



Clean Air News

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Pollution rise 'worsens' South Asia's winter smog

By Navin Singh Khadka

A rapid rise in air pollution from fossil fuels and biomass burning has worsened winter smog and extended its duration in many parts of South Asia, scientists and officials have said.

In Bangladesh, India and Nepal the temperature has plummeted and clouds of fog and smoke hang in the sky blocking sunlight for several days.

Normal lives have been affected with many flights diverted and suspended and trains delayed because of low visibility.

Experts say they have noticed that the intensity of smog has grown in the Indo-Gangetic plains in the last few years, leading to increased impacts.

"Since 1990 onwards, there has been increase in the number of [smog-affected] days in northern India," says BP Yadav, director of the Indian Meteorological Department.

Nepal's Department of Hydrology and Meteorology director-general Keshav Prasad Sharma agrees the issue of smog is becoming increasingly serious in the plains in southern Nepal bordering India.

Some are also investigating whether the conditions can be linked to health problems in parts of the region. Although widely reported as the direct effect of a cold wave, medical professionals say deaths and illnesses are often related to respiratory diseases.

"None of our patients died of hypothermia," says senior consultant physi-

cian Gaurang Mishra of a regional referral hospital in south-eastern Nepal where dozens of people have been reported to have died during the last three weeks that saw many smoggy days.

"They mostly suffer from chronic pulmonary obstructive disease that is caused by burning of wood and cowdung cake and pollution from industries and vehicles, mainly during winter season."

The number of such patients, particularly children and elderly people, is also in the rise in Bangladesh.

"But it is not just about people's health in our country," says Iqbal Habib of the Bangladesh Environment Movement (BAPA). "At times, all means of transport come to a complete halt because of zero visibility and all walks of lives are affected."

Experts say besides regular sources like vehicles, industrial factories, power plants and dust from gravelled roads, air pollution in some areas in Bangladesh is getting worse because of fast increasing numbers of brick kilns.

Some studies have shown that they account for around 40% of air pollution in and around the capital Dhaka.

"Construction works too are major contributors for the smog in this season as they lead to more pollution in the air," says the Indian Meteorological Department's BP Yadav.

That is in addition to pollutants from energy sources.

Energy demand

In its World Energy Outlook 2010, the International Energy Agency said: "India is the second-largest contributor to the increase in global energy demand to 2035, accounting for 18% of the rise."

Scientists say pollutants and aerosols in the air enhance condensation of water in the atmosphere causing dense smog.

"The more pollutants in the air, the denser the smog," says Keshav Prasad Sharma at Nepal's Department of Hydrology and Meteorology. "In some Nepal-India bordering areas, smog blankets can be seen from early evening."

When such blankets of smog block sunlight, sending temperatures down, people make fire from wood, cowdung cake and hay to warm themselves and that creates more air pollution which leads to denser smog.

Scientists say the real trouble is that smog during winter cannot escape to the upper atmosphere as it can during other seasons, because of meteorological conditions.

"The cold wave becomes severe because of this local trapping of the aerosols and other pollution that block off the solar radiation and create very unhealthy air in this part of the world."

Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news_January_06_2012

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Flyover Construction to Begin Within This Fiscal Year

By Ramesh Shrestha

The Ministry of Physical Planning and Works has said the construction of underpasses or flyovers planned for Kathmandu's five busiest junctions will begin within the current fiscal year. At present, the government is preparing final designs.

Kalimati, Tripureshwor, Thapathali, New Baneshwor and Old Baneshwor junctions have been selected for the construction of grade-separated underpasses/flyovers. These structures are aimed at reducing traffic congestion for at least next 20 years. "We are awaiting the detailed design to start construction within the current fiscal year," said Tulasi Prasad Sitaula, secretary at the ministry. He added that the construction would be carried out using government resources. The actual cost will be ascertained after finalising the detailed design, type of structures to be built and detailed project report, accord-

ing to the ministry. The Bridge Project under the Department of Roads is undertaking work related to the proposed underpasses/flyovers by hiring a consultant—a joint venture between Salt Test and Abhiyan Consulting. The consultant had proposed two to five options for each junction. The Bridge Project has also asked the Central Regional Road Directorate, Kathmandu, to accommodate the grade-separated intersection plan in its 10-lane road improvement work in the Maitighar-Tinkune section, as the New Baneshwor junction falls within this section. Grade separation is a method that is adopted to improve traffic flow at busy junctions by constructing tunnels, ramps, underpass roads or flyovers. "Selection of final designs has almost been completed," said Naresh Man Shakya, senior divisional engineer at the Bridge Project. He said the best applicable designs for each junction would be approved after needful modifications by an international expert.

