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BIKRAM RAI

BAD AIR

The suffocating rise in roadside dust in Kathmandu in recent months has had one important benefit: it raised public awareness about the Valley's increasingly unbearable air pollution. The mass media's exposure of the health hazard prompted the Supreme Court to direct the government to curb pollution, and a task force this week submitted a report to the National Planning Commission recommending urgent mitigation measures.

The dust is a result of road-digging to lay new water mains, delayed street-widening, and the practice of using the sidewalk for

post-earthquake reconstruction. Although more visible, dust is less harmful to health than microscopic particles from vehicle tailpipes. Experts worry that wider roads will mean more cars, and worsening pollution.

"Widening roads without improving public transport system will increase pollution. Some roads, of course, need to be widened, not to accommodate more cars but to have bus lanes and sidewalks for pedestrians," environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar tells us in a Guest Editorial (page 2).

Diesel soot levels in Kathmandu went down this winter because of 24-hour electricity and the drop in generator use. However, the concentration of toxic particles from vehicular emission is still several times higher than what WHO regards as safe.

Air pollution is just the symptom. The real disease is the lack of accountable local government because Nepal hasn't had municipal and local elections

for 20 years. Dirty politics makes dirty cities.

As the special coverage in this issue of *Nepali Times* proves, there is a direct correlation between better public transport and improved public health.

However, our undercover investigation of bus syndicates (page 14-15) shows that the transportation mafia has political backing and will stop at nothing to protect its monopoly.

Regulators cannot discipline operators because bus cartels are protected by the political cartel. Moral of the story: we must clean up our politics if we are to clean up our air. 🇳🇵

POLLUTED POLITICS EDITORIAL

PUBLIC TRANSPORT = PUBLIC HEALTH

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PAGE 14-15

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POLLUTED POLITICS

Just when we thought the Valley's urban environment couldn't get any worse, Kathmandu has become even more unliveable. The rivers are open sewers, their holy banks are garbage dumps, the dust is so thick it can't be measured, there are epic traffic jams, roadside air quality fails the WHO test even when it is at its best, brick kilns and garbage burning choke residents.

Yet, these are only symptoms. The real disease is dysfunctional governance. The city looks the way it does, and is as toxic as it is, because of the lack of accountability which in turn is a direct result of local elections not being held for two decades. Nepal is ruled by a political cartel that reigns through patronage and *bhagbanda*. Dirty politics makes dirty cities.

As the special coverage in this issue of *Nepali Times* proves, there is a direct correlation between better public transport and improved public health (*page 8-9*). Since a bulk of the most harmful suspended particulate matter in Kathmandu's air is from motor exhaust, efforts to clean it up must zero in on reducing the number of vehicles. The best way to achieve that is

by upgrading public transportation with a bigger, cleaner and more reliable urban mass transit system. We cannot just blame the government. The Land Transportation Office's effort to make the bus network more efficient is being stymied by private bus cartels. Our undercover investigation (*page 14-15*) proves that the transportation mafia will stop at nothing to protect its monopoly. Regulators cannot discipline operators because the bus cartels are protected by the political cartel.

The most visible pollution in Kathmandu these days is the dust from earthquake rubble, road-widening, laying down water mains, and the practice of dumping construction material on the sidewalks. Even though it is a nuisance, dust is not as toxic as smoke from vehicles, brick kilns and burning garbage.

The trouble with road-widening is not the dust. It is that there will be more vehicles spewing more fumes on those broader roads. Moral of the story: we must clean up our politics if we are to clean up our air.



GOPEN RAI

GUEST EDITORIAL
BHUSHAN TULADHAR

Public Transport = Public Health

Kathmandu Valley's air pollution threat is mainly caused by vehicular emissions, brick kilns and roadside dust. Of the suspended particles in the air, the most dangerous is the very fine soot from the tailpipes of diesel vehicles, which is a known carcinogen.

The fact that air pollution causes respiratory problems is fairly well known. What people are less aware about is how it also causes strokes, heart diseases and cancers. An increase in air pollution means that the population is exposed to more risk.

Kathmandu Valley's air pollution levels are several times higher than what is deemed safe by the WHO. We need to clean up our air, and we need to start doing it right now.

The smoke from brick kilns is a threat, but these are being dislodged as land prices soar. Dust is more of an irritant, and has been exacerbated by road construction and the laying of new water mains.

Much more serious is the threat posed by vehicular emissions. And the best way to save our lungs is to improve the bus service in the city. So, in that sense, investing in public transportation is actually an investment in public health.

Public transport should be the backbone of urban transport system in any big city and should carry at least

half of all commuters. In Kathmandu buses at present only carry 28 per cent of commuters.

Private car ownership is still fairly low in Kathmandu, but this is growing at 13 per cent every year, and it is disproportionate to the Valley's annual population growth of 5 per cent.

Widening roads without upgrading the public transport system is counter-productive. In fact, it might just increase pollution by encouraging more people to buy cars. Some roads, of course, need to be widened – not to accommodate more cars but to have bus lanes and space for people.

For example, the Ring Road is being widened to accommodate eight lanes but this will only invite more cars on the road. The only way to reduce congestion on the Ring Road is to dedicate two of the lanes to buses. Once public buses begin to whiz past private cars, people will leave their cars and motorcycles at home and commute by public buses. This will then result in a people-centric rather than car-centric city.

Public buses will be the most feasible and realistic mass transit system for Kathmandu in the near future. We need a more efficient public transport network not just for efficient commutes, but also for our health and the quality of life we aspire to have.

Times.com

HEALTH AND TRANSPORT



HIGHWAY ROBBERY

A *Nepali Times* sting operation on transportation cartels shows that the bus mafia will stop at nothing to protect its monopoly on routes. **Shreejana Shrestha** goes undercover posing as an investor. Also read threatening letters made by the Federation of National Transport Entrepreneurs (FNTE) to the Land Transportation Office.



EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE

Kathmandu's air pollution is often associated with the rise in levels of dust. But microscopic particles in vehicular exhaust are much more harmful. The solution lies in improving public transport, not widening roads to accommodate more cars. Watch videos of how the Valley is coping with this problem.

WATCH VIDEOS



A LIFE SAVING LOVE

When a man's kidneys fail, he gets one from his wife. But if a woman's kidneys fail, she is unlikely to get it from her husband. But Bhoj Bahadur Ghale did not think twice before giving one of his kidneys to his wife, Sabitri. On Valentine's Day, watch this remarkable couple celebrate true love.

LETTERS

This is not the way to develop Kathmandu ('Bulldozing development', Srizu Bajracharya, #844). You cannot destroy a historical monument that is part of the soul of the city just because it comes in the way. No one is against better roads, and efficient traffic. But this blatant lack of consideration to anything is not the right approach.

There are many European cities that have very narrow roads. They never tore down those historical homes. People find other ways. Make narrow roads one-way, or don't allow big trucks and buses on the roads, don't let cars and motorcycles park and don't let street vendors on sidewalks. Build a wider road that bypasses the town and leave the historic heart intact.

There are many alternatives but our government has chosen the easiest one: tear everything down. Let us make the people like Bhai Kaji Tiwari who say "The government will always win despite local opposition" know that the real power is with people.

Hurray

WHAT'S TRENDING



Bulldozing development

by Srizu Bajracharya

Not only is the Valley's road-widening the wrong solution for traffic congestion, it is also destroying priceless historical heritage

Most reached and shared on Facebook
(11,390 people reached and 26 shares)

Most visited online page
(1,666 views)

Most commented



Most popular on Twitter
(32 retweets, 74 likes)

Long-distance medicine

by Sonia Awale

Lack of Internet access and low bandwidth slows the spread of telemedicine in Nepal's remote areas

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Will #Nepalis be voting electronically in the next elections ?
<http://bit.ly/2kCUYcy>

Raphaël GEORGE @raphaelgeorge
Question is : Will #Nepalis vote finally one day ?

