Power to the people

What a difference one man makes. In May, Sunil Prasad Fahedi appeared on the front page of Nepal 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 generosely and distribute 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 860MW to 2200MW 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 760MW 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 Madhi, 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 Rhandirati said: “The perception work load has gone down by almost 90 per cent since we don’t have to keep track of the load shedding schedule anymore.”

Shrijana Shrestha

Atlanta joins our U.S. network

Make new friends at one of the world’s largest aquariums, or travel back in time and immerse yourself in the city’s rich history.

For more information and to book your tickets please:

Visit qatarairways.com/frp
Call us on +677 44484
Contact your preferred travel agent

Some are limited and subject to availability. Please review terms and conditions at time of booking.
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 pull the plug on the massive black-marketing of electricity.

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 illusion that load shedding was taken as a given.

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

All Ghising did since taking over at NEA is to ensure 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 obrviate 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 drummed into silence by any other 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 benefited from load-shedding over the last decades will be too much for Ghising to bear. He is already feeling much of a cash cow for greedy politicians.

The 3,948 province model is an experiment that has failed. The District Development Commission is too busy doing their petty politics. 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 pull the plug on the massive black-marketing of electricity.

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

The 3,948 province model is an excellent idea. Now let us talk about moving the capital to Kapildev, managing TIA to Kathre VDC and transforming Singh Darbar into a 23 star hotel. Thamel should be rechristened as a metropolitan city/province and given a special tax free status with government officials banned from entering.

There is 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. It is also a stroke of luck that Energy Secretary Anup Upadhyay is not just any old bureaucrat drummed into silence by any other ministry, but an electrical engineer himself.

The 3,948 province model is an experiment that has failed. The District Development Commission is too busy doing their petty politics. 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 pull the plug on the massive black-marketing of electricity.

Most reached on Facebook

Thumba Sherpa, 46, by Michael Rebold

6,818 likes

Most shared on Facebook

Thumba Sherpa, 46, by Michael Rebold

3,583 shares

Most visited online page

Adrian van Westrenen to Kathmandu by On Aisle 8

Most popular on Twitter

Kabita Koirala, Editor

34,952 retweets, 57 likes

Most commented

Kabita Koirala, Editor

Power Struggle

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.

Pritihi 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

I was molested from behind while I was praying at Pashupatinath Temple.

Bhina Shrestha

The AES

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.

Tenzi Tsomo

The 3,948 province model is an excellent idea. Now let us talk about moving the capital to Kapildev, managing TIA to Kathre VDC and transforming Singh Darbar into a 23 star hotel. Thamel should be rechristened 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 when we published a tribute to Thundu Sherpa (correct photo, left).

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com
CITY OF NOSTALGIA: HAVANA

FLIGHTS STARTING FROM THE 20TH OF DECEMBER
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 Cinchawkot. Buddha Ram Ramjit, owner of The Inn guesthouse in Swayambhunath Square, receives between 500-600 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.”  

JESSICA CORTIS

At home abroad
Heritage homes in Kathmandu’s historic towns appeal to a new breed of visitors
Banking made easy

Nepal First Bank, in partnership with NIC Asia Bank, launched a new service, WestBank Payroll System (WPS). The service allows employers to transfer salary to the bank accounts of their employees securely and efficiently.

Express service

Nepal First Bank has partnered with American Express to launch an express service for business customers. This service allows customers to transfer funds to more than 70 financial institutions in the country using the WPS System.

Monk in Nepal

The iconic monk brand, Old Monk, has launched a new product in the country. The new variant, Old Monk 10 Years Old, is aimed at the premium market segment.

Momo mania

The popular momo brand, Momos World, has introduced a new range of momos, including vegetarian and non-vegetarian options.

Prabhu Bank: Prabhu add branches

Prabhu Bank has expanded its reach with new branches in Kathmandu. The bank is focusing on providing ease and efficiency in banking services.

