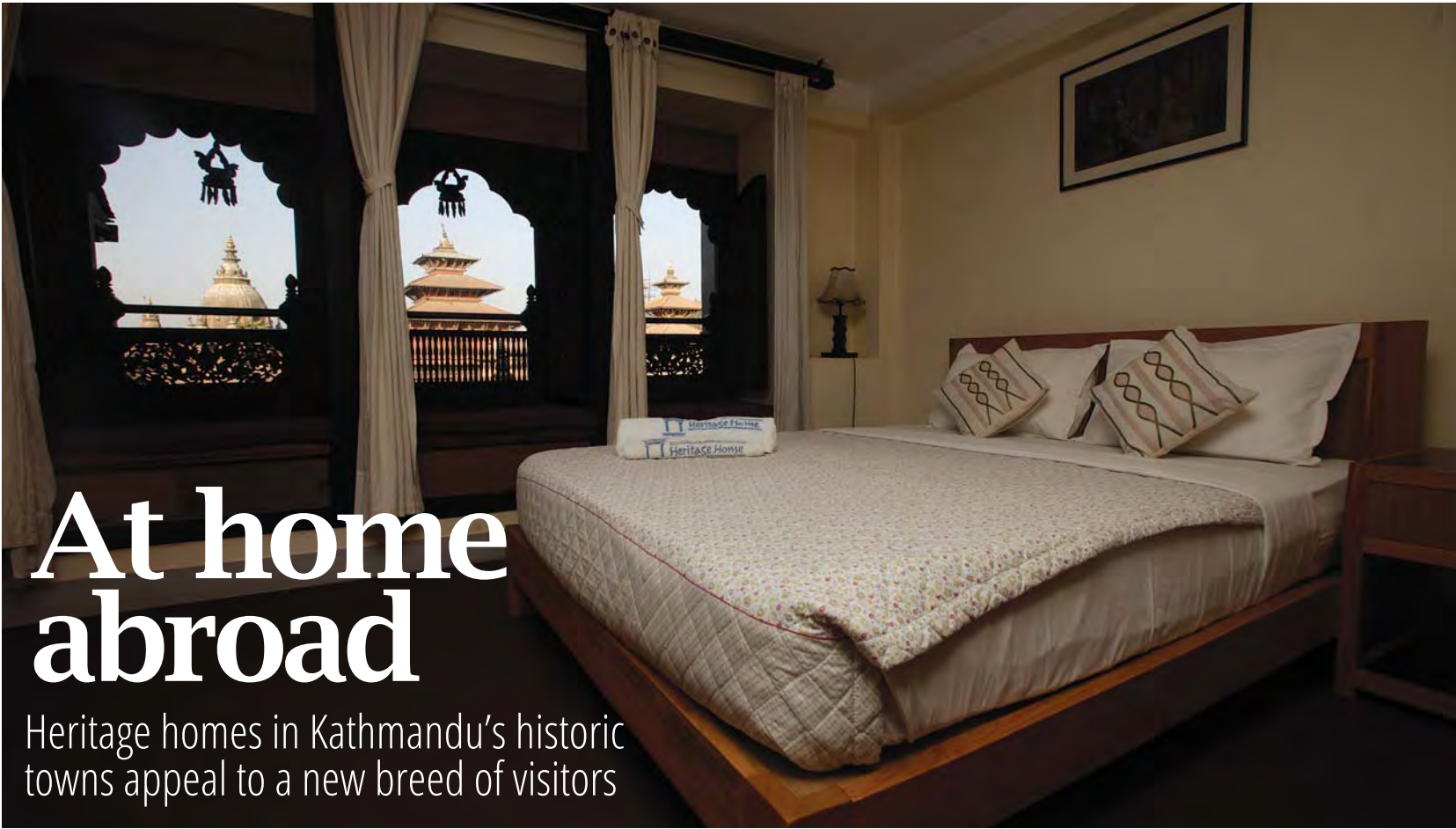
JESSICA CORTIS

The 2015 earthquake and last year's Indian blockade dealt a blow to Nepal's tourism, and the number of visitors plummeted by one-third. However, travel websites like TripAdvisor and Booking.com are bringing in a new breed of visitors who shun tourist ghettos like Thamel and prefer to stay in heritage homes in historic towns like Patan.

New boutique hotels and homestays have sprung up in Bhaktapur, Kirtipur, Patan and even further afield with bed and breakfast lodgings in Bandipur which cater to individual travellers looking for a more authentic local experience, and who book their stays online.

In Patan, new family-run lodges that are a cross between homestays and guest houses get most of their guests through online bookings. The trend has been pushed by the 'voluntourists' who came to Nepal in large numbers after the earthquake to help with relief work as well as trek.

"The reviews on the Internet have opened us up to a wider audience," says Renish Maharjan from Lalit Heritage Home which overlooks Patan Darbar Square. The guesthouse has recently changed its management structure to cater to its growing online presence.



GOPEN RAI

At home abroad

Heritage homes in Kathmandu's historic towns appeal to a new breed of visitors

The tourism industry has seen the emergence of Fully Independent Travelers (FIT), and as a result tourists have become more reliant on the online reviews of tourists rather than travel agents.

"Customers that come into our homestay know all about it before they even walk through the door," says Shailendra Shrestha, the owner of Tajaa Pha Heritage Home in Patan's Pim Bahal.

Buddha Ram Ranjit, owner of The Inn guesthouse in Swotha Square receives between 50-60 emails a day with requests

and queries from prospective guests. He believes having an online presence and a portal for communication helps tailor the homestay experience of guests and provide feedback.

Tourists that are coming to Nepal are changing their tastes and it seems that locals are catching on to the trend with new guest houses now coming up in Bhaktapur and Patan as alternatives to Thamel. They are mostly upgraded ancestral property some of which have been in the family for over 300 years.

Canadian tourist and

volunteer, Maria Abdelmalik has visited Nepal three times and prefers to stay at a guesthouse in Patan. "It becomes like a family home, we often share meals with the owners and they tell us about the history of the Valley," she said of her experience at Tajaa Pha Heritage Home.

These guest houses, however, are not just attracting tourists. Researchers, volunteers and workers from abroad are also choosing to reside in the area. During the Photo Kathmandu Festival, international photographers from National

Geographic, World Press Photo and other media opted for the Patan homestay experience.

