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**VIEWPOINT**  
Dr. Tilak Rawal



**OPINION**  
Dipak Gyawali



**FORUM**  
Dr. Prabin Manandhar

# NEW SPOTLIGHT

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March 12, 2021  
FORTNIGHTLY

KATHMANDU-TERAI/MADEHSH EXPRESSWAY

# Fast Progress

## INSIDE



**COURT VERDICT**  
PM Oli In Command



**COVAX FACILITY**  
First Batch To Nepal



**EU SUPPORT TO BUNGAMATI**  
Reviving Tradition



“महाशिवरात्री तथा सेना दिवस-२०७७”

को हार्दिक मंगलमय

शुभकामना





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For prime minister and chairman of CPN-UML KP Sharma Oli, the recent decision of Supreme Court to annul the unification of two communist parties was a major victory. Weakened politically following the apex court's decision to revive the House of Representatives, Prime Minister Oli has suddenly turned into the strongest personality in Nepali politics. The decision of the apex court has revived the two communist parties with their earlier position. With the court's verdict, formerly CPN-UML leaders Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jhalnath Khanal and others have decided to return to the old fold led by KP Sharma Oli. This move has separated Nepal's alliance with Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda. As the verdict of the court unfolded the new political scenario in the country, one can see many new political alliances in coming days within two communist parties. In the current political drama, Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba, who has been accused by his critics as power hungry, has also strengthened his position further. Although there are so many new developments likely to emerge, we have focused this issue on development agenda. From the sustainable green city development of Bungmati under European Union support to Japanese scholars' opinion on Nepal, we have had a wide coverage of different issues. As Nepal Army is celebrating Army Day, we also have a special story on Nepal's Army efforts to accelerate the construction work of the fast track.

**Keshab Poudel**

Editor



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# International Women's Day: Gender Equality In COVID-19 Response



BY: DR. PRABIN MANANDHAR

Violence against women and girls takes place across the world in normal times. Even before COVID-19 existed, domestic violence was already one of the greatest human rights violations. There are reports that in the previous 12 months, 243 million women and girls (aged 15-49) across the world have been subjected to sexual or physical violence by an intimate partner. Similarly, progress toward equality in work and society has stayed relatively flat in the five years between 2014 and 2019.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, during self or home quarantine, this number has significantly grown with multiple impacts on women's wellbeing, their mental and physical health, and their ability to participate and lead in the recovery of society. According to a UN report, countries have experienced an average 30% increase in calls to domestic violence helplines since the start of the pandemic.

Loss of income, harmful social norms or traditional practices, lack of health services (including reproductive health), and lack of safe shelter for GBV survivors are among some of the top reported GBV risks. However, the magnitude of violence against women and girls indicates that GBV is not just an isolated incidence, but created by unequal power *relations* between women and men, and rigid gender roles, norms and hierarchies. Further, there are multiple inequalities between men and women based on intersecting identities such as caste, ethnicity, race, (dis)ability, age, sexual orientation and civil status.

Many people who confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic have experienced high levels of psychological and economic distress and that many people have used negative coping strategies for adapting to this crisis. Girls in South Asia are at risk of early or forced marriage due to an increasing number of children falling into poverty. UNFPA estimates indicate that the COVID-19 will disrupt efforts to end child marriage, potentially resulting in an additional 13 million child marriages taking place between 2020 and 2030 that could otherwise have been averted.

In Iraq, the World Food Programme (WFP) has estimated that there could be an additional 1.5 million people outside of conflict-affected areas in acute need of food assistance in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19, and noted that an estimated 5.3 million people are using negative coping strategies and could see their living conditions deteriorate.

As we celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, 2021, this day is very important to raise a global awareness for gender responsive response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The theme **-Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world** is very relevant as it's now clear that the COVID-19 pandemic is not just a health issue. It's human, economic and social crisis and the impact of COVID-19 has hit women harder than men in a number of ways.

We need to take action now for gender responsive response to the COVID-19 pandemic taking into account for women's and girls' specific needs, risks and roles in the response as care providers and increased exposure to GBV with confinement measures.

On the one hand, there is an immediate need to contain the spread of the coronavirus and to strengthen livelihoods and resilience of most affected and at-risk women. On the other hand, there is a need to increase women's leadership and voice in the COVID-19 response, and to support positive social norms to prevent and mitigate violence against women and girls.

We must apply a gender lens to COVID-19 response. The governments should take lead through multisectoral action supported by international community and civil society.

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## NEWSNOTES

### Ambassador Of India To Nepal Kwatra Lays Foundation Stone For Reconstruction of Kumari Chhen In Lalitpur



Ambassador of India to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra laid the foundation stone for reconstruction and development of Kumari Chhen and Kumari Niwas in Patan, Lalitpur today.

The event was attended by Mayor of Lalitpur Metropolitan City Chiribabu Maharjan, former Minister of Culture and former Mayor of Lalitpur

Buddhiraj Bajracharya, Project Director, National Reconstruction Authority Shyam Kishor Singh, Members of the User Committee of Kumari Chhen and community members. Officers from Reconstruction and Development Wing of the Embassy of India were present at the ceremony.

The conservation and development work of Kumari Chhen and Kumari Niwas is second of the 28 cultural heritage conservation and restoration projects being under taken with Government of India reconstruction grant of NRs 5800 million conservation, restoration and reconstruction of cultural heritage projects in eight districts of Nepal.

### Japan Provides Assistance Various Districts



Japanese Assistance for Water and Sanitation Facilities Construction and Hygiene Education Intervention Project for Primary and Secondary Schools in Mugu District, Nepal

The Government of Japan has extended US dollars

865,034 (about NRs. 101.13 million), to Good Neighbors Japan under the Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects Schemes Mugu District, and aims at improving the water hygiene environment at public elementary and junior high schools in Mugu District. A grant contract for this project was signed and exchanged on 9th March 2021 by Yoshioka Yuzo, Charge d'Affaires ad Interim of Japan to Nepal and Ms. SATO Makiko, Good Neighbors Japan.

The Charge d'Affaires a.i. of Japan to Nepal YOSHIOKA Yuzo, signed a grant contract for US\$ 453,368 (about NRs. 53 million) with Ms. Nakajima Ayaka, Country Representative of the Japan Asian Association and Asian Friendship Society (JAFS) to implement a project to support earthquake-affected communities in Sindhupalchowk District to enhance livelihoods through agriculture.

The support was made under Japan's Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects Scheme for FY 2020 and will be implemented by JAFS, an international NGO based in Osaka, Japan, in collaboration with its local partner NGO, JAJS-Nepal. The project focuses on building irrigation and life water systems and training local farmers on using the systems.

### US, With ADB And NRA, Builds Two Secondary Schools

U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, Randy W. Berry, along with United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Nepal Mission Director Sepideh Keyvanshad, handed over two secondary schools in Kathmandu.

The small ceremony included the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) Chief Executive Officer, Sushil Gye-wali, and the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Officer-in-chief, Sharad Bhandari.

The U.S. government, through USAID, has partnered with the NRA, and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology to complete the reconstruction of 29 permanent schools in Nepal. The event marks two more of those primary and secondary schools as ready for use.

During the event, Ambassador Berry said, "The U.S. government shares Nepal's priority of getting children back in school. As part of this commitment, we partnered with the ADB and NRA to construct seismically safe, well-equipped, and child-and disabled-friendly schools. This reflects the longstanding and continued support of the American people to help rebuild a safer Nepal."



### Nepali Graduates Share KOICA's Master Degree Scholarship Experience

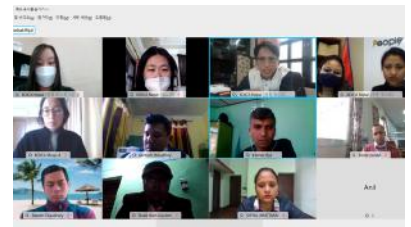
Selected 8 recent graduates of KOICA's Master's Degree Scholarship Program have shared the outcome of their theses, experiences and knowledge gained during their stay in Korea which can be implemented in the context of Nepal.

They highlighted Korea's student oriented learning and research environment, master's thesis preparations, daily life, cultural exchanges, global networks which is solely supported by Korean Government.

Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and KOICA Alumni Association of Nepal (KAAN) organized an Online KOICA Scholarship Experience Sharing Program on March 05, 2021.

In the year 2019 a total of 15 government officials were selected in KOICA's Masters Degree Scholarship program (CIAT (Capacity Improvement & Advancement for Tomorrow) and graduated from various renowned Korean Universities. This year as well there are 18 Scholarship Programs offering various courses on Rural Development, Governance, Environment Energy and Technology. The main objective of the webinar was to share the experience and knowledge of the Scholarship program.

In the program, Country Director of KOICA Sunghoon Ko congratulated the 2020 Master's Fellows for their success in the program. He highlighted the key aspects of CIAT program and cited Korea's economic development and the role of skilled human resource in nation-building.





### Japan Constructs Classrooms In Gulmi

An official of the Embassy of Japan handed over a school building for specialized courses in agriculture to the Shree Nepal Rastriya Tribhuwan Secondary School, Gulmi District. Approximately 90 percent of the population in Gulmi District is engaged in agriculture, but productivity has remained low.



The low productivity is also among the reasons that has caused the younger generation to seek employment abroad. According to a report in 2018, Gulmi District generates the largest number of migrant workers. In order to address this situation, the Shree Nepal Rastriya Tribhuwan Secondary School planned a curricula of specialized

courses in agriculture.

### Seto Machindranath Temple Restoration Begins

Ambassador of India to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra and Sushil Kumar Gyawali, Chief Executive Officer of National Reconstruction Authority and Bidhya Sunder Shakya, Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, jointly carried out bhoomipooja to mark the starting of work of conservation and restoration of Seto Machindranath temple.



According to a press release issued by the Embassy of India, the conservation work of Seto Machindranath temple is first of the 28 cultural heritage conservation and restoration projects being under taken with a reconstruction of NRs

5800 million committed by Government of India for the cultural heritage sector.

All the 28 sites were identified by Government of Nepal and both India and Nepal signed an MoU in this regard in August 2017. The Central Level Project Implementation Unit (Building) of NRA is the implementing entity for the restoration works as per Nepal's Ancient Monument Preservation Act.

### India To Fund Rs 530M For 25 Health Posts

India is to fund NRs 530 million for reconstruction of a total of 25 health posts in Dhading and Sindhupalchowk.

Head of Development Partnership and Reconstruction wing of the Embassy of India, Nepal and Project Director of Central Level Project Implementation Unit (Building) of National Reconstruction Authority signed four MoUs for reconstruction of total 25 health posts in Nepal.

According to a press release issued by Embassy of India, 12 health posts are located in Dhading district and 13 are located in Sindhupalchowk district and these health posts, damaged during the 2015 earthquake will be reconstructed at a cost of NR 530 million.

On the same occasion, four Contract Agreements, award work to successful bidders, were also signed between CLPIU (Building) and Contractors. The Central Building Re-

search Institute (CBRI)-Roorkee, a premier institute of India in the field earthquake-resilient reconstruction, will be providing technical assistance during for the reconstruction.

### China Provides Support To Durbar High School

The Government of the People's Republic of China has provided stationery, sports and health materials to the Durbar High School, the oldest school of the country reports RSS.

According to national news agency, China had also reconstructed the building of Durbar High School which was damaged by the Gorkha Earthquake of 2015.



The Embassy of China provided clothes, 10 thousand units of face masks, 500 litres sanitizer, 1500 note books, two boxes of reference books, basketball, table tennis and badminton equipment. The embassy had supported furniture and other goods to the School before this also.

The support was handed over to the school authorities by Ambassador of China to Nepal, Hou Yanqi in the presence of Minister for Education, Science and Technology Krishna Gopal Shrestha and Chief Executive Officer of National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) Sushil Gyawali.

### Japan Provides Assistance To Maternal And Child Health In Dang

Outgoing ambassador of Japan to Nepal Saigo Masamichi signed a grant contract for US\$ 406,730 (about NRs. 47 million) with Ms. Okuda Kaeko, Acting Country Director of AMDA Multi-sectoral and Integrated Development Services (AMDA-MINDS) for improving maternal and child health care in Dang District.

The support made under Japan's Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects Scheme for FY 2020 will be implemented by AMDA-MINDS, an international NGO based in Okayama, Japan. AMDA - MINDS will work with its local partner NGO, AMDA Nepal.

This project is now in its third year and has plans to build and equip four Outreach Clinics and four Community Health Units, which were surveyed and designed in the first year. In addition, AMDA-MINDS will provide trainings to build the capacity of staff at the health facility to improve the quality of services. The project also aims to enhance knowledge and understanding of local people on the prevention of premature infant deaths.



## BUSINESS BRIEF

### Nepal Investment Bank Reaches 35

Nepal Investment Bank has organized “Samman Raly” to express solidarity with Medical Personnel and Frontline Workers for their contribution during the global pandemic COVID-19. Further, the Bank has launched a promotional loan offer for the Health Workers at reasonable interest rates.

On the auspicious occasion of the Bank’s 35th Anniversary, the Bank has also launched its 3rd Comic Book named “Hamro Sukha Dukha Ka Sathi, Bank Kati Jaati”. This initiative is in line with the comics-“A Visit to the Zoo” and “Bank Sangako Naata, Mero Aafnai Bachat Khata” promoting financial literacy launched during previous anniversaries.