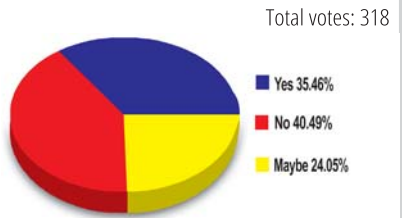
Anup Kaple @AnupKaphle
If we have a) elections b) electricity

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Watch patients in rural Myagdi getting medical advice from doctors in #Kathmandu through #telemedicine <http://bit.ly/2jDAGvW>
@SoniaAwale

IMST Telehealth @imstTelehealth
@nepalitimes @SoniaAwale the expansion of #Telehealth can impact and make a difference for so many! Keep up the great work!

Weekly Internet Poll #845

Q. Will Donald Trump's immigration ban induce Nepalis to return home from the US?



Weekly Internet Poll #846
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Which should come first, Constitutional Amendment, or elections?



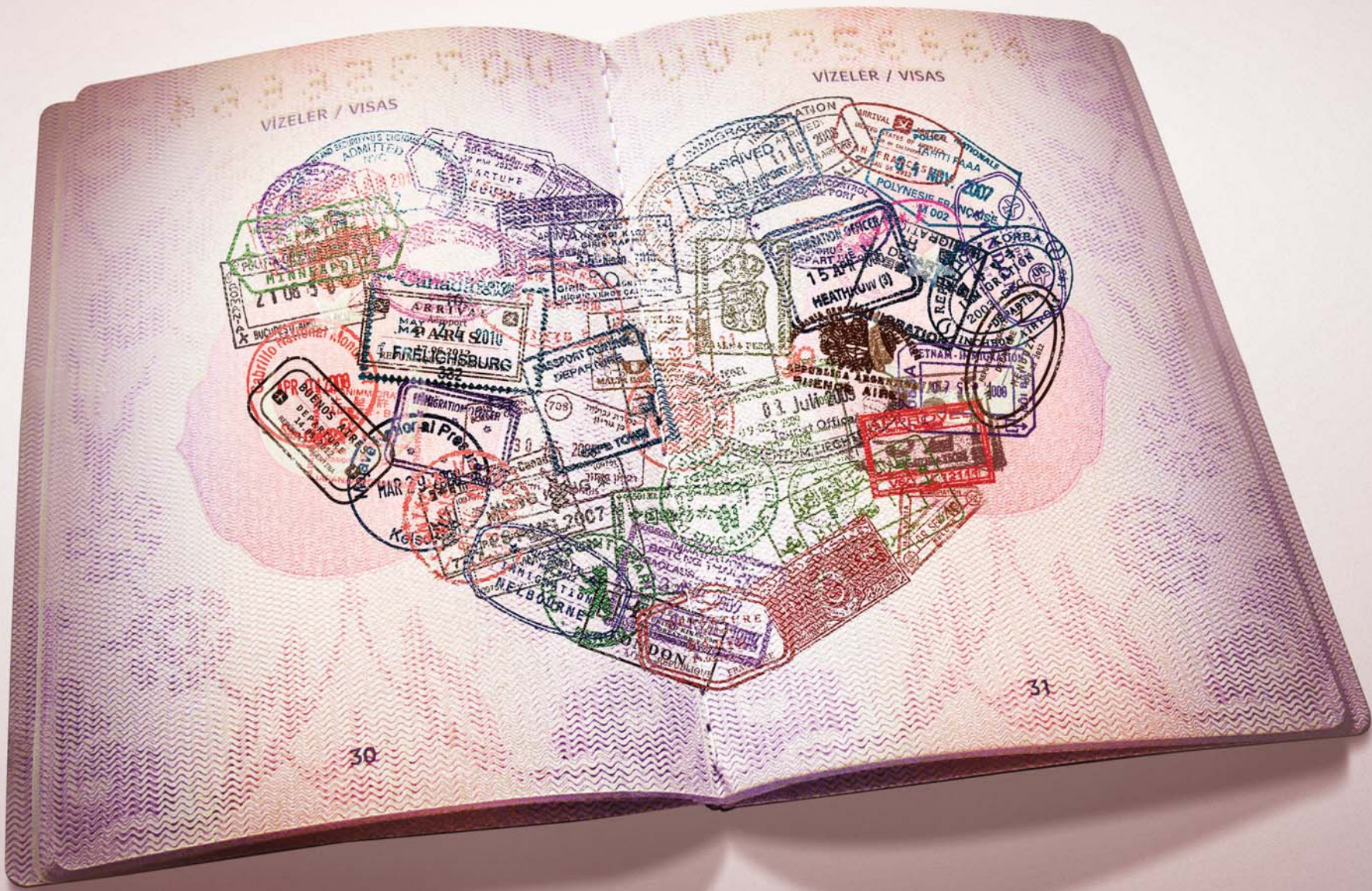
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Publisher and Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit
Associate Editor: Om Astha Rai | Design: Kiran Maharjan
Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518
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prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Long haul

Qatar Airways has launched daily direct flights from Doha to Auckland, New Zealand. The flight lasts 17 hours and 30 minutes and covers a distance of 14,535 km, making it the world's longest commercial flight.



Pairing numbers

On the occasion of Valentine's day, Ncell has introduced a new offer for customers allowing users to call one paired number at 50 paisa (excluding tax) per minute, send 100 SMS for free and get a 50% discount on selected ring back tones.



Sharing codes

Air Namibia and Turkish Airlines have signed a codeshare agreement coming into effect from 1 March. Passengers from both the airlines can avail to more



travel options between Namibia and Turkey.

Flagship model

Otto, a new mobile brand has introduced its flagship smartphone Otto Mark in Nepal. The phone comes with 6 in, 2.5 D curved HD IPS display, a 3 GB RAM, 32 GB internal memory, 13 MP rear camera and 8MP front camera. It is priced at Rs 19,996.



Cashless future



Siddharth Bank upgraded its debit, credit and prepaid cards and introduced EMV chip cards in the market. With this, the bank hopes to encourage cashless transactions and ensure efficient and secure online banking services.

KTM to Thiruvananthapuram

A rushed trip to Kerala provides a treasure trove of ideas and updates

Here in Kathmandu, we are so fixated on New Delhi that we forget what Nepal can learn, not from the coddled, self-important demographics of Raisina Hill, but from the constituent states of India. For example, the experiments in grassroots self-government in Rajasthan, or the politico-contractor complex that has destroyed the river system of Sikkim and is proceeding to do the same in Arunachal.



There is need for Nepali planners to understand Kerala, furthest south from us in the Subcontinent, a state that has achieved the most in human development indicators (population 33m, literacy 95%, life expectancy 77 years, sex ratio, 1,084f:1000m). How Kerala got here has to do with a legacy of education and political mobilisation that goes far beyond the contribution of Marxism through the ruling CPI-M.

Indeed we have more to learn from Kerala than unlearn. The immediate empathy derives from the historical ties that bind Kathmandu Valley to the Malayalam world. Since the

mid-1400s, Lord Pashupatinath has been served by Namboodari Brahmin from northern Kerala as chief abbot. There is an alternative view that it was Tailang Brahmins, slightly further north.

Regardless, one thanks the Lord (Pashupati!) that the a-historical, ultra-nationalist attempt by the Maoist in their first bout of state power in 2009 to discontinue this link to South-of-the-Vindhyas was challenged and voided. This connection to the Southasian deep south tells us something about medieval Kathmandu's reach and power.