Tajaa Pha's Shrestha believes that Patan's popularity has made the surrounding guest houses more attractive. He says: "From the moment your eyes open in the morning until you close them in the evening, you have a feeling that you are living as a local."



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“ Guest houses are much more intimate, our whole family is involved. Tourists like homestays better because they know the money is going in the pocket of the locals and not to a larger hotel chain.

Shailendra Shrestha , Tajaa Pha Heritage Home



“ Our guesthouses are renovated from our ancestral homes and tourists prefer the authentic heritage experience.

Buddha Ram Ranjit, The Inn

“ Patan is a cosy community with a lot of history. I’m here for a while so this is the one place that feels like home and it’s in a close proximity to things like the supermarket and Darbar Square.

Maria Abdelmalik, Canada



“ Patan Darbar Sqaure is definitely quieter than other places in Kathmandu Valley and you can notice it’s a lot cleaner too, making it pleasantly walkable.

Peter Agnew, United States

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Banking made easy

 NIC Asia launched a new service, Interbank Payment System (IPS), in collaboration with Nepali Clearing House Limited (NCHL). Bank customers using internet banking services can now transfer funds to more than 60 financial institutions including commercial banks associated with NCHL-IPAS system.



Express service

Nepal Tourism Board announced ‘Experience Nepal’ campaign in partnership with Himalayan Bank and American Express. American Express has been declared as the official card for the campaign which runs till 31 July 2017.

Monk in Nepal

The iconic dark rum brand, Old Monk, was launched in Nepal. Blended and bottled in Premier Organics, the rum will come in three pack sizes: 750 ml, 375 ml and 180 ml.



Prabhu add branches

Prabhu Bank recently inaugurated branches in Achham and Rukum with the support of UK Aid’s Sakchyam programme. With the coming of the banks, the customers look forward to easy and efficient banking services.



the company aims to add outlets in New Road, Baneshwor, Koteshwor, Maharajgunj and Jhamsikhel.





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The gods will be angry

MINA SHARMA and PRAKASH SINGH
in BAJURA, HUMLA and MUGU

Seminars in Kathmandu debate gender, reproductive rights and the maternal mortality, and as we mark the 16-day campaign against gender-based violence the clamour for gender equality gets louder. But in the remote mountains of western Nepal, women still deliver babies in dirty, cold and stuffy cowsheds. They live there for one

month, without nutritious food and no attendants. Donor-funded projects for safe motherhood have yielded few actual results in these far-flung villages. Women here fear that the gods will punish their families by causing drought, famine and disasters if they enter the house after childbirth. They are not allowed to eat nutritious food before and after delivery, and no one can touch them. The superstitions persist despite development projects and education. As a result, mothers and newborns suffer from malnutrition, other diseases and even death.



Nandasara Sarki, 23, Bajura

27 OCTOBER. I have been living in the cowshed since I gave birth 12 days ago. After delivering the baby, the mother and child were not allowed to stay in the house because the gods would be angry and we will face poor harvests and the baby will not be healthy. All the women from this village and my maternal village in Humla live in a shed after delivery and during menstruation. This is my fifth child and I have lived in a shed for a month after every delivery. It gets too cold in there, and two of my babies died because of exposure. This baby is also suffering from cough and diarrhea. Not all children who are born survive. Everyone has lost a child, so have I. The doctors at the health post tell us not to live in a cowshed after giving birth. The people from the NGOs also tell us the same thing. But this is how things have been done here for ages. Why would we have any problems when no one in the past faced any? I was also born in a cowshed and I am still healthy. Why discontinue the rituals that have been going on? We should not be selfish and make the gods angry?



Sarswati Budhthapa, 21, Bajura

28 OCTOBER. I delivered my baby two weeks ago, and ever since I have been living in this shed. If I enter my house or kitchen, the gods will be angry. Health workers tell us that we should not live in the shed with our newborns, but this has been our tradition. My mother gave birth to me in a shed. And she was also born in a shed. So was her mother. Nothing happened to them because they were careful not to anger the gods. If the god gets angry, we will face drought, famine, landslides and other disasters. Our children also become disabled. Knowing those consequences, how can we enter the house?



Chinkala Chadara, 22, Mugu

30 OCTOBER. I delivered my baby in this cowshed six days ago. I had visited the local health post during pregnancy, and the health workers had advised me to visit them for the delivery. But if spending one month in this shed with my baby saves my family from the god's anger, I should do it. Most women around here deliver their babies in the cowshed and live there for at least one month since no one can touch them for that time. They cook, wash and look after their babies themselves. They can work outdoors, but cannot enter the kitchen.



Bhawana Budha, 22, Humla

29 OCTOBER. I have three children, and I gave birth to each of them in the cowshed. The nearest health post is far away so it is difficult for me to go there. During the time we spend in the shed, we do not eat green vegetables, beans and lentil soup. No one is allowed to cook for us. We have to do everything ourselves. But we endure this suffering hoping that the gods will show mercy on our families.



Dudhari Dhami, 24, Humla

29 OCTOBER. When my labour pains started, women from the neighbourhood took me to the cowshed. The umbilical cord was cut with a sickle, just like the others. I delivered my first baby in a cowshed, too, my mother gave birth to me in a cowshed, and nothing happened to me. That is the way we have always done things here. If we deliver in the home, the gods will be angry. We lose weight, and in summer there are insects, but we have to bear with it.

Magi Chadara, 17, Mugu

30 OCTOBER. My daughter was born 13 days ago. Today I went to work in the field after putting her to sleep. After lunch, I will feed her and go to collect fodder for the cattle. The health post is five minutes away from my house. When I go there, the health workers tell me to come for regular check-ups and not stay in the cowshed after delivery. But how can we stay in the house when the elders tell us not to do so? All the women in my village have stayed in the shed during and after delivery, and nothing has happened to them. So why should I not stay here? Women like us should not touch men. Even when we are educated, we have to follow the rituals when we know that the gods will be angry. These are traditions handed down by our ancestors.



Dhan Bahadur Phadera Acting Head, Rugin Health Post, Bajura

I have been here for two years. The mothers are brought to the health post only after their condition deteriorates in the cold cowsheds, and they are in no conditions to moved to hospital. We are trying to brief them, but they don't want to give up their tradition of not giving pregnant women butter, meat, milk and yoghurt. I am from the west, I have been all over the Karnali, and I can say that 80 percent of women still deliver in cowsheds. Even husbands who have college degrees make their wives have babies in cowsheds.