Nepal Investment Bank Ltd. (NIBL) having reached the milestone of 35th year has been endeavoring to provide quality banking services through 87 Branches, 30 Extension Counters, 59 Branchless Banking Centers and 130 ATMs spread across seven provinces of the Country.

Over the course of 35 years with the Capital Base of NPR 29 billion, the Bank has served over 1.2 million customers ranging from Corporate, SMEs and Individuals and has been able to meet deposit of NPR 169 billion and maintain credit portfolio of NPR 155 billion with banking facilities provided to deprived as well as national priority sectors contributing to uplift nation’s economy. The Bank has provided small loans of over NPR 5 billion directly to more than 30,000 individuals spread throughout the country for the needy.

The Bank has offered special discount of 65% on banking services viz. Debit Cards, Credit Cards including EMI, Locker, E COM/ Online Payments and SME / Retail loans.

Nepal Investment Bank Limited would like to extend its sincere thanks and gratitude to all the customers, stakeholders and regulatory authorities for their support and guidance.

### Golyan Elected Chairman Of CBFIN Chairman

Pawan Kumar Golyan is elected chairman of Confederation of Banks and Financial Institutions Nepal (CBFIN) unanimously. A renowned industrialist Golyan is also the chairman of NMB Bank Limited.

The first Annual General Assembly of the organisation the other day elected a 15-member working committee unopposed.

Bhoj Bahadur Shah is elected Senior Vice-chair of the organisation and Rajesh Upadhyaya Vice-chair.

Likewise, Keshav Bahadur Rayamajhi is elected to the post of general secretary, Tulasi Ram Agrawal treasurer, Kush Prasad Malla secretary and Manoj Kumar Kedia joint-treasurer.



Prithvi Bahadur Pandey, Tulasi Prasad Gautam, Ichchha Raj Tamang, Upendra Keshari Neupane, Mahendra Kumar Goyal, Dasharath Rimal and Hirendra Man Pradhan are the working committee members.

### Mayors To Implement Infrastructure Project

Mayors of 29 plus municipalities signed Nepal Urban Governance and Infrastructure Project implementation agreement. The World Bank financed Nepal Urban Governance and Infrastructure Project to strengthen service delivery and post-COVID-19 recovery.

“With the signing of the agreements, the municipalities are entering the stage of project implementation to make cities more livable, resilient & inclusive, to benefit 2 million people & support post-#COVID19 recovery,” tweeted Faris H. Hadad-Zervos, World Bank’s Country Director.

“The signing of the project participation agreement with Mayors of 29+ municipalities from #Nepal’s strategic urban centers is a proud moment for the World Bank-financed Nepal Urban Governance and Infrastructure Project to strengthen service delivery & post-COVID-19 recovery.”

“As I sign the project participation agreement, I look forward to improving the governance, management; staff capacity & accountability of my municipality & help people enjoy the fruits of improved service delivery,” said Shiva Prasad Dhakal, Mayor, Sundar Haraicha Municipality, Morang.



### Nepal To Graduate From LDC Category By 2026

The United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) has recommended for Nepal’s graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category with preparatory period of five years. This means that the graduation of Nepal would be effective in 2026.

The CDP, in its triennial review held from 22 to 26 February 2021, made this recommendation as Nepal had met the criteria for graduation for three consecutive reviews. Out of three indices which the CDP considers while deciding on the question of graduation – GNI per capita, Human Assets Index (HAI), and Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI), Nepal met the thresholds for the latter two, thus being eligible for graduation.

Due to the extraordinary challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and based on the request of the Government of Nepal, the normal preparatory period of three years has been extended to five. In addition to Nepal, Bangladesh and Lao People’s Democratic Republic have also been recommended for graduation by the CDP.

Though Nepal had met the graduation criteria for the first time in 2015, the CDP in its 2018 triennial review recommended to defer the graduation on the request of the Government of Nepal considering the setback on Nepal’s economy by the 2015 earthquake and other disasters in the following years.

The CDP’s recommendation is an important milestone in Nepal’s development trajectory towards the national ambition of ‘Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali’ and the nation’s development aspirations as reflected in the Fifteenth Periodic Plan.





## India To Fund Rs.246M For Cultural Heritage Projects

Memorandum of Understanding and Contract Agreements for restoration and reconstruction of three cultural heritage sites was signed in Kathmandu.

The Head of Development Partnership and Reconstruction Wing of the Embassy of India to Nepal and Project Director of Central Level Project Implementation Unit (Building) of National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) signed the MoUs. Similarly, the Contract Agreements were signed between the successful bidders and NRA.

The three projects are Jestha Varna Mahavihara in Lalitpur, Sulighyang Gumba and Shermathang Gumba located in Sindhupalchowk district. The Indian National Trust for

Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) will be providing technical assistance for the restoration of Jestha Varna Mahavihara while other two will be undertaken by CLPIU (Building).

The three cultural sites were damaged during the 2015 earthquake

and will be reconstructed at a total cost of NR 246 million under the Government of India reconstruction grant. Government of India has committed total US \$ 50 million (NR 5800 million) for conservation, restoration and reconstruction of total 28 cultural heritage sites in eight districts of Nepal.

Out of 28 cultural sector Projects to be undertaken under Indian reconstruction grant, total 6 contracts have already been awarded and Ambassador of India to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra carried out the bhoomipooja on 28th February 2021 for conservation and restoration of Seto Machindranath temple in Jan Bahal area of Kathmandu, jointly with Chief Executive Officer of National Reconstruction Authority of Government of Nepal and Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City.

## PPE, Reproductive Health Kits Handed Over

The Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) received 6,048 sets of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), 50,000 pairs of examination gloves, 50,000 pieces of surgical

mask and 27 sets of Inter-Agency Reproductive Health (IARH) kits that will augment the government's efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, while ensuring con-

tinuity of essential reproductive health and gender-based violence response services.

According to a press release issued by UNFPA Country Office for Nepal, the PPE, IARH kits and other supplies worth approximately Rs 30 million were procured by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) with the financial support of the People's Republic of China under the existing south-south partnership initiative between Nepal, China and UNFPA. The IARH kits are comprised of essential drugs, supplies and equipment that enable service providers to ensure safe deliveries, manage obstetric complications as well as cases of sexual violence in health facilities.

At an event organised at the ministry, the supplies were handed over to MoHP Chief Specialist Dr. Roshan Pokhrel by UNFPA. Present on the occasion were senior government and other partners.

After receiving the kits, Dr. Pokhrel said, "We are committed to ensuring continuity of essential reproductive health services for vulnerable women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our concerted efforts have been to combat COVID-19 and much of our financial and human resources have been focused on this goal with very good results hence the support of our development partners at this critical time is very much appreciated as the needs are significant. We are grateful to the People's Republic of China for their generous support and UNFPA for facilitating this contribution".

## NIBL Ace Capital Conducts Demat Program

NIBL Ace Capital Ltd has conducted the free demat account opening programme in Ghusel, Bagmati Rural Municipality-1, Lalitpur supporting 'Ek Nepali Ek Demat Khata' campaign of Securities Board of Nepal.

According to a press release, NIBL Ace Capital Ltd organised the programme with an objective to ease the access of every Nepali citizen in the capital market. The program was jointly organised by Nepal Investment Bank Ltd, Lagankhel Branch and NIBL Ace Capital Ltd.

To facilitate its customers, NIBL Ace Capital Ltd has been operating its morning counter from 8:00am to 9:30am to provide demat account opening/renewal and meroshare registration/renewal services and the capital is also providing free demat account opening and free meroshare registration for its new customers until further notice.



# Scenario Post Two Verdicts



BY: DR. TILAK RAWAL

The controversial dissolution of the House of Representatives (House) recommended by Prime Minister Oli and approved by President Bhandari on December 20 was nullified by the constitutional bench of the Supreme Court on February 23, after extensive hearing that stretched over some 7 weeks. In the landmark verdict, the apex court not only nullified the government's decision but also ordered the concerned to call the new session of the Parliament within 13 days. As thought by many, commoners and elites alike, the apex court termed Oli's move unconstitutional and invalidated all the decisions related to the dissolution from the beginning. It also stated that the term parliamentary form of government mentioned in Article 74 should be seen in totality and not in isolation. It also clearly mentioned that Nepal's parliamentary system was built on its own past experiences and various constitutional provisions related to the House and National Assembly election, the number of

Cabinet members, inclusion in the Cabinet, bar on moving no-trust motion in the first two years and parliamentary hearing made our system unique, not including all the characteristics of conventional parliamentary system. Lessons were learnt from the HOR dissolution under the 1990 constitution and the head of government was

not given unconditional power to dissolve it. The verdict has also clearly stated that the decision taken on subjective ground could put an additional economic burden on people, which could not be termed constitutional, if examined in light of the spirit and objective of the constitution. Despite some rumours of differences amongst five judges on the constitutional bench, it is gratifying that the verdict came as a solid decision, much to the liking of Nepalis. Indeed, this was something for majority of people of this country to celebrate and rejoice over and it was natural for people, especially those supporting Prachanda\ Nepal faction of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), to do so on the street. After the historic court verdict, processions\ street affairs more or less ended, much to our relief. Leaders got themselves engaged in both intra and inter-party interactions, focusing on the formation of the new government.

Dahal and Nepal rushed to meet Nepali Congress (NC) president Deuba to discuss a power sharing proposal, which was followed by their meeting with Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP) leaders. Despite both the parties in opposition (NC and JSP) condemning the House dissolution as unconstitutional, they have remained noncommittal in sharing power with them and

have demanded the faction of CPN to come up with specific answers to some issues. Looked like the two parties were waiting for the CPN to formally split into two. Nothing looked certain, even days after the verdict, because the much expected resignation on moral ground of Prime Minister Oli did not happen, despite pressure exerted on him by different quarters to do so. Some politicians close to Oli made it clear that he will bravely face the no-trust motion and will not resign. Oli turned a deaf ear to the request of many, including that of party leader Bam Dev Gautam, to take a graceful exit. Numerous urging to resign on moral grounds have just been brushed aside. Removing Oli from the top job became more and more difficult. The two factions of CPN fought a serious battle at the Election Commission (EC), counter claiming their respective legitimacy. Dahal, Nepal and other leaders of their faction wondered why EC was taking so long to take a decision even when they had invoked the dispute settlement clause of the Political Party

Registration. It may be noted that the EC had earlier stated its inability to act because the dispute settlement clause of the act was not invoked. This delay, according to leaders of the faction, decelerated the speed with which they wanted to proceed to get the nation out of the confusing political mess. It was also difficult for them to remove Oli as parliamentary party leader, despite their claim of majority in it, be-

cause as per their party statute the parliamentary party meeting has to be called by Mr. Nembang, deputy leader of the parliamentary party and a close confidant of Oli, who would not call any such meeting, fully aware of the number game. Passing a no-trust motion against Oli would also not be easy without support from a noncommittal NC. Both NC and JSP looked undecided which faction of the NCP they will support. Looked like the opposition parties would extend their cooperation to any of the two factions, conceding major concession e.g. the post of top executive of the country. Despite the well-intention SC verdict, which many thought would contribute towards clearing the impasse, situation remained very confusing and some even saw the possibility of feuding leaders hugging each other, forgetting mounds of allegations and abuses publicly exchanged. Some thought Prime Minister Oli could even surprise all with another bold decision, more complicated and astonishing than his earlier decision of dissolving the House. All these guess works have, however, come to an end with another surprising verdict of the apex court that the ruling party cannot have Nepal Communist Party (NCP) as its name as it was a copy of petitioner Rishi Ram Kattel's Nepal Communist Party

**This verdict has also pushed into oblivion the much-praised earlier verdict and has created lots of confusion, which is bound to inflict more injuries on the ailing economy of this country.**



and also nullified the unification of the two parties headed by Oli and Prachanda. This astonishing decision has complicated matters and made things more difficult for Prachanda\Madhav faction as the two leaders now, as per the verdict, belong to the erstwhile Maoist Centre and the United Marxist Leninist (UML) party, respectively. This verdict has opened the Pandora Box, making it possible for anything\everything to happen in the scenario to be unfolded gradually over time. Despite celebration by Oli supporters, they should not forget that the verdict has made even him little uncomfortable because he will have to prove his majority in the House soon. Prachanda is now heading the Maoist Centre and in a strategic move Nepal and Khanal have decided to get back to UML under Oli. This verdict, which coincided with the convening of the first session of the resurrected House on March 7, has come under attack from different quarters and politicians have termed the verdict wrong, unnatural and politically prejudiced. Alleging that the court has spoken on issues that the plaintiff had not raised in his petition, some well-respected lawyers have taken this act as a glaring example of extra judicial activism of the apex court review petition against which is likely to be filed soon. This verdict has also pushed into oblivion the much-praised earlier verdict and has created lots of confusion, which is bound to inflict more injuries on the ailing economy of this country.

