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OPINION
Dipak Gyawali



FORUM
Dr. QU Dongyu

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FORTNIGHTLY

MCC RATIFICATION

Crisis Averted

INSIDE



FACE TO FACE
DR. VIJAY KUMAR DATTA



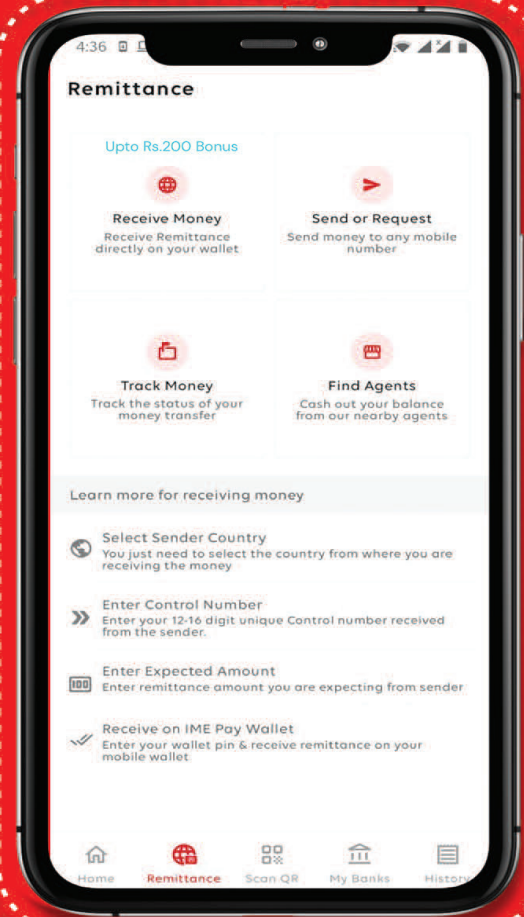
INVASION ON UKRAINE



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Notes From The Editor



Following intense rounds of contentious debates on the Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC), Nepal's parliament has finally approved it by paving the way for the implementation of a 500 million dollar grant project in the country. Although the debates over the MCC-Nepal will continue for some time to come, the approval from the House of Representatives has ended the possibility of tarnishing Nepal's diplomatic credibility all over the world and Nepal's 75 years long friendly relations with the United States of America. Tabled four years ago by K.P. Sharma Oli in the parliament, the speaker of the house had suppressed the agreement from being presented in the house. The delay in the parliament gave ample space to rumors and disinformation about it, widening the division of public opinion. The MCC agreement dragged even Nepal's neighbors and regional powers. Handling the situation with tact, Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba brought all the political forces in the parliament to pass the agreement showing Nepal's priority to the relationship in the US. Along with this, Deuba also has convinced the US of the necessity to include a clarification. This is a major achievement of PM Deuba. With the approval, the government of Nepal has started the countdown of the agreement as it is now the time for Nepal to successfully complete the projects in time. We hold the view that the MCC grant will help Nepal and Nepalese people prosper. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has changed the global order. It also shows the vulnerability and limitation of small nations in world politics. It is unacceptable for us when there is any foreign intervention in a small nation. As citizens of small country, Russian intervention in Ukraine is unacceptable to us and we support sovereignty and integrity of Ukraine. As other countries around the world are busy to evacuate their citizens from war torn region, Nepal government also needs to take appropriate step to evacuate Nepalese citizen safely

Keshab Poudel

Editor

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Asia And The Pacific Regional Conference-#APRC36

Asia-Pacific countries poised to transform agrifood systems through innovation and digital technologies – FAO ready to support Members in the region



BY: QU DONGYU

The current nutrition situation in Asia and the Pacific is difficult in many areas across the region. About 40 percent of its inhabitants cannot afford a healthy diet, and in some areas the fight against hunger has seen reversals rather than advances. Progress toward meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of defeating both poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2) has been thrown off track amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which has devastated both lives and livelihoods.

Luckily, the picture is not all bleak and there are signs of optimism and dynamism. Advances in the region's agrifood systems are changing the ways in which food is sustainably produced, marketed and consumed. This transformation reflects a greater awareness by Asia-Pacific producers and a growing demand from consumers for healthier, more nutritious foods.

Crop and livestock farmers, fishers, pastoralists, other producers and retailers – large and small – are successfully turning to innovative ideas and digital technologies. These improvements in production and sustainable resource management keeps more money in their pockets, while also helping to reverse environmental degradation.

All this is helping to create a paradigm shift that is taking shape in other parts of the world too. In Asia and the Pacific, there is a clear and growing movement toward innovation and digitalization along the entire agrifood value chain.

Retail grocery and food shopping is an important example. This is not only a phenomenon of well-developed economies, with four out of five sales of on-line food and grocery purchases taking place in the Asia-Pacific region.

This is just one aspect of the agrifood systems overhaul that is reshaping countries rapidly across Asia and the Pacific, from West Asia, all across South Asia, South-east Asia and East Asia to the Pacific island countries.

In the Pacific's Small Island Developing States (SIDS), grassroots entrepreneurs are increasingly stepping forward. Their innovative smart phone apps help producers and consumers to make informed, nutritious choices. The private and development sectors are also leveraging increasingly available data to make the supply chain of agricultural commodities to markets more efficient and timely, and to map areas vulnerable to extreme weather events. Several of these innovations were showcased at the 'SIDS Solutions Forum', the first of an event to be held biennially, co-convened in August 2021 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Government of Fiji.

There are still some challenges in accessing data on

demand and without interruption, as we saw when Tonga's undersea communications cable was severed during the eruption of the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano. But these setbacks will bring forth the new ideas needed to overcome them!

At FAO, we are working with our Members across Asia and the Pacific region to transform agrifood systems to be MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable - to the benefit of all. Through the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, we are assisting policy makers in their plans to further leverage data, technology and innovation to meet the SDGs targets by 2030.

We are proactively identifying and supporting digital villages across the region as part of FAO's 1,000 Digital Villages Initiative. We are continuing to nurture and promote country-led SIDS solutions and Hand-in-Hand partnerships, which includes advising on climate event mitigation and adaptation, and helping to overcome the damage caused to lives and livelihoods by the pandemic and the climate crisis.

These are among the topics that will be discussed at the 36th Session of the FAO Asia and the Pacific Regional Conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh, from 8 to 11 March. FAO Members from the region – 46 in total – will come together to build on the transformational agenda and actions under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, along with the recommendations of the UN Food Systems Summit 2021.

FAO is leading in hosting the recently established Coordination Hub for the follow up of the Summit, which will support countries in further developing and implementing national pathways towards agrifood systems transformation in line with national priorities.

Working with our Members in Asia and the Pacific, we will create even stronger partnerships with academic and research institutions, civil society organizations, co-operatives, parliamentarians and the private sector, with the inclusion of women and youth, as part of our commitment to the global efforts to build back better.

FAO is supporting the region to think big and act concretely. We are providing a constructive hand, but we need many more hands to reach our collective goals. For a better world with a better future for our children, we need better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life for all – leaving no one behind.

For this, we need strong political will and efficient, effective and coherent multilateral actions.

QU Dongyu is the Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)



NEWSNOTES

US Embassy Press Release After MCC's Ratification

The decision whether to ratify the \$500 million-dollar Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Nepal Compact has always rested with the Government of Nepal as a sovereign democratic nation, said US Embassy. "Today's decision by Parliament to follow through on its signed commitment and ratify the compact will mean more jobs for the Nepali people, a reliable supply of electricity, and lower transportation costs."

In the nearly 20 years since its inception, MCC compacts have helped alleviate poverty around the world by forming partnerships with developing countries who are committed to economic freedom, investing in their citizens, and good governance, including promoting democratic principles and combatting corruption, it stated.

The Government of Nepal signed the MCC agreement in 2017 after determining its goals to modernize Nepal's energy and transportation sectors with the hope of helping more than 23 million Nepalis. The Nepali government will now be able to continue to work towards implementing the five-year program.

This year marks the 75th year of diplomatic relations between Nepal and the United States. During these 75 years, Nepal has seen monumental and incredible changes. We have stood with Nepal through these changes and supported the country with development aid, disaster response and preparedness assistance, health, and education programs, and more. The United States' relationship with Nepal is broader than one agreement and we will continue to support the country and its democratic values and long-term economic prosperity.

COAS Open Marathon And Run For Fun-2078 Concluded

Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Prabhu Ram Sharma distributed the prize to the winners of the COAS Open Marathon and Run For Fun-2078 events amid a function.



The Nepal Army had organized 'COAS Open Marathon and Run For Fun-2078'. It included a 42.195-km marathon, 21-km half-marathon, 10-km run and 5-km run for participants from the NA, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, government officials and foreign counterparts.

UK Ambassador Pollitt Calls On Energy Minister Bhusal

UK's ambassador to Nepal, Nicola Pollitt, called on Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation Pamha Bhusal, reports RSS.

During the meeting held at latter's office in Singh Durbar, the two discussed about the issues of mutual interest and common concerns.

On the occasion, Minister Bhusal pledged that Nepal would work closely in all areas of mutual interests.

Stating that production and promotion of clean and renewable energy, e-mobility, low-carbon infrastructure and eco-tourism were the priorities of Nepal, the Minister thanked the UK Government for its support to Nepal in renewable energy and in the environment management endeavors.

Reminding the role and contribution of Himalayas in balancing marine ecosystems and minimizing the global temperature rise, the Minister said, "We expect international support and cooperation in our efforts to protect the mountain range."

As the Minister apprised the UK representative, her Office had prioritised the promotion of reservoir-based projects to maintain a balance in energy sector.

"Hydropower, one of the types of clean and renewable energy, is the priority of the Nepal Government and its focus is on the production of mixed energy," she mentioned.

Terming the UK as the most trusted development partner of Nepal, the Minister recalled its support to Nepal during crisis and disasters.



COAS General Sharma Inaugurates Nepali Army's 'Mass Exhibition'

Chief of the Army Staff (CoAS) General Prabhu Ram Sharma inaugurated the Nepali Army's 'Mass Exhibition' amid a special ceremony organised on the Army Headquarters premises.

The three-day exhibition will be exhibiting the glorious history of the Nepali Army (NA) followed by the present situation and developments in between. It is being organized on the occasion of the Army Day.



The works of the NA, weapons, machineries and costumes will be exhibited. Different equipment used in bands, horse riding, warfare, special team, sports and national park and wildlife conservation will also be displayed in the exhibition alongside photos.

The NA informed that the exhibition was organized to let the public, mostly youths, students and children, know and understand the NA closely.

Incumbent and past senior Army officers, seniors from other security agencies, officials from Kathmandu Metropolitan City, security personnel of different embassies in Nepal, Nepal Art Council members, senior photographers and historians were also present in the exhibition's opening ceremony.

Indian Army Gifts Vaccine Against Covid-19 To Nepali Army

Under the Government of India's "Vaccine Maitri" initiative, the Indian Army gifted 1,00,000 doses of Made in India vaccines to Nepali Army in a ceremony at Nepali Army Headquarters, Tundikhel.

At a programme organised at the NA Headquarters, Chief of Gorkha Brigade, Lieutenant General PN Ananta Narayan handed over such amount of vaccine to Lieutenant General of NA, Bal Krishna Kar-ki.

The Indian government had gifted such a quantity of vaccines to NA under a vaccine-friendly plan.

Lt. Gen. PN Ananthanarayanan, also lauded the gallantry and commitment of the Gorkha soldiers in the Indian Army and expressed his commitment to serve the Gorkha community.

The Indian Army has been assisting the Nepali Army to fight Covid-19 through various kinds of assistance since 2020 including Covishield vaccine, medical equipment, ambulances, etc. This latest gift of vaccines is another testament to the close cooperation between the two armies and the two countries, particularly in times of need.

The VCOAS Nepali Army welcomed the gift of vaccines and expressed happiness over the cooperation extended by the Indian Army.

Indian Army Day Celebrated In Kathmandu

Defense Wing, Embassy of India in Nepal, organized a function on the occasion of the 74th Indian Army Day.

The Indian Army Day is commemorated in rec-

ognition of Lieutenant General (Later Field Marshal) KM Cariappa's taking over as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army on 15 January 1949.

General Prabhu Ram Sharma, Chief of Army Staff Nepali Army and Honorary General of Indian Army, was the Chief Guest at the function which was also attended by former Army Chiefs of Nepal, other serving and retired army officers, officers from the diplomatic community, officials from the government of Nepal, members of think tanks and the press corps.

Vinay Mohan Kwatra, the Ambassador of India to Nepal, recalled the deep historical linkages between Indian Army and the Nepali Army that bind the two countries in a strong bond of fraternal ties.

Expressing gratitude for the selfless service and sacrifice of Gorkha soldiers in Indian Army, he reiterated India's commitment to the welfare of Indian Army pensioners and their families residing in Nepal.

