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Public Transport Fares Up 9 Percent

Ramesh Shrestha

The government on Tuesday has hiked public transport fares by 9 percent, effective from Friday.

The Department of Transport Management (DoTM) also hiked cargo carrier fares by 3.74 percent for hill routes (Kathmandu-Pokhara-Narayanghat) and by 16 percent for Tarai routes.

After the revision, freight charge per tonne per km went up to Rs 5.40 on Tarai routes and Rs 10.10 per tonne per km on hill route. The latest fare hike is this year's third. This year alone, public transport fares have risen by 17 percent.

With the latest revision in fares, commuters have to pay Rs 15 for a short ride in Kathmandu. The new rate for long routes will be published on Wednesday. "We will be publishing a public notice hopefully by Wednesday by determining the exact fares the commuters have to pay after the revision," said Sharad Adhikari, director

at the department. He added the fare hike was based on fuel and non-fuel components that affect the cost of transport service.

Department officials said the drop in bank interest rates, constant government taxes and no hike in transport workers' salary helped keep the hike below 10 percent. However, the department did not hike taxi fares, citing need for further study.

A technical committee at the DoTM had studied price hike in fuel and non-fuel components including inflation, prices of spare parts, lubricants, tires and bank interest rates, among others, before proposing the fare hike to the ministry.

The Federation of Truck Tanker and Transport Entrepreneurs, the Nepal Metre Taxi Entrepreneurs' Association, and Federation of Nepalese National Transport Entrepreneurs Association had long been demanding that the government increase the fares by 15 per-

cent.

The government has to review transport fares annually as per the scientific fare determination mechanism implemented in 2009. The fare revision has to be done based on factors such as consumer price index, spare parts' prices, cost of lubricants, tires and fuel, staff salary and bank interest rates.

Source: www.ekantipur.com, March 6 2013



Call for Wheelchairs that Suit Nepalis, Nepal's Terrain

Marking the sixth International Wheelchair Day, the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre (SIRC) organised a wheelchair march around Tundikhel on Friday.

Some 150 wheelchair users attended the march, aimed at boosting the confidence of people with disabilities. At the march, SIRC founder Kanak Mani Dixit underscored the need to make such events more frequent. Urging serious attention for the issues of wheelchair users, Dixit said: "The energy of the participants in Friday's

event was such that the entire march around Tundikhel was completed in just 40 minutes. This showcases the enormous potential of wheelchair users. All they need is a platform and confidence."

Highlighting the need to reform the standard structure of wheelchairs, Dixit said that user-friendly wheelchairs should be brought into use. "The standard structure of a wheelchair cannot guarantee the comfort of every wheelchair user," said Dixit. "Wheelchairs should be designed

taking into account terrain and size. For instance, a vehicle consisting of three wheels would be more comfortable than one with just two wheels."

It was the second time that International Wheelchair Day was observed in Nepal.

Source: www.ekantipur.com, March 2, 2013

Pedals and Possibilities

Durgalal KC

Few would think the bicycle, one of the more modest modes of transportation, as being invested with the power to change lives. And certainly, in the context of cities, where all manner of vehicles ply the roads, one rarely notices these flimsy little two-wheelers. But in Deukhuri, Dang, the humble bicycle has come to symbolise long-elusive freedom and opportunity for a group of young girls, for whom any degree of control over their own fates would have once seemed like an impossible dream.

These ex-Kamlaris had little to look forward to, until not very long ago, aside from a life of wearisome bonded labour. Having started working from an age when they should've been playing with toys, they were declared free by a 2009 decree issued by the government, but even then, freedom was more or less theoretical and their futures were still marked by uncertainty. They would either be pressured by families to get married as soon as possible—even those who were clearly too young to do so—or to work, some even returning back into the very system they emerged from, out of desperation. Education, then, was a tall order, not even considered a possibility for many.

