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**VIEWPOINT**  
Dr. Tilak Rawal



**OPINION**  
BINOJ BASNYAT



**FORUM**  
Shiva Ram Pd. Koirala (PhD)

# NEW SPOTLIGHT

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FORTNIGHTLY

## H मेरी अस्पताल H

COVID CRISIS

# Health Alert

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Back At Work



**JSP-N POLITICS**  
On Verge Of Split





# नेपाल राष्ट्र बैंक

सहुलियत पूर्ण कर्जा उपयोग गरौं, स्वरोजगार बनी जीवनस्तर उकासौं । युवाहरूलाई स्वरोजगार, व्यावसायिक क उद्यमशील बनाउने उद्देश्य राखी सहुलियतपूर्ण कर्जाका लागि ब्याज अनुदान सम्बन्धी एकीकृत कार्यविधि, २०७५ लागू गरिएको छ । यस कार्यविधि अन्तर्गत १० प्रकारका सहुलियतपूर्ण कर्जा जुनसुकै बैंक तथा वित्तीय संस्थाबाट प्राप्त गर्न सकिन्छ ।

- क) व्यावसायिक कृषि तथा पशुपन्छी कर्जा पाँच करोड रुपैयाँसम्म
- ख) शिक्षित युवा स्वरोजगार कर्जा सात लाख रुपैयाँसम्म
- ग) विदेशबाट फर्केका युवा परियोजना कर्जा दश लाख रुपैयाँसम्म
- घ) महिला उद्यमशील कर्जा पन्ध्र लाख रुपैयाँ सम्म
- ङ) दलित समुदाय व्यवसाय विकास कर्जा दश लाख रुपैयाँसम्म
- च) उच्च र प्राविधिक तथा व्यावसायिक शिक्षा कर्जा पाँच लाख रुपैयाँसम्म
- छ) भूकम्प पीडितहरूको निजी आवास निर्माण कर्जा तीन लाख रुपैयाँसम्म
- ज) कपडा उद्योग सञ्चालनको लागि पाँच करोड सम्म ।
- भन्) प्राविधिक शिक्षा तथा व्यावसायिक तालिम परिषद्बाट मान्यता प्राप्त संस्थाबाट लिइने तालिम आदिको लागि दुईलाख सम्म ।
- ञ) युवा वर्ग स्वरोजगार कर्जा पाँच लाख रुपैयाँ सम्म ।

थप जानकारीका लागि नजिकको बैंक तथा वित्तीय संस्थामा सम्पर्क राखौं ।

## लैङ्गिक हिंसाको अन्त्य; समृद्ध नेपालको गन्तव्य



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**Notes From The Editor**



With the spike of coronavirus cases in the second wave, Nepal's health system is now facing a major strain. Given the current rate of infection and fatality, Nepal is likely to see the number of infections and deaths doubling within few months. As Nepal had made a good progress maintaining the level of COVID-19 below 100, it opened all the economic activities ignoring the capability of virus to spread. Unlike in the first phase, Nepal did not close its border and discontinue flights to India despite the major threat of spreading the virus in the country. Along with political rallies, festivals, marriage ceremonies and other such other activities, full opening of schools without maintaining a proper safeguard give open space to the virus to spread at the community level. Due to all these activities, the success achieved by Nepal in yearlong effort has crumbled just in a matter of 15 days. Facing all political troubles due to break up of the party, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli led government ignored the warning issued by health experts and Ministry of Health and Population. Following the surge and saturation of patients in the hospitals, the government finally took a drastic step by announcing lockdown, border closure and other activities. However, the country has started to see the painful scenario. As the country's 22 districts, including Kathmandu Valley, are now under a three-week lock down, how this helps to curb the pandemic spread remains to be seen. At a time when the country has been passing through this kind of situation, it is the duty of all the citizens to abide by the rules and support the steps taken by the government. New Spotlight also calls for its readers to take all the caution and support the initiative taken by the government to control the virus. This is our cover story for this issue.

**Keshab Poudel**

Editor

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# How COVID-19 Threatens The Future Of The Children, Especially Young Girls?



BY: NOVELA ACHARYA

Of all the innumerable lives touched by the deadly COVID-19 virus, the 600 million children in South Asia are amongst the profoundly affected ones. Although the virus has affected all groups of children, for some the impact might be long-term and life-long damaging. There are millions of children in the region who are in the underprivileged position for whom the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 can be more intense apart from the direct health hazard. Existing disparities among children, especially girls are worsening and the decade long progress made to achieve gender equality has been reversed.

Nationwide lockdown to control the virus created various challenges which affected the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups the most. Deep rooted discrimination and inequality has been uncovered with the ongoing pandemic. Amongst various group of population, the virus infection in the children under the age group of 15 was less during the first wave of the virus in comparison to other age groups, but there have been several other challenges that the children of this age group are facing which has exacerbated the already existing problems of food security, unequal access to education and nutrition, disparity in access to health facility and many more.

Disruption in education has led to permanent drop out of school for children in the poorer families. Report shows that due to school closures, millions of children are stuck at home and the household chores especially for the girl children living in the rural and remote areas in South Asian countries like Nepal are skyrocketing. This has prevented them from spending enough time for their studies. Further, many children are not in the position to be able to do remote learning due to inaccessibility of facilities like computer and internet resulting in performing poor in studies leading to permanent school drop-out. A recent study by the UNICEF shows that, only 25 percent of school going children in Nepal used distance learning platforms during the school closures. This clearly depicts how large number of children are deprived of getting access to education during the pandemic. These situations have been of major setback on the progress of children's education in Nepal.

Further, according to the World Bank, Nepal is amongst the two countries in South Asia which has the worst economic indicator and poverty remains a major problem. Lack of education leading to lack of employment opportunities for the younger generation can make the situation even worse. Hence, the pandemic should not be a hurdle for the equal educational opportunities for the younger generation irrespective of their gender, caste or economic status.

Due to the school closures, apart from lessons and learning, children have also been deprived of school feeding and nutrition programmes which have had serious effect on families with poor economic condition who had job loss and income resulting from the pandemic. Pandemic has aggravated the food security issue which has directly affected the goal to eradicate malnutrition and achieve zero hunger. Lack of nutrition has caused many children to suffer from non-communicable diseases as well such as anaemia and other nutritional deficiency diseases, which directly affect their decision-making and thinking abilities. Further, girls have been deprived of getting menstrual hygiene knowledge and products due to the school closures.

High number of early marriages have also been observed as the consequence of the pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic, 40 percent of young girls in Nepal were married before the age of 18 and 7 percent before the age of 15, shows UNICEF report. As per the report, Nepal ranks third in South Asia after India and Bangladesh with high number of child marriages. Child welfare organization, Save the Children has also warned that up to 2.5 million girls around the world are at risk of early marriage in the period of next 5 years as the result of the pandemic. This global graph helps figure out the situation of the countries like Nepal too. Among various regions, South Asia is a major risk zone for child marriage which has further worsened due to COVID-19.

The number of child marriage has escalated higher in Nepal following the lockdown during the pandemic. Many girls at a very young age are married off to ease the economic burden, as many families in the rural areas who generate income through agriculture are suffering from economic crisis caused by the pandemic. A joint research done by Yale Research Institute on Innovation and Scale (Y-RISE) and the Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility had found out that during the lean season in agriculture in Nepal, the total hours in income-generating work decrease by 75 percent every year and through this they had predicted that the continued lockdown would lead to the percentage increasing even higher. The prediction did come out to be true as the continued lockdown for months exacerbated the lack of agricultural income generation because of the over-lapping of the lean season. Economic crisis resulting from these situations in the family leading to early marriage of the girl child has negatively affected the future of the girl children.

visit : [www.spotlightnepal.com/](http://www.spotlightnepal.com/) for full article

The author holds a Master of Science degree in Gender and Development Studies from the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand.

## NEWSNOTES

### Japanese Government Honors Ms. Yamane Masako

Yamane Masako has been recognized for her outstanding contribution as a medical volunteer in Nepal. In recognition of her long-term effort, she has been conferred the Order of the Rising Sun, Silver Rays.

The Government of Japan announced the recipients of the 2021 Spring Conferment of Decoration, which this year includes a Japanese volunteer

who has been working in Nepal since 1983.

“The Embassy of Japan congratulates Ms. Yamane on her achievement. Ms. Yamane began her activities in Nepal as a volunteer of the health care sector from 1983, and has been working here for more than 30 years. She works with the Rural Health Education and Service Center (RHESC), which was established in 1986 and has been providing medical treatment for socially and economically disadvantaged people in rural areas and suburbs in the north-east area of the Kathmandu Valley. RHESC’s reputation has spread and many people asked for treatment from all over Nepal,” read a statement.

They now care for about 15,000 people annually. Two months after the Gorkha Earthquake in 2015, RHESC started a mobile clinic in the earthquake-affected remote mountainous villages, particularly where doctors were not available. Their assistance gave both hope and peace of mind to the people in those areas. Ms. Yamane made contribution for better medical service in Nepal and her assistance is also recognized as one of the important support which has been made from Japan to Nepal. She was awarded the Ambassador’s Commendation in 2017.

### India Gifts 39 Ambulances And 6 School Buses To Nepal

Government of India has gifted 39 ambulances and six school buses to various governmental and non-governmental, not-for-profit organizations working in the field of health and education.



These organizations are spread across various districts of Nepal, including remote districts. These were gifted as part of long-standing tradition of the Embassy of India gifting ambulances and school buses to government and not-for-profit organizations every year to support grassroots medical

access, and of ongoing celebration of India@75.

Since 1994, the Embassy of India has gifted nearly 862 ambulances, including the latest gifts. The Embassy has this year gifted three different categories of ambulances: Ad-

vance Life Support category, Basic Life Support and Common Life Support ambulances. All three categories are built as per the guidelines of Government of Nepal.

The Embassy has, so far, gifted 166 school buses across Nepal, including the six latest gifts, to educational institutions located in various districts of Nepal.

The gifting of ambulances and school buses is part of Government of India’s continued support for the efforts of Nepal to strengthen health services, particularly emergency medical services and also facilitating students in easy physical access to their places of learning.

### India Builds Three School Buildings In Palpa

Karun Bansal, First Secretary (DP&R) of the Embassy of India, Kathmandu, District Coordination Committee, Palpa and School Management Committee and local representatives recently inaugurated three newly constructed school buildings in Palpa district.

Those buildings include Shree Rambha Higher Secondary School, Shree Laxmi Higher Secondary School and Shree Nava Adarsha Multiple Campus.

The schools were built with Government of India’s financial assistance of NRs. 98.37 million.

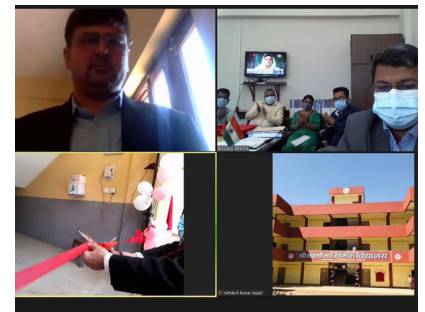
Shree Rambha Higher Secondary School was established in 1952 at Tahun VDC in Palpa district as a Secondary School and subsequently upgraded as Higher Secondary level School in 2002. Shree Laxmi Higher Secondary School was established in 1963 at Tansen-5, Bandipokhara in Palpa District as primary school and subsequently upgraded as Higher Secondary School in 2008.

India has already completed 448 HICDPs in Nepal, of which 41 are in Province 5, including 7 in Palpa District. Nine Government of India funded projects are under various stages of completion/implementation in Province-5 including one in Palpa District. In addition to above, the Embassy of India has gifted 12 ambulances and 2 buses to various health posts, NGOs and educational institutes in Palpa District.

### Japan Extends Grant Aid For Improvement Of Medical Equipment

The Government of Japan extends grant assistance of up to nine hundred and ninety-six million Japanese Yen (¥996,000,000), equivalent to about NRs. 1,096 million to the Government of Nepal for the project to improve Medical Equipment in Eight Advanced Public Hospitals in Nepal.

Japanese ambassador to Nepal KIKUTA Yutaka and Sishir Kumar Dhungana Secretary of the Ministry of Finance signed notes to this effect at the Ministry of Finance on Mon-







day, April 26.

The project aims to strengthen both diagnosis and treatment of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) by procuring medical equipment, providing consulting services, and undertaking renovation and maintenance

services at eight public hospitals. In Nepal, health care system is weak while NCDs, such as cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and cancer are serious problem.

Patients with underlying diseases of NCDs are at higher risk of becoming in critical condition once they are infected with COVID-19 which currently prevails in the world. Against this background, the enhancement of diagnostic and therapeutic services for NCDs in public hospitals has become more important and urgent than ever.

However, medical equipment for treating NCDs in Nepal's public hospitals is often insufficient or out-dated due to lack of financial resources for replacements. The Government of Nepal has prioritized treatment of NCDs, especially in public hospitals.

According to a press release issued by Embassy of Japan, the institutions to be supported are the Human Organ Transplant Center; Patan Hospital; Paropakar Maternity and Women's Hospital; National Trauma Center; Bir Hospital; Shahid Gangalal National Heart Centre; Manmohan Cardiothoracic Vascular and Transplant Center; and Kanti Children's Hospital.