He also paid tribute to the Late Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat who lost his life along with his wife Madhulika Rawat and 11 other ranks in a tragic air accident on 08 Dec 2021.

COAS General Prabhu Ram Sharma conveyed his greetings to General MM Naravane, COAS Indian Army and Honorary General of the Nepali Army, on the occasion of the 74th Indian Army Day.

He highlighted the close ties and long standing cooperation between the two armies and appreciated Indian Army's support to the Nepali Army for its fight against the Covid-19 pandemic and assistance towards modernization, according to a press release issued by Embassy of India, Kathmandu.

COAS General Sharma also felicitated gallantry award winning Gorkha soldiers of the Indian Army.

Chinese Foreign Ministry Response To MCC In Nepal's Parliament

Hua Chunying, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said that Nepal is a friendly close neighbor and development partner. "China will continue to support the Nepalese people in choosing independently their



NEWSNOTES

own development path and offer support and assistance to Nepal's socioeconomic development to the best of its capability."

Responding to a query about the tabling of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact in Nepal's parliament at the regular press conference at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in Beijing, she even questioned how a gift could 'come with a package of an ultimatum'.

"It is China's consistent belief that in pursuing international development cooperation, the principle of mutual respect and equality should be upheld, the sovereignty of the country concerned and the will of its people should be fully respected, and there should be no interference in any country's domestic affairs, no political strings attached, no coercive diplomacy, and certainly no infringement on other countries' sovereignty and interests for selfish gains. As Nepal's friendly close neighbor and development partner, China will continue to support the Nepalese people in choosing independently their own development path and offer support and assistance to Nepal's socioeconomic development to the best of its capability."

Nepal Opposes Russia's Action Against Ukraine

Nepal has expressed its opposition to Russia's military actions in Ukraine. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) stated that the country opposed any use of force against a sovereign country in any circumstance and made it clear that it believed

in peaceful resolution of disputes through diplomacy and dialogue.

The statement also affirmed Nepal's commitment to the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity as enshrined in the charter of the United Nations and noted that the recognition of the break-away Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as inde-

pendent entities by Russia went against the UN Charter.

MoFA, on behalf of the state, also called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and not escalate tension.

Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a multi-pronged attack on Ukraine, with explosions heard in many Ukrainian cities including the capital Kyiv and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy claiming missile strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure and border guards. The latter's media have also reported a barrage of cyberattacks and dissemination of misinformation and falsities via social media.

However, Russian authorities have termed the action a 'military operation' and have claimed that it was necessary to protect the civilians of eastern Ukraine, mainly in the recently-recognized Donetsk and Luhansk.

Western powers including the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union have used terms like "in-

cursion," "invasion" and "aggression" to define Russia's actions and, along with Japan, have imposed sanctions on Russian banks and individuals.

Meanwhile, MoFA has asked all Nepali nationals to not fly to Ukraine and if already there, return as soon as possible. It has requested all citizens to contact either the Nepali Embassy in Germany which is concurrently accredited to Ukraine or the Embassy in Russia.

MCC Acknowledges Nepal's Decision To Ratify Compact

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) has acknowledged Nepal's decision to ratify the MCC Compact of US\$500 million grant from the parliament.

The Federal Parliament has decided to ratify the agreement on February 27.

"The decision to ratify the Nepal Compact has always rested with the Government of Nepal as a sovereign democratic nation. Ratification of the compact enables work to continue towards implementing the five-year programme, which will create the conditions for a more reliable supply of electricity, lower transportation costs, and help create more jobs for the Nepali people," the MCC said in a statement on Wednesday. Nepal had signed the MCC grant in 2017 after determining its goals to modernise Nepal's energy and transportation sectors.

This year marks the 75th year of diplomatic relations between Nepal and the United States. "MCC and the American people have stood with Nepal through these changes and supported the country with development aid, disaster response and preparedness assistance, health and education programmes, and more," read the statement.

The United States' relationship with Nepal is broader than one agreement, and we will continue to support the country, its democratic values, and its long-term economic prosperity.

Meanwhile, Nepal Chamber of Commerce (NCC) has urged for the effective implementation of the MCC project.

"The transmission line will support the energy trade thus attract investment in the energy sector while the upgradation of the road will facilitate in easy trade," it said in a statement. NCC President Rajendra Malla said that the 400KV transmission line from Shankharapur-Ratamte-Damauli-Butwal and substations can be a milestone for the cross-border energy trade.

"This project will help create employment and economic growth. Therefore, all stakeholders should join hands to make it a success. In the same line, environment should be created to complete the national pride projects in time," he said.

Nepal's Sovereign Parliament Alone Decides What Development Assistance Is Needed For Nepal: Ministry Of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the decision



to accept development assistance is taken by Nepal in terms of our national interest and priority. The sovereign parliament of Nepal alone decides what development assistance is needed in the best interest of Nepal and Nepali people. We sincerely hope for continued goodwill of our friends.

In response to the media queries about the views that appeared in various media on the Millennium Challenge Compact assistance to Nepal, the Official Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Nepal has always been pursuing an independent, balanced and non-aligned foreign policy.

Pursuant to this policy, as a sovereign country, Nepal has accepted and utilized development assistance as per her national requirement and priority. Development assistance has played an important role in the building of infrastructures and development in Nepal.

The Government of Nepal remains grateful to our neighbours and those friends with whom Nepal has traditionally been enjoying strong partnership and cooperation as well as regional and multilateral development partners, including the United Nations for their continued support to the socio-economic development of Nepal.

China Is Glad To See International Community Conducting Development Cooperation With Nepal: Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson

China has said that it opposes 'coercive' diplomacy and actions that pursue selfish agenda at the expense of Nepal's sovereignty and interests.

China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin said so while responding to a query at the Ministry's regular press conference in Beijing.

Spokesperson Wang was responding to a question about China's comment on the reported US' pressure on Nepal to ratify Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact by February 28 and the demonstrations in Nepal against the MCC.

Expressing happiness over the international community conducting development cooperation with Nepal, the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson made it a point that 'cooperation should be based on full respect for the will of the Nepalese people and come with no political strings attached.'

"We've noted relevant reports. China is glad to see the international community conducting development cooperation with Nepal to contribute to its economic growth and livelihood improvement. However, such cooperation should be based on full respect for the will of the Nepa-

lese people and come with no political strings attached. We oppose coercive diplomacy and actions that pursue selfish agenda at the expense of Nepal's sovereignty and interests," said the spokesperson.

Violence, Incitement To Violence Not Acceptable: US Embassy

The US embassy in Nepal has stated that 'Violence & incitement to violence are never acceptable.'

The US embassy's view comes out in the context of the demonstrations against the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) in the country.

The embassy said that it supports 'free speech & public discourse based on fact' as free speech is 'intrinsic to democracy.'

"We are a strong supporter of free speech & public discourse based on fact, including on MCC. The right to express one's views is intrinsic to democracy, and people must be allowed to peacefully share their views. Violence & incitement to violence are never acceptable," the US embassy stated in its Facebook account.

India Supported Construction Of A New School Building In Dhangadhi

Purna Joshi, Minister for Internal Affairs & Law of Sudur Pashchim Province, and Naveen Kumar, First Secretary, Embassy of India, Kathmandu jointly inaugurated a new buildings including a multi-purpose hall, boys' hostel and teachers' quarters of Nepal Police School in Dhangadhi, Kailali District. During the inauguration function, officials from Kailali District Coordination Committee, School Management Committee as well as local government representatives were also present.

This is one of the 75 projects being inaugurated this year in Nepal as part of "India@75 Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav" which celebrates 75 years of India's independence.

According to a press release issued by Embassy of India Kathmandu, these new buildings at Nepal Police School have been constructed at a cost of NRs. 42.26 million under India-Nepal Development Cooperation with Government of India's financial assistance. The School, set up in 1985, currently has 665 students.

Since 2003, India has taken up over 523 HICDPs in Nepal and has completed 467 projects. Amongst these, 32 Projects have been undertaken in Sudur Pashchim Province, including 8 projects in Kailali District. In addition to these, Government of India has gifted 8 ambulances and 7 school buses for Kailali District, including one school bus for Nepal Police School in 2013.



BUSINESS BRIEF

NIBL Celebrates 36th Year Of Operation



Nepal Investment Bank Limited (NIBL) has celebrated its 36th year in operation by conducting a series of social, sports and financial awareness programs. A day filled with various team building sports activities such as football, basketball, tug of war, Chinese whisper and pyramid relay was arranged at the premises of St Xavier's School, Jawalakhel, urging active participation from our staff, both inside and outside the valley.

Similar to previous years, a blood donation program was organized on 27th of February at the head office premises. A 36th anniversary special fixed deposit scheme titled "Gajjab Chha Fixed Deposit" which multiplies the deposited amount by 6 in 20 years was launched with the intention of promoting financial stability and saving habits amongst the clients.

On the occasion, the Bank has also launched its 4th Comic Book titled "Bachat garne kaida, digital banking ko faida." This comic is part of a series and in line with the previous three comics; "Hamro sukha dukha ka sathi, bank kati jaati", "A Visit to the Zoo" and "Bank Sangako Naata, Mero Aafnai Bachat Khata" promoting financial literacy throughout.

NIBL has been catering to its customers from 88 branches, 131 ATMs, 21 extension counters, 10 revenue collection counters and 58 branchless banking counters. The Bank, being the recipient of five Bank of the Year awards for exemplary service and business, was accredited with Euromoney awards for "Best Bank 2018" and "Best Bank 2021" from the international publication - Euromoney. Further, ICRA Nepal (International Credit Rating Agency- Nepal) has given the bank a credit rating of A.

India To Supply Chemical Fertilizers To Nepal

Nepal and India have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the supply of Urea and DAP from India to Nepal under Government to Government Arrangement for five years.

Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development Dr. Govinda Prasad Sharma and Secretary at the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers of India Rajesh Kumar Chaturvedi signed the agreement on behalf of their respective governments.

According to a press release issued by the Embassy of India Kathmandu, the agreement was signed virtually in the presence of the Minister for Agriculture and Livestock Development



Mahendra Ray Yadav and Indian Ambassador to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra.

Officials highlighted the relations between Nepal and India.

In his remarks, Rajesh Kumar Chaturvedi highlighted the close and mul-

ti-faceted nature of India-Nepal ties and hoped that the MoU will further boost bilateral cooperation in the agriculture sector by supporting Nepal's economy and food security

The signing of this MoU is expected to help address the recurring fertilizer shortages in Nepal and enable improved agricultural productivity for the direct benefit of Nepali farmers. The MoU is yet another milestone in the bilateral economic cooperation and also an important reflection of the priority attached by India to its partnership with Nepal.

FNCCI, CNI Welcome MCC Ratification

FNCCI and CNI welcomed the ratification of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact by the House of Representatives.

Issuing press statements separately, the private sector umbrella organizations – Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) and Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) – have appreciated the ratification of MCC Nepal Compact by the House of Representatives (HoR) citing that it will play an important role in infrastructure development of Nepal.

After long discussions and debates, the HoR ratified the agreement between Nepal and Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC).

The government of Nepal and the MCC, a US government agency, had inked an agreement on September 14, 2017 to implement a US\$ 630 million compact – \$500 million from the MCC and \$130 million from Nepal – to construct large transmission lines and rehabilitate strategic roads.

Presenting the views on MCC Nepal Compact, the CNI said that the implementation of the project will play an important role in the infrastructure development of Nepal within the stipulated period.

The Confederation said, "As mentioned in the MCC Compact, the provision that construction should be completed within five years of project implementation would be a model for Nepal's development management."

The CNI has requested the Millennium Challenge Account Nepal to create an environment for timely completion of the project in coordination with all stakeholders.

The 400 kV Lapsipedi-Ratamate, Ratamate-Hetauda, Ratamate-Damauli-Butwal transmission lines and substation to be constructed under MCC assistance are important for the improvement of Nepal's internal power transmission system and inland electricity trade.

Also, upgrading the Kapilvastu-Dang section of East-West Highway will be important for economic development, trade facilitation and improvement of living standard of the region, it said.

The CNI has said that everyone should think about the economic development of the country, job creation and improved living standard of the common people through the implementation of mega infrastructure projects.

The government and all stakeholders should focus on making maximum use of the assistance received from multilateral and bilateral bodies to support Nepal's economic development, it said.

The CNI urged for the successful implementation of projects such as the MCC for the economic recovery of Nepal, for the achievement of the goal of upgrading the country into a developing country and



for the mobilisation of necessary resources for upgrading Nepal into middle-income country.

The Confederation has said that the foreign currency received for the implementation of the project will be useful to replenish the dwindling foreign exchange reserves in Nepal.

Such projects, if implemented on time, will also contribute to increase capital expenditure, read the press statement.

“With the parliamentary approval of the agreement, the way has been opened for the implementation of the project. For this, we urge the government, concerned provinces and local levels and MCA Nepal to take the work forward with the confidence of all stakeholders and the people of the affected areas.”