Social workers involved in ensuring rights for these ex-Kamlaris therefore decided, about three years ago, that it was time for a different approach to allow them some form of agency aside from the general, and none-too-effective, awareness campaigns that were the default tools of the trade. Reports of the success of a cycle campaign among young female students in Bihar was what sparked the idea, and soon girls in this part of Dang were distributed free cycles in an attempt to aid them in their academic pursuits.

That one seemingly innocuous move has seen unprecedented positive results. Mobility, for one, means that more and more girls are now able to attend school. "It's had a real, tangible effect on so many lives," says Bishnuprasad Chaudhary, the headmaster at the

Chainpur Higher Secondary School in Ganguarapur, where the cycle initiative first took off with the financial support of the Tharu community and other related organisations. "Attendance was dismal before this; school just wasn't a priority. But look at how many girls we have coming in now," he beams. Student attendance, in fact, has risen a whopping 60 percent since the bicycles were handed out, and the school has gone from about 200 students when it started to more than 585 today—indisputable evidence of the campaign's effectiveness, Chaudhary



says.

That sentiment is reiterated by Puja Chaudhary, an ex-Kamlari from Gadhawa Manpur, and among the girls who have benefitted from the campaign. "I think the biggest difference is that I feel like I can make my own decisions now, like I have a choice, and that's something I never had before," she says. The young girl explains that with the amount of domestic chores she is occupied with in the mornings and evenings, it would've been impossible to attend classes daily considering the time it takes to get to school and back. "Our cycles make that so much easier," she says proudly.

Apart from the visible boost in school attendance, the cycle initiative has also had a deeper, indirect impact on the mindsets of older generations in the area. According to Deepa Chaudhary, a former Kamlari herself and a leader of the campaign at present, with

the girls at school, the pressure from families to get them married has lessened, something reflected in the reduced incidence of child marriage here. "The figures are very encouraging," she says. "We used to have about 10 to 12 girls on an average being married off from the area, but that's gone down to two or three now." Chaudhary says there has been a slow but sure altering of attitudes among parents, particularly in terms of the futures they envision for their daughters. Of course, the success of the initiative thus far has hinged on certain conditions, without

which the project couldn't have the effect it's seen, says Dineshraj Sapkota, director of Creating Possibilities, one of the organisations involved in the campaign. The foremost among these is the insistence that the girls who receive the bicycles are absolutely dedicated to completing the seventh grade—the minimum level necessary, Sapkota emphasises, for a basic grasp of different subjects.

With the view to perpetuate the project's efficacy, the number of bicycles handed out has also been rising each year—16 in the first, 26 in the second, and 36 the following year. Cycles are also being distributed this year to 16 other child labourers, in an attempt to extend the project outside of the ex-Kamlari group. But initiators of the campaign know there is still a lot more work to be done. "We need to be able to continue this in the years to come, because here are thousands of young girls and boys around the country who still need help," Sapkota says. "It's not time to be complacent."

Source: www.ekantipur.com, March 1, 2013

A Breath of Filthy Air

Dhanvantari by Buddha Basnyat, MD

This past winter has been very harsh on our lungs. The thick inversion layer trapped dust and smog in the air for weeks and Kathmandu recorded dangerously high levels of pollution with the unfinished road expansion project making the city's air more unbreathable. And if you smoked during this time, you made yourself doubly vulnerable to a host of chronic lung disease such as COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) as proved by studies by doctors like Mark Zimmermann and Paban Sharma from Patan Hospital.

But to better understand air pollution and figure out ways to protect ourselves, we need to understand aerosols. Aerosols are a collection of particles that remain airborne for a substantial period of time. Many pollutants exist in this form and their pattern deposition in the lung depends on the size. Larger partic-

ulate matters above 10 microns (PM 10) are trapped in the nose and upper airways, but the finest and most deadly particles, PM 2.5, find their way into the inner recesses of the lungs.

Most Kathmandu residents don masks or cover their mouths with handkerchiefs when out on the streets. But PM 2.5 which is about 30 times thinner than human hair can easily penetrate these generic masks. While many of us know how harmful air pollution is to our lungs, the relation between pollution and cardiovascular diseases is not talked about too often. Many people are surprised to find out how these small particles lead to an increased susceptibility to heart attacks and strokes.