I AM PERFECT

Sagar Nath Upadhyaya

Classic Touch

Creta

The Perfect SUV

HYUNDAI NEW POSSIBILITIES

NEW THINKING
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 mountainous western Nepal, women still deliver babies in dirty, cold and stinky 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 those far-flung villages. Women have 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 have 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 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 of 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 we are in the past faced any? I was also born in a cowshed and I am still healthy. Why discount the rituals that have been going on? We should not be selfish and make the gods angry!

Sarswati Budithapa, 21, Bajura

28 OCTOBER. I delivered my baby two weeks ago, and even since I have been living in this shed. I can’t 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 gods get angry, we will face drought, famine, landslides and other disasters. Our children also become disabled. Knowing these 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 stay there for the delivery. But if spending one month in this shed with my baby saves my family from the gods’ anger, I should do it. Most women around here deliver their babies in the cowshed and live there for at least one month. Some even stay for four months. They cook, wash and look after their babies themselves. They can work outdoors, but cannot enter the house.

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 neighbouring house 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 house, 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 15 days ago. Today I went to work in the field after putting her to sleep. After lunch, I will feed her and give her a yellow fodder for the calf. 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 now we can 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 do the same? 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, Regin Health Post, Bajura

I have been here for two years. The mothers are brought to the health post only after they are in a bad condition. In the cowshed, they are in no condition to move to hospital. We are trying to breastfeed them, but they don’t want to give up their tradition of not giving pregnant women either food or water. They are in a poor condition to move to hospital. We are trying to breastfeed them, but they don’t want to give up their tradition of not giving pregnant women either food or water.

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 house. I couldn’t service others. They won’t even be taken to a clean room because of the belief that the gods will get angry. We have women having periods stays inside the house. Suppression 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 daughter-in-law asks. We have been successful in getting them to have regular check-ups, to take vitamins and iron pills, to stop smoking. 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 on staying in the dity but amidst the cowling and straw, their reply is: “It is enough if the gods are happy.”

Centre for Investigative Journalism
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 skills, injecting innovation and experimenting with expression through various mediums. 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 received recognition for her previous exhibition, ‘Jhumpa’, because the current work plays more with colours, vibrant and captivating, the multifaceted delight on the display at the Madras Art Gallery.

What makes the show even more compelling is the attention to detail. The locks and bolts on the doors have been crafted into ornaments for the goddesses. Paper mache, parts of broken wall tiles, and used jewellery have been used by the artist to give them a contemporary touch. The doors are filled with stories, 她 says, explaining that the audience can draw strength from what people consider powerful goddesses to realise their own potential.

Amidst the conceptual recycling and reuse, the doors were salvaged from the rubble of earthquake-damaged neighborhoods of Baktapur. The doors do not only represent the devastation, but are also a symbol of protection and salvation, new beginnings. Like the Jhumpa, the doors stand as buildings to humans from harm.

However, the artist does not limit her creative abilities to only earthquake-damaged doors from her hometown.
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. Nepal Times spoke to some of them.

Former refugees from Bhutan know Pradip Gurung as “Sahuy”. With friends Hem Gurung and Hom Gurung, Pradip invested $300,000 to start the Mune Nepali Indian Grocery on Albemarle Rd. The store stocks clothing, footwear, 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 Bhutanese refugee camp of Jhalta, Pradip used to teach in a local school, but in America he is on the job. “If you don’t work hard, you cannot succeed,” he says.

Puma Karki was a teenager when he arrived at the Beldangi I Refugee Camp in Jhapa from Bhutan with his family in 1990. He still remembers that their home for nearly two decades was Sector B Hut Number 139 at Beldangi. Karki graduated from Tribhuvan University and used to teach at an English school outside his refugee camp in Nepal. He arrived in Charlotte in 2009 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 leave. Initially, he was attending college in Nepal when he was resettled in the US in 2013. He had worked in a food packaging factory, but decided to strike out on his own. He used his savings and borrowed from friends to invest $50,000 in a provision store on Albemarle Rd in Charlotte.