Predictions are that Covid- devastated economy of Nepal will remain weak for some more time as industries/businesses have yet to fully recover and are desperately seeking support from the government, which has slashed its annual budgets three times in a row. Ever since its assumption of power, the Oli-led government has been slashing the budget at the half yearly review of it. The highest cut was seen last fiscal year when the total outlay of Rs. 1533 billion was cut by Rs.147 billion, while the decrease this year approximated Rs. 130 billion. Amongst different heads, capital expenditure has taken the largest hit of around 20 percent of the earlier allocation of Rs. 353 billion. It is disheartening that in the seven months of this fiscal year capital expenditure has remained low at 19 percent. Indeed, Nepal government has not been able to play the role expected of it when governments elsewhere have launched stimulus packages to stir depressed economies. Despite some efforts made by Nepal Rastra Bank (central Bank) such as allowing rescheduling of affected loans and making refinance available on easy terms and conditions, industries and businesses are still seen seeking tangible support from the concerned agencies to become fully operational. Like in China and India, medium and small scale enterprises have suffered the most in Nepal also but the attention these ailing enterprises have received here is nowhere near what they have received elsewhere, mainly China and India. Covid-19 has taken its toll on human lives and inflicted injuries on the economy and the current political mess that Nepal has been pushed into is certain to further complicate matters for some more

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**Let us also try to replicate the exemplary work of some individuals in Jumla who will be soon exporting Marshi chamal, a local rice brand, and some other native products worth Rs. 5 million to Canada. Given proper support and encouragement, this tiny attempt could snowball into exports worth billions of Rs over time, which would help reduce our trade imbalance, much more meaningfully than what soya and palm oil have done. Correcting the astoundingly confusing political situation, we have to make humble moves of this kind to save our economy.**

time because the crisis, further fueled by the second verdict, is not likely to recede soon.

It looks like Covid-19 and political instability have joined hands to further injure the already sick economy of this country, which many believe is already in a state of recession and will take time to get out of it. It is beyond doubt that our economy is weak now and will remain weak next year also, despite Prime Minister Oli's claim that it will grow by 10 percent next fiscal year. Current weak base year is the only advantage that next year will have to offer a growth scenario relatively better than the current one but it will be nowhere near achieving a double digit growth claimed. Indeed, one could draw some solace seeing some decrease in our trade deficit, which is as a result of decline in imports and some increase in exports of some commodities. But if we delve a bit into the composition of export, it is seen that items like soybean oil has registered a 289 percent increase in the six months of this fiscal year, occupying the position of number one export item. It should also be noted that Nepal imported soybeans from as far as Argentina and Brazil, worth Rs. 17.67 billion, and exported the extracted oil to India, earning Indian currency worth Rs.17.33 billion. That Nepal used convertible currency to import soya beans and earned Indian currency exporting the extract there should not be a problem for a country, which has to occasionally sell

American dollars to buy Indian currency (sold 2.04 billion dollars for this purpose in the last six months), but the most disturbing thing is the value addition part of it. It may also be noted that like palm oil, whose export to India has plummeted due to some policy change there, soya oil is also exported to our neighbour without much value addition. In the very short run, we could make serious efforts to increase the production and export, after proper processing, of items like ginger and cardamom, which has occupied the position of number 2 export after registering an increase of 51 percent in the last six months. Let us also try to replicate the exemplary

work of some individuals in Jumla who will be soon exporting Marshi chamal, a local rice brand, and some other native products worth Rs. 5 million to Canada. Given proper support and encouragement, this tiny attempt could snowball into exports worth billions of Rs over time, which would help reduce our trade imbalance, much more meaningfully than what soya and palm oil have done. Correcting the astoundingly confusing political situation, we have to make humble moves of this kind to save our economy.

*Dr. Rawal is a former governor NRB*



# <sup>v</sup>PM Oli In Command

*Following the decision of Supreme Court, CPN-UML has fallen under the command and control of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli who can now recommend fresh elections*

By A CORRESPONDENT

With the decision of Supreme Court to nullify the unification of two parties in the name of Nepal Communist Party, the political course of Nepal has taken a new direction.

Given the hung parliament with no political party with clear majority and deep rooted feud in the ruling party, prime minister Oli may again recommend fresh elections in case of failing to secure confidence in the house.

Unlike the last dissolution which was turned down by the Supreme Court, PM Oli's new move will have more supporters.

All political parties, which fought jointly against the dissolution of the House of Representatives, have very few options other than to convince PM Oli for elections. Given the current seat status in the parliament, a stable government is virtually impossible.

Following the verdict, the demand for resignation of prime minister Oli on moral grounds on his move of dissolving the House of Representatives has disappeared.

All the leaders in CPN-UML and Maoist are now adjusting and readjusting their positions. Nepali Congress is in a wait and watch mood.

Senior leaders such as Dr. Shekhar Koirala and Ramesh Lekhak, however, have already indicated that NC favors elections rather than forming a coalition government.

PM Oli is now in the commanding position in his party and has become a strong prime minister. However, it is a major political and legal blow to Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal. The ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP), which is on the verge of split due to intra-party feud between the factions led by Prime Minister Oli and his rivals, is now history and the country is now un-



der a coalition of CPN-UML and Maoist.

The SC invalidated the Election Commission's decision to allow CPN-UML and CPN-Maoist Centre to have Nepal Communist Party (NCP) as the name of the party they formed after their merger.

As the SC verdict effectively revives the UML and Maoist Centre, the verdict also means that the NCP government, which was a majority government formed under Article 76 (1), has been reduced to a coalition government.

If the Dahal-led CPN-MC does not extend support to the Oli government then the process of forming a

merge, they could do so by fulfilling legal criteria.

The SC said Section 6 of the Political Party Act prohibited any party from having a name mimicking any other party's name. Kattel had registered his party with the EC on 6 August 2017. The EC had registered the new NCP (NCP) led by Oli and Dahal on 6 June 2018. The Kattel-led party had submitted a petition at the EC disputing its decision of 26 October 2018 allowing the party led by Oli and Dahal to have NCP (NCP) as its name.

The court observed that the name Nepal Communist Party (NCP) was not distinct from the Kattel-led

HoR.

Radhe Shyam Adhikari, who represents the Nepali Congress in the National Assembly, said the SC decision had left vulnerable lawmakers who were with the UML or CPN-MC earlier but later shifted their loyalties to Dahal or Oli, respectively.

Dissidents can split their mother party only when they can muster 40 per cent support in both the Central Committee of the party and the Parliamentary Party. The UML led by Oli had won 121 seats, whereas the CPN-MC led by Dahal had got 53 seats in the 275-member Lower House.



coalition government under Article 76 (2) should start immediately.

The verdict was delivered by a division bench of justices Bam Kumar Shrestha and Kumar Regmi in response to a case filed by the coordinator of Nepal Communist Party Rishi Ram Kattel. The SC said that CPN-UML and CPN-MC will now be independent parties as in the past and if they wanted to

NCP. The court ruling came at a time when the Dahal and Nepal-led faction of the NCP was threatening to register a no-trust motion against the PM.

Subas Chandra Nembang, who is close to Oli and was with the UML before its merger with CPN-MC, said that the NCP's Oli-led faction would honor the SC verdict as it did when the SC reinstated the

Although Dahal and Nepal earlier said that they would file a review petition against the Supreme Court's verdict that nullified the unification of the CPN-UML and CPN-Maoist Centre claiming that the SC had erred while passing the verdict, they have shifted their stand now.

Instead of challenging the verdict of the court, Nepal and his group

## POLITICS

has decided to return to the mother party. Similarly, Maoist Center members also took a similar decision.

Maoist leader Narayan Kaji Shrestha said the SC verdict was wrong, unnatural, and politically prejudiced because it gave remedy on the question (nullification of the unity between the CPN-UML and CPN-MC) that the plaintiff had not asked.

“We disagree with the court verdict dividing a unified party,” Shrestha said. He added that they would seek political and legal remedies to the problems caused by the SC verdict. He said the SC verdict had left many questions unanswered, particularly the one about lawmakers and local representatives that were elected on NCP (NCP) tickets.

“The SC verdict that has asked a unified party to split into separate parties cannot be justified on any ground,” said Shrestha. Shrestha said revival of CPN- UML and CPN-MC as independent parties would come into effect only after the Election Commission completes the process.

The fate of some CPN-Maoist Centre lawmakers Ram Bahadur Thapa, Prabhu Shah, Top Bahadur Rayamajhi, and Lekhraj Bhatta, who are with Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, is yet to be known.

The position of UML leaders Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jhalanath Khanal, and many others, who are with Dahal, remain uncertain. Shrestha said party leaders were of the view that the CPN- UML and the CPN-MC had unified to achieve the goals of socialism oriented democracy and social justice. Although Maoist leader Prachanda has an option as he can decide on withdrawing the support to prime minister after discussing the mat-



ter with other parties, it is not easy given the political scenario. Nepal, Khanal and others are urging Prachanda not to take such a course.

Earlier, NCP (NCP) Standing Committee member Raghujii Panta and some other Standing Committee members suggested Nepal and other party leaders should try their best to keep party unity intact and Pushpa Kamal Dahal and KP Sharma Oli should discuss the issue.

Following the informal meetings, leaders of the Prachanda-Nepal-led faction of the Nepal Communist Party decided to return to their previous parties—CPN-UML and Maoist (Centre).

Participating in the parliamentary party meeting of the faction in Perishdanda, they agreed to continue their struggle separately from within the party.

However, they showed their disagreement to the verdict of the Supreme Court regarding party unification. “The decision of the party unification was made correctly, however, the court has spoilt it,” they said.

Dev Gurung, a senior leader of the faction, said that the meeting concluded that the verdict of the

Supreme Court was against the demand of the petitioner. “The court decided against party unification, which was not the issue in the writ but the name of the party,” he added.

Gurung said that the leaders would obey the verdict and return to their previous parties till the court corrects it. “No option is left except for obeying it,” he said.

He also said that only the name of ruling NCP was mentioned in the petition. “But the court has unfortunately divided the unified party into previous positions,” he said.

With this, the 2018 unification between the CPN-UML and Maoist Centre is no longer legally recognized, and the two parties are still in existence as separate elements. This transformed Oli led government from a majority to coalition government.

At a time when there is no possibility of beginning the unification process any time soon, a stable government is unlikely. In this situation, the country may be heading for fresh elections in November.



MUSKAN KHATUN

# Reward For Cause

*Rights Activist Muskan Khatun Wins 2021 International Women of Courage Award*

By A CORRESPONDENT

From being virtually on the verge of death following an acid attack in Birgunj, Muskan Khatun has found her way to a happiest moment in her life. For her contributions for exceptional courage and leadership, the United States has provided her International Women of Courage (IWOC) Award.

Khatun was attacked in Chhapkaiya Birgunj two years ago by a young boy on the way to school damaging her face and hand. Thanks to an immediate response and call from Ujjwal Bikram Thapa, a social activist and anti-acid activist, Khatun was brought to Kathmandu in a charter helicopter.

Thapa, a leading anti-acid activist, has not only supported Khatun for treatment but also internationally highlighted her issue making arrangements to have direct phone conversation with Bollywood star Amitabh Bachhan.

From completely physical collapse to later mental trauma, Thapa has helped her and her family to live in the society raising the cause of acid-victim all over Nepal. Inspired by her surrounding and support of Thapa, Khatun, from a poor family of Birgunj, has started to raise voice for the acid-victims.

From a school girl to a victim of terrifying acid attack, Khatun has been championing the cause of acid-victims who have to live a life time of trauma.

From being a victim at the age of 15, Khatun today is a leading activist mobilizing community

against acid-attack. With the support of Thapa, she has been working against acid attack for almost a decade now.

The United States Embassy in Nepal announced Muskan Khatun will be awarded the prestigious International Women of Courage (IWOC) Award for her work to end acid attacks. First Lady of the United States Jill Biden and Secretary of State Tony Blinken will host a virtual event on March 8.

Now in its 15th year, the IWOC Award recognizes women around the globe who have demonstrated exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for peace, justice, human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment, often at great personal risk and sacrifice. Previous winners include Malala Yousafzai, the youngest Nobel laureate, for her advocacy work for women and girls in Pakistan.

“Drum roll please! धेरै-धेरै बधाई! I'm absolutely thrilled to announce that Nepal's Muskan Khatun will be receiving the @StateDept's International Women of Courage Award for her work to end acid attacks. She'll be the 1st Nepali to win & Keycap digit one of the youngest awardees ever!” tweeted Ambassador Randy Berry.

In 2019, at the age of 15, Muskan became the victim of an



acid attack for rejecting a boy's advances. She suffered severe burns on her face, chest, and hands. Her recovery was painful and continues to this day.

Despite this, Muskan turned a tragedy into an opportunity to bring about change in Nepal. Facing threats and social pressure, Muskan lobbied for stronger laws and punishments for acid attackers. She met with Prime Minister K.P. Oli who called for a new law to be drafted for acid attacks, and issued an ordinance punishing perpetrators and regulating the sale of chemicals.

According to a press release issued by U.S. Embassy in Nepal, Muskan's leadership was crucial in bringing about change. The U.S. Embassy in Nepal is proud to support her and promote the advancement of women's and girls' rights in Nepal.

For exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for peace, the United States provides Khatun IWOC Award. This recognition has put Khatun as one of the women around the globe who have demonstrated leadership and courage.

# Between Melamchi Blues And Euphoria: A Personal Reflection



BY DIPAK GYAWALI

Hindu epics describe how it took godly thousand-year penances of three generations of kings – from Anshuman to Dilip to finally Bhagirath – to bring Ganga, trapped in the matted locks of Shiva, down to earth. The Sanskrit equivalent of the expression 'Herculean efforts' is Bhagirath prayatna. In a way, that has been the story of modern Nepal's effort to bring the waters of Melamchi to Kathmandu Valley.

When visiting the Swiss capital Bern, a village really with a population of less than 5% of Kathmandu, I was struck by the grandeur of its massive Cathedral which took almost 400 years to complete. After a major earthquake destroyed the original church, and despite suffering from the Plague as well as major religious schisms between Catholicism and Zwingli Protestantism, this small cantonment toiled generations after generations for four centuries to complete the endeavour. What binding motivation could inspire them to labour so long for such higher ends?