A meeting in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) last week provided opportunity to study Kerala's progress and, simultaneously, how India is doing under the Modi juggernaut (from the Puri 'Jagannath'). There is enough cause for worry when populism has hit such a peak that even to question the logic and implementation of demonitisation (of 500 and 1,000 rupee notes) is liable to attract accusations of 'anti-national'.

In terms of progress, Kerala is the Indian province that has gone the furthest with local government. In attendance were Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey, who pioneered the drafting as well as country-wide implementation of India's Right to Information Act. In Nepal, we are still stuck with the ritualistic use of the

right, or wrongfully consider it an as an appendage of press freedom.

Roy and Dey have moved on to fight for the right to work, right to minimum wage, much of it through watchdogging the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). Kerala seems to be where these initiatives are best implemented.

Panchayati Raj local government institutions languish in large parts of India, whereas Kerala has moved to incorporate it into the governance structure. The *sarpanch*, or elected village leader, has adequate staff, infrastructure and authority, and the public at large is highly motivated and knowledgeable on cost estimates, expenditures, bills and vouchers.

If only Kerala were not so far away, it would be good to fill two or three busloads of Nepal's best and brightest and trundle down the Malabar coast. For Kerala also provided a window perspective on the rest of India.

To refer to some examples, there was the fear of activists that the digital Aadhar universal ID card, for all its advantages, can accelerate surveillance of citizens by state authorities. A panel of activists talked about judicial

prabhu BANK



CONGRATULATIONS

BEST NEW ARTIST



April Rush
Tyo Hawa

BEST MALE POP VOCAL PERFORMANCE



Almota Rana Uprety
Funtastic

BEST COMPOSITION



Ananda Rai
Sansar Mayama
Adhcha Bhane

BEST ROCK VOCAL PERFORMANCE



Sabin Rai & The Electrix
Timi Nai Hau

BEST FEMALE VOCAL PERFORMANCE



Rajina Rimal
Mutu Dukhyo

BEST MALE VOCAL PERFORMANCE



Ram Krishna Dhakal
Ma Hurima

ALBUM OF THE YEAR



Adrian Pradhan
Abhiwaadan

SONG OF THE YEAR



Ramesh B.G.
Ma Hurima

RECORD OF THE YEAR



Ram Krishna Dhakal
Ma Hurima

BEST SONG ORIGINALLY RECORDED FOR A MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK



Arjun Pokharel
Ma Yasto Geet Gaunchu

BEST PERFORMANCE BY A GROUP OR DUO WITH VOCAL



What The Funk
Funky Daju

FOLK RECORD OF THE YEAR



Anjan Babu
Gurasai Phoole Ho

BEST POP/ROCK COMPOSITION



What The Funk
Funky Daju

BEST ARRANGEMENT



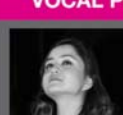
Maharaj Thapa
Sansar Mayama
Adhcha Bhane

BEST VOCAL COLLABORATION



Sujata Upadhaya
Manandhar & Udit Narayan Jha
Sansar Mayama
Adhcha Bhane

BEST FEMALE POP VOCAL PERFORMANCE



Nicky Karki
Jet Udauchhu

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accountability in India, where there is a need to abolish the death penalty (on this, Nepal is ahead).

The activists decried the tradition of post-retirement appointments which make High and Supreme Court judges kowtow to the political bosses. They spoke of the unconscionable delays in delivery of judgements, with more than 30 million cases pending in the courts across the land. Only public prosecutors are being allowed to enter the judiciary from the outside, whereas law professors, scholars and legal activists should be allowed access, said the panelists.

Human rights activist and film critic Harsh Mander said his foremost worry was about the deep sense of insecurity among Muslims of India, who felt unprotected under 'right wing majoritarian triumphalism'. In a shocking reference, he said many Muslims were now using the name 'Akhlaq' (victim of the Dadri mob lynching in Uttar Pradesh) as a verb, indicating the "ongoing systematic construction of second-class citizens".

On the more pleasant side, one was intrigued to see the state Finance Minister and Chief Secretary sitting in the podium, talking comfortably as equals and taking cues from each other during presentations. A far cry from the palpable obsequiousness of bureaucrat before minister, whether in New Delhi or Kathmandu.

A Keralite activist wryly asked participants from elsewhere not to get carried away by romantic visions of his state, as there were problems enough festering under the surface.

One wanted to ask, But is that not in the nature of things? Nothing is ever perfect in a democracy, with one always having to watchdog and course-correct. Sometimes things go from bad to worse, for which one only has to take a glance at the daily unravelling of American democracy. Looks like they could learn a thing or two - from the state of Kerala or the nation-state of Nepal. 🇳🇵




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TRANSPLANTING LOVE

On 14 February, celebrate the ultimate love of a man who gave his kidney to his wife



SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Bhoj Bahadur Ghale wakes up at six every morning and prepares tea for his wife. As the rays of the rising sun strike the walls of their soft marigold-coloured bedroom, they sip tea together and plan out the day. Every day together is a gift for this

remarkable couple. Five years ago, when both of Sabitri's kidneys failed, Bhoj Bahadur stepped forward to donate his left kidney. This was highly unusual. Most of the 114 kidney transplants performed at Bir Hospital in the past year have been on husbands whose wives donated the kidneys. Bhoj Bahadur is one of the only five husbands who were donors. "Who will save my wife

if I don't? I would not have been able to survive without her," Bhoj Bahadur says, eyes brimming with tears. He overcame pressure from his own family not to donate his kidney. Bhoj Bahadur, 44, was a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia and returned home to take care of his wife when she was diagnosed with renal failure. The kidney

FEBRUARY 14

transplantation was done in 2012, and the couple remembers their meeting two days after the operation in the ICU of Bir Hospital as the happiest day of their lives. Their eyes met, but neither uttered

a word as tears rolled down their cheeks. "I remember being so happy to see my wife breathing, and I forgot my own pain," says Bhoj Bahadur, giving his wife a loving glance at their three-room rented flat in Gongabu. Sabitri is from Lamjung and Bhoj Bahadur is from Tanahu. Their marriage 20 years ago was arranged by their families. She remembers thinking he was the

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The circulation associated with the westerly front changed the wind direction, bringing in warm dry air from the south – hence the hazy skies and elevated temperature this week. The precipitation also did not last and fizzled out with just a dusting of snow over western Nepal. It will get colder again with temperatures more normal for this time of year. A low pressure system over Central India will move past Nepal, just touching the south-eastern plains. Kathmandu will have misty mornings and sunny days over the weekend.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
23° 5°	23° 6°	21° 6°

Going places together - qatarairways.com



PICS: SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

right man as soon as she saw him for the first time. So did he.

When Sabitri became ill and needed a transplant, as luck would have it, Bhoj Bahadur had the same blood group and Human Leukocyte Antigen (HLA) tissue which is necessary to match transplant patients.

Rajendra Agrawal, the surgeon who looked at their case remembers the couple had a unique bonding. “They are

perfectly made for each other. It is the power of love, especially because it is so rare for a man to donate his kidney to his wife in our society,” Agrawal says. Bhoj Bahadur always accompanies his wife when she has gone for checkups in the last four years.

Apart from Bir Hospital, kidney transplantation is done at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital and Human Organ Transplant Centre, and records

show that more than 90 per cent of the of the kidney donors are female.

After donating his kidney, Bhoj Bahadur himself is physically fragile but he carries on with a smile on his face. He says his weakness and hardships do not compare to what his wife has had to endure. Neither is now fit enough to work, and depend on their extended families for their livelihood and educating their two children.

They help each other in household chores. They are dependent on their extended families for their livelihood and educating two children because they say they are not physically fit to work.