However, outdoor air pollution is not our only enemy. Thousands of households across Nepal still burn wood and dried cow dung to use as cooking fuel in their kitchens.

Inhaling this exhaust is as worse as smoking five packs of cigarette a day and women who

are in-charge of the kitchen are at most risk. In a recent study conducted by Mountain Medicine Society of Nepal, Nepal International Clinic, and our Italian colleagues in Khumbu, a non-invasive ultrasound revealed that the inner lining (endothelium) of the arteries of a large number of inhabitants of this region was impaired. Derangement of endothelial function of the arteries leads to atherosclerotic disease, the hallmark of heart attacks and strokes. Although Khumbu has clean air, most people here still use bio-mass in homes which causes the damage in the endothelium. The good news is that both outdoor and indoor pollution are reversible, but we need to create awareness and the political will to make a change.

Source: www.nepalitimes.com, March, 2013

Ring Road Widening to Begin in Two Months

Widening of the Kathmandu valley's Ring Road is slated to begin within the next two months. A team of Shanghai Construction Group Company Limited, the contractor, is arriving in Nepal for preparatory work next week. The team will select one of the government-provided locations and set up an office, housing facility for workers and a station for their machineries and equipment, according to the Ministry of Physical Planning Works and Transport Management. The team is arriving on March 15. In December last year, the Department of Roads and the Chinese contractor had signed a pact for upgrading the 9-km Koteshwor-Kalanki stretch of the 27-km Ring Road. The existing four-lane road will be upgraded to eight lanes with a four-lane carriage-way that will also include a two-way relief road, two-way bicycle track and two-way pedestrian path, as per the contract.

"As part of our duty to provide space, some locations, including Khumaltar of Lalitpur, have been selected for contractors," said Tulasi

Prasad Sitaula, secretary at the Physical Planning Ministry. He added the contractor's team would select one of the locations for setting up their hub and start work. Under the Ring Road improvement plan, the government plans to upgrade the whole Ring Road in three phases with China's annual grant assistance. The northern neighbour has been providing RMB 200 million annually since Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's Kathmandu's visit in January last year. Earlier, the amount was RMB 150 million annually.

In the first phase, the Koteshwor-Kalanki section will be upgraded based on the design readied by the Third Railway Survey and Design Institute Group Corporation, a Chinese consultant. It will take 40 months for the completion of the first phase, Karki said.

In February 2011, China had agreed to widen the road based on a bilateral agreement. As per the agreement, Nepal will have to clear the right of way (RoW) on the stretch, provide borrow pit (for digging to dig gravel, soil,

and sand) and give location to contractor to house its machineries and workforce of around 200 individuals. The project is estimated to cost Rs 4 billion. Madhav Karki, deputy director general of the road department, said the main construction team would arrive by April-end. "Initially, the contractor will upgrade 2 km as model improvement," he said, adding the Balkhu River-UML Headquarter and Ekantakuna-Gwarko sections have been selected to develop 1 km each as model road. The 9-km road widening plan also includes intersection improvement in three locations, bus stations and parking lots. The three junctions — Kalanki, Satdobato and Koteshwor — will be improved for uninterrupted operation of vehicles. The Physical Planning Ministry said the existing overhead bridge at Kalanki would also be incorporated in improvement plan if possible, otherwise will be demolished.

Source: www.ekantipur.com, March 6, 2013

UK in Bid to Delay EU Laws on Air pollution amid Failure To Comply

UK faces a crucial battle in the Supreme Court next week over who controls British environmental legislation on air pollution – the national government or the EU, with Britain lagging far behind the Brussels regulations. The case has been little publicized but will attempt to end a decade's long scandal of air pollution, which kills tens of thousands of people in the UK annually.

Three years ago the London mayor, Boris Johnson, published research showing that air pollution caused 4,300 deaths in London alone, while the nationwide mortality figure was 29,000, according to the official government air pollution watchdog. More than 20 UK towns and cities were found to be emitting air pollutants at two times World Health Organization (WHO) limits.

