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**Notes From The Editor**



Although the preservation work on heritage sites from Lichchhavi and Malla periods is slowly picking up, the heritage sites, monuments and temples built after the unification of Nepal are under a demolition drive. If the present pace of demolition and destruction continues, there will be nothing left of the monuments from the time of Nepal's unification. While the heritage sites of the last 240 years were systematically being demolished, the process accelerated following the earthquakes of 2015. It is very unfortunate that the government and elected representatives, supposed to work in the preservation of the heritage sites, are encouraging demolition and helping erase every trace of history of modern Nepal. At a time when the government's own institutions are unable to start the reconstruction of the heritage sites, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, a small locally registered body, has shown a way to do justice to history. With support from national, international, government, non-government and local institutions and communities, KVPT has completed the main portion of the Patan Durbar Square. Given the wave of demolition, KVPT's move is inspirational. Thus, we have decided to cover the recent reconstruction of Patan Durbar Square as our cover story of this fortnight. Our team of reporters have investigated the implications of earthquakes. For another story, we cover how the earthquakes helped accelerate the pace of girl trafficking. Along with these, we have covered the current political and other developments as well.

**Keshab Poudel**

Editor

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COAS GENERAL CHHETRI

# Purposeful Visit

*COAS General Chhetri left for Canada and UAE on a visit aimed at enhancing the bilateral relations*

By A CORRESPONDENT

Nepal Army is known in the world for its growing role in international peacekeeping. Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Rajendra Chhetri is visiting Canada and UAE to further enhance the organization's relations with the armies of these two countries.

COAS General Chhetri left for Canada on 2 September to attend the Annual Chiefs of Defense (CHOD) Conference - 2017. Co-hosted by the Canadian Forces and the United States Pacific Command (US PACOM), the conference began on September 4 and was ended on September 6, 2017, in Victoria, Canada.

After the CHOD conference, COAS Gen Chhetri is scheduled to visit United Arab Emirates (UAE) on an official invitation from Chief of Staff of UAE Armed Forces



Lieutenant General Hamad Mohammed Thani Al Rumaithi.

Chief of General Staff (CGS) Lt Gen Baldevraj Mahat bade farewell to COAS Gen Chhetri at Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA). Prior to his departure to Canada, COAS Gen Chhetri was accorded a Guard of Honor from a troop of Nepalese Army

at TIA. General officers of the NA and defense attachés of various nations in Nepal were present during the occasion.

This kind of visit will not only enhance Army to Army relations but it will also enhance Nepal's relations with those countries. ■

लागू औषधबाट छुटकारा पाउन  
तुरुन्तै नजिकको अस्पताल तथा  
उपचार केन्द्रमा सम्पर्क राखौं ।



नेपाल सरकार  
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय  
सूचना विभाग

## NEWSNOTES

### Nepal To Identify Projects

Nepalese Deputy Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara has said that his country is fully



committed to pushing forward bilateral cooperation with China under the Belt and Road Initiative.

With an interview with Chinese news agency Xinhua, Deputy Prime Minister Mahara, who is now on a six-day official visit to China, said Nepal is fully omitted to Belt and Road Initiative.

During his visit, deputy prime minister Mahara will also inaugurate a Nepalese consulate office in Guangzhou.

"We have already signed the Memorandum of Understanding on participating in the Belt and Road Initiative proposed by China," Mahara told Xinhua.

"The Nepali government has made sincere efforts to push forward bilateral cooperation in multiple areas such as trade, transit, energy, agriculture, connectivity, investment, among others, under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative," said DPM Mahara.

The deputy prime minister said that the Nepalese government had set up two separate mechanisms to identify and accelerate cooperation projects between the two countries under the initiative.

### West Bengal Festival In Kathmandu

The Indian Embassy, in association with the Nepal Tourism Board, the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and Hotel Soaltee Crown Plaza, is organizing the Festival of West Bengal in Kathmandu, 3-10 September 2017 at Hotel Soaltee Crown Plaza. This is part of a program to celebrate 70 years of India's independence and 70 years of India-Nepal diplomatic relations. The festival is supported by Asian Paints and Nestle.



According to a press release issued by the Indian Embassy, the inaugural ceremony of the Festival would feature Santoor performance by renowned Indian classical musician Tarun Bhattacharya and Bengali vocalist Archita Bhattacharjee on the evening of 3rd September 2017.

The Festival will also present renowned Chefs from Holiday Inn Kolkata to showcase Bengali cuisine. On 4 September at Q's Cinema at Rising Mall, Kathmandu, there would be the screening of the movie "Messi", a Bengali movie highlighting the fondness for football in West Bengal. This would find resonance amongst the Nepali audience.

As part of the Festival, a Cross-border Trade and Tourism Expo will be held with support from the Nepal Tourism Board and FNCCI. A business delegation from West Bengal-Nepal Chambers of Commerce and Industry (WBNCI) would hold B-2-B meeting with Nepal's business leaders. The delegation would also hold meetings with senior Government of Nepal officials, including at the Ministries of Commerce, Industry and Urban Development as well as Nepal Investment Board and Kathmandu Metropolitan Corporation.

### US Embassy Hosts Farm To Table

The U.S. Embassy hosted a farm to table, bringing leaders from Nepal's agriculture sector together to explore new linkages.

According to a press release issued by the U.S. Embassy in Nepal, leaders from agribusinesses, buyers, suppliers, financial service providers, and farmers came together to make new connections, share ideas, and explore innovative solutions to maximize resources and improve



efficiency across all components of Nepali agriculture.

U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Michael C. Gonzales welcomed guests to the event, encouraging them to explore new partnership opportunities and create stronger linkages that maximize the potential of the agriculture sector to drive economic growth.

Talking about the event, Chargé d'Affaires Gonzalez said, "Our objective today is to spark a conversation on how best to instill this concept of 'farm-to-table' and encourage people across the entire agricultural sector to learn more about new and evolving products and services available in Nepal, while establishing new connections and finding innovative ways of doing business."

### SSDP Collaboration Formalised

The Government of Nepal and eight Education Development Partners signed a Joint Financing Agreement (JFA) to formalise the cooperation in the implementation of School Sector Development Plan (SSDP). The JFA is the common framework of Government and Development Partners to effectively implement the SSDP.



At a recent meeting called by the Minister of Education, Gopal Man Shrestha, JFA Partners discussed SSDP implementation and the responsibility of being Education



Development Partner focal points was handed over from EU and Finland to UNICEF and Norway.

EU Ambassador Rensje Teerink highlighted the challenging and exciting context in which the SSDP was developed and is currently being implemented on the backdrop of a profound and historic state restructuring. "It was an intense and delightful honor for the EU to co-chair together with Finland the education working group during the last twelve months in Nepal at the crucial time, when the SSDP was finalized," said Teerink, who is soon to move to Bangladesh.

"We need to continue the implementation of the Consolidated Equity Strategy in the education sector in order to ensure that gains in quality are fairly distributed among the school population, leading to a decrease in the current disparities," said Hozomui. "The Ministry of Education should facilitate capacity strengthening at all levels to enable implementation of strategies within the SSDP at all levels and achieve the envisioned results within the federal context."

### **Nepal Launches GCM Consultation Process**

Half day Multi-Stake Holder's consultation for developing Nepal Position Paper to Global Compact Safe, Ordinary and Regular Migration (GCM) concluded recommending various suggestions.

Organized by Ministry of Labor and Employment with support from International Office of Migration (IOM), secretary of Ministry of Labor and Employment Laxman Prasad Mainali highlighted the importance of GCM stake holders meeting in the context of formulating Nepal's Paper.

Participated by over 40 from UN, INGOs, Donors, Private Sector, Research Organizations, NGOs, CSOs, Migration organization, this was first such a meeting where Nepal's issues were widely raised.

IMO Chief of Mission Paul presented his paper explaining the migration context, the road to declaration, preparation for GCM and IOM's planned activities.

"The international demand for Nepali labor is huge. As many as 1.2 million jobs were available in 27 countries according to the pre-approval granted by the Department of Foreign Employment in 2014/015," said IMO Chief of Mission Paul. "Nepali labor migrants have obtained permits to work in as many as 142 countries over the past several years."

### **WFP Food To Thousands Hit By Flash Floods**

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has begun food distributions to 180,000 people in response to the Nepal floods. The tragedy has affected 1.7 million people, with nearly 461,000 of them displaced from their homes and

in desperate need of assistance. The distributions are going on as the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) warns of more floods in coming days.

Within 48 hours after the floods, Nepal Food Security Monitoring System (NeKSAP) supported by WFP, issued a first assessment of the damage, playing a vital role in determining the extent of food insecurity in flood-affected districts. According to the latest report, almost half a million people in impacted areas are currently food insecure, and 300,000 people have very little access to food and are urgently in need of food assistance.

"Many people whose homes have been washed away were extremely poor already, living in rudimentary shelters and struggling to make ends meet. Families that have lost food stocks have nothing to fall back on," said WFP Representative and Country Director Pippa Bradford. "WFP is working around the clock to provide food to the poorest to ensure that they have enough to eat."

### **Nepal-India Joint Army Exercise Starts**

Nepal India Joint Military Exercise Surya Kiran launched and it will continue till September 12. This is the 12th edition of the exercise.

Joint military exercise, Surya Kiran, being held at Nepal Army Battle School at Saljhandi, will have around 350 troops from each side, focussing on counterinsurgency and counter-terror operations.

To be held from September 3 to 16, it is the 12th edition of the exercise.

According to a press release issued by Nepal Army, among the series of military training exercises undertaken with different countries, Surya Kiran is the largest in terms of troop participation.

### **People With Disability Can Do Everything**

Jessica Cox, a Guinness Book Record Holder, shared her vision and experiences with the person of disabilities of Nepal and inspired all of saying that there is nothing impossible to achieve.

Good will ambassador of Handicap International, motivational speaker Jessica Cox's inspirational notes attracted Nepal's people with disabilities.

She born without arms became a martial arts expert, learned to fly, drive, and even play PIANO with her feet. Being born without arms has not proven a disability for this inspirational woman who has adapted to life using her feet.

Organized by Handicap International, USAID, and NFD-N, large numbers of people with disabilities and media persons attended her inspirational talks. ■



## BUSINESS BRIEF

### Nepal Has Immense Investment Opportunity

A delegation led by Vice President of Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) Nirvan Chaudhary participated in a round table of Northeast Asia



Chambers of Commerce in China's Jhelum city of Chengdu Province.

According to a press release issued by CNI, the Nepalese delegation also signed an MoU between CNI with CCPIT. Vice President Chaudhary signed the MOU on behalf of CNI.

During the meeting, vice president Chaudhary said that there is an immense opportunity for investors in Nepal. He also called on Chinese investors to come to invest in Nepal.

He said that the MoU opens the way for bilateral investment and strengthening the relations between CNI and Chinese chambers. Chaudhary also addressed the international round table conference.

### Sana Kisan Bikas Bank Gets New CEO

Sana Kisan Bikas Bank Ltd (SKBBL) has appointed Shivram Prasad Koirala as its new CEO. Issuing a statement, the 'D' class microfinance development bank said that the meeting of the board of directors (BoD) held on Wednesday took the decision. Koirala was

earlier working as the deputy CEO of the microfinance bank.

Koirala was appointed the new chief of the bank after incumbent CEO Jalan Kumar Sharma's eight-year tenure ended on Tuesday. Speaking at the installation ceremony on Wednesday, the outgoing CEO said that the SKBBL has become a leading microfinance bank in



providing financial services in rural areas of the country.

### NRA And Indian Embassy Organize Program

The National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) of Nepal and Indian Embassy have jointly organized a two-day training program from 30-31 August on the Export Import (EXIM) Bank of India's Line of Credit guidelines and procedures along with simulation exercise on a range of projects.

The two sides agreed to collaborate on future capacity building efforts of the Government of Nepal officials who would be closely working on the

Government of India's Line of Credit supported projects.

According to a press release issued by Indian Embassy, a total of 23 Government of Nepal officials from various Ministries, Central Level Project Implementation Units (CLPIUs) and NRA participated in the training program. Two senior experts from the EXIM Bank of India have conducted the training program.

### Skoda Superb, 3rd Gen, Unveiled

SKODA MAW, the authorized distributor of ŠKODA cars in Nepal, has showcased the third generation 'Superb' at the ongoing NADA Auto Show.

According to a statement, the third-generation Superb will be available in four colors: Candy White, Brilliant Silver, Magnetic Brown, and Business Grey at Rs 11.6 million.

According to the statement, the company has offered warranty of four years or up to 100,000 kilometers (whichever comes first) for the Superb. "The new Superb is fitted as standard with Electronic Stability Control including Multi-Collision Brake, electronic tyre pressure monitoring, eight airbags, and five three-point seat belts with fastening alerts as well as safety headrests. XDS+, electronic differential lock," the company added in the statement.

### FNCCI Relief To 1,020 Flood-hit Families

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI) has distributed a family relief package to 1020 flood-affected families in eight districts.

The family package consists of a sack of 25 kilograms of rice, a cartoon of bottled water, a tent and a food cartoon. The FNCCI said it is almost enough to sustain a family for a month.

Each food cartoon contains 5 kilograms of pulses, 1 kilogram of sugar, a liter of cooking oil, five kilograms of beaten rice, a mini bottle of water purifier, two bathing soaps, a cartoon of noodles and a cartoon of biscuits.

The FNCCI has been collecting relief materials at its secretariat at Teku, Kathmandu. The collected material is packaged and sent to the district FNCCI chapters, said Anil Kumar Gupta, senior officer at FNCCI who coordinates the relief distribution.

Gupta said the relief materials have been sent to flood-affected families in Rautahat, Saptari, Inaruwa, Janakpur, Gaushala (Mahottari), Nawalparasi, and Gulariya (Bardiya).



### Himalaya Airlines Starts Saudi Flight

Himalaya Airlines started its new route connecting Kathmandu directly to the city of Dammam in Saudi Arabia. With this flight, it reiterates its commitment towards strengthening the connectivity in the Middle East market.

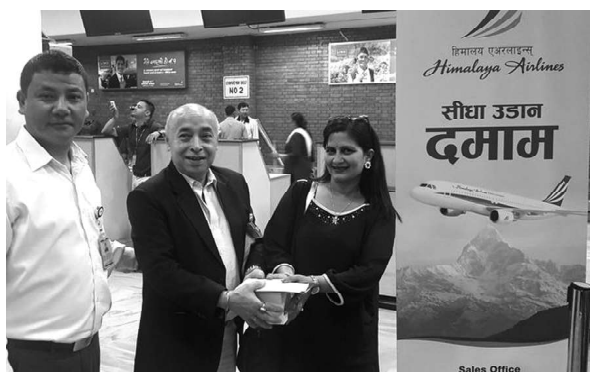
Himalaya Airlines is the first and only airline to

operate direct flights between both cities meeting the strong demand from air travelers, especially Nepalese. Presently the airline will be operating a daily flight on this route.