Ramudevi Malla, Female Health Volunteer, Bajura

I have been telling women here not to deliver in cowsheds for ten years now. But I have failed. I delivered inside the home, but I couldn't convince others. They won't even be taken to a clean room because of the belief that livestock will be sick if a woman having periods stays inside the home. Superstition is difficult to eradicate. "Nothing happened to my mother-in-law when she stayed in the cowshed, why should it be different for me," the daughters-in-law ask. We have been successful in getting them to have regular checkups, to take vitamins and iron pills, deworming medicines, but we have failed to get them out of the cowsheds while giving birth or when they have their periods. Last year a young mother here died in a cowshed because of loss of blood, yet they insist in staying in the dirty hut amidst the cowling and straw, their reply is: "It is enough if the gods are happy."

Centre for Investigative Journalism



ALL PICS: MINA SHARMA



PICS: GOPEN RAI

DURGAS and DOORS

Meena Kayastha's latest artwork on doors salvaged after the April 2015 earthquake exudes ingenuity and quality



Time and again, artist Meena Kayastha has proven her calibre, injecting innovation and experimenting with expression through various medium. Her latest exhibition 'Divine Debris' depicting gods and goddesses in wooden doors and detailed handwork is a classy addition to Kathmandu's art scene.

Kayastha recalls having grown up hearing stories of Nava Durga, the nine goddesses. Her work is a homage to them, and other living beings, hoping to encourage the audience to draw strength from what people consider powerful goddesses to realise their own potential.

A firm believer in the concept of recycling and reusing, the doors were salvaged from the rubble of earthquake damaged neighbourhoods of Bhaktapur. The doors do not only represent the devastation, but are almost a symbol of protection and salvation, new beginnings. Like the Durgas, the doors shield humans from harm.

However, the artist does not limit her creative abilities with only earthquake doors from her hometown.

What once used to be a lawn-mower has been converted into Mahakali, the goddess of time and death, while Yamraj, god of death, also gets a facelift using mixed media. Additionally, making use of leftovers from her previous works, and the scraps that people donated to her, Kayastha has come up with a beautiful exhibition that exudes originality and quality.

"I've always felt passionate about antique items," Kayastha told us, adding that it was also important for her to communicate the underlying message of empowering women.

Doors lead into different worlds, offering hope and new prospects. The artist thus makes the doors symbols of what women are capable of if given full opportunities. Women need to open their inner doors, she says.

Kayastha uses recurring motifs of immortality: doors rescued from the debris, reusing salvaged material, and recycling resources -- all passing on the message of revival and reducing our footprint on the land. Perhaps this comes out from her own vision of how she wants to be remembered, we ask Kayastha. She replies: "We all die someday, but my work is what is going to remain."

Divine Debris is distinct from Kayastha's previous exhibition, 'Lyrics from the Junkyard', because the current work plays more with colours. Vibrant and captivating, the multi-hued deities set the mood of the exhibition and liven up the white walls of the Siddhartha Art Gallery.

What makes the show even more compelling is the attention to detail. The locks and bolts on the doors have been craftily turned into ornaments for the goddesses. Paper mache, parts of watch wrist bands, used jewellery have been used by the artist to give it a contemporary touch, a stark contrast to the printed images of goddesses that you find in abundance in the market.

In doing so, however, the creations do not look overdone. Kayastha's passion for reassembling has given her a unique edge in the art world with items that are lively and sophisticated.

Kayastha wants to keep experimenting with newer forms and medium, and she is learning to edit videos and is planning to delve into the world of multimedia art forms. 🇳🇵

Smriti Basnet

Until 11 January 2017, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 42180488

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GOPAL GARTOULA
in CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Refugees from Bhutan who lived for two decades in camps in Nepal and were resettled in the United States are finally finding their feet after an initial period of adjustment. It has not been easy for the 100,000 refugees who were evicted by Bhutan in 1990-92 and 25,000 others who were born in seven refugee camps in eastern Nepal administered by UNHCR. After Bhutan repeatedly stonewalled on taking its citizens back, a process of third country resettlement was started in 2007. By the end of this year, nearly 95,000 will be resettled in the United States with the UK, Canada, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Australia and New Zealand taking smaller numbers. Eight years after being resettled, former refugees from Bhutan have turned Albemarle Road in Charlotte of North Carolina into a Little Bhutan. There are an estimated 5,000 Bhutanese in and around Charlotte who run shops and restaurants or work in groceries. *Nepali Times* spoke to some of them:

Pradip Gurung, 38

Former refugees from Bhutan know Pradip Gurung as “Sahuji”. With friends Hom Gurung and Om Gurung, Pradip invested \$300,000 to start the Munro Nepali Indian Grocery on Albemarle Rd. The store stocks clothing, foodstuff, cosmetics and has a daily turnover of \$3,000. On the side, he also does interpretation for newly arrived Bhutanis being resettled in the US. In the Khudunabari Refugee Camp of Jhapa, Pradip used to teach at a local school, but in America he is on the job 16 hours a day. He says: “I had to start from zero here, but in America if you work hard you can go far.”



Purna Karki, 36

Purna Karki was a teenage when he arrived at the Beldangi 2 Regugee Camp in Jhapa from Bhutan with his family in 1991. He still remembers that their home for nearly two decades was Sector B Hut Number 139 at Beldangi. Karki graduated from Trhibhuvan University and used to teach at an English school outside his refugee camp in Nepal. He arrived in Charlotte in 2008 and has set up his own garment shop. What strikes Karki the most is how easy it is to start a business in the US. He says: “It is completely hassle-free as long as you follow the rules.”





Khadga Gurung, 28

Khadga Gurung doesn't remember much about Bhutan, since he was a small boy when he was forced to flee with his family. As a refugee, he was attending college in Nepal when he was resettled in the US in 2010. He first worked in a food packaging factory, but decided to strike out on his own. He used his savings and borrowed from friends to invest \$75,000 in a provision store on Albemarle Rd in Charlotte.



Kamal Dhimel, 45

Kamal Dhimel is actually a writer from Bhutan who was forced to leave along with other Lhotsampas from his ancestral home. After spending 18 years in Goldhap Refugee Camp in Jhapa, he was finally resettled in the US in 2013 where he first worked as a geriatric caregiver for six months. Then he worked in a footwear company and now has taken out a \$30,000 loan and invested his savings to set up Central Market on Albemarle Rd in Charlotte. Dhimel drives his truck 1,200 km to New York to bring products provisions preferred by South Asian residents here. The store now has a daily turnover of \$2,000.