After the signing of E/N, the Grant Agreement for the project was signed between Shreekrishna Nepal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Finance and Yumiko Asakuma, Chief Representative, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Nepal Office.

### KOICA Supported IRDP 2nd Phase Kicks Off At KU

KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency) with Jeonbuk National University (JBNU) of South Korea and Kathmandu University officially started the 2nd phase of the project "Integrated Rural Development of Nepal through Strengthening Research and Development Capacity of Kathmandu University"

Prof. Dr. Subodh Sharma, Registrar of KU, Sunghoon Ko, Country Director of KOICA Nepal Office and Prof. Dr. Gi Hwan Cho, Executive Vice President for Research of JBNU, were present at the event.

The project started in 2016 with a total budget of USD 10 million and completed the 1st phase in December, 2020. In the event, KU and PMC signed a



deal to transfer funds to KU for the 2nd phase project implementation.

The eight years project is being implemented with the goal to strengthen research and development capacity of Nepal to improve quality of life and income status of people in rural communities of Nepal through technology innovation.

In the 1st phase, various activities like establishment of Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP)/Nepal Technology Innovation Center (NTIC) Master plan, reinforcement of management capabilities of NTIC through 7 pilot projects have been carried out successfully. The construction of state-of-the-art NTIC Building (3117 sq. m.) is ongoing and 17 highly specialized scientific research equipment shall be installed in KU within May 2021.

In the 2nd phase, the project is implementing support programs in 7 major project themes; Research and Business Development Support (R&BD), Testing and Accreditation, Smart Health, School-based Enterprise, Start-up & Incubation, Education & Training, and Technology Database & Networking. The main purpose behind these projects is to establish a system for NTIC operation and enhance research and development capacity to promote technological innovation.

In the program, Sunghoon KO, Country Director of KOICA expressed that the 2nd phase of the project will create a solid foundation for the successful operation of NTIC. He added that the NTIC will be positioned as an excellent platform to facilitate research innovation, start-ups and incubation for the innovators in Nepal and their global partners.

### Japanese Ambassador Kikuta Emphasizes Special Intimacy Between Japan And Nepal

Ambassador of Japan to Nepal KIKUTA Yutaka has presented his credentials to the President Mrs. Bidya Devi Bhandari at the Office of the President, Shital Niwas.



After presenting his credentials, Ambassador Kikuta and President Bhandari discussed bilateral relations between the two countries, COVID-19 situation, trade and investment promotion, and social and economic development of Nepal.

Ambassador Kikuta mentioned that Japan shared the joy on the successful completion of the Melamchi Water Supply Project for better standards of living of Kathmanduites, as Japan assisted the crucial Water Treatment Plant (WTP) in Sundarjal.

He also mentioned the EXPO 2025 OSAKA, KANSAI, JAPAN, as an opportune showcase for Nepal to attract further foreign investment by highlighting "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali."

Ambassador Kikuta emphasized the special intimacy between Japan and Nepal and the strong ties between the people of two countries, which have also contributed to the long-term friendship.

## BUSINESS BRIEF

### NIBL ACE Capital Receives Enthusiastic Response

NIBL ACE Capital Sambridhi Fund-II has sold its 54 percent units on the first day, according to a press release issued by NIBL - A C E . It had announced Rs. 10 per unit for an amount of Rs.1.2 billion equivalent of 100 million units



**NIBL ACE CAPITAL**  
Managing shares Managing investments.

According to the press release, fifteen percent of units will be secured for promoter Nepal Investment Bank Limited. Under the provision, one can apply for minimum 100 units to 12 million units.

### HBL And Union Pay International Sign Agreement

Himalayan Bank Limited and Union Pay International (UPI) have entered a partnership to issue “HBL SCT UnionPay Debit Card” in Nepal to facilitate Nepalese students, travelers and businessmen traveling to India.

UPI expressed pleasure to see that, as a shareholder of SCT, the Bank has begun to issue UnionPay Debit Cards through SCT to more locals of Nepal. Further, UPI hopes to strengthen cooperation with the Bank in contactless POS acceptance, QR code and e-wallet business in near future.

The cards issued by HBL will be able to conduct

transactions on all UnionPay networks in Nepal and India. At present, almost all the ATM and POS terminals in Nepal accept UnionPay cards and 95%



ATM and 75% POS merchants in India can accept UnionPay cards.

Himalayan Bank Limited is one of the top banks in Nepalese Banking Industry. It is the only bank having the largest card acceptance in Nepal which includes various world renowned card Brands such as American Express, JCB, MasterCard, UnionPay, Visa and soon to accept Diners and Discover. HBL has been providing the largest options to its cardholders in case of issuance of the Debit,

Credit and Pre-paid card.

Himalayan Bank is the strategic partner of UPI in Nepal. The two parties have been cooperating well since 2010, and Himalayan Bank is the first bank to issue UnionPay card in 2014 in Nepal. SCT is the largest local UnionPay card issuing institution, both parties launched e-wallet product Qpay in 2018, which provide UnionPay mobile payment service to the local UnionPay cardholders. Himalayan Bank and SCT greatly support UPI's localization strategy and serve the economic and commercial exchanges between China and Nepal.

### Yarn Manufacturers, UKaid Programme Forge Partnership

The British Ambassador to Nepal Nicola Pollitt, Chairperson of Nepal Yarn Manufacturers' Association (NYMA) Pawan Golyan, came together with the UKaid Skills for Employment Programme to commemorate the impacts of the SEP-NYMA partnership and reflect on the way forward—for sustained job creation and industry transformation of the yarn industry.

NYMA and SEP's multi-factory partnership, since November 2019, has enabled quality job-linked skilling and employment for nearly 4,000 workers and improved factory capability at the Triveni Spinning Mill, Jagadamba Spinning Mill, Reliance Spinning Mill, Tricot Industry, and Jaya Spinning Mill.



“We are proud of our joint efforts which have strategically addressed skill gaps to meet industry workforce and productivity demands,” noted the British Ambassador to Nepal Pollitt. The event, joined by leading industrialists from the yarn industry such as Ram Chandra Shanghai, Bishnu Neupane, Abheek Jyoti, Shakti Golyan, and Akshya Golyan also saw the launch of an industry-adopted curricula covering five job roles. The improved and standardized curricula – co-created, tested, and refined with inputs from the factories – alongside improved trainer capability, infrastructure, and streamlined processes at the factories, can enable and ensure sustained productivity and job creation by the industry.

“Skilling initiatives coupled with firm growth-enabling interventions form an integral part of our combined efforts to transform the yarn industry through modernization and expansion, diversification of its exports to new geographies [through improved quality and price competitiveness], and improve organizational capabilities,” Pawan Golyan, Chairperson of NYMA, explained.



## KOICA And KAAN Donate Medical Equipment In Kavre

In the presence of PARK Chong-suk, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Nepal, KOICA Alumni Association of Nepal (KAAN) with support from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) donated medical equipment related to COVID response program to Methinkot Hospital.



During the program, Dipak Kaphle, Secretary of Ministry of Social Development, Bagmati Province, Hetauda, representatives from KOICA, KAAN, Namobuddha Municipality and hospital were also present. The equipment cost an equivalent of USD 16,000

PARK Chong-suk expressed that South Korean Government aims to strengthen the health sector in Nepal through KOICA.

KOICA has been supporting Nepal's health sector by establishing 3 hospitals in Thimi, Nuwakot, Mugu ; and dispatch of Doctors and Health Professionals. He applauded and congratulated all the hard working team and management of the hospital by efficiently carrying out the COVID 19 response activities.

Simultaneously, Dr. Byungchel Kim, KOICA global doctor dispatched to Nepal Korea Friendship Municipality Hospital, Thimi provided training to the medical staffs of Methinkot hospital. In his training he mentioned the recent trend of COVID as well as explaining how Korea responded COVID 19 in emergency situation. Similarly, he provided some recommendations to cope up with COVID 19.

## Israeli Ambassador Hands Over Medical Equipment To Trauma Center

The Embassy of Israel donated ABG Machine and Patient Monitor to National Trauma Center NAMS to respond to COVID-19 and other essential health services.

Hanan Goder, Amba-

sador of Israel to Nepal, visited the hospital and formally handed over the medical equipment. Ambassador Goder met with Chief Medical Superintendent and senior doctors of the hospital and held discussion with the hospital team about the possibilities of collaboration in the future.

Expressing contentment to be able to contribute to the medical sector of Nepal, Ambassador Goder said, "This cooperation is essential for our effort to handle COVID crisis. We salute the doctors and medical team for their amazing work to treat this pandemic."

Appreciating the trauma care system in Israel as one of the best, Dr. Santosh Paudel, Chief Medical Superintendent of the Trauma Center wished that the Embassy could help the Trauma Center by bringing technical inputs from Israel or building human resources capacity through trainings facilitated by Israeli experts.

The Embassy is looking forward to continuously deepening cooperation with Nepal in various fields including medical sector.

The Embassy donated Ventilator, Patient Monitor and ECG Machine to Patan hospital and Tumbler Dryer Machine to Dhulikhel Hospital last month.

## NIBL, Digital Wallet Corp Sign Agreement

Nepal Investment Bank Limited (NIBL) and Digital Wallet Corp. have entered into an agreement for remittance service to facilitate Nepalese expatriates working in Japan to send remittance back home to their families.

According to a press release issued by NIBL, this service can be used from Digital Wallet's "Smile Mobile Remittance" app. In this pandemic situation, this service is very helpful and recommended to send remittance staying safe at home. Remittance can be received from more than 10,000 paying locations of Prithivi Remit - the online remittance service of Nepal Investment Bank Limited.

The payment sent for deposit into account of families with any bank in Nepal is instantly deposited. This arrangement with Digital Wallet has made it easy for customers to transfer their funds from Japan to Nepal.



# Politics And Pandemic



BY: DR. TILAK RAWAL

Prior to the origin in China and spread therefrom of Covid-19 to other countries more than a year ago, trade war between the two largest economies (US and China) had played a major role in complicating global economic situation, adversely affecting world economic output and trade. Although the negative effect of the trade battle did not remain confined to the two countries in question,

its direct impact remained limited to the economic front and has not been blamed for any major mishaps (famine, starvation and loss of human lives) till date. Indeed, trade-related problems have remained relatively manageable and not at all like this pandemic, which has rendered even the most powerful countries in the world somewhat helpless as far as timely control of its spread and the resulting harm to human lives (3.2 million deaths globally) and economies all over the world is concerned. It seems the entire world is fighting a painful battle against this resurging enemy of mankind and billions of dollars poured into finding an effective cure have produced some commendable results but a lot is still to be done in finding an affordable, effective and less controversial method to effectively stop the recurrence of it in different forms such as African variant, UK variant, etc. Expectedly, with the global spread of this killer disease, world economy shrank in 2020 and so did the world trade and no exception were the major economies, which experienced sharp shrinkage. Many countries (such as US) saw unemployment level soaring to

**Nepal government, more specifically Prime Minister Oli, probably was not too wrong in assuming that after a contraction of GDP, a bounce back to positive growth (10 percent next year as publicly mentioned by him) is not unlikely but they seem to have ignored, while wishing growth levels, complications of various nature and magnitude faced by the nation they have been governing. They should have at least taken into account facts related to their slashing of budgetary outlay (especially capital expenditure), reduced FDI and continuous decline in government investment.**

levels worst since great depression. Some firms in some countries could have done well even during these difficult times but the undeniable fact is that all the major economies have suffered a setback and are still struggling despite huge amounts, mostly in the form of stimulus package, pumped into them. Amongst major countries, China probably was the first to restore domestic demand and bounce back to positive growth, after successfully keeping under control the devastating virus. It may be noted that China's economic recovery quickened sharply in the first quarter of 2021 to register a growth of 18.3 percent from last year's slump, which has been possible by stronger demand at home and

abroad and continued government support mostly geared towards tens of thousands of smaller firms, which were hit the most in China as is the case elsewhere. Another Asian giant, India, was affected adversely, both in terms of loss of human lives and economic output, during the first round of pandemic but the losses remained manageable and it appeared, until recently, that this political

power of global scale had put its somewhat derailed economy back on track to resume its acceleration towards becoming a major economic power of global scale. Unfortunately, however, the situation now has alarmingly changed, with this populous country registering the highest daily number of infection (more than 300,000 daily for more than two weeks in a row) in the world, acute shortage of hospital beds, oxygen and other necessary facilities. People are seen waiting in long queues at different crematoriums to perform the last rites of their dear ones. Realizing the increasing number of deaths from this disease and the unprecedented pressure on the existing facilities, makeshift funeral pyres are created and efforts are made to increase production and supply of

oxygen and pandemic-related generous assistance from countries currently in a position to do so is gratefully accepted. Despite these efforts, Indian health system is collapsing under the latest record breaking surge. Situation elsewhere is also very serious and people are in know of the devastation caused earlier by the pandemic elsewhere such as USA, UK, Brazil, EU and many other countries but Nepalis had not panicked this way as they have now, after seeing what has happened in India in the last couple of days. What is seen in India now is not only painful but scary, too. Let us pray problems of this magnitude do not befall this nation already precariously placed on both fronts-political and economic. We may also have been little bit selfish in praying that things in our neighborhood get back to normal soon because a prolonged period of crisis there could seriously hurt our economic interest as we have to depend on India to fulfil the demand for almost everything from food to fuel. Any disruption in Indian supply chain could generate shocks to pave way for high level of inflation at a time when most economies elsewhere are already in recession on account of slacking economic activities and depressed domestic demand for goods and services. Euro Zone is said to be suffering double-dip recession on account of continued impact of the pandemic. Beyond doubt, Nepal's economy is not at all in a good shape.