The maiden flight H9 559, bound for Dammam, departed from Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu at 22:30 hours (Local Time) with an encouraging flight load and will arrive at King Fahd International Airport, Dammam at 00:50 hours (Local Time) the next day.

Himalaya Airlines Vice President - Administration, Vijay Shrestha said, "We are very happy to be the first and only airline to connect Dammam with Kathmandu directly. Himalaya Airlines has launched this new service in the winter season in order to meet the significant demand of our Nepalese Passengers to visit their home country.

With this new route, Himalaya Airlines would be able to cater over 500,000 Nepalese staying in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, enabling many of them to rejoice with their families during this festival season. We are confident our truly "Nepali Hospitality" on board would



be a pleasant home coming experience for our passengers."

According to a press release issued by the Airlines, the airfare offered by the airline for Kathmandu - Dammam, and Dammam - Kathmandu will be most affordable and competitive with other airlines operating services to KSA transiting their hub stations. The tickets can be booked at Himalaya Airline's Sales and GSA office or through your preferred travel agent. The Free Baggage Allowance for both the routes is 40 Kg for Business Class and 30 Kg for Economy Class.

The airline has appointed Asfar Travel and Tourism as its General Sales Agents (GSA), who will represent the airline in Saudi Arabia and will be responsible for the airline's sales and marketing, market development, reservations, and ticketing services.

### **Honda's New Offers**

Syakar Trading (STC), authorised distributor for Honda motorcycles and motor scooters in Nepal, launched two new bikes - Honda CBF190 WHG XSI and CBF190 WHG ZSI (Repsol) - at the NADA Auto Show 2017.

The Honda CB190R draws on Honda's racing heritage in MotoGP. Sporting Honda Repsol's orange, white and red colours, it looks real fast.

Its aggressive styling - brooding headlamp, red spark



plug wire and rear spring, faux air scoop shrouds and short tail end - hints at a sporty commute. It has an air-cooled, four-stroke, single cylinder engine and five-speed transmission.

This feature packed bike comes with upside down front suspension, rear monoshock suspension and low seat height for comfortable riding position. With about 16hp, the four-stroke 190R is a beauty to ride.

The 184cc Honda makes maximum torque and power at between 7,000 and 8,000 rpm. Given its light 140kg fully-fuelled weight, the fuel-injected Honda is a blast to ride in bends or stop-go city traffic.

The price of CBF190 WHG XSI is Rs 599,000 and CBF190 WHG ZSI (Repsol) is Rs 614,000.

### **TAAN Interaction**

Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal (TAAN) has organised an interaction programme on the 'Role of Honorary Consuls in Tourism'.

Rajendra Kumar Khetan, dean of Honorary Consular Corps Nepal (HCC-N) and honorary consul for Portugal; Ang Tshering Sherpa, honorary consul for Belgium; Sriram Lamichhane, honorary consul for Luxemburg; Dinesh Shrestha, honorary consul for Malta; and Basanta Raj Mishra, honorary consul for Chile, highlighted the role of consuls for multilateral cooperation for Nepal's tourism development and promotion, as per a press statement.

Other attendees included Shovakar Neupane, honorary consul for Lithuania; Karan Vaidya from Consular Office of



Ukraine; Sumit Kumar Agrawal, honorary consul for Peru; Bishnu Bhattarai, from Consular Officer for Greece.

TAAN executive committee members, tourism entrepreneurs, tourism journalists, among others, were present at the programme. ■

# Deuba Visits India

In keeping with the long established tradition and the announcement made soon after becoming head of the government for the fourth time, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba visited India in August for five days at the invitation of his Indian counterpart Mr. Narendra Modi. Since Deuba did not embark upon this state visit with some specified agendas in mind and people in general did not expect concrete output from this visit, it would be unwise to waste time talking about whether the visit was a failure or successful one. It was not different from visits of about four prime ministers in the last three years who like Deuba had talked about water management issues, increasing Indian assistance and speedy execution of projects signed in the past. Deuba has every right to claim that his visit succeeded in enhancing confidence between the two countries and that assistance will increase in Nepal's important sectors such as energy, trade, connectivity, tourism for socio-economic development. Let us not forget that Deuba left for New Delhi just a few days after floods caused by torrential rains had wreaked havoc across the Tarai region, causing death of 135 people and affecting around 5 million men and women. It was natural, therefore, for him to apprise the Indian authorities, including chief minister of Bihar, of the damage caused by floods and shares with us back home his success in persuading Indian authorities into forming a team of experts to address the same. When others in the past have claimed success, why Deuba should be barred from making claims on the strength of comparable outcome. People are still at a loss to make out who of the two ex-prime ministers (Oli and Prachanda) improved the deteriorated Indo-Nepal relationship and who should the worsening of bilateral relationship be blamed on. Deuba is also unnecessarily attacked by no less a person than his new-found political partner Prachanda that the former's submission that ruling parties will introduce a fresh amendment bill in parliament was unwarranted. Dahal and many UML leaders are also unhappy that Koshi High Dam and Sun Koshi storage and diversion projects were included in the joint statement, despite the fact that there is no consensus at home on these two projects. In keeping with the deeds and observations of his predecessors and his own while on such trips to India before, Deuba was right in defending his remarks on the constitution amendment bill which he made in a joint press conference with his counterpart Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 24. He is not wrong in thinking that he was right when he said that the government would try again to pass the bill which had just failed in the Parliament prior to his state visit. Why should he not get benefit of doubt when he asserts that he has not compromised Nepal's national interest. Anyway, signing of MOUs, reaching of understanding, creation of a positive environment and creation of a joint team of experts to look into problems are the rhetoric that people get to hear and



BY DR. TILAK RAWAL

read before, during and after such visits. Instead of blaming and accusing Deuba who is faced with a Herculean task of managing serious political problems at home, more meaningful would be to attract the attention of the concerned Indian authorities that avoidance of inordinate delay in implementation of joint projects is beneficial for both countries. They must have noted how happy people of Nepal were when Prime Minister Modi visited Nepal soon after his election to the position and announced the speedy execution of projects in which India's funding was involved, including the much-delayed Pancheshwar multi-purpose project. People of Nepal have begun to understand that each prime minister visiting India talks a bit about national

interest, basically for public consumption, and seeks special support for his party and blessings for himself and his faction within the party. With this knowledge at the back of one's head, can anyone blame Deuba for crossing the limit? A careful and alert Deuba behaved and acted well while in India. Moreover, dignitaries on the entourage were attentively keeping an eye on Deuba lest he acts or utters something unpalatable or controversial. Jeetendra Dev, a minister on the entourage, shared his happiness with Nepal Television that everything went well during the visit, despite the fear many of them had deep within. Since all of us are very clear by now that no scene was created and no nonsense was spoken by our head of government while in Delhi, why

should anyone delve much into this visit which was in no way much different from visits of our other prime ministers in the past. Let Deuba concentrate on domestic political and economic problems undistracted.

Ever since becoming prime minister for the fourth time, Deuba has been lobbying hard to get the Rastriya Janta Party (RJPN) on board the ongoing election process two phases (local level elections)

of which were held successfully without this party's participation. RJPN and the ruling parties were seen seasowing a bit on amendment and election issues. RJPN, which was adamant about non-participation in the election without amendment, started showing some flexibility about participation in the remaining elections soon after a decision of the apex court paved the way for adding local units in eight districts of Province- 2. This decision of the apex court coincided with the conclusion of RJPN's seven-day-long marathon meeting. The party finally agreed to participate in the third phase of local polls scheduled for September 18 in Province -2, irrespective of the outcome of vote on the amendment bill. Expectedly, the constitution amendment bill was voted on and failed (August 21, 2017) as the ruling alliance could not garner 395 votes in the 592-strong Parliament. Of the 553 lawmakers present, only 347 voted in favor of the amendment. Of the 39 lawmakers who were

*Since all of us are very clear by now that no scene was created and no nonsense was spoken by our head of government while in Delhi, why should anyone delve much into this visit which was in no way much different from visits of our other prime ministers in the past. Let Deuba concentrate on domestic political and economic problems undistracted.*

absent at the time of voting, majority were from the ruling alliance- NC and the Maoist Centre. The ruling alliance fell short of 48 votes to reach the required number of 395 votes to pass the bill. NC proceeded with the twin objectives of getting RJPN on board the election process and to expose those who are against the bill, thinking it would make some political capital placating the Madhes-centric leaders and inflicting political injury on its rival CPN (UML). It is, however, very difficult to say whether NC has made some political capital out of the amendment-related exercise because a large number of RJPN leaders and cadre have unhesitatingly begun to express their unhappiness that NC was just keen about concluding the process but did not show the required seriousness to get the bill passed. They have also noted that NC could not get all its lawmakers to vote for the bill. Moreover, UML has been very clear since long on amendment bill which has got to do with issues related to citizenship, language, etc. and thus whatever had to happen has already happened to UML. Therefore, NC has no chance of inflicting additional injury on the main opposition. Let us hope NC performs better in Province- 2 and makes up the loss suffered in the previous two local level elections.

The government has also ultimately conceded to the Election commission's (EC) proposal that it would be very difficult to hold both elections on the same day as desired by Deuba and supported by other parties including UML. Backtracking on its decision of holding provincial and parliamentary elections at one go, the government has decided to hold two elections in two phases on November 26 and December 7, despite its previous decision to hold both elections on November 26. Prime Minister Deuba should not be blamed much for the flexibility shown in agreeing to the proposal of the body responsible for holding elections in the country if this kind of flexibility is not extended to other controversial areas. Let us believe that his act of installing a 50-member Council of Ministers, the largest ever in Nepal's history, is meant, more than anything else, to ensure timely and desired accomplishment of major tasks that his government is charged with.

The Electoral Constituency Delimitation Commission (CDC) has also submitted its report to the government, expectedly late and after the dates for parliamentary and provincial elections was announced. The CDC has delineated 165 constituencies for the federal parliament and 330 constituencies for the provincial assembly. It is said CDC has given least priority to geography while fixing constituencies for the upcoming elections. Geography is not given due priority despite the categorical constitutional provision that geography and population should be the major bases for the purpose. The grumble is that only 10 percent weightage has been given to geography. On the other front, RJPN has lodged a protest with Deuba that the CDC has reduced the representation of Madhes while carving out electoral constituencies. The concerned leaders see this kind of act as a ploy against their party. The EC's move of imposing election code of conduct for the provincial and federal polls has also been criticized by no other than Deputy Prime Minister Gachhadar, saying the poll code was

imposed too early and it tied the government's hands in the name of election code of conduct. Hope the government led by experienced Deuba wittily faces problems related to constitution and election that are likely to surface in a serious way before the provincial and parliamentary elections. Likewise, the economy that has been devastated by the recent floods and landslides needs proper attention so that it does not take a nose dive in terms of growth.

It is said that the flood and landslide damaged over 30 bridges, two of them irreparably, along the major highways. Six hundred big and small industries were shut after the floodwaters entered their premises in the Sunsari-Morang industrial corridor. A total of 43400 houses have been destroyed and 21000 families are still displaced. The total loss caused by the calamity in Saptari district amounts to Rs. 1.40 billion, show latest data available. The relief and rehabilitation work carried out by the government is slow and grossly inadequate. Likewise, it has been reported that floods and landslides triggered by heavy monsoon rains in



PM Deuba (left) with Indian PM Modi

Tarai have swept away planted crops worth more than Rs. 8 billion. In addition to this, available reports suggest that livestock and fishery have also suffered sizeable loss on account of this natural calamity. Paddy production is likely to decline this year as rice plantation was not satisfactory due to lack of rain initially and whatever was done, using extra efforts, was damaged later by the excess water that fell from the sky. Moreover, no encouraging reports are available on the budget implementation front. Having hit hard by the natural calamity and the government not being able to give due attention to increasing productive activities, the economy may remain far away from achieving the targeted growth of 7.5 percent this fiscal. One good thing for the concerned authorities is that no matter how much unaccounted money is pumped into the market in an unproductive fashion during upcoming elections, inflation, currently around 4 percent, is not likely to cross the single digit level in the near future. Let us see if Deuba gets to report some encouraging facts on the economy by the time the elections are over and he embarks upon a campaign to become prime minister of this country for the fifth time.

*Dr. Rawal is a former Governor of NRB* ■

## POLITICS

# Elections Fever

*As Nepal decides to hold the national and provincial elections on Nov 26 and Dec 7, new challenges of setting up new institutions have emerged*

By A CORRESPONDENT

**A** If elections are held as proposed by the Election Commission on November 26 and December 7, Nepal's entire state structures will see drastic changes. Following the elections of local level, Nepal's third tier of government, new challenges of power sharing have cropped up. The completion of national and provincial parliaments

As per the constitutional provision, seven provinces will have seven parliaments, head of the government and various ministries, including the home affairs and state police. The present constitution also has provisions which will allow local bodies to have police on their own.

With three tiers of security agencies and multiple other

lies in province 2. However, China does not have such consulate general offices in any province. In a recent press report, China has reportedly shown interest to open Consulate General Office in Pokhara, which is likely to be the provincial capital of no 4 province.

With a long open border, India's security agencies have been raising their concern on security and criminal activities and counterfeit currency with Nepal. Chinese media have also recently started to raise similar kinds of issues.

Having well-established and stable security and other state institutions, Nepal's two neighbors are likely to express more concerns over the newly established security institutions.

Given the recently settled border disputes between India and China over Bhutan's Doklam area, more pressure is likely on Nepal's new security institutions from both of its neighbors. As Nepal's security institutions are facing several problems, including politicization, it will be natural for Nepal's two neighbors to express their own concerns.

### Nepal's Preparations

Almost two years have already passed since the promulgation of the new constitution; but the state is yet to establish a proper institutional setup. Just a week back, Ministry of Home Affairs posted seven Additional Inspector Generals of Police to lead the provincial police teams. The Ministry is yet to take a decision on Intelligence Offices. Similarly, acts on the role of current set ups, Nepal Police, district administration and others, are yet to be

will add two more tiers to the power equation.

With a unitary state, Nepal had for long been under the state power centralized in Kathmandu. However, the elections will transform more than two hundred years old practices, traditions and power structures.

agencies, there will be more problems in their coordination. Four provinces No 1, 3, 4 and 7 share borders with India and China, provinces 2 and 6 share borders with India and province 5 shares border with China.

Currently, India has a Consulate General's Office in Birgunj, which



formulated.

With the handing over of the report by the Electoral Constituency Delineation Commission (CDC) to the government, there are 165 electoral constituencies for the election of House of Representatives and 330 constituencies for the election of provincial assemblies.

All eight districts of Province 2, where the final phase of local elections is scheduled for September 18, have four constituencies each. Province 3 will have the highest number of constituencies with 33, followed by Province 2 (32 constituencies), Province 1 (28 constituencies), Province 5 (26 constituencies), Province 4 (18 constituencies), Province 7 (16 constituencies) and Province 6 (12 constituencies).

"As this constitution is purely a product of Nepal's current political parties, they will set up all the institutions to implement the constitution and make it functional," said former Home Minister and leader of Nepali Congress, who played a key role in finalizing the present constitution in a program, Challenges of Implementation of Constitution, organized by Nepal Constitution Foundation. "Everything will be alright following the elections for national and provincial levels," said Sitaula confidently.

