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**OPINION**  
Binoj Basnyat



**FORUM**  
Bharat Raj Paudyal



**VIEWPOINT**  
Arnaud Cauchois

# NEW SPOTLIGHT

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May.- 20, 2022  
FORTNIGHTLY



## GBIA Linking Buddhist Land

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**LOCAL POLLS**  
NEPALI CONGRESS LEAD



**MODI'S LUMBINI VISIT**  
SEARCH FOR COMMONALITIES



**'OTHER' COMMISSIONS**  
IN A HAZE



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१२.०३%

ब्याजदर

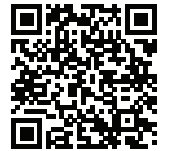
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## Notes From The Editor



From the beginning of the project to its end, Gautam Buddha International Airport (GBIA) faced major obstructions, including the earthquake of 2015, trade disruptions, dispute with contractors and Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, seventy-four years after the operation of first international Airport in Kathmandu, Nepal got GBIA, a second international airport in Bhairahawa, close to the birthplace of Gautam Buddha, in operation. Financed by Asian Development Bank and OPEC, the project reached to a point of collapse due to several reasons. Thanks to the hard efforts of Asian Development Bank, persuading Nepal government for the economic benefits GBIA will bring, the government renegotiated with the contractor and resumed the work. After inauguration by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, GBIA has embarked on a route of enormous and strategic advantage to Nepal. With the second international airport in operation, it will likely contribute to economic development through tourism. Thus, GBIA is our cover story for this issue.

Putting issues of differences aside, Nepal and India started discussions on points of agreement to warm up bilateral relations. The recent visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Lumbini on the auspicious occasion of Buddha Jayanti is significant for further strengthening the bilateral relations. Nepal and India are politically two separate independent countries. However, both the countries share same civilization, religion and culture and same geography. Our root of civilization is one. The visit to birthplace of Gautam Buddha by PM Modi is a significant event to show our common interests. Although Gautam Buddha was born in Nepal, his three most important pilgrimage places lie in India, including the place of Enlightenment Bodhi Gaya, place of sermon Sarnath and attainment of Nirvana or death in Kushinagar. These four places are integrated with each other in Buddhism and all are equally important. This tells how religion integrates closely Nepal and India. Along with these two events we also cover other important issues for this edition.

**Keshab Poudel**

Editor



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# Nepal Has Consistently Supported Israel's Right To Live In Peace



BY: BHARAT RAJ PAUDYAL

It is my honour to be part of this celebration of Nepal-Israel friendship. Thank you, Ambassador Hennan Goder, for organizing this event today to mark the sixty-two years of our diplomatic ties.

We were preparing to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> year of Nepal- Israel diplomatic relations two years ago. However, it was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Back in 1960, Nepal and Israel decided to formalize our diplomatic relations, acting with extraordinary vision and far-sightedness.

Nepal was among the first countries in Asia, and the first in South Asia, to recognize the State of Israel. We were also the only country in the region for many years to host the residential Embassy of Israel in Kathmandu.

Having emerged from such historical context, our relations have now received over six decades of careful nurturing and hence, do have solid foundation.

We have built on our goodwill towards each other and expanded areas of cooperation to make them meaningful.

We have appreciated that ours is the unique connection between the highest point on earth, namely Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) and the lowest point, namely the Dead Sea.

Be it the 2015 earthquakes or more recent Covid-19 pandemic, the government and people of Israel have generously extended their helping hands to Nepal in difficult times for which we remain grateful.

Our relations today encompass the ever-expanding areas of cooperation ranging from employment, human resources development, education to agriculture and energy. Israel is one of the sought-after destinations of foreign employment for Nepali youths.

Cooperation in agriculture continues to be one of the flagship collaborations. The planned operationalization

of agriculture centers of excellence in Nepal will be crucial to transfer the state-of-art technology to modernize Nepal's agriculture sector and provide employment and earning to our youths.

Establishment of Bilateral Consultation Mechanism between our two foreign ministries in 2016 has provided a platform for regular, structured and forward-looking conversation.

Nepal desires to move further ahead and expand its engagement with Israel in the areas of trade, investment, transfer of technology as well as tourism and people-to-people linkage. There exist tremendous potentials in all these sectors.

We are happy to see the great strides Israel has made in the front of scientific invention and technological edge. We wish Israel and its friendly people continued success and prosperity

in the days to come.

Nepal has consistently supported Israel's right to live in peace within secure and defined international boundaries. We have also been supportive of the initiatives taken over the years in the direction of sustainable peace in the Middle East. As a peace-loving nation, Nepal always welcomes every step towards peace through dialogue and diplomacy.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the government and people of Israel as they celebrated, just a few days ago on 4-5 May 2022, their Independence Day according to the Hebrew calendar.

Bharat Raj Paudyal is the Foreign Secretary of Nepal. Excerpts of the statement delivered on the occasion of 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Nepal and Israel on May 10, 2022.



## NEWSNOTES

### Naveen Srivastava Appointed India's Ambassador To Nepal

The Government of India has appointed Naveen Srivastava as its Ambassador to Nepal.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced the appointment of seasoned diplomat Naveen Srivastava a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid a visit to Lumbini in Nepal.

Srivastava, a 1993 batch Indian Foreign Service (IFS), is currently serving as additional secretary in the MEA.

Vinay Mohan Kwatra, who became foreign secretary over two weeks ago, was serving as India's envoy to Nepal before his appointment.

"Naveen Srivastava, presently Additional Secretary in the ministry, has been appointed as the next Ambassador of India to Nepal. He is expected to take up the assignment shortly," the MEA said in a brief statement.

In his capacity as additional secretary in the east Asia division, Srivastava headed the Indian delegation in several rounds of diplomatic talks in the virtual format with China on the eastern Ladakh border row.

He was also part of the Indian delegation in a few rounds of military talks between the two sides in the border row.

Nepal is important for India in the context of its overall strategic

interests in the region, and the leaders of the two countries have often noted the age-old "Roti Beti" relationship.

He is expected to take up the assignment shortly, according to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

### U.S. Ambassador Inaugurates Health Post In Makwanpur

U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, Randy W. Berry, along with United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Nepal Mission Director Sepideh Keyvanshad, participated in an inauguration ceremony for the Kankada Health Post in Makwanpur.

The U.S. government, through USAID, has partnered with the National Reconstruction Authority; Ministry of Health and Population; and Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology to rebuild 29 permanent schools and seven health facilities in earthquake-hit districts. This event marked the completion of USAID's earthquake reconstruction outside Kathmandu Valley.

During the event, Ambassador Berry said, "The U.S. government continues to prioritize access to health services and education for the Nepali people most in need. As part of this commitment, we partnered with the Government of Nepal to construct this health post in one of the most re-

mote parts of Makwanpur, which will benefit one of the most disadvantaged communities. This reflects the longstanding friendship and continued support of the American people to help rebuild a safer Nepal."

According to a press release issued by the U.S. Embassy in Nepal,

since the 2015 earthquakes, the U.S. government has invested more than \$190 million in earthquake response and recovery. Our support has allowed children and families to continue receiving health services and education. We have built more than the physical infrastructure, which this health post symbolizes. This building shows the collaboration between USAID and the Government of Nepal to ensure every family in Nepal is entitled to quality health care and a safe place to receive it.

This handover shows the United States' continued commitment to support the Government of Nepal to build back safer and ensure quality health care and education for Nepal's children and families, with these facilities benefiting more than 240,000 Nepalis. For 75 years, the United States has had a strong and enduring partnership with Nepal, and we look forward to continuing our friendship.

### China Eastern To Start Kathmandu-Kunming Direct Flights From May 30: Ambassador Hou

Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi informed Home Minister Bal Krishna Khand that preparations have been made for a direct flight from Kathmandu to Kunming, China, from May 30.

Ambassador Hou had informed Home Minister Khand that there would be direct flight from Kathmandu to Kunming and from Kunming to Kathmandu.

She paid a courtesy call on Home Minister Bal Krishna Khand on Wednesday.

During the meeting held at the Ministry of Home Affairs in Singha Durbar, bilateral relations and exchange of cooperation between the two countries were discussed, according to Madhusudan Bhattarai, press coordinator of the Home Minister.

During the meeting, Ambassador Hou congratulated Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba for holding the local elections



successfully.

Ambassador Hou also conveyed Chinese President's message regarding the election. She said that Chinese President Xi Jinping has expressed that the process of electing people's representatives from the people themselves was a good one and congratulated Prime Minister Deuba for accomplishing the task.

She said that she had visited various places where the elections were held and was happy to see the people's participation in the election with enthusiasm.

Ambassador Hou thanked the security forces through the Home Minister for the good security arrangements during the recent visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Nepal.

### **Israeli Embassy Organized A Program To Celebrate The 62 Years of Establishment Of Diplomatic Relations Between Nepal And Israel**

The Embassy of Israel organized a special program to mark 62 years of diplomatic relations between Nepal and Israel amidst the presence of Nanda Bahadur Pun, Vice President of Nepal, high ranked Nepali government officials, diplomats, media fraternity and distinguished business community guests.

Welcoming the guests, Hanan Goder, Ambassador of Israel to Nepal said, "Israel and Nepal share the same values of tolerance, democracy, community solidarity and respect for each other. We both nations are proud of our heritage and as small civilizations, face similar challenges. This is what united us in the past and this will continue to keep bilateral relations good."



Yair Lapid, Alternate Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel expressed his warm wishes in a video congratulatory message. He said, "For three decades, Nepal was the only country in the region to maintain diplomatic relations with Israel. Israel continues to seek out new opportunities to cooperate with Nepal, considering Nepal a great friend and a partner."

Likewise, Haim Sharett, son of Late Moshe Sharett, Former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel referred to the meetings of Late Moshe Sharett and Late B.P. Koirala in Myanmar, Israel and Nepal led to intensive dialogue, closer understanding and a deep friendship. He further said, "The wonderful ongoing friendship later became a bi-national friendship." Late Moshe Sharett was one of the architects of establishing Nepal-Israel relations.

Besides, Sujata Koirala, Former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Honourable Ramesh Nath Pandey, Former Minister for Foreign Affairs,

Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, Former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bharat Raj Paudyal, Foreign Secretary, MoFA also spoke about 'Nepal-Israel Relations' and highlighted on the strong bonds between the two countries.

Concluding the event, DCM Tal Shvartsman said, "I believe that the bond between our two countries will continue to grow and flourish for many more years to come."

The diplomatic relations were established at the initiation of the two great leaders and Prime Ministers of their respective countries, B.P. Koirala and David Ben Gurion on 1 June 1960. Since the establishment of the relations, the two nations have continued to cooperate and collaborate on various areas of mutual interests benefitting both the countries in the field of agriculture, health, and education, among many others.

The gallery of an exhibition on flashbacks of Nepal-Israel relations was also displayed, portraying historical cooperation between the two countries.

### **Israeli Ambassador To Nepal Pays A Courtesy Call On COAS General Sharma**

Israeli Ambassador to Nepal Hanan Goder paid a courtesy call upon Chief of Army Staff General Prabhu Ram Sharma at Nepal Army headwater.



According to a press release issued by Public Relations and Information Directorate of Nepal Army, they discussed the matter of bilateral relations and mutual interest during the meeting.

Nepal Army holds the view that these kinds of meeting helps to further strengthen existing warmly relations between the two countries.

### **Shivapuri National Park Clean Campaign For Europe Week 2022**

European Union and Clean up Nepal jointly organized Shivapuri National Park Clean-up campaign in the framework of Europe Week 2022. The campaign was organized to highlight littering and waste dumping as a harmful practice.

Nona Dreppez, the European Union Ambassador to Nepal joined the Shivapuri Clean-up campaign taking part actively collecting plastic bottles and other wastes lying in the park

One hundred and thirty individuals from different social organizations participated in Shivapuri Clean-up





## NEWSNOTES

Campaign on 14 May.

The participants started the campaign from National Park entrance gate towards 3- hiking routes, Nagigumba, Bishnudwar and Shivapuri peak to collect 153 kg of waste. The volunteers also sensitized 165 National Park visitors to bring back their waste with them with the slogan, "Take memories, leave nothing but footprints."

The waste audit conducted after the collection showed 15 kg of paper box, 23 kg of glass bottles, 40 kg of PET bottles and 75 kg of plastic wrappers collected from the hiking routes.

### **Qatar Hands Over Liquid Medical Oxygen Tank To Nepal**



Yusouf Bin Mohamed Al-Hail ambassador of the State of Qatar to the republic of Nepal handed over liquid medical oxygen tank to Health Secretary Dr. Roshan Pokharel amid a function at Ministry of Health and Population.

Ambassador Yusouf Bin Mohamed Al-Hail said that the assistance provided to

the friendly country of Nepal is strengthening its efforts to fight spread of Covid-19 and support health infrastructure. He said that the aid reflects established relations between the two friendly countries and a further evidence of collaboration and coordination of common positions between the State of Qatar and Nepal.