Nepal's external sector has been suffering unchecked deterioration since long, which is adequately manifested by our ever increasing trade imbalance with most of our trading partners, the highest being with India followed by China. In the nine months of this fiscal year, trade deficit has exceeded Rs 1000 billion. Compared to the corresponding period of last fiscal year



(2076/77), imports in the nine months of this fiscal year went up by Rs. 131.42 billion to hit Rs.1113 billion, while exports grew just by Rs.16 billion. Net service income has also remained negative by Rs. 39.69 billion in the eight months of this fiscal year, registering a sharp increase over the negative figure of Rs.4.22 billion during the same period last fiscal year. Travel income this year has taken a freefall (declining by 91 percent), while travel expenditure has declined by 54 percent. Available data show that Nepal is a loser on both fronts- service and merchandise trade. Deficit in current account has also increased over time, while balance of payment (BOP) has continued to remain positive and foreign exchange reserve looks sound when judged from its import-funding capacity. There is also a strong possibility of this government not meeting the revenue collection target as only 67.59 percent of the target (Rs.1011.75 billion) has been collected in the nine months of this fiscal year. This left government may create a record of not being able to collect the intended revenue for four consecutive years in a row. Likewise, foreign direct investment has sharply gone down in recent times and the pathetic picture of underspending of capital expenditure is likely to continue this time also as only about 29 percent of the allocated sum under the head has been spent in these nine months. In the midst of this dismal performance, however, multilateral agencies such as the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have thrown slightly positive information for the government to draw some solace from. Giving credit to continued steady flow of remittances, unlike an apprehended sharp drop, WB has revised upward its growth estimate to 2.7 percent from its earlier projection of 0.6 percent for this fiscal year. Likewise, ADB has stated that Nepal's gdp will grow by 3.1 percent in the year 2021, a positive come back from a negative 1.9 percent registered a year earlier. Unlike Nepal government's wished growth rate of 7 percent for this fiscal year, ADB's projection is that Nepal will achieve 5.1 percent growth only in 2022(fiscal year 2079/80). WB also feels that Nepal will have to wait a few more years for growth to return to a satisfactory level. Nepal government, more specifically Prime Minister Oli, probably was not too wrong in assuming that after a contraction of gdp, a bounce back to positive growth (10 percent next year as publicly mentioned by him) is not unlikely but they seem to have ignored, while wishing growth levels, complications of various nature and magnitude faced by the nation they have been governing. They should have at least taken into account facts related to their slashing of budgetary outlay (especially capital expenditure), reduced FDI and continuous decline in government investment. In addition, situation is likely to worsen more due to the recent surge in virus(causing dozens of deaths everyday) as has been rightly mentioned by our central bank that industries\ businesses, already hit hard by the virus earlier, are likely to face problems in recovering because the second phase of pandemic could be more dangerous than the first phase when Nepal government took the much criticized phased decisions of keeping the country under lockdown for 120 days, bringing the economy to a grinding halt. Helplessly, it seems, the concerned have issued pro-

hibitory orders again for 15 days and they are expected, learning from the earlier mistake, to do their utmost to keep the economy moving at least partially, if not fully. In addition to this pandemic, the political mess that the country is in since long has been a great retarding factor as far as development\growth of Nepal is concerned. Currently, efforts are on to dislodge not only the federal government but also provincial governments and Prime Minister Oli, it seems, is working day and night to foil attempts to remove him at the centre and his loyalists in different provinces.

Political instability has done serious harm to the nation\ economy but has done no harm as far as continuation in power of a controversial but always confident- looking\ sounding Oli is concerned. In fact, even the verdict of the Supreme Court (SC) that nullified his decision to dissolve the Parliament (lower house), did not shake him at all and he confidently continued to poke fun at his rivals (Parchanda\Madhav) that the celebratory mood the duo got into was meaningless. On the contrary, his rivals did not have even the slightest premonition of the misfortune that would soon befall them in the form of another verdict of SC (March 7)

**Oli will probably have further weakened his political rivals before the parliamentary elections he intends to organize soon, irrespective of the outcome of the May 10 vote of confidence he has sought. Hope the two-third majority, which he expects to be returned with, is used in achieving the often-repeated prosperity of the nation and not wasted in gossip\ scandal and political manoeuvre\ manipulation as has been the case so far. In his next stint as head of the government, he has to show that a shrewd politician can be a competent economic manager, too so that people of this nation would stop thinking that politics practiced here has been as harmful an enemy of Nepal as the pandemic.**

that threw buckets of ice-cold water on the celebrating duo and many others, invalidating the unification between CPN-UML and the CPN-Maoist Centre. Even the review petition filed against this verdict has been rejected by SC. Indeed, Oli has been tactfully outsmarting his political rivals in a planned way and no immediate threat is seen to his government, with not much unfriendly major opposition party (Nepali Con-

gress), his friends-turned - foes with much weakened strength and a practically divided Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP) dozens of which leaders and cadres have recently been exonerated. Oli will probably have further weakened his political rivals before the parliamentary elections he intends to organize soon, irrespective of the outcome of the May 10 vote of confidence he has sought. Hope the two-third majority, which he expects to be returned with, is used in achieving the often-repeated prosperity of the nation and not wasted in gossip\ scandal and political manoeuvre\ manipulation as has been the case so far. In his next stint as head of the government, he has to show that a shrewd politician can be a competent economic manager, too so that people of this nation would stop thinking that politics practiced here has been as harmful an enemy of Nepal as the pandemic.

*(Dr. Rawal is a former governor of NRB)*

JSP-N POLITICS

# On Verge Of Split

*The decision to back the no-confidence motion against Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli pushes Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal (JSP-N) to the verge of split*

By A CORRESPONDNET

Although Nepal has been passing through a serious health crisis arising due to COVID-19, the country's political parties continue to indulge in power politics. At a time when Nepali Congress and Maoist-Center are struggling to table a no trust motion against PM K.P. Sharma Oli government, with a thin margin of numerical strength, the decision of JSP-N is likely to encourage both the parties to move ahead.

Although there are major differences within JSP-N over whom to back, the faction of the Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal led by Upendra Yadav and Baburam Bhattarai that commands a majority in the party's powerful executive committee has decided to back the no-trust motion against Prime Minister Oli.

However, Mahantha Thakur and Rajendra Mahato, who have been delaying the debate in the party on pressing political issues, have already expressed their opposition over

the decision.

"We are against the party decision and it is a major political blunder against Madheshi people and Madhesh-based parties," said Rajendra Mahato.

"Mahantha Thakur and Rajendra Mahato had been delaying the debate in the party on pressing polit-

ical issues, forcing his faction to take a decision on the basis of majority," said executive committee member Dambar Khatiwada.

"We fought against Oli's regressive move of dissolving the House of Representatives. Other parties decided their next course of action, but we failed to do so due to







Thakur and Mahato's indecision.

"If Thakur and Mahato command majority in the party, they should show it, otherwise they should accept the majority decision. We have decided to go with the majority decision. If the rival faction wants to split the party, they can do so," said Khatiwada.

He said if federal lawmakers from the rival factions went against the party's decision, then they might lose their parliamentary seats. Mahato said the executive committee meeting called by Yadav-Bhattarai faction was not valid because invitations were not sent to all members. He said the 'opaque and fraudulent' meeting of the executive committee had imperiled the party unity.

"We had unified two parties (Rastriya Janata Party-Nepal and Samajbadi Party-Nepal) last year with the aim of creating an alternative political force to champion the cause of identity, equality, and empower-

ment of marginalized communities. The rival faction's decision threatens these goals of the party," he said.

Mahato said the party had not taken any call on the formation of next government. JSP-N has 51 executive members - 26 from the erstwhile RJP-N and 25 from SP-N.

JSP-N executive committee members who have decided to back the no-trust motion against Oli are: Yadav, Bhattarai, Ashok Kumar Rai, Mahendra Ray Yadav, Ramesh Prasad Yadav, Gajadhar Rohita Yadav, Rajendra Prasad Shrestha, Narbaraj Subedi, Yubaraj Karki, Rakam Chemjong, Renu Kumari Yadav, M Lalbabu Raut, Hishila Yami, Ganga Narayan Shrestha, Randhwaj Limbu, Ram Sahay Prasad Yadav, Damaru Ballav Khatiwada, Dan Bahadur Bishwakarma, Prakash Adhikari, M Ishtiyak Rai, Durga Sob, Parshuram Basnet, Prashant Singh, Bhakta Bahadur Shah, Sushila Shrestha, and Bijay Yadav.

In the number game, NC-Maoist Center and JSP-N have the magic numbers with the support of independents. Out of 275 members of House of Representatives, the three-party alliance needs 138 to form the government.

With the likely split of JSPN, CPN-UML will have easy majority. However, opposition led Nepali Congress will have to see another split in CPN-UML to have the majority.

#### Party Position

CPN-UML	121
Nepali Congress Sher Bahadur Deuba	63
CPN (Maoist-Centre) Puspa Kamal Dahal	49
People's Socialist Party, Nepal Rajendra Mahato	34
Independents	4
Vacant	4
Total	275

# Nepal's Internal Political Feud During Inconsistent Global Order

## Introduction

Jake Sullivan the National Security Advisor of the US on 4<sup>th</sup> Feb stressed on the fact that the relationship between China and the US will define the twenty first century. Secretary of State Antony Blinken indicted Beijing on human rights interruption in Xinjiang, Hong Kong and of various cyber-crimes. China retorted by telling the US as enormous human rights violator.

China and India's battles seem temporarily settled, but the campaign is on and will continue as it is related with geopolitics to great power rivalry, it is geostrategic as it is economy, it is perception as it is psychology and the theory of warfare, it is value based as it is fight for freedom, it is space for political influence for creativeness in global affairs.

Not pleasant, but a pitch for face-off between the two largest economies and two political systems, while almost all South Asian nations including Nepal is cringed with various internal political and security dilemmas that is calling for possible global power's intercession.

The long-awaited meeting of two fraction of United Marxist and Leninist (UML) leaders KP Oli and Madhav Kumar Nepal concluded for a formal detachment of the most powerful political party after two decades. This is not the first time that the political parties to formally take different paths due to the doubt of authoritarian headship.

The judgement of the Supreme Court for the re-instatement of the Parliament have raised three queries; the competition of the constituted forces and the constitutional forces is still prevalent and second, the argument of Nepal Communist Party Maoists (NCPM) raising arms against a democratic system of governance and legitimacy. Lastly the question of India's policy with the signing of the 12-point agreement between the then seven party alliance and the warring communist fraction the NCPM in 1996.

Dominant national security challenges to the state are the source of political feud 'the argument of the Maoist raising arms against the democratic system', the 'state of national affairs totally politicalized, unchecked institutional corruption, lack of strategic thinking and national priorities, diplomatic stalemate, politicization of institutions and bureaucracy as well as economic impact the nation will have to bear post COVID-19.

Leaders political, military or others, professional alike must be accountable, strategic and visionary. A question arises: "Didn't the political and military leader-



BY: BINOJ BASNYAT

ship during the peace process visualize that political alteration, regional dynamics and global shifts would find Nepal in a different strategic environment and in a disarray as system changed but not the thoughts, attitudes nor the prominent political leaders?"

Unimaginative of strategic leaders then has put political power as one of the major national security challenges of Nepal today. Strategic leaders currently on chair must visualize how Nepal will configure in the next half a century before their personal ambitions so that Nepal strives. The most important but less prioritized is National Security. Optimistic political environment has been missed but the silver lining resides.

## Regional Geopolitical Milieu

During Secretary of Defense Lloyd J Austin III visit to India PM Modi said "India and US are committed to our strategic partnership that is a force for global good", while China pursues QUAD meeting as a NATO of the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR). Secretary Austin commended India's leadership role in the Indo-Pacific and growing engagement with like-minded partners across the region to promote shared goals reaffirmed their commitment to promote a free and open regional order. Both sides exchanged perspectives on shared challenges confronting the region and committed to further strengthen their broad ranging and robust defense cooperation. What does this signify to Nepal and the Himalayan region that witnessed confrontation between China and India? When the global environment strides, Nepal is in search for a new PM with argument over power politics.

South Asia is a market and a strategic alternative route to the Indian Ocean, India's significance will rise and China-India border disputes are not designed for war but rather to stress and pressure India politically and diplomatically of allying with the US. Himalayan arc was important but now with strategic importance. States like Nepal must think strategically and be more calculative of what will happen in the maritime domain that will directly reflect in the Himalayan arc. There are to options for Nepal either a strong security arrangement with an argument of financial sustenance or a political and diplomatic resolution.