Shiva Darji, 52

When Shiva Darji was living in Chirang Pattale in southern Bhutan, he carried on his ancestral profession of tailoring. In 1991, his family was driven out of Bhutan like 100,000 other Nepali speakers, and he set up a small tailoring shop in his bamboo hut in Sanischare Refugee Camp in Morang. When he boarded a white International Organisation of Migration (IOM) bus to be resettled in the US in 2008, he brought along his interlock tailoring machine. Here, he bought a stitching machine for \$250 and set up a small shop in the Central Market on Albemarle Road. His customers are mainly South Asians who want blouses and salwar kameez, and he makes about \$1,500 a month. Says Darji: "I'm happy because even in America I can make a living doing what I know how to do."

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EVENTS



Scenic trail,

Run or hike through the scenic 15 kilometres of Changu Narayan to Nagarkot trail. All proceeds go to the Nagarkot Buddha Peace Garden and Clean Green Nagarkot movement. Both way transportation provided.
17 December, 9851192617/98414111789/9751 041507, carondhoju@gmail.com, Fee: Rs 1500, Transport provided from Nepal Tourism Board

Christmas in Kathmandu,

Hum to the tunes of traditional and contemporary Christmas songs with Kathmandu Chorale. Attend also for the world premiere of A New Church by Nadine Rogers.
10 December, 3.30 and 6 pm, British School, Jhamiskhel, thekathmanduchorale.wordpress.com

Art for kids,

Enrol your children in a twelve-day winter art camp organised by Artudio where they can experience and experiment with different artistic mediums.
10 to 21 December, 10.30 am to 2 pm, Artudio, Chhauni, 9851180088, artudio@hotmail.com, Fee: Rs 5500 (for school children)

Video art,

Attend the screening of 28 video arts from all over the world on the occasion of International Day of Human Rights.
10 December, 4 pm onwards, Mcube Gallery, Chakupat

Brazilian cinema,

Mark your calendars for the screening of Brazilian feature films and documentaries. Passes can be collected from the Brazilian Embassy, Maharajgunj.
December 11(0 Palhaço- The Clown 3 pm & Brasileirinho 5 pm), December 18 (Yatra 3 pm & Heleno 5 pm), Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, (01) 472 1462 / 3

Celebrating art,

Mark your calendars for an art fair showcasing 12 Bangladeshi and 54 Nepali artists under one roof.
9 to 11 December, 10.30 am to 5.30 pm, Park Gallery, Pulchok, www.parkgallery.com.np, (01) 5522305, 9808525790

Divine debris,

Attend an exhibition of sculptures by artist Meena Kayastha at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Read more on Page 7.
Until 11 January, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4218048/4433930

Rajman's Kathmandu,

Don't miss out on the exhibition of artist Rajman Singh's mid-19th century drawings of Kathmandu Valley.
Until 16 December, Taragaon Museum, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, (01) 5178334



Girls ride,

Ride up to Budanilkantha in preparation for the upcoming Budanilkantha MTB race. The event is dedicated to train, support and encourage girls to ride.
10 December, 6.30 to 9 am, Starting point: Himalayan Single Track, Thamel, (01) 4700909

Cycle rally,

Join hundreds as they cycle to celebrate the World Antibiotic Awareness week.
9 December, 7.30 am onwards, Starting point: Basantapur, (01) 4412787/4410826

Photographing shelters,

Attend a photography exhibition by UNICEF featuring children, adolescents and people who came to make shelters as their home following the April 2015 earthquake.
9 to 11 December, 2 pm onwards (9 December), Bhrikutimandap Grounds, Kathmandu

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



MUSIC



Christmas carol,

Experience an intimate concert and enjoy some of your favorite Christmas melodies including the luscious harmonies played by Evoke choral group.
9 December 7.30 to 9pm, Kantipur Temple House, Thamel, (01)-4250131, info@kantipurtemplehouse.com, Rs 500

Rock at Moksh,

With a fusion of rock ensemble accompanied by a killer horn section, the Kathmandu Cats and the Dirty Boogie Brass Band team together to present a fun night of music.
9 December, 7 to 10 pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5528362, Mokshlive@hotmail.com

Night market,

A night of music accompanied by art, shopping, eating and relaxing.
10 December, 5 to 11 pm, Basecamp, Arun Thapa Chowk, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur



Songs with Akhu,

Do not miss the chance to see the frontman of Imphal Talkies, Akhu Chingabam playing songs of freedom at Basecamp.
14 December, 7 pm to 10 pm, Basecamp, Arun Thapa Chowk, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur, Rs 300

Purple haze,

Come and listen to bands Atrocity, Rage Hybrid and more as they join together to support street children in their charity music event. Donations of winter supplies are welcome.
10 December, 1 to 5.30 pm, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, Kathmandu, Fee: Pre-sale Rs 300, Door-sale Rs 500



FILM FESTIVAL

Join the 14th annual festival, where over 80 films from 28 countries will be screened over five days aiming to entertain, challenge and inspire its audience.
Rs 100 (per screening), Rs 1500 (season tickets)

9 December, Friday

QFX| Hall A

11 am
Aram Sei (in Fairness)
Simal Ko Bhuwa Jastai (World Premiere)
The Song Collector (Asian Premiere)
1 pm
Daughters of the Curved Moon (World Premiere)
3 pm
The Doll's Funeral



Barakhari Lauro (Nepal Premiere)
Mira (Nepal Premiere)
5 pm
Papa
Les Ignorees - Chronique d'une campagne nippone en lutte (The Ignored Ones - A Chronicle of a Japanese Rural Life)

QFX| Hall B

11.30 am
High and Mighty
A la poursuite de l'endurance, sur les traces de Shackleton (The Pursuit of Endurance, on the Shoulders of Shackleton)
1.30 pm



Bartas
A Line Across the Sky
3.30 pm
Prva Makedonska (First Macedonian Traverser)
Il Passo (The Pass)
5.30 pm
Facing the Mountain
Paddle SUP – Mission Amazon

Russian Culture Centre (RCC) | Main Hall

10 am
Los asesdel corral (Barnyard Aces)
Syaahi (Uphill)
Urzulo
11.30 am
'Know Your Himal' – Quiz
1 pm
Mi Yohav Oti Achshav? (Who's Gonna Love Me now?)
2.45 pm
Introspections
Through the Unknown