Qatar Fund for Development sent medical aid to the Republic of Nepal, containing liquid medical oxygen tank, to counter the outbreak of the Corona pandemic., which was delivered to Hetauda Hospital in Bagmati.

Khalifa bin Jassim Al Kuwari, Director General of Qatar Fund for Development, said: "This aid contributes to the third goal of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is concerned with health, and it also reflects the great medical efforts made by the State of Qatar to combat the outbreak of this pandemic, which represents a common threat that face the whole world, as it is considered a common international responsibility that the whole world is uniting to confront."

It is worth noting that QFFD, since the beginning of the outbreak of the Corona virus, has sent many urgent medical aid, including supplies and vaccines.

### **Nepalese Ambassador To India Dr. Shankar Sharma Presents Letters Of Credence**

Nepalese ambassador to India Dr. Shankar Sharma presented Letters of Credence to President of India amid a function at Rashtrapati Bhawan in New Delhi.

"Grateful to call on His Excellency Shri Ram Nath

Kovind @rashtrapatibhvn, President of India following the presentation of credentials," tweets Dr. Shankar Sharma.

"Honored to have formally presented my credentials to His Excellency President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind @rashtrapatibhvn. I look forward to taking our strong, age-old ties between Nepal and India to new heights."



### **Global Friendship Art Festival Nepal 2022 In Kathmandu**

Ambassador of Bangladesh to Nepal Salahuddin Noman Chowdhury inaugurated the 3rd edition of 'Global Friendship Art Festival in Nepal' on May 10 at Nepal Art Council in Kathmandu.

Artworks of 35 artists from Bangladesh, Nepal, India, USA, Japan, Greece and Canada are on display at the exhibition.

Addressing the program, Bangladesh Ambassador to Nepal Chowdhury mentioned that the exhibition will further strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two countries which is already connected by a string of historical and civilizational linkages. He also handed over certificates of appreciation to the participating artists.



The 5 day exhibition was organized by the Bangladesh Artist Group and supported by the Bangladesh Embassy in Kathmandu.

### **Emperor Of Japan Mentions Nepal Twice On His Keynote Speech**

Ambassador Kikuta expressed gratitude to Minister Bhushal for participating in the Asia-Pacific Water Summit.

Kikuta Yutaka, Ambassador of Japan to Nepal, paid a courtesy call on Pampha Bhushal, Minister for Energy, Water Resource and Irrigation, at the Ministry of Energy, Water Resource and Irrigation in Singh Durbar.

On this occasion, Ambassador Kikuta expressed his gratitude to Minister Bhushal for participating by video message in the 4th Asia-Pacific Water Summit that was held in Kumamoto City, Japan, 23-24 April 2022.

In addition, Ambassador Kikuta introduced that His Majesty the Emperor of Japan mentioned Nepal at the begin-

ning as well as the ending of the commemorative keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the summit.

During the meeting, Ambassador Kikuta highlighted importance of relationship between Japan and Nepal and mentioned the long history of bilateral cooperation, especially in the energy sector such as Kulekhani Hydropower Project from 1970s.

Ambassador Kikuta also stated that the Government of Japan recently revised “Country Development Cooperation Policy for Nepal” and Japan would continue to support Nepal’s national achievement based on the major target of the Policy, “Assistance for a balanced and sustainable economic growth, aiming at Nepal’s graduation from the Least Developed Countries status”.

Ambassador Kikuta indicated that Japan would continue to cooperate in areas such as social and economic infrastructure development including energy and water sector, human resource development, disaster prevention, and poverty reduction in line with the Policy.

Ambassador Kikuta and Minister Bhushal shared the view to continue to further cooperate for the socio-economic development of Nepal and enhancement of the relationship between the two countries.

### Indian Embassy In Kathmandu Celebrates Birth Anniversary Of Tagore

Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre (SVCC), Embassy of India, Kathmandu together with Kendriya Vidyalyaya celebrated the 161st Birth Anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore at Vivekananda Hall, Embassy of India, Kathmandu.

The event was organized as part of the ongoing celebrations of INDIA@75 AZADI KA AMRIT MAHOTSAV.

Vocal Teacher and students SVCC-Kathmandu put together recitals of RabindraSangeet whereas the students of Kendriya Vidyalaya Kathmandu performed songs and dances based on Tagore’s composition which was very well received by the full house audience. In his welcome remarks, Naveen Kumar, First Secretary, Press, Information, and Culture, highlighted how Gurudev continues to inspire millions of people across the world.



Basu Gautam, President of the Lumbini World Peace Forum and a notable speaker, gave an interactive presentation on the topic “Shanti Niketan: Tagore’s Idea on Education”

The event was attended by young students of music, arts and literature, children’s from CBSE Schools, members of the Indian diaspora and academicians.

### Nepal and the United States Sign New 5-year Development Assistance Agreement

The Government of Nepal (GON), through the Ministry of Finance (MOF), and the United States, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), signed a new Development Objective Agreement.

This Assistance Agreement, which will span five years, outlines the broad development areas of U.S. and Nepal cooperation and collaboration.

The grant, amounting to \$659 million (equivalent to NRs 79.71 billion) over the five-year period, will support Nepal’s goal of graduating to a middle-income country.

Partnering with the GON, civil society, and the private sector, U.S. assistance will advance

Nepal’s sustainable development through strengthened democratic governance, enterprise-driven economic growth and increased resilience for communities most at-risk to natural disasters and climate change.

The amount of assistance will be recorded in the GON Red Book and transparently implemented through both on and off treasury modalities. USAID will develop projects under this assistance agreement in collaboration with line ministries and implemented in accordance with GON rules and regulations.

Ishwori Prasad Aryal, Joint Secretary and Head of International Economic Cooperation Coordination Division (IECCD), MOF and Ms. Sepideh Keyvanshad, USAID/Nepal Mission Director, signed and exchanged the agreement on behalf of their respective governments.

Delivering a short remark following the signing ceremony, Mr. Aryal, expressed, “In 1951, after signing the Point Four program, the United States became the first bilateral donor to Nepal. This began a 70 plus year relationship of trust, mutual respect, and commitment to the people of Nepal.” He further added that Nepal has greatly benefited from the financial and technical assistance extended by the United States to help drive Nepal’s socioeconomic development. He expressed that the Assistance Agreement as a departure agreement for both governments due to the fact that, for the first time in this enduring partnership, U.S. assistance will be fully reflected in GON’s Red Book.

Similarly, Ms. Keyvanshad noted, “Today we add a new chapter to our long-standing partnership with the Government of Nepal and the Nepali people. We look forward to continuing the U.S. government’s long-term commitment to support activities that strengthen Nepal’s democracy, governance, and economic growth across the country.”



## BUSINESS BRIEF

### World Bank Reallocates \$23M To Help Unemployed Poor

\$23 Million from

World Bank-financed Youth Employment Project Reallocated to Help Unemployed Poor



KATHMANDU, May 24, 2022— The World Bank has reallocated \$23 million of the \$120 million in the Youth Employment Transformation Initiative (YETI) project to scale up direct support

to unemployed poor impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The financing will help about 64,000 unemployed individuals, especially those who lost employment during the COVID-19 pandemic, receive temporary employment through the Prime Minister Employment Program.

“We have been working closely with the Government of Nepal to support its COVID-19 emergency response and prepare for a green, resilient, and inclusive recovery,” said Faris Haddad-Zervos, World Bank Country Director for Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. “With the reallocated funds, the project will provide temporary employment for many poor people who lost employment or could not find work during the pandemic.”

This reallocation of these project funds to provide temporary employment follows global good practice where existing social protection programs are expanded to cover a larger group of beneficiaries during a crisis. This complements the YETI project’s ongoing efforts to improve employment services and labor market outcomes, especially for youth.

These funds were made available by activating the Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC) of the YETI project. CERCs allow funds to be reallocated from existing projects to address emergency response needs.

### Nepal, Sri Lanka Discuss Investment Opportunities In Hydropower

Hydropower companies in Sri Lanka had the opportunity to interact with Nepal’s Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation (MOEWRI) and Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) on the investment opportunities in Nepal for hydropower development during a meeting held virtually on 6th May 2022. The meeting was jointly organized by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Nepal and the Export Development Board of Sri Lanka.

Chairman/EDB Suresh de Mel highlighted the importance of the construction sector as an export service for Sri Lanka and the expertise in hydropower available with the Sri Lankan private sector which has made considerable inroads particularly in the African continent. Nepal therefore would be an important regional market for Sri Lankan investors.

Ambassador Himalee Arunatilaka said that the vast water resources in Nepal made it an ideal market for hydropower development projects. Given Sri Lanka’s expertise in the field, particularly in small hydropower projects, prospects for joint collaborations are many. Ambassador Arunatilaka further noted that such collaborations between Sri Lanka and Nepal would be a valuable example of south-south and regional cooperation for

achieving energy security.

The Nepali authorities highlighted the advantages of investing in the sector as well as the procedures and guidelines for foreign investors. Nepal has the potential to generate 42,130MW of hydroelectricity that is technically and economically viable while only a fraction of that (1476MW) is being generated at present.

NEA’s Managing Director Kul Man Ghising stated that Nepal encourages investment from neighboring countries as it plans to export its excess hydroelectricity to the region in the future. Given the abundance of water bodies and the low cost of production per unit, investing in Nepal’s hydropower sector can be advantageous and bring win-win solutions for the region to shift to green and clean energy.

MOEWRI Joint Secretary Madhu Prasad Bhetuwal made a detailed presentation on the positive investment climate in the sector and the targets set by the Government for power generation by 2028, for both the domestic market and for export. He also highlighted the regional initiatives within SAARC and BIMSTEC as providing a conducive environment for regional cooperation in the energy sector.

NEA Director Prabal Adhikari highlighted the prospects for cross border power trading and also briefed on the current generation capacity, and the transmission and storage infrastructure in place. He further highlighted the importance of the private sector in hydro power generation in Nepal and noted that by 2025 Nepal hoped to completely eliminate dependence on imported power.

The Small Hydropower Developers’ Association of Sri Lanka conveyed their keen interest to invest in Nepal’s hydropower sector particularly given the opportunities for small projects which is a niche expertise area for Sri Lankan companies. The credibility and confidence accrued from international experience and partnerships has enhanced Sri Lankan hydropower developers’ ability to seek overseas funding.

Furthermore, the sector has been further strengthened by its backward integration capacity. LTL Holdings, which is already engaged in Nepal’s hydropower sector, shared their experience of investing in Nepal, providing a valuable input to the discussion.

According to a press release issued by Embassy of Sri Lanka in Nepal

Kathmandu, the present meeting is the 4th in a series of webinars organized by the Embassy with the EDB to explore opportunities in the construction services sector.

The request for an in-depth and focused discussion on the hydropower sector was made by Sri Lankan companies during the last interaction held

on 7th February. EDB’s Director Export Services Indumini Kodikara made the closing remarks and thanked all participants, especially from the Nepal government, for their valuable presence and contribution to the discussion. Close to thirty (30) companies’ representatives from the





hydropower sector in Sri Lanka, including the Small Hydropower Developers' Association, attended the webinar.

## **Himalaya Airlines Provides Educational Supplies To Prayas Nepal**

Sixth year in a row, Himalaya Airlines, an international carrier of Nepal, continued its support to the children of Prayas Nepal with yearlong educational supplies. With the commencement of the new academic session, this contribution was a much awaited gesture for the organization.

Prayas Nepal, a non-government, non-profitable, social organization has been under Himalaya's CSR banner since 2017 and over the years, H9 has extended its support through essential educational, snack/grocery, kitchen utility items as well as COVID-19 protective supplies.



Having entered into its 19th year of establishment on May 1st, Prayas Nepal has touched the lives of many, leaving a positive impact on them through various empowering programs.

Currently housed with 26 young and energetic children, Prayas Nepal has made sure that these children will lead the organization by taking their vision and mission to the next level. Over the years these children have stood out with their exceptional performance in different fields, sharpening their skills; some have even gone abroad for further studies.

With an objective to create awareness amongst the children about the aviation industry careers and professional courses etc. this year, Himalaya organized a brief experience sharing session for the children wherein the experienced Cockpit and Cabin Crew of Himalaya Airlines interacted with the children. The session was aimed at broadening their knowledge about the aviation industry and familiarized them with the various courses and career opportunities in the aviation sector of Nepal. The session was well attended by the children with keen interest and enthusiasm.

The educational supplies included academic course books for various grades, notebooks, registers and stationery items such as calculators, geometry boxes, pens etc. While handing over the educational supplies on behalf of the Airlines, Mrs. Ujjwala Dali, Head of Brand Department, shared, "Societal Responsibility is one of our key CSR objective and a driving factor for our six yearlong association with Prayas Nepal. The bond has become stronger every year and a special one. We would like to extend best wishes to the entire team and children of Prayas Nepal on their 19th anniversary. We are glad that this year especially, apart from our regular support, we have tried to open a knowledge sharing forum to inspire the younger generation and help them unlock the unlimited possibilities to build their future."

