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**OPINION**  
Dipak Gyawali



**VIEWPOINT**  
Namit Wagley



**PROSPECTIVE**  
Labisha Uprety &  
Dr. Vishnu Prasad Pandey

# NEW SPOTLIGHT

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Sept 18, 2020

FORTNIGHTLY

## Energy That Transform

### INSIDE



**KULMAN GHISING**  
Light Man Exits



**COAS GENERAL THAPA**  
Two Years Of Defense



**POLITICS**  
Oli Tricks



**स्वास्थ्य नै ठूलो धन हो ।  
कोभिड-१९ को संक्रमणबाट आफु बचाउ  
र अरुलाई पनि बचाऔं, अत्यावश्यकीय सेवा  
प्रवाह गर्दा निम्न कुरामा ध्यान दिऔं ।**

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- ✘ अनिवार्य रुपमा मास्क लगाऔं, सेवाग्रीहीलाई अनिवार्य रुपमा मास्क लगाउन सु-सूचीत गरौं ।
- ✘ सेवा प्रवाहमा भौतिक दुरी कायम गरौं ।
- ✘ साबुन पानीले मिचिमिची हात धुने गरौं वा सेनिटाइजरको प्रयोग गरौं ।
- ✘ कुनै पनि स्वास्थ्य समस्या भएमा नजिकैको स्वास्थ्य संस्थामा तुरुन्त सम्पर्क गरौं ।



**नेपाल सरकार  
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय  
सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग**



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Regular, qualitative, inclusive and affordable energy is a key to transforming the livelihood of women and marginalized communities. For this, what is required is the participation and engagement of those communities in the various phases of electricity generation and distribution, particularly planning and tariff fixing. Although Nepal's electricity generation and distribution has over 100 years of history, policymakers had rarely taken any initiative to engage women and marginalized communities in planning. From planning to distribution and fixing of tariff, Nepal Electricity Authority and big consumers used to have the monopoly. The tariff rarely addresses the community level institutions and poor people. Practical Action has been promoting a bottom-up approach to increase the access of energy through participation of community-based institutions, mainly women and marginalized communities, in various sectors of energy by publishing Poor People's Energy Outlook (PPEO). After years of efforts of all concerned, the process of participation of people in fixing the tariff has begun in Nepal. For the first time, the Tariff Fixation Commission has started the process of consultation and engagement with community level institutions, marginalized group and women in restructuring tariff. This is a major breakthrough in Nepal's energy sector. For this issue, we focus on the topic as our cover story.

**Keshab Poudel**

Editor

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KULMAN GHISING

# Light Man Exits

*Outgoing NEA MD Kul Man Ghising has shown nothing is impossible with commitment and dedication in work*

By A CORRESPONDENT

A commitment and dedication of an individual in the leadership can make a difference in the country. This is what Kulman Ghising has shown while he was working as NEA's managing director.

Ghising was appointed the managing director four years ago when the country was facing severe load shedding up to 18 hours, allowing the battery and inverter industries all over the country to thrive.

On 15 September 2020, when his four-years tenure was completed, he was addressing a farewell program -- the story of 18-hour-outages was a history and NEA had transformed from a money loser entity to highly profitable public entity.

For Ghising, a man born in a remote rural part of Ramechhap, transforming Nepal from darkness to a country with light was important. With no connection with the urban elite, MD Ghising, despite bringing such a major change, was always projected as a bad guy by an elite section. However, his popularity among the common people is very high.

Nepal Electricity Authority's employees hosted a grand farewell to say goodbye to outgoing Managing Director Kul Man Ghising.

Appointed four years ago by the government to lead NEA, the outgoing MD made a history in transforming Nepal's power sector and ending two decades of prolonged load shedding with a number of reform programs to strengthen NEA.

During his tenure, MD Ghising transformed NEA from a loss making public utility to highly profit making institution with the profit of over 12 billion rupees this year.



Appointed on 14 September 2016, MD Ghising had several challenges before him. Devastated by earthquake, 456 MW Upper Tamakosi, which is now at the final stage of completion, was in a dire situation. Similarly, 60 MW Trishuli 3 A and 14 MW Kulekhani were in trouble.

Likewise, 36MW Chameliya was in a limbo. Half a dozen of transmission line projects were in trouble.

Wors, 14 hours of chronic load shedding seemed to have no end. Outgoing MD Ghising will be remembered for years for having done what he did. For all this, he also made enemies. However, Ghising will be in the minds of the common people. This is the asset he secured in completing his four years.

"I am proud as MD of NEA and I would be grateful to all who supported me during my tenure," said outgoing MD Ghising, who spent all his time to look at the institution.

Appointed on the basis of work performance, MD Ghising fulfilled over 85 percent in his four years'

tenure. "Making Nepal load shedding free was not possible without full support and backing from political leaders, Minister for Energy, Secretary and all staffs of Nepal Electricity Authority. It was the joint work of us all," said outgoing MD Ghising in his humble tone.

"I am proud with the employees and technical staffs of NEA who have supported me all the time not saying day and night," said Ghising, who was a retired employee of NEA.

Kul Man Ghising completed his tenure showing that a person in the leadership can make a lot of difference to the organization. As he has gone, people have started to worry whether load shedding will return again.

Ghising, who grew up in remote Ramechhap, in the Tamang community, has created a lot of jealous persons from high class who monopolized power, including Prime Minister and Minister, for his work and performance. However, his popularity is much higher among common folks.

## NEWSNOTES

### India Provides Relief Materials Disaster Victims



Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy of India Namgya C. Khampa handed over a consignment of disaster relief materials to Chanda Chaudhary, Member of Parliament and President of the Nepal-India Women Friendship Society (NIWFS).

The relief materials include tents and plastic sheets for distribution to flood and landslide affected families in five districts of Nepal on behalf of the Government of India.

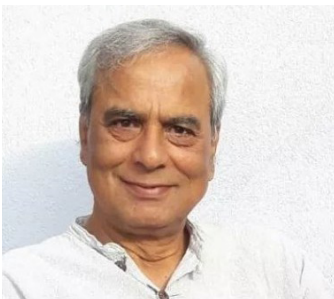
According to a press release issued by Embassy of India, in view of the recent destruction and loss of life caused by floods and landslides, the entire consignment will be distributed through NIWFS in coordination with local governments.

They will be distributed in affected districts of Sindhupalchok, Kailali, Mahottari, Nawalparasi and Sarlahi in Provinces 2, 3, 5 and 7. This gift is part of the Government of India's regular humanitarian assistance and disaster relief support to Nepal.

### Ageing Nepal Receives UNESCO Literacy Prize 2020

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is set to present this year's UNESCO International Literacy Award 2020 to Ageing Nepal, an organization working in the field of senior citizens.

According to Dr. Baburam Adhikari, Assistant Secretary-General of the Nepal National Commission for UNESCO



Nepal, the decision was taken by the UNESCO Headquarters on the basis of recommendations made by the organization on the issue of senior citizens and literacy. The amount of this world-famous prize given every year to two of the competitors from all over the world is 20 thousand USD.

Dr. Adhikari informed the awards were to be distributed in September 8 this year at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, France on the occasion of International Literacy Day. He said that it was a matter of pride for the Government of Nepal, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the Secretariat of the UNESCO Commission, and Nepal to receive the international award.

"We were awarded the prize for our work on Education for senior citizens as their rights. We have been running Basic Literacy Class for senior citizens since 2016," said Krishna Murari Gautam 'Chatyang Master', founder chairman of Ageing Nepal.

Established in 1989 with the support of the Government of the Republic of Korea, the prize is presented to two organizations annually.

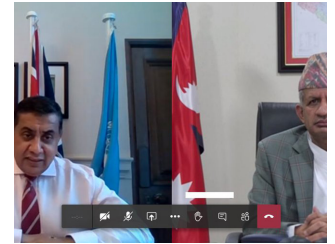
### Minister Gyawali Holds Virtual Meet With UK Minister

Minister for Foreign Affairs Pradeep Kumar Gyawali held a virtual meeting with the State Minister of Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom the Lord Ahmed.

During the meeting, the Ministers exchanged views on various matters of mutual interest, including cooperation in the context of COVID-19 and climate change. They also expressed sympathies and solidarity to each other on the loss of life and sufferings since the onset of the pandemic.

Recalling the Global Vaccine Summit held on 4 June 2020 in which the President of Nepal had sent video messages, the two sides exchanged views on the ongoing research and development of anti-COVID vaccine.

The United Kingdom, the host for the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) to be held in November 2021, looked forward to Nepal's active participation in this global dialogue.



### BIMSTEC Ministerial Meet In Early 2021

Foreign Secretary Shanker Das Bairagi has underscored the need for taking strong measures to make a headway in the identified areas of cooperation, including trade and connectivity in the upcoming meeting of BIMSTEC. The Foreign Secretary called for taking concerted efforts to make BIMSTEC a robust regional organization by way of widening and deepening the cooperation among the Member States.

He expressed the views while making an assessment of the progress made by the BIMSTEC, especially after the 4th Summit held in Kathmandu in 2018.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Session of Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was held through video conferencing. Foreign Secretary Bairagi led the Nepali delegation to the 21st SOM Session.

The 21st Session of SOM took stock of progress made in various areas of cooperation under BIMSTEC, endorsed the appointment of next Secretary General, finalized the draft of the BIMSTEC Charter, finalized the draft of the Memorandum of Association on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Centers/Entities, among others. The meeting has also discussed Sri Lanka's proposal of holding the 17th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting and Summit in 2021.





## Indrajatra 2020: No Grand Public Ceremony

For the first time since its origin, communities, at the request from the government, have decided to observe Indra-jatra Festival limiting it to the temples this year to prevent the possibility of spread of COVID-19.



Chairman of Indra-jatra Management Committee Gautam Ratna Shakya said that they have decided to observe

the festival limiting it to the temple respecting the decision of the government. “We will perform all the rituals and practices within the temple,” said Shakya.

The festival was observed even at the assault of Gorkha ruler or on the day of takeover of Kathmandu. Culture expert Purshottam Lochan Shrestha said that it is a wise decision to cancel the festival to prevent the spread of pandemic. “It is a wise decision by the community and government to cancel it. Human life is precious.”

## China Proceeds With Study Of Kathmandu-Kerung Railway

The Government of China has proceeded with the study of Kathmandu-Kerung railway in its territory. The project however has been affected by global COVID-19.



The study will be carried out on the area from Shigatse to the border with Nepal. China’s conducting of the study has been a positive move at a time when the project has been affected by the infection, said the

Railway Department of Nepal.

Information about the study of the project from Kerung to Shigatse has been received, said the Director General of the Department.

## World Vision Launches Child Well-Being Learning Exchange

World Vision launched its first “Asia Pacific Child Well-Being Learning Exchange” in a virtual setting, in its continuing efforts to help vulnerable children and communities live life to their full potential.

The initiative aimed at bringing together government, UN agencies, donors, civil society organizations, corporations, academia, subject matter experts and thought leaders in the development sector, to throw light on pressing issues facing the world’s most vulnerable children and their well-being in Asia Pacific.

The event saw representation from UNICEF, South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC), Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Plan International, Brandix Lanka and US-AID Bangladesh, along with humanitarian experts, leaders, business experts, academ-



ia and media professionals.

## Save the Children Provides ICU Ventilators

Save the Children under the Global Fund Project handed over seven units of mechanical ventilators to the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) to support the government’s efforts to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The full-fledged ICU ventilators are worth NPR 17,530,537.50. They will be used for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. Rajan Bhattarai, Interim Chief of Party, Global Fund Project/Save the Children handed over the support to Dr. Roshan Pokharel, Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM) Chair and Chief Specialist, Ministry of Health and Population. The ventilators will be installed in MoHP identified sites.

“Responding to the acute shortage of ICU ventilators, Save the Children under the Global Fund Project is supporting seven units of mechanical ventilators to further strengthen the government’s COVID-19 response, and ensure that critical life-saving support is provided to the most marginalized, especially, women, and children,” shared, Virendra Thagunna, Acting Deputy Country Director of Save the Children. With the alarming rise of COVID-19 cases in the country, there has been an increase in demand for ventilators to provide treatment to COVID-19 patients.

## UN And DFID To Support COVID-19 Response

The United Nations in Nepal and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) have strengthened their partnership to enhance the UN’s approach to emergency preparedness and scale-up response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having far reaching impacts globally including in Nepal, which is already vulnerable to natural disasters - the compounded impact goes beyond just the health crisis. This package of support will enable the UN to reach those impacted by COVID-19 and at the same time, prepare for any crisis Nepal may face in the future, in support of the Government.

In Nepal as of 20 August, more than 29,645 people have been tested positive for COVID-19 and 126 people have lost their lives because of the virus. Likewise, as of 19 August, floods and landslides triggered by the monsoon rain have killed 241 people and 88 have gone missing.

Beyond supporting the Government of Nepal’s response to both COVID-19 and monsoon-related crises, the UN is also working to develop national and local disaster management capacity through its cluster co-leadership role. It is committed to jointly plan and prepare for emergency response in Nepal this year and beyond.



## BUSINESS BRIEF

### NIBL-Tie Up With WireBarley



Nepal Investment Bank Ltd and WireBarley have agreed to provide remittance services from South Korea, Australia, US and New Zealand.