However, constitutional experts and political scientists express doubts. They show the challenges faced by mature democracy like Australia, Canada and South Africa in implementing their federal structures. Prominent constitutional lawyer Dr. Surya Dhungel has expressed concern over the institutional capability in the governance level.

As the last phase of local elections at province no 2 is under way, national and provincial level elections, scheduled for November 25 and December 6, will bring a completely new setup and institution everywhere.

With a relatively small economy, unstable political process, weak institution and capability, Nepal's march to implement federal constitution in the regional situation at present will be very tricky. ■

NCF

## Constitutional Debate

*Experts argue that Nepal to face several constitutional challenges*

At a time when Nepal has been passing through a crucial period of implementing the constitution, Nepal Constitution Foundation, with support from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, organized a talk program on the challenges in the implementation of the constitution.

At the program, chaired by president of NCF Ganesh Bhatta, Dr. Surya Dhungel and Professor Krishna Khanal presented two papers on the legal and political implications of the Constitution.

Dr. Dhungel highlighted institutional gaps and constitutional challenges in the context of three tiers of government and bringing political stability. Similarly, Professor Khanal highlighted the role of political leadership in the present context.

Attended by a large number of people, including members of parliament, lawyers, constitutional experts and others, the 3-hour program concluded with the observation of political leaders, Krishna Prasad Sitaula of Nepali Congress, former chair of CA and CPN-UML leader Subhash Nembang and Maoist Center leader Shakti Basnet.

Although the speakers expressed the challenges of quality leadership, political leaders, present at the program, stressed the need for harmonious relations among all the stakeholders. "Nothing is perfect. What is required is to implement the constitution," said NC leader Sitaula.

"We have entered into a new phase following the promulgation



of the constitution and holding of the local election. No one can prevent us from holding the next round of elections now," said Nembang.

"The constitution documents all different views on directly elected president and parliamentary system," said Basnet.

Annette Schlicht, resident representative, FES, spoke about the role of her organization in promoting democratization and civic education in Nepal. She said that this is an important function in the context of the implementation of the program.

Wrapping up the program, Ganesh Bhatta, president of the foundation, said that there is the need of honesty among political forces and state organs to implement the present constitution. ■



# Once Bitten, Twice Shy

It is on record that following the big earthquake of 1934 shook Nepal, the then PM Joodha Shumsher insisted that we carry out all the relief measures by ourselves. This policy was implemented and the extent of help from outside of the country was fairly limited. Of course as most of the aid rendered was in the capital Kathmandu, one cannot state with conviction that everyone affected was helped to recover and get back to the state of normal living again.

Some time ago it was the fashion in Nepal that whenever there was a calamity, there were groups of people going around the roads of the cities, holding linen sheets and eliciting donations. The men and women encountered would open their thallis or small cloth bags and give money for that particular national disaster. Bands of people would do the rounds of the toles and the gaons to collect cash or kind as clothes and even foodstuffs for distribution. All said and done the sad part of all this was that there was no accountability. Was the aid disbursed? If so, to whom? No one really knew!

There is a saying that one copies those higher up the ladders. It has been the practice in Nepal to ask people to contribute to the PM Fund at such times of distress. People, including those who were ruling or at the helm of affairs, gave part of their monthly pay for the particular cause at that point of time. Use of this fund is tight-fisted. Usually it is the norm for the prime minister in power to utilise this as 'Dasain Kharcha', to not only the NGOs attached to his particular party but also to cadres. Even newspapers which announce, give and collect donations and later publish list of donors are literally compelled, because of the current regulations to hand over donations to the publicity generating PMs Fund. The current state of this fund may be known to the inner circle but the average Nepali has no idea. It is high time to make it obligatory to publish periodically details of the PMs Fund say in the Gorkhapatra or The Rising Nepal, for the donating public ponder over. Many a donor will be thankful for transparency.

Starting with massive earthquake of April 2015, the country has been through bad times. Aid piled up, a lot of it, and took a long time to be dispersed. Some of the consumable items turned bad and could not be eaten. It was even charged that some rotten rice, not properly stored in national godowns was also donated! The question arises as to what has been done about it so far by the people who were then and those who are in power now. The affected populace has endured two long and cold winters but the aid that had been promised has still not reached all who have had to go through this traumatic experience. Many are still awaiting the promised for aid,



BY HEMANG DIXIT

with all its strings attached! Now a new catastrophe, so much not in the hills but more in the plains of the Madesh has played havoc. The last time when we had floods of such high magnitude was July 1994 when Manmohan Adhikari of UML was PM of this land.

The 'One Door Policy' was possibly enforced by the government ostensibly because of the misdistribution and misuse of donations in cash and kind after the earthquake of 2015. Fine, but one has to look at the functioning and the backlash which has resulted because of it. Genuine individuals and organisations are being prevented from helping Nepalis in need and despair.

But can one blame those at the top of the echelons out here? After all it is an international norm for many aid giving countries to announce relief measures for famines, floods, earthquakes etc. Even Nepal does its share, contributing once in a while to other disaster subjected communities, as a token gesture. What has to be realised is that the expenses of those providing the aid: pay of personnel involved, helicopters, fuel, and upkeep of transport of equipment plus the upkeep of personnel and essential sniffer dogs at the time of relief work, are all deductible items. This is all rational, for as the Americans say, "There is no free lunch"! The actual amount to be dispersed is then handed over to their own INGO office or the national NGOs who will do as per their desire or bidding. Many of the items donated may be genuine or substandard though an exorbitant cost is quoted for it. One danger is that genuine items may be hijacked and sold in the local markets for profit and not distributed.

There is no doubt that there was a fiasco in the dispersing of aid after the 2015 earthquake. It's apparent that our Government and its related authorities have still to recover. With the now imposed one door policy the pendulum of functioning has swung the other way. Many welfare providing organisations and individuals are sitting idle and twiddling their thumbs. Some, who are genuine, feel sore about it. Others, comprising of the 'Social Media Selfie Poser' types, interested more in publicity than genuine service literally do not know what to do. Even donors are asking, "Ke Garne". No reply is forthcoming from our government as it is still recovering. After all, 'Once bitten twice shy'.

But there are rooms for despondency too for the aggressive fund collectors of the aid giving nations too. Amounts promised to Haiti by renowned donor countries have still to be sent there. This has not taken place as that country is no longer a priority, nor elicits sympathy at this point in time. Time is running out for Nepal too!

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

*But can one blame those at the top of the echelons out here? After all it is an international norm for many aid giving countries to announce relief measures for famines, floods, earthquakes etc.*



## BRITISH COUNCIL AWARDS

# For Global Students

## *Twenty five Nepali Schools receive the British Council's International School Award (ISA) under the Connecting Classroom Project*

By A CORRESPONDENT

British Council Nepal honored twenty five Nepali schools with International School Award and reaccredited one school at an event on 27 August 2017. This award is endorsed and supported by the Ministry of Education and this is the fifth year, Nepali Schools are being awarded through this award scheme.

The award was handed over by chief guest and special guests, British Ambassador to Nepal Richard Morris and Babu Ram Paudel, Director General, Department of Education.

Forty seven schools from fourteen districts of Nepal had submitted their dossier out of more than 100 schools initially working on International School Award. Full award is granted to 25 out of these 47 dossier submissions. One school awarded in 2013 has been reaccredited for ISA awards this year.

The schools include Bethel English School Palpa, Mount Valley School Palpa, Himanchal Boarding School, Kaski, Kalika Secondary School, Rupandehi, Alpha Boarding School, Kaski, Kailash Bodhi School, Kathmandu, Eurokids School, Kathmandu, Pragya Kunj School, Kahtmandu, Niharika Shishu Kunja School, Kathmandu, NIST School, Bhaktapur, Gyanodaya Secondary School, Bafal Kathmandu, Nepal Model School, Syangja, Radiant Montessori School, Kailali, Gurukul Int'l Academy, Dang, Gyansindhu Secondary School, Dang, Gaidakot English School, Nawalparasi, and Joseph High School, Kathmandu.

Other schools are Phoenix School, Kathmandu, Reliance Public School, Kathmandu, Learning Realm International School, Kathmandu, Himalaya Milan School, Kaski, Ace School, Kathmandu, Little Angel School, Dang, Gladstone

School (Reaccreditation), Bhaktapur, and Axis Vidyashram, Kailali

According to British Council Nepal, the schools receiving the full award will be provided with a trophy and certificate and will be allowed to use the coveted International School Award kite mark along with their school logo on all the official stationeries and promotional materials for a period of three years.

"Our education system recognizes that we need to support our students become global citizens. Here in Nepal and around the world, the BC works to create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of UK and Nepal. Its works in education and society to

and communication. This helps in deeper learning, developing global citizens helping the students to acquire skills needed in the 21st century, said British Ambassador to Nepal Richard Morris.

Babu Ram Paudel, Director General, Department of Education, said on the occasion, "Thank you, British Council, for bringing an international award to Nepal. The award has brought in an encouragement in the educational institutes to study and teach in new and innovative ways. The MoE hopes for the continuation of this award in the coming years and Department of Education would like to acknowledge the support provided



help transform national education system, built more inclusive and open society and increases young people's opportunity. The International School Award encourages young people and educational institutes from UK and around the world together to learn from each other, build trust and lay foundation for prosperity and security around the world. ISA frameworks help schools worldwide in various ways, including staff development, teacher training, continuous professional development and collaboration between partner schools through projects, activities

by the British Council."

Nepal Government is introducing new grading system lately and Department of Education is working with the British Council in different components like developing changing present curriculum, teachers' preparation to move into this system and strengthening of the evaluation system. We have been working with British Council for a long time now and British Council's contribution in this area is appreciable. We are hoping that our evaluation and grading system will be equal and at par with the international standards very soon". ■

# Where Is Civil Society?

Nepal is in a process of profound changes, and the current post-conflict and post-new constitution process is an opportunity to build an inclusive state by reforming past systems and structures that have contributed to violent conflict and inequalities in the country.

The civil society in Nepal has been vital in the political transformation, and the promotion of peace and social harmony. Civil society organizations have made significant contributions in short-term humanitarian assistance and poverty relief to long-term poverty reduction. Their roles have been critical during the violent conflict and disasters in the country.

This article is questioning whether the civil society is asking the right question to the government and major political parties - on the issues of building democratic institutions and practices, deepening democratic values in society, and exercising of power by various levels of government.

Democratization and good governance are critical pillars to address the root causes and structural factors of poverty. Today, the country is facing serious challenges on these fronts. The civil society chooses to be quiet at many instances when there are attempts to irregularities in the government and wrongdoings by the political parties. However, media has played an important role generating mass awareness through news and views. Appreciation also goes to independent professionals for voicing people's concerns at different times.

**Let me raise here a couple of issues:**

Where is civil society when lawmakers of various parties have proposed that the law does not bar convicts of corruption and other criminal cases from contesting elections? There have been reportedly serious irregularities in recent government purchase of land, medical college affiliation and tax



BY DR. PRABIN MANANDHAR

settlement. Why is civil society laid back on politico-corruption nexus?

Where is civil society on political appointments when the right person was not appointed to the right job to various state bodies? There are good people, but many of the positions have been filled with political affiliations and corrupt practices. Why is civil society silent on abuse of power and wrong appointments?

Where is civil society on a tendency of political parties and Kathmandu bureaucracy to curb the power of local government? The local government should now be providing 60% of development services to local people on health, education, water supply, sanitation, roads, agriculture and disaster management. There are lacks of staffing and slow delivery of services despite additional resources. Why is civil society silent on the interference of politico-trade unions pushing Nepal sliding down to centralized federalism?

Well these are some of the key concerns of general public. There are devils in the details.

It's our common responsibility to voice for democratization and good governance. The civil society should not become a victim of politico-propaganda that has forced it into silence. The basic condition is that the civil society has to be apolitical.

*Dr. Manandhar is an expert of international development. Currently, he is working as Country Director of The Lutheran World Federation. He is the Convener of ACT Alliance Nepal Forum and the former Chair of Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN). He is also a visiting faculty at the Kathmandu University. He can be*

*reached at [prabin.manandhar11@gmail.com](mailto:prabin.manandhar11@gmail.com) ■*

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**Where is civil society on political appointments when the right person was not appointed to the right job to various state bodies? There are good people, but many of the positions have been filled with political affiliations and corrupt practices. Why is civil society silent on abuse of power and wrong appointments?**

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KVPT

# Preserving Heritage

*When reconstruction of several heritage sites of Kathmandu and Bhaktapur is yet to start, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) has mobilized the local community, with local donors working in harmony with international donors, and made a difference in the reconstruction of temples and monuments. By completing the reconstruction of Mulchowk, a major portion of Patan Durbar Square, KVPT has shown a way ahead*

By A CORRESPONDENT

**A**t a time when many historical monuments of Kathmandu and Bhaktapur durbar squares are yet to be restored and opened for public, the reconstruction of Patan's Mulchowk and Seeman Gallery has been completed, thanks to the efforts of KVPT.

The credit of completing the reconstruction goes to the local community and different stakeholders, under the leadership given by a KVPT team, led by Rohit Ranjitkar. Coordinating with the local community and government agencies, the KVPT team has completed the reconstruction of the most precious sites of Patan Durbar Square.

The generous financial support

given by Nepal Investment Bank and its chairman Prithvi Bahadur Pande, Pratima Pande and Sophie Pande, and their fund-raising drive, have been remarkable.

Coming a long way from New York, Eric



Inauguration of Mulchowk

## HERITAGE

Theophile, co-founder of KVPT, who has contributed his entire life for the restoration of the heritage of Kathmandu Valley, thanked Prithivi Bahadur Pande and Pratima Pande for their announcement to match dollar for dollar and rupees for rupees in raising the funds. He also thanked Sophie Pande for her strong support in the fund raising drive.

The KVPT organized a preview tour of Seeman Gallery Architectural drawings at Patan Museum. In a function, the Trust also announced the new earthquake response campaign with donors' names.

Eric Theophile, co-founder KVPT, announced the names in a function. They include Sulabh Agrawal, Daya Foundation, Future



### "Completion Is A Big Achievement"

**Pratima Pande Executive Board Member of KVPT**

It is wonderful to see you all here after our last program on World Monuments Watch Days, which brought awareness of all heritage lovers to our work at reconstruction and fundraising for the KVPT's ongoing Temple Restoration Projects.

Thanks to the World Monuments Watch Day Program, we have had positive responses locally to our fund raising initiative and we have been able to raise some sums of money. Many institutions and individuals are donating for the rebuilding of the heritage sites damaged by the earthquakes.

The KVPT board would like to thank all the people who have donated so generously to help in the rebuilding of our precious monuments destroyed by the earthquakes. The board would like to thank all for their support and love of our heritage sites in the Patan Durbar Square.