“I am fortunate to have a husband like him who risked his own life to save mine. I would have died if it were not for him,” she says, bursting into tears. Bhoj Bahadur affectionately wipes the tear drops from her cheek. “Money cannot buy love and happiness. I just want to live the rest of my life with him.”



Watch video of Bhoj Bahadur Ghale as he talks about how he overcame family pressure and gave his kidney to his wife, Sabitri.

nepalitimes.com



GOPEN RAI

On 14 February, Nepalis celebrate an imported festival by gifting to their beloveds roses imported from India.

This year, Flower Association of Nepal (FAN) has estimated that 200,000 rose pieces worth Rs 5 million will be imported from as far away as Bangalore and Pune. An additional 100,000 rose pieces will be sourced from within Nepal.

“We do not have the technology to grow roses in winter, so we need to depend on India,” explains Kumar Kasaju of FAN.

Kasaju may not like us saying so, but you lovebirds out there may want to rethink V-Day roses since they don’t last long, are wrapped in plastic and widen our trade deficit with India. Consider the carbon footprint of blossoms that have journeyed from so far away, and we are not even going to remind you of the agrochemicals used for

floriculture.

And we haven’t even told you about the Methyl Bromide used in ornamental flower cultivation, which destroys the protective ozone layer in the stratosphere that blocks harmful solar UV radiation.

Next Tuesday, instead of splurging on a cliché show your loved one they’re special with these alternatives:

- Donate to a charity helping Earthquake survivors
- Invest in a child’s future and support youth earning their education
- Give to those who cannot ask, care for local dogs
- Send a handmade card made from locally-sourced Lokta paper
- Gift your sweetheart an industrial-strength anti-pollution mask

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Figuring out what to do

Air pollution data is needed for an informed public and responsive decision making

While in recent years we have been choking and coughing through ground-level air pollution, and Himalayan peaks have disappeared behind a regional haze, the larger picture of air pollution may be changing.

The recent widespread construction on Kathmandu Valley's roads has unloosed such terrible amounts of dust that action to reduce air pollution finally seems imminent. And to support this potential action, a state-of-the-art air pollution monitoring network in Nepal has begun broadcasting data to the public.



COMMENT
Arnico Panday

The atmosphere team at ICIMOD has supported the development of new air pollution monitoring networks in Nepal and Bhutan. To date five stations are operational in Nepal: in Kathmandu (Ratna Park), Lalitpur (Pulchok), Kavre (Dhulikhel), Chitwan (Sauraha), and Lumbini (Rupandehi). For the first time ever, we have instruments broadcasting real-time air quality information through the government's data portal www.pollution.gov.np.

All of our stations measure PM10, and PM2.5, and ozone, as well as meteorological parameters needed to interpret pollution data: sunlight, pressure, temperature, relative humidity, precipitation, wind speed, and wind direction. PM10 is the mass density of particulate matter smaller than 10 micrometers (think dust particles), while PM2.5 is the mass density of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micrometers (primarily smoke particles). Historically, more attention has been paid to PM10, but in recent years there has been increased recognition of the health impact of finer particles like PM2.5, that can penetrate deeper into the lungs.



SONIA AWALE

DATA DRIVEN: Aerosol Scientist SP Praveen of ICIMOD and Shankar Prasad Paudel of the Department of Environment at the air pollution measuring station at Ratna Park this week.

Soon, some half a dozen new stations will be added to the network, while at several stations gas analysers that measure carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and sulphur dioxide will also be brought online.

Recent data from the new stations provide notable insights:

- Pollution levels started increasing as soon as the last monsoon rains ended.
- Particulate levels are higher in the mornings and evenings than at mid-day or late at night. The timing of the pollution peaks, however, do not coincide with rush hour as might be expected. Rather, these peaks are the result of a complex interplay between emissions, and when and how the Valley is ventilated.
- While the ground-level station at Ratna Park shows high PM10 levels due to wind-blown dust from nearby roads, PM2.5 levels at Ratna Park and on a 6th floor collection point in Pulchok show remarkably similar patterns, indicating that fine particles are fairly well mixed in the Valley's air mass.
- The air in Dhulikhel is significantly cleaner than in Pulchok and Ratna Park, but Dhulikhel does experience a small peak of

- pollution in the late morning as Kathmandu's pollution blows through.
- Surprisingly, PM2.5 levels in Chitwan are often as high as in Ratna Park, while in Lumbini they are often much higher than in Kathmandu. What this means is that air pollution is not a problem confined to the Kathmandu Valley. It is also common across southern Nepal due to industry, widespread open burning, use of biomass energy, and pollution that blows into Nepal from beyond its borders.

The new air pollution monitoring network allows us to track such trends over time, and to increase our understanding of the processes that influence pollution levels. In addition, this network will serve to inform the public about when to avoid exposure to dangerous levels of pollution. Residents of Beijing, for example, check PM2.5 levels before deciding to exercise outdoors.

The network will provide the basis for designing emergency response plans for cutting emissions when air pollution levels exceed certain pre-determined thresholds. We can learn from Paris and Mexico City which have successfully implemented these systems.

In addition, the network will provide feedback about the effectiveness of our mitigation efforts. If you have a fever and take a paracetamol, you would measure your temperature to see if one tablet was strong enough to reduce the fever. If it doesn't, you take one more.

Because air pollution in Kathmandu Valley has multiple large sources, reducing it requires targetting emission sources in different sectors, addressing the lowest hanging fruits in each sector immediately, and then moving on to more difficult measures. In a task force report submitted to the National Planning Commission this week we have identified action in 12 areas, while highlighting six immediate steps. 🇳🇵

Arnico K Panday is Senior Atmospheric Scientist and Programme Coordinator of the Atmosphere Initiative at ICIMOD.



Every breath

The impact of air pollution on public health can be minimised

SONIA AWALE

Alarm bells have been ringing about the dust that blankets Kathmandu, but experts say that vehicular exhaust is much more harmful.

The earthquake, endless road-widening, and the dumping of construction material on sidewalks have all helped turn the Valley into a dust-bowl. But the increase in the number of vehicles and lack of emission control have led to a worrisome rise in the level of the most harmful pollutants.

"The impact of air pollution on health isn't limited to respiratory infections but is a leading cause of heart diseases and strokes," said environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar. "And a major source of this pollution is transportation which will increase unless we invest in a proper mass transit

system."

Although the concentration of dust in the valley's air is off the charts, dust particles are bigger and not necessarily toxic, meaning they are blocked in the nasal passage. However, diesel soot is microscopic, can be embedded deep in the lungs, and even be absorbed into the bloodstream.

The dust from the valley's road-widening therefore is a symptom, and not the disease. The dust will ultimately settle as the roads are completed. However, wider roads mean more cars and therefore more pollution in future.

Explained Tuladhar: "The problem is we haven't seen beyond road-widening. We need to get over the fixation that a bigger road is better. The backbone of a transportation system in any city must be its public transport."

Kathmandu's poor air quality has become serious enough for

the UN's World Health Organisation (WHO) to take notice and send Carlos Dora of its Department of Public Health in Geneva to Kathmandu last week. He told *Nepali Times*: "The government is widening roads and reducing sidewalks. That is going to increase pollution in the long run."

The good news is that increasing public awareness is translating into government action. A task force led by the Department of Environment submitted a 12-point recommendation to the National Planning Commission on Wednesday which highlights the importance of improved mass transit (*page 14-15*).

Task force member Arnico Panday, an atmosphere scientist at ICIMOD said: "PM2.5 (particles below 2.5 microns) in diesel exhaust is the most harmful. Measuring air quality helps us see trends and plan mitigation efforts." 🇳🇵



BIKRAM RAI

With you take

misised by improving Kathmandu's public transport system



GOPEN RAI

Going up in smoke

You cannot solve a problem until you understand what the problem is. To effectively reduce Kathmandu's horrendous air pollution crisis, scientists say, it is important to measure the nature of pollutants. Solutions must be data-driven.