Despite seeing three kings, three political systems, many prime ministers, ministers, engineers, consultants and contractors as well as a major insurgency, Melamchi forces us to ask the same question. What ethos of Nepalipani inspired this multi-generational effort? Is it the deeply held Dharmic injunction, so aptly expressed by our national poet Bhanu Bhakta, of this being a meritorious act beyond one's narrow economic self-interest? I mull over this question of development philosophy by reflecting on my 40-year encounter with Melamchi, starting as a junior engineer in the Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR) in the late 1970s and going on to conduct two major evaluations – the Pokhrel Commission in 1987 and the UNDP review in 1995 – plus a failed activism later to have Melamchi re-designed as a multipurpose project.

The Melamchi story started during the last years of King Mahendra's reign. Although Kathmandu's public water supply system dates back to the Lichhavi period with the intricate stone water spout dhungey dharas still functioning today, to say nothing of the innumerable dug-well kuwas, it was the Rana rulers, specifically Bir Sumshere in 1885, who introduced piped water system to the capital city. It was managed by the Pani Goswara, whose jurisdiction was expanded in 1969 to improve the water supply and sewerage system of three cities of Kathmandu Valley in light of its expanding population and tour-

ist influx. At the same time, a unit under the Ministry of Agriculture was charged with improving drinking water for the rest of the country, which was eventually calved out into a full-fledged Department of Water Supply and Sewerage (DWSS) in 1972 and placed under the MoWR.

King Mahendra passed away in January 1972; and preparations began for the coronation of King Birendra in 1975, for which (in light of all the foreign heads of state expected to attend) a massive beautification plan was rolled out and funds for it sought. As fate would have it, the 1973 Oil Crisis resulted in Western banks being awash in cash and looking for any profitable investment. Enter the World Bank and a bevy of international donors. While foreign aid as grants first entered Nepal in 1948 with US's 4H program under President Truman, it was in the early 1970s that Nepal encountered the Age of Development Loans with foreign aid agencies and their consultants, if not in the driving seat, certainly directing which way national plans were to go ahead.

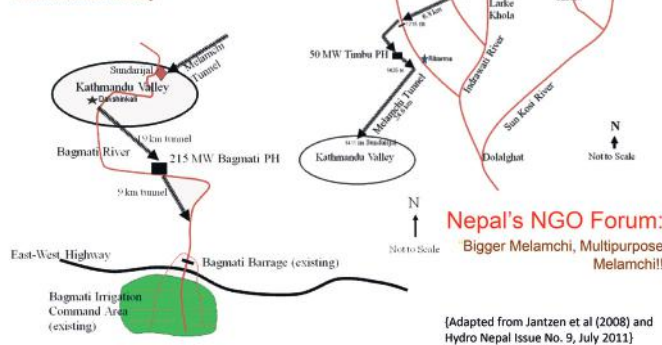
A master plan study funded by UNDP and carried out by UK's Binnie & Partners examined, inter alia, over two dozen new water supply options for Kathmandu Valley, including storages in Balkhu, Kodku, Roshi Khola, Sunkosi/Trisuli pumping ... and far away Melamchi.

I was witness, as a junior engineer in MoWR in 1981, to discussions between the secretary, chief and deputy chief engineer of DWSS as well as other officials: of all the available options, they recommended going ahead with Melamchi because land acquisition issues in Kathmandu Valley would be problematic as people were more aware whereas those in far away Helambu

were not and land there was cheap anyway! They seemed unaware that Helambu residents had served in Rana Durbars and were savvier with state doings than even our ministry folks. This was what eventually led to their being able to wrest more compensation than envisaged, including for Tinpile and Panchkhal areas far away from Melamchi. But I digress.

The Binnie & Partners study eventually led, in 1974, to the World Bank's 1st Water Supply and Sewerage Project, just for Kathmandu Valley. Two others, the 2nd and 3rd Projects, followed that expanded coverage to Pokhara, Birganj, Biratnagar, Nepalganj, Butwal, Bhairawa, Hetauda, Janakpur, and Dharan. A 4th Project involving transbasin water transfer to Sundarjal

Melamchi Water Supply Scheme for Kathmandu Valley





from Melamchi headwaters was expected to start in the late 1980s to provide 24-hour water supply to Kathmandu as part of King Birendra's "Achieving Asian Standards by 2000AD" goals. That was when all hell broke loose, so to speak.

The last tranche of the 3rd Project was being held back by the World Bank because Nepal government had not done the massive tariff increase it had demanded. The World Bank had also insisted, as part of its covenant, in creating a wholly new outfit, the Water Supply and Sewerage Board (WSSB) to manage the project and its loan, bypassing existing institutional structures such as the Pani Goswara and the DWSS. (Shades of US's MCC today, bypassing transmission line building and operating capacity of the NEA and creating a wholly new organization to build its 400kV line!!)

The Marich Man Singh government was in a fix: World Bank's first three projects had failed to deliver on its promises and water users were not seeing any improvement in supplies, but the World Bank's only medicine for any management woe was to increase tariff, which obviously was politically infeasible. To investigate the state of the World Bank's projects, he formed the Pokhrel Commission in 1986 under the chairmanship of member of Rashtriya Panchayat and former chief engineer of the Department of Roads Birendra Keshari Pokhrel with National Planning Commission's joint secretary Bihari Krishna Shrestha and myself.

We visited all the cities and all the sites, interviewed everyone from lowly plumbers to engineers, accountants and World Bank experts. We came to the conclusion that WSSB was bankrupt and dysfunctional, that the procurement culture within it overshadowed any semblance of professional management. Our report corroborated and outlined in greater detail what the auditor general Bhubaneshwar Khatri had damningly described in a September 1984 report.

Just some examples would suffice to highlight the rot. For example, new sewerage line development kilometer target had been kept the same (to look good) but to meet the reduced funding crux, the diameters of the sewerage trunk mains were reduced from 42 inches to (in one case) as little as mere six inches! A sleight-of-hand was also employed to say that the WB project would build not sewerage lines that carried away combined flood flows and sewerage (then under the municipalities) but ones that handled "sullage" (i.e., kitchen and toilet flows) only! They never worked, and the sewerage line taking all of Kathmandu's waste to the Sundarighat treatment plant was never laid even though the contractor was already paid. (It currently houses solar panels, and Bagmati has become dirtier than ever.)

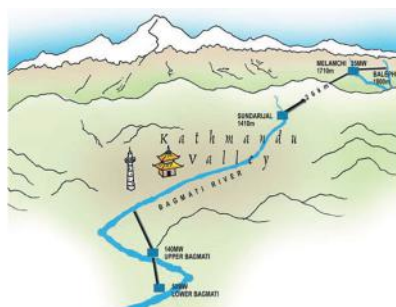
We recommended major institutional restructuring by devolving water supply management then under a nationally centralized WSSB in Tripureshwar for all major urban areas of Nepal to the respective municipalities. We also highlighted the priority that should be given to leakage and theft control in WSSB over rush towards supply augmentation procurement

contracts envisaged in the 4th Water Supply Project. (Kathmandu's water supply system leaked on an average 70% with leakage, theft, and no meter reading and consequently no bill payment in some localities as high as 84%!).

The water supply hydrocrats were furious and the World Bank livid: they spent the next eight years suppressing the Pokhrel Commission report, but willy-nilly had to take into account its criticisms. In early 1990, the UNDP was roped in by the World Bank to contribute to a 60 million dollars basket to develop another 15-year development plan that included not just Melamchi for Kathmandu Valley but also management improvement of WSSB, by then a full-fledged corporation through "twinning arrangements" with utilities in Europe and America. Without major institutional reforms, for which neither the Nepali or donor hydrocrats nor the then new multiparty political class were ready, it was not going to work, and it did not.

I and a colleague of mine from Nepal Water Conservation Foundation/ Interdisciplinary Analysts were roped in to conduct an evaluation of this effort in 1995. We again revisited all the cities visited earlier during the Pokhrel Commission work, and came to the conclusion that water supply management had, rather than improve, deteriorated even further. At this point, the World Bank lost any will to continue further and pulled out of Melamchi and, in a blatant display of donor competition, the Asian Development Bank jumped in with the Norwegians (whose interest was in using its Himal Hydro and BPC to develop the tunnelling and the powerhouse) and the Japanese (interested in hydropower and treatment plants).

In an amazing display of sector competition within Nepal and the donor community, the Norwegians and the Japanese were edged out and the hydropower component removed. The



Country gets electricity: electricity pays for the cost of the tunnel.

Kathmandu Valley gets cheaper water AND water treatment plants. Bagmati becomes clean.

But in denexused reality, Kathmandu gets expensive water; Bagmati remains a sewer; Tarai gets no irrigation, only Kathmandu's sewer; and the country gets no electricity!!

Tarai gets more dry season irrigation

massive energy from the head between Melamchi and Sundarighat, instead of generating anywhere from 15 to 50MW of electricity, was criminally wasted and instead hydraulic baffles used to dissipate the energy. Nepal's NGO Forum

campaigned to have Melamchi be made into a multipurpose project additionally including hydropower, sewerage treatment and irrigation that would also pay for the immense cost of the tunnel. However, the then finance minister dismissed them by saying he would listen to the ADB and not to them!

It was only towards 2007 that a new distribution system was included with the Melamchi plan, and only now three decades later that Hetauda, Bharatpur and Dharan's water supply system have finally been finally handed over to the respective municipalities.

What wasted decades for sensible, competent and efficient development!

# Perspectives From Japan

*Japanese scholars and officials see a strong dimension of Nepal-Japan relations, highlighting Nepal's role in the new world order*

By KESHAB POUDEL

“Japan associates Nepal with two or three things. First and foremost is the Himalayan landscape. Second, many Japanese know Hindu gods and Buddhism both are worshipped in Nepal and that spiritual root has commonalities with the spiritual root Japan has had. So Nepal and Japan are bound by spirituality. There have been long-term commitments from Japan in terms of developing infrastructures, water facilities, education, health and others. Water is more important than petrol,” said Professor Tomohiko Taniguchi, who works at the Graduate School of System Design and Management, Keio University. The professor was also a Special Advisor to the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Doctorate in national security, 20 years in business journalism, a stint for 3 years in London and one-time President at the Foreign Press Association in London, Professor Taniguchi sees: Nepal Is A Crown Jewel For Humans Because Of Its Geographic Treasure.

For those Nepalese who like to know how Japanese scholars hold the view on Nepal, Professor Tomohiko Taniguchi's opinions give an example of Japanese citizen's average perceptions on Nepal.

Japanese citizens and scholars have been holding highly appreciative views on Nepal and its beautiful landscape since the first Japanese visitor to Nepal. Ekai Kawaguchi (1866-. 1945), a Buddhist monk, was the first recorded Japanese national to visit Nepal in 1899. He visited Nepal four times. In his description, he was also highly influenced by culture, religious harmony and nature of Nepal.

Similarly, Takehide Kazami, a photographer, who visited Nepal in 1958, had unprecedented love towards Nepal. “In 1958, I spent a couple of months in Nepal, where I fell in love with Nepal.

In the postscript to me,” Nepalese Mountains and people,” published in 1960, I wrote:” You don't need to have to climb a mountain in Nepal to experience the beauty of the country. There is something indescribably delightful in just wandering around the countryside with a small party, the great mountains towering above you.”



From interview of few highly respected scholars from different areas and high level government officials, their opinions and remarks showed that they are highly informed about Nepal's overall situation and are fond of beauty of Nepal like Professor Tomohiko Taniguchi.

Although Nepal is far away from Japan in terms of geography, scholars and officials in sea-locked Japan admire land-locked Nepal and its religious, cultural, natural and strategic place.

All these indicate that Nepal-Japan relations have several dimensions linked with all the sectors. “As a friend of Nepal, I think Japanese Nepalese cooperation will remain stable and foster future dreamers. Japanese have to work more with Nepalese to share the same dream for the Nepalese future. Young people in Japan and Nepal need to work together to create a shared dream and future of Nepal,” said professor Taniguchi.

Given the current geo-political tectonic shift and growing concern in Nepal over rivalry between the two Asian powers, Japanese strategists have firm views on the role of Nepal.

“As Nepal is not a big military

power, Nepal can be a good third-party negotiator between India and China. Nepal has a very important role to play in the future,” said Professor Seijiro Takeshita, teacher of management, international affairs, and innovation at the University of Shizuoka. “Being smaller than the two parties is your strength. Your weakness is actually your strength.” Professor Takeshita understands Nepal's position in depth.

As Nepal has transformed from unitary state to federal republic, Japanese scholars have been keenly watching the development and evolution. This is what one can see in the opinion given by Professor Akira Nakamura, Emeritus Professor of Meiji University.

Given the current state of transition, Japanese scholars are keenly watching the whole process. “It is good for Nepal to change the outlook of the government. You cannot change the whole system in a short period of time. The changing process is strenuous and calls for hard work on the part of the nation's leaders. I am sure that Nepal would receive a lot of pressure from different donors. But as often said, Rome was not built in a day,” said Professor Akira Nakamura.

Not only among the scholars of international relations and governance, Nepal has been on the eye of renowned natural disaster experts of Japan. Paying several visits to Nepal and interacting with experts, Professor Nakamura, University of Nagoya, Disaster Mitigation Research Center (DMRC) has built understanding about Nepal's disaster management challenges. “Like Japan, Nepal does have a lot of earthquakes and you need to learn from Japan in implementing the building code and make your houses



are safe and seismic resistant. There is the need to have multi-stake holder approach to deal with disaster. The earthquake safety of houses and buildings are very important," said Professor Nakamura.