RCC|Annex

1 pm
Talk and Slide Show: Bird Migration over Himalayas
2.15 pm
Panel Discussion: Nepali Film – Here and Now

10 December, Saturday

QFX| Hall A

10.30 am
What They Believe

Mela (World Premiere)
A Song for Barpak (World Premiere)
12.30 pm
Urmilla – My Memory is My Power
2.30 pm
In Search of Rhythm
Coming of Age
4 pm
Dadyaa
Phulsiri (World Premiere)
5.30 pm



Chandra
Blockade (World Premiere)
7.30 pm
Vara: A Blessing

QFX| Hall B

11 am
Alive
1000 Hands of the Guru: Saving Bhutan's Sacred Arts
12.45 pm
De La Marche
Morir Por La Cima (Dying for the Summit)
2.30 pm
Across Antarctica
Jean Troillet, toujours aventurier (Jean Troillet, Still an Adventurer)
4.30 pm
Caileach
Wind of Change in Lo Mustang (World Premiere)
6.30 pm
E.B.C. 5300m
Big Men
Alpine Wall Tour

11 December, Sunday

QFX| Hall A

11 am
Bhusko Logne (Maya's Husk Husband) (World Premiere)
Le space bleu entres les nuages (The Blue Space Between the Clouds)
12.45 pm
Ailleurs (Somewhere)
Artists on Jorasses
Story of Annapurna
2.30 pm
In Search of Devaki (World Premiere)



Beyond the White Cane (World Premiere)
4.30 pm
Langtang
Operation Moffat
6 pm
Split Ends (World Premiere)
Hospital (World Premiere)

QFX| Hall B

11.30 am
Celebrating 1000th edition of Aankhijhyal
1 pm
Before the Flood
3 pm
Love of Dingjun Mountain
5 pm
Sira Disi İnsanlar (Extraordinary People)
7 pm
Face to Face
Sloboda pod nákladom (Freedom Under Load)

12 December, Monday

QFX| Hall A

11 am
'Strengthening Public Services in Nepal' Short Film Competition
12.30 pm



Bakur (North)
2.30 pm
Citadel
The Kidney Action (World Premiere)
4.30 pm
Mustang, the Horses Kingdom

QFX| Hall B

11.30 am
Sunu (Corn)
1.15 pm
Paradise Melting
Saving People's Heart
3 pm
Showdown at Horseshoe Hell
Spitting Distance – The Descent into a Raging Volcano



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GOPEN RAI



ASTHA JOSHI

On a recent Saturday afternoon, 75-year-old Buddha Bahadur Shrestha was basking in the weak winter sun in front of his house in Bungamati, the town on the southern fringes of the Valley that was largely destroyed in last year's earthquake.

Shrestha's home lies in Baha Chhen and is one of the oldest houses in the town built with traditional brickwork, and its upper storey was badly damaged in the quake. He would like to rebuild, but says: "I have yet to

receive the Rs 50,000 first instalment grant, but even that is not enough for the repairs."

As elsewhere in historic parts of Kathmandu Valley, brick and mud mortar buildings and many ancient temples tumbled in the earthquake while adjoining concrete blocks suffered no damage. This has convinced many residents that concrete is safer, and conservationists fear that this will erode the traditional skyline of towns like Bungamati.

Krishna Shakya and his wife run a handicraft shop near Dev Pukhu and live in a temporary shelter after their clan home was completely destroyed.

Because of the joint ownership, and required approvals from the municipality, the family has not been able to rebuild it in its traditional style. Far from being able to afford to reconstruct their ancestral home, the Shakyas have not received any of the compensation money, and neither have their neighbours.

Bekha Ratna Shakya would like to rebuild his damaged home in the traditional style, but says he could not afford it and built a concrete structure. "If given the finance I would like to build back in the old way," he says.

A poster announcing



the government's launch of reconstruction in Bungamati last year lies discarded at the entrance to the town, and despite being so close to the capital much of it is still in ruins with many living in tin huts.

But Bungamati still clings to its old way of life, it's residents still practicing the unique blend of rural-urban that used to be characteristic of the Valley's kingdoms. Many families still follow their traditional occupations, and here it is mainly wood carving. The traditional spaces play an important role in Bungamati's cultural and economic life.

Padma Sundar Joshi of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has been trying to restore Bungamati's public spaces in the traditional style, and also to build awareness among locals that it is important to rebuild preserving traditional facades.

"We took Bungamati residents to Patan to show them old buildings to change their perception that restoring traditional buildings is more expensive, or that concrete structures are safer," Joshi explained.

UN-Habitat is working with the Centre for Integrated Urban Development (CIUD)

to encourage community participation in the restoration of two public spaces — Deva Pukhu and Machhendra Bahal.


Anil Tuladhar of CIUD uses the game Minecraft to show that design is easy. He says: "People tend to think that building design is very technical, but using the game we can show people that they can create their own designs based on the community's use of public spaces."

Tuladhar selected 30 Bungamati residents including children, teenagers and the elderly to discuss key issues of what their public spaces are used for, the real needs of the people, and to design a model based on the needs. "We made people prioritise the main requirements and are trying to create interventions based on it," says Tuladhar.

Despite this, reconstruction has not started because of the new Fundamental Construction Bylaws on Settlement Development, Urban Planning and Building Construction 2015 which tries to create safe communities to deal with future disasters. Under the new rules, buildings up to 10m height have to leave 1.5m setback. Similarly, public houses up to 17m have to leave 3m setback, meanwhile non-public had to leave 2m setback. A row of houses is only allowed if they are three storeys high and have a common height.

However, these rules do not reflect traditional designs, and a new by-laws for heritage areas drawn by the Ministry of Urban Development with support from UN-Habitat have not yet been approved.

Meanwhile, Krishna Shakya was refused permission by the Municipality to use the electricity metre from his damaged house in his temporary shelter. Buddha Bahadur Shrestha has repaired his house with his own money after deciding that his family could not live in a temporary shelter anymore.

Many like Shakya and Shrestha of Bungamati are caught between delays in disbursement of compensation, confusing rules about rebuilding in heritage areas, and the challenge of spreading awareness about the reconstruction of public spaces in a historic town known for its famous chariot festival. 



“I have yet to receive the Rs 50,000 first instalment compensation, but even that is not enough for the repairs.”

Buddha Bahadur Shrestha



“If given the finance I would like to build back in the old way.”