The consultant is all set to hire a Canada-based Bangladeshi expert for the evaluation of the designs. The Bridge Project has also said that it will consult with stakeholders, including ministries concerned, traffic police, Kathmandu Metropolitan City, security agencies and transport entrepreneurs, before finalising the designs. Officials at the department said the construction of these two- to four-lane underpasses/flyovers was expected to complete within five years at most. Meanwhile, the department is also considering amending plans for Kalimati and Tripureshwor junctions for lack of spaces, according to an official at the department. "According to studies, several houses are required to be dismantled at Kalimati Chowk and King Tribhuwan's statue at Tripureshwor should be removed as per the existing plans," the official added.

Source: <http://www.ekantipur.com> January 20, 2012

East-West Rail, Ktm Metro Reports in a Year

The government and a South Korean engineering firm Chungbuk Engineering Company (CEC) finally signed the much-anticipated agreement on Dec 28 to prepare a Detailed Project Report (DPR) of a section of the proposed East-West Electrical Railway and a feasibility study of the Kathmandu metro project.

Director General of the Department of Railway (DoR) Ram Kumar Lamsal and a representative from CEC signed the pact, which makes it mandatory for CEC to complete the study for both the projects within a year. The agreement was delayed for

some time as the Ministry of Finance (MoF) was taking time to assure payment of the consultancy fee in US dollars. "The agreement was signed immediately after the MoF assured to pay the consultancy fee to the company in US dollars," Lamsal told Republica. Under the agreement, the firm will complete DPR of 136-km Birgunj-Bardibas section of Mechi-Mahakali electrical railway and Kathmandu Metro, a mass rapid transport (underground and elevated) rail system in the capital. "In addition to the study reports, the company has to suggest necessary provisions for the Railway Act to be formulated in Ne-

pal," said Lamsal. Around Rs 400 million (about \$5 million) will be paid to the firm for completing the DPR for the Bardibas-Birgunj electric railway system (\$4 million) and the feasibility study for the Kathmandu Metro (\$1 million). According to the government estimates, around 75 km of underground and elevated railway system will be put in place under the proposed Kathmandu Metro, connecting major points inside the core areas of the Kathmandu valley.

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Three global companies CEC, Scott Wilson of India, Systra F.A of France had submitted technical and financial proposals for DPR of Bardibas-Birgunj section of the East-West Railway. Similarly, CEC, RITES Limited (India), Systra F.A of France and TEAM Consulting Engineering and Management of Thailand had submitted their financial and techni-

cal proposals for the feasibility study of the Kathmandu Metro. Meanwhile, MoF has given its consent to a proposal from the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works (MoPPW) seeking to conduct a DPR of the 256-km Simara-Butwal section of the East-West Electrical Railway. MoPPW has already called for expression of interest (EoI) from consulting firms for the project. Likewise, MoPPW has also proposed a DPR for the

406-km Butwal-Mahendranagar section of the electric rail line. The costs for the DPRs for the Simara-Butwal section and Butwal-Mahendranagar section are estimated at Rs 500 million and Rs 900 million respectively.

Source: <http://www.myrepublica.com> January 1, 2012

Fuel Crisis: Apex Court Orders Smooth Fuel Supply

By Pranab Kharel

In what could bring some relief to the consumers facing chronic fuel crisis, the Supreme Court has directed the government to stop the retailers of petroleum products from staging any protest that could disrupt the supply and distribution of essential fuel. The court also said Nepal Petroleum Dealers Association's announcement on December 22 to close all its petrol pumps demanding more commission is illegal.