In this regard, Nepal Investment Bank Ltd and WireBarley, Money Transfer, has inked an agreement to start the remittances trans-

fer. Following this agreement Nepalis living in Australia, US, South Korea and New Zealand can transfer their money from their account using WireBarley's Mobile App to Nepal. This Mobile App can be loaded from Google Play store/App Store and installed in the mobile.

The money sent through Wirebarley to Prithvi Remits, a remittance service of Nepal Investment Bank Ltd, can be received from more than 10,000 payment counters available all over Nepal instantly. NIBL has requested the people to use Wirebarley Mobile app to send the money safely during COVID-19 pandemic. The Bank also said that WireBarley is effective, easy and safe way to send remittance back home in Nepal.

The WireBarley Mobile app is good for sending money to bank accounts, cash pick-up locations and straight to your recipient's home. It also offers multilingual support.



### NTB Forms Task Force To Revive Tourism

Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) has formed a task force aiming to revive the tourism industry.

Under the coordination of Dhananjay Regmi, CEO of NTB, 'Tourism Revival Taskforce' was formed with represent-

atives from tourism associations, government bodies and other stakeholders.

As per NTB, the team comprises presidents of six different associations of tourism entrepreneurs, former CEO of NTB Deepak Raj Joshi, and Rajan Pokhrel, director general of Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN). Similarly, as tourism experts, the task force has included Chairperson of Hotel Dwarika Ambica Shrestha, President of Temple Tiger Group Basanta Mishra, Managing Director of Buddha Air Birendra Basnet, former CEO of NTB Prachanda Man Shrestha and Executive Director of Yeti Airlines Sonam Sherpa.

### Himalaya Airlines Secures ISO Certification

Himalaya Airlines, a Nepal-China joint venture, has secured the prestigious ISO9001:2015 certification for



Quality Management Systems (QMS) on Aug 13, 2020.

The certification confirms Himalaya Airlines' competency in providing Aircraft Maintenance and Engineering services in line with the Airline's vision of offering highest possible standards in every area of its operation. ISO 9001:2015 is a globally recognized quality management standard developed and published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) which ensures that the products and services meet the needs of customers, through an effective quality management system.

Himalaya Airlines' commitment to work towards ISO 9001:2015 accreditations demonstrates its ability to consistently provide products and services that meet customer and regulatory requirements. To become ISO 9001:2015 compliant, team Himalaya went through an extensive company-wide audit that included quality management system development, a management system documentation review, pre-audit, initial assessment, and clearance of non-conformances.

Vijay Shrestha, Vice President, Himalaya Airlines remarked, "It is indeed a well-deserved achievement for team Himalaya which proves company's commitment to provide best possible quality services to our clients. ISO 9001:2015 is built on various quality management principles including a strong focus on customers, an involvement of high-level organization management, a process approach, and an ongoing improvement of the process. Using ISO 9001:2015 will help to ensure that our customers get consistent, high-quality products and services, which in turn will bring many business benefits for H9."

### Qatar Airways Resumes Regular Flights

Qatar Airways has announced that it has resumed three weekly flights from Kathmandu to various destinations. The airlines has started the flights from September 5, 2020. The decision came following Nepal Government's decision to ease restrictions on international flights.

According to a press release issued by the airlines, it said two state-of-the art Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft and Airbus A320 aircraft will resume flights to connect Nepal with other countries, in line with the government's guidelines.

As per the guidelines of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, following categories of passen-



gers are allowed to travel to Kathmandu – Nepali citizens, United Nations/specialized organisations, development partners and diplomatic staffs working in Nepal.

All passengers must have a negative RT-PCR test conducted within 72 hours of scheduled flight time and must have completed an online entry form, reads the statement. Qatar is a first international airline to resume regular flights to Nepal. This will likely reduce the current airfare.

### **Meena Shrestha First Woman To Lead DOWSM**

Meena Shrestha has become the first woman to lead the Department of Drinking Water and Sewerage Management as its Director-General. The Ministry of Water Supply has appointed Shrestha as the Director-General.



With decades of institutional history behind, Shrestha is the first director-general, who joined the department in 1994 as

an engineer. Shrestha was deputy director-general of the department.

Following the transfer of Sunil Kumar Das from the department, she was given the responsibility. The Minister for Water Supply is also a woman.

### **Another National Economic Census 2018 Report**

The Central Bureau of Statistics has published another report on salaries and wages of persons engaged in the entities throughout Nepal. The first ever National Economic Census 2018 was conducted with the technical support from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). This covered all fixed and movable establishments that existed in Nepal at the reference date of the census operation that was April 14, 2018. As per the census data, there were 900,924 entities



in Nepal where 3,115,112 persons were engaged.

The economic census collected information on average monthly salaries and wages from the entities with paid employees. There were 219,303 entities with paid employees in Nepal and the number of paid employees were 1,709,101. The annual salaries and wages came out to be Rs. 421 billion.

### **IFC Appoints A New Resident Representative For Nepal**

The International Finance Corporation, IFC, has appointed Babacar Sedikh Faye as the new Resident Representative for Nepal.

Faye has more than twenty years of experience, including fourteen years with the World Bank Group. Most recently, he served as IFC's Resident Representative in Sierra Leone and Liberia and in the Democratic Republic of Congo where he led the expansion of IFC's portfolio.

In Nepal, Faye will focus on IFC's business development efforts, expand upstream engagement and deepen partnership with all key stakeholders to substantially grow IFC's investment and advisory activities to deliver development impact, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"IFC is delivering on its ambitious target for Nepal by significantly increasing investments and advisory services," said Wendy Werner, IFC Country Manager for Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. "I am very pleased that Babacar, with his strong experience in developing countries, will be spearheading our efforts to further grow our programs in Nepal."



### **British Diplomat Richard Morris Missing Body Found**

Missing body of former British Ambassador to Nepal Richard Morris found in England. Served in a very crucial period of Nepal-Britain reaction from 2015-2019, ambassador Morris, a career diplomat, has not only brought back Nepal-Britain relations back in track but also contributed immensely to support Nepal in the earthquake.

His most recent posting was a four-year stint as ambassador to Nepal, where he arrived in 2015, just after a devastating earthquake had claimed 9,000 lives in the region. In 2016, he hosted the Duke of Sussex during his official tour of the Himalayan nation.

During his tenure as an ambassador to Nepal, both the countries celebrated two historical events 200 years of establishment of diplomatic relations between Britain and Nepal and 200 years of Gurkha in the British Army.



# Covid Uncertainties, Technical Authoritarianism & Philosophical Qualms



BY: DIPAK GYAWALI

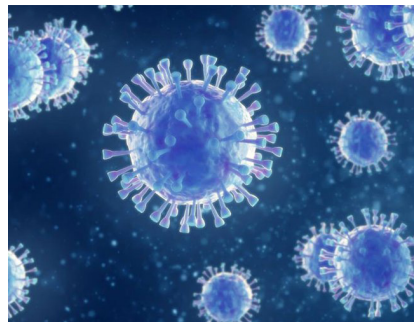
As this essay is being penned, I have just completed two weeks of home isolation with this latest lockdown and am waiting to hear if it will be extended or relaxed for the coming week. Having endured four months of it earlier, and now full two weeks without stepping outside my house – and exhibiting no Covid symptoms – I can say I am Covid-free and so will anyone be who will come into close contact with me. Today. But am I or they completely safe?

This is where Covid science as currently practiced completely fails me and all who may come into contact with me. First, lockdown, i.e. converting my home into a hospital ICU and me and family members as its patients works only for the upper and upper-middle class and only for the isolation period, which itself is difficult to maintain. It is impossible for those who have to work for a living and impractical even for those who may not have to work as long as their savings last, but do need to go out to get daily necessities like milk. Once my home lockdown ends, I could inhale the virus just by going out to buy vegetables.

Second, testing does not help either, even when discounting their unaffordability to most Nepalis. Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) which try to detect the virus protein have high unreliability and are not recommended by WHO for clinical diagnostics but may only be used for research. The more reliable Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests which detect relevant antibody in the blood are *“very labour intensive with several stages prone to errors between sampling and analysis with false negatives as high as 30%”*. Other more reliable serological tests are even more difficult to conduct within Nepal’s health system and too expensive for most. Most important, given that in Nepal results of tests rarely come before a week or more, my sample given today might come back negative a week hence. But me sitting on my balcony tomorrow watching people in the street could be blessed with an updraft of breeze carrying droplets with Covid from someone infected who just sneezed two floors below me. How many testings can one do? Under Loktantra, multiple and free testings are only available (and at home) for Our Dear Leaders!

Covid lockdown and isolation has completely unraveled the mass movement-dependent global economy; but as solution to the health crisis, they do not seem to have much success to show. New cases are rising in Nepal and India, and even in places like Vietnam that had completely contained it. Of those infected, death rate is only 1.76% for India, 3% for US, 0.6% for Nepal, and 6.88% for Sweden that imposed no lockdown whatsoever. When analyzed per million population, US (554) and Sweden (575) are high while India (47), Nepal (8) and China (3) are very low. More interestingly, in the US as per the Center for Disease Control, of the total deaths from Covid, only 6% were from Covid itself while 94% were from other underlying conditions (hypertensive diseases, dementia, cardiac weaknesses and renal failures etc.) compounded by Covid. In the UK, a quarter of the Covid deaths were in people with diabetes; and in Sweden it is mostly old people who died.

Even in Nepal, most of the Covid deaths had other serious causes, and the social consequence of Covid lockdown has resulted in unnecessary deaths of other patients who could not get timely health care such as those related to childbirth, cancer and kidney treatments etc. The conclusion seems inevitable: in the industrialized West, high death rates are due to



older aged population with pre-existing conditions, diseases from prosperity-induced obesity, and privatized health system making affordable health inaccessible to the majority. In contrast, India and Nepal have more resilient younger populations and China has a highly socialized public health system. Ours (and India’s) fails on the social front.

In a world in panic and going mad, what exactly are the facts about Covid that one can have confidence in and what are populism-driven fads masquerading as sci-



ence? As the West now adopts untouchability with a vengeance that would shame even the most orthodox Brahmins of yore (e.g. social distancing, no handshakes, burka-like masks in public) questions have been asked about their efficacy. UK's deputy chief medical officer has questioned the efficacy of masks, saying that there is no strong evidence in either direction (e.g. masks protecting the wearer or those the wearer comes in contact with). Said by anyone else, they would risk being labeled Trump-supporting barbarians and deplorables! And while vaccines have proven their worth for cases like smallpox and polio, it is not clear for Covid, as an when they become available, if they are good for a life-time, for two years or just a few months. Ultimately, it is said, it is going to be herd immunity with or without vaccines, masks or social distancing. That is how Sweden has flattened the infection curve despite relatively high mortality rate (primarily among its senior citizens).

Herd immunity is when 70 to 90% of the population has been exposed to the virus and survived, thus reducing its transmission and infection-spreading capacity. It is inevitably going to be the evolutionary, survival-of-the-fittest solution; but the only concern public health folks seem to have with it is the overwhelming of hospitals and health facilities before herd immunity is achieved. Underlying this ambivalence is the serious problem Western medical science has with the very idea of immunity: it has reductionist cases and chemicals to deal with them aplenty; but it is unable to explain what exactly it is and why it is strong in some individuals but badly depleted in others.

There are basically three types of immunities: innate that evolution has built into us; adaptive that our individual bodies learn along the way countering infections our innate systems cannot deal with, and building specific antibodies and lymphocytes along the way; and passive that we acquire socially from mother's milk in babies who import a mother's immunity, or from plasma therapy. The latter is fluids from adaptively immune people transfused into sick ones which, while somewhat effective, smacks of modern cannibalism for the comfort of many.

The failure to understand immunity lies in the nature of modern Western science (including medicine) and its basis in reductionism that eschews holism and a systemic approach. Philosopher Julian Baggini, in a recent book on comparative philosophies titled *How the World Thinks*, describes reductionism as "*the idea that the best way to understand anything is to break it down into its constituent parts, emphasizing these over wholes*". One thus learns more and more about less and less, missing the forest for the trees. While reductionist methods have resulted in remarkable successes in technology, their application in the social and

policy sciences has resulted in the disastrous individualism (and ignoring social goods for narrow private benefits) of today's global capitalism.

Even in the sciences, reductionism has led to the narrow rationality of methodological individualism that another philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend (famous for his book *Against Method*) fulminates against in his last book *The Tyranny of Science* as leading to a kind of authoritarianism that in the end is bad science. In line with the tradition of methodological pluralism championed by Feyerabend, Foucault and others, the Italian philosopher Giorgio

Agamben decries the "techno-medical despotism" of Covid lockdowns. He argues that political power has been disguised as expertise and used as a pretext for withdrawing the rights and privacy of citizens, it being nothing more than the discredited narrative of "national security experts". Given

their failure in controlling Covid, one can hardly dismiss his charges.

How should we in Nepal begin to re-think Covid and our individual as well as collective responses to it? Modern medicine and technology do have reductionist benefits in extreme cases, but fail at the larger social level as well as individual well-being. It may be time to include Complementary Alternative Medicine (CAM) in our portfolio of community wellness. (The US Congress in 1998 did establish the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at Bethesda's National Institutes of Health!) CAMs science is not reductionist individualism but methodological systemic wholeness. There are five major traditions within and near us that we should give more thought to: Chinese (Kampo, acupuncture); Tibetan (Sowa Rigpa that is pre-Buddhist); South Asian Ayurveda (which is holistic and uses plant products, diet, and lifestyle changes with exercise); homeopathic (based on Eastern ideas of body curing itself but founded in Germany in the 1700s); and Unani (from ancient Greece but now practiced in India via Persian-Arabic traditions to minimize chances of disease). No one lives forever, but one can live relatively healthy if one sees one's body and the society it is within as one composite that needs to be addressed, not in parts but as a whole.