The second round of the "Great Game" is compelling a proxy war serving as a battleground for cold war 2.0 with the withdrawal of the last remaining 2500 US troops and NATO from Afghanistan by 11 September, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the terrorist attack in New York. This stresses



on the fact of the significance of the IPR and the continuation of US National Security Strategic policy from the Obama Administration in 2011 “Pivot or Rebalancing towards the Asia Pacific”. Afghanistan will be free of foreign forces with the government and the parties not likely to be capable of administering the probable political and security disorder leaving the immediate neighbors particularly China, Pakistan and Russia to be more involved in Afghanistan and their bordering state’s peace and stability. China has been implicated in training the Afghan Mountain brigade with the purpose to counter possible attack by al-Qaeda and Islamic State in the adjoining Xinjiang province one of the sensitive provinces north of the Himalayas, that could interrupt China’s counter terrorism efforts in the region. Afghanistan is also known as the passageway from Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent.

Myanmar is intimidating into cataclysm after the 1<sup>st</sup> Feb military coup known as Tatmadaw. The military sought to take full control of the country leading to unstoppable deaths and violence to almost 800 including children till date. The coup was launched against the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi leading to the decade long constitutional democracy dreading the influence of the military in politics. When the world is moving forward with a value-based argument against authoritarian communism rules; for democracies like the US, India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) patience is the least bad option. Blinken tweeted “We are horrified by the bloodshed perpetrated by Burmese security forces, showing that the junta will sacrifice the lives of the people to serve the few. I send my deepest condolences to the victims’ families. The courageous people of Burma reject the military’s reign of terror.” Myanmar is a bridge to the Bay of Bengal with Bangladesh China India Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC). Decidedly disappointing and unconceivable in this century of livings with rights to freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear. The world is gearing for value-based system of governance but looks appalling in Myanmar.

#### On current Nepal’s political discourse

Nepal lies at the central part of the Himalayan arc almost central to the two possible problematical countries Afghanistan and Myanmar. Opposition is dwelling amongst our immediate neighbors China and India.

Political history set forth by political party’s pro-

file was on the basis of ideology Left or Right except on major political-social changes. But PM Oli remaining in power has fully reevaluated Nepal’s political divisions, which are now pro or anti Oli. The 2015 constitution has protected the weakness of the political leaders in power challenging the democratic credential like ‘NO’ to no-confidence motion for two years after the formation of the government. Another example can be the Nepali Congress (NC) joining hands with the ultra-left NCPM have been very costly for democratic NC. Ideology should play more significant than the past.

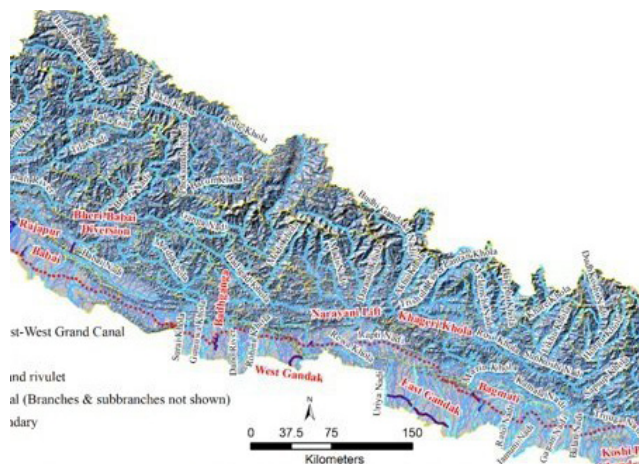
Upholding the verdict of the Supreme Court in a democracy by political parties is primary but has prompted political unpredictability that will continue until the root cause of instability is established.

The settlements signed between different warring faction by the Oli steered government connotes more political and restricts to oblige national security. This agreement signing ceremonies are continuing process to bring the armed group into democratic framework that commenced from 12-point between the seven party alliance and the

NCPM in 1996 to CK Raut with a 11-point agreement in March 2019 to the 3 point agreement with Biplav group, second, contentions between the constitution forces (UML, NC, Rastriya Prajatantra Party and others who were part of the V.S. 2047/1990 constitution) and the constituted forces post peace process (NCPM, The Madhesi political force though most of them were part of the constitutional force) or short term political credibility, trustworthiness and reliability and third, all political parties are weak comparatively; attempting for space with lack of trust in people’s perception

like the constitutional appointment, other political appointees and transfers are evaluated and perceived as politically protected, politically affiliated, financial links and personal relations but not from professionals and the people. Lastly, reasoning and justification of long-term stability with an absence of a strategic outlook.

In deduction; the dominance by Communist Parties in politics is very visible with (a) the likelihood of NCPM, Madhav Nepal led UML alliance which may not be ruled out. (b) political polarization and politicization of national institutions is viable and (c) democratic political party alliance may happen. Secondly in diplomacy: likelihood of the immediate neighbors China and India’s political and economic interests will escalate and most likely invite added regional competitive environment for long term amongst democratic and the communist forces. Thirdly the



## OPINION

population will feel contented with the political conclusion for improved security environment but proceedings and occurrences will detour trust and finally, instability will lead to institutional corruption and downturn in economic upswing post COVID-19.

### Conclusion

The world powers are focused in the IPR and when nations in the territory is opting to find a space with the query Non-Alignment, Multi-Alignment, Alignment or other political and diplomatic resolutions. Moving together with India and partners for economic-security cooperation and coordination as part of the Act-East policy and enthusiastically contribute in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) when South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is compliant would be an opportunity for utilization of Nepal's resources.

Global and regional security milieu is obscure than what our constitution envisages. Deficit of authentic and realistic strategic structures and premeditated forethoughts is where complications lie. Nepal should not be the victim due to moving against the tide of change and space for transformation. One example is the National Security Policy which still lies in a few desks and in no time gather dust, which expresses that national security is still thought as in the late 20th century.

Nepal and Nepal's national interests comes foremost, national interests must guide policies and strategic decision making not pursuance of foreign governments and trends of national challenges. Non-visionary actions lead to unwarranted occurrences in the future therefore understanding the shift in regional and international order of the 21st century as Nepal, South Asia and the IPR is altering.

Whoever gets their card right, it is politics for power missing the originality that democracy is for the people, by the people and to the people. Though the leaders are attempting to win for themselves, the country has lost many years and missed great opportunities. The only answer to this political contest is "election" though it will have to happen within two years as constitutionally mandated. The dubiety of who will conduct the election will prevail.

Nepal needs to find a suitable position diplomatically and politically for the population to acknowledge

faith to politics and love to the nation as well as secure with the prospects of economic advancement. Nepal will be left behind with uncertainty as regional political dynamics is shifting and moving forward for free and open Indo-Pacific with democratic credentials. The political parties require further brain storming for a strategic outlook of latest defense development in the northern borders and framing Nepal's strategic security architecture and revisiting organizations, deployment and system of internal governance. The government's approval to align the Nepali Army as per geographic features are favorable indications when a new geopolitical environment is in creation. Nepal Himalayas or Nepal's northern borders should have separate commands looking into the northeastern and northwestern sector, covering the potential military maneuvering with the trends of strategic networks and means of transport systems impending in the future. Military posturing during Nepal-Tibet war and Nepal-China war can be looked into. Geography has not changed, but yes, the climate and technology have, making challenged geographical feature more feasible. Himalayas was and is militarily more significant today and in the long-term. Standardizing capabilities, mobility efficiencies and defense intelligence are needed for a fighting and an agile force in an altering geopolitical environment.

With South Asia's pre-eminence, the security bodies should focus their time, space and energy on impartial intelligence, collaboration, co-operation with South Asians security agencies via security diplomacy and be part to support the Regional Security Architecture of South Asia. Nepali Army as the oldest and professional army of South Asia should take the lead.

Formation of a coalition government is most likely in the up-coming election. The next election should be an election for the people with national issues tabled, question formed by all the stake holders and answers by the people with participation from where ever in the world a Nepali may have settled. This opportunity should not be lost as the constitution was not owned or ratified by the people at large though two third of the Constituent Assembly (CA) endorsed it. Pursuance by the 12-point agreement came without envisaging sustainable stability as well as not in proportionality with the India's national policy. The election must be taken as an opening or a sparkling light at the end of the tunnel with the question what is that "Big

Game in South Asia?" As the big concern is political stability, social-cultural harmony, curtailing the scope for acts of terrorism, commination that space provides for illegal migration and assuring good governance accentuating on the national security challenges.

Basnyat is a Strategic Analyst and a Major General (retired) of the Nepali Army

**South Asia is a market and a strategic alternative route to the Indian Ocean, India's significance will rise and China-India border disputes are not designed for war but rather to stress and pressure India politically and diplomatically of allying with the US. Himalayan arc was important but now with strategic importance.**



## DIPLOMACY

# China In South Asia

## *Chinese Foreign Minister Pledges to Deepen Anti-pandemic Cooperation with South Asian Countries*

By A CORRESPONDENT

As India has been passing through a grim situation with the upsurge of second wave of COVID-19 pandemic, five foreign ministers from South Asia and Chinese Foreign minister have pledged to deepen anti-pandemic cooperation and support India as much as possible.

Foreign ministers of China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh agreed to deepen cooperation as South Asian countries are facing a new wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

velopment of all countries.

China expresses deep sympathy for the raging pandemic in India and extends its sincere condolences to the Indian people, Wang said. "China is ready to provide support and assistance to the Indian people at any time according to the needs of India," Wang said.

He expressed the hope that the meeting, to which India was also invited, will act as the assistance to India's fight against the pandemic.

The Foreign Ministers of Nepal, China, Pakistan, Bangla-

Acting Foreign Minister Mirwais Nab of Afghanistan, Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen of Bangladesh, Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi of Pakistan, and Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena of Sri Lanka, in the video conference, discussed joint response to COVID-19 and exchanged views on international and regional cooperation on pandemic response and post-COVID economic recovery.

A joint statement issued by the Foreign Ministries of six countries informed that that during the



Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi hosted a video conference with his five counterparts, discussing efforts to consolidate anti-corona virus cooperation including vaccine supply, to boost post-epidemic economic recovery, and to maintain sound international environment for the de-

desh, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka have pointed out that COVID-19 is a common enemy of humankind, and that the countries should step up solidarity and cooperation to win the final victory over it.

Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi of China,

video conference the Foreign Ministers have noted with satisfaction the concerted and productive efforts made by their countries since the start of COVID-19 to combat the virus and promote economic recovery in the spirit of overcoming challenges through cooperation and mutual assistance.

## NATIONAL

At the meeting China expressed its readiness to provide continued medical supplies and technical assistance to the participating countries to the best of its ability. Chinese initiative was appreciated, the statement read.

The Foreign Ministers reiterated their firm support to WHO's due role in the global cooperation against COVID-19 and acknowledged that tracing the origin of the virus is a matter of science and a global mission. They have expressed opposition to politicizing the issue. The participating countries will strengthen cooperation to track COVID-19 mutation closely.

They have agreed that vac-

of COVID-19 vaccines," the statement read.

Recognizing the serious impact of COVID-19 on the global economy and its complex implications for the sustainable development of all countries, the Foreign Ministers have agreed to deepen Belt and Road cooperation, open their borders under the premise of pandemic prevention and control for smooth trade, keep the industrial and supply chains stable and secure, and give a stronger boost to economic recovery and the improvement of people's lives.

"China agreed to support the participating countries to overcome the impact of COVID-19 on

na announced its decision to establish a China-South Asian Countries Emergency Supplies Reserve, set up a China-South Asian Countries Poverty Alleviation and Cooperative Development Center, and hold a China-South Asian Countries E-commerce Cooperation Forum on Poverty Alleviation in Rural Areas.

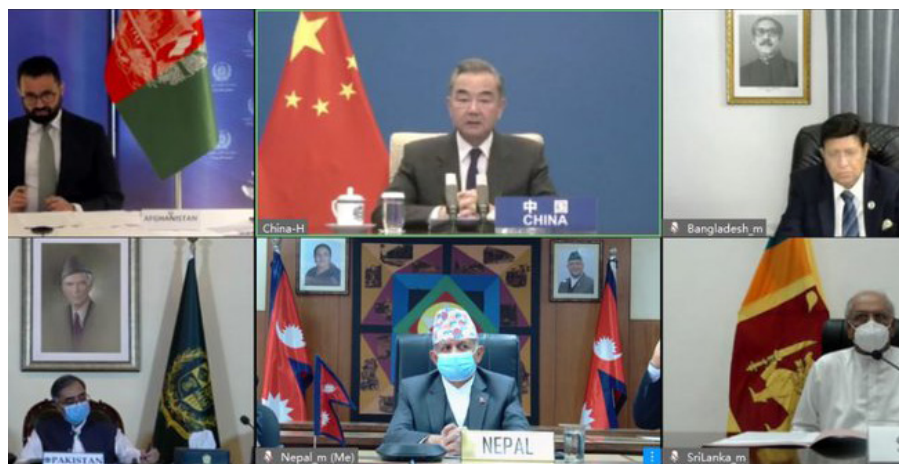
The Foreign Ministers agreed to make these mechanisms inclusive, transparent, sustainable and demand-driven. Similarly, they have agreed to closely follow the development of COVID-19 situation in India, and expressed their willingness to provide needed support through respective channels in consultation with India.