Having had a long support in the sports sector by Japan, Nepal is familiar with Japanese sports officials. Organizers of Tokyo Olympic 2020 are eagerly waiting to welcome Nepalese squad in forthcoming games. "Tokyo Olympic will be held in summer 2021. We are waiting to welcome all the athletes including Nepali in the game," said Tatsuo Ogura, Project Director of the International Communications Team.

#### Relations In Continuity

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Nepal and Japan, both the countries have been maintaining their cordial relationship enhancing the bilateral relationship.

Despite the change in the pattern of support, Japan remains a major development partner of Nepal. "Our support

to the development and stability of Nepal leads to our contribution to the stability in the whole of South Asia which is politically and economically important. Therefore, Japan will promote its cooperation with Nepal from the vision of contributing to the stability and prosperity of the region," said Hitomi Sato, Senior Regional Coordinator, Southwest Asia Division of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

JICA's regional head also echoed for continual support to Nepal. "JICA has been providing three types of support: grant, ODA loan and technical cooperation. It is also a case with Nepal. Our cooperation has been more focused on grant aid and technical cooperation for the last few decades. Under the technical cooperation, Japan has been offering expert support to Nepal and also providing training programs to government officials of the Government of Nepal," said Nobuhiro Kawatani, Director, South Asia Affairs, JICA (ODA in Nepal).

Coordinated by Yuriko Akiyama PhD, First Secretary (Information

and Culture of Japanese Embassy in Nepal, the seven interviews of various dignitaries carried out through online from Japan has shown growing interest about Nepal in Japan.

Despite geographical distance, Nepal continues to receive high attention in Japan. Statement delivered by professor Taniguchi explains affection of Japanese people to Nepal.

The best asset Nepal has will continue to be the same as Nepal has had over centuries that are your beautiful landscape. There will be a lot of mountaineers who wish to climb those majestic peaks. If you put together all these elements, the development for a country like Nepal should be the agro-centric, tourism-centric and human capacity-building focus. In retrospect, that is what Japan has been doing for many years. I think Japan should make it clear even more to grass root community in Nepal saying that Japan is here with you and what Japan could provide with you are these things."

## अन्तराष्ट्रिय नारा

**"Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19, world"**

## राष्ट्रिय नारा

**"महिलाको सुरक्षा समृद्ध नेपालको आधार :सम्मान र रोजगार"**



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

# Nepal Has Very Important Role To Play In Future

**PROFESSOR SEIJIRO TAKESHITA** teaches management, international affairs, and innovation at the University of Shizuoka. He spoke to **KESHAB POUDEL** at various issues. Excerpts:

**As India and China have been rising militarily and economically, what implications it has in South Asia?**

Certainly, there increase in ambiguity and worries. Chinese are increasing their military spending and presence in the past decades, it is causing uneasiness in the region. Look at the last military spending coming through the Chinese, it is clear that they are continually expanding their powers particularly in regards to hegemony in this area. This raises the alarm over the leaders of the free world including the United States. Unfortunately, we had a very negative situation in the past four years as the lead in the free world United States was non-existent. President Trump was busy burning down the bridge built connecting western alliances.

**How do you see Chinese power?**

China is not only military power, they are gearing up through trade power, communication power and financial power. You can see this in many countries including in Africa. Chinese are trying to influence their hegemony beyond the field of trade. So, this is bringing very negative unrest in the region.

**Sandwiched between India and China, how would you see a likely scenario for Nepal?**

It is crucial in the region. The aggression of China in the region is very evident. India, which is expected to be another superpower, has not in very good relation with China. One of the important things for Nepal to play a role of a negotiator in between two rising power and to neutralize many of the tensions. Nepal has a very important role to play in between two powers. Nepal can help to ease the tensions.

**How it is possible for Nepal?**

As Nepal is not a big military power, Nepal can be a good third-party negotiator between India and China. Nepal has a very important role to play in the future. I firmly believe that the clashes between India and China are inevitable in the future. China is not going to back off. Look at what the Chinese are doing in Hong Kong. After looking in Hong Kong, it has sent a weak up call for western countries as well. Given the changing geopolitics, Nepal has a tremendously important role to play in the future.

**Given the current situation, a country like Nepal is facing assertive China as a neighbor even recently it has made effort to settle disputes of two communist factions. How do you advise for a country like ours which has two big neighbors?**

Being smaller than the two parties is your strength. Your weakness is actually your strength. If you were a big military power, you would not have any power to play any role. However, you have a unique position. The danger here is China is enhancing its trade power and telecommunication dominance and eventually finance.

**How do you see Chinese economic power?**

I don't believe economic prosperity could drive oppression or suppression. Chinese government utilizes this. Following the COVID-19, the situation will be different. Regression away from international trade or globalization is not a good way. Countries are outsourcing their investment from China because of aggressions of China. Many countries are trying to go into a trade without China. Japan has decided to subsidize many of the companies which would transfer their base from China to other coun-





tries like Vietnam and other Asian nations. Many nations come to realize that concentration in China is a risk. It is very dangerous.

**Is it a good idea?**

In the global perspective, it is not a good thing to do but it has to be done by a certain degree because of the aggression one has seen.

**What Nepal's is the role being in the future?**

I think you are a wonderful negotiator and litigator between two gigantic nations. In order to do that, you need to stay neutral. Leaning towards China would mean that exiting away from free world trade which will not be a prosperous move. I am pretty sure that the Chinese will come up with a lot of packages as they have been doing in Africa and other countries. But in the long term, the citizens of Nepal will prefer to be free Nepali. This is so where you need to be very careful trading this trend.

**Given your long experiences, professor what do you suggest for a country like Nepal for its survival as a peaceful nation?**

As I have mentioned, you need to maintain your neutrality. You have a lot of benefits both geographically and geopolitically as well. This is what history also tells you that you have a lot of confrontations and tensions as well as a good relationship with these two neighbors. As

you are in a position not to give a threat to either the parties, you are in very idle positions to a very good negotiator or litigator. Your country can be cushion from the aggression of China.

**Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Nepal and Japan, Nepal has been receiving enormous economic support as well as moral support from Japan. Will it continue in the future?**

Along with Japan more and more international alliances of the free world have come to realize the importance of Nepal. From a trade perspective, I have started to realize that the aggression of China is not going to get lower but it will higher. There need to have a coalition of the free world. As many Japanese companies are pulling out of China and going to Vietnam and Myanmar, Nepal also can take benefit by offering space. There needs a strong connection of Asian nations which ward off the unnecessary aggression of China. Japan should try to figure out the situation where helping Nepal should help us.

**How does Japan feel a growing alliance between Russia and China and the Indian Ocean?**

The Japanese public is extremely naive about the geopolitical situation and growing Chinese threat. Japanese media have just started reporting on the South China Sea and Indian ocean. Japan is a very peaceful country and we don't accept any conflict.

# “Nepal Is A Crown Jewel For Humans Because Of Its Geographic Treasure”

*Professor TOMOHIKO TANIGUCHI, who works at the Graduate School of System Design and Management, Keio University, was also a Special Advisor to the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Doctorate in national security, 20 years in business journalism, a stint for 3 years in London and one-time President at the Foreign Press Association in London, he also spent sabbaticals at Princeton University (Fulbright visiting fellow), Shanghai Institute for International Studies, and at the Brookings Institution as a CNAPS Fellow before joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Deputy Press Secretary. Since August 2008, he held professorships at Keio and Meiji and taught international political economy and media studies. Professor Taniguchi spoke to KESHAB POUDEL through zoom. Excerpts:*

## **How do you view the role of Japan in the current global context?**

The role Japan should play in the future is very important. It is still a sizeable economy. The Chinese economy is getting bigger and bigger, but the Japanese economy still is the third-largest. If you look only at democratically run economies, Japan's is the second-largest, second only to the United States'. People in Japan are getting emotionally prepared to accept as a reality that not only China but in our own lifetime India and probably Indonesia will overtake Japan in terms of the size of the economy. What Japan should do is, therefore, going to affect the courses and trajectory taken by the rest of the world. It is almost self-evident.

## **How do you see the challenges faced by democracy?**

People say these days that democracy is in retreat, parliamentary representation system is losing its influence. Thus, Japan must be a country that resists those scenarios by showcasing to the rest of the world that this way you can continue to develop your own democratic system. No democracy is perfect. Speaking on democracy, I always think that it is a unique sort of animal that takes not only decades but also generations to mature. Japan is among those nations that have spent so many generations to come to where it is.

## **How Japan can help Nepal in democratizing the process?**

Japan will continue to encourage countries such as Nepal or Myanmar. The Japanese government is not going to impose sanctions on Myanmar. Many such attempts have ended with failure and now is the time for the world community to learn a lesson or two. Instead, what the Japanese government together with aid organizations like JICA have been doing vis-à-vis Myanmar is to give hope to the future generation. How can you do that? It is only in Myanmar that elementary school textbooks have been rewritten, revised and newly introduced entirely in cooperation with Japan. Myanmar has come to the government of Japan requesting technical assistance in order

for Myanmar to issue textbooks to be delivered nationwide to elementary school children. Already those first graders and second graders in Myanmar have been reading newly published textbooks that came into existence by the cooperation between Myanmar and Japan.

## **How Japanese people see Nepal?**

People in Japan associate Nepal with more or less two or three things. First and foremost is the Himalayas landscape. Second many Japanese know Hindu gods and Buddhism both are worshiped in Nepal and that spiritual root has commonalities with the spiritual root Japan has had. So Nepal and Japan are bound by spirituality. There have been long-term commitments from Japan in terms of developing infrastructures, water facilities, education, health and others. Water is more important than petrol. It is very difficult for you to become like China or India because your population is not big and Nepal's domestic market is not big. As a result, big manufacturers, like automotive may not find Nepal an attractive place.

## **What development model perfect for Nepal?**

Many intellectuals in Nepal are pondering what development course is affordable for Nepal. I think a lot of people have reached the same conclusion that agriculture still remains very important and human capacity building is very important. Water resources must be kept safe and must be used as a resource carefully. The best asset Nepal has will continue to be the same as Nepal has had over centuries, that is your beautiful landscape. There will be a lot of mountaineers who wish to climb those majestic peaks. If you put together all these elements, the development for a country like Nepal should be the agro-centric, tourism-centric and human capacity-building focus. In retrospect, that is what Japan has been doing for many years. I think Japan should make it clear even more to grass root community in Nepal saying that Japan is here with you and what Japan could provide with you is are these things.





### **How do you view the Indo-Pacific region, given the rise of China?**

Japan is an island nation hovering over the huge continent as she is a neighbor to Russia, North Korea and China. And it is because as an island nation, freedom of movement over the sea is very much important. Well in the future or in coming decades Japan as well as many other nations will be less dependent upon the middle-east oil. Saudi Arabia and Gulf nations are becoming very much desperate because all of a sudden people are paying less attention to fossil fuel and more and more to renewable energy and zero-carbon strategy. For now, Japan entirely depends upon the safe passage of fossil fuel coming all the way from the Arabian Gulf, the Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean and through the Malacca straight and to Japan. It is vitally important for Japan to have a secure trade connection between these two spots of middle-east and Japan. Until very recently no one has had to pay that much attention to the peace and security over these long straight of sea line of communication.

### **Why it is worrying for Japan?**

China is building an awesome arsenal. This is not a diplomatic talk but bluntly put the South China Sea is becoming almost like "Lake Beijing," making the Japanese and others feel more suffocated. It is both a geo-strategic and psychological phenomenon. If you think about it, down south, your main entrance is getting congested. China's shadow is looming large. You need to have absolutely more freedom of navigation, freedom of thinking, freedom of envisioning the future. No one wants to cut out to your gigantic neighbor. It is vitally important for you to have to maintain a good relationship with your big neighbors but you don't have to kowtow toward China. So psychologically and emotionally, it is important for Japan to tell first and foremost its domestic audience that the sea and ocean are the domain where you can go freely. Geo-strategically, it is a realist thinking because Japan is among very few democracies surrounded by hostile nuclear powers.

### **How about European nations?**

Europeans may be anxious about Russia's influences and nuclear arsenal but for Europeans, China is a remote existence. However, Japan stands at a place where Russia, North Korea and China surround it. None of which is interested in reducing their nuclear arsenal. The Chinese military is increasing constantly its nuclear warheads. Even North Korea is increasing its sea-launched long ballistic missiles with submarines and Japan

is an easy target.

### **What initiative Japan is taking?**

In order to get many kinds of freedom, it is important for Japan to get closely connected with like-minded sea-faring democracies. This is why Japan as well as India and Australia are working together to form a virtual coalition, though it has not institutionalized yet. But, Quad informal strategic forum between the United States, Japan, Australia and India, have been meeting on regular basis. Nepal has a very sensitive relationship with India and China. Your challenge is to make balance safeguarding democracy.

### **In recently, Nepalese media are also reporting exerting the influence of the Chinese in internal politics. How do you suggest for smaller countries like Nepal to survive in difficult circumstances?**

It is challenging for the countries such as Nepal. The same goes with the central Asian nations like Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and others. All of them are landlocked and Chinese economic power is gaining attraction year in and year out. Russia is still very close. So Nepal needs to cut a good balance between those big nations. People in Japan should think twice and three times how difficult it is for Nepalese to maintain a good balance between India, China-Russia and including Japan, United State and others. I don't think there is any quick solution. However, you need to sustain yourself. You need to tell your public that the future is brighter. You can tell your children that the sky is the only limit for you. If you don't lose a sense of who you are, you can sustain your identity and will be able to tell future generations that Nepal is this kind of country and we need to go.