Bekha Ratna Shakya



Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival 2016

It's that time of year again when the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) will bring more than 80 films from 28 different countries to be screened for viewers who would otherwise never have the chance to see films that range from documentaries to features, short and long form, covering subjects that are multitudinous.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

This year the festival will screen some very special films by extremely talented filmmakers from Nepal and our neighbouring countries, opening with Deepak Rauniyar's *White Sun* - a feature film about the aftermath of our civil war, Kesang Tseten's *Trembling Mountain* - a documentary about a community in Langtang dealing

with the catastrophic effects of the earthquake, and *Vara: A Blessing* - an unexpectedly voluptuous love story by the Bhutanese monk Khyentse Norbu, a renowned Tibetan Buddhist Rinpoche who also made *The Cup* (1999) and *Travellers and Magicians* (2003). Additionally, KIMFF is offering a free screening of *Before The Flood* (pic, above) a widely talked about documentary about climate change, the most urgent subject of our times.

All of the films at KIMFF are carefully selected by a hardworking panel, so you will not go wrong walking into any screening, but this year's *Mira*, the 42 minute documentary about Mira Rai, the award winning Nepali trail runner, is particularly striking. Lloyd Belcher's stunning visuals and his access to Mira's confidences give us an intimate portrait of a young, impoverished girl from Bhojpur whose natural athletic talent might so easily have been lost in

the backbreaking work required by village life. Mira's courage, fortitude, and sheer strength of will has made her one of the top trail runners in the world, and the film's sweeping drone-filmed visuals will give you a feeling of empathic elation along with a lump in your throat as you see this slight, tough, young woman crossing the finish line holding the Nepali flag high in the air.

With *Paradise Melting* a 35 minute documentary by Umar Majid Ali, you have what KIMFF does best, a story about the mountains that surround us, the beauty and danger intrinsic and inherent in climbing them, and the terrible cost of global warming on the eco-systems and communities that live in and under the shadow of the Karakoram mountains and glaciers.

KIMFF has always astonished me with the range of intimate documentaries it offers, giving us glimpses into the lives of people we would otherwise never know, and so it does with *Saving People's Hearts* a 54 minute documentary by the Kazakh Ondasyn Tastanov that follows Dr. Yuriy Vladimirovich Pya, a surgeon who specialises in heart transplants and has performed 24,846 heart operations since 2011, changing the lives of the people who believed they never stood a chance.

Till 12 December, QFX Cinemas - Kumari, Kamalpokhari & Russian Culture Centre, Kamal Pokhari, Tickets: Rs 100 (per screening), Rs 1500 (season tickets), Schedule: http://kimff.org/images/Kimff_Schedule.jpg, (01) 4440635

HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

GREAT HALL OF POLITICIANS: President Bidya Bhandari holds an all-party meeting at Shital Niwas on Sunday to break a political stalemate over the second amendment to the constitution.



PMO

HANDS ACROSS THE HIMALAYA: Chinese artists hand over a painting of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Chinese President Xi Jinping to Dahal at Baluwatar this week.



GOPEN RAI

BREAK FAST: Crusader Govinda KC ends his 10th hunger strike on the 22nd day on Sunday following a 12-point agreement with the government on medical reform.



BINOD POKHREL

SHOW MUST GO ON: Minister of Information and Communications Surendra Karki (left) strikes a gong to inaugurate the 14th Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival on Thursday.



GOPEN RAI

LIGHTS OF CONSTRUCTION: People light oil lamps to mark the 9th National Construction Day in Patan Darbar Square on Wednesday.

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Counter-attack of the microbes

Beware of the deadly combination of air pollution and anti-microbial resistance in Kathmandu

**BUDDHA BASNYAT,
SAMEER M DIXIT
and PARAS POKHREL**

Ever since the discovery of Penicillin in 1928, antibiotics have been used to treat major human infections caused by bacteria. Since then, more than 100 varieties of antibiotics are in commercial production worldwide.

However, there is now a new threat to global health posed by Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) because of which antimicrobials including antibiotics, antivirals and antifungal medication can no longer be used to treat infections. Of particular interest is antibiotic resistance, which makes up the majority of the AMR threat.

Bacteria are interesting organisms -- they can be our friends or foes. They are found all over the human and animal body and have a role to play in our bodily functions, including digestion. However, there are some that do not necessarily live within our bodies which can cause major diseases in humans. Sexually transmitted infections, food poisoning, tuberculosis are some examples.

These tiny organisms reproduce very fast and can

change their genetic makeup through mutation. When their growth environment is suitable, they reproduce in a stable manner and co-exist with other inhabitants in the human body. However, when under stress due to various limitations within their habitat, they can go rogue.

When bacteria identify antibiotic families as threats to their survival they develop resistance. Bugs that survive the first rounds of antibiotic attack undergo mutation that allow them to either counter or bypass antibiotic molecules they are exposed to. This leads to development of progeny bacteria that are resistant to the given class of antibiotic(s).

These bacteria develop Anti-microbial Resistance within the human host. AMR bacteria can pass genetic information not only to their progeny, but also to bystander bacteria. They, in turn, pass it on to their progeny and other bystanders and so forth. Human to human transmission of bacteria is also possible, leading to the spread of AMR bacteria in a population, and globally.

To add to this dilemma, food animals such as poultry, dairy, livestock and fish are being given antibiotics in their feed as growth promoters. The idea is to prevent bacterial infection in these animals, but this has lead to

more AMR bacteria, which can again be transmitted to humans in meat and dairy products. AMR is therefore a 'One Health' problem -- human health is affected by both non-humans and the environment and there is only one approach required to tackle it.

Nepal is not immune to the global threat of AMR. We have issues of overuse of antibiotics in both humans and animals, uncontrolled prescription, or hospital-based infections. AMR is already present within Nepal,

bacterial and viral organisms in the air. Bacteria and viruses are very small, and in fact, a single dust particle can carry numerous such pathogens. If one is to imagine breathing in such particles while walking, cycling, or jogging, there is a very high chance that they would be breathing in not only the particles but also infectious pathogens along with them.

These particles can make their way into the lungs, our digestive system, as well as the blood stream. Not only do they cause

people can only fight off so much of the infection, and may need antibiotics.