The court ruled that the law has prohibited all kinds of strikes in the area of essential services, including in the supply and distribution of petroleum products. The court drew upon the Essential Services Act that has placed petroleum products' distribution, storage and transportation under essential services. The interim order issued by a single bench of Justice KalyanShrestha also states that resorting to shutdown, lock-out or similar forms of protests in the

area of essential services would be in breach of the Consumer Protection Act, 1998. It is the government's responsibility, the court said, to enforce the laws and ensure unhindered supply, sale and distribution of petroleum products. The order calls on the government-controlled and public sector-run petrol pumps such as those of Sajha and Salt Trading Corporation to ensure that they keep their pumps open during crisis. Any violation of the court order and the laws should face immediate action, the court said. The court order was in response to a writ petition filed on Sunday by advocates Achut Raj Budhatoki, GajBahadurAiri and Jagannath Mishra of Consumer Rights Protection Forum. The writ sought a stay order against the move of the Petroleum Dealers Association, Association of LP Gas, and Federation of Gas Dealers to call a shutdown and lockout issuing a press release on December 22. They have been shutting down their pumps for an hour everyday since January 1,

and have warned of fully shutting down their pumps until the government provides them with more commission, among other things. The petition demanded that the report of high-level commission on improvement in the Nepal Oil Corporation be implemented to allow a smooth supply of petroleum products. It also called for scrapping of licenses of those dealers or petrol pumps that act against the interest of the consumers. The writ had called for ensuring interest of the country when the Nepal Oil Corporation enters an agreement with its Indian counterpart by March 2012. The defendants include Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Commerce and Supplies, Ministry of Finance, Board of Directors NOC, NOC and the supplier's associations.

Source: <http://www.ekantipur.com> January 3, 2012

Public Vehicles Not Disabled-Friendly

By Pritam Bhattarai

Macharaj Maharjan, a differently-abled who cannot move his feet properly, has been facing difficulties in boarding public vehicles.

A permanent resident of Battisputali, Kathmandu, Maharjan said public vehicles do not stop for him when they identify his disability. In a recent incident, he had to wait for almost two hours to get on a public vehicle at Kamalpokhari, Kathmandu. "It was a tiresome wait before I was able to get on a bus," he said, adding that most often he gets help

from the traffic police while boarding a vehicle. Dharma Thapa, a wheelchair user from Jhapa, has a similar problem to share. He struggles to get a ticket for a long route bus, let alone avail of a discount on its price or a seat reserved for people like him. Almost all the disabled people, according to disabled rights activists, have a tough time boarding public vehicles. Teknath Neupane, vice president of the National Federation of the Disabled Nepal, said though differently abled people are entitled to discounts or priority in public vehicles, the reality is pathetic. Neupane, who himself is fully blind, said that disabled

people, especially visually impaired ones, are cheated while getting a change, taking advantage of their difficulty in identifying currency notes or coins.

According to the public transport code of conduct, seats in public vehicles should be reserved for women and people with disabilities and they must be helped to board vehicles. Differently abled people constitute 10 percent of the country's total population.

Source: <http://www.ekantipur.com> January 15, 2012

Nepal Leads Biogas Collaboration

By Smriti Mallapaty

Nepal is looking to scale up its flagship household biogas programme, which has made forays into other developing countries in Asia and Africa.

Initiated in 1992 with support from the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), Nepal has installed over 240,000 household biogas plants with a thermal energy capacity of 444 megawatts and greenhouse gas savings of 367,409 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year. Biogas plants break down biodegradable matter to produce mainly methane. In Nepal, they are fed with cow dung and human waste and the output burned in cooking stoves, while the solid residue is used as farm fertiliser. Nepal country director for SNV, Rem Neefjes, attributes the success of the programme to simple, uniform biogas technology and coordination among government, private sector and microfinance institutions. Nepal's model has

been replicated in various Asian countries, including Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Bhutan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia, according to Khagendra Nath Khanal, assistant director at the Biogas Sector Partnership (BSP-Nepal). "We are the second largest power generator in Nepal after hydropower," said Khanal. Several African countries are benefiting from Nepal's experience, said Paul Hassing, senior advisor of the African initiative, Biogas for Better Life. "In terms of the level of marketing of the biogas sector, it is fair to say that Nepal is still some 10 years ahead of developments in certain African countries," Hassing said.