The Foreign Ministers agreed to maintain the momentum of cooperation among the six countries, hold consultations at the Foreign Minister, Vice Foreign Minister/Secretary and Director General Levels, expand cooperation areas and lend impetus to future cooperation.

On boosting the post-epidemic recovery, Wang said China proposes to establish a China-South Asia poverty reduction and development cooperation center to exchange experiences in poverty reduction with other countries.

The foreign ministers said their countries are willing to work with China to continue to deepen the joint construction of the Belt and Road, maintain the stability and security of the industrial and supply chains, strengthen cooperation in non-traditional security areas such as poverty reduction and food, and discuss measures to facilitate personnel exchange and commodity circulation based on the regular epidemic prevention and control.

The six foreign ministers issued a joint statement on cooperation in fighting the epidemic after the meeting.



cines, as a key weapon to defeat COVID-19, should be distributed in accordance with the principle of equity and justice.

Foreign Ministers expressed that "vaccine nationalism" will hinder the global efforts to defeat COVID-19 and underscored the need to avoid the "immunity gap" and they appreciated China's efforts in addressing this challenge.

"China would act on President Xi Jinping's important statement on making the vaccines a global public good, and carry out continued vaccine cooperation with the participating countries in a flexible manner, including co-production

their economies through enhanced level of economic cooperation and collaboration," the statement added.

Similarly, they stressed the importance to strengthen cooperation in poverty reduction, food security and other non-traditional security fields to protect the livelihood of people with special attention to the most vulnerable groups.

To facilitate personnel exchanges against the backdrop of COVID-19, the Foreign Ministers agreed to discuss the possibility of mutual recognition of digital "health codes".

To push forward practical cooperation in relevant fields, Chi-



# EUROPE DAY 2021

## Stronger together

By Nona Deprez

Today is a special day for the European Union. It is our 71st birthday. Every year on 9 May we celebrate what started as a peace project in 1950 and is now an alliance for our joint future. The 27 Member States and their 450 million citizens build our Union every day with their actions and their commitment, making it stronger through challenging times such as the

COVID -19 pandemic. From day one, Europe has always been guided by the principles of community, solidarity and cooperation. Today, these principles remain as relevant as ever.

Europe promotes a sustainable and balanced growth: at home and in our partner countries. The European Union is the largest donor of development



Interaction with children at Temporary Learning Centre (TLC) in Gorkha in 2016. The EU supported to establish many TLCs in partnership with UNICEF in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake that hit Nepal.

/Photo : Mim Hamal/EU Delegation to Nepal





Women with their babies displaying their 'Nanglo with nutritious diet'. Ever since the first (2013-2017) phase of the Multisector Nutrition Plan (MSNP) gathered steam with support from the EU and UNICEF implemented by Nepal Government in 30 priority districts, there has been visible progress in the health of both mothers and their infants

**/Photo :** Eloisa Fernandez Astudillo, EU Delegation to Nepal

and humanitarian aid in the world and one of its major economic blocks, building the future based on agreed rules. The European Union has expanded its presence in 140 nations across the world to build for all children, wherever they are, whoever they are, a shared world of peace, democracy, prosperity and security.

The European Union advocates and promotes a multilateral rules-based world order. It believes that there are global solutions to global problems. And to solve today's global problems, the EU is pushing for universal access to COVID-19 vaccines, to strengthen the global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic,

tackle inequalities, modernise global institutions, establish global rules for the new digital technologies, win the race against climate change and restore our relationship with nature.

Let's focus on climate change. The EU is dedicated to tackle this challenge, in Europe and in Nepal, because there are no partial solution to climate change. 40% of the world's public climate finance comes from the European Union, and climate change is at the heart in our external action and financing. We want to take this opportunity to invite the Government and the people of Nepal to engage in a conversation



on how we can work together and make a green alliance with Nepal.

The European Union has seized the challenge of climate change in the context of COVID recovery and has adopted the ambitious European Green Deal, which is the Union's internal growth strategy aiming towards a carbon neutral Europe by 2050. As in Europe, the fight against climate change in Nepal is an opportunity to support, alongside with other international partners, Nepal's evolution towards a modern, sustainable, resource efficient and competitive economy. A green recovery is not only about climate change. The pandemic has reminded us of the links between environmental degradation and the impacts on human health. Air needs to stay cleaner, and biodiversity loss needs to be reversed. We have to build back better, for the health and wellbeing of our people. The COVID-19 crisis has proven gender-biased, looking at its impact on women-owned businesses, on the burden women are facing during the crisis, on their role as essential workers, the increased household load and the increase of gender-based violence. It is more relevant than ever in this context, to shape the coming socio-economic recovery with women at its centre, so that it is so-

cially just, resilient and inclusive for all and support the progress on Nepal's global commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement.

The EU is showing leadership, responsibility and solidarity with those affected by the pandemic. Since the very start of this pandemic, the EU has chosen multilateralism and cooperation over nationalism and competition. We have formed Team Europe, which consists of the EU, its member states and their diplomatic networks, and financial institutions such as the national development banks, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Together, Team Europe has contributed €2.47 billion to the COVAX initiative, which delivered already 40.5 million doses of vaccine to more than 100 countries worldwide, including Nepal – truly embodying our European principles of community, solidarity and cooperation.

348,000 doses of COVID vaccines reached Nepal in March under this COVAX facility and Team Europe will do its part so that 20 percent of Nepal's population is vaccinated for free.

The EU in its over 45 years of partnership



Responsible mountaineering can be a means to empower women and to design locally owned paths towards a green and sustainable development. The EU stands with Himalayan communities and indigenous people to address climate change, governance, education, gender and environmental issues and to build together local success stories.

/Photo : Dakipa Sherpa



The goal of EU's international partnerships is to build a more sustainable and inclusive world.

with Nepal has contributed to the development, reform and democratization process of the country, as a reliable companion in the implementation of Nepal's reform strategies. European citizens have given 600 million Euros to Nepal in the last 15 years, and they intend to continue. We were here during the hard times, as when the earthquake hit, and we will continue being here in the next decade.

The EU as a political partner will make Nepal's voice stronger in the global and international dialogue and partnerships. Let's celebrate Europe Day and may the friendship between Nepal and the European Union and our people grow deeper and stronger. Let's

live the principles of community, solidarity and cooperation because we are stronger together.

This year's celebrations, just as last year's, come amidst the COVID pandemic. In keeping with the social distancing measures, online events will replace traditional Europe Day celebrations (see details on our website ([https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/nepal\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/nepal_en)), Facebook and Twitter accounts (@EUinNepal). We may not be able to share physical spaces, but we can still be together virtually, safely from our homes. Stay safe.

*(Mrs. Deprez is Ambassador & Head of EU Delegation to Nepal)*



# BRI And Nepal



Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 when he became President of China. It was also called OBOR (One Belt One Road) in earlier years and is now being increasingly called BRI.

I first visited China on the invitation of a NGO based in Beijing called CAFIU (Chinese Association for International Understanding) in 2004. It deals with NGOs and think-tanks of many neighbouring countries of China. I was at that time executive member of Nepal Council of World Affairs (NCWA) and got an opportunity to visit China for the first time. My trip was arranged by NCWA (Nepal Council of World Affairs) offices at Kathmandu. It is also a think-tank in Nepal similar to CAIFU. Our trip included visits to Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu in Sichuan. When we visited China in 2004, there was no talk about OBOR or BRI at that time and in none of the offices that we visited talk were made in this respect. We had at that time also visited China Institute of Strategic Studies (CISS) affiliated with PLA (Chinese armed forces). Lectures and question and answer sessions there were quite enlightening and informative. CISS website informs "Primarily charged with the analysis of international strategic situation, China's national security, international political and economic environment, the institute consults and offers policy advice to Chinese governments, military and related institutions. The current chairman of the organization is Xiong Guangkai, former PLA's deputy chief of staff."

A workshop on China-Nepal-India Economic Corridor was organized jointly by Nepal Council of World Affairs and China Study Center at Kathmandu, Nepal on 10 August 2016. Although invitation was sent to the Indian Ambassador to Nepal Ranjit Rae, he declined it to participate in the workshop. On the other hand, Dr. Bhekh Thapa, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Finance of Nepal in his opening remarks talked about embarking on trilateral co-operation Nepal, India and China. Sundar Nath Bhattarai, Acting Chairman of China Study Center in Nepal talked about opening connectivity between China and South Asia via Nepal.

Prof. Dr. Ji Zhiye, President of CICIR (China Institute of Contemporary International Relations) mentioned

that leadership from China, India and Nepal had reached their consensus to build China, India and Nepal economic corridor. The Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Wu Chuntao said that the Workshop on trilateral co-operation was being organized for the first time. He said Nepal had sent delegations to China and signed MOU on OBOR. He added that China is the major source of financing and technology.

Why was India reluctant to participate at the Workshop?

According to internet (China.org.cn), CICIR (China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations) is one of top ten think tanks in China.

According to Wikipedia, CICIR is also identified as providing to MSS (Ministry of State Security) intelligence reports to the Politburo Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China. As Wikipedia says the institute is affiliated with Ministry of State Security of China. Prof. Dr. Zhiye is President of CICIR. It was he who gave the opening speech at the inaugural session of the Workshop on August 2016. India and Bhutan were the only two countries in South Asia which didn't sign the MOU on OBOR. There was Sino-Indian border clashes in the northeastern part of

**A news report published a Kathmandu daily interviewed Nepalese businessmen involved in trading with China using land route in 2020 when there was long period of lockdown in Nepal due to coronavirus.**

India near its border with Bhutan. It may be remembered that China has claimed the present-day Arunachal Pradesh as "South Tibet". India has stated that its reluctance to sign OBOR in the Indian subcontinent was due to its claims on Pakistan occupied Kashmir which it calls "Azad" or Free Kashmir and Gilgit including a major part of Karakoram Highway extending from Manshera to Khunjab on the Pak-Chinese border. It is possible that it could also be due to construction of north-south road via Nepal connecting the hills and Terai in Nepal with the Gangetic Plains in UP and Bihar in India which might make India vulnerable to its security. As there is already a limited Sino-Indian border clashes in Dolkham in the northeast near tri-junction of India-Bhutan-China border on one hand and Ladakh border in the northwest in recent years, there are grounds to believe in this scenario. This is in spite of Sino-Indian trade report-



## PERSPECTIVES

edly exceeding \$89 billion in 2017-18. The trade deficit was \$53 billion in China's favour. (Economic Times).

During the late 1980's when I was working for the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) in Peshawar, Pakistan, I had travelled from Rawalpindi to Gilgit on a pleasure trip by bus. The Karakoram Highway, built by the Chinese is excellent, much better than Kodari (Arniko) Highway in Nepal. The main purpose of this part of highway is to connect

**A workshop on China-Nepal-India Economic Corridor was organized jointly by Nepal Council of World Affairs and China Study Center at Kathmandu, Nepal on 10 August 2016. Although invitation was sent to the Indian Ambassador to Nepal Ranjit Rae, he declined it to participate in the workshop.**

the port of Gwadar in Baluchistan with the Chinese border in Sinkiang enabling Pakistan to transport petrol from the Gulf to Western part of China (Sinkiang and Tibet). It is therefore, more important to China than roads connecting Tibet to the Gangetic Plains via Nepal. The purpose of construction of this road could also be to assist Pakistan in any Indo-Pak conflict if any Chinese intervention were required. As this highway passes through part of Kashmir which is under occupation of Pakistan, China has been the biggest beneficiary of de-facto "partition" of Kashmir between India, Pakistan and China when the British left the Indian sub-continent. Pakistan actually "donated" part of erstwhile Kashmir to China so that China could construct a road connecting Tibet with Sinkiang. India has expressed concern about China operating a strategically located port of Gwadar which is situated close to Pakistan and Iran border. This port is also close to strategically important Strait of Hormuz. According to a news report published by Reuters, it will enable the Chinese to move to the Gulf and the Arabian Sea.

I was a student at University of Michigan in the United States in 1962 when there was a limited conflict between India and China. Although it was my first year at an American university, I was a regular reader of the New York Times which was available at Ann Arbor. I got acquainted with a student from People's Republic of China whose name was Liu. He looked like Chairman Mao and I mentioned it to him. He said he was from the same region where Mao was born. I remember him telling me "Sino-Indian boundary was called McMahon Line and was demarcated by the British in 1914 who were ruling India at that time. It was not decided on the basis of bilateral understanding".

Although Nepal is a signatory to OBOR or BRI

initiative, little progress has so far (April 2021) been made in selecting and implementing projects under this initiative in Nepal. There is no line agency or institute of the government which is responsible for this from Nepal side. Columnist Hari Roka (Kantipur, 4/1/21) has written about reluctance of Oli government to do any work regarding BRI.

A news report published a Kathmandu daily interviewed Nepalese businessmen involved in trading with China using land route in 2020 when there was long period of lockdown in Nepal due to coronavirus. Imports from China to Nepal was being used such border points as Tatopani (Kodari) or Rasuwagarhi but it had fallen to only 10 to 15 percent of total due to diversion to Indian ports from China and using Indian routes for entering Nepal (Kantipur, 11/4/21). Another news report from vernacular daily Naya Patrika (23/4/21) states that Nepal has imported goods amounting to Rs 12.97 million in the first nine months of fiscal year 2020-21 using Rasuwa and Tatopani but didn't export even Rs one worth of goods from these two points north of Kathmandu during this period. Nepal has been requesting the Chinese side several times from its Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supply to simplify procedures for exporting from Nepal via the Chinese route but has rejected these due to covid pandemic. Although this unusual situation could be due to coronavirus pandemic, this raises serious questions about the sustainability of BRI passing through Nepal.