The whole cycle then repeats itself: patients get treated for infection, they may recover if the pathogens in their body are not AMR bacteria, but if the treatment may be difficult or in some cases, useless. If patients do recover, they may become hosts to AMR bacteria which they can then pass on to others over their lifetime. The irony of this is that the very activities that should be making a person healthy is doing quite the opposite.

The next time you venture out on to the streets of Kathmandu, do enjoy the fresh air, but also keep in mind that the dirtier the air, the higher the chance of getting not only sick but also contributing to the spread of AMR. 🇳🇵



and each of us is susceptible to the threat. Kathmandu and other cities are at heightened risk because of the combination of AMR and dust pollution.

Everyone on the streets of Kathmandu breathes in copious amounts of polluted and dust-ridden air. While there are various health risks (respiratory, visual) associated with this, some dust particles which are too small for the naked eye to see can also be

physiological damage to the linings of our organs, but the particles allow the pathogens to colonise various parts of our body.

A healthy human body has its own defence mechanism and can fight off a majority of the infecting pathogens. However, the very young, the very old and immunologically compromised individuals may not be able to fight these on their own and have to rely on antibiotics. Even healthy

Buddha Basnyat, MD is a consultant at Patan Hospital. Sameer M Dixit, PhD, is Director of Research at Centre for Molecular dynamics Nepal (CMDN) Paras Pokhrel, MD is head of Community Medicine, BPKIHS Dharan

All three are also associated with the Global Antibiotic Resistance Partnership (GARP) run under the Nepal Public Health Foundation (NPHF).

Dabur

Honey

FOR A FITTER YOU

NEPAL'S NO.1 BRANDED HONEY

STAY FIT, FEEL YOUNG.

GRID CONTROL: The Load Dispatch Centre of NEA in Siuchatar on the outskirts of Kathmandu which till recently decided where and when to cut power in Nepal.

Speaking truth to power

Officials secretly created a deliberate artificial shortage of electricity to enrich themselves while doing untold harm to Nepal's economy

PICS: SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Six years ago, while Kathmandu suffered 108 hours of power cuts a week, the electricity shortfall was 380MW. Today, the gap between supply and demand has risen to 450MW, and yet there is no load-shedding in the capital.

How was this possible? If it was so easy to scrap electricity rationing, why wasn't it done earlier? Why were Nepalis kept in the dark for so long?

A *Nepali Times* investigation has exposed a sordid tale of corruption in high places, kickbacks from industry and an utter disregard for the public good on the part of elected politicians and the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA).

"It was after the NEA officials started taking bribes to allow industries to have dedicated feeders that power started going to those who paid, and load-shedding got much worse," one engineer told us.

After Kulman Ghising was appointed Managing Director of NEA in September this underground corruption network was dismantled, and people in

Kathmandu started getting 24 hours of power. He simply cut four hours of power during peak demand to heavy industrial consumers, and redistributed that to the public.

Altogether 183 consumers including commercial, industrial, essential services and government offices used to get power from dedicated feeders, and Ghising brought these down 40.

"All I am doing is equally distributing power to all industries, and properly managing demand and supply," Ghising told us. (*See interview, overleaf*)

What Ghising does not mention is how difficult it was for him to cut through the entrenched culture of corruption within the NEA and the political protection officials there received from Singha Durbar in lieu of kickbacks.

Cleaning up NEA has helped, but Ghising has also been lucky that Nepal is now getting 80MW of power from India after the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur transmission line was connected to the national grid. Power generation has also increased with the addition of Upper Marsyangdi A (25MW) and 50MW from smaller power producers.

Also, the NEA has given priority to replacement of more than 200 transformers that exploded due to overloading during the Indian blockade last year during which many switched to cooking on induction stoves. Substations across the country have also been streamlined to better manage load.

The spread of household solar



WHO WAS IN CHARGE?

(From 2007-2016)

Energy Ministers

Gyanendra Bahadur Karki (NC)
Bishnu Poudel (UML)
Prakash Saran Mahat (NC)
Bharat Mohan Adhikari (UML)
Gokarna Bista (UML)
Posta Bahadur Bogati (Maoist)
Umakanta Jha
Bam Dev Gautam (UML)
Radha Gyawali (UML)
Top Bahadur Rayamajhi (Maoist)

NEA Chiefs

Arjun Kumar Karki
Uttam Kumar Shrestha
Jibendra Jha
Dipendra Nath Sharma
Rameshwar Yadav
Mukesh Kafle
Kul Man Ghising

Chiefs of Load Dispatch Centre, Siuchatar

Sher Singh Bhat
Sher Singh Bhat
Sher Singh Bhat
Sher Singh Bhat and Bhuwan Chettri
Bhuwan Chettri
Bishnu Shrestha

had reduced demand, making it easier for NEA to manage the shortfall. But eliminating load-shedding has had a snowball effect, as household and office inverters are not cannibalising power from the grid anymore.

It was after Ghising started cleaning up NEA that engineers and whistleblowers within the utility got the courage to speak out about the rot within that made a few people rich at the cost of wrecking the national economy, and keeping millions of Nepalis in misery for a decade.

NEA insiders told us the practice of exaggerating the power shortfall started in 2006 when Arjun Kumar Karki was Managing Director and Sher Singh Bhat was head of the Load Dispatch Centre in Siuchatar. When they published a 17-hour daily load-shedding schedule that winter, it was easy to justify dedicated feeders to industry in return for under the table payments.

An NEA engineer who observed the practice at close hand, and was increasingly outraged by it, said industries and commercial companies only got uninterrupted electricity if they paid kickbacks, and there were 70 consumers with dedicated feeders in 2006. *Nepali Times* was told that the NEA's Directorate of Distribution and Consumer Services, the Load Dispatch Center, and substations across the country all received monthly retainers from those getting power from dedicated lines.

The economics of it was clear-cut: An industry consuming 2,400 units of power every day would

need Rs 260.8 million a year extra for generator diesel if it suffered a daily 12-hour power cut. But if it got uninterrupted power from the grid, it only had to spend Rs 140 million in NEA bills per year. And there were many industries that used much more than 2,400 units a day.

"The deep-rooted corruption at NEA will persist as long as there is political interference," says Sita Ram Thapa of the NEA's National Employees Union, accusing officials of even receiving kickbacks from solar and inverter companies to prolong load-shedding.

Not everyone is convinced Kulman Ghising is the saviour he is being made out to be. Dipak Gyawali, who was Minister of Water Resources in the royal regime 2005-2006, says there is a lot of grandstanding and populism.