Kamal Dhimal, 45

Kamal Dhimal is actually a waiter from Bhutan who was forced to leave along with other Thactories from his ancestral home. After spending 18 years in Goldsby Refuges Camp in Texas, he was finally resettled in the US in 2013 where he first worked as a janitor’s cleaner 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. Dhimal drives his truck 1,200 km to New York to bring products 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, Parbati in Southern Bhutan, he carried on his ancestral profession of tailoring. In 1991, his family was chosen out of Bhutan like 100,000 other Nepali Jews, and he set up a small tailoring shop in his bamboo hut in Sansadpur Refugee Camp in Bungam. When he boarded a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 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 many South Asians who want blouses and salwar kameez, and he makes about $500 a month. Says Darji “I’m happy because even in America, I can make a living doing what I know how to do.”

Imitating nature

Nepal’s most modern printing facility, Jagadamba Press, now makes natural colours come alive with its state-of-the-art equipment.

Jagadamba’s new Mitsubishi Diamond 1000
5 Colour – Coating Unit

(01) 5250017-19 | fax: (01) 5250027 | www.jagadambapress.com
Brazilian cinema, Mark your calendars for the screening of Brazilian feature films and documentaries. Passes can be collected from the Brazilian Embassy, Maharajgunj.

Divine debris, Attend an exhibition of sculptures by artist Monica da Silva at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Read more on Page 2.

Rajman’s Kathmandu, Don’t miss out on the exhibition of artist Rajman Singh’s mid-20th century drawings at Kathmandu Valley.

Girls ride, Ride up to Budhanilkantha in preparation for the upcoming Buddhanilkantha MTB race. The event is destined to train, support and encourage girls to ride.

Cycle rally, Join hundreds as they cycle to celebrate the World AIDS Awareness week.

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.

Christmas in Kathmandu, Hum to the tunes of traditional and contemporary Christmas songs with Kathmandu, Quintet. Attend also the world premiere of a new Church by Nudine Rogers.

Art for kids, Find your children in a twelve-day winter art camp organized by ArtMud where they can experience and experiment with different artistic mediums.

Video art, Attend the screening of 2D video art from all over the world on the occasion of International Day of Human Rights.

Brazilian cinema, Mark your calendars for the screening of Brazilian feature films and documentaries. Passes can be collected from the Brazilian Embassy, Maharajgunj.

Celebrate art, Mark your calendars for an art fair showcasing 12 Sambalpuri and 54 Nepali artists under one roof.

Divine debris, Attend an exhibition of sculptures by artist Monica da Silva at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Read more on Page 2.

Rajman’s Kathmandu, Don’t miss out on the exhibition of artist Rajman Singh’s mid-20th century drawings at Kathmandu Valley.

Girls ride, Ride up to Budhanilkantha in preparation for the upcoming Buddhanilkantha MTB race. The event is destined to train, support and encourage girls to ride.

Cycle rally, Join hundreds as they cycle to celebrate the World AIDS Awareness week.

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.

Brazilian cinema, Mark your calendars for the screening of Brazilian feature films and documentaries. Passes can be collected from the Brazilian Embassy, Maharajgunj.

Celebrate art, Mark your calendars for an art fair showcasing 12 Sambalpuri and 54 Nepali artists under one roof.

Divine debris, Attend an exhibition of sculptures by artist Monica da Silva at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Read more on Page 2.

Rajman’s Kathmandu, Don’t miss out on the exhibition of artist Rajman Singh’s mid-20th century drawings at Kathmandu Valley.

Girls ride, Ride up to Budhanilkantha in preparation for the upcoming Buddhanilkantha MTB race. The event is destined to train, support and encourage girls to ride.

Cycle rally, Join hundreds as they cycle to celebrate the World AIDS Awareness week.

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.

Christmas in Kathmandu, Hum to the tunes of traditional and contemporary Christmas songs with Kathmandu, Quintet. Attend also the world premiere of a new Church by Nudine Rogers.

Art for kids, Find your children in a twelve-day winter art camp organized by ArtMud where they can experience and experiment with different artistic mediums.

Video art, Attend the screening of 2D video art from all over the world on the occasion of International Day of Human Rights.

Brazilian cinema, Mark your calendars for the screening of Brazilian feature films and documentaries. Passes can be collected from the Brazilian Embassy, Maharajgunj.