I would like to thank Rohit Ranjitkar and his team of builders and craftsmen who are working painstakingly to bring our temples and monuments back to their splendor and glory. Finally, it is so wonderful to have Eric Theophile, co-founder of KVPT and Neils Gutshow, senior advisor, with us today to motivate, encourage and lead the KVPT, which is doing such a wonderful work in heritage conservation and restoration for Nepal. Gutshow, senior advisor, is with us today to motivate, encourage and lead the KVPT, which is doing such a wonderful work in heritage conservation and restoration for Nepal.



of International Exchange Association Japan, Nepal Investment Bank Ltd, Manju and Jharendra SJB Rana, Prithivi B. Pande and Pratima Pande, Siddhant Pandey, Prabhakar SJB Rana, Siddhartha SJB Rana and Suchotechnology, Japan.

At the function attended by diplomats from various countries, art lovers, government officials, heritage lovers and local and international conservationists, Eric Theophile said that this was a great moment as KVPT was able to complete the renovation of the project before the schedule.

Honorary life member of KVPT Kanak Mani Dixit said that KVPT has completed the work of reconstruction of one of very important heritage sites of Kathmandu. He said that Nepal's historical sites, including the temples, are the living heritage where people interact daily through worshipping, festivals and spiritual motives.

During the program,



Kanak Dixit

Pratima Pande, executive member of KVPT, Director General of Department of Archeology

Bhesh Narayan Dahal and Executive Director of KVPT Rohit Raj Ranjit also highlighted the significance of the program.

Along with Japanese ambassador Masashi Ogawa, Ambassador Designate Roland Schafer of The Federal Republic Of Germany, renowned German archaeologist and

senior advisor of KVPT Neils Gutshow and people from various walks of life were present at the program.

The completion of reconstruction of Mulchwok is a first major achievement Nepal has made so far in bringing Nepal's heritage sites back on track. ■

## HERITAGE

### "We Are Proud To Save All The Elements"

**Rohit Raj Ranjitkar**

I am very happy to welcome you all to our site on the soft opening of galleries of Sundari Chok where we have been working since 2006 as Patan Durbar Campaign. The whole building was in a much-deteriorated condition, when we started working here, as it had been 'not in use', as well as with 'no maintenance' for a few decades.

Three wings of the chowks were completed before the earthquake, which was intact in the earthquake. However, the unrestored east wing, which collapsed in the earthquake, was rebuilt a few months ago with support from WMF, NIBL, Prithivi Bahadur Pande and German Embassy. The reconstruction of Seemann Gallery was supported by Yogeshwor Amatya.



The KVPT and Department of Archeology Coordinated the security aspect, rescuing artifacts and cleanup efforts in Patan Durbar Square immediately after the earthquakes, with Mangal Tole Sudhar Samiti, Patan Museum, LSMC and local residents and community. Remnants of the fallen monuments in the Patan Durbar Square were secured with the help of hundreds of volunteers, local stakeholders, the Nepal Army, the Armed Police and Nepal Police. All valuable historic building components were secured within the first ten days after the earthquake and

stored in the Patan Museum compound. They were documented and sent into storage with labeling. Among these thousands of rescued pieces are intricately carved wooden elopements from the tired temples that collapsed in the square.

We are proud that we were able to save all the elements from the rubble, even small pieces of carved elements. Of course, some of the elements were not reusable, but they will serve as evidence in references to make new replicas. Since the earthquake, we have been repairing all those carved elements from completely collapsed as preparation for rebuilding.

Restoration of the monuments, which partially or fully collapsed, such as Char Narayan, Harishankar, Visveshvara and around 15 other monuments in Patan Darbar are to be restored or rebuilt with 4 additional temples in Kathmandu Darbar Square. This is what we like to call earthquake response campaign of the projects in Patan and two projects in Kathmandu have already been completed and some expected to complete at the end of this year.

### "Department Needs Close Collaboration"

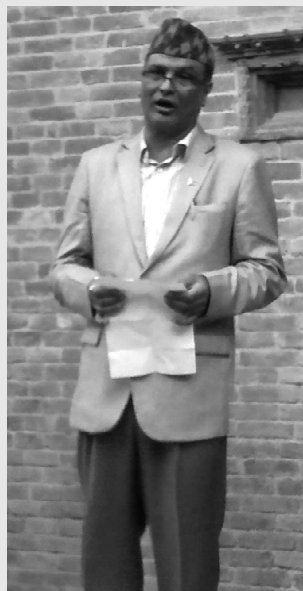
**Bhesh Narayan Dahal, Director General of Department Of Archeology**

On behalf of the Department of Archeology, I would welcome all of you to this special galleries preview organized by the Department's partners for many years standing, the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT). The work of KVPT provides a positive example of the overwhelming challenges faced by our society since the earthquakes of 2015.

These two and half years have been especially challenging for our Department while the human casualties and injuries and material losses from the earthquakes were tragic beyond description, the medium-to-long-term task of our department has been the area of architectural and cultural heritage. Our focus has been in the repair, rebuilding of many of these seven hundred historical buildings and monuments lost in the quake.

The historical structures of Kathmandu Valley not only define our national heritage but we have been recognized as important to all humankind. Among the built heritage, of the Valley, the Patan Durbar and plaza provide one of the finest preserved sites. I applaud the local community, including the youth, the Lalitpur Metropolitan, Lalitpur Chamber of Commerce, Mangal Tole Sudhar Sangh, the security forces and others who contributed to protecting Patan Durbar Square area after the earthquake. The Department of Archeology is proud to work with you now for protection of our heritage.

The work of KVPT provides a positive example of the overwhelming challenges faced by our society since the earthquake 2015. Let me offer a few words about the KVPT, which has been collaborating with the Department of Archaeology since 1991. The trust is a unique example of an international private charity in Nepal, with a specific mission which is to safeguard the Valley's architectural heritage. The KVPT raises funds and implements projects on a turn-key basis, always in coordination with the Department. Their team of Nepalese professionals has preserved more than 60 monuments, many of them around here in Patan.





File photo

## DEMOLITION OF BAGH DURBAR

# Erased History

*As Nepal's heritage landmarks of Lichchhavi and Malla periods are undergoing a revival, the palaces built in the Shah and Rana times are in the process of demolition. The latest victim from the demolition drive is Bagh Durbar*

By KESHAB POUDEL

**S**ingh Mahal, a Palace in Thapathali, was a historically significant palace constructed by the grandfather of Jung Bahadur Rana, who dreamt to be a prime minister from here.

Built by Nayan Singh Thapa, father of Mathbar Singh Thapa, once the power center of Thapa and Rana clans, Singh Mahal was at risk of losing its entire historical legacy during the ownership of Nepal's central bank.

As glory and happiness return on completing the restoration of the Malla Palace in Patan, the decision taken by the Kathmandu Metropolitan City to demolish the historical Bagh Durbar came as another shocking event for conservationists.

With the demolition of Dharahara in the earthquake of 2015 and other palaces around Sundhara, the last reminiscence of Bhimsen Thapa clan will be finally removed and turned into another concrete jungle.

At a time when conservationists have been launching campaigns to save the palaces built in different periods, the KMC set out to demolish the historical Bagh Durbar. In the 1950's, revolutionaries led by Nepali Congress and communists destroyed many statues and palaces in a hate campaign against the Ranas. In the recent times, Maoist revolutionaries destroyed the remaining sites from Nepal's unification era.

Despite vehement campaign against the demolition of the palaces built after the unification of Nepal by conservationist Chanda Rana, the government is permitting the demolition one after another.

Kathmandu Metropolitan's Joint Spokesperson at KMC Numaraj Dhakal said the latest study report, which was submitted two weeks ago, stated that Bagh Durbar was badly damaged and could not be retrofitted. "We had been waiting for this report and finally KMC has decided to demolish the building," Dhakal was quoted by the Himalayan

Times as saying. He further added that Bagh Durbar's demolition will begin in one-and-a-half months.

Built by Amar Singh Thapa, the palace was occupied by various rulers and individuals. Ministry of Finance was also located here for quite a long time before it was handed over to Kathmandu Metropolitan City. Then mayor Keshab Staphit took the initiative to make this building the property of KMC.

On taking his oath of office, KMC Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya declared he would construct a new office building for KMC. A study had also been conducted on whether Bagh Durbar could be used after retrofitting as engineers had found the building unsafe in the aftermath of the April 2015 earthquake. According to KMC, the new building will be constructed in three years. However, cost estimates and design of the new building have not yet been prepared.



Earlier, KMC and the Department of Archaeology had differences over whether or not to demolish the historic Bagh Durbar, which is located to the west of Tundikhel.

#### History of Bagh Durbar

Bagh Durbar is a Thapa Palace in Kathmandu. The palace complex, located in south and west of the Dhara-hara and Tundikhel, incorporates an impressive and vast array of courtyards, gardens, and buildings.

Initially, the palace was owned by Amar Singh Thapa Sardar of Bagale Thapa dynasty and his descendants but later was occupied by Royals of Shah dynasty, and still later by the government of Nepal.

According to Wikipedia, the palace complex lay in the heart of Kathmandu, to the north of the Bagmati River. The history of the palace is closely linked with the history of Nepal and its rulers.

In Royal courtier family Thapa, some lived in Thapathali Durbar complex and some lived towards the west of the Sundhara in today's place of Bagh Durbar. Initially, a palace was built by Amar Singh Thapa (Sanu) and later a new palace was built and used by Bhimsen Thapa due to its close proximity to the Royal Hanuman Dhoka Palace in 1805 AD.

After the fall of Bhimsen Thapa in 1837, this entire palace complex was seized by Government of Nepal but was later occupied by Prime Minister Mathabarsingh Thapa as a descendant and member of Bagale Thapa clan. Bag Durbar was again seized by Government of Nepal in 1845 after the murder of Mathabarsingh Thapa by his own nephew Jung Bahadur Rana.

After nationalization of Bag Durbar, this property was given to Royal Prince Upendra Bir Bikram Shah in 1854. However, he was kept under house arrest for Treason. Upon his death, in 1896 BS, this palace was inherited by his son Bhupetindra Bikram Shah and again to Bhupetindra's son Mohan Bikram.

As Mohan Bikram was RamRaj (Zamindar of Ram Nagar estate), he started living in Ramnagar, India. Thus, his property was used by his step brother Chandra Bikram Shah. Both Mohan Bikram and Chandra Bikram were the Son-In-Laws of Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher JBR, so their property was eventually captured by Juddha and his son Hari Shumsher.

With the decision to demolish the Bagh Dubar, this story has come to end. ■



CHIEF ENGINEER COL. LATE DILLI JUNG THAPA

## Infrastructure Builder



BY CHANDA RANA

While talking about preserving the Rana era Durbars left in tatters after the 2015 earthquakes, it took me to the era when the 1934 earthquake had shaken the country, ruining our cultural and religious heritage. Awesome Rana Durbars built by two genuine engineers Kumar and Kishore Narshing Rana and Durbars built by Architect Jogbir Stahpit and Ranasur Bista had experienced the jolts. They did not have to wait for years, such as in the period following 2015, after which earthquake victims are still waiting for a permanent roof till now. Pioneer engineer Dilli Jung Thapa (my grandfather), coming from Roorkee, started reconstruction of the damaged Durbars with his advanced neo-classic designs and with new touch. Some major reconstruction happened to old ones.

Few changes were done here and there, with his brilliant engineering skill for which he had collections of branded catalogues from London, Europe, for his unique interiors, choosing chandeliers, glasses, railings to furniture to carpets to suit the various Durbars with each different pattern and style. "Daly", he used to be called, started reconstruction and renovation from 1935 B.S. I can claim my grandfather did 80 percent of the major reconstruction and built new Rana Durbars, too after the 1934 earthquake, Lalita Niwas, Laxmi Niwas etc. Not only had he renovated Ghantaghar and undertaken many other major reconstructions of damaged infrastructure then, chief engineer brigadier colonel Dilli Jung Thapa was also first to introduce RCC buildings in Nepal. Scared by the earthquake, Mohan Sumsher Rana requested my grandfather to build earthquake resilient buildings with RCC inside. Laxmi Niwas and a house near Ghantaghar were built using RCC. So mostly all Rana era durbars were reconstructed by my grandfather, including Bagh Durbar, part of Sital Niwas and Belayati Baithak, along with Putali Bagaincha.

Catalogues of my grandfather, which we have, match with the interiors of many Durbars from wall paper and embossed pattern at ceiling to all the art work on them, including the furniture. I have noticed this at various Durbars I visited during my research for my book on my beloved grandfather. My grandfather and other renowned engineers built new road, as did chief engineer colonel Surya Jung Thapa and chief engineer Colonel Nara Bahadur Karki. Karki later built a few Durbars for the sons of PM Juddha. To carry the construction materials for the Durbars, my grandfather Dilli Jung Thapa constructed the first ropeway in Nepal from Teku to Hetauda. Not only that, he also built Chure tunnel, the first in South Asia. This linked Kathmandu's to terai from Bhimphe. He also constructed the Bhimphe road. So I can proudly say that my grandfather, chief engineer, Brigadier colonel Dilli Jung Thapa is a pioneer of Nepal, who opened the golden gate of development in Nepal. ■

# Utilization Of Full Potential Of Kosi

## Future Kosi Flood Problem

Nepal's major storage dam projects are among the largest projects in the world. Our highest political establishment must know every important aspect of each such projects. We should always ensure that our own wrong action would not put in jeopardy our full right to water of our river.

Unfortunately we signed in 1959 Gandak river treaty that would have totally deprived forever our country's right to use water of Gandak as well as her tributaries. Fortunately the 1959 Gandak treaty was revised in 1964 restoring many of our lost water rights.

### Our Great Success

Our biggest success in dealing with India is the revision of the Kosi Treaty in 1966. The 1966 Revised Kosi Treaty has granted our country absolute right to use entire Sun-Kosi and Kosi river waters for coming 199 years without prejudice to existing ( Hanumannagar Kosi barrage project) as well as future uses in India. In the absence of 1966 Kosi Treaty revision the implementation of Sun-Kosi river diversion project would have been unthinkable. It is quite frustrating that some of our technical as well as legal experts still fail to understand the significance of 1966 Kosi Treaty revision. Our intelligentsia must not let happen that due to our own fault the 1966 Revised Kosi Treaty is scrapped.

### Multipurpose Use of Kosi

In course of first official visit of our then Prime-minister G.P. Koirala to India an agreement was signed to conduct jointly detailed feasibility study of the Kosi High Dam Project primarily aimed at generation of electricity. This type of isolated study of the Kosi dam project could be detrimental to the interest of our country since Sun-kosi project and Kosi dam project will be mutually exclusive of one another if the Sun-Kosi Project is not implemented first. Kosi navigation project is also extremely important project for landlocked Nepal which can be directly tied up with the Kosi Dam Project. The flood control is the most important aspect of the Kosi storage dam project to save the life and property of millions in Nepal and India.

I raised above issues within the Ministry of Water Resources displeasing many of my colleagues, who regarded that an agreement already signed between two prime-ministers should not be questioned.