Gyawali's previous Covid related pieces also read:  
<https://www.spotlightnepal.com/2020/03/29/corona-forces-rethinking-democratic-governance/>  
<https://www.spotlightnepal.com/2020/05/20/post-corona-world-what-next-nepal/> }

**In a world in panic and going mad, what exactly are the facts about Covid that one can have confidence in and what are populism-driven fads masquerading as science?**

## POLITICS

# Oli Tricks

*If politics is about tricks and cunning, Prime Minister Oli will remain in power till he wishes*

BY KESHAB POUDEL

Niccolo Machiavelli writes that a Prince is respected when he is either a true friend or a downright enemy. A prince loses the trust and respect from both when he starts playing each other for the sake of own personal gain.

For Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, the tactics of playing with each other seems to be working to sustain his power base. Prime Minister Oli has been successfully using all these tricks internally and externally to thrive in power, sidelining all his enemies.

For the sake of his own power, PM Oli shakes hands with the enemy and friend alike. Following abruptly ending the budget session of House of Representatives in July, Prime Minister Oli's enemies launched a joint move to pull him out of power.

He broke the enemy camp a month ago luring Bam Dev Gautam from rival faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhalnath Khanal. After luring Gautam by offering him a post of vice president and member in Upper House, Oli has strengthened his position.

Following lingering standing committee meeting, PM Oli lured Prachanda in his favor offering executive chairman to him. After this co-chairpersons of the NCP Oli and Dahal have prepared the agenda for the meeting on the basis of the report submitted by the six-member task force.

This strategy has further weakened the enemy camp. Although PM Oli was able to bow out his own time die-hard comrade Madhav Nepal and Jhalnath Khanal, he has lost the trust.

In three months, Prime Min-

ister Oli emerged from a minority in the standing committee to the majority support. There is now no one to challenge his authority. Till April, as the standing committee meeting concluded last week agreeing to hold General Convention from April 7 to 12, 2021

and its Central Committee meeting from October 31 to November 2.

The Standing Committee of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) held on September 11 passed the agenda prepared jointly by the two co-chairpersons of the party — KP





Sharma Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal — and decided to give Dahal executive powers to run the party.

“The committee also decided that the party would not interfere in Oli’s day to day work as PM, but on key governance policies and issues of national importance. Similarly, Oli would have to follow the party’s guidelines,” said spokesperson Narayan Kaji Shrestha.

#### Task Force

With no sign for ending the stalemate, PM Oli and Prachanda agreed to set up a task force to recommend the functioning of the party and government. The report of six-member task force gives a new life to PM Oli.

The force had stated that Oli would remain the prime minister till the general election and would focus on governance, while Dahal would hold party meetings, implement party decisions and focus mainly on party affairs. The task force has also suggested that the party prepare for the first unity convention scheduled from April 7 to 12 on the basis of consensus.

Although it was prepared by a committee including arch-enemy Bhim Rawal, both the agenda passed by the committee were as per the wishes of PM Oli

Seven agenda that the Standing Committee meeting of the ruling party had been discussing before the meeting was postponed indefinitely, included COVID-19, the government’s performance, the relation between the party and the government, millennium challenge corporation agreement and border issues with India.

After these adjustments, the NCP faction led by Dahal and senior leader Madhav Kumar Nepal, who had earlier asked Oli to resign either as PM or party co-chair, dropped their

demand. The whole anti-Oli group has lost the strength following Dahal faction toned down the rhetoric against Oli.

PM Oli has also been applying a similar approach in dealing with neighbors and other international powers. He verbally assured United States till last minute to pass MCC agreement from the House of Representatives in the budget session. Abruptly ending the session just a day before tabling MCC agreement, he prevented controversy in anti-American oriented communist party.

If the political dynamic of

even signed several agreements with northern neighbor to end dependency on South. After the current agreement with Prachanda, Oli agreed to drop the issue of new map with India.

With his initiative, Prachanda led Maoist and Oli led UML formed an alliance, contested the elections on anti-Indian plank exploiting the blockade to woo the votes. Following the election, winning nearly a two-thirds majority, he has taken some initiatives to reestablish his relations with Indian government led by Narendra Modi. PM Oli vehemently criticized Modi



Nepal is any indication, it shows how Prime Minister Oli has been using all dirty tricks one after another to weaken enemy and sustain in power.

Following the promulgation of Constitution in 2015, Oli has made several political alliances with different political groups. During his first tenure following the promulgation of new constitution in 2015, Oli formed a coalition government with support from Prachanda’s Maoist and self-claimed monarchist and Hindu party RPP led by Kamal Thapa.

When Prachanda withdrew the support to his government, he criticized Prachanda as a foreign stooge. Later in the elections, he agreed to make unification with Prachanda led parties.

In his first tenure, PM Oli projected himself as a die-hard anti-Indian leader taking a stand against the blockade imposed by India. He

led BJP government during the election campaigns projecting India as hegemonic power.

He hosted Chinese president Xi showing that he is true nationalist leader who can stand with India. Following the publication of new map by India, Oli found another fire to harp anti-Indian slogan.

Under his leadership, Nepal’s parliament amended the constitution and ratifies a new map incorporating disputed within Nepal. Facing several criticisms for inefficiency and non-performance, PM Oli claimed himself as a great nationalist leader.

As Chanakya said in politics every action is fair. He argues those individuals in power need to use cunningness, cruelty, corrupt trick in politics and state affairs. Chanakya, however, hinted that all these quality cannot rescue King Dhanananda from losing him empire and power.

# Two Years Of Defense

*Chief of Army Staff General Purna Chandra Thapa, who has completed his two years in office, has reasons to defend the work and duty performed by Nepal Army in various sectors*

By KESHAB POUDEL

COAS General Thapa has shown that he knows the art of expressing displeasure politely. In his recent interaction with editors of selected media on September 9 at Nepal Army Headquarters, he politely explained the harsh questions asked about Nepal Army.

In the last few years, different media persons and houses, knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, with their own views or under the influence of others, have been portraying Nepal Army's programs dedicated to welfare of army personnel as army's business venture. Even Nepal Army's contributions in opening the education institutions for excellence are coming under criticism.

Although the interaction program was organized to share the progress of work over his two years in office, COAS General Thapa spent a substantial time to explain the disinformation and misinformation against Nepal Army's schemes and programs launched for the welfare of Nepal Army personnel.

The issue of Nepal Army's Welfare Fund, its savings and some activities carried out through it have

been in media criticism for a long time. However, the government ministers and civilian authorities, who are supposed to defend the army, have ignored it, leaving the army to clarify it from time to time through press conferences and media releases.

As civilian authorities and ministers responsible to defend the institution do not come out publicly, COAS General Thapa himself had clarified on the use of deposit accumulated in the Welfare Fund and its role

He said bluntly that Nepal Army is not doing any business or is willing to do so in the future. What we want is to help our families of over 800,000 at the time of need.

With its limited saving collected in Army's Welfare Fund through contributions from UN Peacekeepers, Nepal Army has been launching various programs to support almost a million retired and serving families in need of education, health and income generating activities.



“Armies around the world have various systems to start welfare. Along with Welfare Fund, we have been launching welfare programs through Nepali Army Wives Association as well,” said COAS Thapa. “Kindly understand, we don’t have any intention and aim to go for commercial

in depth.

“All the organized and professional armies around the world have their own kinds of welfare programs and Nepal is not an exception. Through limited saving accumulated through our own contributions, our Welfare Fund has been providing basic support in health, education and livelihood to retired and serving personnel,” said COAS General Thapa.

ventures and we don’t have any intention to make profit out of it. This is a purely welfare oriented program.”

In the name of defending the institution, some media houses have been regularly running fabricated opinions, news and analyses aimed to damage the institution and its credibility. Despite refusal of Nepal Army, media mayhem continues.

Interestingly, the govern-





ment, which is supposed to take a stand on the institution, prefers to remain silent. Just within a couple of days, following taking the post of COAS, General Thapa directed to stop the process to rent its officer clubs and other venues for public.

“Nepal Army is ready to defend the country and it is our constitutional duty to protect national sovereignty. We also need to provide some welfare schemes to our soldiers and officers who work tirelessly living in separation from the family. As a chief of force, it is my duty to look after our soldiers along with taking actions against those involved in corruption and other such activities,” said COAS General Thapa.

He said that Nepal Army is a professional organization that evolved from the inception of national unification. COAS General Thapa has made it clear that Nepal Army does not have any thirst for business or for increasing involvement in commercial activities.

Constituted in 1975, the Army’s welfare fund currently has cash deposits of Rs 45.86 billion in differ-

ent banks, apart from an investment of Rs 5.74 billion in different ventures.

#### **Nepal Army In Forefront**

During his two years, Nepal Army has continued to be in the forefront of supporting various activities including constructing fast track. As the country has been facing COVID-19 crisis, Nepal Army is working in the frontline.

Whenever a major national crisis emerges, Nepal Army’s work has always been in the forefront. As the country has been facing a major crisis to manage the COVID-19 and protect the citizens, the government has mobilized Nepal Army to perform the most difficult part of the work.

Along with managing quarantine, isolation and helping in testing in early days, Nepal Army has been given the most difficult task of managing the dead body safely and sensibly while respecting the traditions and practices.

As COAS General Thapa was completing his two years last fortnight, he had spent almost seven months to prepare and implement the

emergency plan to contain COVID-19 pandemic. As a member of Crisis Management Center (CCMC), COAS General Thapa has been attending the meeting regularly.

Following the start of monsoon in June, Nepal Army also has performed rescue and rehabilitation missions during the landslides and floods.

With just over 90000 forces, Nepal Army has been fulfilling all its major responsibilities, constructing the roads in remote areas of Kalapani, fast track and other several roads, protecting national parks, providing security to vital national installments and VVIPs, providing troops to UN Peacekeeping and remaining alert to defend the border.

As the Chief of the institution, COAS General Thapa has been busy to look at all these works along with implementing his policy of institutional reforms.

Whether it is a difficulty caused by landslides, floods, fires or national disasters of any kind, including the recent COVID-19 Pandemic,





Nepal Army has been in the frontline to deal with it.

In other countries of the world, Army rarely speaks publicly on its duties and functions. Concerned civilian authorities, ministers and political leaders immediately respond to reactions against the Army.

There is a reason behind this. The institution of army spends the entire time to defend the nation, for national security and to perform humanitarian missions like rescue and rehabilitation during disasters and launch must difficult development works including the road building in remote regions.

Nepal Army is also no different in pursuing such duties remaining all the time alert and ready to mobilize its forces in all kinds of emergency. However, what is different in Nepal is the rare recognition from the authorities regarding the role of Nepal Army.

In our neighboring countries, ministers, civilian bodies, political leaders and others defend the institution of army against any criticism. In Nepal, along with defending the country and pursuing all its responsibility, Nepal Army has to come to the front to defend its own role and work as well.

The article 267(1) of Constitution of Nepal 2015 says that there shall be an organization of the Nepal Army in Nepal, which is inclusive and committed to this Constitution, for the safeguarding of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of Nepal.

Article 267(4) says that the Government of Nepal may also mobilize the Nepal Army in other works including development, construction and disaster management, as provided for in the Federal law.

Over 90000-strong, Nepal Army has been performing two of its

major roles as per the decision of the government even at a time when no concerned minister, political leader and other civilian body has come to defend the work and support the tender by Nepal Army,

At the function he spared all his two hours with the media to defend the glorious history of Nepal Army and its contribution in nation building and all-round development.

Nepal Army is a leading security institution of Nepal, which grew up side by side with national unification process, defending national integrity, sovereignty and getting involved in national development process and humanitarian work of defending the people. However, Nepal Army rarely finds anybody who defends the institution in recognition of the contributions made by it. Nepal Army's soldiers are defending ministers and prime ministers, giving them security with high alertness. However, Nepal Army has to come to defend itself all the time.

From making the army transparent, accountable and zero-corruption tolerant, COAS General Thapa has brought a lot of changes in the institution over two years since he assumed office.





# Added: Four Million Jobs

*A newly released report of the World Bank reveals that four million jobs were added to Nepal's Economy in the past decade*

By A CORRESPONDENT

At a time when over a million Nepalis are leaving the country for jobs overseas, the newly released report of the World Bank has given a hope to Nepali policymakers that Nepal is also generating the employment opportunity back home.

According to the report, Nepal added 4 million jobs to its economy in the past decade. The report, however, says that the constraints to labor market outcomes still persist.

Nepal's economy added nearly four million jobs over the past decade, and average job quality increased significantly, according to the World Bank's recent Nepal Jobs Diagnostic report. But continued job creation, especially of wage jobs, is needed to absorb underutilized workers into better-quality, stable, and well-paid jobs. The economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic – while not addressed in this report – highlights the importance of increasing stable and secure employment in the post-pandemic recovery period.

Nepal's economy has been gradually shifting from largely subsistence agriculture to more modern industry and services, and this structural transition is bringing better work opportunities for the labor force.