The handing over of supplies took place in Kathmandu on May 10, 2022 amidst a special programme.

## **Kuwait's Jazeera Airways To Conduct Three Flights A Week To Kuwait From GBIA**

Kuwait's leading airline, Jazeera Airways is expanding its services in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. It announced the launch of a new service to Gautam Buddha International Airport in Nepal, connecting the large community of Nepalese expatriates living in the Middle East and Europe to the south-west area of the country.

Speaking at a press conference organised by the company on Wednesday in the capital Vice President-Sales for Jazeera Airways, Ravindran Bharathan said: "Jazeera Airways continues to expand its network to offer destinations that also cater to large expatriate communities that are often not served by direct routes from Kuwait and the Middle East. It now really makes it a lot easier for Nepalese and tourists to get into the Terai area of Nepal rather than going through an indirect route which could take up to more than a day of traveling. The new service to the Gautam Buddha International Airport is a direct service to the gateway of Lumbini - the birthplace of Gautam Buddha."

Rabi Chandra Singh - Chairman of Society International Travel Services, a part of the RR Group of companies, stated, "after 74 years of international flights based only in the Kathmandu, this service is going to make a huge difference in the western part of Nepal. This newly opened international flight service will help boost tourism of Bhairahawa which is one of the potential sectors for economic development in Nepal. Let's rejoice in this historic moment together."

This is the second service operated by Jazeera Airways to Nepal which responds to high demand for travel to the Terai plains of Nepal. Flights to Gautam Buddha International Airport had commenced on May 15, 2022.

The airline that is expanding its services in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe, expressed its commitment to conducting regular commercial flights to and from the GBIA.

Speaking at a press conference organised by the company on Wednesday in the capital, vice president of Jazeera Ravindran Bharathan said that the newly launched service makes it a lot easier for Nepalis and tourists to get into the Terai area of Nepal rather than going through an indirect route which could take more than a day's traveling.

"The new service to the GBIA in Bhairahawa is a direct service to the gateway of Lumbini - the birthplace of Gautam Buddha," he said.

This newly opened international flight service will help boost tourism of Bhairahawa which is one of the potential sectors for economic development in Nepal, he said.

However, the lack of infrastructure and facilities to issue labour permit from Butwal has affected the migrant workers going abroad.

"We are rerouting the passengers from Kathmandu to Bhairahawa which incurs additional cost of Rs. 75,000 a time," said Singh.



# Russian Aggression In Ukraine And Outcome In South Asia



BY: BINOJ BASNYAT

“Indo-Pacific Strategy” was ratified by the US on 11 Feb. Russia recognized Russian inhabited two regions in east Ukraine, the self-styled Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhansk People’s Republic as independent states before launching the February 2022 aggression. Belarus stood as an enabler of the biggest assault in a European state since World War-II. Russian populous Crimea though was part of Ukraine with the collapse of the Soviet Union came under Russian effective control in 2014. Besides a few states recognizing the parliamentary procedures was declared as illegal and Ukraine refused to accept the annexation.

Over 5.1 million refugees have since left Ukraine, while an estimated 7.1 million people have been displaced within the country, more than 3200 deaths with Russia making it to 15000. As of 21<sup>st</sup> April UN Commissioner for Human Rights (UNCHR) recorded 5264 civilians’ casualties: 2345 killed and 2919 injured noting that it could be much higher and violation of human rights.

The war has caused the fastest and largest displacement of people in Europe since World War-II. Russian invasion now has transmuted the political discourse in Europe. Sweden and Finland of becoming members of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) stepping away from their national identity of neutrality while Russia threatens nuclear deployment if the two nations join NATO. The dependence of energy from Russia particularly Germany has been seen as a set-back to the ‘War of Economy’. Russian assessment of the invasion sought to be over in a few days with a formation of a supportive government and declaration of more independent states. The prolonged war seems to drag Russia even to a point of losing its status as one of the global military powers and an exporter of energy and food.

South Asia stands fourth in nominal Gross Domestic Product with \$ 6,472.28 billion after EU (18,183.95), China (24,127.84) and the US (27,659.16) in the world economy race. India ranks fourth after China, Russia and the US and Pakistan ninth in the Military Strength Ranking as per the [globalfirepower.com](http://globalfirepower.com). 3.5 percent of the world’s land surface area, 11.71 percent of the Asian continent and 5.2 million square kilo me-

ter with one fourth of world’s population (1.891 billion) is covered by South Asia. The most populous and most densely populated geographical region in the world accounts for approximately 34.49 percent of Asia’s population and over 24 percent of the world’s population. The influence by the war in looming.

When the world is being wedged by COVID-19 the war now has added to the predicament. A third of global wheat and barley, over half of world’s sunflower seed oil is produced in Russia and Ukraine. 36 countries count on them for more than half of their wheat exports. One fifth of world’s fertilizers is exported by Belarus and Russia when Russia is the world’s second largest exporter of crude oil after Saudi Arabia. The supply chain has been disrupted surging food and energy costs which 41 countries in Africa, 38 in the Asia Pacific and 28 in Latin America and the Caribbean are witnessing with spiraling fuel prices, surging food costs and syndrome of financial disorder.

As per the United Nations Development Program analysis, 1.7 billion people in 107 economies rigorously lay open to rising food prices, swelling fuel prices or governments struggling to make debt payments and stabilize their economies that bring about general climate of insecurity in domestic politics thus instability like Sri Lanka is South Asia.

The war in Europe did not come as a surprise. The strategic surroundings in Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union is perceived through one, expansion of NATO, two, rising of the US inspiration in the sphere of interests of Russia, three, European nations inclinations to Russia for energy, four, US European policy during Donald Trump’s presidency and finally an extension of the cold war. Also known as the first European war of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 was when Russia launched a full-scale land, air and sea invasion of Georgia including its undisputed territory on 8<sup>th</sup> August referring to it as a “peace enforcement operation”. Russia accused Georgia of an aggression against South Ossetia.

The 22-23 February 2014 Crimea peninsula annexation from Ukraine was the first part of the Russo-Ukrainian War. The United Nations General Assem-

bly (UNGA) in March passed a non-binding resolution with 100 in favor, 11 against and 58 abstentions in the 193-nation assembly that declared Crimea's Moscow backed referendum invalid with a range of international reactions to the annexation. The US government-imposed sanctions against persons they consider to have dishonoured or abetted in the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, an act supported by the Lithuanian President.

The declaration of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states before the launching of the aggression was another indication.

### **Divided South Asia in the United Nation General Assembly Resolution**

In UNGA on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 141 countries of 193 members including Nepal voted in favor of the UN resolution 2623 to condemn and reprimand Russia for invading Ukraine and demanding that Moscow stop fighting and withdraw its military forces an action that aims to diplomatically detach

Russia at the world body. 35 countries including China and India both Nepal's immediate neighbors abstained from the resolution are not siding with Russia except five Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea, Russia and Syria that rejected the resolution.

The UNGA Ukraine Resolution has a question of the relevance of the United National particularly in South Asia of the eight members of South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) four abstained and four supported. Small states landlocked countries Nepal, Afghanistan, Bhutan and an island small nation Maldives supported the resolution while Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka abstained but none objected. This elucidates how big nations and smaller nations in South Asia contradict.

The purchase of arms from Russia by India is 46 percent, Bangladesh 9.2 percent and Pakistan 5.6 percent whereas South Asian Nations together spend \$63,606,086,665 fifth after UK who spends \$68,000,000,000.

### **Economic impact a hindrance to prosperity and stability**

South Asian countries recovery from economic devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is once again thumped by the war. Balance of payment crisis in Sri Lanka, political crisis as well as energy subsidies in Pakistan and the humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan, reduction of the inflow of tourists, weakened demand in Europe will hit Bangladesh's exports and the upsurge in prices both in food and energy, adverse effect on people's tangible income preceding high inflation in the other nations including Nepal. "The negative impact of the war in Ukraine on FY2022.23 growth is expected to be moderate, so growth will begin to taper off in the second

half of 2022" a UNDP report said. As per the South Asia Economic Focus the 6.6 percent growth in 2022 and by 6.3 percent in 2023 can be revised downwards by 1.0 percent.

When these circumstances are comprehended Nepal's, gov-

ernment sacked the governor of the central bank though re-instated by the court and stopped imports. When it is time for the governments to formulate monetary and fiscal policies to counter peripheral alarms and shield the vulnerability. Arranging the groundwork for green, resilient and inclusive growth should prevail.

#### **Consequences of a long conflict**

Russia beside losing the battle for Kyiv is assertive through the eastern theatre via Mykolaiv towards Odessa is understood to encircle the main land as well as to exclude access to the sea. President Biden steadfastness on military aid, economic assistance and provision to the refugees with the recent \$800 million in more weaponry, direct economic aid of \$500 million with a ban on Russian associated ships from docking at US ports, while bidding the Congress for added money to assist the Ukrainian military.

War culminates but also may be distorting. World War-I terminated with the signing by Germany and the Allies in Nov 1918 but the interwar period of





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1920s and 1930s in Europe was submersed with apprehensions and pressures that concluded in another great war. The conclusion of World War-II manifested the dawn of the Cold War. You can argue that despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cold War may not have ended. Tenth week into the war neither side can achieve their own intentions, Ukraine will not be able to drive out the Russian forces nor will Russia be able to fulfil its aim of political control over Ukraine. The strategic surroundings are ushering into the new era of conflict of a sustained conflict that could have long-term upshot in South Asia.

April has been a month of diplomatic manoeuvring in the war-torn Ukraine. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, top officials of the EU European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and the Baltics have also visited Zelensky in Kyiv. The 25 April visit by US Secretary of State Blinken and Secretary of Defence Austin and the upcoming visit by the Under Secretary General of the UN to Kyiv and Moscow has four folds geostrategic interests of the US and the European nations, a weakened Russian military capabilities, sovereign and united Ukraine and finally a comprehensive peace deal offer.

The termination of the war could authenticate with reforms in the UN on the provisions of veto power by the five permanent, two, either reshape the international and global landscape from US domination or diplomatically and economically secluded Russia, three, Russia standing as the imminent European power politically and economically polarizing Europe or a weakened Russia militarily, economically and politically, four, vigorous diplomatic endeavours during and post war for geostrategic advantage, five, substitutes to the dependency on energy, food security and an alternative global supply chain and finally revitalizing Humanitarian law.

Economic sanctions may not be as effective as it has been sought without an alternative source particularly on supply of energy, food security and supply chain indicating a prolonged war.

### Opportunity

The Russian invasion in Ukraine isn't just Russian and Ukrainian affair. It has the potential to fundamentally reshape the global landscape. In some ways it already has: Germany is rearming, NATO has awakened, commodities prices are through the roof, and Russia is increasingly disconnected.

The extent to which the global order changes

will depend largely on how long the conflict drags out. 35 countries that abstained occupies two third population and China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India have 4 billion almost half the world's population. Bangladesh, China, India and Pakistan are almost half of world population that decided not to side with US and NATO. Add Russia - half of military strength. Add Iran, Middle East and majority of African countries - more than half of land mass; oil and other minerals. South Asia will be impacted with trade, tourism, economic growth, connectivity, energy security, food security, forex generation and military modernization policies.

The reaction of small states of South Asia is giving precedence to their national interests apparently border issues and an outcome of their geographical setting and apprehensions positioned at the core of power

**The war in Europe did not come as a surprise. The strategic surroundings in Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union is perceived through one**

disputation between China and India reflecting annexation of Tibet and Sikkim. Upholding UN Charter and the rights and independence of small states is primary supposing to countenance alike encounters in the region with the reinstate the application of spheres of influence, dependance on geoeconomics for security, scenarios of neutrality, alliances and the trust

on the west. Smaller economies of Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka are susceptible to peripheral dynamics and could perceive short-term growth inconsistencies than the large states Bangladesh and India.

Three issues appear protuberant for South Asians that is contending with mounting commodity prices, supply holdups and susceptibilities in financial quarters; one is to review the reliance on oil and fuel with improved energy security and the second food security with greener economy and finally for landlocked countries securing line of supply from the ocean to the mountains. The prolonged war in Ukraine will only amplify these challenges. The South Asian requires to be more strategically connected and to authenticate by lessening dependance on fuel imports and convert to a green, vigorous and inclusive growth trajectory.

Let me close with the argument of the regional bodies South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation emerging in the forefront for common challenges that needs common solutions for long-term international politics and diplomacy.

*Basnyat is a retired Nepali Army Major General, is a political and security analyst*

## ECONOMY

# Widening BOP

*Despite the adoption of various measures, there is no sign of improving foreign currency reserve*

By A CORRESPONDENT

**A**lthough Nepal has taken several steps including the banning the import of a number of luxury items to end the pressure on foreign currency reserve, the result is opposite. Nepal's trade deficit has widened during the last three months.