### **How Japan support Nepal?**

In Japan, a great many Indian restaurants are actually run by the Nepalese. You get hundreds of restaurants with Indian flags, in Tokyo, but the truth is that most of those restaurants are run by Nepalese. These people are sending money back to Nepal and they are supporting your economy. So I say this half-jokingly that one way to support Nepal is to eat more at one of those restaurants.

Nepal is a crown jewel for humans because of its geographic treasure. You can impose entry fees that are not cheap and you can ask those mountaineers to pay more fees to climb up those sacred mountains. The money thereby earned can be used to make the city of Kathmandu cleaner, its air less polluted, and garbage collection system more effective. No one thinks Nepal is a hostile nation. Everyone loves the beauty of Nepal and you need to be more patient in order for you to take advantage of your treasured assets for a long stretch of time. We have to tell Nepalese friends these realities. The Japanese have only affection not animosity for the Nepalese. As a friend of Nepal, I think Japanese Nepalese co-operation will remain stable and foster future dreamers. Japanese have to work more with Nepalese to share the same dream for the Nepalese future. Young people in Japan and Nepal need to work together to create a shared dream and future of Nepal.

### **Have you ever visited Nepal?**

I have yet to, I am afraid.

# Japanese Assistance To Nepal Remains Quite Stable: Nobuhiro Kawatani

*NOBUHIRO KAWATANI, Director, South Asia Affairs, JICA (ODA in Nepal), has visited Nepal several times. He spoke to KESHABPOUDEL on JICA's contributions and role in Nepal.*

**Nepal has been receiving big grants through Japan's ODA over the years in various infrastructures and livelihood development projects. It seems Japan's grant assistance is declining recently. How do you look at it?**

JICA has been providing three types of support: grant, ODA loan and technical cooperation. It is also a case with Nepal. Our cooperation has been more focused on grant aid and technical cooperation for the last few decades. Under the technical cooperation, Japan has been offering expert support to Nepal and also providing training programs to government officials of the Government of Nepal. Under the grant agreement, we are building infrastructures providing equipments like roads and schools, hospitals and medical equipments, education and agriculture. Sinhduli road is an example

**What Is the state of JICA's support to Nepal?**

Our ODA used to be much larger during 1990's all over the world and it was also the case with Nepal. Although there is a slight decline in the amount of aid to Nepal, Japanese assistance to Nepal remains quite stable compared to the decline of the amount of Japanese ODA aid.. The technical cooperation remains the same in the past 20 years. We have been giving Rs.2 billion annually to Nepal.

**How about the loan?**

When comes to a loan, we provided loan time to time in the past. We are trying to formulate more loan projects than in the past because Nepal is almost graduating from LDC and there will be substantial needs for economic infrastructure. Nepal's Per Capital GDP is now over 1000 US dollars. While we maintain our support in poverty alleviation we also would like to further strengthen our support in the development of infrastructures like hydropower and highways. Under ODA loan, we provided a loan to Nagdhunga Tunnel in 2016. We are considering to loan power and transport sector.

**Nepal has badly affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic. As the Nepal government has recently called international development partners for the arrangement of the COVID-19 vaccine, JICA has any plan to offer support?**

For short-term support, our government has provided about 300 million Yen which is almost equivalent to 300 million rupees. This amount provided to Nepal so that government can purchase equipment for COVID-19. We have also provided masks, PPA, and another protector to local governments. For the medium and long term, we have been preparing one project to provide medical equipment to major hospitals mainly in Kathmandu valley and some other



major cities in Nepal and other types of equipment that can be used COVID-19 and other diseases.

**Former water resources minister of Nepal during his visit to JICA head office reportedly requested an arrangement for a grant or loan to construct a hydropower project in Nepal, how do you see the possibility of Japanese investment in the hydro-electric sector in the future?**

We are currently supporting the Tanahu Hydropower project. JICA sees huge potential in the hydropower sector in Nepal. Only a small portion of hydropower potential developed in Nepal and it can be one of the major industries in Nepal to gain foreign currency sources from India and Bangladesh and contribute to regional connectivity. I have heard that some Japanese private companies are interested in Nepal. We have been discussing the possibility of promote private sector participation.

**As Nepal is in the process of graduating from Least Development Country to developing countries status, will it change the ODA's criteria for grant in Nepal?**

As JICA has recently handed over rehabilitation of sections of BanepaSindhuli Road damaged by the earthquake in 2015 and the construction of Naubishe-Thankot Tunnel has already started, how do you see the performance of JICA aided projects in Nepal? ???

**What the priority sector for ODA in Nepal?**

We have been focusing on four areas. Those include earthquake rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction, We have been doing this for many years. However, after the earthquake 2015, this area is one of the most important areas in our cooperation. During this period we have reconstructed schools, hospitals and roads. We also provide financial and technical assistance to those who lost the houses, while promoting seismic-resilient buildings. Now we are shifting our attention from reconstruction to disaster risk reduction. So that the country can move towards resilience to natural disasters. The second area is infrastructures which include hydropower and highways and also water and sanitation. The third area is governance. For example, we supported to make civil law and we have also supported the government to a community dispute resolution system. Forth area is poverty reduction. This includes agriculture, education and health. These are the areas we have been working in in Nepal.

**One can see visible contributions of JICA in Nepal including health, education, road, and energy and agriculture sector, how you view these projects?**

Under the earthquake response, we have been helping housing reconstruction and school rebuilding. After the earthquake, we did more including the construction of hospitals and other important roads. In the transport sector, we are now supporting Nagdhunga Tunnel. This is now under construction. We have also been supporting the air safety of Tribhuvan International Airport. In power generation, we have supported two hydropower and currently, we are supporting Tanahu Hydropower. For water supply, we have to build several infrastructures. One has already completed in Kathmandu and one ongoing project in Pokhara and we are formulating a project in Biratnagar. We are also supporting sanitation in Pokhara. In governance, we have been supporting justice and public administration. In health, we have been supporting major hospitals, including Tribhuvan University Hospital.

**What about the private sector?**

Under the private sector development, we are encouraging private sector investors in Nepal. We have been trying to attract foreign investors to Nepal.



KATHMANDU-TERAI/MADEHSH EXPRESSWAY

# Fast Progress

*Despite facing so many hurdles including issues of land acquisition, COVID-29 Pandemic and technical obstructions, Kathmandu-Terai-Madhesh Expressway (Fast Track) Road Project has made a significant progress recently. As Nepal Army celebrates Nepal Army Day, the progress made in the construction of the highway has again proved that Nepal Army can well manage a mega infrastructure development project*

By A CORRESPONENT

Whenever difficult and seemingly-impossible tasks arise, the civilian government seeks the support from Nepal Army. Obeying to the civilian authority, NA always fulfills the trust endowed upon it.

After several setbacks and controversies in the construction process, Nepal government has requested NA to take the responsibility of construction of Kathmandu-Terai-Madhesh Expressway (Fast Track). Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda-led government on August 11, 2017 handed over

the project to Nepal Army.

With its involvement in track opening, NA's leadership has decided to take the construction of mega project on its hand.

Having wide experiences of constructing many strategic roads in difficult terrain in the hills, NA had mobilized its technical unit to carry out the initial construction work. Due to several reasons including the disruption caused by land acquisition and resettlement, the project's progress has suffered.

Following the approval of

DPR and appointment of Consultant in December 2020, the construction work of Fast Track has made a drastic progress. Despite the disruption posed by COVID-19 Pandemic, the construction of fast track is now gaining pace.

Earlier in 2011, Nepal Army opened the track of the road. The total cost of 72.5 kilometer road project is estimated to be Rs. 175 billion, according to a recently approved DPR.

Nepal Army is expected to complete the project by 2080/81 (2024/025) fiscal year, the project has



Photo by: Nepal Army

made over 42.85 percent physical and 42.80 percent fiscal progress. In total, the physical progress of the project now stands at 11.11 percent and 9.52 percent in the end of last fiscal year.

According to financial reports, the project has already spent Rs.17.83 billion till January 13, 2021. In the land acquisition, the project has already made a big progress distributing compensation to over 84 percent of the population. Disputes with locals in land in Khokana area are not fully settled yet.

In its recent press meet, Ne-

pali Army Headquarters (NAHQ) said that it would complete the construction of Kathmandu-Madhes/Terai Fast Track Project (Expressway) by March, 2024.

Although physical infrastructure progress in the Expressway, one of the national pride projects of the government, was reached just 6 per cent in two years, it has accelerated now at good speed.

Although the final date for the completion of the project was fixed for 2024, the NA has said that it would take the project works by developing a separate holistic plan or master plan to

complete the project within the given four years terms after the government handed over the project to the NA.

Brigadier General and project chief Sharad Lal Shrestha said that the NA was, however, committed to completing the project in the given timeframe of the government.

As the work is on, the Project develops and gives the final shape to its holistic plan that will have several packages and programs to complete the project in next four years.

Although the DPR of the project was finalized taking some more time, works like finalizing the tender processes and selecting the international project consultant is in the process of completion.

However, the government's current fiscal year's plan and policy program and budget had provided five years' term for the project. The Project office has estimated that it takes Rs. 175 billion, including VAT to complete the project.

As per the recently endorsed DPR of the project, the alignment of the project has been changed in Khokana (the zero point area) to avert historical Sikali temple and other pilgrimage as per the concern of the locals. As per the newly endorsed DPR, now the to-





## COVERSTORY

tal length of the fast track will be 72.5 from earlier total length 76.2 km. The NA will construct 87 bridges and three tunnels (6.41 km) in different locations of the project site.

Among the total bridges, 16 will be of special kind, he said. The Expressway will be of four lanes with 50 metres right of way and 25 metres wide road section in the hilly and 27 metres in the Terai region. Similarly, three tunnels will be constructed at Mahadev Danda (3.355 km), Dhedre (1.630 km) and Lendanda (1.430km) of Makwanpur district.

The Expressway will be of Asian Highway Design Standard (Primary Class) with 'A' level of service. The DPR of the project was prepared by Soosung Engineering & Consulting.

The project will have three interchange sections in Khokana, Budune and Nijgadh of Bara district and three toll plazas in the same places. Similarly, there will be 12 passengers under passes (PUP), five vehicle under passes (VUP), one passenger over pass (POP) and four vehicle over passes (VOP). Following the completion of

construction of the Terai/Madhesh Fast Track (Expressway) Project is underway despite some problems in mobilising team members representing the international consultant owing to COVID-19 pandemic.

Borehole drilling task began after the International Consultant completed its works of conducting geophysical survey, Brigadier General Poudyal said.

He said the borehole drilling tasks had begun in Mahadevtar, Lendanda and Dhedre of Makwanpur district. Samples of the collected rocks and soil taken out from the boreholes will be tested later.

The Fast Track or Expressway Project is one of the national pride

projects of the country, which the NA has been engaged with dedication for completing it by 2080/81 B.S.

The fast-track project was a test for not only the Nepal Army but also the entire leadership of the country. The fast-track is the shortest highway connecting Kathmandu Valley to

the Terai national road network.

The initiatives and cooperation of all sides is necessary for fulfilling the responsibility within the deadline, carrying out the works on the project with utmost seriousness and demonstrating the capability as the Fast-track Project is a national commitment and the lifeline.

NA has been carrying out works on the fast-track project without any delay taking it as an opportunity to create history for the country's economic development. Land within the range of 50 meters on both sides of the road has been acquired for the fast track.

A dedicated Project Head Office in Army HQ premises has been established with minimum necessary staffs comprising of experienced and competent army officials.

So far six meetings of Steering Committee (SPV) have been convened resulting in numerous key decisions and initiation of various important steps towards ultimate objective of timely and efficient construction of the project.

In three years since the construction of the project kicked off, it has achieved only 11.11 percent overall physical progress. If the work had been carried out as per the pre-determined schedule, more than 70 percent of the construction should have been completed by now.

In the report submitted by



the road, it will take one hour two minutes to travel the highway.

Head in Public Relations and Information Directorate and spokesperson of Nepal Army Brigadier General Shantosh Ballave Poudyal said that the project has been making good progress. He said that work on tunnel



Bikash Pokharel, project head of the Kathmandu-Terai-Madhesh Expressway (Fast Track) Road Project to the Development and Technology Committee of the Parliament, it is mentioned that the financial progress of the project is only 9.52 percent. Of the main works, blacktopping the roads, construction of tunnels and bridges has not started yet.

The length of the fast track road connecting Kathmandu to Terai is 72.5 kilometers in which, 55.5 kilometers of roads, 10.59 kilometers of tunnels and 6.41 percent bridges need to be constructed.

According to the project, 72.34 percent of the stone cutting work has been completed, 46.39 percent of the stone and soil filling work, 46.31 percent of the machinery structure and 32 percent of the pipe culvert work has been completed. Even three years after the start of construction of the project, the land acquisition has not been finalized yet.

Although 84 percent of the people in the project affected areas have received the compensation, 16 percent are yet to receive the amount. Of the 5,165 ropani of land in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Makwanpur districts ac-

is a problem in distribution of compensation of around 165 ropani land in Khokana, Bungmati and Dhukuchhap of Lalitpur. The government has allocated Rs 8.93 billion for the fast track in the current fiscal year. Target has been set to complete the project by fiscal year 2023/24 by dividing the works into 11 clusters.