Of particular concern are dusts, sulphates and nitrates from road traffic and other sources. Air pollution is linked to 200,000 premature deaths in the UK and according to data from 2008 the Independent Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants, found that com-

pletely removing particle pollution would have added six months to the life expectancy of very new birth in the UK. Air pollution in Britain has long been regulated on a continental basis from Brussels, but successive UK governments have failed to implement EU directives and now ministers in Westminster are intent on watering down the latest EU environmental legislation. And one air pollutant, nitrogen dioxide, has come in for particular attack from the UK Prime Minister David Cameron.

Under EU directives, all member states are obliged to bring nitrogen dioxide pollution down to levels determined by medical grounds. Britain has fared particularly badly with only three out of 43 areas in the country being within prescribed limits, while London is considered the most polluted capital in Europe, in terms of nitrogen dioxide levels. Brussels has allowed national governments to apply for 5-year extensions for particularly difficult areas where air pollution is hard to tackle. Yet Britain is insisting that 16 areas including semi-rural counties like Berkshire and Surrey will not be cleaned up until 2020 and London won't be able to enforce

the restrictions until 2025.

By taking this stance ministers freely admit that they are in effect daring the European Commission to take legal action against them. The European Commission could take Britain to the European Court and have it fined.

ClientEarth, a UK based green legal watchdog, has already tried taking the government to the British High Court but in May last year the Court of Appeal ruled that the matter should be enforced at a European level. And on Thursday the Supreme Court will have its say. "This is one of the most important cases to come before British courts in recent years. It would be disastrous if the principle were upheld that, when there is a breach in EU law, it should be solely left to the commission, rather than national courts to deal with," Professor Richard Macrory of University College London, one of Britain's top environmental lawyers told the Sunday Telegraph.

Source: www.rt.com, March 3, 2013

Air Pollution, Among Top Global Killers

The study was published online this week by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington with interactive graphics that allow policymakers and public health officials to compare "modifiable" causes of death and disability among countries, and over time. The effort was funded by the Melinda & Bill Gates Foundation.

In South Asia, which includes India, indoor air pollution was the leading risk factor for burden of disease in 2010, while in Eastern, Central, and Western Sub-Saharan Africa it ranked second, and in South East Asia it ranked third. The study calculates that indoor and outdoor air pollution together are responsible for more than six million deaths annually, including 3.5 million deaths from household air pollution from solid fuel pollution, 3.1 million deaths from the ambient particulate matter pollution, and 0.2 million deaths from the ambient ozone pollution. In addition, the percentage of global disability-

adjusted life years (DALY's) attributed to air pollution is 4.5% from household air pollution from solid fuels, 3.1% from ambient particulate matter pollution, and 0.1% from ambient ozone pollution in 2010.

"Reducing air pollution, which includes black carbon soot pollution, can save millions of lives a year, reduce crop losses significantly, and cut the rate of global warming in half and the rate of warming in the Arctic by two-thirds over the next few decades," said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development. "With this combination of benefits—healthier citizens, higher crop yields, and half the rate of climate change—reducing air pollutants should be a top priority for sustainable development." Black carbon soot, which is one of a group of four climate pollutants known collectively as short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs), due to their relatively short atmospheric lifetimes, is the second leading cause of global

warming behind CO2. The other three SLCPs are methane, tropospheric ozone, and hydrofluorocarbons. Fast action to reduce SLCPs has the potential to cut the rate of climate change in half, slowing global temperature rise by up to ~0.6°C by 2050, while preventing 2.4 million air pollution-related deaths per year, and avoiding around 30 million tonnes of crop losses annually.

Due to the heightened effects of black carbon and tropospheric ozone near their emissions sources, these benefits, including much of the climate mitigation benefits, are enjoyed largely by the regions making the cuts. For example, eliminating emissions of black carbon from traditional solid biomass stoves with improved cook stoves would have a major impact in reducing black carbon direct climate effects over South Asia (by about 60%).