According to NRB, the current account deficit has widened by Rs. 49.78 billion in a month from mid-March to mid-April 2022. Similarly, gross foreign exchange reserves decreased by 16.5 per cent to Rs. 1167.92 billion in mid-April 2022 from Rs. 1399.03 billion in mid-July 2021. It was Rs. 1171 billion in mid-March. However, the purchasing power of the foreign exchange has remained the same over the months.

"Based on the imports of nine months of 2021/22, the foreign exchange reserve of the banking sector is sufficient to cover the prospective merchandise imports of 7.4 months, and merchandise and services imports of 6.6 months," said the NRB.

In the previous month, the foreign exchange reserve of the banking sector was sufficient to cover such imports for 7.4 months and 6.7 months respectively.

The current account remained at a deficit of Rs. 512.71 billion by mid-April compared to a deficit of Rs. 462.93 billion in mid-March, according to the 'Current macroeconomic and financial situation' report of the NRB. Report of the first nine months of the current fiscal year 2021/22 was published recently. Such deficit was Rs. 210.51 billion in the same period of the previous year 2020/21. The current account deficit was in upward trend that year as well, it widened by Rs. 59.09 billion in a month from mid-March to mid-April 2021.

Likewise, Balance of Payments (BOP) remained at a deficit of Rs. 268.26 billion by mid-April against the deficit of Rs. 258.64 billion in mid-March. BOP was in a surplus of Rs. 42.54 billion in the same period of the previous year.

The central bank has implemented a cash margin while opening the Letter of Credit (LC) of various luxury goods and the government has restricted the import of 10 goods to prevent the foreign exchange reserves from further depletion.

During the nine months of 2021/22, merchandise imports increased by 32.0 per cent to Rs. 1466.66 billion compared to an increase of 13.1 per cent a year ago. Of the total imports, the share of intermediate goods remained 53.2 per cent, capital goods 10.5 per cent and final consumption goods remained 36.3 per cent in the review period.

Likewise, merchandise exports in-

crease inflation stood at 7.40 per cent whereas non-food and service inflation stood at 7.18 per cent in the review month. Average inflation remained at 5.62 per cent during the review period.

The prices of ghee and oil, milk products and eggs, pulses and legumes, and tobacco products rose by 28.36 per cent, 11.56 per cent, 10.53 and 8.91 per cent respectively on year-on-year basis. Likewise, prices of transportation, education, and miscellaneous goods and services rose by 20.16 per cent, 8.79 per cent and 8.17 per cent respectively.

In the review month, the Kathmandu Valley, Terai, Hill and Mountain



creased by 69.4 per cent to Rs. 160.57 billion compared to an increase of 20.2 per cent in the same period of the previous year.

In the 9-month period, capital transfer decreased by 39.5 per cent to Rs. 7.78 billion and net foreign direct investment (FDI) increased by 33.7 per cent to Rs. 16.51 billion. In the same period of the previous year, capital transfer and net FDI amounted to Rs. 12.86 billion and Rs. 12.35 billion respectively, read the NRB report. Capital transfer witnessed a growth compared to the previous month – it was Rs. 7 billion in mid-March.

### **Inflation in upward trend**

With the escalation of price of petroleum products, the consumer price inflation has continued its upward trend in mid-April and reached 7.28 per cent, up from 7.14 per cent in mid-March. In mid-April 2021, consumer price inflation was 3.10 per cent.

By mid-April, food and bev-

witnessed 6.25 per cent, 7.61 per cent, 7.79 per cent and 8.25 per cent inflation respectively. Inflation in these regions was 3.24 per cent, 2.92 per cent, 3.38 per cent and 1.54 per cent respectively a year ago.

### **Remittance inflow improves**

Remittance inflow witnessed an improvement in the ninth months of this year compared to the eighth months before. It decreased by 0.6 per cent to Rs. 724.74 billion by mid-April against a decrease of 1.7 per cent to Rs. 631.19 billion previously. Remittance inflow had increased by 16.5 per cent in the same period last year.

Similarly, number of Nepali workers taking approval for foreign employment increased significantly to 256,031 in the review period up from 227,900 by mid-March.

The recent data published by Nepal Rastra Bank has shown that Nepal's economy has been passing through a very difficult time. There is a need to take further precautions.

## LOCAL POLLS

# Nepali Congress Lead

*Despite losing its candidate in Kathmandu, NC stands atop securing victory in 196 local levels*

By A CORRESPONDENT

As it expected, Nepali Congress Party has swept the local level elections taking the advantage of making alliance with Maoist Center and CPN-UML Unified Socialist.

Compared to the last local elections, Nepali Congress leads over 80 more municipalities and rural municipalities. Similarly, Maoist Center has also gained much in the local elections compared to the last elections due to the alliance with Nepali Congress.

Although the alliance and main opposition party are competing all over Nepal, an independent candidate Balen Shah is close to clinch victory defeating their leaders in Mayoral position in the capital city.

Losing many seats to Nepali Congress, Maoist Center and breakaway faction led by Madhav Kumar Nepal, CPN-UML led by KP Sharma Oli is at a big loss as it has

lost many seats of chairman and vice chairman. In the last local elections, CPN-UML had almost swept, capturing over two thirds of the seats, including two Metropolitan Cities, Kathmandu and Pokhara Lekhnath.

Nepali Congress (NC) has won so far in 225 Mayoral and 213 deputy mayoral positions of local units of 753 under the local elections held on May 13. Similarly, NC has been leading in 60 municipalities and 29 rural municipalities as per the counting that is underway while writing this.

“This is the victory of the people and democracy. The winning of over two-third seats by alliance is indication of failure of main opposition,” thundered Nepali spokesperson Dr. Prakash Sharan Mahat. “Our alliance will continue for national elections as well.”

CPN (UML) has won in

29 municipalities and 91 rural municipalities. CPN (UML), the major opposition party to the coalition government, is leading in 45 municipalities and 30 rural municipalities. So far, UML candidates have been elected deputy mayor in 145 municipalities and vice-chairperson in 151 rural municipalities.

CPN (Maoist Center) candidates have won in total 85 local units- 11 municipalities and 74 rural municipalities. The coalition party has been leading in 13 municipalities and 14 rural municipalities. The center has won 98 head and 103 deputy mayors.

CPN (Unified Socialist) has won in two rural municipalities with 9 mayor and 16 deputy mayors. One of the five-party coalition partners, CPN (Unified Socialist) is leading in 8 local units in ongoing vote counting. So far, the party candidates have





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won in chairperson post in five rural municipalities.

Similarly, Janta Socialist party won 9 mayors and 17 deputy mayors followed by RPP 2 mayor and 4 deputy mayors. Others secured 16 mayors and 7 deputy mayors.

### NC Emerges Major Party

Ruling Nepali Congress has emerged as the biggest party from the local polls, as it has already won the key posts in the largest number of local bodies while its candidates are leading in more local levels.

Vote count is progressing and the NC has won 221 local units and maintained lead in 78 while the UML has won 138. Likewise, it won the post of deputy mayor in 56 municipalities and deputy chair in 155 rural municipalities.

According to the data provided by the Election Commission, ruling NC has secured mayoral posts in 69 municipalities and chairpersons in 152 rural municipalities.

The main opposition CPN-UML, which had emerged as the largest party winning 294 local units in the 2017 local poll, is trailing behind the NC.

The CPN-UML has won the post of chief in 138 local bodies, including 39 municipalities and 99 rural municipalities. The UML candidates have been elected deputy

mayors in 47 municipalities and deputy chair in 97 rural municipalities.

Likewise, the ruling coalition partner CPN (Maoist Centre) has won the mayoral posts in 14 municipalities and deputy mayors in 21. It has secured chairs and deputy chairs in 81 rural municipalities.

“Despite massive mobilization of all forces against our party by coalition alliance, CPN-UML has made good progress in the local polls. We have certain reservation over the process where the cadres of ruling alliance used all kinds of means to defeat our candidates,” said Pradeep Gyawali. “We will come out with our reactions after taking stock overall.”

The CPN (Unified Socialist) has been able to win mayors in three municipalities and deputy mayors in five municipalities. Can-

didates of the ruling coalition partner, Janata Samajwadi Party-Nepal (JSP-N) have been elected as chairs and deputy chairs in 11 rural municipalities.

Candidates of other parties have been elected as mayor in seven and deputy mayor in three municipalities and chairpersons in 16 and deputy chairs in 17 rural municipalities.

Likewise, NC candidates have been elected chairs in 2,099 wards, UML in 1,626 wards, CPN (MC) in 884 wards, JSP-N in 172 and others in 444 wards.

CPN (Maoist Centre), CPN (Unified Socialist), Janata Samajwadi Party-Nepal and Loktantrik Samajwadi Party Nepal are trailing behind the NC and the UML. The Rastriya Prajatantra Party is also leading in some municipalities and wards.

The ruling coalition partners CPN (Maoist Centre) and the JSP-N are likely to emerge as the third and fourth largest parties.

CPN (Unified Socialist) is likely to emerge as fifth largest party from the local polls.

The ruling alliance has made a major gain in the local poll. Maoist center is a major beneficiary at the cost of main opposition party CPN-UML compared to the last elections. The trend of local elections has shown that the alliance worked in local level despite rebellion in some areas.





## MODI'S LUMBINI VISIT

# Search For Commonalities

*Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has paid a short visit to Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha, confining most of his six-hour stay in Nepal to spiritual activities and high-level bilateral meetings. His official meeting with Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Nepali delegation ended in a positive note, signing agreements on construction of hydropower project and support to enhance Nepal's higher education institutions. The message of the visit: common culture and civilization is a meeting point for both the countries to foster bilateral relations*

By KESHAB POUDEL

Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi are prime ministers of two independent countries; they share one civilization, religion, culture and values.

The venue of Mayadevi Temple in Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha, symbolizes how Nepal and India are bound by common civilization, culture and religion. This is the meeting point for both the countries to strengthen

and enhance bilateral relations.

In a recent religious function at Lumbini in Paritran Path, the body language of two Prime Ministers spoke volumes about their devotion and commitment.

As a devout spiritual personality, Indian PM Modi remained quiet, patient and humble in the entire religious functions organized in Lumbini on the auspicious occasion of Buddha Jayanti. Nepal's Prime Minister Deuba, whose

brother was in coma at that moment, failed to reciprocate with the same commitment as Modi during the chanting of Paritran Path.

As Nepal and India share common civilization, culture and religion, there are many points of agreement. In his last two tenures, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pushed this common interest claiming India's place in Nepal's Buddhist and Hindu heritage.

However, Nepalese prime



ministers including Deuba have been not stable in dealing with bilateral matters reciprocating India's claim. Undoubtedly, Nepal has many important religious places which have direct connection with Hindu and Buddhist of India. Whether Janakpurdhan, Pashupatinath, Mukitnath and Lumbini, they are highly important for Buddhists and Hindus.

Although Prime Minister Deuba, despite his individual shortcomings in recent functions, has always been seen in compromising postures, he is yet to pursue commonalities to overcome disputes.

Although Nepal and India, two close neighbors, have certain differences, they are now coming much closer pursuing common interests and values to strengthen bilateral relations, pushing the point of differences apart.

Even in India, Modi is the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Lumbini and to claim India's place in Nepal's Buddhist heritage. Although he had expressed a desire to visit the place during his first official visit to Nepal as Prime Minister in July 2014, the visit was realized almost eight years after.

The rush of India is understandable. In recent times, Nepal's northern neighbor China has been pursuing Buddhism as its soft power coming with huge investment to connect Lumbini with China.

After the recent visit by Prime Minister Modi and signing agreement to support construction of various sites in Lumbini, India has finally made efforts to reduce the influences.

With less than 10km south on its border, India had both a cultural and a security interest in the development of Lumbini. However, it has taken decade for India to show its position on Lumbini.

Prime Minister Modi was in Lumbini on May 16, the 2,566th birth anniversary of the Buddha, to lay the foundation of a monastery and addressed a celebration at the Maya Devi temple.

After Modi's visit, India has joined more than a dozen countries including China, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea



to have a monastery of its own in the global project.

Although China continues to expand its influence, India itself showed no significant interest in building connectivity to Lumbini — or in promoting other shrines in Nepal.

For Hindus, Prime Minister Modi allocated funds for the renovation of the passage around the Pashupati Nath Temple and the building of a dharmashala for pilgrims.

Both he and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath visited Janakpur, the birthplace of Sita — and announced a connectivity package to link the pilgrimage centre to Ayodhya by a regular bus service. This was intended to be part of the proposed Rama-

yan circuit, but the project continues to lack clarity and a concrete roadmap.

Similarly, this time he allocated resources to build an international Buddhist Conference Hall in Lumbini.

Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to Lumbini and India's involvement to construct the Monastery will help to develop the Buddhist circuit, in which Lumbini would be a prominent stop.

Flying from Kushinagar, another Buddhist pilgrimage and part of the Buddhist circuit, Indian Prime Minister Modi has indicated the possible scenario for development of Buddhist circuit.