### Kosi Canal Navigation and Flood Control

I prepared based on my own personal experience a new plan for the Kosi river development that could be put to the Indo-Nepal joint meeting. The proposed plan has been presented in two reports ( Ref-1, Ref-2). Those reports had been circulated to various concerned agencies. Similarly important findings of those reports have been published in several local newspapers and magazines. The following three new issues have been dealt with in my reports.

(a) Sun-Kosi dam project and Kosi dam project would



BY DR. AB THAPA

be mutually exclusive of one another if the Kosi dam project would be built first. Thus the Sun-Kosi dam project would have to be implemented first which would provide year round irrigation to all Terai districts of Nepal between Kosi river and Chitwan in addition to generation of abundant cheap electricity. There is already sufficient market in Nepal for full utilization of the Sun-Kosi project generated energy.

(b) Use of Kosi irrigation canal for additional power generation and inland navigation. A similar example is the use of Upper Rhein canal for power generation as well as navigation that provided landlocked Switzerland

waterway access to seaport.

(c) Flood control role of Kosi storage dam project ( though India was denying the necessity of Kosi storage Dam for flood control but during discussion they accepted our view).

### Sorrow of China and Sorrow of Bihar

In an article published on October 16, 1998 in " China Daily" on Yellow River known in the past as " Sorrow of China" Xiong Lei has written " A Cradle and a killer, a mother and a menace. From time immemorial, China has both depended on and dreaded its mighty rivers." It is reported that during 1887 and 1931 Yellow River maximum floods when the Yellow River embankments were breached, the death toll each time was over one million, and similarly in 1938 flood the death toll was about half million.

Unlike Yellow River which has now been completely regulated after the implementation of storage dam projects, the mother Kosi also known as " Sorrow of Bihar" can still





be a merciless killer. According to Dr. K.L. Rao, former Minister of Govt. of India the maximum flood discharge of the Yellow River is similar to Kosi River. Like the elevated Yellow River bed at the times of disastrous floods, the Kosi river bed too particularly on a stretch of the river upstream barrage is already well above the surrounding lands. In the past both these rivers have exhibited similar characteristic of completely shifting their course during high floods. Needless to explain that the loss of life and property would be astronomical in scale if the very recent widespread submergence particularly in north east Bihar would have been simultaneous accompanied by breach of Kosi left bank embankment triggered by maximum flood discharge of about nine lack cusecs ( a discharge already recorded twice during the last 50 years).

#### Conclusion of 1997 Indo-Nepal Joint Meeting

We were easily able to convince the Indian delegates our view points on Kosi development. The Indo-Nepal joint meeting completely endorsed our proposal as described in my two reports. However, nobody was expecting that Indo-Nepal joint meeting could so easily reach an agreement about the thorny Kosi river issue. People had good reason to suspect that Nepal's interest might have been compromised

Gradually people started to realize that the Kosi study agreement was in conformity to our country's long term development need. MITRAKUNJ helped to organize a meeting in Russian Cultural Centre attended by relevant experts, politicians, media persons distinguished in the field of water resources. Kosi problems were explained in the meeting. Those attending the meeting realized the significance of the Kosi study agreement. The following day all papers covered positively Kosi news.

**REFERENCE - (1) Planning Kosi High Dam Project, Thapa AB 1993; (2) Kosi Canal Waterway, Thapa AB 1993 ■**

# The Standoff At Doklam

The standoff at Doklam between India and China finally ended last week after rounds of diplomatic manoeuvring. In a statement issued by India's Ministry of External Affairs, it was stated that the "expeditious disengagement of border personnel at the face-off site at Doklam has been agreed to and is ongoing". The decision to 'disengage' at the border came in the run-up to the BRICS summit where Indian prime minister Narendra Modi and Chinese president Xi Jinping were slated to meet each other.

Earlier this week, when the two leaders did meet on the sidelines of the summit, they agreed that more must be done to improve mutual trust and avoid future border standoffs. But given the past rivalry and unresolved border issues between the two rising superpowers, the statements from the two leader is likely to be simply a 'diplomatic rhetoric'.

As for now, tensions have subsided. What then were the takeaways of the conflict?

The conflict gave India a reason to assert its strong stand in the region. At a time when Beijing is moving aggressively



BY ABIJIT SHARMA

Minister Arun Jaitley, India's position in the Doklam conflict showed that 'India of 2017 was indeed different than that of India of 1962'.

The diplomatic way in which New Delhi handled the issue also highlighted the maturity of the country's foreign policy. New Delhi maintained restraint throughout the

stand-off and apart from engaging in the initial war of words, it refrained from any sort of retaliatory rhetoric. On the other hand, the Chinese media, which is considered as the mouthpiece of the government, was full of propagandist agendas and aggressive threats. While stepping up military presence in the area, New Delhi's relatively calmer stance hinting that it was interesting in resolving the issue diplomatically rather than engaging in war of words, was a show of its mature foreign policy.

Most importantly, a big take away from the conflict was India's realization of where the country's real threat came from. More often than not, the Indian media is full of propagandist news depicting how Pakistan is the main threat to India. The stand-off suggested that



in South Asia, India's decision to step into the conflict which did not even concern its own territory showed that it was not willing to accept unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the region. Although chances of full blown war was minimal from the very beginning, India's decision to maintain its firm ground gave impressions that it was ready to take on any challenge. To borrow the words of the then Defence

the real strategic threat to New Delhi came not from Islamabad but from Beijing. A recent PwC study says that China will be a 38 trillion dollar economy by 2030 - the largest economy in the world while India will be at number 3, with a 19 trillion dollar economy. As the two superpowers jostle each in the world's economic platform - rivalry is almost inevitable. ■

## FLOODS

# Same Blame Game

*Every year, as the monsoon rains pour down to flood Nepal and India's Ganges plains, blame games begin in both the countries while sidelining the prospects of any real solution*

By KESHAB POUDEL

As is usual for every monsoon, heavy rains on August 13 and 14, in and around Mahabharat and Chure ranges of Nepal, caused streams and rivers to swell and inundated vast swathes of Nepal and India.

At least 140 Nepali people died and property belonging to tens of thousands got washed out, with their land under deluge and community infrastructure damaged.

Heavy rainfall and flood form a cycle in several places every year. Three years ago, floods played havoc with life in Nepal's far-west, two years ago the mid-west suffered that same fate and this year the eastern part of Nepal is bearing the brunt.

After the annual devastation the rivers wreak following unnatural disturbances in their natural courses, political debates and blame games start making their presence felt. Nepali and Indian elites, who keep mum for almost 10 months, begin to turn the real humanitarian agenda into a blame game.

The Nepali side blames Indian embankments and barrages, Kosi, Gandak, Khudialotan, Laxmanpur, Tanakpur and so many others, constructed unilaterally to control flood and prevent inundation in India, for the resulting havoc in the Terai plains. Indian politicians blame Nepali authorities for releasing additional water from dams in Nepal, unknowing that Nepal does not have any dam inside its territory.

This time, similar blame games started after the rainfall of August 13 and 14, followed by floods and water logging. "Nobody understands the lower Ganga

plains hydrology involving eastern UP, Bihar, Bengal and Nepal's terai. Among others, this is the result of inappropriate embankment technology applied by Indians to tame rivers as well as Dozer Terror of Nepal's hills, where in the name of road construction, there is rampant destruction of the hill slopes.

The massive destruction of slopes causes landslides and rivers to carry all the soil and sand from the hills to drop them in the plains where the Indians have already built hundreds of embankments using inappropriate

provide only a set of skills.

Embankments can work in certain places and short distances. However, they cannot cover an area around 124 kilometers of length. India has built massive embankments along the Nepal-India border. According to daily newspapers, there are 18 embankments, starting in length from 2 kilometers up to 124 kilometers.

According to border expert Buddhi Narayan Shrestha, out of 1,808 kilometers long Nepal-India border, 595 KM border lies over river beds of 60 small and big rivers.



technology. These embankments are creating floods in Nepal but floods as well as massive water logging problems are there in the Indian side, too.

Due to the inappropriate embankment technology, water logging stays in India for a longer period than it does in Nepal plains, from where water gradually moves south.

The character of rivers and their hydrology needs to be studied in search of any solution to the annual problem. There is a need to involve multiple sets of expertise, from that of civil and engineers and architects to sociologists, for a durable solution. Water resources engineers will

The situation in the Indian side is also painful. Despite constructing massive embankments along the rivers, Indian citizens living in the southern parts of Nepal are also suffering from water logging and floods.

What is now required is to understand hydrology of rivers and allow them to flow in their course rather than trying to contain them by constructing embankments by using inappropriate technologies.

"There is the need to dismantle all the embankments to protect the Nepali people. We need to raise this issue with the Indians," said Ratan Bhandary, a water resources activist. "Rivers should not be tamed." ■



# Politics Of Natural Disaster

BY DEEPAK RAJ JOSHI

Natural disasters have always existed although we have seen them increase in number and destructive power lately. Nepal is a disaster-prone country. In Nepal, we have frequent natural calamities such as floods, storms, and landslides that become real disasters due to the lack of adequate risk management and preparedness. Whenever disaster strikes, nature is blamed and it is stated by the authorities that nothing can be done against these happenings.

The earthquake trail is still visible in parts of the country, where debris still lies strewn in the streets and where some partially destroyed buildings are still standing in places like Kathmandu, the capital of the country.

In eleven districts, due to the heavy floods and mudslides caused by the torrential rains, 132 people died, more than 50 went missing and thousands of people, who lost their homes, have been forced to move due to flooding. Many people are adversely affected by the government's delay in distributing aid. This very issue should not be a political topic.

Political elites who are in constant competition are prone not to leave any stone unturned when it comes to making political capital. Natural disasters are becoming a social media tool for publicity seekers. Sometimes they fight over who will distribute the relief aid.

Mobilizing the political party volunteers to the affected area is a part of the political mobilization for political benefits. Damage in one area is much less than another but the relief fund goes to the lesser damaged area for political benefits. It's not new to us, our ministers and representatives moving relief aid to their respective constituencies rather than the areas where it is needed regardless of the extent of the damage.

Crises are a determining factor in the construction of the narrative of politicians. In the circumstances of crisis, what politician does or says adds value to their political career because of the emotional factor.

In these situations, there is no social divide, there is no politics, no ideology. Natural disasters can boost a politician's image positively and it cannot hurt them. In other words, natural disasters can be a boon for politics, but also an opportunity for political leadership.

When all the parties should have focused on doing the relief work together, the leaders of the ruling party and opposition were fighting on nonsensical issues. These leaders are trying to get the political mileage from natural disasters while thousands of people were waiting for relief for several days under the open sky, under harsh rain and the sun. It was necessary to leave behind all other things to save the people first.

Most of the time humanitarian help and aid comes quickly and with great publicity. Then the aid will begin to be delayed by bureaucratic procedures in order to find a suitable way get to the disaster area. Meanwhile, many perishable provisions will be damaged. Another form of corruption is in distributions based on partisan preferences rather than the need of those affected. People who truly need help will not receive it. However, politicians and their cliques will have the cream of that help for themselves.

We do not have good experiences in reconstruction because when aid arrives, corruption arrives. However, the frequent disasters are not directly proportional to the number of lessons learned to improve the disaster management system.

A picture is worth a thousand words, especially when it is authentic and genuine. Citizens like to see their elected

representative with sleeves rolled up to the elbows and boots full of mud collecting debris and helping victims. It does not only add great value, it is a sincere, inspiring moment that generates the sense of hope and social cohesion to the victims and their families.

Our government is still struggling with immediate relief to save people where our disaster management mechanism is quite confused. There are lapses in every disaster. Politics seems to be derailing relief efforts. There should be no agenda other than to help the people. Political parties and NGO's are capitalizing on disasters like vultures feeding on carnage.

In times of natural disaster, like in every other country, people of Nepal also look up to the government for solutions but most of the time our politicians use disasters to further their political career for their vested interest.

Logistical problems also arise, and in many cases cannot be efficient in receiving donations and help. All this generates even more sufferings for the victims. People are assisted very little by the state and only receive some credit or materials to rebuild their homes, although in many cases receive nothing.

The destruction of the housing may have other major long-term impacts on a society. Health problems have short and long term consequences. Human society is being stressed by growing destructive or altering events of their quality of life, whether by causes of natural origin or created by human action.

Regardless of all these measures by the government, awareness for effective disaster management is the first condition, in which relief agencies can be brought to the affected areas immediately. If people are not aware of disasters, then terrible destruction becomes

the biggest obstacle in the way of relief. By providing the basic information needed to rescue people from the disaster areas, the damage caused by disasters can be reduced as much as possible. Proper communication, honest and effective leadership, planning and coordination, etc. are very important for disaster management.

Unclear coordination between agencies dealing with disasters can open up opportunities for corruption. Due to poor coordination, no one knows which areas have received assistance and which have not, especially if the delivery and receipt of assistance is not accompanied by proof of delivery and acceptance. This type of aid is very vulnerable to leakages and under the table issues, especially in the form of cash and the type of aid that can be cashed in the future. At the policy level, coordination issues can lead to overlapping policies, including policy goals. Disaster projects can be vulnerable to manipulation when the same project with different budgetary sources is implemented in the same target area.

Blaming others is not accepting your responsibility so pointing a finger at others is not the solution to your problems. The disaster must be faced, prevented, and minimized. There should be no other agenda than to help the people but political parties and NGO's are capitalizing on disaster. The political parties think natural disaster is a time for their politicians to shine. The politics behind natural disasters has gone too far. Let's not do politics with natural disasters. These disasters are a signal, telling us that there is still a higher force that controls us.

(The author is a lecturer and IT consultant. He also writes fiction under the name of Kapeed Joshi. He can be reached by email at [info@dipakjoshi.com.np](mailto:info@dipakjoshi.com.np).) ■

# Woes of Bus Conductors

Owning a private vehicle means having to pay 200 percent customs duty and facing the intermittent fuel crisis in Nepal. For individuals, including some who can afford to purchase their own vehicle, public transport continues to remain the preferred mode of transport- only preferring taxis for emergencies. Students, senior citizens, and differently able people get discounts on public transport. Getting to any point along the ring road, a 27-km Circular belt around the capital with fairly good radial connections to different areas, is the best way to manage travels and time. Naturally, that is what I do mostly. I prefer buses and micros. I come across many drivers and conductors along the routes I normally take. For me, they are important sources of knowledge to understand the reality of our society and the individuals within it. A driver concentrates on safely operating the vehicle whereas a conductor multitasks- raising fare from passengers, signaling the next halt, getting passengers in and out, and sometimes making peace between the driver and passengers when they get into heated arguments.

The bus routes have plenty of green flags or stickers indicating that Nepal is a child labor free zone. But most conductors in the buses that I travel around look well below 16. The reality comes as a stark contradiction to the slogans and stickers I see around.

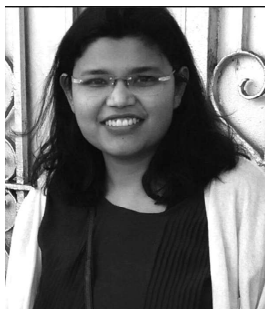
Two years ago, I took a bus from Ratnapark. It was winter, and at 7 PM, it was already dark. Once the bus began rolling toward the destination, a small group of women passengers began their casual conversations. Topics hopped from one to another, and suddenly the conductor became the issue. One of them asked him if he'd wanted to be a conductor since his childhood.