Despite great strides, not all job seekers are able to access quality jobs, especially women. In the last decade, large numbers of men have entered jobs in construction, manufacturing, commerce and transportation, or have migrated abroad. Even though many of these are informal jobs or temporary wage jobs, they are nevertheless more productive and provide improved livelihoods compared to traditional low-productivity farm work. Women, on the other hand, have not transitioned in significant numbers. The share of wage work in Nepal jumped from 17 percent to 24 percent of total employment between

2008 and 2018, as nearly half of the jobs added since 2008 were wage jobs.

“The shift toward wage employment signals a fundamental change in Nepal's economic development and is similar to patterns seen around the world. As economies diversify their production activities and increase scale economies, employment becomes more specialized and more productive, and jobs are increasingly based in firms rather than self-employment, and pay more,” stated Dr. Elizabeth Ruppert Bulmer, World Bank Lead Economist and main author of the report. “Urbanization amplifies these effects by concentrating economic activities while increasing the variety of products and services.”

Evidence from a combination of data sources – national labor force sur-



veys from 1998, 2008 and 2018, the 2018 Economic Census, and a 2019 survey of 900 SMEs across 6 districts – points to a number of constraints to achieving better labor market outcomes in Nepal. One key impediment is Nepal's dramatic topography, which makes access to wage jobs and to product markets costly. Most jobs are informal and concentrate in relatively low productivity sectors, while most firms are micro-sized with one or two employees, and target small local markets rather than exporting or connecting to regional or global value chains. In addition to credit

constraints, many SMEs cite tax regulations, high taxes, scarce skills, and bureaucratic inefficiencies as obstacles to growth and therefore job creation.

Gendered social norms have limited female labor mobility and work opportunities, reflected by the fact that most women remain in unpaid work. Three-quarters of new jobs taken up by women between 2008 and 2018 were in non-wage self-employment or unpaid family work, much of which was farm work. Occupational segregation and social norms contribute to the large earnings gap between men and women, as per the report.

In order to improve job outcomes in Nepal, the report recommends policies focusing on fostering SME productivity and growth; improving the business environment and labor market policies; increasing the individual, family, and economy-wide benefits of international migration; and preparing and connecting women and youth to better jobs, including entrepreneurship.

“While the report does not address the shocks from COVID-19 experienced by Nepal's economy and its people, it underscores the imminent priority for Nepal to save livelihoods of the most vulnerable workers, including those in subsistence agriculture and urban and rural informal day laborers or self-employed workers who lost their income sources,” states Faris Hadad-Zervos, World Bank Country Director for Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

“The Government of Nepal has already initiated programs including the Youth Employment Transformation Initiative Project to address the immediate labor market challenges, and it is hoped that this analysis will further guide policy interventions to improve job outcomes as part of Nepal's resilient recovery efforts from the crisis.”

PRESIDENT LATE MUKHERJEE

# Demise Of A Friend

*Having personally known the ins and outs of Nepali politics and political leaders, former President Pranab Mukherjee visited Nepal several times in different capacities. Personally he had high regards for the culture and religion of Nepal*

By A CORRESPONDENT

Former President Pranab Mukherjee, who died on Monday, August 31, has left his mark in India's political space and Nepali politics as well. Mukherjee passed away at the Army's Research and Referral Hospital where he was admitted after a fall at his home. At the hospital, he also tested positive for Covid-19.

Mukherjee's death marks the end of an era in the Indian National Congress; he was among the last of the Congress leaders to have worked closely with Indira Gandhi. He also dealt with different political systems in Nepal. His last decision on Nepal has admirers and critics.

However, Mukherjee spiritually and individually remains a good friend of Nepal.

"Kathmandu is not only the political capital of Nepal, but also a spiritual center for the people in the region," wrote former President of India late Pranab Mukherjee in the visitor's book during his state visit to Nepal in 2016.

His words written in the Kathmandu Metropolitan City's visitor book in 2016 reflected his own personal feelings about Nepal in his mind. This sentence written in the visitor's book spoke volume about his personal attachment to Nepal.

Although there are admirers and critics on his political actions in Nepal, he was a very soft spoken and cultured politician in India and respected leader of Indian National Congress.

Dealing with three political systems, absolute unitary Hindu Monarchy, constitutional monarchy and federal, secular republic and three political generations in Nepal, former president of India late Mukherjee was one of the senior politicians and statesmen in India who knew the ins and outs of Nepali politics.

Although the implementation of Maoist agenda in Nepal started to get executed during BJP government led by late Atal Bihari Bajpayee in 2000, late Mukhar-

jee as a foreign minister finalized it as per a design of Indian bureaucracy and intelligence led by then foreign secretary Shyam Sharan.

Hari Sharma, who worked as a private secretary of Girija Prasad Koirala and principal political advisor to first president Dr. Ram Baran Yadav, has described late Mukherjee as an architect of giving up of Indian policy of the two-pillar constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy of Nepal. In his article in BBC Nepali Service, Sharma described late Mukherjee behind bringing Maoist in Nepalese mainstream.

Having served in the state in different capacities, Sharma, a political analyst, might have an informed report. Giving up the two-pillar policy in Nepal began in BJP's rule in 1999-2004. Numbers of scholarly articles and information are there to show how Nepali Maoist got strong backing from the Indian establishment including defense minister late George Fernandez and Prime Minister late Vajpayee's national security advisor late Brajesh Mishra as well.

Although leader of RPP Kamal Thapa and Sharma stand on two opposite sides, both hold the same view regarding the role of late Mukherjee. Thapa in his tweet expressed sincere condolences on the demise of President Mukherjee. However, Thapa blamed him for initiating the micro-management in Nepali politics supporting to establish a republic, federalism and secularism in Nepal.

Interestingly, advocate of Hindu state Thapa voted for present constitution which institutionalized Maoist agenda of republic, federalism and secularism in 2015

Constituent Assembly.

Late Mukherjee also exposed Maoist in later accepting the role of India in overthrowing monarchy. "Should have been allowed to lead INC as prime minister and party chief but Family Feudalism denied him the honor. In Nepal, he will be remembered for admitting on Aljazeera that India overthrew Nepal's monarchy and erased Nepal's Hindu identity by using BRB-PKD Maoists," tweeted Dipak Gyawli

Late Mukherjee dealt with same Nepali political leaders who changed their

brand from absolute monarchist to constitutional monarchy and republican. He knew Kings, politicians and bureaucrats.

Being a devout Hindu, late Mukherjee, who paid several visits to Nepal during his political career, always visited Pashupatinath temple and other Hindu shrines in Nepal showing his inner faith.

This was the reason Mukherjee paid an official visit to Nepal in 2016 just

after Nepal-India relations reached at the lowest point in November 2016. He was the first president of India to pay a state visit in the gap of 18 years.

"I am particularly happy to visit this holy city once again. Needless to say, Kathmandu has expanded greatly since my last visit. I congratulate the Kathmandu Metropolitan City Office for their unfailing dedication in managing and maintaining this rapidly growing city - despite the inevitable challenges," he wrote.

"Thousands of our citizens visit Nepal in search of solace at the holy temple of Pashupatinath and Muktinath. Similarly people from Nepal visit Varanasi in the North and Rameshwaram in the South in search of spiritual inspiration," he said.





# Addressing Water Security In The South Asian Region Through Nexus Governance



BY: RATEEK POUDEL

The COVID 19 has been creating havoc since December last year. As of now around 900,000 people have already died due to the disease. As a precaution, we have been advised to wash our hands in every interval of time. We have been following that advice since day 1. But what about those people who don't have access to clean water? According to reports, nearly 4.2 billion go without safe sanitation services and 3 billion people lack basic hand washing facility. Not only developing countries, even developed country like US has been facing the problem of water crisis since very long time. According to Asit Biswas, in the US, two million people do not have access to piped water. Nearly 25% health care facilities worldwide lack even basic water services. Asit Biswas further states that in South Asia with over 1.7 billion people, there is not a single town or city that trusts their water utilities

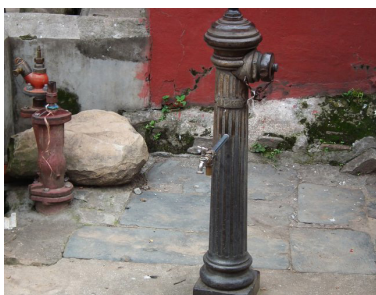
The deteriorating socio economic condition of South Asia is one of the contributing factors for the water insecurity. In South Asia, the socio economic situation was already grave even before the pandemic. Now the COVID 19 has further exacerbated it. According to sources, nearly half of the world's poor (46%) and more than a third (35%) undernourished people live in this region. More than 500 million people don't have access to electricity, more than 900 million people (52%) don't have access to proper sanitation and more than 200 million people face chronic food shortages issues. With growing population, rising economy, growing middle class and rapid urbanization, South Asian people are facing the precarious problems, including the challenges to meet the rising demand for water, energy and food.

Efforts in the water resource development in the South Asian Region is mostly single purpose oriented and don't serve the larger interest. Most of the water security studies in Nepal have been context specific. Some studies have focused on farmer managed irrigation system, some have focused on hydropower potentiality and some based on agricultural insecurity. Golam Rasul writes, "These piecemeal projects may serve short term needs, but they can also serve other potential co-benefits and undermine long-term strategic goals and the integrity of the regional public goods. The policy makers in the current scenario have to think from a nexus governance perspective. The nexus approach offers a conceptual approach to better understand and systematically analyze the complex interactions between the natural environment and human activities, and to work towards a more coordinated management and use of natural resources across sectors and scales.

In the case of Nepal, failure to look from a multi-use

perspective, various projects did not gain significance as they should have gained. The case of Melamchi Drinking Water Project is very pertinent in this scenario. The project is the biggest and the most expensive infrastructure scheme in Nepal today, and will bring 170 million litres a day to Kathmandu. The Phase 2 of the project will also connect the Yangri

and LarkeKhola through two more tunnels and nearly triple the daily water flow. However, if it was thought through a nexus perspective, then it would have been more significant. As Dipak Gyawali writes, "The additional diversions from the Melamchi tributaries would not only provide some 50 MW of hydroelectricity but also triple the dry season flow from six to thirteen cubic meters per second, meeting all possible future demand for drinking water in the valley. Below the Chobar gorge at the southern tail end of the Kathmandu valley, the head difference between it and the terai plain of some 900 meters could be used to generate an additional 190 MW of



power for the Nepal power grid. In addition, the increased dry season flow in the Bagmati river could increase the potential irrigable command area of the lower Bagmati plains in Sarlahi and Rautahat districts by 30,000 hectares." Now the project has become very costly and still not functional after more than 25 years of construction. According to sources, the government will have to spend another Rs 300 million to bring the Melamchi water to Kathmandu Valley under temporary arrangement. The project is projected to cost around \$464 million.

Therefore the time has come that we should not view water as a single use entity. Rather, we should view water as multi use entity. This pandemic situation has further increased the urgency. As Asit Biswas writes, "the time has already come when water policies and major water related issues should be assessed, analyzed, reviewed and resolved within an overall developmental and societal context otherwise the main objective of water management, such as improved standard and quality of life of the people, poverty alleviation, regional and equitable income distribution and environmental conservation cannot be achieved". As International Water Management Institute (IWMI) has said, water connects health, food systems, climate change, nature, energy and finance. The fabric of water security is created by weaving together effective governance, knowledge and skills, connectivity across systems and investment in and application of infrastructure, technologies and services for ecosystem. In this scenario, the importance of nexus governance kicks in.

# Energy That Transform

*Practical Action Nepal, which has been working to increase the access of energy to the women and marginalized communities in different parts of Nepal, has shown that energy can transform the livelihood, health and economic conditions of people. With its vision, Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepali, the government has also announced several inclusive programs and policies to increase the access to energy and use it for broader economic development targeting marginalized communities and women. Started since 2010, Poor People's Energy Outlook (PPEO), Practical Action's flagship publication, has been raising issues of universal access to energy, ensuring the participation of poor in total energy process. Given all these circumstances, newly constituted Electricity Regulatory Commission (ERC) has taken PPEO's bottom-up approach ensuring participation of Community Rural Electricity Entities (CREEs), women and marginalized groups in fixing the new tariff. With this new process, the rights of community based institutions, women and marginalized have been established in fixing energy tariff. However, there is still a long way to go to ensure broader participation, transparency and accountability in the planning to bring complete transformation in livelihood of people through energy*

By KESHAB POUDEL

With the supply of reliable, affordable and quality electricity through NEA's grid, many parts of rural and remote Nepal have seen a transformation, particularly visible among women, who have started to work in once male-dominated enterprises like maintenance of electrical equipment, such as radio and mobile phone.

The recent tariff amendment providing up to 10 units of electricity free of cost can increase the access to electricity of marginalized communities. Similarly, subsidy given in the electricity consumed for irrigation has also encouraged women to move to commercialization of agriculture, in

growing off-season vegetables.

Following the approval of new tariff by Tariff Fixation Commission (TFC), after holding public hearing and ensuring participation of various stakeholders, certain changes have already come about. In that sense, the decision is a major breakthrough.

However, there is still a long way to go to improve total energy supply and make all the kitchens smoke free, thereby, improving the health conditions of women and their livelihood. Similarly, participation of marginalized communities, women and community-based organizations also need expansion.

Although providing up to 10

units of electricity is a good beginning to increase the access of electricity for light for certain hours, it is not enough to bring down the use of traditional sources of energy. According to data, there are still over 68% of households using traditional biomass as a source of energy.