While the Indian message is clearly of shared cultural and religious





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links with Nepal that are removed from that of any other country, the fact, as an Indian diplomat pointed out privately, is that governments prior to Modi had done little to promote India's soft power and religion in Nepal.

### India's Ties With Nepal Are Unparalleled: PM Modi

India's ties with Nepal are "unparalleled" said PM Modi, on the day of his departure for Lumbini in Nepal on the occasion of Buddha Purnima.

"Our ties with Nepal are unparalleled. The civilization and people-to-people contacts between India and Nepal form the enduring edifice of our close relationship," Modi said in his departure statement. "My visit is intended to celebrate and further deepen these time-honored linkages that have been fostered through centuries and recorded in our long history of inter-mingling," he said.

In the statement, Modi said he was looking forward to meeting Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba again after their "productive" discussions during his visit to India last month.

He said both sides will continue to build on the shared understanding to expand cooperation in multiple areas, including in hydropower, development and connectivity.

The prime minister was paying a day-long visit to Lumbini on the occasion of Buddha Purnima. It was the prime minister's fifth visit to Nepal since 2014.

"I look forward to offering prayers at the Mayadevi Temple on the

auspicious occasion of Buddha Jayanti. I am honored to follow in the footsteps of millions of Indians to pay reverence at the sacred site of Lord Buddha's birth," Modi said.

Modi and Deuba held talks in Lumbini with a focus on further expanding cooperation in multiple areas including hydropower and connectivity.

PM Modi also participated in the foundation laying ceremony for the construction of a centre for Buddhist culture and heritage in Lumbini.

"I have a feeling that the conversation between the two leaders will have a comprehensive agenda, will cover the entire scope of our discussions," he said at a media briefing.

The visit of Modi contributed to further strengthening the bilateral relations and the age-old socio-cultural bonds between the two countries.

### PM Deuba and Modi Talks

Prime Minister Deuba and PM Modi held talks on comprehensive agenda to further expand cooperation in multiple areas, including hydropower and connectivity.



Both prime ministers avoided discussion on disputed issues like EPG report and border.

According to a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the two Prime Ministers held bilateral talks in Lumbini. They recalled the fruitful discussions they had in New Delhi during the official visit of Prime Minister Deuba to India on 1-3 April 2022. During the bilateral talks, the two Prime Ministers had a broad overview of Nepal-India cooperation and matters of mutual interests with a view to further enhancing the close and cordial ties between the two countries.

The Prime Minister of Nepal thanked the Prime Minister of India for the Government of India's assistance in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. He also expressed gratitude for India's support in the post-earthquake reconstruction, including the heritage sites.

The two sides discussed promoting cooperation in connectivity; early supply of fertilizers; expeditious conclusion of the revised Transit Treaty, its Protocols and Memorandum; review of the treaty of trade; additional air entry routes; hydropower generation; culture and tourism including Buddhist circuit and Ramayana circuit; education and academic collaboration; increasing the threshold of carrying Indian currency by individuals; and cooperation at regional and multi-lateral forums in matters of mutual interest.



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Minister Modi to Lumbini has clear message Nepal and India relations are unparalleled.



The two sides discussed infrastructure development including the dry port and integrated check posts in Chandani Dodhara as well as bridges linking Purnagiri Mai, Uttarakhand, India and Parshuram Dham in Dadeldhura, Nepal; and Jhulaghat over Mahakali River.

Prime Minister Deuba requested the Government of India to consider constructing Motigada-Fattepur-Rampur Road in Udaypur district of Nepal under Indian grant assistance.

In the context of official inauguration and commencement of commercial operation of the Gautam Buddha International Airport, Prime Minister Deuba highlighted that the airport will further facilitate connectivity, cultural linkages, and people-to-people movements and promotes cultural tourism. He also requested the additional air entry routes from Mahendranagar, Nepalgunj and Janakpur.

The Prime Minister of India assured that authorities concerned of India would take up the matters raised by Prime Minister Deuba.

Prime Minister Deuba requested for seamless power trade on a long-term basis under mutually beneficial terms. The two sides expressed satisfaction that Arun III project is progressing well and welcomed the signing and exchange of MoU between Nepal Electricity Authority and SJVN Ltd. India for the development of Arun-IV hydropower project.

The two Prime Ministers stressed the importance of hydropower for clean energy and noted that im-

mense potentials exist for Public Private Partnership (PPP) in hydropower sector. Prime Minister Deuba invited interested companies from India such as NHPC for the development of West Seti Hydroelectricity project. The two Prime Ministers agreed to take up the Pancheswor Project with priority.

The two sides also agreed in principle to establish the sister city relations between Lumbini and Kushinagar. The necessary process will be taken in due course through appropriate local authorities

Earlier, Indian foreign secretary Kwatra said India has always maintained that the existing bilateral mechanisms are the best way forward to deliberate on the issues, adding they should be discussed in a "responsible manner" without their "politicization".

"The fact that a return visit is taking place in such a close succession is a reflection of the closeness of our high-level exchanges as well as of the upward trajectory in our mutually beneficial partnership," Kwatra said.

Nepal and India are on right track for fostering their bilateral relations based on their common culture and values. The visit by Indian Prime

The two Prime Ministers also witnessed the exchange of the following Memoranda of Understanding related to cooperation and collaboration in academic field and power sector:

MoU between the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Tribhuvan University, and the Indian Council

for Cultural Relations (ICCR) on the Establishment of the ICCR Chair of Indian studies.

MoU between Kathmandu University (KU), Nepal, and ICCR on the establishment of the ICCR Chair of Indian Studies.

MoU for Cooperation between Kathmandu University, Nepal and Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IITM)

Letter of Agreement between Kathmandu University (KU), Nepal, and Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM), India *(for joint degree program at Masters' level at KU Campus.)*

MoU between the Lumbini Buddhist University (LBU) and Indian Council for Cultural Relations on the Establishment of the Dr. Ambedkar Chair for Buddhist Studies (ICCR Chair).

Memorandum of Understanding between Nepal Electricity Authority and SJVN Ltd for development and implementation of Arun-4 hydropower project, Nepal.





# GBIA Linking Buddhist Land

*Following the inauguration of Gautam Buddha International Airport (GBIA), Nepal's second international airport, Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha, is connected to the rest of the world by air. Financed by Asian Development Bank, GBIA will immensely contribute, among others, to linking Nepalese tourism sector to Buddhist corridor of Nepal and India. However, all will depend on how Nepalese policy makers pursue the path to achieve high economic growth through this new connectivity*

By KESHAB POUDEL

**A**s an Airbus 320 of Jazeera Airways landed carrying over 60 Nepalese, most of them foreign workers, at GBIA at 7:07am on 16 May 2022, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha got formally connected to the world by air.

Located in the central Tarai, GBIA has been envisaged as the international gateway to Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, located 18km from Bhairahawa.

The total cost of the airport construction is \$76.1 million, excluding land acquisition. Out of this, the Asian Development Bank contributed \$37 million in loans and grants, while the OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) Fund for International Development contributed about \$11 million in loans. According to the project, Rs. 28 billion was spent to

acquire the land at the construction site.

Constructed under ADB's South Asia Tourism Infrastructure Development Project, GBIA is helping Bangladesh, India, and Nepal improve infrastructure and services in key tourism sites.

With 3,000-metre-long and 45-metre-wide runway, the airport will be a game changer. At a time when only a few tourists are travelling to Lumbini due to the connectivity issue, the airport provides Buddhist religious tourists to land directly at Bhairahawa.

The airport also helps connect Lumbini to the Buddhist Circuit in India, namely, Bodh Gaya in Bihar, Sarnath in Benares, and Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh.

Gautam Buddha was born in Nepal and Bodh Gaya, Sarnath

and Kushinagar are important for his enlightenment, his first sermon and attainment of Mahaparinirvana respectively.

Apart from promoting tourism and connecting to Buddhist circuit, the GBIA is expected to expand trade and economic activities, generate local employment and address the air traffic congestion at the TIA.

## GBIA Inauguration

Prime Minister of Nepal Sher Bahadur Deuba inaugurated Nepal's second international airport, the Gautam Buddha International Airport (GBIA), supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The opening was marked by a successful landing of an international commercial flight.

PM Deuba said the open-





ing of the airport is a historic day in Nepal's aviation and tourism sectors and will contribute to the country's overall development and prosperity in the long run.

On the occasion, the PM said that the opening of GBIA has created the foundation for the nation's tourism and sustainable economic development, expressing the belief that tourist arrivals will increase with this.

Home Minister Bal Krishna Khand said the Gautam Buddha Airport will support promoting tourism in a big way. He shared that although the construction of the airport was delayed to some extent due to the COVID-19 pandemic; it is successfully constructed through joint efforts from all sides.

Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Prem Bahadur Ale expressed that Nepal's message of peace and prosperity would be spread across the world from the land of the Buddha. He said GBIA is one among the five national pride projects to be completed, adding

that the country's tourism and economic development would take a stride after the completion of all these five projects under the Ministry of Tourism.

Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) director-general Pradeep Adhikari said GBIA will be an alternative to TIA with the operation of international flights.

He further added that the operation of GBIA has put to an end the compulsion of having to divert airplanes to the neighboring countries in situations when aircraft could not land or take off from TIA due to technical problems. He said that the process of construction of the terminal building under the second phase would be forwarded soon.

Speaking at the inaugural event, ADB Country Director for Nepal Arnaud Cauchois congratulated the Government of Nepal on the completion and opening of the airport despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. "The airport will help connect Lumbini—a major

tourist and pilgrimage destination—to Buddhist circuits in South Asia as well as to the rest of the world. On a broader context, the airport will form a cornerstone of the country's overall development by facilitating tourism, expanding trade and economic activities, generating local employment opportunities, and improving international air transport access to migrant workers and people living in the nearby provinces."

### High Expectations

With the inauguration of the airport, there are high expectations from the GBIA in transforming the economy of Lumbini, Karnali, and Sudurpaschim. Entrepreneurs and locals anticipate a big boost to tourism with more airlines expected to start direct flights to the airport.

Lumbini, which is a center stage of Buddhism, has remained no more than an extension of the Indian Buddhist Circuit package, with visitors slipping in through the border to spend only a few hours at

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the Buddha's birthplace.

For the migrant workers from Terai, this airport provides easy alternative to fly. The opening of the GBIA gives them the alternative to fly from or to Bhairahawa.

The GBIA holds much promise for Nepal's overall economic development and progress. However, it is up to the authorities and the entrepreneurs to plan their operations and businesses properly so as to make the most of the airport.

For Bhairahawa-based tourism entrepreneurs, traders and migrant workers, the construction of the airport is an historic event, and symbolizes the effort to decentralize development across the country.

"We had to travel to the capital city for each and every task. Now this compulsion has ended," said Chandra Prakash Shrestha, president of the Siddhartha Hotel Association. "The development of the airport is an immense accomplishment. The doors to rapid development have opened."

Development means creating jobs and economic opportunities, according to Shrestha. "We should generate jobs and stop people from going abroad. We are

aspiring for these things to happen," an elated Shrestha told a newspaper.

According to Siddhartha Hotel Association there are 5,000 rooms available now and an additional 2,500 are under construction. Half a dozen five-star hotels are in the planning phase and few are already operational including Hotel Pawan.

Gautam Buddha International Airport located in south-central Nepal is a 280-km drive from Kathmandu. Surya Prasad Khanal, an entrepreneur in United Arab Emirates, is happy to fly to Dubai from near to his home town.

Khanal lives in Nawalparasi, 35 km from the airport, and travels frequently to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates where he owns a restaurant named Silver Spoon.

"The airport saves both time and cost," said Khanal before boarding the inaugural flight. The Dubai-based Nepali restaurateur, who has been doing business abroad for 25 years, said it was a proud moment to see international flights landing in Bhairahawa.

"We are very happy to have the international airport close to home," said Riyazullal Musalman, a migrant worker from Kapilvastu who boarded the first flight from the Gautam Buddha International Airport to Doha, Qatar on Jazeera Airways of Kuwait.

"Instead of taking more than 14 hours journey and staying overnight in hotel in Kathmandu, I came here on my motorbike," said Musalman. "The airport is just an hour's drive from my home."

Before the Gautam Buddha International Airport, Khanal and Riyazullal had to travel to Kathmandu and spend a night there before flying abroad.

As Nepal is in the process of political transformation form



unitary state to federal, the operation of airport is a major shift ending the monopoly of Kathmandu for international flights.

Conceived in 2009 following the approval of Asian Development Bank's board under the South Asia Tourism Infrastructure Development Project to develop and improve tourism infrastructure in Nepal, GBIA has gone through upheaval in several ways.

Awarding the contract to upgrade the Bhairahawa airport into an international airport to a Chinese company in October 2014, the project was slated to be completed by the end of 2017. At one time, the project entered nearly to a stage of cancellation, but Asian Development Bank saved it, realizing the complexities.