Nepal and Nepalis will reap the benefits of development if the project is implemented within the stipulated time, CNI added.

Similarly, FNCCI said that all the misconceptions about the agreement will be shattered now that the agreement has been approved by the HoR clarifying the doubt on some of the issues. “We believe that timely completion of power transmission line and road maintenance projects, which are of strategic importance in the development of Nepal, will contribute to higher economic growth,” it said.

Due to the situation created by COVID-19, internal resources have shrunk and foreign aid has not increased as expected, it said and added that the implementation of the agreement will help in the revival of the economy after the pandemic and will also open the door for long-term export of electricity and transfer of technology.

The provision that projects under the MCC should be completed within five years of its commencement can also be a model for development and good governance, the FNCCI said.

As projects under the MCC have been constructed in more than three dozen countries, the private sector is confident about smooth implementation in Nepal as well.

FNCCI also said that the ratification of the agreement will convey the message of a good investment climate in Nepal to the world community and will attract more foreign investment and assistance in the future.

Nepal, World Bank Sign \$18 Million Agreement For Nepal's Covid-19 Response

Government of Nepal and World Bank Sign Agreement of \$18 Million for Nepal's COVID-19 health response including vaccines

The Government of Nepal and the World Bank signed an agreement for a second additional concessional loan financing of \$18 million (Rs. 2.14 billion) for COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness (CERHSP) Project. The use of the proposed loan assistance will further facilitate the expansion of the comprehensive vaccination campaign against COVID-19 by the Government of Nepal and will help in purchasing safe and effective vaccines for the age group above 5 years.

The agreement was signed by the Finance Secretary, Madhu Kumar Marasini on behalf of the Government of Nepal and the World Bank Country Director for Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, Faris Hadad-Zervos.

“Nepal has responded expeditiously to the continuously changing environment triggered by the pandemic. It has recorded impressive gains in both primary series COVID-19 vaccination for all populations 12 years and above as well as booster doses for its most vulnerable populations. This second additional financing

will support Nepal to scale-up its vaccination efforts to cover its child populations as well,” stated Madhu Kumar Marasini, Finance Secretary.

The proposed second additional concessional loan Financing and the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness (CERHSP) project share a common objective of preventing, detecting, and responding to the threat posed by COVID-19 and strengthening the systems for public health preparedness in Nepal. The CERHSP project and its additional financing will continue to be implemented under the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Population by the Department of Health Services and associated institutional bodies.

“I am very pleased that the World Bank in its continued partnership with Nepal and through this Additional Financing will make available safe and effective vaccines to a larger proportion of the population. This is very critical as new variants of the corona virus continue to pose a threat to people's safety and livelihoods and exhaust public health systems,” stated Faris Hadad-Zervos, World Bank Country Director for Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

Minister Bhusal Urges India To Help Energy Trade

A delegation from India comprising the secretary at the Ministry of Power, Alok Kumar, including others paid a courtesy to Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Pampha Bhusal.

During the meeting, matters relating to energy development, power trade, bilateral cooperation and mutual interests were discussed.

On the occasion, the Minister stressed the need for mutual cooperation for the utilization of Nepal's hydropower and thus advancing towards the path of economic prosperity.

“Nepal's hydropower should be utilized for the cause of both countries and a bilateral cooperation is needed for the same,” she shared. The Minister further echoed the need of creating an atmosphere for energy trade in the third countries as well.

She urged the southern neighbor to help build the atmosphere for Nepal's energy trade in the Indian market, hoping that India as a good and close neighbor of Nepal would support its friend nation in achieving prosperity. “I hope that meeting of energy officials (joint secretaries) from Nepal and India underway in Kathmandu would be productive towards that end,” she mentioned.

In response, the power secretary was of the view that power trade would help further strengthen the bilateral ties, adding that India was always positive for building an environment conducive for energy trade. As he hinted, India was positive for promoting transnational power trade.



Mcc And The Weaponization Of Aid



BY: DIPAK GYAWALI

It was that notorious geezer Karl Marx who, in his oft quoted essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, said history repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce. No where has this been truer than in Nepal over the last quarter of a century in the water and energy sector. The first was the tragedy of the Mahakali Treaty with India, ratified by the parliament in September 1996 with four strictures (*'sankalpa prastav'*) and stuck in an impasse ever since. The second is the parliament's farcical ratification of the US Millennium Challenge Corporation – Nepal Compact (MCC) on the last deadline day of February 2022 with a 12-point interpretive declaration (*'byakhyatmak tippani'*). And as fate would have it, both happened with the same cast of characters: Sher Bahadur Deuba as prime minister and UML's KP Oli in the opposition (with the additional farce this time around of Lefties Madhav Nepal and Prachanda in the government as well as in the opposition).

To understand how this happened, how Nepal's incompetent leadership sleep-walked into such embarrassing deals, we need to revisit the background to both. Mahakali Treaty was India's success in whitewashing its Tanakpur mess, a run-of-river hydropower project on the western border river Mahakali built unilaterally by India ignoring Nepal's protests but later requiring Nepal's acquiescence to tying up the dam's left afflux bund to high ground in Nepal, thus gifting India 577 meters of Nepali land. It, however, split political parties, paralyzed different governments that attempted to wriggle out of political difficulties with pork barrel deals like the Pajero scandal, depleted India's political capital with rancour in Nepal for generations to come – in short, it led to the wholesale tragic corruption of multi-party democracy and in no small measure the rise of Maoist insurgency and the public's support for it. The treaty is in limbo, as good as dead (together with hydro diplomacy between the two countries and relations with potential international development partners thrown into the coffin as well). Things stipulated to be completed within six months after ratification have still not been done in all these twenty-five years. And neither the Indian nor the Nepali compromised leadership has the courage to revisit and revise it, even though the treaty itself stipulates that it shall be done "ten years or earlier"!

The decade-and-a-half road to MCC has been even murkier. This US government agency was born of

America's need, following the collapse of the Soviet empire, for a more overt strategy-oriented outfit that the older and more pluralistic development-oriented USAID as well as the World Bank could not meet. 9/11 accelerated the process of weaponizing foreign aid in particular and foreign assistance by US and its allies in particular. The first exploratory mission of MCC came to Nepal following the regime change of 2006 effected by US outsourcing its Nepal policy to the Mughlanis with the EU's armchair revolutionary diplomats and aid bureaucrats tagging along. Nepal's political instability initially helped, but ultimately did not help. At first the Americans could get a distracted Nepali dispensation (which included half a dozen prime ministers and many more finance, foreign and energy ministers to say nothing of as many senior bureaucrats) to sign off on anything they proposed. Later – as the interpretive declaration drama in the parliament a few days back showed – the feckless leaders of Loktantra had no qualms backtracking as the rest of the country wised up to their decade-long stupidity.

And the backtracking was spectacular. The interpretive declaration – a one-sided explanation of what agreement clauses in black-and-white in the main bilaterally signed document mean that the other side is not bound to accept (as happened with the Mahakali strictures) – essentially says two things. First, in signing the compact, Nepali political figures are only now waking up to the fact that we should not have signed off on this or that clause, or not agreed to these wordings but replaced them with what is in our interpretive declaration. Second, what the compact says is not what we understand what it says. For instance, where it clearly says "the Parties understand that this Compact, upon entry into force, will prevail over the domestic laws of Nepal", we understand it to actually mean "it will be governed by the domestic laws of Nepal". A rather naughty wag even likened this verbal jugglery to our LSE-returned prime minister teaching Uncle Sam English! We will have to wait and see if Uncle Sam learns and accepts the interpretive declaration; but if it does, then unlike with the Indians and the Mahakali strictures, it will be interpreted as a major friendly gesture by the US – or a major climb-down depending on which side of the political fence the seeing is done from.

To add to the mess, it was Nepal's aid- and revenue-addicted finance ministry (with poor understanding of development economics and an even more pathetic appre-

ciation of political economy or foreign policy) that became the key interlocutor for the American MCC bureaucrats. Of late, again taking advantage of political instability, the finance ministry had started empire-building, setting up hydropower and power trade companies within itself bypassing the energy ministry and the NEA at the first sign of any prospective donor waving a carrot before it. As of now, there is no explanation why, together with these two legitimate electricity-related entities, the foreign ministry too was AWOL when it concerned export of Nepali electricity to India, a subject matter with over half a century of unresolved issues.

Because of their institutional blindness and failure to properly consult not just power sector officials but also academics and civil society leaders, MCC and Nepal's finance ministry also failed to appreciate the fundamental problems bedeviling the power sector, which have been debated for decades within Nepal. On exporting electricity to India, which is the primary objective of this MCC project, a USAID study in 2003 clearly states that Nepal would get no more than six cents (actually it turned out to be 4 cents with recent agreements) from export when it would gain 86 cents in value addition if used within the Nepali economy. Nepalis are one of the lowest per capita electricity consumers at approximately 230 kWh/cap with India's consumption four times higher. This report thus makes a fundamental theoretical mockery of the MCC claim that it would contribute to poverty alleviation in Nepal. (We in the development sector know very well the bad blood existing between MCC on one side and USAID with World Bank plus other Bretton Woods outfits on the other, and for good reasons: MCC debases and securitizes development per se undercutting the albeit questionable professional efforts of the Bretton Wooders!)

Moreover, MCC, in bypassing NEA which is the legitimate Nepali transmission line building authority and creating a new outfit in the name of efficiency (absolute iron-clad, completion in five years deadline which critics have derided as a pie-in-the-sky claim), has badly damaged the equity aspects of development. NEA has built its 400 kV transmission line at Rs 40 million per kilometer while MCC is planning to do that at four times that going rate, much the same as happened with the World Bank with the late but not lamented Arun-3. It also consigned to the dustbin a 2016 World Bank-funded master plan for NEA's transmission line development which does not include the transmission line that MCC proposes but correctly tries to upgrade the 132 kV existing grid to a 400 kV one along the Tarai and particular basin corridors!

MCC, with its super power political pressure, has

MCC, with its super power political pressure, has also badly distorted the 12-Point Delhi Deal inspired 2006 “democracy” and the politics of major parties, exposing the two-faced sleaze within them.

also badly distorted the 12-Point Delhi Deal inspired 2006 “democracy” and the politics of major parties, exposing the two-faced sleaze within them. When MCC's strategic implications, that of Nepal having to give up its non-alignment and array itself with the US's attempt to encircle China and Russia, began to dawn on leaders of the Left persuasion, they balked at ratifying it. The speaker of parliament who resisted its tabling was Me-Too-ed and removed (he was subsequently cleared of the charge of rape, it turning out to be mere adultery between two consenting adults). When the current speaker (no saint with a murder case against him pending in the court) balked, he too was threatened with impeachment and more.

Kangress has never discussed policy, not even in its recent convention, deferring that instead to an uncertain future date; but it paradoxically chose to single-mindedly pursue MCC even though it was never part of the common minimum program this current coalition was based on. Prachanda and Oli are having a difficult time convincing their cadres of their duplicitous behaviour during the voting. And the parliamentary fast-track voting itself was rushed

through, not allowing any debate on the contentious clauses indicated in the interpretive declaration. It was exactly how the last budget was passed, indeed how the 2015 constitution itself was passed. The sleaze even spread to the Supreme Court that intervened directly to have Deuba appointed PM, as if for the sole purpose of having MCC passed, even though his party does not command enough votes to table

a motion in parliament.

So, what is the future for MCC? Paradoxically, with its murky parliamentary passage it has become legal but politically illegitimate. China has begun speaking out against it (why would it not, given MCC's Indo-Pacific anti-China orientation?), “noting” its passage as India had done with the 2015 constitution it did not like and imposed a blockade to stop its implementation. Chinese social media has gone much further, saying Nepal sold its sovereignty for \$500 million. India never intended to build the mammoth Pancheshwar project under the Mahakali Treaty (especially after Uttarakhand was carved out from Uttar Pradesh): the strictures passed with the treaty can be ignored. But the Americans are in a fix with the MCC: they cannot obviously accept a one-sided interpretation, but they cannot ignore it either since it has been passed by Nepal's sovereign parliament. How will they navigate the shoals of implementation fueled by the gales of illegitimacy and public anger? But the bigger question they have to answer will be: is this how you promote democracy abroad?

MCC RATIFICATION

Crisis Averted

With the personal initiative of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, Nepal's parliament has finally passed the 500 million dollar MCC grant agreement amid an intense political polarization, protests and concerns of Nepal's northern neighbor. Signed five years ago and tabled in the parliament three years ago, the MCC agreement has raised an intense dispute. Had not the agreement been ratified, Nepal would have lost its international credibility. Thanks to PM Deuba who has convinced his coalition partners and secured support from the main opposition party, Nepal has averted a major credibility crisis

By KESHAB POUDEL

As the House of Representatives meeting passed the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Agreement with an interpretative note on February 27, it paves the way for the implementation of the 500 million dollar grant development project ending the long political deadlock.