As an oldest institution, Nepal Army (NA) has made many impossible things possible. From building roads in remote and difficult parts of the country to defending Nepal's international border, protecting the national park, saving life during the natural disasters and enhancing Nepal's international image taking part in UN peacekeeping, NA has been contributing tremendously.

#### Project Brief

Following the Government decision and after taking over the re-



On 2074/03/08 “Kathmandu-Terai/Madesh Expressway Project Implementation Procedure-2074” was approved by the Council of Ministers, the Government of Nepal.

On 2074/02/23 an aerial reconnaissance was conducted by high level army official to assess the present status of Expressway's alignment.

A Walk-Over Survey was conducted by a team of engineers from Kathmandu to Nijgadh from 2074/03/29 till 2074/03/01.

Establishment of camps and deployment of troops have already commenced. As of now, five camps have been manned. Procurement process for camp management and minimum required equipment has already begun.

A dedicated Project Head Office in Army HQ premises has been established with minimum necessary staffs comprising of experienced and competent army official.

So far six meetings of Steering Committee (SPV) have been convened resulting in numerous key decisions and initiation of various important steps towards ultimate objective of timely and efficient construction of the project.



quired by the project, it has paid compensation for 4,357 ropani. It has not been able to distribute compensation for the remaining 807 ropani land as the locals of Khokana, Lalitpur are refusing to receive it.

The project stated that there

sponsibility of construction and management of the Expressway by Nepali Army, following work progress has been achieved as of now:

On 2074/02/14 then Prime Minister Puspa Kamal Dahal laid foundation stone in Nijgadh of Bara district.

# Outcomes from the Driving Seat



BY: BATU UPRETY

The Government of Nepal renamed the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (MoFSC) into the Ministry of Forests and Environment (MoFE) in 1992 with any additional environmental functions at the time of Minister Shailaja Acharya and it was again renamed as MoFSC before the establishment of the Environment Protection Council in 1993. In September 1995, the Government, led by the Prime Minister Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba, established the Ministry of Population and Environment (MoPE) with defined functions. The MoPE survived for a decade and was dissolved in 2005. The Ministry of Science and Technology was renamed as the Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology (MoEST) in 2005. Merging and separating ministries continued till 2018 by forming Ministry of Environment (MoE), MoEST, Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MoSTE), MoPE and finally MoFE without any major changes on functions and responsibilities. For the last two and half-decade, environment was dealt as a 'potato' by mixing with population, science, technology, and forests. Record shows higher level of dedication of the MoE in discharging its functions.

Prior to the establishment of MoPE, the Government implemented the Environmental Impact Study Project headed by Mr. Sushil Bhattarai, a seasoned, committed and dedicated forester since 1981. Mr. Bhattarai started government-funded project with slightly over NRs 1 lakh (annual budget, including salary) and contributed substantially in raising awareness at different levels even by organising seminar annually during King's visit in development regions, introduced Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, convinced the policy-makers to include environment-related policies in the periodical plans (6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> plans), and drafted national environmental policy and a bill. Project budget reached to NRs. 6

lakhs and 24 thousands in 1987. Then, separate Environment Divisions were established in the National Planning Commission in 1988, and the Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed

Management in 1987. Environment Division of the Department was later moved to MoFE in 1992. Contribution of Dr. Mohan Man Sainju, Prof. Upendra Man Mall and P.P. Shah was instrumental in including environmental policies in the periodical plans in 1980s. It took nearly one and half-decade to establish MoPE in 1995 with defined roles and responsibilities. Contribution of Dr. Arju Deuba was recognised in establishing the MoPE.

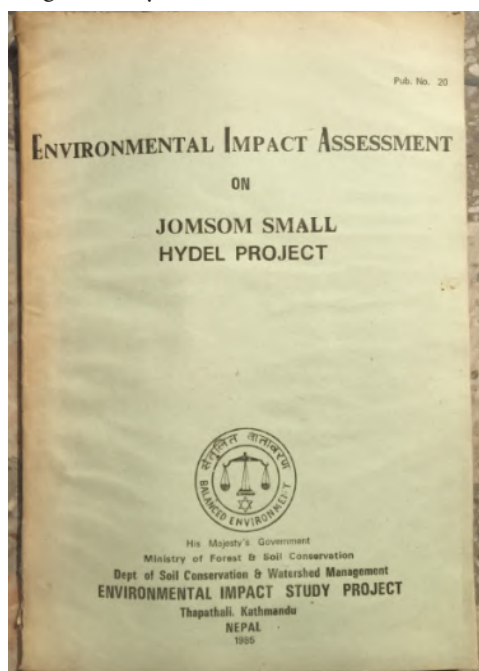
Excluding Prime Ministers and Deputy Prime Ministers having environmental portfolio for shorter period, a total of 28-ministers led the Environment Min-

istry with once repetition of Mr. Prakash Man Singh, first Minister for Population and Environment in Nepal. Ten and 12 ministers represented Nepali Congress and Communist Parties (UML and NCP, including 5 ministers from NCP-united) respectively, and remaining 6 were from other Parties. Almost all got the environment portfolio when they became the minister for the first time. During this period, 23 secretaries served the environment ministry. With this in background, this note memorises the key outcomes of the political (M) and administrative (S) leaders on the environment (first initiative) during the last 25 years.

Mr. Prakash Man Singh (M) and Mr. Surya Nath Upadhya (first Secretary) were instrumental

in formulating, negotiating and getting approval of the organisational structure of MoPE with multi-disciplinary human resources, and the Environment Protection Bill (1996) from the Parliament.

Ms. Vidya Devi Bhandari (M) is remembered for enforcing the Environment Protection Rules (EPR, 1997) as of her 100 days work and initiating Rhododen-



dron conservation in Milke Danda.

Mr. Purna Bahadur Khadka is credited for officially publishing the State of the Environment Report in 1998 for the first time in Nepal, and mobilising Environment Protection Fund.

Mr. Bhakta Bahadur Balayar, also remembered as 'Tempo Minister' proved himself committed and dedicated leader with Dr. Govinda Raj Bhatta (S) in banning the use of diesel-operated three wheelers from Kathmandu, Pokhara and Lumbini areas, releasing Nepal Vehicle Mass Emission Standards (BS 2056), and introducing micro-buses in Nepal, including issuance of Rules concerning the import of Ozone Layer depleting substances.

During the Royal regime, MoPE was dissolved in 2005. Mr. Dev Raj Regmi was the secretary and Mr. Lok Darshan Regmi was the chief of the Environment Division at that time. Mr. Lok D. Regmi is credited to make the Environmental Assessment Section technical in 2006 in MoEST and initiating carbon trade in 2005 by registering biogas CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) project and selling carbon credit at the rate of US \$ 5 per ton of CO<sub>2-eq</sub> (same rate in REDD+ in February 2021). Mr. Bal Krishna Prasai (S) was instrumental in revitalising the climate change activities in 2007 as a Party to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The Climate Change Section was established in 2008 during the time of Er. Ganesh Shah (M) and Mr. Umesh Prasad Mainali (S).

Under the leadership of Thakur Prasad Sharma (M) and Dr. Udaya Raj Sharma (S), Nepal prepared negotiating issues for Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, and organised regional conference on Kathmandu to Copenhagen. A Cabinet meeting at Kalapatthar drew the attention of the international community on adverse effects of climate change in Nepal Himalaya. Mr. Deepak Bohara (M) actively mobilised in-country works and climate rally in Copenhagen in 2009.

Concerted efforts, commitment and dedication of the Environment Minister (Mr. Sharma) and two technical secretaries - Dr. Udaya Raj Sharma and Dr. Ganesh Raj Joshi - were remarkable in institutionalising climate change activities in Nepal by initiating and establishing Climate Change Management Division of technical nature in MoE in early 2010. Furthermore, Minister Sharma and Dr. Joshi showed leadership while adopting National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) in 2010 and the Climate Change Policy in early 2011.

Approval of the National Framework on Local Adaptation Plan for Action (LAPA in November 2011) and establishment of the Department of Environment (DoE) in July 2012 happened during the time of Mr. Hem Raj Tated (M), and Mr. Krishna Gyawali (S).

Mr. Prakash Mathema deserves appreciation for leading the LDC Coordination Group in UNFCCC

process in 2013 and 2014, except Lima session in a professional manner. Final session of Nepal's chairmanship was professionally coordinated and negotiated by Dr. K.C. Poudel (S) in Lima, Peru in 2014. The NAP formulation process was initiated in 2015 and intended Nationally Determined Contribution (iNDC) was prepared and submitted in early 2016 during the time of Dr. Poudel.

Mr. Shakti Bahadur Basnet (M) and Dr. Biswa N. Oli (S) led the environment for the longest period in Nepal. During this period, separate action plans on clean environment campaign (2018) and air quality management in the Kathmandu Valley (2019), and a National Environment Policy (2019) were released. The EPA (2019), EPR (2020), climate change policy (2019) and LAPA framework (2019), and second NDC (2020) were issued after 3-tiers of government in Nepal but they were first issued in 1996, 1997, 2011 and 2016 respectively.

Two unnatural events happened. Nepal made statement in English with Nepali script in Paris in 2015. The MoPE Secretary was sent 'back to Nepal' before remaining two days of the Fiji/Bonn Climate Change Conference in November 2017. Interesting stories of the last 4 decades remain undocumented on environment and climate change.

Many people contributed in developing and implementing policy and legal instruments with guidelines and manuals, in establishing and/or strengthening institution(s) and internalising environmental assessment system and climate change activities in Nepal. At present, environmental institutions have been sufficiently staffed, equipped and matured; necessary policies and legal instruments, and acceptance on the urgency of protecting and sustainably utilising environmental goods and services are in place; necessary funding is available from bilateral and multilateral sources; and knowledge is sufficiently generated and documented. Nepalese universities are producing good number of human resources. Nepal has made 'huge' national and international commitments in ensuring environment conservation and advancing climate change activities. People have strong desire to participate in improving the environmental quality but there is a big gap between 'commitments and actions' and mobilisation of 'knowledge-based' human resources. In many cases, needs for revising policies, guidelines, guides etc are raised before their implementation along with the change in leadership.

Nepal has 'golden opportunities' to benefit from environmental assessment process, water and air quality improvement, and climate change adaptation but requires to translate commitments into actions professionally.

*Upriety is a former Joint-Secretary (Tech) and involved in institutionalizing Environment Assessment system in Nepal, then Ministry of Environment. E-mail: uprietybk@gmail.com*



# First Batch To Nepal

*As Nepal has launched the second phase of vaccination, receiving the first batch of COVID-19 vaccines from COVAX facility is a great support*

By A CORRESPONDENT

Vaccinating Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli at TU Teaching Hospital, Nepal has entered into the second round of COVID-20 vaccination drive. As it is aiming to vaccinate over 4 million population above the age of 55, Nepal needs to ensure adequate supply.

Thanks to COVAX facility, Nepal was among the first countries in Asia to receive COVID-19 Vaccines. The COVID-19 vaccines delivered by COVAX will contribute to the Government of Nepal's efforts to vaccinate some of the most vulnerable people across Nepal.

As Nepal has launched the second round of vaccination scheme, Nepal received its first consignment of COVID-19 vaccine doses shipped through the COVAX Facility, a partnership between CEPI, Gavi, UNICEF and WHO, made possible through generous donor support from governments, international organizations, foundations and the private sector.

The delivery of COVAX-procured vaccines to Nepal is part of a historic step towards ensuring equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines globally, in what will be the largest vaccine procurement and supply operation in history.

The goal of the COVAX Facility is to supply Nepal with enough doses to vaccinate 20% of the population depending on funding availability. Under the first COVAX allocation, the COVAX Facility will deliver 1.92 million vaccine doses to Nepal by the



end of May 2021, in support of the Government of Nepal's nation-wide vaccination campaign.

The first COVAX shipment of 348,000 doses of AstraZeneca 'Covishield' vaccines manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII), together with 350,000 syringes and 3500 vaccine safety boxes arrived in Kathmandu before being distributed to provinces and municipalities across the country.

COVAX-supported vaccines provide a critical contribution to the Government of Nepal's National Deployment and Vaccination Plan (NDVP) target to vaccinate roughly 22 million people, among them refugees, migrant returnees and other migrant populations. With the contribution of the Government of India, Nepal was able to commence the vaccination campaign and to date, 429,705 people have been vaccinated.

The COVAX Facility is gen-

erously funded by partner governments, including the Governments of Australia, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union as well as foundations and corporations.

The arrival of the COVAX supplied vaccines will boost Nepal's vaccination efforts as it coincides with the launch of the second phase of the vaccination campaign which targets those who are most vulnerable to developing severe illness from COVID-19 including the elderly and people with comorbidities. The second phase will also target teachers, as part of the expanded group of frontline workers.

Ongoing public health measures to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 will continue to be critical alongside vaccination. This includes adhering to testing and quarantine measures, mask wearing, hand hy-

giene, and physical distancing of at least two meters.

Representatives of the COVAX technical and funding partners joined the Minister of Health and Population, Hridayesh Tripathi, in welcoming the global COVAX contribution to Nepal's COVID-19 vaccination efforts at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu.

Development partners congratulated Nepal for being among the first countries in the world to have launched COVID-19 vaccination efforts in January 2021. They reiterated their solidarity with Nepal, as exemplified by the arrival of the first COVAX vaccine contribution.