From earthquake of 2015, trade disruption with India, dispute with contractor, stone quarrying and finally the COVID-19, GBIA has gone through all kinds of disaster faced by Nepal delaying it by at least three to four years. However, Nepal has now an infrastructure which has changed its aviation history.

"Despite many hassles, we are very proud to see it happening," said Arnaud Cauchois, the Asian Development Bank's country director for Nepal.

"In a broader context, the airport will form a cornerstone of the country's overall development by facilitating tourism, expanding trade and economic activities, generating local employment opportunities, and improving international air transport access to migrant workers and people living in nearby provinces," added Cauchois.

"It's the beginning. We



would like to see more airlines joining the Gautam Buddha International Airport in the near future," said Cauchois.

### Lumbini In Boom

Just after the beginning of the construction of GBIA, investors have started to invest in Lumbini. Economic activities have been booming in Bhairahawa with opening of new hotels.

Nepal's renowned hoteliers and former president of Hotel Association Nepal Yogendra Shakyas is coming with new investment proposal. The Rs5-billion Hub Lumbini scheme is a tourism destination development project that amalgamates hospitality and housing.

"The Hub is a project to entice the foreign tourists coming via India, who drive back the same day, to spend some money in Lumbini and help the Nepali economy," said Shakyas, owner of the Nagarkot-based Club Himalaya resort and Hotel Ambassador in Kathmandu. "We are quite aware that our investments are risk-taking and long-term; but we are confident that

if we can do it on the barren hills of Nagarkot, we can do it on the fertile grounds of Lumbini." Shakyas told The Kathmandu Post.

"In spite of the many hurdles not only due to the pandemic, but slow government permit, we are crusading forward with the new project in Bhairahawa," said Shakyas, former president of Hotel Association Nepal.

Despite many challenges including the air route issue with India, GBIA is now a reality and operational second international airport of Nepal.

Tourism Minister Prem Bahadur Ale said during the inauguration of the new airport that he was hopeful India would give access to new entry points to facilitate Nepal's air connectivity.

"The opening of the airport is a moment of pride for the country. Nepal's second international airport will serve as an alternative to the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu, and airlines will no longer have to divert to other countries in the event of bad weather or other technical issues," he said.

In a separate event in



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Lumbini, in the context of official inauguration and commencement of commercial operation of the Gautam Buddha International Airport, Prime Minister Deuba highlighted that the airport will further facilitate connectivity, cultural linkages, and people-to-people movements and promotes cultural tourism, according to a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry.

“The opening of the airport is an historic day in Nepal’s aviation and tourism sectors,” said Deuba, “and it will contribute to the country’s overall development and prosperity in the long run.

### India Is First To Use GBIA

Nepalese media mentioned Indian prime minister skipping the GBIA citing the reason of the issue of air route and Indian media wrote that PM Modi avoided the use of GBIA citing the Chinese investment for the project. Based on fake information about GBIA, which is constructed under the investment of ADB and OPEC, Indian media tried to damage the project.

Nepalese media speculated about the views and opinions of PM

Narendra Modi and Indian media harped on fake information regarding Chinese investment. Reality was different.

Actually, it was Indian Air Force Plane which was the first aircraft to use the GBIA for carrying necessary supportive equipment to PM Modi’s visit.

Handling a wide-body aircraft of NAC successfully, GBIA shows that cargo can be operated from there. Indian Air Force’s Illusion aircraft IC-76 is second bigger aircraft to land at GBIA.

A special plane, belonging to the Indian Air Force, landed at GBIA on May 11 carrying a team of 30 Indian military officials to make the necessary security arrangements for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi who came to Lumbini on May



16 on the occasion of Buddha Jayanti. The plane also brought a vehicle that Prime Minister Modi would use during his visit here, according to reports.

GBIA spokesperson Shyam Kishor Sah informed that the Indian Air Force’s Illusion aircraft IC-76 came twice to Bhairahawa from Delhi via Kathmandu to drop and pick up necessary security related equipment to prepare for Modi’s visit.

### Regional Project

This is a part of overall regional project. Main objective of the project is to improve tourism. This is a part of Buddhist circuit linking the shrines of Bangladesh, India and Nepal to improve connectivity and develop basic facility to attract quality tourism.

In India this project was implemented in state of Sikkim. Similarly, it was implemented to improve Buddhist tourist infrastructure in Bangladesh but also other religious sites of Hindu and Muslim.

In case of Nepal, the project started with the connectivity and improvement of some of the basic facilities within Lumbini. GBIA is the major part of the project. Development-wise, Lumbini Development Trust area is more important but fund-wise GBIA is the major component.

“Inauguration of the airport is a milestone. This project



will benefit the migrant workers and tourists and local people. Many people do not have to go to Kathmandu to catch the international flights,” said the ADB’s Country Director.

“We are very proud of what is happening now. This airport will not only improve the connectivity but also boost the tourism in this Buddhist circuit connecting Bangladesh and India. The airport will also attract pilgrimage tourists from Sri Lanka, Japan and Southeast Asia. Hotels have been mushrooming in this region generating employment.

Built with the support from Asian Development Bank, the GBIA is going to be not only a major game changer in Nepal’s aviation sector but also a harbinger of a new era for federalization.

For the last half century, Asian Development Bank has been providing all kinds of support to Nepal to improve and build infrastructures in drinking water, electricity, road, schools, health and other livelihood related projects.

“To date, ADB has committed 488 public sector loans, grants, and technical assistance totaling of \$7.4 billion to Nepal. Cumulative loan and grant disbursement to Nepal amount to \$4.68 billion.”

As Nepal is trying to recover from the COVID-19 Pandemic, ADB support is highly important for Nepal in infrastructure, improving access to basic services and protecting the poor and vulnerable.

## 'GBIA Will Be A Game Changer'

Having invested in tourism infrastructures including cable cars in Butwal, **CHANDRA PRASAD DHAKAL**, Senior vice president Of the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, see the opening of Gautam Buddha International Airport (GBIA) is going to be a major game-changer in tourism promotion and other activities in Nepal. Came to attend the inauguration of the GIBA, Dhakal spoke to **New Spotlight** on various issues related to GBIA and its implication for the Nepalese economy. Excerpts

**How do you view the opening of GBIA?**

This is a historic event for the country because this is the second international airport constructed over the span of 73 years. This will bring a lot of economic and other changes in the western part of Nepal. Opening of this airport is at the right time as Nepalese tourism industries have been passing through a critical time due to COVID-19 Pandemic.

**As a senior vice president of FNCCI and an industrialist, how do you see its economic impact?**

This will immensely contribute to accelerating the economic activities in western Nepal through tourism. The airport, which is close to Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha and Buddha circuits, will likely increase the number of tourists visiting the region. Apart from this, the migrant workers will also get benefits. We can also handle big cargo here as

well helping to boost our export industry here.

**How do you see the investment in the tourism sector in the region?**

With the opening of airports, more tourism industrialists will come to invest in the tourism sector like hotels and recreation centers to attract tourists. The opening of the airport boosts the morale of hoteliers who have already started the operation of hotels.

**Have your group invested here in the tourism sector?**

We are developing recreation facilities along with cable car in Butwal, which

is 20 kilometers from the airport. If more flights start coming and the number of tourists increases, it will also benefit our venture.

**How private sector can cooperate with Civil Aviation Authority Nepal to make the airport viable?**

It is a greater interest of private parties to make the airport more busy bringing a large number of tourists here. Industrialists have already invested billions of rupees to construct the hotels and other tourism-related activities generating a large number of employment opportunities here. We want collaboration and partnership with the government to make Lumbini as a big tourism hub. This is in the interest of all of us. The government must use the Public-Private Partnership model here.



# A Milestone In Nepal's Aviation And Tourism Sectors



BY: ARNAUD CAUCHOIS

It is a great honor for me to participate in the inauguration of the Gautam Buddha International Airport by the Prime Minister.

On behalf of the Asian Development Bank, I would like to congratulate the Government of Nepal for the completion of this project and its opening on the auspicious day of Buddha Purnima.

The opening of the airport is a milestone in Nepal's aviation and tourism sectors. I would also like to offer my sincere appreciation and congratulations to Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, the project team, contractors and consultants in successfully completing the project under the leadership of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation. I would especially like to acknowledge Minister Ale who has worked relentlessly to make this day a reality.

We are very happy to see that with the persistent efforts of all stakeholders, this critical infrastructure project is completed and now set for operation despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and that in itself is something to be proud of.

Direct air connections will help bring in more visitors to Lumbini and surrounding areas and connect Lumbini to Buddhist circuit in South Asia as well as rest of the world. On a broader context, the airport will form a cornerstone of the country's overall development

by expanding economic activities across countless sectors: tourism, hospitality, transport, trade, to name but a few, generating local employment opportunities, and improving international air transport access to migrant workers and people living in the nearby provinces.

ADB, as Nepal's long-standing development partner, is proud to have supported the Government of Nepal in this national pride project.

ADB is committed to continue supporting Nepal in its green, resilient, and inclusive recovery from the pandemic to achieve high and sustainable economic growth, improve the lives of Nepali people and build resilience to climate change impact.

Once again, my heartiest congratulations to the Government of Nepal and everyone involved in the successful opening of the airport.

And thank you to the organizers for your kind invitation to this historic event this morning and for your gracious hospitality.

(Arnaud Cauchois is the Country Director of Asian Development Bank's Residence Mission in Kathmandu. Excerpts of the remarks delivered at the Inauguration of Gautam Buddha International Airport in Bhairawa.)





# Europe Day 2022

## *Russian Aggression On Ukraine Has Greatly Threaten The Stability And Peace In Europe*

By A CORRESPONDENT

Terming a day of peace and unity, the Embassy of the European Union in Nepal has celebrated European Union Day by organizing a program at Lalitpur. European Union's ambassadors say that Russian aggression to Ukraine is creating the Europe and entire world unsafe and insecure. They said that European Union's importance is today more relevant than ever.

Pertti Anttinen Finnish Ambassador to Nepal, Gilles Bourbao French Ambassador to Nepal, Nona Deprez EU Ambassador to Nepal and Dr. Thomas Prinz German Ambassador to Nepal condemn the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

### **Full text of the article:**

War has returned to Europe. Almost thirty years after the Yugoslav wars, civil defense sirens again went off in the heart of a European capital.

We condemn Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. By its unprovoked and unjustified military actions, Russia is grossly violating international law, and international humanitarian law, undermining European and global security and stability. The international community has—notably on three occasions so far through the UN General Assembly—sent clear messages rejecting an invasion that contradicts the core principles of international coexistence as reflected in the UN Charter itself: The equal sovereignty of states, the peaceful solution of conflicts and the ban on the use of force in international relations.

We deplore the loss of life and human suffering. Those responsible will be held accountable for this.

In this context, we welcome and endorse the Commission of Inquiry set up by the UNHRC. We also welcome and fully support the investigation launched by the International Criminal Court's Prosecutor and we keep recalling the order by the International Court of Justice of March 16 for Russia to withdraw all forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine immediately and unconditionally.

The EU stands firmly by Ukraine and its people.

Russia's aggression on Ukraine

gravely threatens peace and stability in Europe and the whole international peace order.

This is a moment of truth for Europe and the world. This is a clash between the rule of law and the rule of the gun, between democracies and autocracies, between a rules-based order and a world of naked aggression.

What is at stake today is the very core of the international world order based on the charter of the United Nations.

The purposes of the United Nations Organization, agreed in 1945, were to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. Peace, friendly relations and human progress are the three pillars of our common legacy, the legacy of the Second World War.

Ukraine is an important producer of agricultural products, including the world's fifth-largest exporter of wheat. However, the shelling and the bombing make it impossible for Ukrainian farmers to sow. On top of this, Russia is blocking hundreds of ships filled with wheat in the Black Sea. So the consequences will be felt worldwide.

Rising fuel prices and any negative impact on global food security are resulting from the Russian aggression and military activities on Ukrainian soil, not from EU sanctions.

However, we are very sensitized to the fact that—in addition to the dramatic consequences locally—the Russian aggression in Ukraine risks deteriorating all existing food crisis scenarios worldwide and increases the impact, especially on the most vulnerable groups in our partner countries. In practice, the consequences of lower levels of global crops production, also due to reduced fertilization rates, imply higher price levels for grains and oilseeds and higher costs for consumers with repercussions on food security, especially in view of the most vulnerable, and on the income of livestock and fish farmers who

would be facing higher feeding costs.

The EU, together with many partners, helps countries most in need through bilateral aid and the mobilization of the World Food Program, the World



Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Global challenges, such as climate change, economic development, the fight against pandemics, or the maintenance of international peace and security can only be solved by joining forces. This is why the EU, alongside partners such as Nepal, will continue to defend a multilateral order, based on common objectives and international law.

Once again, there is no justification for invading Ukraine. It should be noted that Russian disinformation has a track record of promoting manipulative narratives trying to justify its invasion. But imperial ambitions have no place in our 21st century.