After eleven years of its inception in Nepal, the House of Representatives of the Federal Parliament has ratified the MCC ending the current political uncertainty and chaos and saving Nepal's reputation.

As Agrni Prasad Sapkota, the

Speaker of the House of Representatives announced the ratification of the MCC agreement, the most visibly happiest man was Prime Minister Deuba who had made all efforts to bring all his coalition partners and main opposition party CPN-UML in favor of the agreement. Using his own diplomatic channels, Prime Minister Deuba also conveyed his compulsion to the United States and the need to attach an 'interpretive declaration'.

From his own party to the country, Prime Minister Deuba emerges as an unchallenged leader. In his

first tenure, he also played a crucial role to convince all the parties to ratify Mahakali Integrated Treaty with India.

Although the interpretive declaration does not have any legal binding, it gives a face-saving formula to his two coalition partners CPN-Maoist Center and CPN-UML United Socialist.

Highly suspicious of such a big US project in its backyard, Nepal's northern neighbor China, which openly expressed hostile views and Southern neighbor, which watched cautiously without comment, Prime Minister



Deuba's proposal of attaching interpretive declaration also aimed at reassuring them about their concerns.

To further assure Nepal's neighbors, the cabinet meeting on February 28 has also said Nepal will not allow its soil to be used against any country of the world including neighbors India and China.

"In line with the spirit of Nepal's foreign policy of maintaining friendly relations with all countries, the government is committed to preventing the use of Nepali territory against any of the friendly countries including India and China," said a statement issued by the Cabinet.

US Embassy Statement

After the approval of the agreement, the US Embassy in Kathmandu has issued a statement saying the decision whether to ratify the \$500 million-dollar MCC Nepal Compact has always rested with the government of Nepal as a sovereign nation. The US embassy said that the ratification of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact means more jobs for the Nepali people, a reliable supply of electricity and lower transportation costs.

"In the nearly 20 years since its inception, MCC compacts have helped alleviate poverty around the world by forming partnerships with developing countries who are committed to economic freedom, investing in their citizens, and good governance, including promoting democratic principles and combating corruption," the statement stated. "The Government of Nepal signed the MCC agreement in 2017 after determining its goals to modernize Nepal's energy and transportation sectors with the hope of helping more than 23 million Nepalis," the US embassy said, adding, "The Nepali government will now be able to continue to work towards implementing the five-year program."

This year marks the 75th year

of diplomatic relations between Nepal and the United States. During these 75 years, Nepal has seen monumental and incredible changes, the statement further states. "We have stood with Nepal through these changes and supported the country with development aid, disaster response and preparedness assistance, health, and education programs, and more. The United States' relationship with Nepal is broader than one agreement and we will continue to support the country and its democratic values and long-term economic pros-





perity.

Deuba At Top

For the last seven months Prime minister Deuba, who is in the last leg of his political career, has quietly listened and observed the activities of his coalition partners on the MCC Agreement. He tolerated all double speaks of leaders of his coalition partners Maoist Center and Communist Party of Nepal United Socialist and their actions sending cadres to the street to protest against tabling it in the parliament.

A day after parliament pass the MCC, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba spoke with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. This show PM Deuba's successful drive in the process of passing MCC from parliament. He tweeted "spoke with US Secretary of State @SecBlinken and discussed Nepal's poverty alleviation, development & issue of climate change. We appreciate 75 years of continued US support for our progress. We also discussed Russia's invasion of Ukraine & our support for Ukraine's sovereignty."

Simialrly, US Secretary of State Antony Blinkenof tweeted." Good call today with Nepal's Prime Minister @SherBDeuba to discuss Russia's unprovoked attack and our support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We will continue to work closely together on economic development and regional challeng-

es."

Along with this, PM Deuba was also in a difficult situation as the speaker of House of Representatives Sapkota opposed the tabling of agreement in the House session,

As the deadline given for the ratification of the agreement came closer, PM Deuba, who saw deepening differences over the MCC agreement and a hostile statement coming from Nepal's neighbor, jumped in the course.

Supported by his spouse Dr. Arju Deuba Rana, who has learned statecraft with maternal grand-father late Sher Bahadur Shahi and uncle General Shanta Kumar Malla, both of

whom were highly trusted Generals of late King Mahendra and late King Birendra, Prime Minister Deuba reached to opposition leader KP Sharma Oli for support.

Using her own clout, Dr. Deuba also helped Prime Minister Deuba to convince messages regarding the MCC agreement to all the external stakeholders involved in it.

With the assurance of CPN-UML leader Oli, Prime Minister Deuba was able to press his coalition partners Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal to change their stand and support the MCC Agreement.

With all these efforts, Nepal's Parliament ratified a contentious



US-funded \$500 million grant agreement a day ahead of the February 28 deadline set by Washington, ending months of debates, protests and polarization in the country.

Finance Minister Janardhan Sharma presented the proposal in the House of Representatives for endorsement of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact along with the Interpretive Declaration.

Speaker Sapkota, who was a die-hard opponent till a week ago, announced the ratification of the agreement through voice vote despite protests by the main opposition CPN-UML in the lower house.

“I declare that the Millennium Challenge Corporation agreement and its Interpretative Declaration have been endorsed with majority votes,” said Sapkota.

The agreement, the second-most debated agreement after

fied Socialist-led by Madhav Kumar Nepal helped proceed with the deal with the inclusion of an interpretative declaration. They believe that attachment is meant for clearing confusion among the general public surrounding the MCC.

The 12-point Interpretive Declaration clearly mentions that being a part of the MCC compact Nepal shall not be bound to be part of the US military strategy or security alliance such as the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

It also mentions that the conduct of the MCC would be regulated by the prevailing Laws of Nepal and MCC would not have any ownership over intellectual property and the Nepal government enjoys the right to nullify the MCC compact within 30 days of issuing a notice if it violates Nepalese laws.

Nepal and the US in 2017 signed the MCC agreement, meant for

on whether to accept the US grant assistance under the MCC agreement.

The MCC also dragged Nepal into a geopolitical game, with Beijing taking a jibe at Washington for providing a “gift” to Nepal with an ultimatum, for a second time in a week, firstly warning the US against using “coercive diplomacy” in Nepal.

Project under MCC

Under the MCC compact, a 315-km double circuit 400KV transmission line will be constructed. Five segments of transmission lines to be built are - New Butwal-India Border (18km), New Butwal-New Damauli (90km), New Damauli-Ratmate (90km), Ratmate-New Hetau-



Arun III in the country’s history over fears that some its provisions undermine Nepal’s sovereignty, was tabled in the House for ratification on February 20.

The agreement of the ruling alliance partners including the CPN-Maoist Centre led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’ and CPN-Uni-

building Nepal’s infrastructure such as electric transmission lines and improvement of national highways.

The MCC is a bilateral United States foreign aid agency established by the US Congress in 2004. It is an independent agency separate from the State Department and USAID. Nepal’s political parties were sharply divided

da (58km), and Ratmate-Lapsephedi (59km). Once completed, these infrastructure projects are expected to provide a vital missing link for power projects of different river basins to the existing high-voltage grid in Nepal.

A part of the \$ 500 million will be spent on improving road projects, it said. “With the passage of the

COVERSTORY

compact, which had been in Parliament since July 2019, Prime Minister Deuba has pulled off a coup, as he has not only managed to stick to the deadline of February 28 given to the United States but also saved the coalition from breaking apart.

Political Maneuvering

While Nepali Congress was firm on its stance to ratify the agreement, its partners in government - CPN-Maoist Centre, CPN- Unified Socialist, Janata Samajwadi Party and Rashtriya Janamorchha Party - were opposed to the same.

However, after much political polarization and consequent engagements later, ruling alliance parties finally reached a consensus to proceed with the deal, but with the inclusion of the interpretive points to the proposal.

Parties in government other than the NC were suddenly threatened at the prospect of disintegration of the coalition owing to NC's recent dialogues with the main opposition party, which were deemed to be nearing a conclusive agreement.

Prachanda Statement

CPN-Maoist Centre Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal has expressed satisfaction over the parliamentary ratification of the Millennium Challenge Corporation compact.

Organizing a press conference, Dahal said his party agreed to pass an interpretative declaration along with the MCC compact as it would have a binding effect on the other party - the United States of America - which has pledged a grant of \$500 million for the construction of electricity transmission lines and road upgrade project.

"I am happy with the passage of the MCC Nepal compact. This has saved the constitution, as well as the country," said Dahal. "This interpretative declaration is binding on the USA as well," Dahal added. He said the US Embassy was also consulted on the draft of the interpretative declaration and it was okay with the same.

"Had we not supported the MCC compact, it could have led to the breaking up of the coalition government and derailment of the constitution and the comprehensive peace process," said CPN-MC Chairman Dahal added.

Changing Chinese Tone

China is wary of the US making forays into Nepal. China, whose political influence as well as investments has grown in Nepal significantly recently, was mostly silent in recent months after Prime Minister Deuba came to power.

Although China took a harsh

people in independently finding a path to development.

MCC Suffers From Fake Campaign

MCC Agreement also suffers from fake news campaigns and rumors. In the view of senior advocate professor Dr. Gandhi Pandit, out of ten speakers, he participates in the debate over MCC Agreement for over three months, none of his opponents read the contents of the agreement.

"I was shocked to hear from well-known scholars to senior politicians including former prime minister that they ever read the MCC Agree-



stand earlier, opposing the MCC Agreement, it has softened its stance after passing the agreement by Nepal's parliament.

A spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Wang Wenbin said China had noted the ratification of the Millennium Challenge Corporation compact, along with the "interpretative declaration" by Nepal's House of Representatives.

"The Chinese MoFA spokesperson said that as Nepal's friendly neighbor and development partner, China would as always support Nepal

ment," Gandhi said to New Spotlight. "As I expressed the views on the basis of agreement document, my opponents are always in defense. There is nothing new in the attached 'interpretative declaration' and all are there in the original agreement as well as explanation letter sent by MCC on September 2021."

Passing the MCC agreement, Nepal has been able to avert the major crisis of its credibility at the international level as a state. This way, Nepal has shown its commitment to further strengthen friendly relations with the United States.

INVASION ON UKRAINE

Nepal opposes Russia's action Against Ukraine supporting sovereignty and integrity of Ukraine and showing solidarity with Ukrainian citizens

By A CORRESPONDENT

By opposing Russian intervention in Ukraine and expressing strong support to the sovereignty and integrity of Ukraine, Nepal has shown its solidarity with the cause of indeendnce of small countries.

As a small country surrounded by two big powers, Nepal's concern is natural and opposing the Russian intervention, Nepal expresses its commitment to the UN Charter and sovereignty and independence of the nations.

In its recent statement, Nepal has expressed its opposition to Russia's military actions in Ukraine. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) stated that the country opposed any use of force against a sovereign country in any circumstance and made it clear that it believed in peaceful resolution of disputes through diplomacy and dialogue.

The statement also affirmed Nepal's commitment to the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity as enshrined in the charter of the United Nations and noted that the recognition of the breakaway Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent entities by Russia went against the UN Charter.

MoFA, on behalf of the state, also called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and not escalate tension.

Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a multi-pronged attack on Ukraine, with explosions heard in many Ukrainian cities including the capital Kyiv and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy claiming missile strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure and border

guards. The latter's media have also reported a barrage of cyberattacks and dissemination of misinformation and falsities via social media.

However, Russian authorities have termed the action a 'military operation' and have claimed that it was necessary to protect the civilians

Embassy in Russia.

Nepalese Are Safe

Embassy of Nepal in Berlin, Germany has said that all Nepalis who came into contact with the mission in the wake of the recent crisis in Ukraine are safe so far.

According to Embassy, the



of eastern Ukraine, mainly in the recently-recognized Donetsk and Luhansk.

Western powers including the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union have used terms like "incursion," "invasion" and "aggression" to define Russia's actions and, along with Japan, have imposed sanctions on Russian banks and individuals.

Meanwhile, MoFA has asked all Nepali nationals to not fly to Ukraine and if already there, return as soon as possible. It has requested all citizens to contact either the Nepali Embassy in Germany which is concurrently accredited to Ukraine or the

efforts to obtain more information about the status of Nepali people in various cities in Ukraine are ongoing and 193 people have contacted the embassy.

"We received the information that Slovakia, Poland and Hungary – countries bordering with Ukraine – have opened their borders to allow foreign citizens in the war-affected country to move into their land," said the embassy.

It has urged all Nepalis in Ukraine to reach Slovakia, Poland and Hungary to return to Nepal safely. Nepal had issued a travel advisory on making travel to Ukraine.

Two-hundred and forty-four

NATIONAL

Nepali affected by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict have safely reached their destinations.

for 34 Nepali displaced from Ukraine since the recent developments there .