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# COVID CRISIS Health Alert

*Despite the claims of the government, the second wave of COVID-19 cases has thrown Nepal's health system into disarray. With the lack of special care wards like Intensive Care Units (ICU) and ventilators, patients of COVID-19 are dying. Although the authorities had about eight months to brace for the second wave, the politically unstable government spent most of its time to manage the internal political wrangling ignoring the looming health challenges. Nepal's health system is now crippling in the absence of sufficient beds, medicines and plans for mass vaccination for the people. For all political mismanagement and crisis of leadership, the people have suffered greatly.*

BY KESHAB POUDEL

Naina Nepal, 30, who has been living in self-isolation, suddenly felt the lowering of the oxygen level. In a rush, her husband, who himself was infected with COVID-19, knocked the doors of several hospitals for four hours. His efforts went in vain. Finally she was admitted to Kantipur Dental Hospital.

The supply of oxygen stabilized her situation. However, the isolation ward

run by the hospital was without medical staff, nurses and doctors. With the spike of COVID-19, Nepal's health system has suddenly faced a great strain. The Ministry of Health, which is unable to bring vaccines and add hospital beds, has issued a statement saying that the health-care system had been overwhelmed.

"Telephone is ringing. Covid cases are skyrocketing. Hospitals seem overwhelmed. Time to lockdown to give

a breathing chance to the medical world. My prayers to our colleagues who are working day and night in India helping Covid cases. Similar situation is coming to Nepal too. Now, alarming! Patients are calling for help. ICU beds! Cannot breathe! Requesting for beds! I am calling hospitals including ours. Requesting my friends for help. They look desperate and asking me what will happen if staffs get sick? Sir, you take care as no beds



are available!,” tweets Dr. Chakra Raj Pandey, Consultant Orthopedic Surgeon, medical Director at Grande International Hospital and Director of Sports Medicine, Arthroscopy, and Joint Replacement.

With all these in the background, the Ministry of Health and Population (MoPH) has said that the nation’s healthcare system had been overwhelmed with the spike in infections and appealed for everyone to remain careful.

The Health Ministry in a press statement said the COVID-19 cases in Nepal have been mounting in an alarming manner in recent times.

According to the Ministry, the infection rate in 22 districts has been in-

Kavrepalanchowk, Kaski, Dang, Banke, Rupandehi, Palpa, Bardiya, Kapilvastu, Surkhet, Kailali and Kanchanpur.

“A grave situation has already arrived as the health system is not being able to provide beds for the treatment of infected patients,” said the ministry, appealing to everyone to stay alert and duly follow all the health safety standards.

“Wearing masks, maintaining physical distance and frequently washing hands are the best way to prevent the infection,” added the ministry. MoHP said that it was vital to immediately halt crowding in public places and prevent mobility in and outside the nation.

With the case spike, major

Emergency Operation Center (HEOC), Teaching Hospital, Armed Police Force Hospital, Patan Hospital, Civil Service Hospital, Bhaktapur Hospital, Bir Hospital as well as Dhulikhel Hospital are in shortage of beds for COVID-19 patients.

Dr Achyut Karki, spokesperson of the Bir Hospital, said that the 100-120 oxygen beds of Bir Hospital have already been occupied with the COVID-19 patients.

We are planning to add more beds but with these surging cases, the system will face a severe crisis. If this continues, then we will be helpless, said Dr. Karki.

Dr. Sumitra Gautam, spokesperson of the Bhaktapur Hospital, said that all of the 68 general beds are full. Six ICU beds are also packed. There are some beds left in the High Care Unit (HCI), but more than 10-12 patients are waiting for the beds.

We now fear oxygen shortage. We were somehow managing the oxygen up to now. But, within a few days we will run out of oxygen too. The oxygen plant of Bhaktapur is not in good condition, said Dr. Gautam.

Dr. Prabin Nepal, Superintendent of Police (SP) of the Armed Police Force Hospital, Balambhu, said that all the beds and ventilators of the hospital are full.

There are 140 beds in the



creasing at a higher rate. Those 22 districts include Morang, Sunsari, Jhapa, Parsa, Bara, Dhanusa, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Chitwan, Makwanpur,

government hospitals in Kathmandu Valley have run out of bed for the treatment of the infected persons.

According to the Health



COVID-19 ward, of them, 136 are full. All the eight ventilators are occupied by the COVID-19 patients, added Dr. Nepal.

Dr. Samir Kumar Adhikari, Chief of National Health Emergency Operation Center (HEOC), said that Nepal can have a shortage of oxygen cylinders. The beds of COVID-19 patients are being added but the cases seem to rise exponentially as well.

Dr. Adhikari urged the denizens to help break the chain of the virus by being alert and following the health safety protocols and acting sensibly during prohibitory order.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) has issued a notice appealing for denizens to adhere to health safety protocols as well as to strictly follow the prohibitory order citing the exponential rise of COVID-19 cases.

The public notice acknowledges that the health system is facing a severe crisis and that it is facing strain in providing treatment and beds to surging COVID-19 cases.

from April 29.

“Lockdown is essential at this stage to minimize uncontrolled proliferation/mass transmission of virus! It is the extreme measure of physical distancing: #Stay-HomeStay-Safe!

During this Gov must enhance hospital preparedness for testing tracing, care & cure! Not done? No improvement why?” Prof. Dwij Raj Bhatta, professor of Microbiology wrote in his tweet. “Hospitals are over burdened with severe COVID-cases! 4800+ve & 35 fatalities reported today, mostly in Kathmandu! Many will require hospitalization if severe



orders keeping in mind the sharp spike in daily reported cases of Covid-19 in all the three districts of the valley.

“Government of Nepal’s decision on lockdown is the most important and welcome step as a breather. Now, hospitals have to focus on emergency care only. Every resource has to be directed to covid care. GON has to utilize all hospital beds, private and public, in the most subsidized rate,”

tweets Dr. Pandey.

As per the CDOs’ decision, vehicles other than emergency service vehicles, will not be allowed to ply the roads while essential supply stores will have a set window of time for operation, according to a DAO source.

Kathmandu valley, on that day, had reported close to 1,500 infections, almost a half of the total number of daily cases logged throughout the country.

Dr. Luna Bhatta Sharma, PhD Medical Science (Virology), Osaka City University Medical School, Japan, tweets the government finally said “we quit.” Or we can’t do, it is beyond our capacity? “What about the irresponsible statements given by our pm on covid, 15 days ago! Gargling, guava leaves.



### Prohibitory Order

Along with Kathmandu Valley, several other districts have announced prohibitory orders and other such measures. The District Administration Offices of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur have issued prohibitory orders for the valley effective

symptoms develops! But where to go? Hope Lockdown imposed in Kathmandu from today will break transmission chain! #StayHomeStaySafeFolded hands.”

A meeting of chiefs of the three districts, that had lasted for hours, decided to enforce prohibitory





thori ram yara was more important to him. Better, they leave, let others do it !”

### How Nepal's Second Covid wave started, what went wrong

Since April, Nepal has been witnessing a surge in Covid-19 infections with the country seeing over 6000 fresh cases of Covid-19 daily. This massive surge has caused a visible strain on the healthcare system.

Amid the second wave of Covid-19, healthcare personnel in Nepal have been trying to do their best under trying circumstances. Stretched to the breaking point, the pressure of work and shortage of material during the second wave may cause deaths that could have been avoidable.

“The so-called UK variant was detected in September 2020. That was an alert for Nepal to be on guard and look systematically for variants of concern. In December, the lab consortium was networked but the goal of gene sequencing in 5 percent of all cases was not taken seriously,” said experts.

Like in earlier pandemics of influenza and like in other countries, the second wave of Covid-19 has happened in Nepal. The second wave is different and more worrying than the first.

Deaths are proportionate to infections and that proportion may not

necessarily be any different than the first wave. But we will have to wait and see. As of now, the infection-fatality or case-fatality seems to be unchanged. Infection-fatality and case-fatality are not easily dissected in India because of the way numbers are reported. But consistently it has remained below two. More infections will cause more deaths. While healthcare staff is better informed, sheer pressure of work and

of them and my personal favor is this model, which shows by May end the current total of 323187 would easily be doubled. We are hitting the high projection range, this is worrisome (3)

The system was slow to look for and detect mutant variants of concern. Reports in the media indicate that younger age groups, largely unaffected in first wave, are now getting infected. Whether this is indicative of



shortage of resources may cause more deaths.

Bishal Bhandari, MD MBA, tweets, “We are seeing many Projections, many talks about IHME’s number, I have referenced more than 20

higher infectiousness will be known as studies are reported. Probably the higher infectiousness alone may explain this change.

“COVID-19 Nepal. Look how fast the infection is spreading.



(Based on new cases in last 14 days adjusted to population, Apr 15 and Apr 29). 57 districts are between Moderate to Highest Risk (74%). This is bad, very bad,” tweets Bhandari.

Vaccination is a very important intervention. But an impact on epidemiology can be had only after two doses and a sizeable proportion are vaccinated to give a guess, at least 25-30 per cent. As of now, around 2 per cent has been given two doses. Stepping up vaccinations will not affect the rise of second wave, but it will definitely save many lives. I do not think India can conduct mass vaccinations in order to make an impact on epidemiology now, as vaccine supplies will not meet this demand.

The government and scientific community did not expect a second wave, or a wave of this magnitude, as the first wave was a one-year affair. It took six months to reach the peak and six months to decline to steady and low numbers. From December 27 till March 11, the daily numbers were around 20,000 and that pattern was assumed to continue. However, that is no excuse for not being ready for an increase until at least 30% of the population was vaccinated.

Mutant variants are a function of the magnitude of infection: a greater number of people infected means more chances of variants of

concern. So, more mutants were predictable, but would the mutants be of concern or not have to be specifically investigated?

The double mutant was a variant detected late last year, but its impact was not investigated until the second wave threw up questions. The classification of the double mutant is B.1.617 and it seems to be the dominant virus in Maharashtra. Not sure where else it has been detected.

UK variant B.1.1.7 was detected in September 2020, only because of routine genome sequencing. Similarly, South African variant B.1.351 was found in October 2020.

Satish Pandey tweets, “No change in symptoms and infections for B117. compared to pre-existing virus. R1 increased to 1.35 for B117 but lockdown was useful to bring R1 down below 1 even in areas with high proportion of infections with the variant.”

The Brazil variant P.1 was detected since Japan was doing routine gene sequencing; in Dec 2020, Japan picked up a variant in four persons. All had travelled from Brazil then Brazilian viruses were analyzed and P.1 was dominant there. Genome studies are very important for the management of the epidemic.

Festivals, marriage ceremonies, if conducted with all due precautions, are not likely to trigger surge in

cases. But the processions and massive meetings, definitely put a huge number of people at risk of getting infected and worse, spreading it. Everyone knew that it was like a smoldering fire, which would flare up.

Covid is now in pandemic form -- all countries having epidemics. The epidemic phase will be gotten over with and all countries will continue to have “endemic” (low and stable) presence of the disease and its infection. “With the majority getting infected, and vaccines getting rolled out, I hope that we will be reaching endemic phase (staggered country-by country), sometime in last quarter of 2021 or early 2022.”

### **Nepal Closes Border**

Nepal announced the suspension of visas upon arrival for nationals from any country. Those travelers already possessing a prior valid Nepali visa will be required to submit a swab test PCR health certificate issued a maximum of 72 hours before arrival to Nepal to the immigration office at Tribhuvan International Airport. Similarly, Nepal closed all border points with India till further notice.

Those Nepalis who want to enter home, have to present PCR Negative test before entering Nepal and have to go mandatory 10 days quarantine in the home under the supervision of local bodies.



# Ending Extreme Poverty Through Responsible Finance: MFIs Could Be Instrumental



While billions enjoy an affluent style, more than a tenth of the world's population lives in extreme poverty today. Poverty is not a consequence of limited global resources, but political and economic injustice together with violation of human rights. A large chunk of Nepal's population is also trapped in extreme poverty over the years. Despite several initiatives taken and implemented by the government to curb poverty, Nepal still remains one of the poorest countries in the world. The burgeoning economic gaps have continued to grow as the very richest amass unprecedented levels of wealth. Dalit, marginalized, socially excluded indigenous communities and women residing mainly in inaccessible mountain districts and inner terrain parts of Nepal worst hit from severe poverty and hunger, are desperately waiting the year 2030 with the faint hope of getting rid of generational poverty and deprivation, for Nepal is committed to achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) i.e. end poverty and hunger and reduce inequality among others. Moreover, the 15th development plan of the government envisions reducing absolute poverty to zero by F.Y 2100/01 from current 18.7 percent and multidimensional poverty to 3 percent from 28.6 percent. It is heartening that a progressive constitution in many ways envisions Nepal to be an egalitarian, welfare economy heading towards democratic socialism.