The conductor was a small kid of short-frame, not more than 4ft 5 inches. He had some marks on his face. Another passenger asked why he wasn't in school. There was no end to it although the boy looked visibly uncomfortable and irritated.

He had his own reason to do what he was doing. "How would I survive if I am not working", was his first response. He went on. "I am also responsible for looking after my family." The boy had a difficult childhood. His father was a drunkard and died in penury. "I ran away from home I am working as a conductor for the past six months now. If everything goes well and my luck favors me, I will be working as a driver abroad in future," he shared with them his past and future plans.

I remember bumping into him two years after that. He had his hair colored. He looked more confident and friendly while talking to other conductors of his age or less. "Where do you stay?", I asked. He told me that he used to sleep in a bus- where he would be vulnerable to numerous disturbances but now he could afford a room where he could sleep in peace. I asked him if he was enjoying his job. He said he was because, he was making Rs 500 per day- five times more than what he had been a couple years earlier.

I asked him how he feels when he sees children of his age working as conductors "I feel proud of myself. They still need



BY ABHILASHA SHARMA

their parent lap to sit, but I am the breadwinner of my house." It was now his turn to ask me questions. 'How much you earn'? I was a bit confused about how to respond to it, but he continued with his version. "Maybe I am earning more than +2 pass students can. The traffic police laugh at me when I say I am eighteen, and hopefully, within 6 months my voice will change and they may take it as more convincing proof of my age."

A 22-year-old started his career as a conductor 6 years ago in the small, blue colored vans. Within three months, he shifted to a white Zambo that ran along the narrow streets in the valley, that would raise his earning to Rs 500

per day. He then tried to learn more about vehicles and driving. The government was mulling the idea of prescribing minimum academic qualification---class ten--- to apply for the driving license.

His story was not very different from the boys we have come across on the streets and buses. He ran away from home in a remote village when he was 16. His efforts to locate some of his distant relatives in Kathmandu soon after he arrived did not work. And as survival became the first priority, he started looking for a job. He became a conductor in small vans that pay the lowest. He was not happy with what he was doing, but he knew his dream of becoming a driver in the future would suffer if he gave it up. He was furious when he learned that he needs to have studied at least up to class ten to apply for a driver's license. "The education system has failed to deliver efficient education job on one hand, and the skill on the other. If I can learn the skill through alternate way and earn my bread, why should the government come in the way?", he argues. driving is a practice and not class room work."

I happened to meet another teenager in a bus along the Bhaisepati-Ratnapark route. His fashion and gestures made it clear he was trying to look like a Hindi or a Nepali Cinema hero. He knew well how to see discount cards and handle the passengers. "Are you an adult?" "Yes, I am an adult. My little height may not give a real picture of my age. You must figure it out from my voice." This boy is fast and acts irritatingly smart at times. Whenever he sees the passengers on the way he rushes them into entering his vehicle and then tries to charge them more than the usual amount. "Have you ever been to a school?", I asked. "Yes, up to the 3rd grade. The bus driver and I make a good amount of money and I am happy in this profession. We have to give some amount to the owner of the vehicle daily. I still will be earning up to Rs 500+ a day. I really feel happy because I am in demand," he said.

Their struggle- complaints filed against them by their bosses through tip offs from colleagues is not uncommon. But they are essentially responsible members of their families, with a certain degree of social responsibility as well. Mocking them, asking them intrusive questions and giving them unsolicited advice is not helpful. Their lives, experience, and existence in buses are indicators of many failures of the government, their policies, and social welfare measures meant for Children and the unemployed. ■



## NEPAL

# Festival Fervor

*In a number of festivals celebrated in Nepal recently, the Teej stands out as the red festival for women to seek empowerment and pray for their family's prosperity*

As soon as I arrived in Nepal, I began to notice the fervor for festivals in Nepal. I heard about the cow festival and the festival of respecting brothers by sisters. Soon enough, I was actively participating in the Teej festival, which I prefer to call a red festival.

In the festival, women in red worship the lord Shiva, and Parbati. There was also an occasion to celebrate the birth anniversary of Ganesha, a son of Siva and Parbati. I had read a lot about different countries, cultures and religions, but I had rarely heard of the festival of women.

A week after the red festival, I also saw women dancing in Nepal's main city, celebrating their another



BY KATERINA PITHOVA

occasion, the Gaura Festival. Looking at the festivals coming every week, Nepal seems to be a country of festivals of different religions and

cultures.

## Teej Festival

Teej is the most popular festival celebrated mainly by women but even by girls in Nepal in the monsoon season. Women worship the Gods, in particular Goddess Parbati and Lord Shiva. Shiva is one of the trinity of the most important Hindu Gods, the destroyer of evil and transformer. He creates and protects the universe and every living being. In the course of the festival, women dance, fast and pray for a long life of their husband, for a strong and intact union between them, eventually for divine future husband of their daughter and unbound girls.

During the festival, the weather is a less important aspect. It doesn't matter whether it's windy, rainy, stormy or incredibly hot. In each case, you see crowds of women in red, undisturbed and vigorously dancing. For the festival, red is the typical dress. Red color represents wedding, the marriage. Colors which accompany red are green and yellow. Even these have their own significance. Celebration takes place in the monsoon period of the year, which makes crops to grow and entire Nepal is covered in green.

On this day, preparations start relatively early. Every detail must be perfect! Women put on make-up, do the hair, wear bangles and attach tikka



## COVER STORY

between the eyebrows. Married women wear red, unmarried can choose the color they prefer. Then comes the most important part of the outfit, kurta.

That way, we are prepared to go to the temple to hand in gifts to Shiva and take blessings in return. For this reason, we carry plate with apples, bananas, typical coloring, milk, flowers, incense and small amount of money.

There is a long queue before the temple consisting of glaring kurtas. Every woman waits for her turn to pray inside and devote her offering. After reaching the temple, I put the milk into a special vessel, which flows to Shiva's statue, and the rest of the sculptures around. Everywhere are flowers, rice, and pigment and sun rays. Next to the temple is an open space where there is an assembly of dancing people, who already finished their prayers. Besides dancing, they laugh, talk, make rituals, put tikka from

priest and take photos. As blessings the rice in red vermilion powder is placed on our forehead by older women, accompanied with money. Before leaving, I light fragrant stick, make a wish and let it burn next to the temple. At home, we eat apples and banana, eventually yoghurt and tea to at least gently reassure our grumbling stomach.

After a brief break it's time for dancing. Our path leads to another temple in which a big Teej celebration takes place every year. It's very crowdly there, people dance and do not perceive anything else. The place is blazing with energy and determination. Even rain, which suddenly starts, cannot stop us. Some people leave earlier, some of them stay all day. We rest, talk and in the evening, we finally deserve big ration of Dal Bhat. The music plays again until midnight, cheerfully, blithely and defiantly.

**And why fasting?**

Based on the legend, Parbati was daughter of King Himavat and Queen Mena. She was destined to marry God Shiva. The path to enthrall his heart wasn't easy. She realized penance and devotion were the only way. She meditated, without any drop of water neither food. After a few days, Shiva recognized she was reincarnated Goddess and married her. According to this love story, women fast, hoping for a divine husband as Parbati got.

The festival lasts for four days, but only three of them are the very specific ones. I had the amazing opportunity to experience and share the old custom with my Nepali host family who explained to me all the rituals on every single day. It helped me a lot to understand the culture, deeper meaning and purpose of doing so.

The first day is called Dar Khane Din, in which rice pudding is compulsory as a special food. This







day is significant mostly for married women who are invited to visit their maternal home by their brothers and to observe the tradition. Because parents of my family are far away, we stayed at home and spent the day with others. We cook food with neighbors for dinner all together, preparing huge amount of Dal Bhat and rice pudding. As a tradition, sister of my host father was invited for the dinner.

Laughing, smell of rice and vegetables fill the house very quickly. On this day a lot of food is prepared, as a presage of fasting the next, so everyone has to gather strength. For dancing, smiling and celebrating it is much more important than usually! We sit next to each other, eat delicious and typical food with hands and most importantly we converse. After dinner children dance and adults move to the living room to digest. Sometimes it's a very difficult task, today's food is greasier overall. Nepali believe just oily dishes can satisfy them enough for a long time so afterwards it's not that hard to keep up fasting the day after.

In the evening all neighborhood unites. Everyone meets on the corner,

brings food, drinks and music. Very loud festival music accompanies celebrating women and girls, others sit and encourage them. Around eleven is time to eat rice pudding, rejoicing is grueling. This day is long, the celebration continues until late at night. After midnight, the music stops and people go home to have some deserved rest.

The main day of Teej is the second day. It's a fasting day. Just for women. In some families it's taken as very rigid and strict, which means

spending entire day by dancing, singing without any food and furthermore without any drop of water! This day is dedicated just to festivity, except of the obligation to twice a day arrive home to cook food for husband.

However, more and more women perceive fasting in a more relaxed way. They can drink water, tea or milk and eat very light food, which includes fruits, vegetables, anything without salt. ■



# Labour Conundrum During Reconstruction

The annual exodus of able-bodied Nepali workers for work abroad has been blamed for the shortage of labour impeding post-earthquake reconstruction activities. But there is more to the labour shortage than meets the eye.

The massive destruction caused by the April 25, 2015 earthquake and the subsequent aftershocks that shook central Nepal necessitated reconstruction on an unprecedented scale. With almost 9,000 people dead and damages to more than 700,000 structures, reconstruction -including of private houses - was estimated to cost Rs 669 billion, which was Rs 51 billion more than the government budget allocated for the fiscal year when the disaster struck. The scale of destruction and the required recovery and reconstruction activities called for mobilising a large number of labourers.

The Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report had identified meeting the demand for skilled construction workers as a main challenge to smooth reconstruction. The same report estimated that the housing sector may need 17,500 masons, and the increased demand was supposed to create new employment opportunities while pushing wages up. Furthermore, the Post Disaster Recovery Framework (PDRF), prepared in 2016, also pointed out that housing reconstruction is likely to generate 322 million workdays of employment over the next five years. The report estimated peak demand to be around 0.54 million workers, which is a significant number compared to one million workers already involved in the construction sector. A large portion of the required labour was expected to be met by household members and new entrants. It is apparent from the reports and statements of government bodies and beneficiaries that the expectation did not translate into reality.

Given the massive outflow of labour from Nepal to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Malaysia, policymakers and commentators have blamed emigration for the labour crunch. Yet, official statistics on labour out-migration indicate this may not be the whole story. The number of Nepalis seeking jobs abroad has plummeted in the years since the earthquake. In 2014-15, on an average 1,400 individuals left the country per day. By 2016-17 the number has dropped to 1,100. It is possible that the reduced outflow of workers is not sufficient to meet the entire increase in demand for construction workers. It is also plausible that many of those who stayed back do not possess the skills required in the construction sector that are in short supply - for example, those related to masonry. This explanation would be consistent with the fact that most Nepali workers heading for the GCC countries and Malaysia are unskilled or semiskilled. There is a view that the immediate imperative of rebuilding one's own house, together with reconstruction-driven increased employment opportunities within the country, caused the slowdown in migration. However, one must note that the earthquake destroyed not just houses but also livelihoods, possibly making foreign employment and remittance income even more attractive, that the crippling blockade that started less than five months after the earthquake must have also stymied reconstruction activities, and that the slowdown of the economies of the oil-dependent destination countries in the past couple of years directly hit demand for Nepali workers. The point is: multiple factors are at work.

Domestically, labour shortage for reconstruction works does not mean that Nepal lacks spare workforce. According to the Annual



BY DIKSHYASINGH

Household Survey 2015-16 conducted by Central Bureau of Statistics, 82.7 per cent of the total population in Nepal is economically active and 80 per cent is employed in income-generating activities. The 80 per cent employment rate masks the disguised and underemployment, largely due to the seasonal nature of agriculture related jobs. Further, the 17.3 per cent that are not in the labour force include young individuals that are neither enrolled in educational institutions nor are working. They comprise 11.4 per cent of the youth (aged 15-24). There are thus 1.1 million youths that are not engaged in any income-generating activity. A policy measure is urgently needed to involve these youths in the workforce.

Shortage of materials and labour in the aftermath of a disaster is not unnatural, whether reconstruction efforts are fully financed by governments or the private sector. At the same time, the subsequent reconstruction boom is found to have a favourable impact on the domestic economy, including those directly affected by the disaster. The increased construction activities create employment opportunities while higher demand for labourers drives up wages - not only in the construction sector but also in other sectors. Nepal is no exception to this feature. Wages of skilled construction labourer increased from Rs 800 to Rs 1200, along with a similar rise in the wages of unskilled workers. Reconstruction has even shifted the pattern of migration. Many contractors started sourcing workers from far- and mid-western hills, who otherwise would be part of the seasonal migrants to India. Similarly, earlier women labourers hardly ventured into skilled works such as masonry or carpentry, but the labour crunch has prompted women to take up these jobs, which fetch higher earnings.

It is unfair to expect the government to fully finance the rebuilding and arrange for the labourers for that purpose. The government has clarified through its implementing agency - National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) - that it is providing a grant of Rs 300,000 for building earthquake-proof houses, and also technical support towards that end. Construction as per the set technical requirements requires skilled masons. Also, in order to provide livelihood support to the affected people, the

*Similarly, earlier women labourers hardly ventured into skilled works such as masonry or carpentry, but the labour crunch has prompted women to take up these jobs, which fetch higher earnings.*

government policy is to use labour-intensive and local technologies. According to NRA data, about 42,000 masons have been provided with long-term and short-term trainings. Moreover, many international organisations working in Nepal are also active in imparting skill training to aid the reconstruction. Despite these efforts, labour availability is still a major issue.

It is paradoxical that Nepal is facing shortage of labourers, yet youths remain out of the workforce and outmigration persists. Post-disaster reconstruction and recovery could potentially have been a turning point for Nepal to start weaning itself off remittances. Reconstruction could have prompted self-sustained job creation domestically, imparting skills to workers and helping them find gainful employment long after the reconstruction is over. However, failure even to retain the workers within the country that are trained particularly for reconstruction has hampered the pace of reconstruction and does not augur well for Nepal's economic future. This calls for reviewing Nepal's post-disaster labour management policy, as the earthquake is not the first major disaster to strike Nepal and it is unlikely that it will be the last one.

Singh is a Research Officer of South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE)



## POST-QUAKE SINDHUPALCHWOK

# Migration, Trafficking Surge

*At a time when district administrations, civil society organizations and law enforcement agencies are focusing on reconstruction, human trafficking and migration is rampant in Sindhupalchwok following the quake. Historically known for its high rate of migration and human trafficking, the earthquake has further accelerated the incidents results in the lack of manpower for reconstruction*

BY KIRAN BHATTARAI IN  
CHAUTARA,  
SINDHUPALCHWOK

**B**udan Tamang, 34, and Budari, 29, a couple, of Duwachaur in Melamchi, Sindhupalchwok were spotted at the District Administration Office at Chautara Sangachowkgadhi Municipality on the third week of Nepali month Bhadra. The couple had visited the DAO to procure passports with the plan to go to foreign land for a job.