According to the NRNA

ty of the region and for the future of European security, not to mention the immense human suffering.



A high-level committee formed the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) to support and rescue the Nepali affected by the tension between two close neighbours said this. In a press statement today, the committee said they have left Ukraine and reached Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary and Moldova.

Similarly, 154 people have reportedly got stuck along the borders towards Poland (130), Slovakia (12), Romania (10) and Moldova (two) and they are likely to cross the borders by this evening.

According to the NRNA Ukraine, 40 Nepali families are permanently residing in Ukraine.

A meeting of Sunday of the committee headed by its chair and Nepal's Ambassador for Germany, Ramkaji Khadka, decided to take necessary initiations to transport those Nepali affected by the conflict to safer locations. The ambassador apprised the meeting that the Embassy had so far issued a travel permit

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According to the committee coordinator and NRNA vice-president Dr Badri KC, Association president Kumar Pant is present along the border in Poland to facilitate the safe travel of Nepalis in crisis.

Profound Consequences Of Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine will have profound consequences for the stabili-

US President Joe Biden said that Russia had rejected attempts to solve European security issues through diplomatic means because it was planning a special operation in Ukraine from the very outset.

"Putin's war was premeditated and unprovoked. He rejected efforts at diplomacy. He thought the West and NATO wouldn't respond. And, he thought he could divide us here at home. Putin was wrong. We





were ready,” the US leader was quoted as saying in excerpts from his State of the Union Address, published by the White House website and expected to be delivered in coming hours.

It seems too early, almost inappropriate, to imagine what Ukraine’s future will look like while its present is under military attack. The worst-case scenario is unfolding in front of our eyes, and the sad truth is that the West has been reduced to an observer of a war unleashed by a single man: Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The war is only in its early stages. What is certain is that there will be many casualties, high numbers of internally and externally displaced people, and a severe socioeconomic crisis. Ukraine will need the support of the EU, in particular, to address the humanitarian and economic consequences of this war.

However unimaginable this may have seemed even in recent days, it is now unclear how much of its territory Ukraine will still control when the war eventually subsides or ends.

Ultimately, the war is a high-risk gamble on the part of Putin. The Ukrainian government and citizens

will be more determined than ever to orient themselves westward. An opportunity for Ukraine to regain full control of its territory may arise only in the post-Putin era—and it is uncertain when that era will begin.

Russian Assault And New World Order

Experts hold the view that the Russian assault on Ukraine will shape a new world order after end of cold war.

When Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his all-out invasion of Ukraine, he effectively ended the post-Cold War era. A new architecture for global relations must be built, and its shape will depend on whether Putin’s brutal campaign succeeds or fails.

The world watched in horror as a massive assault force attacked Ukraine from three sides with missiles, bombs, tanks and the electronic wizardry of cyberwarfare. Scores of nations including Nepal condemned the invasion. But the gut-wrenching fact is that Ukraine is fighting Putin by itself.

Europe Will Unite

The contrast between Europe’s slow motion and Russian Pres-

ident Vladimir Putin’s rapid full invasion of Ukraine could not be starker. Until two days ago, Europeans were discussing what Russian action would trigger what sanctions, while the Russian military was encircling Ukraine.

The EU’s package of sanctions will become the first phase, not the last, of an escalation. Even if military engagement has been ruled out, European publics are not prepared for the consequences of war on energy provision or the economy, nor are they ready to welcome refugees. Instead, streams of mis- and disinformation have littered European traditional and social media. Europeans need to be mobilized through evidence-based explanations—and outreach to Russians should be another pillar of a different communications strategy.

Beyond the €1.2 billion (\$1.3 billion) package the EU adopted on February 21 to support Ukraine, the other countries in a region already destabilized by Russia will need more political energy and financial resources while NATO beefs up its Eastern flank in case the conflict widens.

Finally, Europeans need to reach out to civil society in Eastern Europe and Russia to energize those



networks that have been the drivers of positive change across the former Soviet Union in the name of human rights, freedom, and self-determination.

Implication To Balkan

The repercussions of the war in Ukraine will no doubt be felt in the Western Balkans. For one thing, the conflict is polarizing opinion there. For anti-Western nationalists in Serbia and beyond, Putin's actions are tantamount to giving the United States and its allies in Europe a taste of their own medicine. What goes around comes around, they say, pointing at the 1999 Kosovo intervention.

Those who support integration into the EU and NATO see the war in Ukraine as a repeat of former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević's onslaught against Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the earlier chapter of Yugoslavia's disintegration.

Neither analogy works perfectly, of course, but the war of narratives is real, has raged for years, and is about to peak in the coming months. Expect Russia to fan it further with the help of its media mouthpieces, proxies, and fellow travelers in the region.

Will Russia take an even greater risk and open a second front in, say, Bosnia, where the Serb-majority entity of Republika Srpska has exited the common state in all but name? That is not very likely. A showdown with the EU and NATO will bring no benefit and will add to Putin's problems. There are more cost-effective ways to stir up trouble than by sending in the paratroopers, with all the attendant political risks. Russia will do more of the same: support Republika Srpska's Milorad Dodik, nurture links with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, and back anti-Western politicians and parties elsewhere in the region. In short, Moscow will wage its political war as before.

Europe Security

As the Russian military offensive continues in Ukraine amid reports of hundreds of casualties, does the invasion mark a watershed for EU security and defense?

These are among the darkest hours Europe has experienced since World War II and the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, which were terribly violent and led to so many deaths. Europeans now know that war is possible yet again on the continent, but are they prepared to experience this kind

of war as well as pay the price of its economic and humanitarian consequences?

The crisis is already testing the EU's readiness to defend the post-Cold War European security order. Much of the public debate on the crisis has portrayed European governments as divided, weak, and vague. Yet, the conflict might just be the catalyst to reinvigorate the EU's security and defense debate and force Europeans to shift from a security order shaped by soft power to one that is yet again dictated by the harsh realpolitik of hard power.

The key to achieving a European common position on Ukraine is coordination among EU member states and the agreement of all leaders to tougher sanctions. The war will increase pressures not only on governments to rethink their defense budgets but also on Europeans to re-evaluate their long-held belief that war is no longer a European reality after more than thirty years of peace.

This will likely make recent EU defense capability development initiatives, such as the European Defense Fund, more attractive. In times of economic austerity, this change of mindset should trigger a new momentum for EU collaborative capability projects and programs.

But most importantly, the crisis signals a regrouping around NATO as the main politico-military alliance in charge of collective defense. In these fast-moving developments, NATO's greatest responsibility is reaffirmed: to protect and defend territories and populations against attacks and emerging threats, and address all challenges that affect Euro-Atlantic security.

For Nepal, the Russian invasion to Ukraine will have a huge economic implication. Rising oil prices has already affected Nepal's balance of payments and the declining of tourists from Europe will further push back revival of Nepal's tourism industry.

TRADE DEFICIT

Widening Further

As Nepal's trade deficit widens to Rs. 1,015 billion in seven months, Nepal's foreign currency reserve is under strain

By A CORRESPONDENT

Although Nepal's export of soybean oil and palm oil has been helping Nepal to increase the export, their contribution is very minimal in minimizing the growing volume of trade deficit.

Thriving for decades with high volume of remittance, Nepal's economy has started to face huge difficulty since the eruption of coronavirus and declining of foreign currency reserves due to high demand for imports of various products.

At a time when the country's trade deficit has reached Rs. 1,015.80 billion in the first seven months of the current fiscal year 2021/22. The increase of export of Soybean oil and Palm oil has little contribution in total gap. Produced from imported raw materials, soybean and palm used less than 5 per cent of local materials.

However, soybean oil worth Rs. 36.85 billion has been exported in the first seven months of the current fiscal year. Similarly, palm oil is the second most exported commodity after soybean oil. Palm oil worth Rs. 34 billion has been exported during the review period.

The country's trade deficit has reached Rs. 1,015.80 billion in the first seven months of the current fiscal year 2021/22. This year's trade deficit is higher by 38.45 per cent than the deficit of the corresponding period last fiscal year, according to the Department of Customs.

Trade deficit during the same period last year was Rs. 733.72 billion.

Despite significant increase in export, the country's trade deficit has widened significantly during the review period due to low volume of exports compared to the imports.

Foreign Trade Statistics of the Department of Customs says that export trade has increased by 88.30 per cent to Rs. 131.65 billion during the first seven months (mid-July 2021 to mid-February 2022) of the current fiscal year.

Nepal had exported goods worth Rs. 69.91 billion in the same period of the last fiscal year.

Meanwhile, import trade increased by 42.78 per cent to Rs. 1,147.46 billion during the review period.

In the same period of the last fiscal year, the country had imported goods worth Rs. 803.64 billion.

With the increase in exports, its contribution to total trade also increased from 8 per cent to 10.19 per cent during



the review period. The share of export in the total trade has decreased to 89.71 per cent from 92 per cent last year.

According to the statistics, total foreign trade has also increased. The country's foreign trade volume has reached Rs. 1,279.12 billion during the review period which is 46.43 per cent more than the previous year. Nepal Rastra Bank has already applied measures to tighten the import of luxurious and non-essential items in an attempt to control trade deficit.

Vaccines worth Rs. 26 billion imported

According to the statistics, the country imported vaccines worth Rs. 26.85 billion.

Around 240,185 kilograms of vaccines for human medicines were imported during the first seven months of the current fiscal year.

In the same period last fiscal year, a total of 39,785 kilograms of vac-

cination for human medicine worth Rs. 1.34 billion was imported.

Diesel import stands Rs. 72.96 billion

Diesel is the most imported commodity in the first seven months of the current fiscal year. Diesel worth Rs. 72.96 billion has been imported during the period.

Meanwhile, petrol worth Rs. 33.56 billion, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) worth Rs. 34.69 billion, aviation fuel worth Rs. 6.40 billion, kerosene Rs. 744 million, lubricants worth Rs. 3.73 billion and petroleum bitumen worth Rs. 4.30 billion have been imported.

The country imported crude soybean oil worth Rs. 36.54 billion, crude palm oil worth Rs. 29.22 billion and crude sunflower worth Rs. 12.37 billion during the review period.

Similarly, maize worth Rs. 12.14 billion, paddy and rice worth Rs. 32.34 billion and wheat worth Rs. 4.08 billion have been imported.

Meanwhile, soybean oil had the largest share in export during the review period. Soybean oil worth Rs. 36.85 billion has been exported in the first seven months of the current fiscal year.

Similarly, palm oil is the second most exported commodity after soybean oil. Palm oil worth Rs. 34 billion has been exported during the review period.

Cardamom worth Rs. 2.64 billion, yarns worth Rs. 5.7 billion, tea and coffee worth Rs. 2.37 billion, carpet worth Rs. 5.07 billion and felts worth Rs. 3 billion have been exported during the review period.

After eruption of new conflict in Ukraine, the prices of petroleum products continue to increase in the global market. This will further increase Nepal's trade deficit.

LOCAL POLL

Heating Up

Elections Commission has added 200,000 new voters for May 12 Polls

By A CORRESPONDENT

With the announcement of the local polls, the Election Commission has already started its work to conduct the poll. In the first step, the EC has already completed the registration of the political parties.

With three new registrations, the number of political parties registered there has reached 106, said a source. The new party has been registered as per Articles 4 and 5 of the Political Parties Act, 2073, on the condition of following the provisions of the Constitution of Nepal, Political Parties Act, 2073, Political Parties Rules, 2074 and the prevailing federal laws.

As per the constitutional provision and existing laws, any political parties willing to take part in the election must be registered at the EC, informed the election body.

According to the EC, any political party willing to participate in elections has to submit a formal application, along with party statute, manifesto, regulation, flag, sample of election symbol, arrangement of 21 central members in the central committee and auditing reports of the previous fiscal year.

The Election Commission (EC) has started registration of political parties for the upcoming local level election scheduled for May 13.

EC Is Ready To Hold Local Poll: Chief Election Commissioner Dinesh Thapaliya

Today is very important day in the history of Nepal as we are also celebrating Elections Commission

Day. I would like to remind all political parties and candidates vying in the upcoming local level election comply with the election code of conduct. The local level election is slated for May 13 this year in a single phase. The reprimand and punishment for violation of the election code of conduct would be severe. The political parties and candidates come to ground to contest like the players come to the ground to play the football.

test for flouting the code of conduct. I suggest employees of Commission and subordinate bodies to carry out activities taking the preparation of the election as an opportunity.

The government has announced the dates of the local level elections for May 13 this year in consultation with the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN). So with the mentality of conducting elections on the stipulated date we have launched preparations at various levels. We are



The Commission plays the role of the referee and the commission should be a watchdog if the political parties and candidates contesting the poll flout the rules and regulations.