Given the scenario, if there is no meaningful political commitment, the dream of poverty eradication and formation of a just and equitable society remains just a dream for ever. Considering that the poor are natural-born entrepreneurs and they have tremendous creative potential, there is a need to focus on sustainable and inclusive programmes that help the poor realize their full potential as entrepreneurs. To this, giving them the right environment and a little bit of help getting started is inevitable. Shortly before his death Mahatma Gandhi wrote "recall the face of the poorest and weakest person you have seen, and ask if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to them". Keeping in view the heart touching remarks of the legendary person, the poverty focused policies and programs designed so far needs revisit at the earliest to make sure that the targeted resources and different measures to protect and improve lives of the extreme poor effectively reach to them and they are making proper use of it. There can be no

sustainable development without catering to these groups.

Viewed from the perspective of lifting extreme poor out of poverty and enable them to share equally the fruits of development, responsible finance among others could be one of the remedies. Responsible finance is a mission driven concept of increasing access to finance serving customers not supported by mainstream lenders. The situation in India's federal state of Andhra Pradesh has further increased global attention to this issue, demonstrating the urgency of advancing the responsible finance discussion across all financial sectors, including microfinance.

Nepal's financial sector has obviously become deeper and the number and type of financial intermediaries have grown rapidly over the past 30 years. There have been 155 Banks and Financial Institutions (BFIs), their branches being 9765 as of mid-July, 2020. Currently 85 microfinance companies are playing a leading role in providing the microcredit services to the poor. Despite the growth of financial services, many poor people in Nepal still remain excluded from formal financial services access. Reasons for exclusion are numerous such as lack of financial service providers or lack of appropriate products and services to meet growing needs of clients. A rating assessment conducted by NRB – EAFS project showed that most microfinance institutions offer similar products under similar terms and conditions to a largely diversified client group. Additionally, there is a growing trend among Nepalese MFIs to focus on serving better end of the poor clients, thus neglecting the financial needs of the very poor potential clients.

The time has now come that all the existing BFIs have to act and behave in such a responsible manner that financial services reach not only to a handful of people but also equally to a large mass of people excluded or excluding themselves for several reasons either social or psychological. It is obvious that conventional banks are prejudiced against the poor, categorizing them as high risk clients or dealing with whom is an unprofitable proposition. Contrary to this, Bank Rakia Indonesia (BRI), the largest commercial bank of Indonesia makes a huge profit providing financial services to the poor through opening a separate window called micro banking. Commercial banks of Nepal too therefore, have to play a role of making poor people bank-

able by massively undertaking financial literacy/education programs and giving banking services at their door steps either through brick banking or digital technology. A study found that “women in Nepal who were offered a simple bank account increased their total assets by 16%. In India, a government effort to open banks in rural areas helped cut rural poverty by up to 17 percentage points. When savings accounts were offered to female market vendors in Kenya, their daily expenditure increased by 37%, relative to a comparable group of women who did not receive an account”.

These facts show that formal financial service providers have a great role to play in poverty reduction. So, there is a felt need for regulations in the banking sector which may support the sector grow and act responsibly towards hopeless and helpless too. Needless to mention, BFIs of Nepal mainly prefer to concentrate their business activities merely in urban and peri-urban areas and that too to a segment of population which is supposed to be very convenient to deal with.

Considering that micro-finance could be one of the effective strategies for financial inclusion and poverty reduction, the 1990s saw growing enthusiasm for promoting microfinance industry in different forms and models in Nepal. Though early advocates,



including Muhammad Yunus, claimed that microfinance would help people get out of poverty, even seeing it as a silver bullet for eradicating poverty, the microfinance industry these days is coming under fire for failing to deliver on poverty alleviation impacts. The reason is that, Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) opt to reach the upper poor amidst debate about whether MFI should target simply the poor or the poorest too. There has been found many challenges of reaching poorest of the poor people in the country, the major being physical, economic and social barriers. Looking at the challenges faced, the restructuring of the policies and strategies for MFIs is necessary to overcome the obstacles. The government and the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) can make some inroads into enhancing financial inclusion of socially excluded and the poorest according special role to MFIs, among others. There are thousands of people in one communities whose lives are shattered by high cost unaffordable credit from lenders, who act irresponsibly and treat their customers unfairly, preying on their vulnerability. So, there is another way to lend, a way that creates hope and opportunity, provide ethical loans and advice to local

people. MFIs could be instrumental to protect and promote the decent living of depressed communities through responsible finance.

A responsible MFI must achieve the double bottom line- economic growth without compromising its core mission of serving poor clients. China, which over a single generation has become the world's second biggest economy, has also proven that microfinance can help enterprises flourish, create jobs and reduce poverty. Various forms of support and development initiatives, including food consumption, savings plans, skills training and microfinance can be sequenced to enable people to graduate out of extreme poverty and into sustainable livelihoods. This adapts a methodology developed by BRAC in Bangladesh. Graduation program needs long term soft funding from a donor or a government.

Lesson has to be learnt from giant country, China which, in July 2020 announced eradication of extreme poverty. To achieve this herculean task, the government of China prepared a roadmap for eliminating extreme poverty by 2020, calling for mobilization of all resources to win the anti-poverty war. The government further designed minimum living standard guarantee scheme and conditional cash transfer programs, defined poverty alleviation responsibilities of governments at all levels, developed a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system establishing an exit mechanism for poor districts/regions. Social safety nets for the most vulnerable are by far the most powerful anti-poverty program even in the United States. The importance of robust social protection systems for safeguarding the poor with lost

hope and expectation is becoming clearer than ever in Nepal too.

To conclude, given the link between financial inclusion and development, government should keep pushing for more access to and use of financial services apart from enforcing social safety net programs for the poorest. The central bank needs to direct and regulate the commercial banks for responsible financing in order to boost financial inclusion. Keeping in view that MFIs have played significant role in transformational development of the country, they have to be promoted and protected for the larger interest of the poorest. Since MFIs have been promoted by the private investors and they collect fund from market debt, reaching to the poorest with financial products of their needs is no longer a compulsion for them. MFIs in fact have deviated from their original goals to serve the poorest. Setting up of a national microfinance fund for support to the MFIs could be one of the strategies to make MFIs responsible for financing to the poorest, thereby seeking their contribution to ending extreme poverty of the country.

*Dr. Koirala is the Chief Executive Officer of Sana Kisan Bikas Laghubitta Bittiyasanstha Ltd (SKBBL)*



## UPPER TRISHULI 3 B

# Back At Work

*Following 14 months of disruption caused by COVID-19 pandemic, the construction work of Upper Trishuli 3 B project has resumed*

By A CORRESPONDENT

Working quietly and carefully, Mohan Prasad Gautam, Managing Director of Trishuli Jal Vidhyt Company Limited, heaved a sigh of relief this week following the resumption of the project, mobilizing the workers in the project site.

For the past 14 months, managing director Gautam, who also has experience of working in Upper Tamakoshi Project, had a very hectic time, spent in facilitating and coordinating with different authorities to resume the work which was disrupted due to COVID-1.

With so many risks involved due to covid-19, MD Gautam had to work very cautiously. In the first few months, Chinese contractor got trapped in China. Following March, the shutdown of air service disrupted work.

Finally the contractor for the construction work of Upper Trishuli 3 B hydro-power project has resumed work from April 26. Given the growing incidents of COVID-19, the threat still looms large.

With a capacity of 37 MW, Upper Trishuli 3 B Project is a cascade project of Upper Trishuli 3 A project.

The project work stopped after the Chinese workers left to their country in December, 2019 to celebrate the Chinese New Year. They did not return to the project due to the surge of coronavirus in China. The project was virtually at a standstill for the 14 months due to covid-19 and stalling of the equipment in border.

The contract of the project was awarded to Sichuan (AANHE Hydroelectric Engineering of China. Maintaining the strict health protocol, the

contractor has resumed its work now in main tunnel, powerhouse and other structures,” said Mohan Prasad Gautam, managing director of Trishuli Hydropower Limited project. He said that there are 64 Chinese and 81 Nepalese workers working in the construction site.

“After continuous efforts from our side, we are able to resume the stalled construction work bringing back all the workers,” he said. He also said that the project is facing difficulties to transport the construction equipment and materials, which are purchased and some are in the packaging and production stage, to project site in Nepal due to the shutdown of Nepal-China border. If this disruption continues, it will likely to affect the resumption of construction work. We have been coordinating with Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation and various offices of Ministry of Finance. Con-



## ENERGY



As a cascade project of 60 MW Upper Trishuli 3 A project, there is no need to construct disender pond and the gate at the headwork has already been completed. The construction work of box culvert has already begun.

Nepal Telecom and Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) have 30/30 promoter share in Trishuli Hydropower Company Limited. Rural Municipality, Municipality each has 5 percent share, local financial institution of Rasuwa and Nuwakot has 5 percent, and local residents of Rasuwa and Nuwakot have 10 percent, public 15 and employees of NEA and Telecom 5 percent each.

Estimated to cost of Rs.7.44 billion with projected interest of Rs.780 million, the project's generation capacity will be 134.8 million units during the winter and 157.7 million units. The power will be evacuated through 3 kilometer long transmission line Trishuli 3 B hub stations.

Although MD Gautam has had a sigh of relief now, one cannot rule out the possibility of disruption in the coming days given the second phase of COVID-19 spike in Nepal.

constructed under People's Electricity Program, 37 MW Upper Trishuli 3 B project situated in Rasuwa and Nuwakot district was started with an aim to complete it by March 2020.

With the disruption in construction for 14 month and inability to work in this winter, the project completion date has been postponed to 2023 April. Under the Engineering Procurement and Construction (EPC) model, the Chinese contractor HNHE Hydroelectric and Engineering signed agreement with the company at the cost of Rs. 1.91 billion (30.19 Million US \$) in 2074 Magh 29.

The contractor company is responsible for the construction of all civil, electric and hydro-mechanical work. The company also designs equipment, construction and installation. The physical progress of the project at present is 47 percent.

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli his wife

Radhika Oli and then Energy minister Barshaman Pun Purchased 20/20 each share of the promoter of the project Trishuli Hydropower Company Ltd.

Prime minister Oli purchased the share during the issuance of 3.7 million shares to the public. Out of 3.8 kilometer tunnel, 1.8 kilometer tunnel has already been constructed and the progress work of power house construction and support work has 76 and 35 percent respectively.





## ENERGY

### NEPAL-INDIA ELECTRICITY AGREEMENT

# New Breakthrough

*The recent decision of Indian government to authorize Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) to purchase electricity from Indian Market is a breakthrough*

By A CORRESPONDENT

Following years of negotiation and agreement with India, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) is permitted to enter Indian electricity market for energy trade. Although Nepal's entry into Indian market is a major breakthrough in terms of trade, a small section of people term it is a trade sold out.

At a time when Nepal's electricity demand is growing and internal generation is shrinking, Nepal does have a very few options: either to go for prolonged hour of power cut or to import electricity from India to balance supply and demand.

Nepal's current peaking power demand is 1450 MW. However, Nepalese hydropower projects generate 775 MW of power. As all the projects are run of the river type, their power generation declines drastically during the dry session. In terms of energy, Nepal's current demand is 29000 MWh and Nepal is importing 19300 MWh. This is over 66 percent of total energy consumption.

Given the current trend, Nepal has no option other than to import for supply and demand balance.

According to the interpretation, trade, of any kind, is a basic economic concept involving buying and selling of goods and services, with compensation paid by a buyer to a seller, or the exchange of goods or services between parties.

Trading globally between nations allows consumers and countries to be exposed to goods and services not available in their own countries. Almost every kind of product can be found on the international market: food, clothes, spare parts, oil, jewelry, wine, stocks, currencies, and water.

As a result of international trade, the market contains greater competition and therefore, more competitive prices, which brings a cheaper product home to the consumer.



Trade is also a give and take. If you are allowed to import, the country will also give you access to export as well. In that way, the recent agreement allowing NEA access to Indian electricity market is a major breakthrough.

Under this agreement, Nepal has started the import of electricity from India at the new rate. As per the agreement, Nepal will pay IC Rs.3.81 per unit including all the charges, according to MD Shakya. This is IC 0.34 per unit cheaper as Nepal used to pay for the import of electricity earlier, which means a saving of Rs 3.48 Million.

Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has started to import 200 to 250 MW of electricity in the energy exchange market of India through Dhalkebar-Mujaffarpur from Saturday (May 1) midnight.

"Following this, Nepal is the first country in South Asia to enter the Energy Exchange market in India," said NEA MD Hitendra Dev Shakya. He said that NEA is able to enter the Indian market

just after getting permission for being well prepared before.

He said that the process for purchasing electricity for other days has already started. NEA is paying Rs.4.18 per unit for the electricity imported from Dhalkebar-Mujaffarpur Cross Border Transmission line. NEA has been importing the highest volume of electricity from this cross-transmission line.

NEA and NPTC have an agreement to import up to 250 MW from July-November, 300 MW December-April and 250 MW from May-June through Dhalkebar-Mujaffarpur Cross Border Transmission line. The PPA is expiring on 30 June 2021.