With this war on Ukraine, the world will never be the same again. It is now, more than ever, the time for societies and alliances to come together to build our future on trust, justice and freedom. It is the moment to stand up and speak out. Might do not make right. Never did. Never will.

During the program, Finland's Ambassador to Nepal, Pertti Anttinen also talks about the important role that young people play in the action against climate change.

Similarly, the ambassador of the European Union to Nepal Nona Deprez highlights the importance of youth and women in the development of Nepal.

## 'OTHER' COMMISSIONS

## In A Haze

*Even four years after taking the full shape, “Other” Constitutional Commissions, which are created to strengthen federalism and inclusion by making a just society, are still nowhere in effect. With the apathy of federal parliamentary committees and the centralized federal government, implementing agencies dumped their recommendations and suggestions presented through annual reports. Limiting their role to formality by presenting an annual report to the President, the commissions also failed to show visible programs and policies for implementation. Despite several financial, administrative and legal constraints, seven other commissions can make a difference in the country, taking the agenda of inclusion to provincial and local levels in collaboration with Civil Society Organizations. At a time when other commissions are invisible in the broader national picture, a study prepared by the Niti Foundation in partnership with Social Science Baha has come out with recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the commissions*

By KESHAB POUDEL

Sanu Kumar Shrestha, the speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Bagmati Province, has disclosed that he has not encountered any officials and commissioners from the other constitutional commissions in his tenure as a provincial speaker of Bagmati Province in the last four years.

“Frankly speaking, I met only the chairman and member of the National Human Rights Commission, Election Commission, Public Service Commission, Commission of Investigation of Abuse of Authority and Auditor General. I have not seen the faces of any of the chief and commissioners of other commissions and their reports. Provincial Parliament is ready to implement the agenda of inclusion and develop policies for inclusion at the provincial level provided by the commissions,” said speaker Shrestha. “But I don’t know what has prevented them to come to us.”

Not only the speaker of Bagmati Province but also the leader of a

local level government shared similar views. Outgoing deputy mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) Hari Prabha Khadgi Shrestha called on other Constitutional Commissions and

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for collaborating with local levels. She said that the KMC can offer resources and institutional support to the commissions to implement the inclusion







agenda and formulate the policies and programs.

“I have to admit that I have not come across any member of these commissions in my office during my five years’ tenure as a deputy mayor and chief of the judicial committee of KMC. The majority of issues related to exclusion, discrimination and domestic violence come to us. My experiences showed that other commissions created in the constitution will need to collaborate with local levels to implement their programs and policies,” said Khadgi.

Speaker Shrestha and Deputy mayor Khadgi’s experiences speak volumes on the current state, presence and effectiveness of other commissions in implementing their policies and programs at the local level.

### Opening Debate

In his opening remarks Mohan Das Manandhar, Executive Director of Niti Foundation, said, “Niti Foundation is looking at the following thematic areas: 1) how policies can be made public and effective by addressing issues of representation, implementation, and accountability; and 2) the federalization of institutional structures, including commissions, governments and civil society organizations.”

“The relations among the Constitutional Commissions, Federal, Provincial, local governments and civil society are important to execute the inclusion and federalization agenda in the country,” said Manandhar. “There are still unsettled three major policy is-

suces like representation, federalization and accountability among other commissions.”

According to the constitution, the “Other” commissions are as powerful as all. Office bearers of the commissions are appointed by

the President under the recommendation of the Constitutional Commission through the parliamentary hearing. The commissions present their annual report to Federal Parliament through President. Commissioners can be removed only through impeachment.

Commissioners of seven commissions are accountable to the people through the Federal Parliament like other traditional commissions. As the overwhelming numbers of civil society organizations, which are the main constituencies of “other commissions,” are still centralized in their structures, there is no one to put pressure on other commissions to go at the provincial and local levels.

Although the elections solve political representation issues through proportional representation at all levels, discrimination, exclusion of marginalized communities, ethnic nationalities, Madheshis and Tharus and violence against women and denials of rights remain as they were. Other commissions are created to address these problems through policy interventions. There is a provision for inclusion in the constitution. This means the commissions need to implement the inclusion agenda.

Manandhar argued that along with making the three tiers of government accountable, these commissions should show, for themselves,

that they are accountable to the people. “Formally, they are accountable to the people through the House of Representatives. The process is yet to start to visibly prove it.”

### CSO’s Role

As the dispute between CSOs and Commissions that appeared following the appointment of the new commissioner is yet to be settled, the possibility of implementing the agenda of inclusion and federalism through CSOs is far away.

Other Constitutional Commissions are created by agitations and pressures of think tanks and CSOs. Only a close collaboration and coordination between them can alter the current situation. This will be the starting point to move forward.

Civil society organizations like the Niti Foundation support the process by doing research on where the gaps are in terms of Nepal’s democratic consolidation and figuring out some of the new answers on how to strengthen those things. Despite certain lapses and gaps in the constitution, a democratic framework is in place in Nepal with three pillars of government, provinces, local level and 13 constitutional bodies to make the state inclusive and accountable to all.

At a time when, for one or the other reason, the commissions are ineffective and invisible, the challenge is to make all these bodies functional to fulfill the objective of the constitution to make Nepal a federal and inclusive state.

Experts hold the view that one of the beautiful things about Nepal is that it has vibrant CSOs in different





sectors. They can still play a critical role in terms of serving as a watchdog to the executive, legislature and other bodies.

Similarly, the commissions in collaboration with CSOs can make the government accountable and responsible to their constituencies and go back to the objective of strong democracy and democratic consolidation and all of that.

Civil society organizations, which are yet to collaborate and co-operate with other commissions to implement the policies and programs at the grass-root level, do have their own grievances on the issues of representation, appointment and function of the commissions.

“The relation between Other Commissions and federal, provincial, local levels and CSOs is important for the implementation of inclusion and federalism agenda. All the commissions are presenting their annual report to President and President sends them to Federal Parliament. They need to go to the provincial and local levels as well,” said Manandhar.

Although Auditor General, National Human Rights Commission and Public Service Commission submit their annual reports to all seven provinces, none of the commissions has reached the province and local levels.

Mohan Kumar Singh, the president of the Madheshi Journalist Association and Madheshi rights activist, holds the view that CSOs cannot collaborate with them till there is reform in representations, appointments, structures and accountability parts of the commissions.

“It is unfortunate that those holding the positions in Madheshi Commission are basically those who don’t know the issues of Madhesh,” said Singh. “All the people who are holding the positions at the commissions lack understanding of inclusion and identity issues because most of the appointees came from a political background. Instead of being accountable to the particular community and social groups for the inclusion agenda, the appointees are representing the voices of their party.

Other CSO members view commissions are just statutory bodies for making recommendations and they cannot compel states to implement the recommendations.

“With the pressure from Tharu Kalyankari Society and other Tharu Rights activists, Tharu Commission has been repeatedly recommending to the government that new law and policy be made to provide Tharu a separate cluster in reservations as in the elections. However, the government did not listen to them,” said Kuchhad Narayan Chaudhari.

Jointly organized by Niti Foundation and Nepal Open University, the one-day workshop on the interrelationship between the other commissions and the provinces, local level and civil society heard various stakeholders share their experiences on the policy gaps, laws and constitutional provisions related to representations, appointments accountability parts of other commissions.

Prepared by Tara Kanel, a presentation on Nepal’s Other Commissions for Justice and Inclusion broadly examined the history behind the formation of other Commissions, their mandates, performance and the challenges they faced for the effective delivery of their mandates.

“This is the first forum where

I listened about the role and duties of other commissions and civil society organizations in promoting and implementing inclusion and justice-related programs for Dalit, marginalized communities, indigenous nationalities, Madheshis, Tharus Muslims, backward class, women and others,” said Khadgi Shrestha.

## Presentation On Commissions

Presenting her paper, Tara Kanel of Niti Foundation, highlighted the state of other Commissions to ensure justice, equity and inclusion in federal Nepal, including their relations with three tiers of government and civil society organizations.

Institutions including civil society networks, human rights champions and local governments can liaise between the commissions and the public.

Fair appointments need an expert committee within the Constitutional Council to be formed with the mandate of developing a roster of qualified candidates. Dedicated human resources are needed for constitutional human rights institutions with commissions given the authority to hire and manage their own human resources as with the NHRC.

Other commissions have their own specific roles. Women commissions look at GBV, discrimination, representation and Dalit commission for caste-based discrimination, untouchability, poverty, access to education and other services, and representation.

Adivasi Janajati, Madhesi,





Muslim and Tharu commissions are concerned with identity, citizenship, unemployment, representation, education, encroachment of traditional and holy places, population data, human rights awareness, unemployment, representation and identity, culture and languages, citizenship, dispossession of land, recognition of badger system, unemployment, sickle cell disease (SCD), representation.

Sharing the main findings of the inquiry, expert Kanel said that other commissions have a big constitutional mandate to pressure governments to carry out and implement inclusive policies and programs. “As per the constitution, these commissions have six types of mandates to carry out.

“The right to issue an evidence-based recommendation is one of the most important powers given to them,” said Kanel. She said the commissions have a major role to push the federal government to implement the federalism and inclusion issues together.

These commissions are also liaisons of various exclusive groups.



The constitution provides these commissions the right to conduct investigations on individual cases related to violence, exclusion and discrimination.

“Coordination and partnership with Provincial level, local level and CSOs are important to create Critical Mass to persuade the Government to comply with the NHRIs recommendations,” said Kanel.

#### Centralized Commissions

Speakers argue that other commissions need to establish their offices at provincial levels to make them effective and powerful in implementing the policies and programs. Instead of looking at procedural issues, other commissions have to collaborate with the CSOs to press their cases.

In recent local elections, Elections Commission mobilized CSOs for voter updating and other elections-related issues. The commission took the benefit of experts of CSOs to prepare the Election Code of Conduct and mobilize the media to put pressure on political leaders to comply with it. However, other commissions are yet to follow it.

Coordination with CSOs is important to create a Critical Mass to persuade the Government to comply with the NHRIs recommendations, stay resilient, robust and independent during democratic backsliding. However, there is a lack of coordination and cooperation between NHRIs and CSOs.

#### Constitutional Role

The Constitution of Nepal gives an enormous constitutional role to these commissions. However, the question is how effective the role they have played in implementing their mandates and what obstruction and difficulties the commissions faced.

“Unlike previous constitutions which took human rights in a holistic approach, the new constitution has granted the civil fundamental rights with cultural and

social rights as fundamental rights. These commissions are in the constitution to safeguard the cultural and social rights,” said Kanel.

Despite being constituted to safeguard social and cultural rights, other commissions do not have common voices on their similar problems and cooperation and coordinate to fulfill the shared mandate. Similarly, these commissions do not have coordination



with civil society organizations.

“Our studies have shown that the implementation parts of the constitution are unsatisfactory because of lack of coordination and cooperation among the commissions. The commission needs collaboration and cooperation with civil society organizations to implement their programs effectively. This is lacking.”

To make the federal, provincial and local governments accountable in the inclusion process, other commissions have to work in a coordinative manner with those who have shared agendas.

Constitutionally, the other commissions are also national commissions. Another traditional commission like Attorney General is also presenting its annual report to all seven provincial parliaments. There are also 753 legislatures at the local level. Other commissions should table their report here also. The Constitution and laws do not prevent them to go there.

“Of course, there is a certain ambiguity in the laws related to the commissions. Such provisions need revision. The commissions are legally independent to collaborate and cooperate with the province, local level and civil society organizations. The mandate of the constitution is broader and wide. The acts and regulations cannot prevent the independent functions of the commissions.

“Traditional commissions like Elections Commission, CIAA, Public Service Commission Auditor General and National Human Rights



Commission have been taking funds from external sources and working in collaboration and coordination with CSOs. The Other Commissions can also do similar actions. With the amendment of Parliamentary procedure the commissions can move further ahead,” said Dr. Adhikary.

“Other commissions do not have a strategic policy. The traditional commissions like Human Rights Commission, Commission of Investigation of Abuse of Authority, Public Service Commission, Elections Commission, and Attorney General’s Office have some sort of understanding and the

government has been implementing the recommendations given by them.”

As per the constitution, these commissions are advisory bodies. Thus, to be more effective in implementation, the commissions need to follow the persuasive approach.

To follow the persuasive approach, the commissions need to mobilize the masses of people. For this, the commissions should also mobilize the civil society organizations. There is always a need for critical masses and civil society can mobilize them. Thus, there is the need of coordination among them.

Out of 13 commissions, newly constituted seven commissions consider themselves weak because of resource constraints and lack of budget. Human resource is also another issue. There are also overlaps and duplications in the mandate.

Others argue that the constitutional provisions and the laws are responsible to weaken the commissions. Here CSOs can make a big difference.

### Centralized In Federal State

At a time when the state has already been federalized with federal, provincial and local levels, civil societies, the constituents of the other commissions, are still centralized.