This is one of the major reasons behind discrimination and burden for women as they have to spend a lot of time to collect the firewood for fuel, bearing economic and health costs.

Realizing the importance of energy, the government has linked its vision Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali with electricity, announcing 2018-2028 as the Energy Decade, aiming to



increase access to electricity for 99 percent of population by 2030. The government also plans to increase per capita electricity to 1500 kilowatt and reduce the use of fuel wood and import of energy while promoting inclusive access to energy as its priority.

However, the current structure cannot displace the traditional energy sources in cooking and increase per-capita consumption in rural areas. This means overwhelming majority of rural women have to cook food in kitchens full of health hazards.

### Inclusive Process

Over the decades, there used to be a monopoly of Nepal Electricity Authority, a power utility, in fixing the tariff and planning for distribution. The role of dissolved Tariff Commission was just to endorse the tariff proposed by the utility without any amendment.

For the first time, the TFC chose to follow an inclusive, accountable, transparent and participatory process in fixing the new tariff.

Despite so many shortcomings and lapses, the process followed during fixing tariff and some of the initiatives are very significant and important to ensure the participation of community groups, women and marginalized



Dr. Ram Prasad Dhital

groups in the process. While the process was still limited, the new tariff is fixed with the participation and voices of different stakeholders in a transparent and accountable method.

With the formation of TFC, a regulatory authority, a new chapter has begun with full legal right to take the decisions on electricity tariff. With the technical support from various national,



An elderly from western Nepal brings back home some firewood for cooking. *Practical Action/Kishor Sharma*

international organizations and voices of community institutions, consumers and other stake holders, TFC has recommended the new tariff.

Although the new tariff does not address all the concerns of small consumers like women and marginalized communities and community based distribution institutions like CREEs and their umbrella association National Association of Community Electricity Users Nepal (NACEUN), the TFC has practiced a new approach following a broad and intensive consultation on NEA's proposed tariff structures.

Although the lockdown imposed by the government restricted the mobility of people and holding public hearing, the commission used internet, telephone, message, voice recording and other tools to ensure the participation of community, women and marginalized groups. It has disseminated all the documents and shared the discussion through its website for public. In this way, TFC has shown its willingness to be transparent and accountable.

"Unlike in the past, NEA's proposal for tariff revision was widely circulated for consultation and discussion among various groups, including community distribution groups, women and marginalized groups. We disseminated all the information regarding the

new tariff and decided new tariff incorporating the views of women and marginalized groups," said Dr. Ram Prasad Dhital, member of the Commission. "This is for the first time such a wide and broad consultation has taken place to fix tariff. To ensure participation of community, women and marginalized group, they were given enough time to express their views."

### Long Way

Not only in fixing tariff, there is the need to engage the community, especially the marginalized community and women groups in expansion of grid and distribution. As the structures of tariff determine the use of energy in household level, ensuring the participation of community group is highly important. If the electricity is distributed in a reliable manner and for affordable tariff, the rural population can use the energy extensively, including in cooking and small enterprises.

The current tariff rates provide 10 units of free electricity for poor and marginalized groups. However, it will still be costly to cook food on induction heaters for the poor. More flexible and affordable tariff rates can encourage urban households to use induction. Given the current tariff, economic affordability is still the issue for rural women and marginalized group.

"This is just a first step. We just looked at one or two aspects. The

## COVERSTORY

next will be broader and different. As the priority of the government is to expand the access of electricity to displace import, the commission will completely accommodate the voices and concerns of community groups, women and marginalized people,” said Dr. Dhital, who has long experiences of working in the alternative energy sector, including in the position of the Executive Director of AEPC.

As the lockdown imposed by COVID-19 had badly affected the process of broader consultations and extensive participation of marginalized group and women, this year’s process set a new precedent.

### Role of CREEs

Although Nepal Electricity Authority generates its large sum of revenue from a small section of industrialist consumers and urban consumers, Community Rural Electricity Entities (CREEs) and their umbrella association National Association of Community Electricity Users Nepal (NACEUN) are pillars to increase access to electricity in the country.

Given its network at the grass-roots level, Nepal government’s target to increase access to electricity to all as propounded by Social Development

CREEs is relatively small compared to others, NEA’s bulk of customers are under this group. For this, NEA proudly claims all the success for increasing electrification.

A report analyzing the proposed electricity tariff and its implication on the operation of Community Rural Electricity Entities (CREEs) prepared by energy expert Vishwa Bhushan Amatya for Practical Action Nepal Office showed that 300 CREEs are in operation serving more than 500000 households.

While the role of CREEs in expanding the grid electrification, together with reducing non-technical losses and creating local employment, is well recognized their sustainability has always been a question.

The report says that many of the CREEs are in a very bad financial shape. Only a few of them seem to balance their income and expense.

“The apprehension whether CREEs will further face the financial brunt due to new proposed domestic tariff that CREEs are supposed to collect from its customer and bulk tariff proposed for CREEs is not fully under-

tomers consuming less than 10 kWh of electricity. Consequently, about half of CREEs customer belongs to this group,” reads the report.

After the announcement of



Narayan Gyawali

new tariff, there is a growing concern on the financial aspect and the sustainability of CREEs. “We have already expressed our concerns about the change in tariff proposed by NEA and financial parts. The process the tariff went through was a major achievement. However, the recent tariff will have a negative implication on business and long-run sustainability of CREEs, which are the backbone to supply electricity to the poor, marginalized groups. Electricity tariff needs to be revised considering CREE’s sustainability as a micro utility,” said Narayan Gyawali, chairman of NACEUN. “NEA must readjust the tariff exempting 10-unit consumption of electricity by each of our members.”

“The free electricity up to 10-unit consumption is a major achievement of present tariff structures. This will support around 800,000 consumers of NEA. However, the current tariff will likely have a negative effect on the CREEs income and sustainability. All the members of CREEs are customers who are in the bracket of 10 units. As we are purchasing electricity in bulk from NEA for the distribution, NEA should exempt 10 units. At a time when the overhead cost is already high and many CREEs are facing financial trouble, the present unclear clauses of NEA will further damage CREEs,” said Gyawali.

### Practical Action

Practical Action-Nepal has been focusing on energy as an agent for



Even in the driest lands of Nepal, innovation in irrigation is leading to better livelihood. *Practical Action/Kishor Sharma*

Goal of 2030 is impossible without the engagement of CREEs and NACEUN. As the revenue generated through

stood and warrants an analysis. This is specifically more evident as new tariff proposed zero energy tariffs to cus-



transformation. In Nepal, it has been supporting people to harness the transformational power of clean, affordable energy and to reduce avoidable deaths caused by smoke from indoor stoves and fires.

Since its establishment in Nepal, Practical Action has been supporting construction of micro-hydro, improved cooking stoves, solar and wind power for off-grid region focusing to increase access to energy to marginalized communities and for women's empowerment.

Through its advocacy program, Practical Action-Nepal has been also been launching various programs including safety and health aspects at the grassroots level, supporting to strengthen CREEs institutional capability and providing technical support to regulatory and energy related institutions.

"We have been working closely with community, CREEs and TFC providing necessary support. We conducted a study on the first tariff presented by NEA. Had it been implemented, it would have more damaging effect on the community. The early draft was bad compared to the recent one. We also gave recommendations for the commission. They had not accepted all our recommendations but they incorporated our points in fixing the tariff," said Head of Energy Program at Practical Action, South Asia Regional Office.

With an aim to bring rural communities, energy service providers and decision makers together to put sustainable, clean energy solutions to work for the people who need them the most, Practical Action has recognized Community Rural Electricity Entities (CREEs) and their umbrella association National Association of Community Electricity Users Nepal (NACEUN) as important agents to facilitate affordable and reliable electricity supply for productive use of electricity and electric cooking.

#### Consultation process

Given its past practices to endorse the proposed tariff submitted by

Nepal Electricity Authority, the Tariff Fixing Commission (TFC) took a very different path to ensuring the participation and engagement of concerned stakeholders.

"There is still a long way to go. But what we have achieved this year is the ending of the monopoly of utility to decide tariff unilaterally without participation and engagement of the consumer," said Dilli Ghimire from Nepal Energy Foundation. Due to lockdown,

international development partners including The World Bank, USAID and Practical Action.

They consulted about the rationale and ground for fixing the new tariff and secured technical guidelines, learning from the process adopted in different countries of the world.

As a regulator, the commission listened to NEA's concerns, including its economic strength, as well as with the concerned stakeholders,



Nomads of Achham returning back homes after passing a long winter in low lands selling livestock depend on portable solar panels for energy supply. *Practical Action/Archana Gurung*

we were unable to discuss face to face, on a large scale, in the public hearing but TFC invited representatives from CREEs and women. It is good to see 10-unit of free electricity given to the poor and marginalized population but they don't talk much about community based institutions which are distributing the electricity, purchasing the bulk energy from NEA."

The TFC published the tariff through its website for discussion. The Commission also discussed the proposed tariff of NEA and sought clarifications and points to prove its demand to adjust the tariff.

They consulted various aspects of tariff with institutional level with FNCCI, CNI, NACEUN and other

particularly consumers. After this, they took the decision.

"For us, it was quite a difficult time to convince all stakeholders. We held a series of meeting with NEA seeking the justification for their proposed tariff. We studied all previous three years' financial reports of NEA. Similarly, we invited representatives from FNCCI, CNI, NACEUN and community groups. We took the decision looking at the government policies, economic health of NEA and communities' affordability," said Dr. Dhital.

"We are convinced that without increasing the access of electricity in rural areas we will not be achieving inclusiveness. Thus, the commission is determined on the need to provide free



Better livelihood means better future for the family and an entire generation to come. *Practical Action/Kishor Sharma*

electricity to the marginalized communities and subsidy for women-run small and micro enterprises, including agriculture. As the tariff proposed by NEA focused on its largest revenue customers but it had nothing for the largest numbers of small customers from rural areas. As we are concerned about equitable distribution, we invited all three voices and took a middle road to give 10-unit free electricity and subsidy in irrigation,” said Dhital. “The commission made public all the proceedings and discussions through its website in a transparent manner.

“Our plan was to hold the public hearing and consultations visiting all seven provinces. Our mobility and face to face interaction was restricted due to COVID-19. Despite all these I can claim the new tariff structure was announced while maintaining transparency, accountability in the process and ensuring the participations of all stakeholders,” said Dr. Dhital. “We received the technical support and advice from The World Bank, USAID and Practical Action to formulate the design. Similarly, Community Rural Electricity Entities (CREEs) and women groups gave us their recommendations. We have also consulted with private sectors, including FNCCI, CNI and IPAN.”

Despite their participation in the tariff fixation process, the voices of

communities are yet to be fully reflected on the new tariff. “This is an achievement as 800,000 consumers representing poor and marginalized group will receive free electricity up to 10 units. For the community organizations like ours which purchase bulk electricity from NEA, it remains to be seen how NEA can compensate us,” said Gyawali, chairman of National Association of Community Electricity Users Nepal (NACEUN).

Gyawali’s opinions have some valid reasons as many of the CREEs out of 300 existing are in a very bad financial shape. Only a few of them seem to be able to balance their income and expenses.

Another of this year’s success was to amend the original tariff proposed by NEA. With the pressure from community level organizations, NEA was forced to make many amendments during the consultation process.

Although the process of change was minimal, the precedents set this time were remarkable for the coming years.

With the support from Practical Action, Analysis of proposed electricity tariff and its implications on the operation of Community Rural Electricity Entities (CREEs) was conducted and it was handed over to the Commission. Had the first proposed tariff been endorsed, CREEs

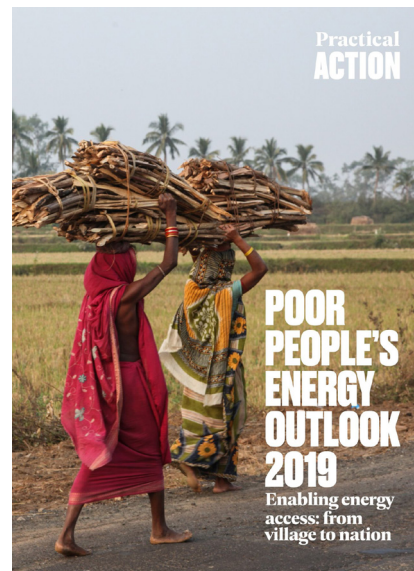
“The commission has not completely accepted recommendations of all our analysis but they took our several recommendations in announcing the new tariff,” said Pooja Sharma, Head of Energy Program at Practical Action, South Asia Regional Office.

In PPOE, we are saying inclusive does not only mean individuals but also institutions. We also focus on the community level organizations which have been part of electricity distribution at the community level. There are several Community Rural Electricity Entities (CREE), which have been distributing the electricity where there is no reach of NEA.”

They have good impacts at the local level but they are in minority in terms of their contribution to NEA’s revenue compared to big industrial houses.

Access to energy is the key for the social and economic transformation. It is equally important for the participation of community organizations ensuring quality supply in affordable tariff.

#### PPEO



The Poor People’s Energy Outlook series (PPEO) was launched in 2010 to shine a light on energy access from the perspectives of the poor. The series challenges the energy sector’s focus on energy resources, supply and large scale infrastructure projects; emphasizing instead that it is energy services which



matter most to poor people, and that decentralized approaches are the best way to achieve universal energy access.