There are over 250,000 election observers for the upcoming election. We wish we do not have to show the red card to any political parties and candidates vying the con-

finalizing the voter list, formulating election policy, working procedure and guidelines and approving them, finalizing budget with the consent from the Ministry of Finance, and conducting meetings with the development partners and other agencies for monitoring and foreign support. Meanwhile, the ECN is studying the applications received to register political parties. Registration of new



parties will be concluded before the local level elections. Management of resource and equipment including vehicles for the elections are also in the priority. ECN is working as per the approved work schedule.

The biggest challenge for us is to educate the voters through the model ballot paper with the list of symbols for the total candidates in each local body so that they could be sensitized on casting their votes properly. There is a need to create 6743 types of ballot papers for each ward across the country and send them to all local levels. It can be done in the final 15 days before the election day. So, we are highly sensitive on this matter. In the previous election, ECN has printed 70 ballot papers in six different design and sent them to the local levels.

Election should be held with greater political consensus but political parties in the country don't have the same perspective on the election. Coordination with all political parties and other stakeholders will be enhanced in the days to come. ECN is ready to face these challenges and move ahead with the required preparations to make the

polls successful. As per the international practice, 120 days are needed to hold national elections successfully. But elections can be organized in three months since the date of announcements, we are making preparations for the same.

It is cost effective since there is uniformity in promotion, advertisement, sample ballot paper, documents, trainings and orientations. If we organize it in single phase, election in a place doesn't affect polls in another location. Likewise, it is not easy to store the ballot boxes safely until the second phase of elections if they were held in multiple phases. ECN has always been advocating for single phase polls for all elections. However, it increases burden for the election management body while mobilization of security forces would also be challenging since every unit across the country need security. But as per our assessment, there isn't any security threat for elections.

The Commission is formulating a guideline for the management of human resources (HR) for the upcoming elections. There will

be a need of 753 election officers for each local body, 753 assistant election officers and about 9 staff in every election office. About 23,500 polling centres would be needed according to the present voters' number. This means if we deploy just 5 staff at a centre, 120,000 staff are needed, however this HR is needed for the final seven days. We are planning to utilize the HR available at the local level. Existing government staff and teachers of community schools in each local body could be enough to address the need for HR for the polls.

Security strategy is developed jointly with the Ministry of Home Affairs and security agencies but will be implemented by the latter. 5-10 security personnel are needed to be mobilized at each polling station. Temporary police will be hired to support the security agencies in the polls. Patrolling by security personnel will also be practiced

(Based on Chief Election Commissioner Dinesh Thapaliya's statements including delivered At A Program Organized By The Election Commission of Nepal On Election Day)

NEA

Up And Up

Under the leadership of MD Kul Man Ghising Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has made Rs. 12.12 billion profit in six months

By A CORRESPONDENT

As is said, the leadership is the key to prosperity and development. If the performance of Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) over the last six months under the leadership of MD Ghising is any indication, it shows how the leadership can transform even a public utility in Nepal.

At a time when many public utilities have been facing huge losses and lack of financial credibility among the credit rating agencies, NEA has proved otherwise. Along with making a profit of Rs.12.12 billion in the last six months, ICRA Nepal Ltd., the credit rating agency in Nepal, has given a credit rating of 'ICRA NP Double A Plus' level to the NEA. Both the results enhance the credibility and trust in the private financial and equity market.

Out of over 100 government public utilities, NEA is first to receive the Double A Plus rating for making such a remarkable profit in merely six months.

There is a price for such achievements. With the support and backing from Minister of Energy Pampha Bhusal, Kul Man Ghising, the Managing Director of Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), has been turning NEA as one of the most profitable and credible public utilities. At the expense of his personal and family life, MD Ghising has been giving almost all his time to NEA.

When he was appointed MD, NEA was in a very bad shape. NEA's profit margin was dwindling along with quality of electricity supply including frequent unloaded load-shedding. Ending 18 years long power cut during his first tenure as MD, Ghising,

who has joined NEA in second term in the lapse of just a matter of year, faced piles of problems including technical and non-technical.

As per his first announcement that he would settle all the ongoing

six months of the current fiscal year, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has earned a profit of Rs. 12.12 billion in the first six months of the current fiscal year 2021/22.

According to NEA's unre-



problems including undisclosed power cut, financial crisis and managerial obstructions within the six months, these two current achievements have shown that MD Ghising has been able to fulfill his promises.

"NEA has been able to earn significant profits this fiscal year due to control of electricity leakage, increase in electricity export to India, decrease in electricity import, increase in electricity sales and increase in other income of the institution," said MD Ghising.

With the drop of electricity leakage to 14.45 per cent in the first

financed financial statement, the profit of NEA has almost doubled in the first six months of the current fiscal year. It was Rs. 6.18 billion in the last fiscal year 2020/21.

The NEA, which had an annual loss of Rs. 8.89 billion in the fiscal year 2015/16, has been making a steady progress in the following years.

"Reduction in operating costs, administrative and financial reforms, and the fact that the 456-megawatt Upper Tamakoshi Power Purchase Rate was cheaper than other private sector projects also contributed to the increase in profits," he said.

“Consumer tariff adjustments have been made with effect from the month of Poush, which may affect profits as incomes will decline slightly for the rest of the current fiscal year, but leakage control is still effective and we are working to cut profits by Rs. 15 billion by tightening financial discipline,” said Ghising.

Electricity export increases, import decreases

The export of surplus electricity to India has increased while the import of electricity has decreased during the six months this year.

Electricity worth Rs. 316 million was exported to India in the last fiscal year, while electricity worth Rs. 805 million has been exported in the first six months of the current fiscal year.

On the basis of energy, the export of 44 million units last year has increased to 173 million units in the first six months of this year.

The import of electricity had increased from Rs. 13.42 billion in fiscal year 2019/20 to Rs. 21.82 billion in the last fiscal year 2021/22.

However, energy only worth Rs. 2.58 billion has been imported in the first six months of the current fiscal year.

Although imports will increase in January and February, it will not exceed Rs. 10 billion this year, said Ghising.

The demand for electricity has increased by about 200 MW this year. About 660 MW, including 456

MW Upper Tamakoshi, has been added to the power grid.

Electricity leakage drops to 14.45 %

The electricity leakage has

leakage, the Authority will take strict action against those who steal by manipulating and hooking up the meter.

NEA Receives ‘Double A Plus’ Credit Rating



dropped to 14.45 per cent in the first six months of the current fiscal year. The NEA is able to reduce the leakage of the system by 2.73 percentage points to 14.45 percent through regular campaigns for power supply and control of technical and non-technical leakages.

Ghising said that the NEA’s profit has increased as a result of the increase in revenue due to the reduction in leakage.

Ghising said that the leakage

control campaign has been carried out effectively, increasing the capacity of substations, adding conductors, replacing overloaded transformers, and encouraging the use of three-phase meters.

In order to control non-technical

Just making a huge profit in the six months, gaining ICRA NP double A plus level is another milestone for NEA. For the first time in the history, NEA is a first government owned organization to receive a Double A Plus credit rating. ICRA Nepal Ltd., the credit rating agency in Nepal, has given a credit rating of ‘ICRA NP Double A Plus’ level to the NEA.

Achieving a ‘Double A Plus’ rating means a high capacity to carry out its financial and economic obligations on time. Financial transactions with an institution with a ‘Double A Plus’ rating carry very low debt repayment risk.

Credit ratings are used to evaluate the quality of credit of an individual or an organization and to express opinions. It provides opinions on the institution’s ability to repay its debt obligations as a simple and understandable indicator of the inherent risks.

ICRA Nepal analyzed the financial condition of NEA, assets, business and financial risks, manager-



ENERGY

al capacity, internal and external environmental factors affecting operational effectiveness. NEA's credit rating is

sources on corporate guarantee.

ICRA Nepal has maintained that NEA is a wholly owned



based on the same analysis.

Managing Director of NEA Kul Man Ghising said that the NEA has a Double A Plus credit rating among the public bodies, which shows a high level of ability to bear financial obligations.

"NEA is now borrowing from multilateral development partner bodies such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank on government guarantees. Credit ratings have shown that transactions with NEA are secure in all respects.

"Long-term Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) has been signed with the hydropower projects to be constructed by local and foreign investors. The results of the credit rating show that NEA has a high level of financial capacity to pay for such projects and there is no investment risk. This will make investors feel safe and will also promote investment in the hydropower sector," said NEA.

While the government was implementing the new project through the budget of the current fiscal year, it was announced that NEA would develop the capacity to mobilize re-

sources on corporate guarantee. subsidiary of NEA government, has a monopoly on power transmission, distribution and purchase and sale of electricity from within and outside the country and is a strategic entity of the government.

Annual revenue growth of about 12 per cent in the last four years, cheap power purchase rate compared to other private sector projects of 456 MW Upper Tamakoshi, which accounts for about 25 per cent of the

total installed capacity of the country, were taken into account. Due to the decline in the amount of electricity imported from India, the efficiency of NEA is high due to the high level of management activity.

Ghising said that discussions are underway to issue shares to the public as per the provisions of the Nepal Electricity Authority Act with the approval of the government.

"In the past, NEA was in deficit and accumulated losses. Now, all the financial indices have improved significantly. Investment in NEA has been analyzed from credit rating as safe in all respects. We will now start the process to issue shares by taking consent with the government as per the provisions in the act," he said.

The Act stipulates that the share capital of NEA will be determined by the government. Of the shares issued by NEA, only the remaining shares purchased by the government will be sold to the general public.

The government has already agreed to issue shares under NEA's second financial restructuring.

Achieving such a major breakthrough in just six months, NEA's Managing Director Kul Man Ghising has shown that hard work with managerial skills can transform a public utility like NEA.



NEPAL-INDIA JOINT MEET

Prioritizing Storage Projects

Indian authorities agree to consider purchasing Nepal's surplus electricity during the rainy season

By A CORRESPONDENT

With the surplus of electricity at hand during the rainy season, Nepal has been desperately requesting India to allow the sale of Nepalese surplus electricity in Indian market. Although India has not made any verbal or written commitment, the officials have indicated that they will consider Nepal's request.

Despite the efforts of expansion of electricity supply and encouraging households to use electricity for cooking, Nepal does not have capacity to consume over 1000 MW of surplus electricity during the five months period of lean season. Given Nepal's geographical proximity and grid connection, only Indian market can save Nepal. For this, India needs to give a green signal to power traders in India.

Compared to Nepal, the demand of electricity in India during the hot season is high and Indian market can easily consume it. Knowing this, Nepal has been requesting India to give access to Nepalese electricity in Indian market.

In the recently concluded 9th meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG, Joint Secretary level) and the Joint Steering Committee (JSC, Secretary level) on bilateral power sector cooperation, Nepal and India has agreed on several key issues on the power cooperation.

Nepal and India agree to constitute a Joint Hydro Development Committee (JHDC) to further explore the development of viable hydropower projects in Nepal with particular focus on storage projects.

During the JSC and JWG meetings, the two sides reaffirmed that power sector cooperation is a strong pillar of India Nepal partnership and agreed to pursue it along the following axes: joint development of generation

projects in Nepal, joint development of cross-border power transmission infrastructure, power trade under respective domestic regulations and policy framework, and capacity building assistance.

The two mechanisms provide the necessary framework to support

Market". Nepali side briefed the Indian side on the recent developments and future trends in power generation, transmission and demand scenario in Nepal.

The Indian side also acknowledged the recent enhancement in the installed power generation ca-



bilateral cooperation in power sector.

The apex JSC meeting was co-chaired by Alok Kumar, Secretary (Power), Government of India and Devendra Karki, Secretary (Energy), Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Government of Nepal.

Prior to the JSC meeting, Secretary (Power) Shri Alok Kumar also called on Rt. Prime Minister of Nepal Shri Sher Bahadur Deuba and Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation Ms. Pampha Bhusal.

Indian side thanked the Nepali side for their warm welcome and hospitality in Kathmandu and briefed the Nepali side on recent developments in India's power sector scenario, including installation of a large renewable energy capacity and the achievement of "One Nation, One Grid, One

capacity in Nepal which paves the way for stronger and mutually beneficial cooperation in the power sector. The two sides also agreed to constitute a Joint Hydro Development Committee (JHDC) to further explore the development of viable hydropower projects in Nepal with particular focus on storage projects.

The two sides decided to continue the discussions on the subject towards expeditious follow-up and agreed to meet soon for the next sessions of the JSC/JWG meetings to be hosted by the Indian side.

Although negotiation is always a long and time consuming process, the recent gestures shown by Indian officials during the meeting is a positive indication for Nepal.

POST CORONA

Living With Virus

With his announcement, learn to live with virus, Boris Johnson has scrapped Covid restrictions showing the way for other countries as well. Badly affected by lockdown and other precautionary measures, Nepal also needs to take such measures to push the economic activities.

By A CORRESPONDENT

As part of his government's 'Living With Covid' plan, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he would end all coronavirus restrictions in England including mandatory self-isolation for people with Covid-19 and free testing drawing skepticism from some scientists and political opponents.