Public policy should be value-based. Liberty and justice Policy should be published. State structure should be accountable. Representation, justice, voters representation and excluded groups do not have representatives.

Fairness depends on who gets what. The commission should demand justice for people who are themselves facing injustice.

They have to look for fairness in whether the budget is allocated or not. Other commissions get unfair treatment for them by parliament.

Had the civil society groups, which

too are centralized in their actions and structures, federalized, the commissions would have seen a different scenario. Although the constitution was already implemented seven years ago, nobody is taking notice that federalism and inclusion, which are major parts of the constitution, are yet to function.

As the other commissions, which are created by the Constitution of Nepal 2015 to promote inclusion and defend the marginalized, ethnic groups, Dalit and women are unable to proceed with their work under federal spirit, the civil society organizations, the constituencies of the Commission, are also centralized in their nature. With the initiatives lacking support, the commissions have seen financial and administrative exclusion for themselves.

Vice-chancellor of Nepal Open University Shilu Manandhar Bajracharya said that the university is ready to work in collaboration with CSOs and other stakeholders to conduct the research and other academic work.

Following the signing of the peace agreement in 2008, there was so much hope for a new Nepal that is representative of all the different people that are within the population. The outcome of the struggle coming with the new constitution, from the first and the second Constituent Assemblies, is most definitely an inclusive one that allowed people to air their concerns.

### Challenges Now

Although Nepal promulgated a new inclusive and federal constitution, there are still certain grievances as the constitution has not fulfilled all of the aspirations of the people demonstrated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The promulgation of a new constitution in 2015 is a starting point. However, there are yet a lot of things to do` and work with the constitution and the bodies that are created at each level of government to exercise their democratic rights. The constitution and on-going process are not perfect but it is moving forward and it has only come into being since the first constituent assembly of 14 years ago. Many people see that Nepal is a bright spot in South Asia in terms of inspiring democracy.





# 'We Are Waiting Court Verdict To Decide On Collaboration'

**MOHAN KUMAR SINGH** is central president of Madheshi Journalist Association and coordinator of Samridha Madhesh Nagrik Abhiyan. Singh, a Madheshi activist and journalist, spoke to **NEW SPOTLIGHT** on the role of CSOs

**How do you see the relations between Madhesh-based CSOs and Madheshi Commission?**



When you talk about the other commissions, you need to know about the history and source of origin and process of establishment. Here is a huge deficit and difference among us. The origin of the Madheshi Commission is the result of Madhesh Andolan. Since the agitation has generated

awareness among various communities about their rights, exclusion and discrimination, these commissions are born to address all those issues. Following agitation, there increased the awareness in the community and civil society organizations to take up these agendas at Constituent Assembly.

**Why is there no coordination and collaboration with CSOs and Commission?**

It is unfortunate that those who were against inclusion and federalism during the agitation are heading the commissions. Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, who was dead against the issues of inclusion, identity and discrimination, found the opportunity to make the commission irrelevant by appointing political workers. It is impossible for us to join the party agenda. Most of the commissioners who were appointed by PM Oli do not have any background in taking the agenda of inclusion. As the commissioners appointed to the commissions are ignorant about the issue, they turn the commission irrelevant.

**What went wrong?**

If the initial formation was wrong, this would go for decades. Those who struggled and sacrificed for the establishment of commissions are now nowhere in the picture. The agenda has been hijacked from them. The experts, activists, scholars and researchers who were at the forefront were left behind in the race. What happened now is the political leaders hijacked the agenda and turned the commission into a party recruit center.

**When will the current stalemate end?**

As a petition in the Supreme Court, stakeholders are detached from the activities of other commissions. This makes commissions inactive and ineffective to address the issues related to inclusion, discrimination and identity. With non-cooperation from CSOs, the commissions are unable to bring the issue to the broader public. There is the need for cooperation and collaboration between the commission and CSOs to estab-

lish the agenda. Since the newly appointed commissioners do not have any connection with CSOs, they have not shown any interest to have cooperation. The commissioners are sent to destroy the institutions not to make them strong and effective. As per the party mandate, the commissioners are successful to make it defunct and fail.

**Why did not CSOs visit the commissions to put pressure? In the first stage, there will be no legal controversy over the appointment?**

I agree that the CSOs' apathy towards the commissions is also responsible to make the commissions ineffective and irrelevant. Initially, CSOs were active and enthusiastic to work in collaboration with other commissions. Their hope was shattered when the government led by Oli appointed people to all the vacant positions in absence of the House Of Representatives. To prevent the appointment, CSOs filed a petition in the court demanding to declare the appointment null and void. However, the court has declined to give interim order and the process went to a regular hearing. This halted all the process of collaboration and cooperation between the commission and CSOs for at least now. Till the verdict of the court on the appointment, nothing can be said now.

**What is the situation now?**

There is now a huge gap between the commissions and CSOs. There is a crisis of confidence. Some CSOs which had shown interest in collaboration are also in a wait-and-watch mode. This has badly hampered the activities of the commissions. Civil society is now considering the commission as a useless place to work in collaboration.

**What will be the future course for CSOs till the court verdict?**

There is no alternative to work in close collaboration between the committee and CSOs. CSOs need commissions and commissions need CSOs. However, the new move will take place only after the decision of the court, we can start thinking about what to do. Our experiences have shown that the commission cannot produce any result-oriented work without collaboration with CSOs. We do feel the same. Civil society is a complimentary body of commissions as they can build public opinion in favor of them. At a time when the government is showing apathy towards the commissions, only civil society can strengthen them. The first and foremost important factor is CSOs. I think the commissioners should have realized it.

**Since CSOs raised the question about inclusion and federalism, how about your organizations?**

Since the promulgation of the new constitution, all the CSOs are now in the process of transformation from unitary to federal and exclusion to inclusion models. We have central, provincial and district level organizations and district-level organization is autonomous to launch the program on their own.

# 'The Current Problem Is With Implementation Of Federalism'

**PARSHU RAM TAMANG**, an Ethnic rights activist and Central Committee member of the CPN-Maoist leading Federalism Study Center, is a well-known name in Nepal. Tamang spoke to **New SPOTLIGHT** on the issue of inclusion and the role of Other Commissions. Excerpts:



**As an activist for inclusion, and leader of a political party, how do you see the current situation regarding inclusion and federalization?**

I am ready to take the issue in the inner-party discussions to make the commission and federalization agenda effective. The current problem with federalism and its implementation is related to the people in power. Those who do not know the concept and commitments to federalism are at the forefront of implementation.

**How do you see the implementation of Federalism?**

Just talking about the issue of implementation of federalism and other commissions does not make any sense. We need to understand what are the international practices? We have incorporated federalism taking notes of several federal countries.

**What do you suggest to make other commissions effective?**

Before talking about the ineffective role of commissions in addressing the inclusion, ethnicity, identity, discrimination and gender agenda, we need to know how these agendas entered in Nepal. When we started the movement, conceptually, there were people saying that King was common for all. However, the monarchical state was not inclusive. The state was under the control of a section of people and it excluded the rest of the ethnic groups, minorities and others. Monarchy rule was based on Hinduisation and power was controlled by the upper calls of Hindus. All the top positions in the state were held by these groups. The ruler excluded other cultures, languages, religions and dresses. There was discrimination on the basis of caste and region. Dalits, Madheshis, janajatis and minorities were facing discrimination as unitary states. Thus there was a realization to bring federalism to end the issue of exclusion.

**How do you see the implementation of the agenda of inclusion?**

Of course, the current state is not perfectly inclusive and federalized. However, the current state is much

better than the earlier one. If we see the past 15 years of the state, one can find defiant change in its structure and participation of all the groups in state affairs. It is not idle and there is still the need to do a lot of things.

As far as the blame of making the commission a party's recruiting center is concerned, I do hold a bit different views than the current trend. CSOs supported the agitation but the current nature of the state is the outcome of a long struggle of political parties and the sacrifice of their leaders and workers. In this context, it is natural to choose the commissioners from the parties in power. We cannot say to political parties that you cannot appoint him or her but what we can say is that they kindly appoint the party cadets who have experiences and linkages with the exclusion issue. This is a party system of governance and I don't think it is wrong to appoint party sympathizers in the commissions. There are hundreds of more capable and eligible people, however, the CSOs need to see whether the party appointees are eligible for the post or not.

**How can we make the other commissions effective in the context of implementing policies of inclusion and federalization?**

First of all the inclusion and mainstreaming concept needs to be understood before talking about structural, functional and other issues. In the early days, the state and those who controlled the state in the past considered inclusion as a transformation of society. However, our current concept of mainstreaming and inclusion is a different one. Our inclusion aim is to empower and brings all those ethnic, religious and social groups into the functioning of state structures. Thus, this constitution is not just for transformation as in the past but also for the inclusion of all the citizens and groups in the mainstream.

**How do you see the role of political parties?**

Whether one likes it or not, political parties are the main actors in the decision regarding the implementation of the inclusion agenda. Where do we reach discussing the federalism and inclusion agenda by civil society by putting political parties outside? This kind of discussion helps to write a good report but it will not be effective. When they are in the government, political parties can recommend persons and experts affiliated with the party to lead the commissions.

**How do you see the role of CSOs now?**

The government cannot ask for names of Civil Society Organizations, CSOs. In my words, CSOs are a permanent opposition of the government and state. They need to play this role to put pressure on the political parties.



Instead of following political lines, CSOs need to react to the appointment on the basis of the qualifications and experiences of the persons appointed in the commission. CSOs must say right if the person is qualified or wrong if the appointee is incapable. If CSOs start taking the side of the government, they will lose their identity. I don't regard them as civil society.

**What are your suggestions to change the current state?**

There is the need to bring three factors together: the political parties, CSOs and implementing agen-

cies or government organizations. The implementing agencies are Constitutional Commissions, Provincial governments or local governments. We have been practicing the party system. Thus, a political party is a forum to make policies and programs. If we bring all three factors together, there will be policy intervention. Only through this, we can move forward. If CSOs and political parties work in isolation, nothing will happen. We can see a lot of policy research prepared by the CSOs. However, they rarely reach the political parties. Our current

system is that parliamentarians raised the issue in parliament formulated by the political parties. Parliament alone cannot do anything without political parties. The role of civil society is to provoke the issues and send them to parties. If the programs and research are framed in coordination among the three forces, they will work. Programs and policies conducted by separating these three entities will not be productive. Frankly, speaking CSOs are not working in the spirit of federalism and inclusion.

## 'We Are Working With Tharu Commissions'

**PREM LAL CHAUDHARI**, general secretary of Tharu Kalyankari Sabha, is a leading activist talking on the issue of empowerment and inclusion of Tharu. Chaudhari spoke to **NEW SPOTLIGHT** on various issues. Excerpts:

**The constitution has created other commissions to address issues related to inclusion, identity and empowerment of various groups. How do you see the state of relations between Tharu NGOs and the Tharu Commission?**

After a long struggle and sacrifice of all Nepali people, we were able to promulgate the new constitution with several clauses especially related to the empowerment and protection of the minority, ethnic and marginalized groups. The Tharu Commission and the other six commissions are a part of this change. As Tharu Commission was created to address our issue, Tharu rights groups have maintained a working relationship with the commission. In all three previous reports presented to the President, Tharu Commission recommended formulating a new federal law to separate the Tharu cluster. It is good to say that the commission is giving space to our concerns.

**What are the major problems right now facing the Tharu community?**

They are not getting the rights given by the constitution. Under the provision of the constitution, the federal parliament would have passed a law within six months separating Tharus from the Madheshi cluster. Due to a lack of law, Tharus are contesting all the government jobs through the Madheshi cluster. Under the existing law, there are reservation quotas for Madheshi, Janjati and Dalits but the government is yet to pass the law given a separate quota for Tharus.

**Has Tharu Commission taken your issue?**

We have filed an application at the Tharu Commission showing the flaws of laws and discrimination against the community. The Commission took the issue and directed the government to protect the constitutional rights of Tharus. However, the government has not responded to the direction.

**How do you see the function of the commission?**

With its limited resources, Tharu Commission has been working to empower Tharus and protect their rights. All the members of the commission are from our own community though they hold different political ideologies.

**How much collaboration does your community have with the commission?**

As far as the protection and empowerment of the Tharu community are concerned, we hold similar views and we have been working in close collaboration. The Commission discusses with us and holds the meeting with Tharu rights CSOs before presenting their annual report to President.

**How do you see the state of Tharus after the promulgation of the new Constitution?**

By recognizing the Tharu as a separate cluster, the constitution recognizes our communities. All the political parties have also amended their own constitution recognizing Tharus in a separate cluster. Elections Act also recognizes this.

**How do you see the relations of Tharu Commissions, local level and province?**

We have launched some campaigns at local and provincial levels in collaboration with the commission. This has helped to raise the issue of Tharus.



## डढेलो नियन्त्रण गरौं, बातावरण जोगाऔं ।

डढेलोले,

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