Which is why the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in collaboration with Department of Environment set up air quality observatories in Ratna Park, Pulchok, Dhulikhel, Chitwan, Lumbini and Langtang. The idea is to investigate the nature of pollution in Kathmandu and track the transfer of suspended particles from the Indo-Gangetic plains up to the Himalaya.

"It is important to understand the emission and the meteorology that affect air pollution, so that we have effective mitigation measures that can solve both technical and behavioural issues," said Bhupesh Adhikary, ICIMOD'S Air Quality Specialist, while inspecting the equipment at the Dhulikhel observatory.

Apart from measuring particulates with diameters of 1, 2.5 and 10 microns, the stations also have analysers to measure carbon monoxide, nitrous oxides and other harmful gases. Scientists can then find out the source of pollutants, meteorological factors transporting pollutants, and propose mitigation methods.

Ratna Park was chosen as an observatory site to represent Kathmandu, and the movement of pollutants from the Valley eastwards in the evenings is sampled in Dhulikhel. The Chitwan site measures air quality in the national park, while the Lumbini observatory tracks the trans-boundary movement of pollution. Measurements in Langtang have helped glaciologists understand increased melting of snow and ice due to global warming and soot deposition.

"We want to measure ultra-fine particles in the future and develop a model to forecast air quality like we do weather and an Air Quality Index," said Shankar Prasad Paudel of the Department of Environment. "Ultimately we want to spread awareness about pollution so we can curb them at source."

The WHO threshold for Particulate Matter (PM) below 2.5 microns is 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, but Nepal's national standard is set at 40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. Even so, the concentration of PM2.5 in Kathmandu is several times higher than even the minimum national level for most of the day.

Most of the PM2.5 in Kathmandu comes from diesel exhaust from generators and vehicles. While the use of generators has gone down with 24-hour power, the number of polluting vehicles is rising.

Brick kilns in Bhaktapur are another major source of air pollution in that area. Of the 107 kilns in the valley, 105 were damaged in 2015 earthquake, but only 12 of them have been replaced with low-emission kilns.



Watch videos of people battle smoke and dust on the major roads of Kathmandu and experts speak about the possible solutions to air pollution.

nepalitimes.com



GOPEN RAI

DUST TO DUST

The roads of Kathmandu were always dusty because they were poorly built and used to dump construction material. But after the earthquake and the road-widening campaign, the concentration of dust in the city's air has become much worse. Recently, pipe-laying work for the Melamchi Drinking Water Project has been a major source of pollution in the valley.

The dust levels are so unbearable that last week the Supreme Court directed the government to take immediate steps to reduce it. Although contractors laying water mains have started hosing down some roads, implementation is doubtful.

Public health experts and urban planners say the problem with road-widening is not just the dust, but that wider roads will mean more traffic and more pollution.

Said the WHO's Carlos Dora: "I see there are potential solutions to air pollution in Kathmandu. Narrow roads can be used for cycling and pedestrianisation and some roads can be widened for bus lanes to reduce traffic."

Environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar agrees: "Forty per cent of people in Kathmandu travel by foot. If we pedestrianise some roads, the pollution will go down. Expansion of roads where needed is essential but we can't have a car-centric development, we need people-centric development."

EVENTS



Children's literature,

Book stalls, workshops, shows, talks and more at this year's edition of the Bal Sahitya Mahotsav, an annual children's literature festival organised by Rato Bangala Group of Institutions. 18 February, 10 am to 5 pm, Rato Bangala School, Patan Dhoka, www.bsmnp.org

Heritage forum,

An open discussion with public officials on the government's decision to award tenders to rebuild heritage sites. 10 February, 2 to 3.30 pm, Kathmandu Darbar Sqaure

Women of the World,

Mark your calendars for Women of the World festival, a one day festival to celebrate women and girls featuring talks, workshops, performances and more. 18 February, 11 am to 8 pm, Staff College, Jawalakhel, (01) 4410798, <http://bit.ly/2hfe6v8>

Movie talk,

Attend the screening and discussion on the film, Takasera, directed by by Eva Pivač and Matjaž Pinter.

23 February, 3 pm onwards, Martin Chautari, Thapathali, Free (limited seating), (01) 4238050, 4102027, 4102243/ 9849206303



Namo Buddha pilgrimage,

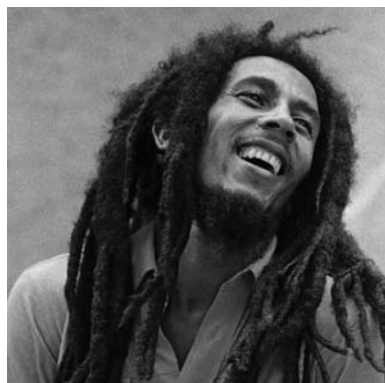
Embark on a one-day pilgrimage tour to Namo Buddha, a monastery located in Kavre district. 18 February, 7.30 am to 5 pm, Meeting point: 7.30 am at Ratna Park, For more details: 9841454462/9841326364/9808799589, blossomexpeditions@gmail.com

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



MUSIC



Celebrating Marley,

Celebrate late international reggae sensation Bob Marley's birthday with Cultivation & The Himalions. 10 February, 8 pm onwards, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, 9841226397, Cover charge: Rs 300

Reggae night,

Hear Nepali reggae band Joint Family Internationale belt out some of their hits as part of the Black History Month series. 10 February, 8 to 11 pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172, Entry: Rs 300

Jazzy evening,

Tap to the beats as Ashra Sunwar and group play up-beat jazz rock numbers. 10 February, 7 to 10 pm, Electric Pagoda, Thamel, (01) 4700123

DINING



Lhakpa Chulo,

Try the tender steak and Thai-style salads. Jhamsikhel, (01) 5542986

Pauline's Garden,

A cosy place in the heart of Kathmandu offering French and Italian cuisine as well as Nepali dishes. Happy hours every Thursday.

Pauline's Garden, Baluwatar (Closed on Mondays), (01) 4221537/9803919575



Mezze by Roadhouse,

Spot a superstar at one of Kathmandu's most popular restaurants. Mercantile Plaza, Darbar Marg, (01) 4223087

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Make it an evening to remember with a glass of sparkling wine, good music, a four-course dinner spread, coffee, chocolate truffles and special dessert this Valentine's day.

14 February, Le Sherpa, Maharajgunj, (01) 4428604/9841128777, Rs 5500 per couple, Rs 2900 per person

Around the corner,

Listen to Malaysian Portugese singer Simon Theseira sing romantic melodies while enjoying a five course meal.

14 February, 6 to 11 pm, Around the Corner, Dhapasi, For reservations: 9861631197



Hyatt Hotel,

Pamper your beloved with a luxurious overnight stay or a relaxing massage. Stay for a romantic experience and a spread of sumptuous five-course meal in the hotel's famed restaurant, Rox.

14 February, Rs 7000 plus taxes per couple (dinner), Rs 9,999 (Overnight stay excluding dinner), Rs 15,000 per couple (Offer valid till 28 February)

The Factory,

Celebrate the day with your loved one with an unplugged session featuring Nepali band Aawaj. Enjoy a special bar and food menu as well.

14 February, 6 pm onwards, The Factory, Thamel, (01) 4701185

Musical night,

Spend a musical Valentine's night with your loved ones as Nepali band Anuprastha performs some romantic numbers.