Poor People's Energy Outlook (PPEO) 2019 is the culmination of five years' research, exploring what it takes to realize the kinds of energy services that enable people living in energy poverty to thrive. The report compiles and updates key messages and recommendations on energy access planning (PPEO 2016), financing (PPEO 2017) and delivering at scale, while also leaving no one behind (PPEO 2018).

It draws on primary research from community consultations in Bangladesh, Kenya and Togo, as well as analysis of energy access programs across Latin America, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa; considering how to ramp up energy access from small-scale interventions to national and global levels, to ensure that, with just a decade to go until our SDG7 deadline, the transformational power of energy is universally enjoyed.

The partnership with development organizations have helped develop these demand-side approaches and gender mainstreaming.

The idea is to invest in building the skills and experience of energy SMEs and future leaders, including supporting and empowering women.

Despite progress on certain fronts, the world is not on track to achieve universal energy access by 2030. At current progress rates, 650 million people will still lack electricity access by the end of the next decade. As the latest tracking report for Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG7) highlights, the outlook for clean cooking is even less promising, with over 2 billion people – mostly women – still expected to continue relying on inefficient stoves using dirty fuels. Along with health damage and gender imbalances, insufficient energy access means fewer business opportunities.

Many communities, consequently, will not be able to lift themselves out of poverty and create better lives and futures. Policymakers should note, how-

ever, that SDG7 is still achievable.

More finance is needed, especially for decentralized renewable energy to serve communities off the established

of their time on menial work that could be performed much more easily if energy were available, and safety concerns often prevent women from going out at night



Right skills need energy interventions to convert them into scalable ideas and ventures. *Practical Action/Archana Gurung*

power grid. In recent years, off-grid renewable energy solutions, including both stand-alone systems and local mini-grids, have emerged as a mainstream, cost-competitive option to expand electricity access.

Over the past three years, Practical Action's Poor people's energy outlook has considered planning, finance, and deployment opportunities that can help to meet the needs of vulnerable people, women, and the poorest, most remote communities. Based on a rich selection of case studies, the analysis draws on the organization's direct experience with energy access programs which place the priorities and perspectives of energy-poor communities at the heart.

In Nepal lack of access to modern energy services represents a pressing problem in the rural areas, particularly for women. According to a series of reports published by various programs, large numbers of women served by health facilities without electricity, and 99 percent of all deaths in childbirth occur with poor health facilities.

Many poor women spend much

where there are no streetlights.

Children suffer too – for the children living in remote parts of Nepal, primary schools lack electricity, and this can lead to markedly worse educational outcomes.

Integrated energy planning is key now. This includes grid and off-grid integration. Currently, there are separate regulations for both. The commission is just looking for grid not off-grid.

The current tariff though has much support to promote clean cooking and contribute to women's health. How can current electricity access and tariff benefit women? Mini-grid includes solar and micro hydro. How can we use them in dedicated productive use or enterprise?

There is the need to go for synchronization. Access to modern energy services might be improved through, among other approaches, establishing small-scale hydroelectric projects, facilitating the use of home solar systems, or providing grid electricity.



## ❁ PHOTO FEATURE ❁



An adolescent girl prepares firewood for her kitchen. *Practical Action/Kishor Sharma*



A woman from high hills in Bajura fills up water from a community tap for household use. *Practical Action/Kishor Sharma*



Traditional kitchen using open fire for cooking is one of the major factors leading to respiratory illness among women and young children. *Practical Action/Kishor Sharma*



Women in rural Nepal use maximum time in energy management which they could have used in more productive area or simply in taking a rest. *Practical Action/Kishor Sharma*



Improved and clean cooking also does a huge favour to the forests and natural resources. *Practical Action/Kishor Sharma*



Improved irrigation system contributes largely to better agriculture and enhanced nutrition intake. *Practical Action/Kishor Sharma*



## ❁ PHOTO FEATURE ❁



Even in the driest lands of Nepal, innovation in irrigation is leading to better livelihood. Practical Action/Kishor Sharma



Better livelihood means better future for the family and an entire generation to come. Practical Action/Kishor Sharma



Gravity Goods Ropeways that run only on gravitational force and are free of any carbon footprint are changing lives of many farmers in steepest hills of Nepal. Practical Action/Kishor Sharma



Productive use of energy giving birth to young entrepreneurs. Practical Action/EdoardoSantangelo



Manual food processing can be time consuming and tedious but young girls here save time through use of processing mill. Practical Action/EdoardoSantangelo



Nomads of Achham returning back homes after passing a long winter in low lands selling livestock depend on portable solar panels for energy supply. Practical Action/Archana Gurung



# Major Breakthrough

*As the country has been passing through a series of lockdowns, Tanahu Hydropower has made a breakthrough in 188 Meter Cable Tunnel*

By A CORRESPONDENT

Having long experiences of working in various positions in the major hydropower projects of the country, Pradip Kumar Thike, managing director of Tanahu Hydropower Limited, knows how to work quietly with the mission to achieve the target set by the project.

Since he was appointed the managing director of the company, the project has gone through several ups and downs. It faced a major debacle when Italian Contractor CMC left the country abruptly.

MD Thike quietly handled the problem. From conciliation of contract to retendering process, Thike worked in a low profile, completing the process of retendering and selection of a new contractor.

At a time when the country has been passing through series of lockdown and obstruction of movement created by the spread of COVID-19, Tanahu Hydropower Project has achieved a major milestone. The project has made a breakthrough in 188 long cable-tunnel, a critical part of the project to start the excavation of powerhouse.

“Congratulation along with sincere appreciation to all involved for the breakthrough of cable tunnel as the achievement of the first milestone of the project despite the current exceptional circumstance of Covid-19,” writes Managing Director Pradip Kumar Thike, Tanahu Hydropower Limited, in his Facebook wall.

Not only for MD Thike, the breakthrough of the tunnel, is one of the major achievements for the people

involved in the project during the period of crisis.

The project was at the right time one time. However, following scrapping the contract with CMC di Ravenna, Italy in April 2019, the project had to start the contract bidding process from scratch.

The procurement of Package 1(Head works) has been significantly delayed due to unavoidable termination of the Contract with CMC di Ravenna, Italy and the rejection of all bids received for the re-bidding, being substantially non-responsive to the requirements of bidding documents.

After the re-invitation of Re-bid II on 28 February 2020 and the opening of bids on 06 July 2020, the evaluation of technical bids is underway with the support from the Project Supervision Consultant (PSC).

Although the contract works for package one is under the final process of selection, Chinese contractor Sino Hydro Corporation has been working in the site under the package 2, on powerhouse construction, procurement of hydro-mechanical and electro-mechanical equipment.

With his experience of working in a number of hydropower projects, MD Thike, handled it all when the company was involved in lengthy process of publication of bidding, technical evaluation and so on.

Following the evaluation of the bid, the project has already submitted the technical bid evaluation report to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for concurrence on 5 August 2020. Now the project is waiting for



Pradip Thike

the clearance before signing the agreement.

Under the package one construction, the work includes the construction of a 140-meter high dam, cofferdams, two river diversion tunnels and other structures.

The \$550-million project is being built with a credit facility extended by the Asian Development Bank (\$150 million), Japan International Cooperation Agency (\$184 million), European Investment Bank (\$85 million) and investment amounting to \$87 million from the electricity authority and government.

The Tanahu Hydropower Project, one of the biggest reservoir-type projects in the country, is projected to generate massive 587.7-gigawatt-hours in the first 10 years of operation. The project can generate energy for six hours daily during the dry season.

The project aims to complete



the construction of the storage type project and generate electricity by June 2024. With the length of cable tunnel, 188 meters, it helps excavation upfront of the underground powerhouse. Works at the Cable Tunnel have been resumed since 10 July 2020.

Along with this, the work including excavation and support works including steel rib installation have

at access platform to the feeder station is being continued. Both batching plant and site laboratory remain in operation during this month.

In the warehouse, normal metal works as well as fabrication of reinforcement cages for the construction of access to feeder station and steel ribs are being carried out.

The maintenance of upper

arrived at the site.

The storage type project is envisaged to have an installed capacity of 140 MW with an estimated annual energy generation of 590 GWh. The Project is designed for at least six hours of peaking operation.

As per the Project Administration Manual(PAM), the total finan-



been continued in the Main Access Tunnel (MAT) with length 365 meter. However, due to the weak geological condition, the heading and benching method has been adopted causing the slow progress of the works.

The Contractor also resumed the works at the Tailrace Outlet Portal. Excavation along with the supports works have been performed for the upper most 12m of the outlet portal.

The erection of crusher plant was completed after final testing for optimizing on 2 July 2020. The Construction of earthen side drain was completed, whereas the gabion works

left bank access road to the dam site has been continued to provide an access to the geological drilling at the location of plunge pool. The geological core drilling work for the second drilling point was completed.

In access road to surge tank, works on cross drain and slope monitoring for landslide have been continued above the crusher plant. The construction of a store building was completed and the work of another store building is started behind the THL camp facilities. The first lot of permanent rocks anchors required for the powerhouse crown supports was

cial cost of the project was estimated to be 505 MUSD as of January 2013 for which the funding arrangements have been made after signing the respective loan agreements with ADB, JICA and EIB. THL has also concluded the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with NEA on 29 June 2018 as a maiden PPA for storage type hydro-power projects.

THL and KEC International Limited, India signed the Contract Agreement for Package 3 (220 kV Transmission Line) on 25 December 2018. The Contractor completed the detail and check survey along the TL





alignment and the geological investigation at the tower locations.

Upon successful testing of DB/DC Type Towers at the Contractor's testing laboratory, the design of DB Type tower has been approved by the PSC. The Contractor has started delivering the Tower Stubs, ACSR Conductor, Earth wire and Insulators to the site.

The tree enumeration works for Tanahu district has been completed, whereas the District Administration Office of Tanahu, following the decision of the Compensation Determination Committee, has published a notice for land acquisition as required for tower foundation works within the district.

## Impact of COVID-19

Following the imposition of national lockdown to prevent the spreading of pandemic COVID-19 by the Government of Nepal on 24 March 2020, the Package 2 Contractor, after notification of the Force Majeure event, suspended all site activities except for the submission of the design/drawing documents of the Works under the Contract.

The Package 3 Contractor also, after notification of the Force Majeure event, stopped the

survey and tree enumeration works but continued submission of the design documents to the Engineer for review and approval.

After the Nepal government's decision on 02 April 2020 in relation to resumption of the construction works of national priority projects maintaining the required health and safety regulation at work places, THL organized a co-ordination meeting with representatives from the district administration office, the district police office and the local authorities.

The meeting chaired by the Chief District Officer (CDO) of Tanahu District agreed to carry out the construction activities of the project with the use of workers residing inside the camp.

The package 2 contractor resumed the limited site activities maintaining the health and safety protocols of the GON, whereas the Package 3 Contractor resumed tree enumeration works in Tanahu district.

Everything is going on smoothly as MD Thike has been working in a low profile to push his work forward.





# Covid -19 And The Rule Of Law In Nepal



BY: NAMIT WAGLEY

*Navigating the uncertain crisis and leading a stable recovery will hinge upon Nepal's ability to strike a balance between protection against the virus and protection of the rule of law.*

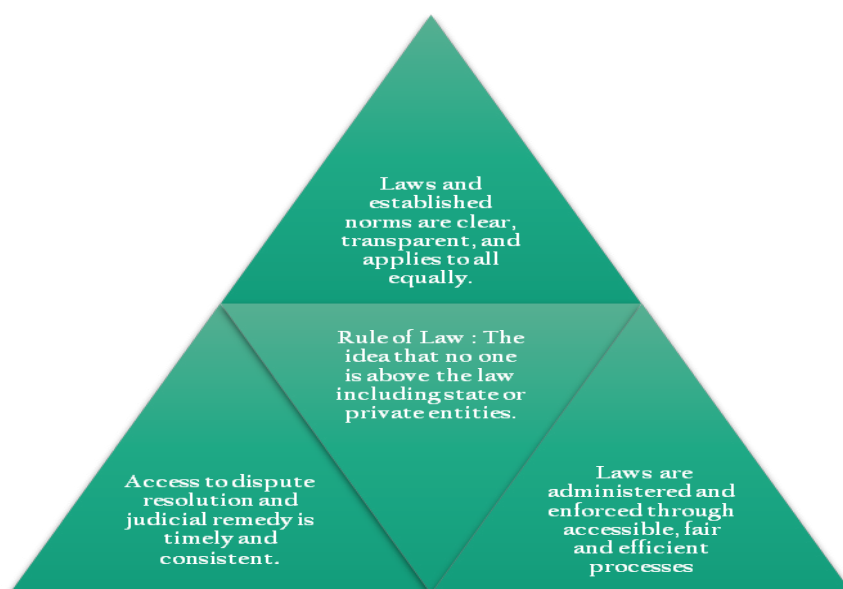
Eight months after the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Nepal, the pandemic rages on with little respite for the state or its citizens. With infection rates and death toll on the rise, Nepal's struggle to flatten the curve is not only frustrating – resorting to repeated imposition of lockdown with no discernible effect – but also a serious public health concern. Beneath the lackluster performance in managing public health crisis, particularly disconcerting is Nepal government's apathy towards the rule of law. Empirical evidence suggests causal correlation between rule of law and public health. Meaningful progress in rule of law will create structural barriers to an already stretched public health response. During these testing times, navigating the uncertain crisis and leading a stable recovery will hinge upon Nepal's ability to strike a balance between protection against the virus and protection of the rule of law.