Although Johnson's plan has sparked alarm that it is premature and will leave the country vulnerable to new viral variants, the government says it has provided more testing than most other countries, and must now curb the cost.

Although China and Hong Kong build isolation units and Europe retains social distancing and vaccine rules, endorsing the complete idea of British Prime Minister moving to repeal any pandemic requirements will not be easy for Nepal. However, it is time to shift the responsibility on public.

Following the easing of restrictions, Nepal needs to lean even more on the rollout of booster vaccines. The government should offer extra booster doses to the most vulnerable, as well as other pharmaceuticals interventions such as antiviral treatments.

As restrictions pose a heavy toll on Nepal's economy, society, mental wellbeing and on the life

chances of children, there is the need to think for a certain way out.

"So let us learn to live with this virus and continue protecting ourselves and others without restricting our freedoms," said the British Prime Minister.

Some surveillance of the coronavirus would continue, allowing for a rapid response to new variants, which could be quickly scaled up but opening economy needs to be priority. Declining death and hospitalization cases due to vaccines and

in the community transmission stage. How is this stage defined, and what are its implications? What changes in strategies to contain the spread?

In the third wave of the coronavirus epidemic, Nepal has acknowledged that the disease is now in the community transmission stage. While it is no more than a statement of the obvious, and has little operational implication at this stage of the epidemic, this acknowledgment has attracted attention because this is the



antiviral and lower severity of the Omicron variant give some points to the decision makers.

Omicron In Community
Nepal has acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic is now

first time India has officially done so.

What it means

In all regions except the origin of the outbreak, the virus is introduced into the population by travelers. In the initial stages of an

epidemic, all further transmissions of the disease can be linked, directly or through a chain, to these travelers. But after some time, as more and more people get infected, they pass on the virus to many more, several of whom are never detected because they might be asymptomatic or did not get tested. But even these undetected cases would have transmitted the disease to others. Very soon, it results in a situation where the chain of infections can no longer be traced to the original travelers, and most of the infections become locally acquired. It is this stage of the epidemic that is classified as one of community transmission.

In simple terms, it is a stage where it becomes difficult to establish the chain of infections, or determine who infected whom. This has implications for deciding containment strategies and response measures to deal with the epidemic.

Community transmission is the final stage of classification of the epidemic on this basis. The World Health Organization (WHO) has three more classifications ahead of community transmission — no active cases, sporadic cases and cluster of cases. If no new cases are detected in 28 days, a country or region is said to have no new active cases. A situation where all the known infections in the previous two weeks can be linked to an imported case is classified as being in the second category.



egory.

Nepal had so far been maintaining that the epidemic in the country was in the stage where it was witnessing a cluster of cases. According to the WHO classification, this is the stage where cases detected in the previous two weeks are “predominantly limited to well-defined clusters that are not directly linked to imported cases, but which are all linked by time, geographic location and common exposures”. It is assumed that there are a large number of unidentified cases, but this is still considered a low-risk situation.

The manner in which the transmissions are happening is key to deciding actions to be taken to

contain further spread of the disease. In the initial stage, for example, when only sporadic cases are detected, aggressive testing and contact tracing is supposed to be among the most effective strategies to halt or slow down the spread of the disease. As all direct contacts of an infected person are identified, tested and isolated, the number of virus-carrying people in the population gets reduced significantly, and so does the number of transmissions.

However, such a strategy might not yield much in terms of slowing down the spread in the community transmission stage. In such a situation, it is considered more beneficial to focus attention on measures like hospital management, access to critical care facilities or genomic surveillance.

Current situation

From the speed at which the Omicron variant has spread, there never was any doubt that community transmission was taking place. Even before Omicron, Nepal was detecting only one of about 30 infections. Now, this ratio would have shot up even further. At this stage of the epidemic, a discussion on community





transmission is largely an academic one, and is unlikely to trigger any change in the kind of response measures that are being taken at the central, state or local levels.

Looking ahead

Since the current wave is producing mostly mild disease, experts argue that a containment strategy might not yield much, especially since the infection was spreading at such a fast rate, and mainly through asymptomatic cases. Instead, it would be better to focus attention on surveillance, with the objective of keeping an eye on future dangerous mutations.

“We should change the strategy of sample collection for genome sequencing. There is no point in focusing on airports. A close watch should, instead, be kept on clinical samples from the ICU or those with serious symptoms to check if there is further mutation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and whether it is changing a bit. There is a need to keep an eye on clusters at localities or parties or any gathering in case there is a sudden eruption of cases and also ensure a

randomized sampling in large areas,” said experts.

Implications

Experts said testing and tracking contacts could not prevent the further spread of the Omicron variant at this stage, even though it was still important to test as many as possible. “But the main focus must be on the hospitalized cases, and those who have developed severe illnesses.”

Several districts have already changed their testing strategy and have not been aggressively doing contact tracing, especially those who are not showing symptoms.

Medical experts argued that the focus must be on saving lives, because such a large number of cases can overwhelm hospitals. “What is known from the current wave is that it has come in a very explosive and tsunami-like proportion. It is more like a cyclone and not a wave. As 80-90% people are asymptomatic, our focus is directed on symptomatic patients. Those who are unvaccinated, or only partially vaccinated, are in the high-risk category. And so are

people with chronic underlying diseases like cancer, heart transplantation or lung disease. The focus clearly is to save lives and ensure health systems are prepared.”

In recent times, the novel coronavirus had spread like wildfire in Nepal, especially in the Kathmandu Valley. As the infection rate jumped from 4.4 per cent to 23 per cent in a week’s span recently, the epidemiologists had suspected that along with Delta variant, the Omicron strain of coronavirus must have been spreading in Nepal at lightning speed.

Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO), in its weekly epidemiological report, informed that the COVID-19 cases increased by 55 per cent (15 million) in one week from January 2 to 9. This is the highest number of cases reported worldwide in a single week until now.

The government’s decision to restrict public gatherings and close operation of physical classes in schools and increase surveillance in border areas also hint that the new variant, which is considered to be highly contagious, has spread in the nation.

Meanwhile, the public health experts have said that the Omicron variant is found to be less fatal than other variants of the coronavirus.

During a press briefing, the WHO said that the Omicron was less severe than Delta strain, but is still dangerous to unvaccinated groups. “However, this new strain stands as a danger because many people across the world are yet to be vaccinated,” said director general of the WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

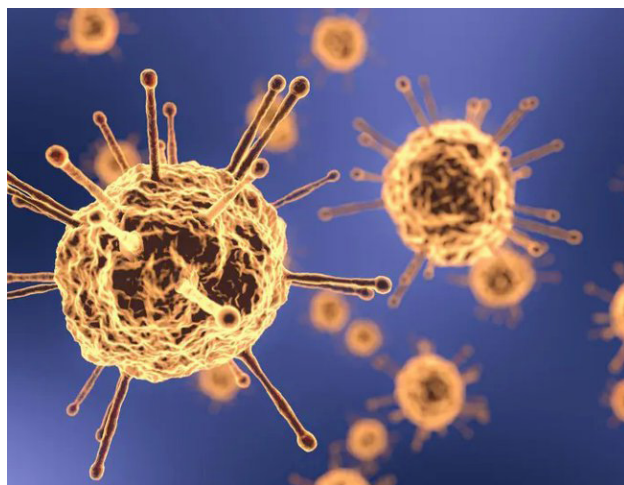
The WHO director general also said that the Omicron variant was rapidly replacing Delta variant in almost all countries and majority of Omicron-infected who have been hospitalized are unvaccinated patients.

Similarly, chief of the Clinical Research Unit of Teku Hospital Dr. Sher Bahadur Pun said that the Omicron strain was spreading in Nepal and its effect could be seen in hospitals. “Lately, there has been an increase in number of patients visiting the hospital with symptoms similar to that of COVID-19,” he said.

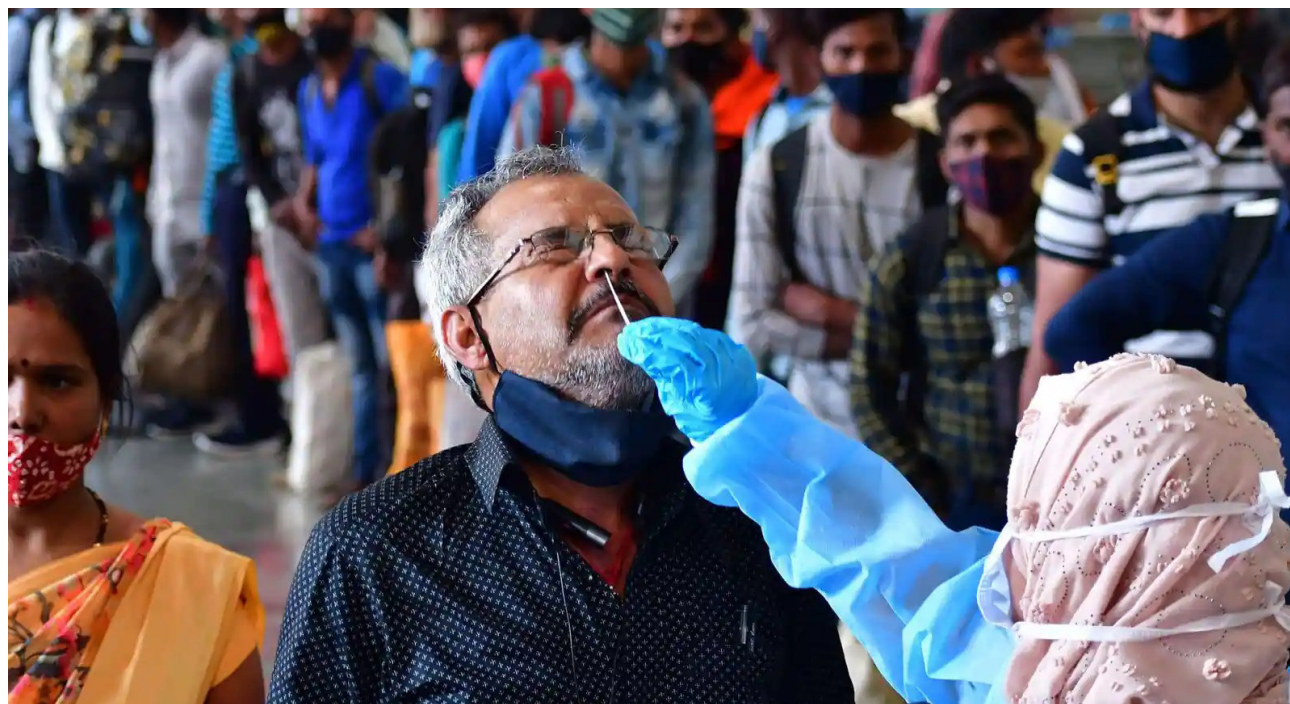
Dr. Pun said that the symptoms of Omicron were mild and no serious illness was reported among the vaccinated people. “Discomfort and itchy throat, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, slight increase in body temperature, runny or blocked

ty of infection is very low,” said Dr. Pun, adding, “As the vaccination campaigns have been running nationwide, we may not face a crisis like we did during the previous waves.”

Stating that half of the population is yet to be inoculated, Dr. Pun said that the vaccination campaign should be run effectively and the public should also participate in the campaign to minimize the impact of Omicron in Nepal. A total of 48.5 per cent of the total population has received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine



Health and Population (MoHP), said that the government was carrying out the vaccination drive in full fledged to control the spread and severity of Omicron. “I request everyone to follow the health protocols and help the government fight this battle against COVID-19 by participating in the vaccination campaign,” she said.



nose are the common symptoms of Omicron infection,” he added.

“Although vaccinated people can be infected with the virus, the severi-

ty and 35.9 per cent have been inoculated with the full dose.

Meanwhile, Dr. Sangita Mishra, spokesperson for the Ministry of

Health and Population (MoHP), said that the government was carrying out the vaccination drive in full fledged to control the spread and severity of Omicron. “I request everyone to follow the health protocols and help the government fight this battle against COVID-19 by participating in the vaccination campaign,” she said.

"Government Has Bakradrishti On Madheshi Commission"

At a time when there is growing concern over efficiency and effectiveness of constitutional commissions to address the issues under their jurisdiction, Chairperson of Madheshi Commission **DR. VIJAY KUMAR DATTA** has shown the way to make the commission effective and accountable to the people. Having completed his Ph.d in English and Masters in Maithili and English literature, Dr. Datta spoke to **KESHAB POUDEL** on various issues. Excerpt of the interview taken at his office in Jwagal.

How do you see your last 35 months in the commission as a chairperson?

I was appointed as chairperson of the commission 35 months ago. I have submitted three annual reports before the president in exact time. As the role, responsibility and obligation given by the constitution and law for the public accountability, we have been giving high importance to timely publication of the annual reports which included all our early activities. Despite Covid-19, we have been able to fulfill our legal and constitutional responsibility, duty and accountability presenting the annual report to the President of Nepal.