14 February, 7 to 11 pm, Ai-La Lounge, Kumaripati, 9801018681

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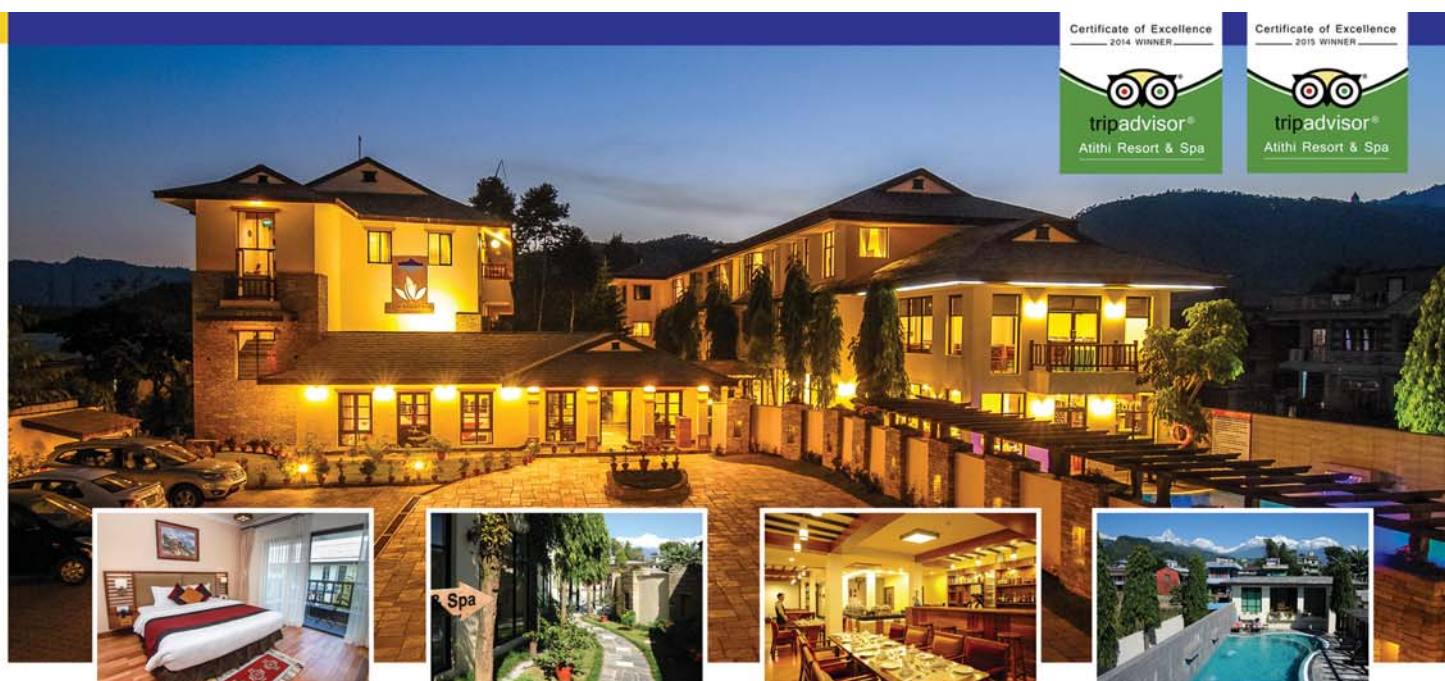
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LA SPA

Teller of tales

Noted Swiss author who made bed-time stories enchanting is visiting Kathmandu next week for a children's book festival

SMRITI BASNET

When *The Rainbow Fish* was first published in 1992, Swiss author Marcus Pfister's multi-colored fish with hologram foils was a sensation in the world of children's book publishing. The book combined his two strengths: art and story-telling. Pfister's selfish fish not only taught children a valuable lesson in sharing, but also showed how children's stories could be made to come alive with creative design.

It has been 25 years since *The Rainbow Fish* came out, Pfister has published many more books since but it is this one that stands out. Looking back, he regrets working too hard and too fast on his books and wishes he had more time to develop the stories. Many children who are now in their twenties may not agree, for them the books were perfect as it were, and inspirational.



"The most important aim that a picture book can achieve is to bring parents and children together for 15 minutes a day in a very intimate way," the award-winning author told *Nepali Times* as he prepared to fly out to Nepal from Bern, where he is now based.

For as long as he can remember, Pfister says he had a deep fondness for drawing and story-telling. But it was not until he gave his entrance exams at the Art School Bern did he realise its true value and saw an opportunity in the field. His first picture book was *The Sleepy Owl* in 1986, and since then he has written 50 more books, selling over 30 million copies in 50 languages. *Questions Questions*, *Happy Birthday Bertie* and *The Yellow Cab* have been translated into Nepali as well.

This year, he is looking to publish two more books, a new



title in *The Rainbow Fish* series and a picture book without any text, using just illustrations and emojis, in September.

"As an artist you just feel the need to invent new stories, techniques, artwork and concepts," said the 57-year-old artist. Apart from the hologram foils, the author has experimented with pop-ups, die-cuts, and innovative folding techniques in his books making them all the more exciting for children.

Children's books have a power to lay the foundation for their early years, Pfister says, "It's the first step to discover a new fantasy."

The author/artist does not limit himself to simple adventure stories, they all come with an embedded message: friendship, modesty, tolerance, understanding alphabets, and appreciation of the environment and nature.

"To see the bright eyes of children while you are telling them a story, what could be more moving than that?" he asks. However, Pfister is disheartened by how parents today are not willing to invest as much time reading to their children.

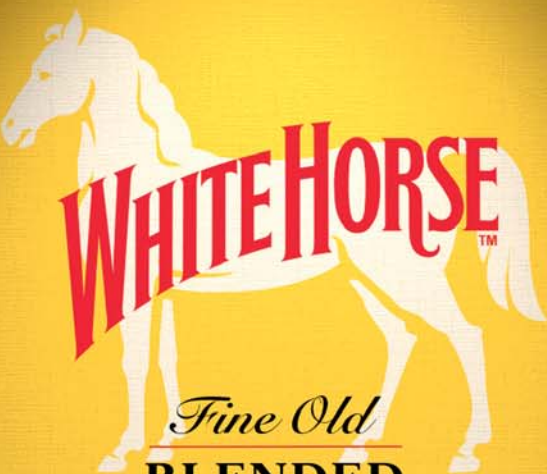
Pfister will be attending the Bal Sahitya Mahotsav festival (see box) in Kathmandu next week and conducting hands-on trainings on drawing and inventing new characters.

"This is my first time in Nepal," he says, "I am waiting for the country to take me by surprise." 🇳🇵

Literature for little ones


Bal Sahitya Mahotsav is an annual children's literature festival and features readings, art and drama workshops, live performances, book stalls, and the Book Bus. The festival will have guest speakers from Nepal as well as Swiss author Marcus Pfister, and writers from the Kahani Project from India. This is the third consecutive festival Rato Bangala School is organizing, and this year the two books in Braille will also be launched. The festival will also have children's book reading under the Pipalbot tree in Patan Dhoka.

18 February 10 am to 5 pm
Rato Bangala School, Rs 200 per person
Pipalbot events are free




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HIDDEN FIGURES

There are nine films nominated this year for the Academy Awards Best Picture category, and while I have not yet seen them all (with four down, and some to go) I can already tell that *Hidden Figures* will be my favourite.

While *La La Land* (reviewed last week in this column) is the fore-runner for the award,



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

and *Manchester By the Sea* boasts the heavy weight that these films demand, with Ken Lonergan, an extremely talented playwright turned even more finessed director, and the likes of Casey Affleck and Michelle Williams in the cast, *Hidden Figures* with its feel-good story and loveable characters doesn't really stand much of a chance -- except that the film is based on the incredible true story of a number of black women who worked at NASA starting in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, making crucial computations as mathematicians and engineers, helping to put the first

Americans in space and on the moon.