Nepal's sharing of its knowhow on household biogas systems "is one of the best examples of south-south cooperation," said Saroj Rai, senior renewable energy advisor at SNV and former executive director of BSP-Nepal. "Biogas technology is more sophisticated in developed countries in Europe and Amer-

ica, but it is so expensive that you can't make it viable here, even with subsidies," Rai said. Neefjes observed that the Nepal model is easy to replicate because of similarities among developing countries. "Countries at the same level of development learn much quicker from each other than countries at different stages of development." Nepal is now ready to expand its biogas sector to cover commercial, industrial and institutional use and address growing concerns of energy security and waste management, Samir Thapa, senior energy officer at Nepal's Alternative Energy Promotion Centre, told SciDev.Net. For this, it hopes to benefit from south-south collaboration by learning from such countries as Bangladesh, China, India and Thailand.

Source: <http://www.scidev.net> January 24, 2012

Beijing Releases Key Air Pollution Data

By Louise Watt | Associated Press

Caving to public pressure, Beijing environmental authorities started releasing more detailed air quality data that may better reflect how bad the Chinese capital's air pollution is.

The readings of PM2.5 — particulate matter less than 2.5 micrometers in size or about 1/30th the average width of a human hair — were being posted on Beijing's environmental monitoring center's website. Such small particulates can penetrate deep into the lungs, so measuring them is considered a more accurate reflection of air quality than other methods.

It is the first time Beijing has publicly revealed PM2.5 data and follows a clamor of calls by citizens on social networking sites tired of breathing in gray and yellow air. The U.S. Embassy measures PM2.5 from a device on its rooftop and releases the results, and some residents have even tested the air around their neighborhoods and posted the results online.

Beijing is releasing hourly readings of PM2.5

that are taken from one monitoring site about 4 miles (7 kilometers) west of Tiananmen Square, the monitoring center's website said Saturday. It said the data was for research purposes and the public should only use it as a reference.

The reading at noon Saturday was 0.015 mg/m³, which would be classed as "good" for a 24-hour exposure at that level, according to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards. The U.S. Embassy reading taken from its site on the eastern edge of downtown Beijing said its noon reading was "moderate." Its readings are posted on Twitter.

Steven Andrews, an environmental consultant who has studied Beijing's pollution data since 2006, said he was "already a bit suspicious" of Beijing's PM2.5 data. Within the 24-hour period to noon Saturday, Beijing reported seven hourly figures "at the very low level" of 0.003 milligrams per cubic meter.

"In all of 2010 and 2011, the U.S. Embassy reported values at or below that level only 18 times out of over 15,000 hourly values or about 0.1 percent of the time," said Andrews. "PM2.5 concentrations vary by area so a di-

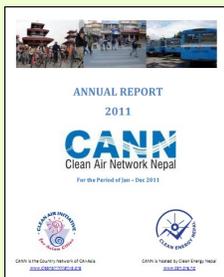
rect comparison between sites isn't possible, but the numbers being reported during some hours seem surprisingly low."

The Beijing center had promised to release PM2.5 data by the start of the Chinese Lunar New Year on Monday. It has six sites that can test for PM2.5 and 27 that can test for the larger, coarser PM10 particles that are considered less hazardous. The center is expected to buy equipment and build more monitoring sites to enable PM2.5 testing.

Beijing wasn't expected to include PM2.5 in its daily roundups of the air quality anytime soon. Those disclosures, for example "light" or "serious," are based on the amount of PM10, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide in the air.

Beijing interprets air quality using less stringent standards than the U.S. Embassy, so often when the government says pollution is "light," the embassy terms it "hazardous."

Source: <http://news.yahoo.com/January212012>



CANN Annual Report

The Annual Report briefly highlights various activities carried out by Clean Air Network Nepal from Jan- Dec 2011.

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To contribute articles, news items, or event announcements for the next issue, send an email with the complete details and URL source to info@cen.org.np or anjila@cen.org.np

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Building Partnership for Clean Air

Clean Air Network Nepal (CANN) is a network of organizations and professionals involved in air quality management in Nepal. The goal of CANN is to increase the ability of professionals and other interested stakeholders to effectively address the problems of air pollution in Nepal. We encourage you to join hands with us to expand our campaign for clean and better Air.

CANN is a Country Network of Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities.

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