Have you ever summoned by Parliamentary Committee to discuss on your report?

Out of three reports, our first report was widely debated and discussed in the Women and Social Affairs Committee of House of Representatives and the National Concern and Coordination Committees in National Assembly. Members of the parliamentary committees of both the house raised various questions on our report and we clarified on it. Members of the parliament suggested us what commission needed to do for the future. The members also suggested how to make the commission activities more effective and accountable.

Have also discussed the report at Provincial level?

Along with Federal Parliament, we also tabled our report before the Provincial Assembly of seven provinces and through them to the local level for the discussions. This showed that the commission submitted its report to federal, provincial and local level government. This is necessary because one of our main roles is to support all the three tiers of government to formulate policies to protect the interest and rights of Madheshi communities. Although I was lonely in the two years period, the commission continued its work.

How Madheshi people respond to Commission?

People from Madheshi communities have high hope towards the commission. For example, we have received 400 various complains in the one year and over 1000 in the last three years.

How do you proceed the complains?

After studying complains, the commission forwards them to concerned agencies for actions. To know the reactions, we have recently constituted a separate committee to know how agencies addressed the complains forwarded by us. A committee headed by a member is collecting the data and working to prepare progress chart.

Do you also receives verbal complains?

Along with 400 written complains, we also received hundreds of call in the last three years in an average of 10 to 20 vocal complains through toll free telephone. These incidents showed that the Madheshi people have trust and high hope towards this commission. I do believe this.

What is the reach of commission?

The commission has been active throughout the country. You can find our presence in Bhajani of Kailali to Panchthar of Province 1. By using modern telecommunication technology, internet and social media, we have been encouraging people to come to us with their grievances, complains and discontents. We have toll free hotline where people can call anytime to register complains. We have our web-site and the commission has like pages in all major social media including face book and twitter. Since every people have mobile phone in their hand, they file complains whenever they feel discriminations. Since the phone is toll free, people reach us. We are also in a close collaboration with civil society members, Madheshi civil society organizations and individuals in all the provinces and local levels.

FACE TO FACE

What is the state of your annual budget?

We have to work in large areas to address the issues of larger communities. However, the government provides us a very nominal budget or budget just enough to pay the salary of commissioners, employees and house rent. We just have additional Rs. 600,000.00 budget annually. How can we pay TA and DA to our members and commissioners in case they want to fly outside Kathmandu? My three years experiences have shown that the government has



We have platform at all the provinces and state level. This is a commission formulated for the first time in the history of Nepal to address the discrimination, concerns and issues of Madheshis.

What about the resources to hold different activities?

The preliminary results of the current census have shown that over 53 percent of the populations live in Madhesh. However, the commission has a very little physical and human resources. However, we have been using different agencies to increase accessibility of the people. As we don't have human and financial resources, we have been doing this with close collaboration with all three tiers of government's federal, province and local level. For instances, we reached the spot to address the demand by farmers and settled Kisan Andolan. A team led by members of the commission took the issue before the chief ministers of the provinces and concerned officials, farmers do not have to come to Kathmandu and their issues were settled at the spot this time.

What kinds of complains do you receive?

Although we have been receiving all kinds of complains including violence, killing and forgery, most of the complains are related to discriminations and deformation between Madheshi and Madheshi and Madheshi and other communities. We don't have right to investigate but we forward such complains to concerned offices.

Astabakra Drishti (negative views) towards us. Madheshis aspire more from commission but the state has not been showing interest towards commission.

What do you expect from us giving Rs.600, 000 annual budget to perform other activities? We have just budget for salary and house rental charge and miscellany including petrol, electricity bills. The commission is serious financial crisis.

How have you been working then?

People have high expectations with us. However, the state has not been supporting us. We have been doing our work through a collaboration with media, civil society organizations and other likeminded organizations. Under our banner, we have been collaborating with different organizations including NGOs civil society and other like-minded organizations.

How do you get resources then?

Despite financial constraints, the commission has done everything possible to have a best results. We have already handed over five years plan, policy guidelines and other necessary suggestions for amendment of existing discriminatory laws, regulations and policies. We are now working on to prepare a recommendation in listing the Madheshi community. This will be the first time in the history of Nepal to have list of Madheshi community. We are now preparing to submit third listing to govern-

FACE TO FACE

ment and will submit it by April. As the census has already published the report, we do have now latest numbers of integrated population of terai Madhesh. We have published district-wise population of Madheshis based on the earlier census. Since we have now new one, we will publish the new one very soon. For service delivery and reservation, what require is the data. Once we publish the list of Madheshi population, it will help for reservation and service delivery which is one of the main objective of the commission as well.



What kinds of complains normally do the commission receive?

We have been receiving many cases related to the violation in the reservation. As the benefit of the reservation is going to those well to do, we are taking initiative how to equally distribute it with downtrodden people as well. The person who is a billionaire, he is getting the benefit of reservation.

Are you also receiving the suggestions to improve it?

We are receiving a lot of suggestions with a demand to amend the provision of reservation so that only down-trodden and poor Madheshi should get priority. Targeted population has been unable to get the benefits of reservations. We have been currently undertaking the study on discrepancy on reservation between poor and rich. We have identified several classes within the community and issues. There are poor, marginalized, middle class and rich among the community.

What about the state of Madheshi Dalit?

As we are in the final stage of publishing third listing, this will look the issue of Madheshi Dalit. Currently, all are Madheshi who have similar cultural and social identity. The commission is taking care all Madheshis. This includes indigenous and Dalits shared similar social and cultural identity. We will address the Madheshi Dalit as

well. We also received numbers of complains from Madheshi dalit. Out of 26 cast in dalit, 19 are from Madheshi. This sowed overwhelming majority are Madheshi dalit. It is unfortunate to say that Pahadi Dalits are taking all the pies of Madheshi dalit. If you can compare the situation in terms of getting the benefits of reservation of Dalit, not a single Madheshi dalit get the reservation allocated to them in the last seven years. All reservation goes to Pahadi dalit. Out of 13 Janjatis, 9 are from terai. Out of 9 Madheshi Janajati, none of Madheshi Janjati secured benefits under reservation allocated from them. Madheshi Dalits and Madheshi Janjati came to our commission and filed complains on this. They have been demanding separate cluster within Madhesh based on our population. They also demanded that all Madheshi Dalits and Janjatis should be given reservations on the basis of population.

Why Madheshis are backward?

There are four most important problems among Madheshis. First is the lack of awareness. As long as there is lack of awareness, transformation is impossible and transformation is necessary for empowerment. Finally, only empowered population has access. In present reservation format, lower class, pichada barga and marginalized class are yet to reap any benefits. As these groups lack awareness, they don't know about the reservations. We have been conducting studies and research on all these issues now. We have recommended to the government the step needs to be taken to wipe out existing bad social practices like dowry system, Superstition.

How do you see the duty of the commission?

The law provides us 18 kinds of duties and responsibilities. We have been working fulfilling all our duties. Under the legal provision of evaluation, Justice and Human Rights Nepal, an independent evaluation group, has been evaluating the performance of all 7 commission formed under part 27 of constitution of Nepal. It is happy to say that our commission secured first position in terms of performance. Our actions, performance and style.

How parliament is responding?

Now the parliamentary committees are defunct due to political reasons. I had opportunity to attend national coordination committee of National Assembly and Women and Social Affairs Committee of House of Representatives. Since appointment of four members last year, the commission took a full shape now. However, I have been able to present three reports fulfilling the constitutional duties and obligations despite Covid-19 pandemic. Out of our three reports submitted to the President, one of our report has already been discussed in Women and Social Welfare Committee of House of Representatives.

BOOK

Ganga To Mississippi: Walking With The Rainbow

Ganga to Mississippi provides an achingly accurate description of an emotional and physical connection that feels as though it describes a whole life

By A CORRESPONDENT

“Ganga To Mississippi – Walking With The Rainbow” is a memoir, a family history, part family novel, part self-examination, interspersed with generational trauma, and imbued with immigrant folklores, all in a package of realism and ‘counter archive.’

Written by an India-born immigrant, Moon Khan, who had to leave the country like millions of Indians in search of better prospects, the memoir reads like a cinematic play-by-play of life in the rural part of India. Settled in Chicago, USA, Moon provides an absolutely captivating social, cultural, and historical commentary on India’s development from the 1960s to the 1980s.

If you are here for twists on twists on twists, this is the book for you. The book is co-authored by Moon’s son, Shaan Khan, who was born and raised in the United States. Shaan’s perspective gives the book a multi-generational and an international flavor.

Commenting on the book at the launch of the memoir from the platform of Kalinga Literary Festival, Santosh Singh, author, and Assistant Editor, The Indian Express, portrays the link of the two generations as a link between Ganga and Mississippi, Moon representing Ganga and Shaan identifying with Mississippi. Singh also wrote the Foreword for the book, which is available on Amazon, both in the USA and India. Its Kindle version is only \$4.99 or Rs. 371.

Ramesh Soparawala, Resident Editor, India Post, USA, calls it “a historical story that will linger with readers like memories of their first love.”

“It’s a testimonial of what we can all achieve if we accept the challenges,” says Dianne Pappas, a Yale Law School graduate, and an American politician. Moon’s life has been a saga

of very poor to very rich. Simultaneously, it was also a tumultuous journey from ordinary to extraordinary, from despair to hope, from shattered streets to shiny toll ways, from a tiny village of Bihar, India, to metropolis like Chicago.

Arun Kumar, Associate Editor, Hindustan Times finds “a super trajectory of identity” in the 233-page book, which was published in January 2022. Moon believes in a multitude of identities. Reinforcing the idea of solitary identity is like asking someone if he likes his wife or his mother, his kidney or heart, his son or his daughter. Moon explains this dilemma in a chapter titled “Who Am I?”

Atul K Thakur, Author, Columnist and Literary Consultant, calls this an amazing novel of unanswerable questions as well as mysterious and innovative curiosities. “A work to be recognized for its honest reflections on the great virtues of struggle and accomplishment. Moon Khan’s journey assures the hope. The book is a testimony to this fact,” he added.

Senior Journalist, Bibhesh Trivedi, advises, “Come hungry with a gorilla like appetite to a grand buffet. This memoir reminds us that no matter how far you fly, the past is always near and part of your dream.”

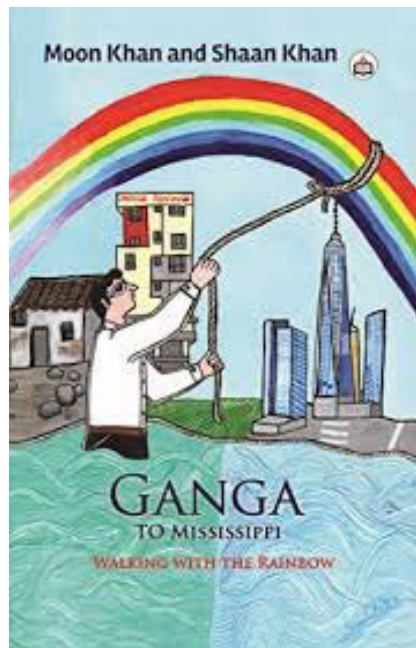
A provocative, defiant, clever, painful, empowering, and hilarious novel of literary climax that you read while upchucking your biases.

Moon Khan and Shaan Khan have written a captivating memoir, with unique rhythms, dusty winds, and live characters that incarnate the voices and aspirations of most Indians. The father and son duo would take you to places you did not know you wanted to go because they write in a tingling humorous style with a poetic touch.

Ganga to Mississippi provides

an achingly accurate description of an emotional and physical connection that feels as though it describes a whole life. The memoir is an open letter to progeny, a suturing of past and present - with so many swerves it feels like a Formula 1 track.

The titles of a few chapters of the book may encourage you to buy this book.



Overcoming the odds: from preterm to awesome

- A monster who snatched our hope
- When I met an angel
- Rooms with holes and rodents
- Broken dreams, shattered faith
- Violating law to break my shackle
- The warmth of other suns
- From roti to hotdog
- Culture shock vs. clash of cultures
- A letter to my son while flying at 30,000 feet
- Dreaming with everybody

कोरोनाबाट बचाऔं र बचाऔं

- पारिवारिक भेटघाट र सामाजिक जमघटमा जानुअघि एकपटक ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफूलाई संक्रमणको शंका लागेमा सार्वजनिक भेटघाट बन्द गरौं ।
- संक्रमणको पुष्टि भएपछि अलग्गै बसौं र सम्पर्कमा रहेकालाई जानकारी गराऔं ।
- कतै हामी आफैं रोग फैलाउने कारण त बनिरहेका छैनौं ?

सचेत बनौं,

ससाना कुरामा ध्यान दिँदा ठूलो जोखिमबाट जोगिन र जोगाउन सकिन्छ ।



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