"For the importing of electricity from Indian Exchange market, NEA will deal with NVVN. NVVN will send the transaction detail every day before 6 PM to NEA and NEA will clear the bill five days after NDVN claims," said MD Shakya.

NEA is planning to export the

surplus electricity generated by 456 MW Upper Tamakoshi following its completion in the coming year. "Since Nepal is a part of the Indian energy exchange market and has entered the market, it will make it easier for export as well," said MD Shakya.

Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has received authorization to purchase electricity from Indian market. As per the Indian Minister of Energy, NEA is authorized to import electricity purchasing through energy exchange market.

NEA was informed by India last week. Following this decision, Nepal is now a member of Indian energy market. "This is a major milestone for Nepal's energy development," said NEA's MD Shakya.

MD Shakya said that the decision paves the way for NEA to import electricity from Indian market in competitive market price as needed and without interference of third party. The decision has historic importance," said MD Shakya. He also said that this is a first step to export electricity to Bangladesh through India. This is a major step for Nepal Bangladesh Electricity Trade.

"NEA has also sent formal letter to India for the permission of export of Nepal's surplus electricity to India. In the first phase, Nepal proposes to export electricity generated by 456 MW Upper Tamakoshi and 45 MW Bhotekoshi during the rainy season," said MD Shakya.

MD Shakya said that India's decision came at a time when Nepal's power sector is facing very tough time to balance supply and generation as power generation from private sector has declined drastically due to lack of water caused by a long drought.. "Following the decision, we have already initiated to purchase additional 30 MW electricity from India to fill the deficit in supply," said MD Shakya. "We can manage the supply and generation if we are able to bring 30 MW from India," said Shakya.

At present, NEA has been purchasing electricity from NTPC, NVVN, Power Trade Company, Electricity Distribution Companies of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. MD Shakya said that NEA can now directly purchase electricity from India.

To maintain demand and supply, NEA's system has been supplying op-

timum 340 MW from RoR and 103 MW from Kulekhani, 200 MW from private sector and 780 MW imported from India.

There is no problem in supply in east of Dhalkebar. However, there is high demand in Kohalpur. Due to lack of transmission line and distribution infrastructures, there are problems for supply.

"Our last four year's effort came true. NEA has entered into power exchange market of India. This has opened avenues for exporting our wet season energy to India in daily basis. This has been successful due to the tireless effort of NEA team, ministry and Indian counterparts for the last four years. Congratulation to NEA team, ministry, IPAN, NVVN, CEA, IEX, MoP, MEA (Nepal and India) and all concerned," writes Kul Man Ghising, former MD of NEA in his face book wall.

Similarly, Dhalkebar-Chandranigahapur of Rautahat, 132 kV Transmission line is supplying up to 200 MW electricity. NEA is now supplying high volume of electricity through Dhalkebar-Mujaffarpur Transmission line.

NEA hopes that the generation of 76 MW of electricity from the first unit of Upper Tamakosi from middle of May can ease the current pressure of demand and supply.

The following is the expression given by SN Goel, Chairman and MD of Indian Energy Exchange (IEX), from where Nepal started the first transaction by drawing power from 30 MW to 90 MW equivalent to 1.0407 GWh on April 18, 2021 one day ahead basis through 400 kV Dhalkebar-Mujaffarpur Transmission Line under the portfolio name NVVN\_NEA.

The price per unit came to be INR. 3.55 including various charges and NVVN's trade margin. We are in process for the sale of power, too, in this Exchange market as early as possible during coming monsoon.

"Nepal India have already signed Power Trade Agreement (PTA) covering wide areas of power trade. After passing several rounds of the PTA, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has signed the recent power exchange agreement with NTPC Ltd, electricity trading company and NVCN. Following this, electricity generated by Nepal will get easy access to India market and Nepal also imports electricity from India wherever it likes. Despite this broader agreement in electricity trade, Nepal imports electricity from coming 3 to 4 years. We don't wish to purchase electricity but it is compulsion to do so to balance our supply and demand system," said Prabal Adhikary.

"NEA expects that Nepal will have enough electricity to export in coming three to four years and Nepal will not require electricity. Only after then we will be able to export electricity," said Prabal Adhikari, Director of NEA's Electricity Trade Department. Under this agreement, Nepal will purchase electricity in mix rate. This is favorable for Nepal.

"For this, we need to prepare infrastructure. For now, we have been using Dhalkebar-Mujaffarpur 400 kV transmission line," said Adhikari.

As Nepal's hydropower projects are based on run of the river, they just produce one third of their capacities during winter. Thus Nepal will be a net importer for a few more years. This opens possibility of energy banking.





# Ready For Generation

*After almost 14 years, Upper Tamakoshi project has finally started the process of testing and commissioning*

By A CORRESPONDENT

“Encouraging the ‘Rolpali’ Welder who is working day and night in the unfortunate place of Tunnel Adit Gate days before filling water in the tunnel,” writes Bigyan Shrestha, CEO of Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Company Ltd, on his Facebook wall.

Having been involved in the country’s mega project from the very beginning and working as a CEO for the last nine years, the comment of Shrestha, who rarely make such comments in the social media, indicates how the entire project team has been working day and night in the site.

His comment appeared in the media a day before the starting of filling the water on dam site. This also shows the confidence of the project to



commence power generation within a month.

Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport Bashanta Kumar Nembang and Minister for Communication and Information Technology Parbat Gurung released the water by pressing the switch to open the left and right intake gates on Thursday, April 30. Secretary at Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation Devendra Karki and NEA’s MD Hitendra Dev Shakya were also present.

Dr. Ganesht Prasad Neupane, spokesperson of the project, informed that water will be sent to the tunnel from the same day as the reservoir of the project is full. “The work of the

project has almost started for testing,” said Neupane. “The main tunnel will be tested by sending water soon.”

After sending water to the tunnel, the main tunnel and penstock will be tested. “Testing is in full swing to start production in the next 8 to 10 days,” informed Neupane, adding, after testing the tunnel and penstock, we will say the exact date of production.”

The project has started preparations to generate 76 MW of electricity from the first unit by mid-May. He said that the work of penstock connection in the vertical tunnel and lower vertical tunnel is in the final stage. Successful technical testing of hydro-mechanical equipment such as dams, intakes and other civil structures including gates and stop-lugs has been successfully completed in the reservoirs and descender ponds.

The project will generate 2.28 billion units of electricity annually. The project will earn Rs 9 billion annually from the sale of electricity. The project was estimated to incur





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an initial cost of Rs 35 billion but due to various factors, including earthquake, border blockade, among others, the project cost could go to nearly Rs 80 billion.

Since the last two months, Shrestha, CEO of Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Company Ltd, has been in an hectic but careful mission in monitoring, directing and encouraging the workers to complete the task of mega project in schedule.

After releasing the water to tunnel by two ministers, the process of testing and commissioning of infrastructures of civil and hydro-mechanical work, including gates, manholes, valves and penstock pipes has begun. They will go for dry test and then there will be wet test of Diversion Dam, Settling Basin, Headrace Tunnel, Penstock (Vertical Shaft and Horizontal Tunnel), Power House (Underground), and Tailrace Tunnel.

Following this, there will be testing and commissioning of each of the six units. This is a very lengthy and complicated technical process. If everything goes well, Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Project, being constructed in Lama Bagar, Bigu Rural Municipality-1, is set to begin generating electricity from May 24.

Faced with all kinds of trouble including the major earthquake, the project was virtually in the collapsing stage following the earthquake in 2015 when the road to head was destroyed.

In the wave of celebration, former MD Kulman Ghising had taken some crucial decision to revive the project and accelerate the speed. Backed by then minister of Energy Janardan Sharma Prabhakar and Secretary Anup Kumar Upadhyaya, MD Ghising supported CEO Shrestha in

his mission.

The 456-megawatt project, which is being built with domestic investment, carried out a test by releasing water into the main waterway. According to Tamakoshi Hydropower Company, tunnel filling will take 10-12 or more days and it will complete by May 11. "We will run the turbine following filling water. It was delayed due to obstacles created by Hydro-mechanical contractor."

"There are some problem areas, which are continuously monitored. The unit will be run on May 12.

The first unit may generate electricity from May 24. NEA is very sorry that expectation is postponed every time but it is trying its best," said a senior official at NEA.

Dr. Neupane, the spokesperson for the project, said that all aspects of the waterway, reservoir, and tunnel pipes would be minutely tested and if there are no complications, the civil and hydro mechanical tests of the hydropower project would be completed by May 12. "Then, we will move on to

the electromechanical tests which will be completed within 10 days," he said.

The reservoir of the 456 MW Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Project – a national pride project— which is in the final stage of production, has been filled and water from the reservoir has been released in the tunnel.

The project, which is preparing for production in mid-May, has filled the dam with water for the main tunnel and penstock test.

For Nepal, Upper Tamakoshi will be the second mega project after Melamchi to complete.





# Time To Turn Over The Page



BY: HEMANG DIXIT

During the occasions when I visited some major cities of India I saw book hawkers with their wares of paperbacks laid out for sale, at very reasonable prices, on the pavements. Buying books at less than the back cover printed price, one felt a sense of having availed of a bargain! This happening was because these were 'Out of Season' books - almost like fashion wear, an essential custom that took place every year to make space for new creations.

Such books sold at discounted rates to augment the sale of new books, found their way to Nepal. It was only the decision of the government to make the importers of such books to pay tax at the printed cost that resulted in the import of such bulk purchase books, mainly paperbacks to decline in Nepal. Happily this shortage of reading matter motivated local publishers to meet this challenge by publishing books, in both English and Nepali. Though this was beneficial, the negative more serious impact was the inability of Nepali readers to acquire topical reading materials at a reasonable rate! About six months ago the government rescinded this decision but the import of books, mainly from India did not recover to its former levels. Why? Was it because the local production of books partly met the need of the hour? Was it because of the increased printing of books by Nepali authors, both in the vernacular and in other languages in Nepal? Memoirs by many Nepalis, albeit by way of ghost writing is now an accepted trend. There has been a resurgence of books on varied subjects, more specifically in Nepali. This is good news for it confirms that Nepalis are reading books, printed in Nepal by local authors. As a result the production methods in Nepal have been modernised and improved, resulting more presentable products. In fact it was the commercial practice for Western publishers to print books for sale to readers in Asia at Hong Kong, Singapore or New Delhi. One can also recall that almost all Nepali books were at a certain period published in Kolkata and Varanasi.

Three treaties between India and Nepal i.e. that of 1816, 1923 and that of 1950 are now seen by many of us Nepalis as detrimental to our interests. The Treaty of Sugauli of 1816 CE took away much land that constituted the then Greater Nepal. The Nepal - Britain Treaty of 1923 CE, which though permitted imports from outside and production of materials within the country, had built in conditions to ensure that what was produced in Nepal was just adequate for internal needs and nothing remained for exports. The 1950 CE Treaty of Peace & Friendship is said to be detrimental to the interests of Nepal and though there had been two years of discussion by the '10 Member Eminent Persons Group' and the final report, submitted in 1950 to the concerned authorities of the two countries nothing has resulted. The PMs of both India and

Nepal have not had time to act on it.

Nepali, as the lingua franca of Sikkim and of the Darjeeling area of West Bengal, has been accepted as a language by the Indian Constitution. Nepali is spoken by over 50 million Indians having Nepali roots, but living anywhere from Uttaranchal to across Assam. Nepali books were and probably are still being printed in Varanasi and brought to Nepal. Currently books in different languages published by different publishers of India are freely allowed into Nepal. In contradiction to such a state of affairs, it is surprising that books printed in Nepal can, as per the 1950 treaty only be sent to India following specific permission by the Embassy of India at Kathmandu. It is stated that this is to discourage the importation of seditious or harmful printed materials - pamphlets and books across the border into India. Cannot this import / export issue be also sorted out at the regular trade talks rather than by restriction of a Treaty which must be revised?

What a silly and anachronistic thought in this age of the twenty-first century! It is a Big Brother attitude restricting a younger one's entrepreneurship. Now-a-days books and other materials can be ordered Online from different countries and businesses worldwide such as Amazon Kindle with the tap of a finger on one's laptop or even android phone. Similarly information, true or otherwise to distance places of the earth is a daily occurrence. 'Fake News' has become a catch-phrase of politicians of varying shades in different countries of the world! Handling of information and its disclosure are the realities of the day. Elections are being affected in distant lands by means of unauthorised posts in Facebook, Twitter, Google, WhatsApp and various other formats. It seems that the current officialdom in many countries, whilst being aware of such happenings, is loath to take action for fear of subsequent reprisals.

Whilst we wait for the decisions on our 1950 Treaty of Peace & Friendship with India, the hope is that wisdom will prevail and that this treaty will be revised soon. It seems foolish to let matters stagnate like this in an age of internet connectivity, for current information cannot be controlled. The air-waves are free and though some control can still be exerted it is not a worthwhile effort. The success of hackers in looting bank accounts and affecting the results of elections in distant lands is proof of this. After all with the aid of Japan and NASA, three Nano Satellites - one each from Japan, Nepal and Sri Lanka have been sent into space and go around the earth five times a day. So, the sooner we wake up to the realities of the present days, the better. One is forced to conclude that the time has certainly come for Indo-Nepal Relationship to turn over to a new page.

*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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