Celebrate art, Mark your calendars for an art fair showcasing 12 Sambalpuri and 54 Nepali artists under one roof.

Divine debris, Attend an exhibition of sculptures by artist Monica da Silva at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Read more on Page 2.

Rajman’s Kathmandu, Don’t miss out on the exhibition of artist Rajman Singh’s mid-20th century drawings at Kathmandu Valley.

Girls ride, Ride up to Budhanilkantha in preparation for the upcoming Buddhanilkantha MTB race. The event is destined to train, support and encourage girls to ride.

Cycle rally, Join hundreds as they cycle to celebrate the World AIDS Awareness week.

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.

Brazilian cinema, Mark your calendars for the screening of Brazilian feature films and documentaries. Passes can be collected from the Brazilian Embassy, Maharajgunj.

Celebrate art, Mark your calendars for an art fair showcasing 12 Sambalpuri and 54 Nepali artists under one roof.

Divine debris, Attend an exhibition of sculptures by artist Monica da Silva at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Read more on Page 2.

Rajman’s Kathmandu, Don’t miss out on the exhibition of artist Rajman Singh’s mid-20th century drawings at Kathmandu Valley.

Girls ride, Ride up to Budhanilkantha in preparation for the upcoming Buddhanilkantha MTB race. The event is destined to train, support and encourage girls to ride.

Cycle rally, Join hundreds as they cycle to celebrate the World AIDS Awareness week.

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.

Brazilian cinema, Mark your calendars for the screening of Brazilian feature films and documentaries. Passes can be collected from the Brazilian Embassy, Maharajgunj.

Celebrate art, Mark your calendars for an art fair showcasing 12 Sambalpuri and 54 Nepali artists under one roof.
Building back Bungamati

Earthquake survivors of historic town find that preserving heritage is expensive business

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 Prabhu 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 Rana 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 sheds.

But Bungamati still clings to its old way of life, its 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 — Dev Prabhu and Manohara.

Anti Taladhar of CIUD uses the game Minecraft to show that design is easy. He says: “People tend to think that building designs 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.”

Taladhar 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 tried to create interventions based on it,” says Taladhar.

Despite this, reconstruction has not started because of the new Fundamental Construction Bylaws on Settlement Development, which Planning and Building Construction 2015 which aims 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.
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 multidisciplinary.

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 Nripal Senauray’s White Sun – a feature film about the aftermath of our civil war. Keisang Tseten’s Frembling 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 Khyenser Norbu, a renowned Tibetan Buddhist Rinpoche who also made The Cap (1999) and Travellers and Magicians (2003). Additionally, KIMFF is offering a free screening of Before the Flood, 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 Bechtel’s stunning visuals and his access to Mira’s confidences give us an intimate portrait of a young, impoverished girl from Bhagoj whose natural athletic talent might so easily have been lost in the bouldering world 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 empathetic elation along with a lump in your throat as you see this slippet, tough, young woman crossing the finish line holding the Nepali flag high in the air.

With Paradise Rotating 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 Ondosky Tashkow that follows Dr. Yuriy Vladimirovich Pyla, a surgeon who specializes in heart transplants and has performed 24,946 heart operations since 2011, changing the lives of the people who believed they never had a chance.

Till 12 December, QFX Cinemas - Kamari, Kamalkhahari and Russian Culture Centre, Kamal Pokhari, Tickets Rs 100 (per screening), Rs 1,000 (season ticket). Schedule http://kimff.org/images/Kimff_ Schedule.pdf. (01) 4440633

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.

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

BREAK FAST: Crusader Cowinda KC ends his 19th hunger strike on the 22nd day on Sunday following a 12-point agreement with the government on medical reform.

SHOW MUST GO ON: Minister of Information and Communications Sunendra Karki (L) officiates to inaugurate the 14th Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival on Thursday.

