Patan, placed in Group 5 (of the seven different groupings), is plunged into darkness.

When darkness falls

TAN PEI LIN

When I first heard about scheduled power cuts in Nepal (or "load-shedding" as the locals call it), I mentally prepared myself for long nights in the dark while shivering in the cold. But no amount of preparation could have readied me for my first power cut. When it finally happened, I found myself groping around in the darkness, tripping on uneven roads and bathing in the dark. Coming from Singapore where electricity is always readily available, I had never experienced such darkness. I sat in front of more makeshift fires in my first week here than I had in a lifetime in my country. But with darkness comes light. The simple and cozy experience of gathering around the flames with my friends and host family would never have taken place if there was power. We'd be in our individual rooms, using our computers or watching television, instead of exchanging jokes and talking about our day. The lack of electricity, in its own way, has brought people closer.

The scheduled power cuts run up to 12 hours a day, and I was curious to know about how the locals dealt with it. This photo essay documents how people of different demographics manage the onset of load-shedding.

When a particular zone is hit by power cuts, a blanket of darkness envelopes that part of the city.

Top: When there's no light at home, people gather around fires on the streets. Sometimes, random passer-bys join in to warm their hands and converse across the flames. Load-shedding becomes a social affair then. **Bottom:** Unlike shops that have the luxury of backup lights, inverters and generators, cart stalls have to resort to candles so that business can go on as usual. // A woman selling tomatoes by the roadside has to use candles to light up her cart.

Top: Families also use the occasion to build fires in their courtyards and spend time together. Warming their hands and feet, they update each other about their lives.
Bottom: Restaurants in Thamel turn power cuts to their advantage by using candles to create a warm ambience.

Top: For street food vendors who wheel their carts from location to location, the only sources of light are motorcycle and car headlights and, if they're lucky, street-lamps. **Bottom:** Load-shedding is sometimes the great equalizer. When hit by power cuts, the more modern spaces deal with the same plight faced by those who cannot afford back-up power. // A bookshop owner writes by a candle.