Adapted from the non-fiction book of the same name by Margot Lee Shetterly, the film follows closely the lives of the mathematicians Katherine Goble Johnson (the lovely, intelligent Taraji P Henson), Dorothy Vaughn (the magnificent Octavia Spencer), and engineer Mary Jackson (the feisty, boundary breaking musician Janelle Monáe) the three brilliant women who are the most famous of the team of black women who computed for NASA but were never recognised at the time.

The film works so well because of the strength of the characters and the incredible charisma of the actors playing these women who struggled, with humour and with grace, to raise families and against all expectations to excel in their fields, feats that are now finally acknowledged with the book, the film, and a 2015 Presidential Medal of Honour for Johnson (there is also now a wing named after her at Langley).

At a time when an American President threatens to open up deep divides within the U.S. and without,

Hidden Figures is a film with a formidable reminder of the injustices perpetuated by white people against those whose only difference from them was the amount of melanin in their skin.

Katherine Johnson, the most brilliant mathematician in her generation was forced to use a separate coffee pot than her white male colleagues; Dorothy Vaughn fought to be promoted to supervisor even while eminently qualified, and Mary Jackson went to court to be allowed to attend night classes at a school that only allowed Caucasians.

The achievements of these women threaten to be undone in ugly times like this when people are barred from their freedom (of movement, to speak out) based on religion and skin colour. It is a shame that Ms Johnson would have to see a day when a man like the deeply racist Steve Bannon has gained crucial access to such a powerful post in the White House. 🇳🇵



nepalitimes.com

View trailer

HAPPENINGS



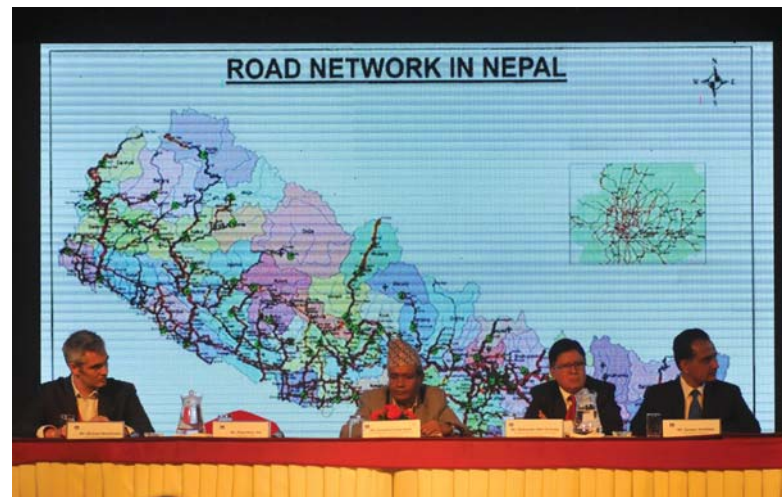
SUNIL SHARMA

SPREADING WINGS: Tourism Minister Jeevan Shahi and Chinese ambassador Yu Hong pose for a picture from a MA-60, one of the two new Chinese aircraft inducted by Nepal Airlines on Wednesday for its domestic routes.



RSS

ANOTHER DREAM: Kathmandu Metropolitan City and the Chinese firm Cimex Inc on Wednesday signed an MoU for a feasibility study of a monorail mass transit network for Kathmandu Valley.



BIKRAM RAI

HIGH FI: Nepal Telecommunications Authority on Wednesday unveiled a plan to expand broadband Internet service at Everest and Annapurna base camps.

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HIGHWAY ROBBERY

Nepal's public transport is in the grip of cartels which will stop at nothing to prevent competition

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA



■ Last month, a bus cartel in Bhaktapur sent a letter to the Route Permit Division of the Transport Management Office. Dated 16 January 2016, it ordered the government agency responsible for regulating public transport to not allow City Yatayat to operate on the Bhaktapur route with its spacious new buses. The letter from the Madhyapur Yatayat Sadbhav Committee warns: 'If you want us to remain friends, do not let (City Yatayat) seize our bus routes from Dakshin Dhoka, Bode, Thimi, Sano Thimi, Pepsi Cola, Guheshwori to Jorpati.'

■ Tokha Chhahare Minibus Entrepreneurs Association which has a monopoly on the Tokha route, warned the Transport Management Office of violence if new permits were given for the route, and warned that new permits should not be issued without its consent. It warned: 'If new buses are allowed to ply in Tokha, there will be violence and vandalism on the road.'

■ In November, Sajha Yatayat added 30 new buses to its fleet to improve public transportation in Kathmandu Valley, but private operators have taken the cooperative's service expansion as a direct threat. The Bhaktapur Minibus Service

Committee, for example, wrote to the Transport Management Office and warned it not to allow Sajha to operate on the Bhaktapur route. 'If Sajha buses are allowed here, our transport system will fail, and commuters will have to face hardship.'

The Small-Heavy Vehicle Section of the Transport Management Office in Ekanta Kuna receives so many threatening letters from private bus cartels that they don't even raise eyebrows anymore. Threats of violence have become the norm, and this is the main reason public transport is in such a sorry state in Kathmandu.

There are more than 250 bus 'committees' registered under the Federation of National Transport Entrepreneurs (FNTE) and they are actually cartels that want to protect route monopolies at all cost – by threatening the government and new bus companies.

The comfort of commuters and public service is not the priority of the bus mafia that is said to enjoy political protection -- some of them are even owned by senior bureaucrats and security officials.

Last week, a *Nepali Times* reporter approached the Bagmati Zone Chief of the FNTE, Dharma Rimal, posing

as a potential investor interested in operating new buses on the Kathmandu-Bhaktapur route. Without mincing words, Rimal warned the reporter: "Careful, there might be problems for you if your new buses operate without our consent."

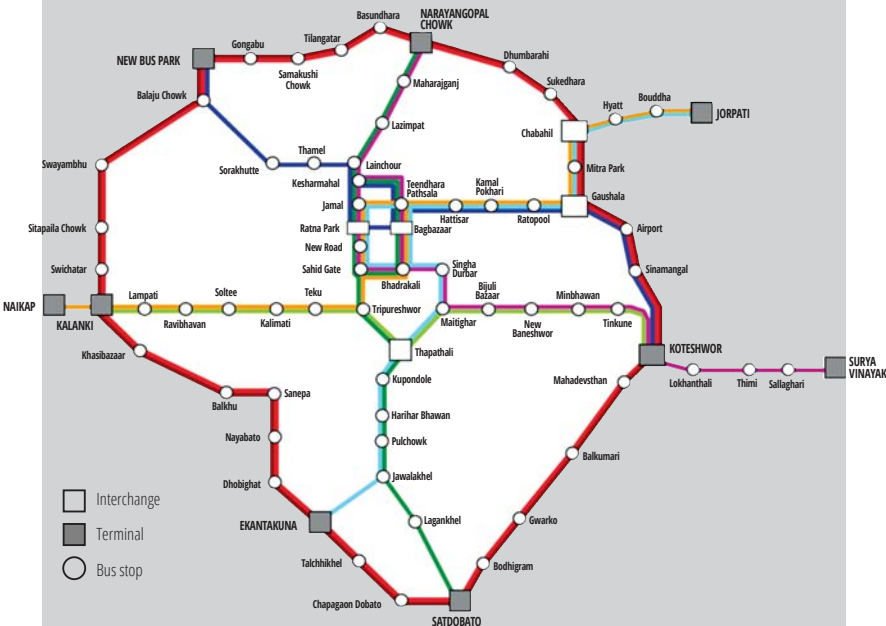
Rimal continued in a threatening tone: "It is we who decide who is allowed and who is not on this route. You will regret it if you defy us."