Budari is a former migrant worker, who worked as a domestic helper in Kuwait for the past two and a half years. However the couple is planning to toil in a foreign land again following a nasty turn their life took when the devastating quake struck. Their house was damaged completely in the disaster.

They have to pay the debt they had borrowed to build a new concrete house, and they have a

plan that they would earn money and pay back the debt by toiling in a foreign land.

Back the time when Budari worked in Kuwait, she had shouldered the responsibility to support for her four children and a husband back home with the earning she would make there, as her husband was jobless then.

She could not make a good earning in the country however.



Budan and Budari Tamang from Sindhupalchwok



Rupdas Tamang waiting for reconstruction

Back home, her husband materialized their plan to build a concrete house with the money she had sent from Kuwait, and he also borrowed some money for the project. The house costs Rs 450,000. The newly built house could not last long however. Not more than one month since the house was built, it was destroyed in the quake, adding to the sufferings of the family.

That incident did not deter the determined couple however. They again tried to rise beyond the problems the quake caused to them,

and erected a new concrete house by taking out a loan. They took out a loan of approximately Rs 800,000 to construct the new house.

This time around, both the couple is planning to venture into a foreign land for a job. "We both desire to work for the same company. It would be better and easier for both of us to work at the same company," said Budan.

Budari also desires to work for a company, instead of as a housemaid, a job she did previously while in Kuwait.

The couple has received the first tranche of Rs 50,000 the government had announced to the quake victims to build a new house. The couple has a plan to keep their 13-year-old son and seven-year-old daughter in a school hostel before they go to a foreign land for a job.

#### **Disappearance and Trafficking**

As numbers of quake survivors leaving for foreign employment increases, the disappearance of people especially women and children from Sindhupalchok district is reportedly on the rise over the months since the 7.8 magnitude earthquake of April 25, 2015. The quake killed nearly 9,000 people, and injured about 22,000 others. The disappeared are suspected to have been trafficked.

According to government estimate, 8,856 were killed, and 22,309 others injured in the disaster, with Sindhupalchok mostly affected out of the total 14 quake hit districts. A total of 3,532 died from the district alone, and 1,573 were injured, while 63,885 private houses were destroyed completely and 2,751 partially.

The intensity of the complaints is negligible however. The number of the complaints against human



District Administration Office, Sindhupalchok

trafficking is put at two each in the fiscal years 2071\072 and 2072\073. Only one complaint was lodged in the FY 2073\074.

The police blame the negligible number of the complaints on the provision that a complaint will be filed from the same district where an incident of human trafficking occurs or the arrest is made. "The number of the complaints against human trafficking is negligible due to the provision," said Superintendent of Police Mohan Pokharel.

"So we cannot say anything whether those disappeared after the quake are all trafficked or not. We are conducting investigations," he said.

Some of those disappeared might be working in foreign countries, he said, adding that while some of disappeared children have left home post-quake and are working in manual jobs in Kathmandu.

The district is ahead of cases of human trafficking, according to available data. Harikala Bhatta,

representative of Shakti Samuha Nepal working in the field of women trafficking said human trafficking is on the rise in the district. There are incidents of women being lured and trafficked to India and the Gulf, she said, adding that in some cases, women victims of the quake are made unconscious through various means before trafficking them into India. The Samuha has established a rehabilitation centre for trafficked people where 12 trafficked persons are taking shelter at present.

According to the police, a total of 181 cases of human trafficking occurred in the FY 2071\072, 212 in the FY 2072\073, and 227 in the FY 2073\074 in the district.



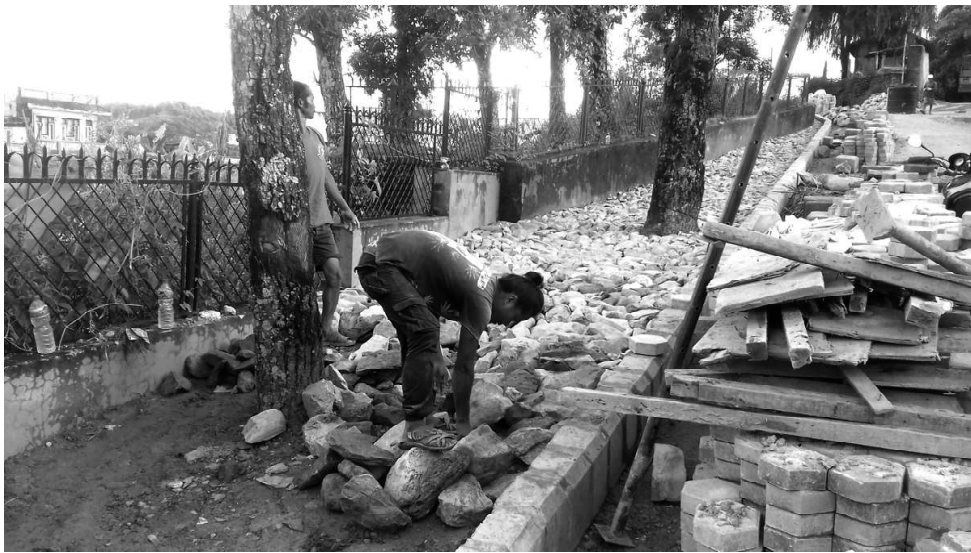
women in livelihood practice

Of the total 70 disappeared



Women in reconstruction work





from the district in the FY 2071\072 following the quake (35 women, 22 girl children, and 13 boy children), the status of only 21 has been found so far, the police said.

Of a total of 75 disappeared from the district in the FY 2072\073 (45 women, 23 girl children, and seven boy children), the whereabouts of only 21 have been traced so far.

Likewise, the total 91 were disappeared in the FY 2073\074 (55 women, 21 girl children, and 15 boy children).

A total of 710 government office buildings have been damaged

completely in the quake, while 37 partially. According to 2068 B.S. Census, the populace of the district is 287,798 from 60,042 households. The figure constitutes 138,351 men, and 149,447 women.

#### **Lack of manpower for reconstructions**

The closure of the Tatopani point bordering northern neighbor China following damage by the quake has taken away jobs of many people of the district, as they heavily depend on the border point for their livelihood through various means like trade.

In this setback, most of the locals especially youths have opted for foreign employments for their livelihood, while others have gone to major cities like Kathmandu in search of a job. Some others are engaged in business at Rasuwa border point.

As a result of this outflow of the locals in search of job opportunities, the district lacks manpower for post-quake reconstructions underway at present. Although the villages are making do with whatever the populace is left in the villages for the reconstructions, city area is struggling to find human resources. In city areas, a huge workforce engaging in the reconstructions is outside of the district, said a construction worker.

"I am engaged in the reconstructions for the past one and a half months," said Dipendra BC from Panchapure Municipality in Surkhet. He earns Rs 800 a day (excluding food), he said. "I enjoy work back home, rather than go to foreign countries for a job. I will be with my family in need, and during festivals



Two migrant laborers in Chautara



devi kumari shreshth in her new house

ready to work for less than that amount however," he said.

Despite the inflow of hundreds of construction workers into the district for the post quake reconstructions, the construction entrepreneurs have complained that they still lack construction workers.

**Earning made in foreign land contributes to building house back home**

However, migration is also contributing to accelerate the building house back better. Devi Kumari Shrestha of Chautara Sangachowkgadhi Municipality took a great financial help from her son working in Dubai at present in building a new concrete house after her house was

damaged in the quake.

Her son Umesh sent approximately Rs 1.2 million to construct the house. Earlier Umesh also worked in Malaysia for three years.

Rama Shrestha in the locality

also built a new house recently with the money sent by her son, who is working in Malaysia at present.

But other villagers in the locality are not lucky enough like Devi Kumari and Rama, who had erected their new houses on their own after their houses damaged in the quake.

"I received Rs 50,000 the government has provided in housing grant. The grant was spent on repairing the damaged house. Now, I do not have money enough to erect a new house," said Uddhav Bahadur Karki.

Likewise, another local resident Lekh Bahadur Khatri built a new house at the cost of Rs 500,000. He received Rs 100,000 as part of a housing grant, and the rest money he had borrowed.

So far the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) has reached an agreement with the total 635,296 of 765,618 households, whose houses have been damaged in the quake, to provide a maximum of Rs 300,000 to each household in housing grant. And of the grant, 65,528 households received the first tranche of Rs 50,000, while 65,879 got the second tranche and 3,927 the third tranche.

According to the NRA, construction of 121,754 houses is underway as part of the reconstruction.

that is enough for me," he said.

The locals have complained however that their employment as a construction worker has been at risk as those construction workers outside of the district are taking over. Moreover they are ready to compromise on as low as wages.

"Those construction workers outside of the district are easily available to work for only Rs 500 or Rs 600 each a day far less than the wages the locals take for the same job, and for the same amount of time. This has risked our jobs," complained a local construction worker Dinesh Ghale.

Not only in construction work, people outside of the district, are engaging in other jobs like road construction. President of the Sindhupalchok Construction Entrepreneurs' Association Nildhwaj Thapa said that workers outside the district are a priority as they are skilled and ready to work for as low as wages. "Unskilled workers from the district are reluctant to work for less than Rs 1,000 each a day. Skilled worker outside of the district are



Still in temporary shelter

## NEW SPOTLIGHT INVESTIGATION

tions.

In Sindhupalchok, an agreement has been reached with 75,304 households for the housing grant, while 75,192 households received the first tranche of Rs 50,000, 11,070 the second tranche and 568 the third tranche, according to the NRA.

### **Quake survivors crying for housing grant to build new house**

Suntali Maya Tamang, 60, of Chautara Sangachowkgadhi Municipality was found recently engaging in a construction work in the locality.

Tamang, whose house was destroyed in the quake, has yet to build a new house for herself however for want of enough money.

"I have not received any grant provided by the government for the quake victims," she complained.

Similar is the story of another local Rupdas Tamang, 65, who has yet to build a new house after his house was damaged in the disaster.

"I received the first tranche of Rs 50,000 provided by the government in housing grant, which has been deposited into my wife's bank

account," he said. As the process of distribution of grant involve so many complications and the amount allocated by the NRA is inadequate to reconstruct the house, young people are fleeing the country. "Had both of us are young, we would have left the village long back to make the money," said Rupdas Tamang. "How can you make your home in Rs.50,000.00? asked Tamang." There are no more young people in the village as some have migrated to urban cities and those who can afford the money migrated to India or Gulf."

### **Generation of job opportunities back home**

Expert in foreign employment Dr Ganesh Gurung said the number of people going for foreign employment has decreased after job opportunities in the post quake reconstructions have been created back home.

"There is an assumption that earning is high in a foreign land, which is not true in most cases. Many may make good money back home as well," he said.

According to the Department of Foreign Employment, a total of 512,087 people had received labor permit for foreign employment in the FY 2071\072, while 401,713 in the FY 2072\073, and 398,978 in the FY 2073\074. The figure outnumbered women migrant workers, and Sindhupalchok tops the number going for foreign employment after Jhapa.

The number of women being taken to foreign countries through illegal channels is rampant in Sindhupalchok as well, according to available data. With the rampant poverty, ineffective enforcement, lack of opportunity, people are fleeing home hoping to secure better employment. As there is rampant migration, there is a highly possibility to trap the people in the net of trafficking.

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Elders are taking burden

## TAXI FOR EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS

# Hasty Help

*The decision to provide 1500 taxi cabs to the families of earthquake victims has failed to prevent foreign migration as it had aimed to do*

By A CORRESPONDENT

**T**wenty five year old Ram Krishna Shrestha of Salyanpur Tar of Dhading District was happy when his father's name was randomly selected on a lottery from 150,000 applicants. Shrestha, who was considering foreign employment, found a respite.

However, his relief did not last long -- he found the amount of money required to invest to purchase the car was huge. With the limited income, Shrestha's family was unable to invest 1.5 million rupees in a car. Instead they decided to sell the number plate to an agent in a secret settlement. Shrestha declined to disclose the amount but it is reported that he might have sold it in the range of 400,000 to 600,000 rupees.

"As we are already in loan to reconstruct the house, who would pay the additional burden of loan?" asked said Shrestha, who is now waiting for his ticket from Dubai.

The story of 32 years old Gyalde Ghale of Haku village of Rasuwa district is similar. Although his name was also selected through the random lottery, Ghale was unable to invest the money required to purchase the car.

"I signed all the documents necessary to register the taxi and transferred it to the person who purchased it," said Ghale.

Shrestha and Ghale are only two examples. Many others are in the same situation.

With an aim to create employment opportunities in the country for quake victims and prevent them from foreign migration, the government introduced the taxi scheme. However the scheme has fallen flat, as a large number of such victims, after acquiring the taxi permits, have been transferring the ownership of their cabs immediately after getting it registered with the government office.

Almost every second household in the earthquake affected zone has at least one family member working in a

foreign country. Experts say that this has profound effects on reconstruction.

However, migration expert Ganesh Gurung has a different opinion. He argued migration to Gulf and other countries is also helping the

of earthquake victims to make the investment in purchasing the vehicle. According to Bagmati Transport Management Office BIMO, almost 700 earthquake victims, who recently acquired the taxi permits, have already transferred



reconstruction. "About 7.4 percent households reported that at least one family member migrated in the one year period before earthquake who did not return after earthquake. About 4.4 percent migrants, who did not return, did send the remittance to cope with the crisis after the earthquakes," said Gurung, presenting a paper on the impact of earthquake on migration, in a program organized by SWATEE.

Showing the above scenario, the government is trying to justify its decision. However, the decision itself promoted internal migration. Those who have the economic capability to invest in the taxi cabs will be compelled to migrate to Kathmandu and drive taxi.

#### Taxi Again

As a car costs almost 1.6 million rupees, it is impossible for a majority

of the ownership of their vehicles.

Due to their failure to withstand the financial burden of buying taxis, earthquake victims are searching for investors to purchase the taxi and transferring the ownership of the cab after taking some commission.

In an open market, new taxi permit acquirers are taking commission amounting to almost Rs 500,000.00-600,000.00 while transferring the vehicle's ownership to the actual investor.

"Though we have the legal provision that one cannot buy or sell vehicle number plates and permits, there is no law that prohibits the acquirer of new taxis from transferring the vehicle's ownership," said Basanta Adhikari, head of Small and Big Vehicle Division at BTMO.

BTMO officials said a large





Basanta Adhikari

number of quake survivors who had been granted new taxi permits were aged above 60 - the age-group for which banks and financial institutions are reluctant to issue loans.

Adhikari admitted that the scheme was launched without enough groundwork. While launching the scheme, the authorities failed to properly disseminate information to quake victims that the government was not giving away free taxis but only free number plates and route permits.

"This is a policy decision taken by the ministry. The department has just facilitated between government and earthquake victims," said Dr. Toka Raj Pandey, spokesperson for DoTM. "The aim is to prevent foreign migration of earthquake victims."