"Of course you can end load-shedding if you run Kulekhani, the question is for how long? Load-shedding will start in March because the crucial fact is that generation in the dry season hasn't kept pace with demand," Gyawali told us.

Kulman Ghising was appointed by the former guerrilla leader of the Maoist-Centre, Janardan Sharma, when he became Minister for Energy in the present coalition. Sharma has the green light from Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal to remove load shedding to show performance and improve the party's credibility. Sharma has publicly accused the previous

No drop in diesel



BIKRAM RAI

After the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) ended load-shedding in Kathmandu from the last week of October, it was expected that the demand for diesel would go down. But it has not. Hotels, malls, factories and businesses that relied on captive diesel generators don't need them anymore, but the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) has not cut its import of diesel from India.

After NEA started supplying round the clock electricity in Kathmandu, the NOC has imported 318,570 kl of diesel – up by 33 per cent from the same period in 2014/15. NOC spokesperson Bhanu Bhakta Khanal justifies it, saying: “Kathmandu may not be burning diesel now, but this is the season when farmers in the Tarai need a lot of diesel.”

However, the real reason seems to be smuggling of diesel from Nepal to India because of the Rs 20/litre price differential on two sides of the open border.

Last year, Nepalis crossed the border to smuggle fuel from India during the blockade. This year, it is Indians coming across to Nepal to fill up jerrycans. This is because the Indian government recently increased local taxes on petroleum products which are not applicable to the fuel exported to Nepal.

The irony is that diesel imported from India is cheaper in Nepal, and is being smuggled back into India. This week the Ministry of Supply and Commerce suspended the NOC eastern depot chief Dinesh Yadav, saying he was involved in fuel smuggling.

Two thirds of the diesel sold in Kathmandu Valley was used for electricity generation. Says Khanal: “If load-shedding does not start again, the diesel import will go down soon.”

management of NEA of “leaking” electricity, and even set up a committee to investigate it.

As in all public sector corporations, the post of NEA chief is usually a political appointment and it has been common knowledge that candidates have to offer politicians ‘pre-paid’ advances to get the job. The head of the Load Dispatch Centre at the Siuchatar substation decides who gets how much electricity in Nepal, and one source told us the person needs to pay for his appointment.

All this is nothing new to engineers at Siuchatar. One of them told us on condition of anonymity: “We have to follow

what my boss and NEA officials order us to do. No questions.”

By dismantling the corrupt patronage structure of power rationing, Ghising has stirred a hornet's nest. NEA unions affiliated to political parties want him removed because their source of income has been cut.

NEA Board members Suraj Lamichhane, Manoj Mishra and Laxman Agrawal have been making it difficult for Ghising to push power purchase agreements with private suppliers, and NEA's plans to use the Chilime model to build seven more hydropower plants. Minister Sharma has sought clarifications from the three. 🇳🇵



“Power to the people”

Nepali Times caught up with new NEA Managing Director Kulman Ghising on Monday for a brief chat:

Nepali Times: How did you manage to end load shedding so soon after you were appointed to NEA?

Kulman Ghising: I found out that it is the priority of the NEA that determines the hours of load-shedding in the country. I chose to prioritise power to the people by cutting a few hours from industrial zones which were earlier given 24-hour electricity. All I am doing is being more equitable in the distribution of power to all, replacement of transformers in the Valley's substations and proper management of demand and supply.

But critics say you are draining Kulekhani and load-shedding will resume in March?

As I have been saying, NEA is not going to publicise load shedding schedules anymore. We will make optimum use of available resources and manage generation and distribution. We are working on additional imports from India, and managing internal resources for the dry season to be fair in distribution. We only use the Kulekhani reservoir as a backup for the peak hours in the dry season.

So, no load-shedding this winter?

The NEA will focus on equal distribution of power to all industries and domestic consumption will be the first priority. Providing uninterrupted power to a 15 MW industry means putting Kathmandu Valley in complete darkness.

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Getting used to electricity again

To tell you frankly, I'm getting sick and tired of listening to many of you who have held forth at every possible wedding reception in the past week praising to high heavens the end to load shedding, and raised a toast to Comrade Cool Man. Some of you are already talking about selling off your generators to the next generation, while others have mothballed their inverters.

Thankfully, people like you are in a minority and an overwhelming number of Nepalis are perfectly happy to have become creatures of darkness. We have hole-heartedly got accustomed to load-shedding because we see its brighter side. You may well ask, so what are the positive aspects of power cuts? Whoa, not so fast, can't you see I'm thinking?

First of all, as a donkey who is ass-first, permit me to be a bit cynical about this euphoria sweeping the nation. Don't you know that there is no such thing as a free lunch in Nepal? We always look at a glass as half-empty because it is not full, and no amount of wishful thinking is going to change that.

There we were making great strides in taking advantage of our return to the pre-industrial age, when along comes Mr Cool Dude and wrecks it all. Our tourism industry was selling Nepal as the last country on earth without electricity, and all that promotion budget has now been wasted and we have to go back to the drawing boards.

Cutting off power to the people for 108 hours a week was the single most outstanding achievement of the Feudal Republic of Nepal, and we must find ways now to restore powerlessness to the country.

Thank you for waiting, here is a list of what we have lost by eradicating load-shedding:

- Instead of engaging in our national pastime of playing interactive games with each other in the dark, Nepalis will now be fondling the remote. As a result, the country will have below replacement level fertility and there will not be enough young people to take care of our ageing population.
- Nepal Tourism Board will have to scrap its slogans designed to market our powerlessness: 'Once Is Not Enough, Take Another Trip To the Dark Ages', 'Visit Nepal -The Heart of Darkness', or 'Be a Torch-bearer in Kathmandu'.
- The sale of Nightvision visors will plummet since people will no longer need these to find their way from the bedroom to the bathroom and take accurate aim in the general direction of the waterloo (Important Reminder for Male Nightvision Customers: As a Courtesy To Fellow Passengers Please Don't Forget to Lift the Seat.) Kids will have no excuse not to have finished homework, and the medical-industrialist complex will lose business because motorcyclists won't be colliding with road-dividers in the dark anymore.
- The proposed 17-storey skyscraper on Purano Bus Park was all set to be a symbol of national pride and be listed in the Guinness Book as the Tallest Building in the World Without a Functioning Lift. But since we now have 24-hour electricity we will have to be satisfied with it only being listed by Guinness as the Ugliest Erection in South Asia.



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