When asked how come transport syndicates appear to be more powerful than the government, an official at the Transport Management Office admitted: "The FNTE is so powerful the government just cannot go against it. The kind of threats we receive if we issue route permits without their consent is frightening."

Hemanta Sherchan of City Yatayat wanted to operate on the Bhaktapur route, but got only a limited permit to operate 10 high capacity modern buses from Kalanki just up to Pepsi Cola. Sherchan freely admitted to us that the only reason he secured the permit was because of his own political connections.

"I was told by other entrepreneurs not to operate big buses because it would take their business away," he said.

Proposed Bus Route Network



In a report submitted two years ago, the Kathmandu Sustainable Urban Transportation Project (KSUTP) recommended restructuring bus routes into three tiers with eight trunk routes for 12m buses, 16 secondary ones for medium-size buses and 42 tertiary routes for smaller public vehicles.

Supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the report is politically untenable at present. Current bus cartels would have to run as amalgamated companies and compete with each other. Dipak Shrestha of KSUTP admits the recommendations need political will for implementation.

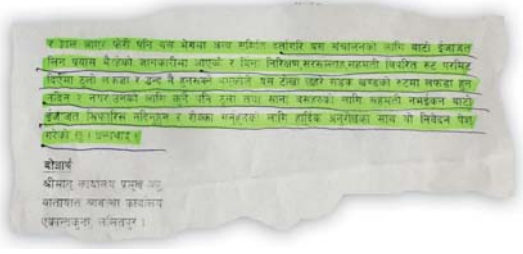
"Transportation entrepreneurs have to understand that we are not trying

to displace their business. We are trying to restructure the routes to improve the quality of service," he says.

KSUTP is readying a pilot project to run 17 medium-size buses in the Samakhushi-Ratnapark-Sinamangal routes and negotiating with the syndicates that dominate the route.

Birendra Swar of Department of Transport Management told *Nepali Times*: "We are relocating small public vehicles to the tertiary routes proposed by the KSUTP."

Meanwhile, the Transport Management Office will stop renewing route permits of public vehicles older than 20 years from 28 February as part of public transport management in the valley.





BIKRAM RAI



Shot by the bus mafia

Bus syndicates are so powerful they will stop at nothing when it comes to protecting their monopolies, as Jeevan Sedhain (*pic, above*) found out 13 years ago when he was chief of the Transportation Management Office for Gandaki Zone in Pokhara.

Despite threats from the bus mafia, Sedhain issued permits for new 20 micro-buses, 25 trucks, and eight intercity buses on the Kathmandu-Pokhara route. The syndicate operators picketed his office for months but Sedhain didn't back down.

One day he was walking in Kathmandu, he fell to the ground. On regaining consciousness after four days, he found himself at TU Teaching Hospital with a gunshot wound in his hip that paralysed him below the waist.

"I analysed the capacity and public demand and issued permits accordingly, I didn't give in to threats or offers of bribes. But look at me now, I am disabled, I have lost hope that the police will ever catch the culprits," says Sedhain as he limps to his new job at the Ministry of General Administration. He is convinced public transportation will remain shoddy and dangerous until the bus mafia is dismantled and the regulator freed from political interference.

What also helped was Sherchan's affiliation with a transport committee close to the UML, and he is also an adviser to the FNTE. He revealed that all members of the transport federation have to be close to one party or other.

Protests and vandalism are the norm when the government tries to increase capacity on routes or allow better bus services to new operators. Officials who have tried to end the monopolies have never been successful, and may even face violent attacks like a transport officer in Pokhara who was shot and injured in 2004 (*see box, above*).

Basanta Adhikari, the new chief at the Transport Management Office, denies there is any undue pressure. "We have nothing to do with any transportation committee and we are against syndicates," Adhikari said defiantly. "We are free to issue new route permits as per the existing laws."

However, the reality does not bear this out. Free market policies adopted by the government in the 1990s were supposed to improve the quality of public transportation, but the sector is in the stranglehold of cartels.

Not only are city and long-distance bus services unreliable and uncomfortable, they are also downright dangerous -- more than 16,000 people have been killed on roads in the last 10 years

because of reckless driving, poor maintenance, overcrowding and the lack of investment in upgraded services.

Poor maintenance of obsolete vehicles also means that bus exhausts are a major source of fine particles and gases in the Kathmandu air. Particles below 2.5 microns in diesel soot lodge deep in the lungs can be absorbed into the bloodstream, causing cancers (*see page 8-9*).

There are more than 10,000 public buses operating in over 200 routes in the valley, but most are overlapping, ad hoc and offer poor quality service in ramshackle buses. The government's effort to phase out smaller public vehicles is facing opposition (*see box, left*).

Tulasi Sitaula, former Secretary at the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, says the only path to more efficient public transport and cleaner air quality is to dismantle syndicates: "The government has the power to shut down all transportation committees and break the monopoly, but it doesn't dare do it."

Currently, Sajha Yatayat is the only semi-government cooperative. More than 250 transportation committees are functioning as NGOs despite repeated calls from the government to get registered as companies under the transportation law. 🇳🇵



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The naked truth

Over the years, we media watchdogs have watched with growing alarm the erosion of journalistic values in this country as the Fourth Estate becomes obsessed with Real Estate, and turns its full attention to mammon and mammaries.

To make matters worse, certain lazy young reporters who have requested anonymity because they are ashamed to call themselves mediapersons still insist on just reporting the facts and leave out all the bigotry, prejudice and preconceived notions they have nurtured since adolescence.

Whatever happened to good old-fashioned bias? Where is the editorialising? Why are we so hesitant to pursue alternative facts and fake news when these are sanctioned in the post-truth age? If journalists don't have the testicular fortitude to stand up to what they believe in, and back that up with views masquerading as news, then I'm afraid I consider it a shame to any longer remain in this profession. I quit.

Our readers do not need hydrolysis, they need analysis (From the Latin. 'Ysis' = leaking 'Anal' = backside). And the only people who can administer the suppository are registered armchair navel geezers who are officially certified to pontificate on any subject under the sun.

Today's young scribes (and pharisees) think opinion is only for the opinion pages. What rubbish. Journalism schools should start teaching students that their job is not just to report facts but to bend them. In fact, facts should never be allowed to get in the way of a good argument, especially if that argument coincides with our own. But alas, standards are slipping and ultimately it is you, our valued clients, who end up being duped.

It is this correspondent's objective and neutral opinion that journalism without

a bias is like chicken without chilli. "After all, admitting to having a prejudice is being truthful. Political correctness itself reveals intolerance of other people's viewpoints," this correspondent said to himself in an off-the-record interview while reporting this objective opinion piece.

So, to make up for letting you down, this week The Ass gives you a completely unbiased summary of this country's current politics. (Editor's Note: The opinion expressed in the following snippet of objective news item is the reporter's own and in no way reflects the prevailing situation in the country.)

Deuba divorces Dahal By a Congressite Correspondent

KATHMANDU — Ex-ex-prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba thinks PM Dahal is dillydallying on elections to prevent him from being ex-PM for the fourth time. He has therefore filed for divorce. He had tied the knot with the ex-King and after that hopped into bed with the Republicans. He openly flirted with Dahal and wooed him away from his ex, Oli. But even that marriage is now said to be on the rocks. This Ballantine's Day, alert readers will recall that Brave Lion once performed congress with the Congress, but he is on the verge of breakup with Mr Needy over the appointment of the new IGP.

It is the considered opinion of this Correspondent that he should be made Promiscuous Minister once more. The man deserves it just for the patience he has shown so far to stage a comeback. And if you don't agree with me, you can go stuff it.



The Ass

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