Source: www.enn.com, March 11, 2013

Life and Death on the World's Most Dangerous Roads

More than 1.2 million people are killed on the roads every year and three-quarters of all road deaths are among young men. Where are the worst places for road deaths and injuries? What is being done to improve the highways for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers? Explore data from the WHO's latest report on road safety, and experience a ride on one of the world's most dangerous roads. More than 1.2 million people are killed on the road every year – and more than 20 million are injured, according to a World Health Organisation report published on Thursday. This makes road accidents the eighth leading cause of death globally – comparable in impact to communicable diseases such as malaria – and the WHO estimates it could rise to fifth in the rankings by 2030 unless action is taken. Dealing with deaths and injuries on roads costs billions of dollars each year (pdf), taking an estimated toll on low- and middle-income countries of 1-2% of economic output – a total across those countries of more than \$100bn a year. Middle-income countries, particularly in Africa, where car use is rising, have been disproportionately affected, said the WHO.

The global road traffic death rate is 18 per 100,000 people. Middle-income countries have the highest

rate – 20.1 – while high-income countries have the lowest, at 8.7. Regionally, the lowest rate is in Europe (10.3 per 100,000) and the highest in Africa (24.1 per 100,000). "Road traffic injuries are increasing, notably in low- and middle-income countries, where rates are twice those in high-income countries. This is partly attributable to the rapid rate of motorisation in many developing countries without a concomitant investment in road safety strategies and land use planning," said the report.

The WHO named six countries that have steadily reduced road deaths – Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. It said 88 countries reduced deaths on the road between 2007 and 2010 (42 high-income, 41 middle-income and five low-income countries), while 87 experienced increases. The WHO refused to name the countries where rates had increased. The report found that the number of annual deaths on the world's roads was more or less stable, at 1.24 million, but said that – given the number of registered vehicles has risen 15% since its last report in 2009 – more people would have died without the action already taken to reduce risk in five key areas. World governments declared 2011-20 a decade of action for road safety and the WHO has been

urging countries to tighten legislation on speed, drink-driving, use of helmets, seatbelts and child restraints. "Although the aim of reducing the annual burden of road traffic deaths has yet to be realised, the lack of increase suggests interventions to improve global road safety may have mitigated deaths that would otherwise have occurred," the report said.

The road safety study found that only 28 countries, covering 7% of the world's population, have adequate laws in place – and this number remains unchanged from the last report. Over the past five years, 35 countries have passed new laws or changed existing laws – but even where laws do exist, their enforcement is inadequate, the report found. The report also calls for standardised data collection on road safety, injuries and deaths – and highlights the need to improve post-crash care.

"Real progress has been made towards improving road safety and saving lives, but what this report shows is that faster and more concerted action is needed to prevent many more lives being needlessly lost on the world's roads," the authors said.

Interactive Video Link: www.guardian.co.uk, March 14, 2013

Good Reads:

1. [More People take to Morning Walk to beat Heart Ailments](#) - Pratibha Rawal, My Republica, March 27, 2013
2. [Back to Black](#) - Bhrikuti Rai, Nepali times, March 2013
3. [Drowning in Diesel](#) - Kashish Das Shrestha, My Republica, March 4, 2013
4. [Environmental threats could push billions into extreme poverty, warns UN](#) - Claire Provost, The Guardian, March 14, 2013
5. [India's Coal Power Plants Kill Tens of Thousands Every Year, Study Says](#) - Jonathan Mingle, The New York Times, March 22, 2013
6. [Implications of Air Pollution](#) - Dr. Ashok Sumshere JBR, The Himalayan Times, March 17, 2013

Compiled by : Kritya Shrestha
Edited by : Anjila Manandhar and Prashanta Khanal

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 Asia and hosted by Clean Energy Nepal.

For more information: www.cen.org.np

www.cleanairinitiative.org

Building Partnership for Clean Air

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

Clean Energy Nepal

POB No. 24581, 140 Bulbule Marg,
Thapagaun, Baneshwor,
Email: info@cen.org.np
Web: www.cen.org.np
Tel: 977-1- 4464981