## What is the rule of law?

The pandemic has struck Nepal in the midst of a governance transition of historic proportions. Emerging out of the devastating earthquake in 2015, the country had been on a slow but steady march transitioning into an uncharted federal structure. With successful federal, provincial and local elections in 2017, the country and its newly elected representatives were poised to cement the building blocks for more responsive and effective governance as well as more inclusive economic development.

However, progress on these fronts had fallen short of the expectations of many. Alarming, in the years leading up to the pandemic, evidence continued to mount signaling a gradual erosion of adherence to global principles of good governance, human rights and rule of law. The pandemic has certainly accelerated the backsliding in Nepal at a time when the country stands at a crossroad.

As the country grappled with the harsh reality of dealing with yet another crisis, all the ingredients that undermine the rule of law became evident. Like many countries around the globe, in March 2020, Nepal government responded with a countrywide lockdown and a forceful presence of security actors. The distribution of emergency aid, medical supplies, and relief packages provided ample opportunity for corruption and fraud. Infringements to individual rights guaranteed by the Constitution became second nature. Often these infringements went beyond what was necessary, adequate or proportional to the situation. Prison overcrowding, unmanaged quarantines, case backlog in the justice system, unequal access to health care and social services exacerbated systemic challenges already faced by vulnerable groups. Restrictions on



movement stranded thousands of migrant and daily wage workers longing to return home. Reports of increased domestic violence, communal unrest and gender-based violence surged. Closed courthouses delayed and cancelled proceedings, postponed trials and judicial scrutiny risked further erosion of constraints on government powers.

Fast-forward five months, Nepal government would have emerged unscathed from scrutiny had it managed to keep the crisis under

## VIEWPOINT

control. Concerns of shrinking civic space, rule of law erosion and corruption would've been swept under the rug with narratives of success stories and effective leadership stealing the limelight. Unfortunately, Nepal has neither been able to contain the pandemic, nor has it been able to halt the rule of law erosion. In fact, sustained effect of the pandemic and lethargy in response threatens irreversible damage not only to physical integrity and life of people but Nepal's quest for democratic stability and economic prosperity.

Despite the gloomy state of affairs, there are three beacons of hope: One, demonstrated by many countries around the globe, the pandemic provides an opportunity to formulate rapid and radical policy changes. Fortunately, this aligns with Nepal's current priority and pressing need to draft (and amend) dozens of policies – such as emergency powers, police/security sector reform and combatting gender-based violence – to implement the new Constitution. The foundation has been laid by a progressive Constitution that safeguards democratic values, human rights and rule of law. However, as key actors maneuver and reposition their interests and power in the evolving landscape, Nepal will need to garner sufficient political will and ensure policy reform is informed by evidence and information providing a clear understanding of the complex changes and ground realities. Meaningful participation of citizens, civil society, and private sector in policy making will be equally important to avoid decisions made in haste and/or purely based on individual or institutional incentives and power. Ultimately, rule of law requires willing citizens and criminological research suggests that people will only be willing if they feel that the law is fair, applies to all equally as well as transparently and proportionate to the circumstances.

Second, just as the need to address justice concerns rose, justice providers around the world have had to either limit or close operations. The impact of this has been particularly devastating to the vulnerable popula-

tions. As countries struggle to respond to increasing access to justice concerns, positive examples such as – shift to digital technology, adoption of community/alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and expansion of legal aid support have demonstrated the efficacy of broadening conventional justice pathways for citizens. Nepal is fortunate to have a relatively strong alternative dispute resolution, traditional or community-based justice system that can help reduce the burden on formal judicial mechanisms. During the pandemic, these community-based networks displayed an important role in coordinating containment strategies, sharing health information and distributing relief to communities. While tailored digital technology remains a distant dream, for now, a more robust investment in community led mechanisms and institutional will is required to make access to judicial remedies more responsive to the needs of citizens in terms of time, cost, and efficiency. The benefits will be particularly significant for the poor, women, and vulnerable groups.

Third, it is no secret that parliaments and executive bodies look to expand their powers during times of emergency. Some countries allow this exception, albeit with a sunset provision, to enable governments to adopt extraordinary measures to combat a crisis. However, more often than not, this exception leads to outcry of misuse of authority and impunity for power-holders. In times of crisis, legitimacy of key institutions of restraint – mainly media and judicial bodies – becomes even more crucial in balancing the rule of law equation with key institutions of representation – legislative and executive bodies. Like many other developing nations, Nepal is not immune to attempts of curtailing press freedom and judicial independency by the legislative and executive. Fake news and excessive judicial overreach have become the mantra for government and ruling political class obsessed with shoring-up their political agendas, stifling opposition and silencing critical overview. Granted, the media and judicial bodies in Nepal are not devoid

of controversies, politicization or mismanagement. In contrast, somewhat ironically, they garner much larger public trust than institutions that directly represent the people – i.e. legislative and executive bodies. During the pandemic, as bastions of the public will, media and judiciary have often been at loggerheads with parliamentary and government enforced initiatives. Dozens of Supreme Court orders, media coverage of excessive force by police and corruption have compelled the government to change tact. Despite this, timely implementation remains a challenge. Therefore, maintaining public trust and integrity of these institutions of restraint is indispensable for Nepal's maturing democratic process and rule of law. Simultaneously, strengthening strategic alliances between the media and judiciary may seem counterintuitive but has the potential to exert more pressure on institutions of representation to curb their expansionist approach and be accountable to the public.

In 2016, President Obama stressed that “one of the challenges of a democratic government is making sure that even in the midst of emergencies and passions, we make sure that rule of law and the basic precepts of justice and liberty prevail.” These words ring true more now than ever. If history has taught us anything, for better or for worse, the world will not be the same after the pandemic. Consequently, Nepal will not be the same either. History has also shown that countries with a strong rule of law foundations tend to recover faster following a crisis. If Nepal wants to be on the right side of history, it needs to strike the right balance between protection against the virus and protection of the rule of law. The question is whether we can learn our lessons and do what needs to be done. Otherwise, further erosion will certainly spell trouble and risk Nepal drifting back into political instability just as it is trying to emerge out of it.

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## ECONOMY

# BOP Surplus

*At a time when all other economic indicators are going down, Nepal has recorded a surplus BOP due to increased remittances*

By A CORRESPONDENT

At a time when almost all economic indicator of Nepal are performing badly, there is good news as well. With the departure of Dr. Yubaraj Khatiwada from Ministry of Finance after serving two and a half years, there is no one in the driving seat to steer the national economy.

As Nepal's import continues to decline due to lockdown, Balance of Payments (BOP) has recorded a surplus of Rs.282.41 billion in the review year. There was a deficit of Rs.67.4 billion in the previous year.

Gross foreign exchange reserves increased by 34.9 per cent to Rs.1401.84 billion in mid-July 2020 from Rs.1038.92 billion in mid-July 2019.

According to annual macroeconomic update of fiscal year 2019-20 of Nepal Rastra Bank, domestic credit expanded by 13.6 per cent in the review year compared to a growth of 21.1 per cent in the previous year. Claims on private sector increased by 12.6 per cent in the review year compared to a growth of 19.1 per cent the previous year.

According to the NRB report, the current account deficit — a measurement of a country's trade where the value of the goods and services it imports exceeds the value of the products it exports — decreased 87.9 per cent to Rs 32.06 billion in the review year from Rs 265.36 billion in the previous year.

In the external sector, merchandise exports inched up by 0.6 per cent to Rs 97.71 billion in fiscal 2019-20 compared to an increase of 19.4 per cent in 2018-19. Meanwhile, merchandise imports decreased by 15.6 per cent to Rs 1,196.80 billion against an increase of 13.9 per cent in the previous fiscal.

Consequently, the trade deficit narrowed down 16.8 per cent to Rs 1,099.09 billion in the review year.

mid-July—the last month of the last fiscal year—that boosted the overall earnings.

Remittance inflows dropped by a marginal 0.5 percent in the last fiscal year that ended mid-July, despite popular labour markets in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Malaysia being severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic that left millions of expat workers with no choice but to pack their bags and leave.

According to the Nepal Rastra Bank's latest annual macroeconomic report, Nepali migrant workers sent home Rs 875.03 billion in the last fiscal year. The report shows that Nepal received an all-time high remittance of Rs 100.16 billion during the last month of the fiscal year (mid-June to mid-July) that boosted the overall remittance earning.

The central bank said that the number of Nepali workers seeking

Such deficit had expanded 13.5 per cent in the previous year.

Capital transfer decreased by 8.1 per cent to Rs.14.21 billion and net foreign direct investment (FDI) increased by 49.1 per cent to Rs.19.48 billion. In the previous year, capital transfer and net FDI amounted to Rs.15.46 billion and Rs.13.06 billion respectively.

In the meantime, Nepal received Rs 100.16 billion in remittance, an all-time high during mid-June to

approval for foreign employment decreased by 20.5 percent to 193,945 individuals in the review period. Similarly, the number of Nepali workers (renewed entry) seeking approval for foreign employment decreased 34.7 percent to 177,980 individuals in the last fiscal year.

Although remittances supported maintaining Nepal's BoP, other economic indicators are going down further. The coming days are challenging for Nepal in all economic fronts.



## ECONOMY

# Growth 1.5 Percent

*ADB forecasts Nepal's economy to grow 1.5 Percent In FY2021*

By A CORRESPONDENT

Nepal's economy is anticipated to grow by 1.5% in fiscal year (FY) 2021 from the preliminary estimate of 2.3% in FY2020, says the latest Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2020 Update, a flagship publication of the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

"After strong growth in recent years, Nepal's economy will see further slump as a result of decline in exports, remittances, and tourist income, and the stringent measures to contain the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, even as the lockdowns have gradually eased. Expected sharp economic downturn in neighboring India, Nepal's predominant trade partner, will also dent Nepal's growth prospects," said ADB Country Director for Nepal Mukhtor Khamudkhanov. "Growth may decline further if the containment period prolongs with periodic lockdowns in major hot-spots and consequent restrictions in economic activities through this fiscal year."

According to the Nepal Macroeconomic Update, which was also released recently, agriculture growth may rise as paddy yield is expected to increase on the back of normal monsoon. Nonetheless, delay in timely procurement of fertilizers may dampen potential agriculture growth. Industrial output will diminish reflecting a contraction in manufacturing and slowdown in construction. Service growth will



be significantly lower with sluggish trade and as international tourism remains largely closed for the time being despite the reopening of regular international flights on 1 September.

The ADO 2020 Update says inflation is projected to moderate to an average of 5.5% in FY2021, down from 6.2% in FY2020, assuming a good harvest, modest oil prices, and subdued nonfood prices on weak domestic demand.

The current account deficit is expected to widen from -0.9% of gross domestic product in FY2020 to -1.9% a year later as import growth marginally picks up and remittance inflows decline owing to a slowdown in global demand from this crisis.

Downside risks to the outlook center on longer-than-anticipated stringent containment measures

that may be necessary to contain the COVID-19 spread. A delayed economic recovery in advanced economies in 2021 may further dent prospects for employment of Nepali migrant workers, undermining remittance inflows and Nepal's external position. With the uncertain return of businesses to pre-COVID-19 normalcy anytime soon, non-performing loans in the banking system may pose some risks to financial stability under a prolonged containment period.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.



# Why We Need Smarter, Targeted Subsidies To Promote Solar Irrigation?



BY: LABISHA UPRETY AND DR. VISHNU PRASAD PANDEY

The pandemic is forcing thousands of migrant workers to return home to Nepal. While this sudden influx of citizens presents an economic challenge—particularly since Nepal earns 28% of its GDP from migrant workers' remittances—it may also provide an avenue for long-term prosperity. COVID-19 has reignited the debate on food security amid concerns about the volatility of import prices. By breathing new life into Nepal's agricultural sector, the returnees could help our nation achieve greater self-reliance in food production. The newly unveiled 2020/21 budget for Nepal demonstrates the Government's continued interest in promoting agriculture; NPR 27.96 billion has been set aside for irrigation alone.

Given this situation, the time is ripe to promote useful, efficient and inclusive technology that can help small-holder farmers to maximize production. And, with the Government's growing interest in clean energy, promoting renewable energy technology like solar pumps for irrigation makes much sense. Since their emergence globally in the late 1970s, solar irrigation pumps (SIPs) have become progressively more affordable through decreasing production costs and increasing demand. They are superior to diesel pumps as they only require sunlight for fuel, have limited maintenance costs, and are lighter and easier to maneuver in Nepal's rough terrains. Aside from supporting crop production, pumping groundwater with SIPs in the pre-monsoon period could help to reduce the risk of floods by lowering water tables in countries like Nepal where much of groundwater remains underexploited.

Currently, the Government subsidizes solar pumps to a maximum of 60% of the equipment's cost, with variations in payment amounts linked to geographical remoteness. The mechanism through which it does this is the 2016 Renewable Energy Subsidy Policy. Since then, when the Policy was launched, the Alternative En-

ergy Promotion Center (AEPC) has helped farmers install nearly 1,400 SIPs, deployed mostly in the Terai region. The subsidy is usually delivered via private vendors, which help farmers complete their applications, install the equipment and monitor its use. An early assessment of the Policy's effects concluded that, while it was a promising intervention, it could be more effective if payments were better targeted, there was a greater focus on gender and inclusion, and local governments were actively involved in applying and overseeing it.