According to the scheme, the DoTM sets the quota. The districts, Kavrepalanchowk, Nuwakot and Ramechhap, received 201, 125 and 165 respectively. Similarly, earthquake victims of Dolakha, Sindhuli and Sindhupalchowk received 214, 46 and 253 respectively.

Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Makawanpur, Dhading, Okhaldhunga, Rasuwa and Gorkha receive 496 taxi permits with earthquake victims of Dhading receiving the highest number of taxi permits (117).

Quake victims of Okhaldhunga and Rasuwa received the least taxi permits (30 each). The department had received a total of 25,000

applications for taxi permits from quake survivors of Sindhupalchowk district alone.

Prabesh Shrestha, a winner of taxi permit and a quake victim of Ramechhap district, holds the view that the government should have gifted quake victims a cow or a buffalo or different agricultural tools, which would help them to sustain their life in their own localities.

Although the government has its own rationale behind the move, the results did not justify their cause. If one looks at the recent migration report of these earthquake affected districts, what one can find is that the number of people leaving for foreign migration is growing. It was a

haphazard decision and the results are also haphazard.

Taxi numbers were provided with an objective to prevent the foreign migration of earthquake victims. However, many victims are using the money to go to foreign countries after getting the money from the sale of taxi. The flawed cabinet decision resulted in more flaws.

Even the people from Kavre, Sindhupalchowk, Makwanpur, Gorkha and Dhading, who had secured the taxi permits, permanently migrated to Kathmandu.

According to the information officer for the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport Information Office, Bishnu Prasad Sharma, Under Secretary at the Ministry, the government had taken the decision with a good intention to prevent foreign migration and help the earthquake victims secure their livelihood.

Due to the cabinet decision, there is a restriction for import of taxis in Kathmandu. Before the earthquake of 2015, there were 10,000 taxis in Kathmandu. After the earthquake, the government has already added additional 2500 more, taking the figure to 12,500.

This shows how flawed decision can bring more flaws as a result.

*This publication has been supported by The Asia Foundation. The contents of this publication reflect the views of the author(s), researcher(s), and contributing editor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Asia Foundation. ■*



Ram Bahadur Basnet, a taxi owner



# Thai Food Is Like Playing Chess

On behalf of the Royal Thai Embassy, it is my honor to welcome all of you at the Opening Ceremony of the Thai Food Gala to showcase authentic Thai cuisine and culture, which has now gained popularity worldwide.

The Thai Food Gala today is held in accordance to the Royal Thai Government's policy "Thai Kitchen to the World," which aims to provide a genuine experience of Thai food and culture to our friends all over the world including our Nepali friends. We strongly believe that the taste of our finest cuisine and the original touch of our cultural performance tonight, will allow you to feel more Thainess and know a little more about Thailand.

What makes Thai cuisine so special is simply like what David Thompson, a Michelin star's chef and an expert in Thai cuisine, said during his interview with the Guardian that "Thai food is like playing chess." It is the unique blend and balance of tastes consisting of spiciness, saltiness, sourness, and sweetness emphasized by all the fresh and aromatic Thai ingredients. Also, the combination of Thai herbs such as galangal, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, coriander and bird's eye chili, really make all of the Thai dishes delectable and beneficial for our health.

I am proud to inform you that recently 5 Thai dishes - Tom Yum Kung, Pad Thai, Som Tam or papaya salad, Massaman Curry and Green Curry have been ranked among the World's 50 Best Foods by CNN Travel readers on its Facebook poll. This is a concrete proof of how Thai cuisine has come to the forefront of the global culinary. I am delighted that all of you are interested to learn how to cook Thai dishes properly as every Thai dish is unique and has its own charm.

The first three dishes will be served tonight and you can enjoy the other 2 dishes during the next three days at the Thai Buffet corner of Sunrise Restaurant in this hotel. All of these



BY BHAKAVAT TANSKUL

deeper understanding of Thailand and Thainess and become a friend of us, Friend of Thailand.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Hotel Yak & Yeti for partnering with us in making this event successful. My gratitude also goes to our 3 Thai chefs from Suan Dusit International Culinary School, Bangkok, for preparing the delicious dinner tonight, as well as our 7 Thai performers from Bunditpatanasilpa Institute for their beautiful show.

This event is held in accordance to the Royal Thai Government's policy "Thai Kitchen to the World," which strives to promote a deeper

understanding of Thai cuisine and culture to all countries around the world, including our dear friend like Nepal, where the popularity of Thai cuisine has tremendously increased over the past years.

I hope by the end of the demonstration, you will gain knowledge and skills in cooking authentic Thai dishes that will be useful for your work and culinary career.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Hotel Association Nepal (HAN), Nepal-Thailand Friendship Co-operation Society, as well as Hotel Annapurna, for the collaboration in making this event possible. My gratitude also goes to our 3 Thai chefs from Suan Dusit International Culinary School, Bangkok for their cooking demonstration.

On behalf of the Royal Thai Embassy, I would like to thank the Hotel Association Nepal (HAN), Nepal-Thailand Friendship Cooperation Society, and Restaurant and Bar Association of Nepal (REBAN) for hosting the event and for collaboration in organizing the cooking demonstration at Hotel Annapurna this afternoon. I hope all participants enjoyed the demonstration and gained some useful skills and tips of cooking some authentic Thai dishes.

Nepal and Thailand have been officially friends for 58 years. Thai people stood by our Nepali friends during the hard time of



Thai dishes are testaments of the intricacy, attention to detail, texture, color, aroma, and combined tastes of our Thai cuisine which attracts the taste buds of people from everywhere in the world.

Apart from the authentic Thai cuisine that you will have the chance to try tonight, you will also witness traditional Thai cultural performance with colorful and delicate costumes, portraying the distinct history of Thailand, stories of our culture and society as well as the lives of the Thais in the countryside. I highly encourage all of you not to miss the miniature puppet show which is an extract of a selected episode, derived from the Hindu epic, Ramayana.

I hope that through the authentic taste of Thai food and traditional Thai cultural performance tonight, you will have a

the earthquake 2 years ago. We know each other through culture, religious belief and tourism. The event today is another way to forge closer bond of friendship through food. The Royal Thai Embassy organizes this event in accordance with the Thai Government's policy of "Thai Kitchen to the World," aiming to promote Thai food and culture to every country possible. We strongly believe that people-to-people contact is one of the effective ways to promote closer relationship between two countries. Food is a part of our culture. The better you know about Thai food means the better you know about us, your Thai friend. Or we can call that this is our Thai Food Diplomacy.

(Bhakavat Tanskul is ambassador of Thailand to Nepal. Excerpts of his statement delivered at two different programs held in Hotel Yak and Yeti and Hotel Annapurna.) ■

# Solar Lights Brighten The Lives Of Refugees And Host Communities

DAMAK - As the sun goes down, 21-year-old Phanindra Ghimire, a local resident of Damak Municipality, walks past a gravel road and checks the battery and sensors of a solar-grid installed along the roadside of Beldangi Refugee Camp.

"I visit the camp at least once every week to make sure that the solar lights are functioning properly," said Phanindra, who was appointed as one of the Energy Ambassadors since November 2016 and looks after the mini-grid solar-powered street light system.

He is one of 12 selected Energy Ambassadors (7 from the host community and 5 from the refugee community), responsible for the maintenance and management of the camp lighting system.

With funding support from the IKEA Foundation and technical assistance from Engineers Without Borders (EWB-USA), UNHCR introduced the solar street lights project. Not only has the project created a sustainable and environmentally friendly energy



BY DEEPESH DAS SHRESTHA

source, but the lights have contributed to creating a safe environment for refugees and local residents to live, study, and pursue brighter futures.

Some 15,000 refugees and local residents, are benefitting from enhanced security and harmonious relations as a result of the public lighting project, which is part of UNHCR's Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE) Strategy.

As of June 2017, a total of 116 solar street lights have been installed along a 4 kilometer area, which includes both internal camp roads as well as host community perimeter roads surrounding the camp. An additional 132 sets of lights will be installed by the end of this year, which will cover another 4 kilometers.

Nepal is among one of the 10 countries, selected for the implementation of the SAFE programme - a global inter-agency initiative focused on supporting sustainable and environmentally friendly access to appropriate energy sources in humanitarian contexts.

The solar lights project began as a pilot project in





## DEVELOPMENT

from the communities illustrate that the solar lights have contributed to addressing the day-to-day challenges faced by refugees and local communities - creating substantial and lasting changes in the areas of health, education, livelihoods, and sustainable energy practices.

According to refugees living in the camp, wild elephants used to roam the nearby forest and sometimes entered the camp, destroying refugee huts,

"It has been a huge relief for us," said Pasang. "The lights have prevented wild elephants from entering inside the camp."

With the solar light installation, residents and refugees alike feel more secure. Livelihoods have also improved for nearby shop owners,

who are now able to stay open for longer due to the lighting system.

Sanmaya Tamang, 35, who runs a small grocery shop echoed similar sentiments as that of Pasang.

"Before there were lights, the road used to be deserted as early as 6 in the evening," said Sanmaya. "Nowadays I open my shop until 8 and sometimes even 9. It is good for my business as well," Sanmaya said, smiling.

"These days I am able to walk alone without any fear even during the night time. It has become easy to take people to the nearest health post when they fall sick or in case of emergencies at night," she added.

"Even my children play until late evening and I don't have to go out to look after them after dark," she said.

"Compared to our yesteryears, we feel much more relaxed and safe these days." ■

2015, targeting refugees from Bhutan. During the first phase of the project, solar lights were installed in areas where essential services were being provided. Solar lights were also placed at the entrances to the camps in order to enhance security. In phase two of the project, lights were installed along periphery roads between the host community and the camps. The ongoing third phase extends into residential areas by lighting cross points along the path leading to the main roads which connect the two communities.

Through on-the-job training during the installation process, the energy ambassadors are now equipped with the technical knowledge, skills and toolkits to sustainably maintain the system in the longer term.

"We work together with local energy ambassadors on a regular basis to coordinate and manage the functioning of the communal lighting," said Pasang Tamang, 39, Energy Ambassador from the refugee community.

"When there is heavy rain and strong wind, we often come to check and make sure the lights are working properly," said Pasang. "We would not have been successful without close collaboration with the locals."

Before the lights were installed, both refugees and local communities faced many challenges and felt unsafe walking on the road. Activities were severely limited as people rushed to their homes before dark to avoid possible robbery and violence. Especially for women and girls, walking after dark, visiting neighbours, and going to nearby toilets was problematic. Testimonies



# In A Galaxy Far Far Away

How many of you, like me, have been having bad dreams lately? How can people whom we call 'the older generation' not have bad dreams? Medical scientists, bless them, have made it possible for even those of us with shocking arrays of genes and heedless habits, to survive beyond the three score years and ten promised. For those of you in parts of the world which have not heard this promise, it's a promise given to the people of the book (Jews, Christians, and Muslims) and passed on through Abraham, the great patriarch, that we will survive for threescore years and ten. Everything more than that is a gift and everything less is a disappointment to be accompanied by comments such as 'It's no age is It?' The greatest shame is that whenever I have been on this earth, the aforesaid people of the book, themselves, seem to have gone out of their way to obliterate populations of their fellow people of the book. Is it any wonder that they find themselves targetted by the ROW (Rest of the world) sometimes?

Well no, it isn't. Leaving out the section of the world to which I do belong, let me say from the start that I am living right now where I do not belong, but I must say I am happy to be where I supposedly do not belong and feel comfortable inside my heart and soul and kurey face! In fact I'm wiser now than I would have been had I stayed back where I started, which now seems like a galaxy far far away.

The only thing that disturbs me is that people in our neck of the woods will become embedded in the 'them and us' game that for decades and even centuries justified the colonisation of others' lands and the enslavement of their peoples to benefit from the resources that were not for 'us' to take.

Last month a BBC documentary shown on the occasion of the release of government archives gave us all an eye-opening run down of Britain's role in slavery. You can now look up the role your ancestors in slavery. The labour of countless men, women and children paid for the adornment of the stately homes of England. They were fed, but never paid and at the end of each month they didn't get a pay packet and the chance of a night on the town but rather were shoved back in the huts provided as dwellings by quite often cruel masters.

When a slave woman had a baby, it became the property of the master, later to work for him or be sold on and the money kept by him.

It was trafficking in people at the lowest level and greed of the highest order. The justification was that the black races were less evolved than the white which, of course is a load of bunkum. The most astounding thing about this whole period of European history- because enslaving the colonised was not confined to the British- was that when colonial countries gradually freed the slaves, after arduous campaigners placed bill after bill through their countries' legislatures, in Britain for example the price for ending slavery was financial compensation. Not to the slaves of course but



BY GRETA RANA

to the owners. A very interesting file on Internet lists all the slave-owners of Britain and how much compensation they received for freeing their slaves. Some were widows who regarded their late husband's slaves as their rightful 'pension' and copious amounts of petitions were received at the office for settlement. It is to the credit of the abolitionists and those assigned to carry out the settlement that they proved as retractable in carrying out this duty as in carrying out any other.

Then of course followed the horrors of war, which today provide plenty of fodder for films. Trudging through the devastation of WW1 and the high promise of it being the war to end all wars but then, however, coming to WW2 and the Holocaust which neofascists claim never took place. Many of us, however, were born 2/3rds of the way through and watched owl-eyed as children, not unlike ourselves, were accommodated in huts with corrugated roofing; but which did have some washing facilities away from the living quarters. For some they were unwelcome, for the rest of us a curiosity to absorb within our neighbourhoods and schools. We forged friendships then that at this point is lasting as long as we are.

But wars and disagreements haven't ended. My student years were filled with China attacking India, the Cuba crisis, the fear of the supreme Soviet and Stalinism. Those were grim days indeed although we filled them with the forced happiness of protest songs and rock and roll. The biggest fear and unknown was always the 'bomb', who would start the nuclear war and how would we survive it? During the Cuban missile crisis, Americans built fall-out shelters; others had their old bomb shelters in backyards. Behind all this

was the fear of what nuclear radiation could do. Behind all the blithe British jokes about papering the pantry with newspapers or 'If you haven't understood all the civil defence instructions just jump into a brown paper bag and hope long to your local civil defence officer and he will tell you exactly what to do!'

As we watch Iraq and Syria fall apart on our television screens; as we see Yemeni children suffering from Kwashiorkor and starvation symptoms reminiscent of Belsen and Buchenwald; as we watch Rohingya babies being carried strapped to their parents from Myanmar; and as we watch cinema depict the lives of slum children in South Asia; or the sad painful lives of daughters enslaved into prostitution; or small boys neutered to provide incomes to the lowest, mean minds on earth, isn't it time we all came together in the names of our many gods and promise ourselves, in our thousands, millions, and billions----- no more, no more, NO MORE. Let's bring that far away galaxy to earth at last!

*\*\* A famous recording made by David Frost and his Beyond the Fringe team in the 1950s. ■*

*When a slave woman had a baby, it became the property of the master, later to work for him or be sold on and the money kept by him.*