LIGHTS OF CONSTRUCTION: People light oil lamps to mark the 9th National Construction Day in Patan Durbar Square on Wednesday.
Counter-attack of the microbes
Beware of the deadly combination of air pollution and anti-microbial resistance in Kathmandu

Buddha Basnyat, M Dixit and Paras Pokhrel

E ver 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 Anti-microbial Resistance (AMR) because of which antibiotics including antibacterials 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 human. 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. Bacteria that survive the first rounds of antibiotic attack undergo mutation that allows 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 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 to be seen by the naked eye to see can also be 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 breaking 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 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 immunocompromised individuals may not be able to fight these or on their own and have to rely on antibiotics. Even healthy 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.

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, BP Koirala Dharan

All three are also associated with the Global Antibiotic Resistance Partnership (GARP) run under the Nepal Public Health Foundation (NPHF).
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 900MW, and yet there is no load-shedding in the capital.

How was this possible? If it was so easy to ensure 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 scandal 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, page 12)

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 Simha Durbar in lieu of kickbacks.

Cleaning up NEA has helped, but Ghising has also been lucky that Nepal is now getting 800MW of power from IndiasNetBharat-Bhutan-Muzaffarpur transmission line was connected to the national grid. Power generation has also increased with the addition of Upper Marsyangdi A (23MW) and 90MW 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, 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 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 wholesalers 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 Bhatt was head of the Load Dispatch Centre in Sitakund. When they published a 17-hour daily load-shedding schedule that winter, it was easy to justify dedicated feeders to industry to return, 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 subdivisions across the country all received monthly returns 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 149 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 Sit Laban 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 survivor 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 Kailash, 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, Jeevan Prasad Shrestha, when he became Minister for Energy in the present coalition. Shrestha has the green light from Prima Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal to remove load-shedding to show performance and improve the party’s credibility. Shrestha has publicly accused the previous
No drop in diesel

After NEA started supplying round the clock electricity in Kathmandu, the NOC has imported 318,579 kl of diesel – up by 33 per cent from the same period in 2014/15. NOC spokesperson Bhani Bhakta Khamal 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 26/litre price differential on two sides of the open border. Last year, Nepal crossed the border to smuggle fuel from India during the blockade. This year, it is Indians coming across to Nepal to fill up jerry cans. This is because the Indian government recently increased local taxes on petrol and diesel products which are not applicable to the fuel exported to Nepal. The irony is that diesel imported from India is cheaper than 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 Khamal. “If load shedding does not start again, the diesel import will go down soon.”

“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 the priority of the NEA had been the hours of load shedding in the country. I made it a priority to stop the practice of power being cut by running a few hours from nuclear power which were earlier given 30 hours extra energy. All the equipment was being used only in the distribution and power supply to all. The Trans Himalayan company 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 statistics anymore. We will make optimum use of available resources and manage generation and distribution. We are working on and local imports from India, and managing internal resources for the city to remain as far as possible in the country.

So, no load shedding this winter?
The NEA will focus on distribution of power to all industries and domestic consumption will be the first priority. Providing uninterrupted power to a 15,000 million users would solve the load shedding in the Valley in complete darkness.

management of NEA’s “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 Lead Dispatch Centre at the Sichathar 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 Sichathar. 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 Sunil Lamichhane, Manoj Malla and Lakshmi Agrawal have been making it difficult for Ghising to push power purchase agreements with private suppliers, and NEA’s plan to use the Chachia model to build seven more hydropower plants. Minister Sharma has sought clarifications from the three.

Vineet Nepal Academy Hall Kathmandu

The PHANTOM of the OPERA

Based on the 1910 horror novel by Gaston Leroux, The Phantom of the Opera follows a deformed composer who haunts the grand Paris Opera House. Sheltered from the outside world in an underground cavern, the lovely, romance man take and composite opens for Christine, a gorgeous young soprano star-des. As Christine’s darken rises, and a handsome suitor from her past enter the picture, the Phantom grows mad, terrorizing the opera house owners and company with his murderous ways.

More than 10,000 Performances. The Phantom of the Opera is Broadway’s longest-running hit. 

Tickets Available At:
School Office: Paradise Residency, Kathmandu / Phone: 01-5055953
Ephany High School, School Office: Paradise Residency, Kathmandu/
Phone: 01-5055953