The subsidy upper limit of 60% is not based on a market-oriented understanding of farmers' needs. So, while the Policy has definitely helped to increase the uptake of solar pumps, only farmers who can afford to

pay the remaining 40% of the cost of the technology have been able to benefit from the initiative. Poorer small-holder farmers, especially women and the marginalized are still far from its reach. Their lack of social and economic capital prevents them from accessing both information about the technology and financing mechanisms that would en-

able them to invest in it. Meanwhile, criteria such as the need for applicants to have land registered in their name exclude many women and tenant farmers, with no land entitlements, from participating in the scheme.

So, how might we best overcome these challenges? First, the subsidy provisions should be targeted to those who cannot otherwise afford the technology. This calls for a deeper understanding of the different ways in which men and women, occupying varying socio-economic conditions, use energy. Intense data and research related to gender and social inclusion is required to fill this pervasive gap in our policies and programs.

Second, financing models are needed to support 'fee-for-water' and 'rent-to-own' irrigation-provision

**There needs to be greater emphasis on gender and social inclusion. Nepal's newer renewable energy policies and strategies have shown some sensitivity in this regard but it often relates to women's traditional roles**

## PROSPECTIVE

models. In the fee-for-water model, a local private-sector actor buys solar irrigation equipment and sells water to farmers, enabling small-scale farmers to access water without buying their own pump. Water prices would need to be lower than those currently charged. With the rent-to-own model, a farmer pays a portion of the cost upfront and signs a water-sale agreement scheduling regular future payments. Once all the payments have been made, the farmer owns the equipment. Both of these models have been successfully demonstrated by private players in Nepal.

Models where a higher subsidy is provided for smaller pumps, or where market innovation is encouraged to decrease the cost of technology on the supply side, could also be worth considering. Furthermore, a performance-based subsidy—where stipulations are set for a minimum number of SIPs to be installed and operated, to defined performance standards—could invite competitive proposals from private-service vendors. Concerning the 40% capital cost, microfinance providers are often the go-to lending institutions for farmers; these could offer lower credit interest to economically challenged farmers to help them afford the technology.

Third, there needs to be greater emphasis on gender and social inclusion. Nepal's newer renewable energy policies and strategies have shown some sensitivity in this regard but it often relates to women's traditional roles, such as security and health concerns around collecting and using fuel wood, and applying renewable energy technologies, such as SIPs, to reduce the burden of women's work. This is no doubt important; with the growing 'feminization' of agricultural labor in the country, women's share of work in the fields has increased dramatically. However, focusing only on provision of labor-saving energy technologies for women is not enough. A better approach is to empower women by increasing access to economic and decision-making opportunities related to energy. However, more research is needed to identify effective ways to do this.

Some projects, including initiatives led by ICI-MOD, have shown that awarding higher subsidies on SIPs for women-owned land has created more incentive to transfer land in the name of women. Land ownership, with its ties to decision-making rights at the household and community levels, remains a valuable asset across most of South Asia. Larger-scale experiments are needed to assess the effects of awarding additional subsidies on SIPs to applicants who transfer land or assets to woman. Energy organizations could support women and marginalized groups, who are currently disproportionately represented within the sector, to access technical information about both SIPs and groundwater governance in general. Small

but important developments such as being able to speak with female technicians could help rural women feel at ease when seeking information on agricultural technology, its use and maintenance.

The use of SIPs alone will not automatically create profitable farmers because successful smallholder irrigation is based on three inter-related components: water access, water distribution and productive resource use. The support in accessing groundwater that SIPs provide needs to be combined with suitable water-distribution systems, the ability to grow high-value crops, and use of fertilizers and other inputs, for farmers to make best use of the technology. Attention must also be paid to factors such as market-access and linkages, and the optimal use of water extracted and energy generated.

Current concerns about food security in Nepal are related more to the disruption of supply chains than the lack of available produce. Agriculture remains a national priority, and the present mass reverse-migration will reduce previous labor constraints.

However, our farmers will soon need to compete once more with cheaper Indian food imports, which are why they must be supported with better technology, and access to seeds for profitable crops.

Local governments, which have been granted large responsibilities concerning local agriculture and irrigation schemes, could play a key role here. While AEPC remains central in renewable energy policy formulation, local governments could be supported by the Center to formulate and implement small-scale renewable energy plans for pro-poor and gender-inclusive projects. They could also create policies within the existing framework, as per their mandate, to better target beneficiaries.

Civil society actors could work with local governments to develop knowledge products regarding SIPs, disseminate information about obtaining subsidies far and wide, and train local government staff in the use and adoption of the technology. Simple developments by local governments, such as translating AEPC's literature into the local language, and reaching out to marginalized farmers to encourage them to opt into the subsidy scheme, could mean that the Renewable Energy Subsidy Policy not only increases renewable technology uptake but does so by reaching the most vulnerable households.

*Uprety and Dr. Pandey are Research Officer and Regional Researcher at the International Water Management Institute in Nepal, respectively.*

**First, the subsidy provisions should be targeted to those who cannot otherwise afford the technology. This calls for a deeper understanding of the different ways in which men and women, occupying varying socio-economic conditions, use energy.**



## MELAMCHI

# Deadline 2021

*Given the current pace of work, it is likely that Melamchi will start distribution of water by January 2021*

By A CORRESPONDENT

For over 20 years, people of Kathmandu Valley have been waiting to see the water from Melamchi in their taps. Had not it seen the tunnel gate damage in July, the water would have reached to Kathmandu now.

Learning from the mistakes of last July, Melamchi Water Development Board is taking all precautionary measures not to repeat such accident again drawing, all its attention in the project sites in finishing work in tunnel and installing all the gates from inside.

The accident was reportedly caused due to error in the knot bolts used to lock the adit bulkhead door. The door had been tightened with 30 knot bolts. The knot bolts got slipped due to the water pressure, which unbolted the door.

A main reason for the failure of the gate is that it is known that the door opened into the adit, rather than into the main waterway. Had it been installed to open into the waterway, it would have been self-locked by the water pressure. The water pressure instead pushed the adit door open.

As the process of changing gate from outside the tunnel to inside, the board has already revised its schedule of testing and commissioning tunnel. The project is planning to start testing and commissioning of tunnel from November.

Led by Secretary Madhav Belbase, a highly qualified and experienced engineer, the Ministry of Drinking Water has been taking careful preparation. Backed by Minister of Drinking Water Bina Magar, who is eager to achieve a major success in her career, highly professional teams have been carefully working to complete Melamchi Mission.

"As testing and commission-

ing hydraulics and operating mechanical equipment will take at least 50 days, the distribution of water from Melamchi will start only by the end of January 2021. Along with construction of head works, the grouting and gate installation work is currently underway which will complete by the end of October," Secretary Madhav Belbase told New Spotlight.

According to sources, the technical teams also discovered leakage in some parts of tunnel close to the gate which was outburst during testing and commissioning in July.

With all these technical reasons, the much-awaited Melamchi Drinking Water Supply Project is likely to take three more months for its completion. The project is given the deadline of November to complete the remaining tasks.

The Ministry of Water Supply had targeted to complete the project last year but it could not be materialized due to many reasons including change in the construction framework which led to delay in canal preparation due to technical

problems.

The Ministry officials shared that they were planning to bring water in Kathmandu valley from the project at any cost but the adit tunnel at Aambathan was damaged, causing human casualties in July in the project site.

Now, technicians are working out to mend the past mistakes to develop



a new gateway by adopting new technology which is taking more days to complete.

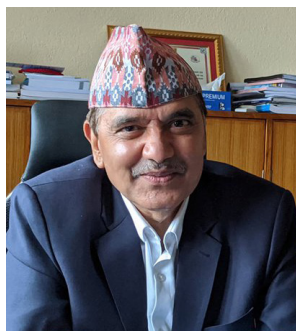
According to Spokesperson at the Ministry Ritesh Kumar Shakya, about a month will take to join the frame in the site.

He added that the test for the water supply could start only in November after the course correction of all technical errors.

The 27.5km long Melamchi raw water supply tunnel to bring fresh water to Kathmandu city in Nepal is close to being finished and inaugurated. Excavation is complete, the upstream run-of-the-river diversion weir and intake structure is about 80 percent complete and work is progressing at the downstream infrastructure on a sedimentation facility before directing raw water into a new treatment plant.

The project aims to supply 170 million liters of fresh water/day to the capital city.

There are a total of 29 control gates for the operation of the water supply tunnel including five 12.5m<sup>2</sup> adit bulkhead gates with a radial gate at the intake and a control gate at the downstream end. The gates for the project are designed, supplied and imported to Nepal and installed by a company from India.



# Swadeshi Char Lakshya



BY: HEMANG DIXIT

On Kushe Aunshi, the other day I saw in a National English Daily, a slogan regarding a Nepali household furnishing product stating “Swadeshi finance, Swadeshi labour, Swadeshi produce and Swadeshi use”. As this is a rather long slogan I shall henceforth repeat it as Swadeshi Char Lakshya. This slogan is one I feel is what should be proclaimed all over the country as a guideline for action in all spheres of our lives in this post Corona era. It may be remembered too that this call for Swadeshi use was utilised successfully by Mahatma Gandhi in his successful effort of getting independence for India from the British. After independence in 1947 there was a call by the leaders in India to support the country’s own products and to utilise Swadeshi goods such as Khaddar for daily use. After self sufficiency in domestic production and improved sophistication, much has changed in India. Our Northern neighbour used the drab blue fabric to make suits for everyone, tightened their belt and deprived themselves of many luxuries for a number of years. It is after such years of fortitude that it is now making almost everything for the world. These are ideals our leaders should pick up. Our current leaders, if they have the welfare of the country at heart, should publicise the enumerated four ideals of Swadeshi Char all over the country for the process of recovery in this post Covid-19 era. Sadly they seem to be worrying more about the gold plated insignias that they will wear on their coat lapels!

In this post pandemic stage, the future of Nepal is literally at the cross roads. In spite of having an almost 2/3 majority, the ruling party, has not been able to achieve much for the country. Megalomania, incompetence and corruption are what is seen everywhere at a time when all Nepalis, irrespective of their station in life are in difficulties, having to cope with the effects of the Corona virus. The pandemic, though it had a slow beginning in Nepal is currently at a stage when a sudden surge like that of USA, Brazil, India and South Africa will take place here also and lead to loss of many Nepali lives. The aftermath of such an event will be calamitous.

I do not know if it was real, but I saw a post the other day in FB showing an alleged production of Phurindana in Nepal. What was displayed was a large heap of the eatable product on the floor, with another worker sitting on the ground and doing the packing. An inset showed the upturned sole of the foot of a worker with some bakheta & bhujia stuck or imbedded in it. Whether it was a reality of a ‘Fake posting’ possible in this Kaliyug age, I cannot say. I felt however that as many persons as possible should be aware of such happenings and so I promptly shared it to my friends. Was it right to do so? After all such actions can be done by producers of such similar products in Nepal or by competitors who import such goods from outside of Nepal. What one has to realise that in this age of competition anything is possible and everything is fair to the extent as they say: “All is fair, as in love and war”.

This brought a smile to my face when I recalled a scene in a very famous film ‘Hercules’, many years ago. It showed peo-

ple trampling grapes to make wine! My second thought was regarding the introduction of ‘Pauroti’ in our Nepali setting when it was rumoured that the flour for the loaf was kneaded by the foot or ‘Pau’ in the process of making bread!

The implementation of the Consumer Act is supposed to check if the food that is being sold to us has been made in hygienic conditions or not. A couple of years ago, some of its officials went around and checked factories and shops in the mit-thai or sweets trade. Many of the factory sites or kitchens were unhygienic and so the sweetmeat / mitthias were not sold. Whether they subsequently ended up as gundhpak, one does not know. A reality these days is the innumerable eating places along the way but one is not sure of the conditions in which preparation is done. One option would be for local authorities to have food courts along highways to ensure that food preparation is under hygienic conditions that does not cause digestive upsets. Over the years the packing and packing of food products has improved but authorities concerned should ensure that this is done in proper fashion. This is essential as the styles and modes of living in Nepal have changed drastically. A large percentage of Nepalis are spending more on eating and wearing better. The government has recently set up a Food and Drug Administration. Let’s hope for its effectiveness.

One recalls that at one time the garment and carpet industries had been functioning well but not so now. A number of concerns are currently producing both male and female apparels both for export and internal use. It will perhaps be beneficial to use locally patented names and try to create a market. One notes that this has been done with some success in the case of footwear.

Similar products from out of the country, by efforts of the importers enter the country at the cost of the local produce. This should be discouraged for it is disheartening that products made in Nepal are not being sold in the country as cheaper products, because of mass production are brought in from outside. The Nepali returnees must be helped to fit in once again into their cultural milieu and start life afresh.

As I said in these columns in July 2020, we ‘Aam Nepalis’ must support Nepali returnees from all over the world to settle down in their own country and by way agriculture or small-scale industries produce various types of products of produced which are consumed / used in this country. We the others in this land must have imbedded in our mind the phrase, “Buy Nepali to support Nepal”. The concept of Swadeshi Char Lakshya should be implemented if we are to get out of the pandemic rut of 2020. How long the effect of this will last is anyone’s guess.

*The author writes fiction under the name of Mani Dixit. Website: [www.hdixit.org.np](http://www.hdixit.org.np). Twitter: @manidixithd*



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