Nepal's development partners are committed to working with Nepal through the pandemic recovery period to ensure that no one is left behind. Supporting the vaccination of everyone living in Nepal through COVAX will go a long way to restoring normalcy, preventing the loss of social and economic gains made and paving the way for socio-economic recovery.

#### PM Oli Administered

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli received the vaccine against the novel coronavirus starting the second phase of the COVID-19 vaccination drive,

The Prime Minister requested everyone to cooperate with the government by taking part in the vaccination campaign. For the first 10 days of the second phase, citizens above 65 years of age will be administered the

vaccine after 10 days people above 55 years of age will be vaccinated.

The second phase of the immunization will cover the citizens above 65 years in the country. In the 15 mountain districts, people above 55 will be immunized.

The target is to administer the vaccine to around 1.6 million senior citizens, said an official. A total of 6,000 vaccination centers have been set up across the country for the purpose.

The first phase of the campaign was organized from January 27 to February 22, which targeted the frontline workers including health workers.

A total of 429,000 people took the first dose of the Covishield vaccine in the first phase.

The second phase of vaccination began after the Prime Minister receiving the vaccine against COVID-19 at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH), Maharajgunj.

At a press briefing organized by the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), said Minister for Health and Population Hridayesh Tripathi said that the government has made various efforts for the availability of vaccine to all the citizens.

Minister Tripathi asked all to help the vaccination drive to make it successful.

"For the first ten days, we will administer citizens above 65 years of age and then will continue to administer the vaccine to people above 55 years of age," said Minister Tripathi.

The second phase of vaccination drive is very important as most vulnerable groups are prioritized in this phase, added Minister Tripathi.

According to Dr. Jageshwar Gautam, spokesperson for the MoHP, the gov-

ernment plans to vaccinate as many as 1.6 million senior citizens above 65 years of age in the second phase of COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

The campaign would be conducted at more than 6,000 vaccination centres and 15,000 health workers will be mobilized across the nation, said Dr. Gautam. Similarly, people above 55 will be administered the vaccine against the disease with the availability of vaccines, informed Dr. Gautam.

According to Dr. Gautam, the vaccination campaign will last for about 20 days, with the first 10 days being allocated for those above 65 years of age and the remaining 10 days for people between 55 to 64 years of age.

"We request everyone in the priority group to go to the convenient vaccine centres (health facilities) for vaccination, to protect self and others from COVID-19 infection," said Dr. Gautam.

One million doses of Covishield were provided and brought to Nepal on January 21, under the grant assistance from the Indian government. Another one million purchased Covishield vaccines have also arrived in Nepal.

According to the MoHP, 429,705 persons have received the first dose of the vaccine, which is 1.4 per cent of the total population in the first phase of vaccination campaign.

Nepal is receiving 348,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines under the World Health Organization's COVAX facility.

Minister Tripathi informed that in total the vaccines under COVAX programme would suffice for 20 per cent of people in Nepal. Among the SAARC countries, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Nepal only are receiving vaccines from COVAX.

Under the COVAX facility, Nepal is receiving the Covishield vaccine, which has been developed jointly by Oxford University and AstraZeneca pharmaceutical company. The Serum Institute of India has manufactured the vaccines.





EU SUPPORT TO BUNGAMATI

# Reviving Tradition

*At a time when Kathmandu Valley's traditional heritage sites are gradually disappearing, EU is extending support to revive the ancient treasure of Bungmati with a message, conservation for promotion of tourism*

By A CORRESPONDENT

In their traditional attire, and with music, local people of Bugmati, a traditional Newari settlement, were enthusiastically waiting for their guests, Ambassador of European Union to Nepal Nona Derez and Mayor of Lalitpur Chiri Babu Maharjan on February 26. For the local residents of Khokana and Bungmati, it was a day of celebration.

They welcomed Ambassador Nona Derez and Mayor Maharjan in their traditional elegance as the guests jointly laid the foundation

stone of the Multipurpose Training Center in Bugmati amid a function.

Damaged and devastated by the Gurkha earthquake in 2015, the Newari settlements have been revived, preserving their past glory. Supported by the European Union and implemented by UN Habitat through Sustainable Tourism and Green Growth collaboration with local community, NGOs, Lalitpur Metropolitan and NRA, Sustainable Tourism and Green Growth for Heritage Settlements of Kathmandu

Valley is a game changer for the local community.

The earthquake damaged 563 of 856 houses in the core area of Bungamati. Most of the buildings that survived were also badly damaged and were left unusable. Major temples and shrines were lost including Machhendranath, Hyagriv Bhairav and Manakamana temple. The biggest loss was the private houses with heritage values. In the last six years, almost everything has been revived.



At a time when many other traditional settlements are still in the process of revival, local community of Khokana and Bungmati have already seen the results yielded. Although COVID-19 has badly shaken Nepal's tourism sector due to lack of foreign tourists, Khokana and Bungmati are attracting the domestic tourists.

For the support given by European Union to revive and preserve their city and way of life, ambassador Nona Derez's presence was highly important for them. The warm welcome given to the ambassador was their reflection of love for the revival of their city.

During the last four years, Bungamati and Khokana have been drastically transformed from being the cities of devastation and destructions to the cities of revived with their traditional settlement. Along with private house, Falacha



Pati, stone spout, traditional well, traditional ponds, street solar lights, renovation of public toilets and view point have already been constructed.

A total of 320 locals have been trained on various skills like Yomari Moulding, Wood Craft,

Homestay Management, Cooking and Food Processing, Dhime Instrument, Lakhe Dance, Pickle production, Bhyo, Advance stitching etc. Other 228 locals, including 182 females, were trained in Entrepreneurship Development.





Realizing the importance of a formal institution to train the local youth, the project has designed a training center. This is going to be a major part to train youths in traditional skills. This is important for sustainable tourism promotion and employment generation.

European Ambassador to Nepal Nona Deprez and Mayor of Lalitpur Metropolitan City Mahajan jointly laid the foundation stone of the Multipurpose Training Center in Bugmati amid the function on February 28.

The center will be used to train people in traditional crafts of the areas. The center will also provide training to the young people traditional skill under the Build Back Better. This kind of training will be exemplary for local youth to learn traditional craftsmanship.

The objective was Promoting Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) with heritage tourism sector stakeholders, including the policy makers of reconstruction, through demonstration in the Bunga-



mati settlement, policy advice, dialogue and advocacy at Kathmandu Valley / Nepal level;

“Training young people in traditional crafts like woodcarving is a great example of the economic opportunities of promoting culture,” said ambassador Deprez who interacted with local community observing their way of life.

Ambassador Deprez thanked the local community, UN-Habitat Nepal for the preservation of traditional crafts. She also

thanked the Mayor of Lalitpur for their exemplary cooperation to restore the ancient cultural city of Bungamati.

Mayor of Lalitpur Metropolitan City Maharjan lauded the support given by European Union for the revival of the two traditional Newari settlements and livelihood. “LMC and local community are very grateful to European Union for its support and UN Habitat and other NGOs for their contribution to restore the cities in the old style.”

The partners of the project are Nepal Government, Switch Asia, European Union, Lalitpur Metropolitan City Ward 22 and Bungamati Area Reconstruction and Development Council (BARDeC).

Implementation partners include UN-Habitat for Overall implementation, Centre for Integrated Urban Development (CIUD) Heritage conservation, LUMANTI Community mobilization, SAARC Business Association of Home-based Workers- SABAH-Nepal for Livelihood and tourism promotion and Institute of Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS) for





capacity building.

In close collaboration with local elected representatives, local communities and Nepal government, the project has been reviving not only the physical restructuring but also the traditional life styles, cultures and hand-crafts. Thus, the multi-purpose training center is highly important.

Driving a few kilometers from congested and crowded new urban settlements of Patan and Kathmandu, one can find well preserved traditional Newari settlements in Bungmati and Khokana. This is also an example to show how different organizations can work together to Promote Sustainable Tourism and Green Growth in Heritage Settlements of Kathmandu Valley, contributing to the overall SWITCH Asia objectives of promoting sustainable development, reducing poverty and contributing towards mitigating climate change. European Union has been financially supporting the project.

The project is promoting entrepreneurship among women and



youth. With SME engagement and investment, product innovation and sector campaigns, the project hopes to support the livelihood of the people.

#### Sharing the Success

After learning from Bungamti, Heritage Recovery Plan handed over to respective Municipalities, including Kisipidi, Balambu, Kirtipur, Panga, Chovar, Siddhipur, Lubhu, Thecho, Chapagaon and Thaiba.

Although some of traditional Newar settlements in the

Kathmandu Valley have been losing their traditional styles with rampant construction of new concrete structures, Khokana and Bungamti have preserved their traditional style as a showcase for other settlements.

Had the UN-Habitat not sought solutions through sustainable tourism, Bungamti would also not have revived as it is today. UN-Habitat launched the project with the main objective of reducing poverty through building the economy of people contributing towards mitigating climate change, promoting sustainable development through technical assistance policy support and pilot demonstration.

Community mobilization, heritage conservation and livelihood enhancement are three pillars of the project. These are key factors for revival of Bungamti as well. During the visit of ambassador Deprez, local people have shown how their tradition and culture can lure tourists in the future thanks to the support of European Union.





# Never The Twain Shall Meet

As a teenager I remember reading stories of the Wild West of America by Zane Grey and other writers. There seemed to be plenty of shooting – bang, bang in what were then really wild areas with cowboy culture. The conclusion of the Trump Era in January of 2021, especially the attack on the seat of Congress seemed to be a yearning to re-create that scenario in a land which has been labelled the seat of the brave. A substantial percentage of the people of US seemed to want to relive those times.

Nearer home we can think of India during the days that the British were ruling the country. Poems and stories by Rudyard Kipling set in those times e.g. the novel ‘Kim’ portrays the political game that was then taking place on the Indian Subcontinent. Kipling, an apt representative of the Colonial masters reflected this in much of what he wrote. In his ‘The Ballad of the East & West’ written in 1889 he goes on to pronounce, ‘East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet’.

Mankind, though of different colours or race has developed on Planet Earth over the centuries. Present day humans, now totalling 7.8 billion in March 2020 worldwide, though of different colours or races are all Homo sapiens. As per the present knowledge, we all have a common heritage being descendants of Lucy of African origin, from whose mitochondria the beginning of present-day mankind occurred.

Life on this planet Earth has never been fair. Suppression of the initial inhabitants in all six continents of this world has been the order of the day. The outsiders, usually from lands across the seven seas were the ones who, in former times subjugated the local inhabitants and lorded over them. Many ethnic communities in different parts of the world were cheated, subjugated and perhaps even eliminated by the conquerors.

Slavery dates back to as early as 3500 BCE when conquering armies took the defeated as slaves. During the time of the Crusades both the Christians and the Muslims took the vanquished as slaves. The Atlantic slave trade in which the Portuguese were major players started in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. This activity in trading of slaves was taken up by many countries of Europe and even practised in many countries worldwide is an example of man’s inhumanity to fellow beings. We in Nepal practised to till PM Chandra freed and settled them in Amlekhganj! It is only by the tumbling down of the statues of slave traders and by movements such as ‘Black Lives Matter’ that prevailing inhuman practises and its effect has been brought to the notice of the world.

It is the spirit for exploration of mankind which has egged individuals to sail or fly around the world, climb the highest mountain, send the Sputnik and later Laika the dog to circle the earth too. This feat followed the setting up of Mir, space station. Then came the US landing on the moon.



BY: HEMANG DIXIT

Pieces of Moon Rock, in an especially mounted form, became souvenir items for special VIPs visiting the US to be presented with. One wonders at all these developments and activities! Is there is a suspicion between the competing forces about one another’s capability and strength which prompts them to carry out and display such activities? Are the development of bombs and missiles all shows of strength? The big powers, spending millions on such activities are ignoring not just the poor of the third world but also the disadvantaged and unprivileged in their own lands! The recent Covid-19 pandemic deaths of large numbers of the population in many countries of the world has demonstrated that it is the unprivileged working poor, persons trying to make ends meet are the ones who are bearing the brunt of this viral onslaught on humanity. The masses of the third world are not asking for Baikuntha or Utopia on earth, but for a just decent manner in which to conduct their lives!

Imagine the millions of dollars spent on the Space Patrol created by Trump and the recent landing of NASA Perseverance Rover on the empty and desolate crater of planet Mars millions of miles away in space. The photographs there from are stupendous but costs are surely phenomenon, in trillions! A great feat for the ‘well offs’ of the world but let down for the poor majority struggling to live. This is frankly one up-man-ship, displaying and proving one’s might to other contenders of supremacy on Earth! This trait has resulted in other nations exhibiting their possibilities by firing missiles over land and seas in other parts of the world.

And how might this be achieved? By selling arms and ammunition to warring groups of the third world or to those with special interests, who want to change or subjugate others? Supply of weapons by sale or donation to warring ones and interference in political affairs by powerful nations must stop immediately. It is the innocent masses of economically poor countries that are affected – go hungry, are injured or even starve to death for no fault of their own.

With all the existing International Bodies, where many nations are represented, is it not possible to come to a worldwide consensus on the desirability of making our world into a better place for all inhabitants, wherever they may be? We of this generation should take action to prevent global warming and environmental degradation so that we of this generation leave the world a better place to live in for all our future generations.

In conclusion it is worth noting the third & fourth lines of Kipling’s ballad which states:

“But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,

When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from ends of the earth.”

*The author is a retired medical doctor and writes fiction under the pen name of Mani Dixit also. Website: [www.hdixit.org.np](http://www.hdixit.org.np). Twitter: @manidixithd*



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